Embedding skills to address everyday conflict:
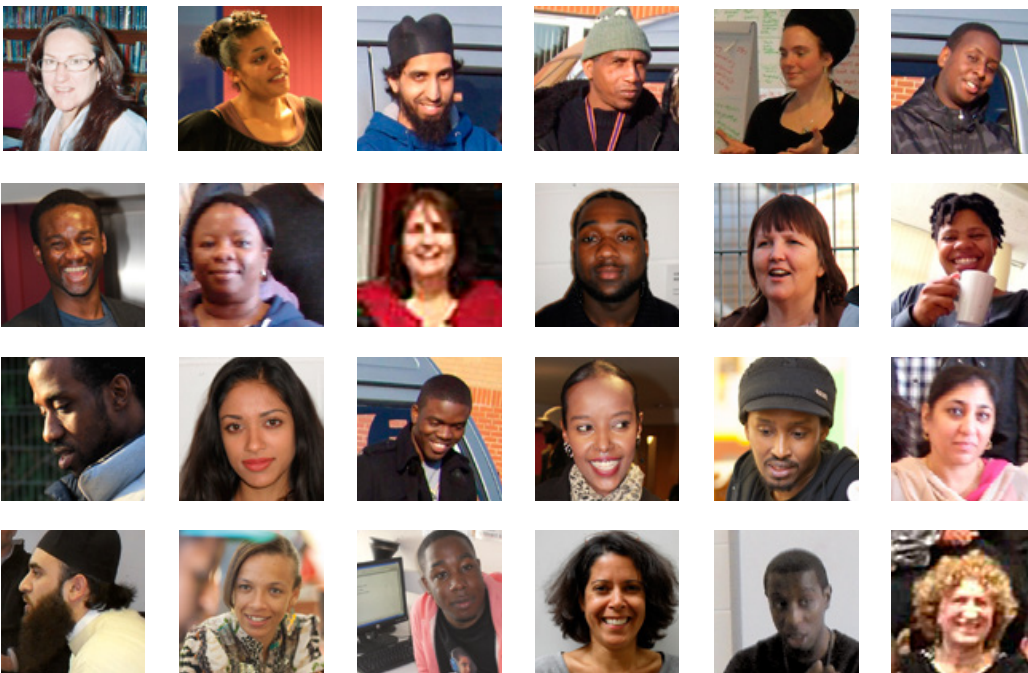
A learning report on 10 years of activity in Bristol, SW England

Acknowledgements

With all thanks to:

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The findings in the Section 3 of this report were provided by Phoebe Beedell and Cecile Jagoo, with additional commentary by Hen Wilkinson. Sections 1, 2 & 4 of the report were written by Hen Wilkinson with input from Siu-ming Hart, both founder members of Community Resolve and currently both Directors of limited company Community Resolve Training. They are also Trustees of Community Resolve charity, which continues to support small local skill- and community-building initiatives in Bristol.

Bristol, June 2014

Front cover pics, from top left - some of the Community Resolve people over the years:
Julie Perkins, Marlene Stewart, Akbar Ali, Joseph Allison, Nadine Bourne, Bill Finch, David Doe, Mobs Timi-Biu, Diana Warden, Jermaine Major, Hen Wilkinson, Amanda Radix, Warren Morrison, Natasha Khan, Tete Ashbourne, Rooda Kulah, Mo Said, Hardip Kaur, Waheed Ahmed, Jade Royal, Angico Daley, Siu-ming Hart, Jayson Morrison, Isobel Clarke

There were many many more who contributed time, energy and ideas – to name but a few...
Yusuf Ahmad, Tammara Anderton-Boyd, Deasy Bamford, Annie Beardsley, Tremayne Beckford, Omari Cato, Anne Clarke, Shobha Das, Alison Hope, Liz Hine, Paul Hoggett, Paul Holder, Nathalie Griffin, Chris Johnston, Ras Coujoe Mudada, Lynn Parfitt, Nik Pitcher, Charlene Richardson, Alida Robey, Shireen Shah ...

Community Resolve
Limited company: 0842095
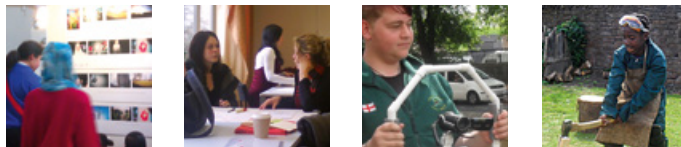Not-for-profit limited company: 4868736
Registered charity: 1141962

Contents

* = useful web link, see page 43 for web addresses

Executive summary

In 2001, two groups of young men living either side of Bristol's M32 motorway attacked each other with knives and machetes – not for the first time, nor the last. At the same time, Bristol – a compact, relaxed and to that point overwhelmingly white city in SW England - was faced with new arrivals and was struggling to cope with one of the highest rates of demographic change in the country. These challenges were being played out in the more disadvantaged communities across the city, with tensions and conflicts on the streets, in schools, in tower blocks.

Founded in Bristol, SW England in 2001, and constituted as a not-for-profit in 2003, Community Resolve worked to strengthen community relationships and build connections across city networks and hierarchies. The organisation emerged from the thinking of a small group of community mediators who had an interest in exploring cross-cultural conflict. They developed an untried approach to community divides, of developing a shared language around everyday conflict while embedding conflict management skills in individuals across all walks of life. Over the decade, Community Resolve's strong commitment to an ethos of inclusivity and respect engaged an extraordinary range of people from across Bristol backgrounds and life experiences - from the poor to the rich, the educated to those without qualifications - who connected with the organisation as workers, volunteers, steering group members, supporters and commissioners, alongside thousands of service users.

This learning report includes findings from interviews with 40 people who knew the organisation from a range of perspectives. The aim was to throw some light on how a small organisation with such a flexible, organic structure and a startlingly diverse group of workers was able to achieve so much in so short a time. However, this was not a seamless operation, and the report also highlights challenges and stumbling blocks the organisation encountered along the way. Esmée Fairbairn's* interest in disseminating the learning from Community Resolve has allowed us to reflect deeply on the organisation's citywide impact since the Bristol offices closed in June 2013. Such commitment from a funder for such a piece of research is unusual, and we are extremely grateful for their support.

'I was always able to identify problems in the community, but didn't know how to find solutions… Community Resolve taught me methods to work out solutions… and write projects around them…' Worker

The report findings are clear: Community Resolve certainly made a difference to the lives of many, many people and organisations across the city and beyond, creating a 'powerhouse' of ideas and activity that built on everyday skills found up and down the country. But the question remains – can this learning be useful elsewhere? The report acknowledges the importance of all individuals involved, and of having a leader figure with a strong vision for the organisation. In addition, we suggest that there are a number of specific learning points to take from the Community Resolve experience that could be useful across a range of settings:

- Successfully embedding skills and organisations within communities (or groups, or institutions), and especially across diverse communities, requires a demonstrated commitment to independence, impartiality, respect and consistency.

- To genuinely value and use local knowledge, instead of simply paying lip service to it, requires a mature response from traditional 'power holders', as it implies a considerable shift in how they commission, manage and evaluate community-facing work.

- Getting buy-in from across the range of people in a city requires a facilitated structure that allows 'co-design' – solution design that builds in ideas from across the spectrum of experience and knowledge, including people on the ground, practitioners, residents, policy makers, thinkers and theorists.

- Managing such a diversity of view is challenging but ultimately extremely creative, as well as promoting a model of respectful working across divides and difference – culture, age, economic status, class, etc.

- One route to managing such diverse teams is to work with the principles of community mediation both as a way to structure internal organisation and communication, and to facilitate external / community meetings.

- A central element in this 'walk the talk' approach is a commitment to self-knowledge and reflection - reflexive working – linked to an ethos of ongoing lifelong personal development at all levels of an organisation. Such organisational commitment to learning and openness is very evident to those they work with.

- Being responsive to community need requires an internal structure that is flexible and adaptive, recognising that everything is always on the move.

Executive summary

On scaling up...

It is important to acknowledge that some of the points above are easier to achieve in a smaller organisation – although many would add tremendously to the impact of larger and statutory bodies too. This relates directly to the question of scaleability and whether with more money, Community Resolve could have continued to deliver in the same way. This was a discussion we had several times over the years, as we grew.

On one occasion, we were asked by a much larger international conflict organisation how we would describe ourselves if we were a shop. They saw themselves as a large supermarket chain... and we saw ourselves a corner shop. This was because we recognised the value of the bonds between us individually, and with our local communities, and knew that if these were diluted too far the 'powerhouse' function of the organisation would be weakened.

Corner shops all over the country are the same but different, according to who runs them. Some are great, some are grotty, most are somewhere in between. All have their own feel and their own clientele. But those who succeed best are those who pay attention to who comes in and what they buy. They are friendly to their customers, ask their opinion on new lines or new looks for the shop, listen to what they say and are quick to respond accordingly. We suggest that such a model of community training is possible across the country, at a small and targeted scale.

This is not a 'how to do' report, and especially not 'how to do with no money...'. There needs to be a recognition of the timeframes involved in positive social change (much longer than a local or national election term, for example), and in the need for upfront investment in a truly skilled and embedded team – although this will reap massive social and economic benefits down the line. What the report does aim to do is to outline as complete a picture as possible of the complex multi-layered operation that Community Resolve became, and point the way for further reflection.

Section 1 gives a brief overview of the Bristol and British context that the organisation emerged into, as well as setting out the need for the work and the picture of underlying issues that emerged as the organisation grew.

Section 2 details the structure and functions of the organisation, including its foundations in the principles of mediation and the importance it gave to local knowledge and peer leadership.

Section 3 presents the findings of the evaluation research as provided by an independent research team, as well as the research approach taken and who the researchers talked to.

Section 4 highlights what has been learnt and what issues presented themselves as during the research. It also discusses whether and how the learning Community Resolve can be built on, 'scaled up' or replicated elsewhere.

Executive summary

Where is the organisation now?

After closing the Bristol office, Community Resolve transformed into a limited company to deliver training across the country and beyond. This allows us to embed skills in communities where we are **not** present, providing accredited online and face-to-face learning at OCN and Masters-level (combining theory and practice), while supporting community activists and organisers with programmes of supervision, group reflection and mentoring. Feedback to our online and face-to-face training has been overwhelmingly positive. As a result we are expanding delivery to provide:

- courses in mediation skills to use in a range of ways, including in organisational development;

- targeted skills-support for frontline workers in any aspect of community, from health to housing;

- new media learning opportunities, translatable into a full range of languages, to share overseas.

Meanwhile, Community Resolve non-profit & charity remains dormant and ready and waiting for when the local context changes again and someone with a new vision for the organisation picks up the reins.

Hen Wilkinson, Director
www.communityresolve.co.uk

Executive summary
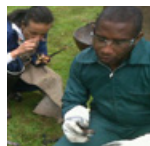
Background to the organisation

1

1.1 Bristol and wider social context

Bristol is rich – it has above average numbers of graduates in the city, wages and house prices. Nonetheless, some of the most prosperous areas in the UK sit side by side with some of the most deprived, with roughly 15% of Bristol's 2013 population of 432,500 living in neighbourhoods which suffer from the same high levels of deprivation in 2013 as they did in 1999. In 2010, for example, 14 wards were in the most deprived 5% in England. Between 2003-2013, Bristol's population is reckoned to have increased by around 38,000, with exceptional population rises in central Bristol wards of up to 62.2%. This relates to a rapidly changing population make-up in central Bristol, with a 'minority ethnic' figure of 8.2% in 2001 doubling to 16% by 2011. This was partly caused by a large growth in Somali and Polish populations in the city, peaking in 2005, but they were not the only ones to arrive. In 2013, Bristol residents were thought to be practising 45 religions, to represent at least 50 countries of birth, and to speak 91 main languages. However, the unequal distribution of this diversity across the city is startling, with significant differences between the city centre and outlying areas - in the central Lawrence Hill ward, for example, 55% of residents belong to a minority ethnic group compared to just 4% in Whitchurch Park. Increasing diversity is likely to be a feature of Bristol's future population.

Community Resolve's arc of growth took place at an interesting and challenging time. As it started out, Labour's Neighbourhood Renewal programme was still in full swing and large parts of central Bristol – such as the New Deal for Barton Hill – were on the receiving end of these policies. At the time, there was an openness both within the city and through national government programmes to the idea of communities managing themselves and skilling up local people, and funding to support such work. In part this was in response to the 2001 riots* in Bradford and Oldham, which led to more open discussion of the dynamics of cohesion in the UK, and mediation was the buzz word of the moment for central government.

At the same time, however, a steady rise of Islamaphobia following the New York 2001 attacks* was becoming interwoven with government thinking about funding for community work, which was further exacerbated by the London bombings* in 2005. These provoked consistently corrosive discussions about entitlement, welfare and 'loyalties' of those seen as 'new arrivals' to

'[They] filled a role: saw a particular issue that was very serious and tried to deal with it and had considerable success in doing so, but [they] have been a casualty of a real sea change in the funding landscape... both in the city and the country.' External partner organisation

Britain, characterised by the targeted 'Prevent' agenda which divisively funded grassroots groups within the Muslim communities across Britain in order to counter 'home grown terrorism'. Similar anxieties then emerged about the concerns of marginalised white communities and the rise of far-right groups such as the EDL, leading to another change in funding priorities as the then Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that 'Britain's multicultural experiment was over' in December 2006. By the time of the 2008 global financial crash,* and all the huge implications at local government and grassroots levels that followed, the environment for work such as Community Resolve's, which was not about number crunching but about seed sowing in a slow, long-term commitment to social change, became distinctly more difficult. A 'domino' effect followed, as government programmes to support social development were withdrawn, foundations and trusts whose stocks and shares had fallen became squeezed, and local authorities and other commissioning bodies had to withdraw support for community-facing programmes.

As such priorities dropped off the local and national agendas, and as local statutory leadership became less visionary and less supportive of innovative work, the organisation decided to close its Bristol office. Its Bristol delivery programme ended in June 2013 although Community Resolve itself continues to exist (see p31).

1.2 How and why did the organisation emerge?

Community Resolve started as a small group of community mediators pooled their contacts and knowledge to see what ideas they could produce in response to demographic changes in the city, which were exacerbating a sense of marginalisation among already marginalised geographic, cultural and youth communities. They were also convinced that the principles of mediation had much to offer if used on a larger scale than between neighbours, and all had a personal interest in exploring cross-cultural communication and conflict styles drawing on their own life experiences. As the organisation developed site-specific work across central Bristol (the most diverse area of the city), its organic structure remained rooted in mediation principles (see box p14) which proved to be a truly empowering stance for those within the organisation as well as those they worked with.

What became clear was that conflicts they were asked to get involved with - clashes between individuals or groups, neighbours, dysfunctional teams or organisations – often seemed one thing on the surface, but were underpinned by a much more complex system of structural and relationship power struggles and blocks. None of the community conflicts the organisation dealt with over a decade had a single, linear 'solution', but required careful unpicking through multiple strands of activity. This reinforced Community Resolve's stance of always starting with an open-minded investigation of the issues to get an understanding of the wider social, political and historical context, before taking an iterative, step-by-step approach to achieve sustainable, long-term change.

Working on conflicts in this way, with a previously untried approach of embedding skills in individuals across a city in all walks of life and social status, produced an extraordinary range of work over the following decade. Hundreds of people contributed their time and experience to develop the organisation. It is this aspect of Community Resolve – the way it engaged and involved such a wide range of people and their ideas, remaining productive, flexible and adaptable through changing times – that has led to this report. How was that achieved, and what can be learnt from that experience?

Driving forces... network building in community

Preparing this report has been exceptionally helpful in understanding the Community Resolve experience – a 'rollicking roller coaster ride', according to one founder member. We suggest that the qualities listed below were crucial for this form of community network leadership, were present in the Director, and were found to one degree or another in all those working in the organisation. As a result, the organisation's core values were amplified across the breadth of communities we were connected to, leading to its 'sum greater than the parts' impact across the city.

Improvisation and flexibility – see and consider unexpected opportunities, ability to think on feet**,** be open and prepared for shifting sands, 'serendipitous contacts'

Butterfly connector – use political, social, economic contacts to find and bounce ideas, collect new information, plan joint action bring together seemingly disparate ideas and links, and make connections in the moment

Ability to mobilise and amplify – get people moving and encourage them to mobilise their own networks

Take decisions quickly, trusting instincts – NB sometimes this won't work out…

Move ideas into action – bring ideas alive, including an ability to anticipate responses to those actions

No such thing as mistakes – be willing to try new approaches, and change direction if they don't work out - 'no fault' ethos

Conceptualising possible futures – see the relevance and possible practical applications of new ideas and concepts

Intuitive recruiting – find individuals with all / some of these qualities (and more) before providing training/ethos/ environment to develop these qualities further.

1.3 What did the work address?

Over the years, the organisation worked alongside agencies of all sizes - from schools, universities and local council departments to voluntary groups, the police and youth justice institutions – to introduce new ways to:

- manage conflict creatively across social divides via training, group work, 1-1 support, mentoring, large-scale workshops and community facilitation

- address clashes between different cultural groups (class, age, faith, nationality of origin, etc) and communities in ways that developed respect and understanding to prevent them escalating to violence

- raise acceptance of difference among young people and to challenge territorialism through what was initially called the Bristol Gang Awareness Project, and then became a city-wide training and preventative programme for young people aged 8-25 around issues of street violence, weapon use and life choices

- understand the systemic nature of local community conflicts, whether overt (neighbourhood clashes and adult anti-social behaviour) or hidden or unreported (eg low level racism or harassment), including the hidden structural inequalities that lie behind much community conflict.

Community Resolve's street-based team, 2009-2011

Organisational structure and function

2

2.1 How Community Resolve grew

The story of how Community Resolve steadily expanded, attracting more funding, more commissions, repeat commissions and above all, more people, is illustrated by the table of a selection of delivery between 2003 and 2013 (Appendix 1, p33)

Over the 10 years, what started as a few part-time volunteers grew into a team of 28 or more individuals as well as a diverse volunteer Trustee group. Paid and volunteer workers were assembled into a skilled and locally-rooted workforce from a range of community backgrounds. The community knowledge, ideas and experience they brought into the organisation shaped what and how it developed next as each worker was encouraged to build on their life experiences to develop projects of their own.

As time passed, the organisation became increasingly interested in how to embed learning and processes in such a way that they become part of the fabric of the local environment, establishing lines of contact in all directions, across closed communities and up and down power hierarchies. In particular, Community Resolve was interested in embedding structures to allow for the flexible and positive management of community tensions as they arose rather than allowing misunderstandings and miscommunications to fester and potentially descend into violence.

Over the decade of work covered in this report, Community Resolve:

- Built a highly diverse organisation whose workers became dynamic and significant role models and advocates for different communities across the city.

- Introduced a new way of working across Bristol, slowly bringing on board statutory and voluntary agencies to accept the importance of acknowledging conflict and the importance of training all people to approach it in a positive and skilled manner.

- Raised the profile of how conflict in schools, on streets and within communities is a massive drain on the city's resources; previously, underlying causes of incidents were ignored or swept under the carpet, so undermining huge investments in housing and education, for example, in Bristol's disadvantaged areas.

- Reached over 10,000 young people and at least 3000 adults across the city through training and support – including a series of free 1-day adult trainings and reaching all Year 8s in the city's schools. All youth training was delivered by peer educators from diverse communities, alongside more experienced trainers.

- Supported professionals and workers of all types across the city to better understand and manage their everyday conflicts, through training in managing conflict on the frontline, team development and facilitation and conflict coaching.

- Championed community research and the importance of investigating situations before acting, often commissioned by local statutory bodies to work in partnership with local universities.

- Developed site-specific innovative models of working, from mixed-age street-based outreach teams to the 'Crucial Conversations' intergenerational mediation project between teens and parents.

- Demonstrated the potential of a diverse team working to model positive relationships across different backgrounds which spanned age, gender, background, faith differences - without having to say it.

This last point seems to be at the heart of why so many people from so many backgrounds and experiences bought into the concept of Community Resolve as an organisation, as well as embracing its approach to managing conflicts and community relationships.The organisation's continually evolving internal structure

CASE STUDY: A tower block in disarray

We were approached by the council and local community workers after violent verbal and physical clashes between white and newly arrived Somali residents. The tower block had seen a transformation of its population in just a couple of years, with nearly 50% of places allocated to Somali families in a block that was historically 'white'. Over six months, Community Resolve led a multi-agency initiative to analyse the situation. As a first step, we trained local residents with both White British and Somali backgrounds to work in pairs, going door-to-door to talk through a questionnaire with residents of both communities about the difficulties they faced.

It became clear that a lack of language, housing support and opportunities for original and new residents to meet were fuelling the difficulties, as was a stark difference in attitudes to dogs. The questionnaire results were fed back to residents (as a letter through their door, in English and Somali) and to local agencies, at two multi-agency meetings and led to a number of positive developments. These included a welcome/induction pack for new residents in English and other languages, and a diverse, fully representative ongoing residents group which monitored difficulties in the block. Clashes between residents fell, and when an incident did reoccur 8 months later, it was quickly managed by the representatives of the residents group who stopped the rumour mill before the incident escalated. Community Resolve also trained volunteer residents in mediation skills to enable them to manage subsequent conflicts in the block.

had at its heart a community mediation process, as well as international conflict theory and practice (see Appendix 2: Drawing from international theory and practice, p37). As a result, its foundations were built on a way of working that encouraged responsibility and empowerment within the organisation, and also explained why Community Resolve were able to hold a neutral space between groups and statutory bodies in their delivery work.

A loose and open organisation structure encouraged everyone to take a management as well as a delivery role, even though some were definitely more at home with paper trails than others. Strategically, the organisation moved continually between the 'big picture' (an awareness of the wider funding, political and social contexts for the work) and the 'little picture' (understanding the importance of supporting relationships and resilience between individuals and groups). Above all, the organisation provided the city with a team of huge resourcefulness, who were able to adapt and successfully operate in the most challenging of environments using their own experiences combined with an internal toolbox of conflict management and facilitation skills.

Table 1: Community mediation principles as organisational values

Community mediation principles	Organisational values and practices
A belief that solutions rest with the people in the situation, and that they bring an experience and knowledge which must form a central part of the answer	Recruiting local people with deep community connections
All ideas are honoured equally, regardless of status or hierarchy	Learning from each other by pooling ideas and resources
All cultural and personal perspectives are welcomed	Respectful working inside and outside the organisation
Ask first, don't suggest or offer solutions	Work underpinned by local action research
Addressing needs identified by those in the situation	Flexibility, continually responding to the changing environment and context
Taking responsibility for the process and the solutions	A commitment to self development, reflection and peer feedback
Maintaining confidentiality	Not talking about those who are not present; sharing information appropriately in public forums
Everyone speaks in turn, listening, without interrupting	Format of team meetings, planning meetings, community facilitations
Everyone has a little bit of the truth: solutions are found by building on each others' ideas	Internal project planning and development of new ideas; external approach to clashes and conflicts

Chapter 2 Organisational structure and function

2.2 Organisational response to a changing world

Community Resolve started off at a time when innovative ways of working were embraced by the city, which was looking for new models to manage relationship and structural weaknesses as the city's make-up changed. However, over the years, and most especially as the impact of the Coalition government's approach to 'austerity' hit post 2010, many of the relationships built up over the decade were disintegrating. Partner agencies had closed or had their funding withdrawn, and key allies across the range of statutory bodies – from schools to the council and the police - either lost their jobs or had their budgets slashed. Repeated rounds of 'restructuring' and redundancy over 5 years or more led to a profoundly depressed and internal-looking statutory and institutional leadership in the city.

When it became clear that the Local Authority had moved from supporting local organisations to commissioning large (and usually out-of-city) agencies to deliver community-facing work, Community Resolve was left with difficult choices, including the possibility of merging with other organisations. As a team, they decided against a merger, and so prepared for closure over a six month period from the end of 2012 onwards. Most workers found alternative jobs within community organisations of one sort or another, and in so doing fulfilled one of the founders' original ambitions: to embed the skills of conflict and relationship management within local communities.

For more information on the breadth of work delivered 2003-2013, see page 33 onwards

year	Young people/adults aged 5-25	Community action & adult training	Action research/ dissemination
2003	• Work with young people/youth workers/ families over Easton / St Pauls stabbing • Contract to: 'create positive social and personal development opportunities, fostering self-confidence and cohesion amongst	• Contract to 'overcome conflict within the community and improve local people's safety by identifying the deep-rooted causes of uznrest within BS5'	• Start of action research into 'hidden conflict' in Easton and surrounding areas

The impact research

3

3.1 Aims and timing for the research

The data in this research was gathered at the point of closure of Community Resolve's Bristol office, between May and July 2013. The research aimed to answer the following questions:

- What could be learnt from the insights of those who engaged with the organisation over a 10-year period, including service users, funders, commissioners, workers, volunteers and supporters?

- How was so much achieved by such a small organization over 10 years of delivery?

- What can be learnt from the organisation's experience in terms of embedding skills across a city and working with such a diverse delivery team?

The quotes from those interviewed, and the themes below, have been pulled together by the research team independently of any Community Resolve workers.

3.2 Who took part?

Over three months, the research team talked to 41 people in depth about their experience and views of the organisation (see chart, p17). It is worth noting that many of those interviewed had at least two different types of relationship with Community Resolve – for example as service user and commissioner, or as a volunteer and then paid worker.

This reflects the characteristically complex and ongoing nature of involvement with the organisation over its years of work in Bristol. For more detail on participants and their relationship to Community Resolve, see Appendix 3, p39.

The summaries on the next page capture the overarching attitudes to Community Resolve and its closure from those the research team talked to:

Service users all felt empowered by their connection with the organisation which had provided them with a range of new opportunities. Those who had moved through Community Resolve into work were particularly committed, interested in the work and the organisation itself. Many expressed a sense of belonging and of being truly 'heard and seen'.
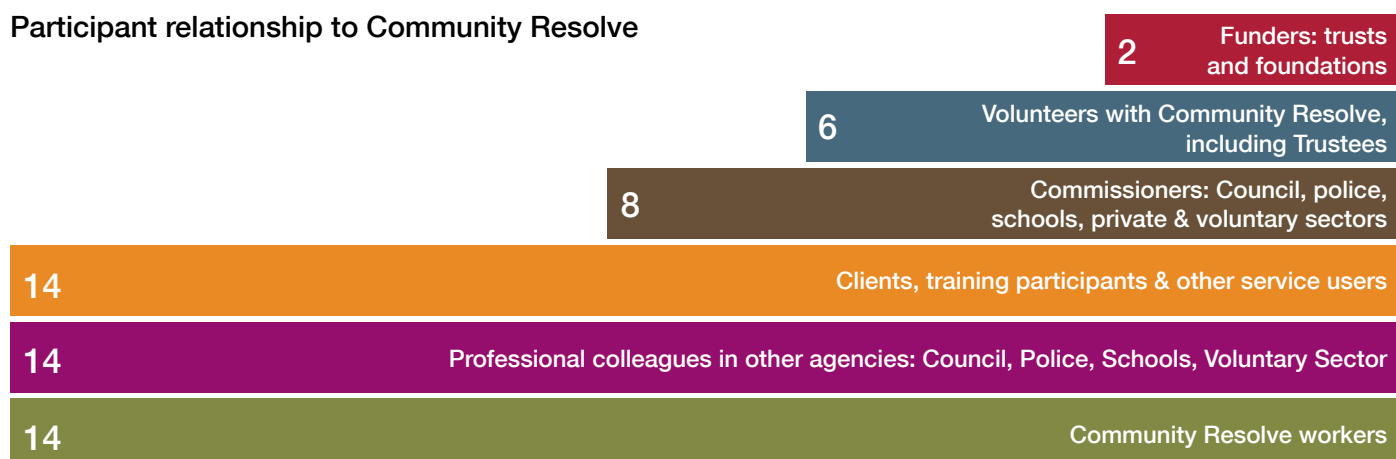
Part-time and sessional workers were enthusiastic about Community Resolve and were disappointed that the work would end. They understood the need for such work and appreciated the degree of connection that the workers and the organisation had across a range of communities.

Longterm workers who formed the central core team within Community Resolve felt they had gained greatly from being a part of the organisation, despite being tired and ready to move on to new opportunities. As they had been part of the decision-making process to close, they were aware of the challenges the organisation faced but also confident its positive impact would be felt in the city for quite some time.

Commissioners and partner agencies highlighted the credibility of the organisation and the advocacy role it played for various central Bristol communities. They drew attention to the negative impacts of closure, losing both Community Resolve's work and its unique networks, and suggested that the loss of the organisation will only become clear years down the line. Those few commissioners who had been most challenged by Community Resolve's independent stance had a different understanding of why the closure had occurred, feeling that the organisation had not 'played the game'. Others, more resigned to the effects of the financial crash and political direction, felt that the organisation's innovative and explorative approaches were not viable in the current financial/ideological climate, no matter how needed.

Funders and supporters highlighted the connection with grassroots communities that Community Resolve had built up, as well as the abilities of the Director to articulate the values behind Community Resolve's work. Others pointed to Community Resolve's reputation and high levels of social capital and credibility.

Participant relationship to Community Resolve

2	Funders: trusts and foundations
6	Volunteers with Community Resolve, including Trustees
8	Commissioners: Council, police, schools, private & voluntary sectors
14	Clients, training participants & other service users
14	Professional colleagues in other agencies: Council, Police, Schools, Voluntary Sector
14	Community Resolve workers

Chapter 3 The impact research

3.3 What did the research look at and how?

Although this is a small evaluation report, meetings with the research team led to broad agreement on the qualitative approach to be taken before researchers worked independently. The research team then contacted participants based on a list of contacts in three broad categories, and collated a list of key themes to emerge from the interviews (see 3.4). Interviews were generally with one person, face to face or via skype, although they also included a couple of focus groups with service users, and covered the questions listed below:

- How did you first come into contact with Community Resolve? What was the nature of your involvement?

- Has that encounter changed you? Is the change short/long term?

- What's been the impact on your work? Other parts of your life? Other people or situations you know?

- Can you tell me something about leadership in Community Resolve and how it works? (for workers): Do you have an example of how you have taken a leadership role?

- What were the organisation's strengths and weaknesses? What do you think they did well/less well?

- When you think about the organisation, what do you feel? What images come to mind?

- Is there anything else you'd like to add?

3.4 Key research findings

What emerged in this study were feelings of loss and sadness, frustration and disappointment at the closure of Community Resolve in Bristol. But what also emerged, in greater strength and frequency, were accounts of life-changing experiences, profound job satisfaction, joy in relationships formed, a sense of belonging, and pride in serving and contributing to the betterment of people's lives in local communities and neighbourhoods. Everyone spoken to - workers, service users and people in other organisations - was changed in some profound ways by their contact with the organisation. Many spoke of new skills acquired that they are putting to use, or new ways of looking at issues of conflict and differences. Below are a number of key themes that emerged from across the interviews, illustrating many of the points made earlier.

'[They] *filled a role: saw a particular issue that was very serious and tried to deal with it and had considerable success in doing so, but* [they] *have been a casualty of a real sea change in the funding landscape... both in the city and the country.'* External partner organisation

A. Building a diverse & resilient organisation

– Respect for the team

Community Resolve's workers were described with great respect by all those interviewed, from service users to funders and commissioners, as well as by each other. Workers talked of feeling *'privileged to have worked in such a diverse group'*, while those who they worked with spoke of how *'like if I'm not here for a week, they notice... you know you're really part of a community when they say 'what happened?'* and another, how *'every time I come here they show me love ... I've got nothing but love for them.'*

While some team members had fantastic local community connections, others had the skills to hold together a complex and rapidly growing organisation. In effect, the specific skills and qualities of each worker built on those of the others, complementing and amplifying the overall impact and reach of the organisation.

'They have the skills to go on the streets, to meet younger people from different cultural backgrounds and talk to them and were able to engage them better than any other organisation.' Service user

'They are one of the organisations that has the most intelligences and experience really' Public sector commissioner

– Recruitment and management

It is important to note that people in Community Resolve were just ordinary people from a range of different backgrounds who went on to build an unusual and dynamic organisation. When workers were asked how they became involved with Community Resolve, many named a meeting where they had met a worker from the organisation, or someone had introduced them, or they had help from Community Resolve. Many had been directly approached by the Director and already had extensive connections and leadership roles within one particular Bristol community. Their wholehearted commitment to the work was because *'they knew thiswas needed'.* Worker

Recruitment was not based on qualifications but workers were always looking out for people with an open heart, a commitment to learning and a desire to contribute. One Trustee described the recruitment model as *'Here you are, what are your skills? Ok, can you go and do it?'*

'I learnt a lot from working with Community Resolve, I really appreciate it, and the opportunities I got along the way, I know my input was valued and valuable to the organisation' Worker

This kind of *'purposeful recruitment'* brought added demands for staff development and intensive management. One worker talked of how:

'Sometimes it might be difficult internally, so like it might be difficult to make dates... and for them to turn up... because they're not bound by their diary in the way that I am. You know, it's different ways of working. There's something about the aim of the project is to continue to support the [workers] *in their journey of being responsible, meeting expectations, so that was difficult and frustrating.'*

While another longterm worker described the need for 'so many different management styles', especially given so much new and innovative work:

'So many people with such good skills, doing so many different things, that it was quite difficult to manage... Partly that was the nature of the work they do and partly the nature of the people involved - that includes myself... People with different abilities, just in terms of filing, computer literacy, the way people reported back... We had systems in place, [but] not everyone used them and sometimes not everyone understood them... People in admin really felt pressured and felt put upon... [whilst]...people on the ground just said 'why don't you let me get on with my work?'. It's weird because it functioned very well for a very long time. As a beast it functioned really well.'

– Building the team

One reason it did function so well was because of the commitment throughout the organisation to group development. This was seen by many as an important factor in promoting successful internal cohesion, with workers speaking of the great feeling of trust between everyone. Fortnightly team meetings run according to mediation principles – different people chairing, talking in turn, respect for all views expressed – reinforced the organisation's highly positive internal dynamics. With so much to do, these meetings could easily have been lost, but became an essential part of keeping such a very disparate group of people, with completely differently values and interests away from work, in touch with each other.

'In meetings we debated, we had differences and we came to compromises, this was important for working together, we all respected each other's opinions even if we didn't agree' Worker

'The meetings were important, cause so many projects and people doing different things… it was hard to keep up… but we could exchange and learn from each other in meetings...' Worker

'We learnt a lot from each other and understanding different ways of working, we would often get support and help from each other on issues we had in our own projects, this was really useful' Worker

'We argued, debated and came to a consensus because we all had the same aim and vision' Worker

– Continuous training

Ongoing training for all was an intrinsic part of building the organisation, and when funding permitted, all workers had an annual training budget they could call on to pay for or subsidise relevant training they wanted to take. Training in how to facilitate difficult conversations encouraged everyone to develop their own vision of how to work with and between Bristol communities. On two occasions, all workers and trustees did one complete week of training together, facilitated by experienced relational trainers from Leap Confronting Conflict. This powerful experience was highlighted by workers as significant in both their work and home lives:

'The training allowed us to really take a look at ourselves, and figure out what made us tick, because that really affected how we were able to help others' Worker

'The trainings, red flags, really changed my life, it had a massive impact on how I looked at the world and my role as a father, and my role in the community' Worker

'I really grew from doing the training, and learnt about how to keep my cool just by being aware of my own red flags' Worker

'Community Resolve has enabled me to grow, I've done a lot of work on myself which has helped me to do this kind of work... it's not been easy, to become more self-aware is a road... and it's not easy...' Worker

The ethos of lifelong learning filtered through to volunteers and service users. Some people spoke of passing on skills and knowledge, with one describing the organisation as creating a *'cascade of mediation-savvy community activists'.* Another spoke of the training in diversity and conflict management he had received which led to his recognition in the wider community, noting that the *'philosophy'* of the Community Resolve workers was *'not about killing energy* [but] *about moving it and channelling it into something positive.'*

'I remember once being told, if there's anything that you see me do that you like the look of, let me know and I will send you on training.' Worker, talking about the Director

'Every time there's an opportunity, she's like 'this is right up your street' … she pushes me for it.' Service user, talking about worker

B. **Empowerment and leadership**

It was clear from people's accounts that Community Resolve 'walked the talk' of empowerment, identifying, valuing and bringing into the organisation a range of people with different skills and attributes but also, crucially, encouraging people to broaden their horizons. The workers, service users, funders and commissioners all acknowledged the ethos of empowerment within Community Resolve and commented in various ways of its role in the organisation's management and leadership style. Funders talked of Community Resolve as *'a learning organisation...* [with] *innovative solution design* [that] *was ahead of the game'*, with one using these solutions as template for other funding applications they processed. Another saw the organisation's ability to *'turn poachers into gamekeepers'* as a key part of connecting and changing lives.

In producing this report, it has become clear that the success of the organisation lay in its interplay between leadership, unique organisational structure, and delivery and multi-agency working. The organisation itself took a key leadership role in the city, naming what many people wanted to avoid (the existence of conflict and tensions); fully embracing the complexity of community dynamics by absorbing a range of community perspectives and moulding them into a single entity; and by acknowledging and honouring the wisdom and experience in communities while challenging long-hidden structural and power inequalities in the city.

– Individual leadership

The intention from the very beginning had been to develop leadership skills within Community Resolve, in part to try and avoid creating a traditional organisational hierarchy. From the reports of many of the workers, this strategy worked extremely well. All of the workers felt they were leaders in their own arenas, and they appreciated the flexibility and trust they were given to do their work. They talked of how there was *'no hierarchy, everyone worked together',* and gave many examples of projects they developed and led.

'From the idea to the delivery, I was mentored to work through how to lead a project'
Worker & service user

'I was always able to identify the problems in the community, but I didn't know as much how to find solutions… Community Resolve and the training taught me methods to work out solutions… and present them... And write projects around them…' Worker

'There always seem to be that commitment to some extent to devolving power... try to spread responsibility and giving young people particularly the opportunity to step up and take things' Funder

'Each worker had a link to their own community, they managed themselves and they were credible, this could be seen by going into the office and having a meeting or a chat with any of them.' Supporter/advocate

As the organisation grew, so too did the demands from outside Community Resolve for an identifiable figurehead who spoke the same language as policy-makers and commissioners and who could hold their own in official meetings and forums. This led to the reluctant internal creation of a 'Director', who took an increasingly outward-facing role:

'[The Director] *was a really good ambassador for the work they did… she really understood multi-agency work'* Commissioner

'[The Director's leadership] *was very dynamic, very inspirational, extremely intelligent and quick, but also with a really keen ideal of trying to enable others'* Funder

'She's very good at directing and looking at the best possible way to move forward and she's a risk taker' Local authority colleague

'[The director] *was like a breath of fresh air...*[with a] *unique combination of a grasp of theory relating to community and conflict and also a sense of action and application. And it's very rare that I see those qualities in one person'* Multi-agency colleague

Chapter 3 The impact research

This focus on the Director's abilities was a mixed blessing for the organisation. While it was helpful for getting buy-in to the organisation's organic approach to community work, it reflected the access barriers for others in the organisation, and especially those from minority backgrounds. Some accounts collected suggest that established partnership organisations and statutory bodies were perhaps more wedded to the idea of the Director's leadership than those in Community Resolve. They had a vested interest in concentrating much of the decision-making and managerial power in her, someone more recognisably like themselves. One longtime worker in the organisation, when asked about leadership, observed that if you belonged to an ethnic minority and had had experience of racism, the 'further up you go' the more you experience it. His description of isolation in strategic meetings, despite providing a much-needed channel of communication between the statutory agencies and the grassroots, is significant:

'I hated going to these meetings, wasting my time, to give them information… I knew they needed the information… but it was like an insider's club, with everything, the way they communicated with each other. ... It just wasn't me and I knew – not that I wanted to - but I knew I didn't fit in' Worker

Another commented on his responsibility as a trail blazer for poorly represented communities in the city: *'Leadership is about being in that position – working and progressing, the more I go on, the more the community goes on.'* Worker

– Citywide leadership around community action

Public service commissioners of Community Resolve's work with young people and community groups were enthusiastic in their praise of the organisation's training and practical work on the ground and the connections and 'inspired links' they made between agencies and groups. The organisation's approach to community action was also highly valued:

'Looking at how community people can be involved in their own solutions and build local capacity… is a very important value that I picked up... it wasn't a hierarchy, it was partnership… A lot of people talk the talk but they don't walk the walk' Local authority colleague

'[Community Resolve] *showed us lots of ways into helping organisations and helping each other. That has changed us, putting on that first event was the making of* [our] *Community Trust I think... We saw the impact of that, the community saw the impact of that'*
Service user & partner agency

'It had an impact on the skills of our staff members... they gained mediation skills that we still use as an organisation... I believe there were personal benefits and also organisational benefits from the [Community Resolve] *training.'* Partner agency

Its widespread community credibility and connections led to a level of knowledge and understanding of frontline dynamics that other organisations and statutory bodies wanted and needed. This, combined with a flexible approach of 'planning to have no plan', enabled the organisation to respond in real time to community situations as they unfolded:

'With CR, there was a safety net there ... sometimes you were doing work and thinking, I've got that organisation and that organisation ... but sometimes you needed a more creative approach that was outside of the Council. I was really aware of that when I was doing some work around

a stabbing of a young guy … Community Resolve were coming in with a different approach of holding things together … in a practical way. I'm really sad that safety net's gone in a way … and I'm aware that there's no-one there to do that bit of work.' Local authority colleague

'Responding to crises and doing that by coming up with a plan, a really clear strategic plan' Commissioner

'It's quite simple-seeming work, but it's actually quite skilful… We didn't have the specific expertise that Community Resolve did. But we learnt a lot from working with them. Our practice shifted after that' Local authority colleague

'Insider information that they were able to manage... this will be a miss... there will be a gap in this knowledge for us now, and we won't know the impact until a few years time' Public sector colleague

'It's gone, a massive vacuum has been created and where there's a vacuum it usually gets filled by something not very good.' Public sector colleague

C. **Credibility & independence**

Open and honest debate was valued in the organisation, which organised itself internally by drawing on the principles of community mediation – those of respectful listening and challenge; of valuing all view points; of confidentiality; and of actively promoting self reflection and self knowledge. Those familiar with Community Resolve's approach to conflict saw challenge as a positive thing, a way to stretch people's ideas and horizons, to find new approaches to old struggles. By promoting a positive attitude and shared tools and language towards everyday conflicts, the organisation had considerable impact on skilling up people across the city to manage their daily tensions and relationships.

Nonetheless, Community Resolve gained a reputation in some quarters of being 'the awkward squad' for challenging not only individuals and groups at grassroots levels (which seemed to be acceptable and expected) but also those working in the city's institutions. This was less acceptable and definitely less expected, in part because statutory bodies understood too little about Community Resolve's underpinning theory and practice (see Appendix 2: Drawing on international theory and practice) to understand why the organisation saw this as their remit.

'CR started out with a real plan to tackle the community conflict, a really strong, like bringing people in, and really strongly facilitating the conflict. Their funder … didn't really like that idea and pushed against the work they could have done, and made it a much milder set of sessions. It could have been a lot more powerful I think.' Local authority colleague

'Antagonistic relationships between members of the Council and members of Community Resolve were ironic since the organisation is about conflict resolution' Public sector commissioner

'We wouldn't bother wasting energy, we would just roll our eyes and walk away' Partner organisation

'You know the phrase 'walk the talk', well [the Director] would do that. She would be the role model, wouldn't shy away from difficult conversations.' Multi-agency colleague

This willingness to challenge the malfunctioning status quo (by addressing and talking about power and structural inequalities in the city) and the organisation's highly diverse and embedded workforce were central to Community Resolve's credibility. The majority of workers and volunteers were born and educated within the communities they were working alongside.

'That's what really worked, the workers were really embedded in their communities and they had their own relationships, you probably know the phrase 'credible messengers' but that's what got created there.' Service user

This embedded-ness and commitment presented considerable challenges for the workers, as separating 'work' and 'life' was not easy. Those in the organisation working with marginalised communities became involved at times with the aftermath of violent, sometimes fatal, conflicts. It could be extremely emotionally demanding, as well as unsafe:

'There were times when I just got really overwhelmed' Worker

'We were at times putting us at risk – this is something we had to consider… people didn't understand this' Worker

The importance given to an independent stance for the organisation was often misunderstood. Although Community Resolve was not a mediation service, it was rooted in mediation approaches and practices, which involved positioning the organisation and its workers as being on everyone's side and none. Independence wasn't a choice – it was an essential component of the organisation's ethos and impact, and was crucial for workers' safety. This wasn't always understood:

'The days when you could have a good idea... and then get some funding to do that and therefore establish yourself as an independent organisation, I think that's increasingly gone. The small organisations are going by the board. It's a pity because they are the ones that are best at engaging with individuals but what needs to happen is that the people who are really good at doing that need to go into work with other organisations which are of a sufficient size that they are more resilient.' Partner agency

This quote also highlights a commonplace correlation between size, resilience and engagement that Community Resolve would question. One person interviewed suggested that a key difference between Community Resolve and other organisations in the city lay in its approach of 'looking at what was happening and then looking for the money', as opposed to the standard model of 'looking at what funding was available and then deciding the work accordingly'. The organisation's commitment to this emergent approach both impressed and frustrated partner agencies and statutory bodies:

'It was really important that it was lifted by its values... you couldn't put it in a box. It had its own form. That was its strength and its weakness.' Public sector commissioner

D. **Evaluating impact**

Many of the organisations spoken to viewed the closure of Community Resolve as a significant loss to the city and to their own abilities to deliver services and manage tensions within and between communities. The loss is situated in the context of widespread and deep cuts to public services across the country. Public sector workers shared deep-seated worries about the future of community cohesion across the city, as well as the effects of youth unemployment and growing levels of conflict arising from increased competition for resources and services.

However, there are contradictions in the accounts around how the organisation's impact was monitored and evaluated. Highly respected large-scale national funders talked of Community Resolve as *'perfect partners',* while a Bristol Local Authority commissioner spoke of how it was *'frustrating… not getting proper evaluations'.* This discrepancy may relate to the increasing pressure on public sector funders to demonstrate hard numbers and tangible positive outcomes in return for funding. Although Community Resolve could and did provide 'numbers' of people trained, events held and other countable measures, much of their work was about changing people's attitudes, perspectives and micro-level behaviours – and so less easily documented.

This led to a situation where the organisation and its impact was perceived and understood differently by different people - another strength and weakness. One city commissioner described how:

'When I think of Community Resolve I see [the Director], [the Director], [the Director]. *Perhaps that was part of the issue, she was Community Resolve'*

while those closer to the organisation, who had never met the Director, talked of Community Resolve very differently:

'If you came here you would see the progress, if you knew these boys on a personal level, if you was in St Pauls every day and you seen what these boys was like you'd be like 'Wow these boys come here, they do this?'' Service user and mentor

'It impacts their lives outside of this place and that's just one or two people, so when you've got 25, 50 people coming here you can just imagine how influential this place is.'
Service user and commissioner

Another senior manager with the City Council noted that while the research and conflict work done by Community Resolve was successful in addressing underlying issues, these issues have not gone away. His observation highlights the systemic nature of community relationships and structures, and the importance of embedding local skills and structures to work with what will always be a dynamic and ongoing process.

– What was achieved

In 2004 the organisation settled on this statement of intent:

> *'New ways of seeing and being: our vision is to transform the negative energy of conflict situations into opportunities for growth, understanding and communication'.*

There is no doubt that over the decade Community Resolve did effect profound personal changes in individuals, groups and communities, opening up new horizons for large numbers

of both young and old, and providing tools to achieve personal and social change through other ways of seeing, living and being. The research provided substantial evidence that this 2004 vision was realised in more ways than might have been expected, as it became clear that Community Resolve had created ripples of social change rooted in individual awareness that were, and continue to be, felt across the city and beyond. In addition, Community Resolve also had considerable impact on citywide statutory and voluntary organisations (of all sizes and stature) , shifting their practices and understandings and upskilling their staff just as much as 'community' individuals and groups.

The impact of the organisation is perhaps best summed up by the different metaphors or images offered by participants in the research:

As 'opening a gate *for the young people, giving access to places young people might not necessarily see… the young people might be thinking 'What's behind the gate?', and Community Resolve would be opening it for them'*

As a fountain, showering skills and knowledge across the city through the creation of a '*cascade of mediation-savvy community activists*'

As 'freedom fighters with no business model'

As ripples caused by 'a great big boulder going into a pond' said one, and 'the proverbial ripple effect – not a cookbook approach' offered another.

And above all as a bridge - over 10 years, the organisation built extensive networks in every direction which served as a multi-directional bridge between different cultures and classes in the broadest sense, acknowledging difference while providing a route for communication, travel and exchange.

'It was about who you are and who you can be' Trustee

Chapter 3 The impact research

To follow up...

4

The accounts collected by the research team clearly show how Community Resolve's role in the city mix was complex and multi-layered. A strong sense of values emerged, as well as numerous accounts of the organisation's long-term influence and impact along a continuum from individuals to statutory development and delivery. Many participants had experienced the 'warmth' of the organisation, demonstrating deep connections and a palpable trust and belief in its credibility.

Although the questions asked did not necessarily identify the full complexity of Community Resolve, they did unearth a number of insights into its workings and wider impacts. As a study into managing community complexity and embedding a skilled workforce to help with that, this report also highlights a number of leads to investigate further.

Community Resolve's theory and practice framework

- **recruitment**
  - prioritising local employment
  - designing an inclusive and accessible process
  - recruiting for qualities, not qualifications

- **management**
  - consistent line management and group supervision
  - accompaniment, encouragement and no blame
  - in-house teams of those with community knowledge and those with office skills

- **internal decision making**
  - group and consensus processes
  - devolved responsibility wherever possible
  - openness and transparency

- **delivery design and carry through**
  - ask first – don't act without an understanding of context and dynamics
  - diverse delivery teams (eg across age, gender, background)
  - one step at a time – design, act, review

- **timescales**
  - there are no quick fixes
  - longterm commitment to building trust and relationships
  - 10 years plus to create a skilled, embedded workforce

- **partnership working**
  - practitioner, policy maker and academic collaborations
  - building multi-directional networks across the city
  - linking power hierarchies and creating a channel for voice

4.1 Organisational learning

- The report acknowledges the importance of the ethos of empowerment and leadership threaded through the entire organisation, as well as having a leader figure who can hold and articulate with a strong and clear vision. It confirmed that devolved leadership can be spread across a diverse worker team to great effect where mixed skilled teams work together.

- Those inside Community Resolve recognised the value of the close respectful bonds within the worker team, and knew that if the organisation grew too big, and these were diluted too far, the 'powerhouse' function of the organisation would be weakened.

- The principles of community mediation were successfully expanded to form the bedrock for such a diverse workforce and its delivery, used both to structure internal organisation and communication, and to facilitate external / community meetings.

- The acknowledged 'walk the talk' of the organisation started with the individual commitment of all workers to a programme of ongoing self-knowledge and reflection, true as much for those who had been at Community Resolve the longest as for the newest arrival. This organisational commitment to learning and openness modelled an attitude to life and others which was transmitted to those we worked with.

- Being responsive to community need requires an internal structure that is flexible and adaptive. Community Resolve's conceptual framework, which evolved over time, allowed a highly diverse group of people – in age, background, gender, class, faith, education levels and interests – to form a cohesive, resilient community workforce.

- Seed sowing is a very effective way of making large-scale impact but runs the risk of an organisation becoming unmanageable and unwieldy if all the sprouts emerge at the same time. In general, people were aware of just one or two aspects of Community Resolve's work at any one time, rather than the full spectrum of the organisation's delivery across the city .

- To grow sustainably, the organisation needed to build its management team for the next stage of development. However, its idiosyncratic nature and commitment to devolved internal leadership made it very complicated for new senior managers to be integrated. This was tried several times and was unsuccessful.

- Community Resolve was a young, untried and continually evolving organisation and had lots to learn, including how to articulate what it was doing so that it made sense for others.

Chapter 4 To follow up...

4.2 Funding innovative community work in challenging times

- To genuinely value and use local knowledge, instead of simply paying lip service to it, requires a mature response from traditional 'power holders' as it implies a considerable shift in how they commission, manage and evaluate community-facing work.

- Developing and supporting people is long-term work. The strain on a local person working in their own community is far greater than for those who can withdraw from it. Public sector workers in frontline roles are offered opportunities for clinical supervision, which is rarely affordable in the voluntary and non-profit sector, even though their risks may be greater to themselves and their families.

- A critical drawback to current funding strategy and allocations for voluntary sector services is the lack of recognition of the need to fund the core of an organisation, from which delivery emerges. Most funds now pay for project delivery work only, which eliminates any possibility of developing longterm embedded teams that build on local skills and connections such as this. This takes time, effort and upfront investment.

4.3 Community engagement – what's the task?

- This report clearly demonstrates that it is possible for wide ranging groups of people to feel pride, ownership and attachment to an organisation that they see as 'fighting their corner'. Managing such a diversity of view is challenging but ultimately extremely creative, as well as promoting a model of respectful working across divides and difference – culture, age, economic status, class, etc.

- Deliberate community engagement through building on workers' personal 'social capital', their connections and community standing, leads to a multi-directional 'bridging' effect that releases community energy and enthusiasm and builds on individual skills, knowledge and connections at any and all levels.

- Getting buy-in from across the range of people and backgrounds in a city requires a facilitated structure that allows 'co-design' – solution design that builds in ideas from across the spectrum of experience and knowledge, including people on the ground, practitioners, residents, policy makers, thinkers and theorists. Again, this shift requires those holding financial and commissioning power to rethink whose knowledge they value and why.

- Successfully embedding skills and organisations within communities (or groups, or institutions), and especially across diverse communities, requires a demonstrated commitment to independence, impartiality, respect and consistency. This can be achieved by big or small organisations as long as they have the trust of local communities - which takes time to build and can be easily undermined without careful attention. Enabling organisations to maintain their integrity and independence is key to building true community support.

Chapter 4 To follow up…

4.4 Replication and scaling up

This report was commissioned in part to explore the key question of replication and scaling up, and in it we have attempted to extract how and where this learning could be useful elsewhere.

Community Resolve do believe this work is scale-able. Despite having to close its Bristol offices, and dismantling a team that was just beginning to really come into its own, Community Resolve would suggest that every city in the country could develop a similarly small, independent and targeted team to build local community facilitation skills levels across all backgrounds.

It is not a question of replicating Community Resolve elsewhere, but of extracting the values, qualities, principles and approaches that were used, and bringing them together in a unique combination to fit another situation or need. By working with a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of how culture, identities, emotions and all aspects of context and power inform local community relations, such a team could provide local training – embedding skills and understanding – alongside provision of specialist skills to manage the trickiest tensions and conflict that arise. It would be staffed by local people who understand local communities and tension points, who use local language and examples, and who would shape the project to fit the specific local needs of multi-agency and bridging requirements.

'[Community Resolve] showed us lots of ways into helping organisations and helping each other. Putting on that first event was the making of [our] Community Trust I think...' Service user & partner agency

4.5 Community Resolve going forward

When Community Resolve started out in Bristol in 2001, it was clear that what it was working on was a concept, a way of working within and with diverse communities, rather than a 'product' as in 'this is what we offer'. Over the following decade (and more), the organisation had the great good fortune to be able to explore that concept in detail, to try out a huge number of approaches and initiatives, and to distill those experiences into a clear programme of learning.

It is now at a new beginning, back to thinking about these ideas as concepts rather than as a single organisation. This time, with the confidence of this report and a decade of work completed, Community Resolve is exploring the potential of supporting embedded teams all over the country, instead of in just one city, through key partnerships and networks, and through accredited online training and multi-media, multi-lingual platforms.

Chapter 4 To follow up...

Community Resolve aims to support this vision through a number of routes:

- Developing online accredited online training courses to support any organisations or individuals who want to pick up on some of the learning outlined here, including mediation skills to use in in organisational development, as well as targeted skills-support for frontline workers in any aspect of community, from health to housing.

- Continuing to produce quality skills, theory and practice training for community activists across the country – watch a short film on related training.*

- Working with web and IT specialists to share these ideas through a range of new media learning opportunities, translatable into a full range of languages to enable a global discussion of these issues.

Over the next 10 years, we hope to build a virtual learning community around these approaches that will serve to underpin the delivery of statutory and voluntary services across the country and into the future.

Feedback from online learners:

'A fantastic course... Loads interested me, ideas and models, really inspired me.'

'Brilliant training - one of the best I have been on... very useful tools'

'Extremely well facilitated'

'Learning process very dynamic'

Chapter 4 To follow up...

Selection of delivery and activity, 2003-2013

year	Young people/adults aged 5-25	Community action & adult training	Action research/ dissemination
2003	• Work with young people/youthworkers/ families over Easton /St Pauls stabbing • Contract to: 'create positive social and personal development opportunities, fostering self-confidence and cohesion amongst young people.' • Coordination of strategy re long term youth clashes in central Bristol • Formation of Bristol Gang Awareness Project (part of CR) steering group round issues of gangs and violence	• Contract to 'overcome conflict within the community and improve local people's safety by identifying the deep-rooted causes of uznrest within BS5'	• Start of action research into 'hidden conflict' in Easton and surrounding areas
2004	• Youth-led Conference "Are Gangs Family?" for around 150 young people in central Bristol. • Training for youth workers/community members to work with young aspiring 'gang' members • Development of Peer Educators aged 13-25 to run workshops around gangs and weapons, youth territorialism • Conflict resolution and peer mediation training, secondary schools • Sort it! Schools Peer mediation project • Youth training with LEAP Confronting Conflict between Somali and other young people in Barton Hill	• Mentoring plan - Getting Real programme – 1-1 one - for work with YOT, those on remand, etc • Funds from Allen Lane to develop 1st language mediator project focussing on developing a common language around conflict across communities	• Conflict mapping central Bristol supported by Government Office South West (GOSW)
2005	• Gang Awareness Project development & formation of regular adult/agency and young people steering groups • Youth conference on bullying run by young people • Workshops in primary/ secondary schools • Partnership with Choice FM for young people's roadshow • Youth forum theatre group	Training for adults in – Community facilitation; – Young people and conflict; – Conflict management – 'Women of faith transforming conflict'; – strategic approaches to conflict; – Tailored courses – police, wardens and youth workers.	• 'Conflict, faith & funding in Easton'-mapping report launch • Community exhibition, central Bristol artists, • Images of our community'
2006	• Production of La Boom, anti-knife drama which toured Bristol & South West funded by GOSW and Avon & Somerset police	• Community exhibition of work by community artists: 'Different faiths, different communities' to promote understanding across central Bristol	• Independent evaluation of Community Resolve, Juice Consulting • Business feasibility report commissioned

Contents

year	Young people/adults aged 5-25	Community action & adult training	Action research/ dissemination
2006	• Work alongside the Probation service and police in secondary schools, re the consequences of knife crime • Work with Avon & Somerset police on the dangers of carrying knives • DVDs - 'Caught in the Middle' - produced as resource for schools and youth clubs around impact of violence • Work with young black men covering masculinity, heritage, conflict strategies, and life choices. • Exploratory discussions in a number of schools around issues of gangs, peer pressure and conflict.	• Training in South Wales on cultural aspects in mediation • 2-day training for police in conflict analysis • Three days network development days/training for the Ashley Youth and Play Partnership • 1+1 Project established following research with South Asian women in Bristol	• 'Hidden Secrets' dissertation based on 18 months research into conflict with women from range of S Asian backgrounds
2007	• Training for 2000 young people (8-24) • Training / facilitation around youth provision in the Dings • Work in schools across Bristol • Play Your part with police in all secondary schools • Respect for All training programme – transition work, peer mediators, weapon awareness workshops – funded by central government via Bristol City Council • Respect for All training pack for anyone working with young people on youth violence, weapons, crime – 5000 distributed free across the city	• Training for 500+ adults working with young people, and 800+ in managing conflict • Work with BCC / SARI around Gypsy & traveller issues • Somali project – building internal solidarity • 1+1 Project development – support for isolated women • Ashmead House tenant development project following clashes between Somali/white residents • Development of street-based outreach team	• Business Plan completed • Paired cross-culture action researchers in door-to-door research into tensions in Barton Hill tower blocks
2008	• Quarrel Shop, conflict resolution training programme with LEAP Confronting Conflict for ages 20–23 - three participants become CR trainees • Groupwork young mothers (13-16) • Workshops, presentations and assemblies in 36 youth clubs, schools, pupil referral units and FE / HE colleges • Mentoring, advocacy, coaching for young men & women at risk	• (CYPS) commission year of free training for adults across the city on young people and conflict.	• Reports on street-based team pilot, funded by the Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP). • Research with University of England into attitudes of long-standing Hillfields residents, commissioned by Bristol City Council
2009	• Preventative workshops on knife crime with police and probation • Workshops in primary and secondary schools including pilot projects on "Faith & Behaviour", giving Muslim young people an opportunity to explore their identities • Groupwork with identified 'gangs' of young people plus 1-1 work with young people, some self referred caught in street violence	• 2 large scale community interventions (one tower block, one street) involving 96 households - much greater indirect impact • Work around appropriate sex education for diverse Bristol Primary school • Black fathers groups - 10 men aged 23-50 attending free 13 week parenting course	• Hillfields cohesion research with University of England, commissioned by Bristol City council.

Appendix 1 Selection of delivery and activity, 2003-2013

Contents

year	Young people/adults aged 5-25	Community action & adult training	Action research/ dissemination
2009	• Sessions with young black men on masculinity • Support group for young Black men 16-22 - who meet weekly to cook, play sport and discuss key issues, including fatherhood and future while they eat • Work with Bristol Museum, project working with 14 to 15-year olds about conflict via their family histories • Support around St George / Worlds End pub stabbing of local young man - requests for workshop/support services city-wide … • V-bid delivery – recruiting youth volunteers, seven different projects, including Making Waves radio show	• 1+1 Project work with isolated Asian women • Intense 1-1 support for parents caught up in youth justice system via youth violence • Crucial Conversations pilot – young and older mediators intergenerational mediation between parents and teens • Pub work – facilitation work with central Bristol pub owners and police to build relationships and discuss pressures/ tensions	• Street based teams, East Central – exploring/working on how young people and adults share public spaces by going out and talking to them on the streets in areas experiencing tensions. 6 mth Pilot of mixed team – age, gender, background – in three Bristol area.
2010	• Schools training via Play Your Part, Respect for All, other workshops • Groupwork with Meriton young mothers unit + Hartcliffe young mums • Ashfield Young Offenders/schools/youth club workshops • 'Targeted positive activities' money for transition work with young people in East Central Bristol • V-bid – 109 youth volunteers recruited • Interactive programme of workshops & 1-1 for four Bristol secondary schools • 1-1 mentoring referrals increase, from Connexions & YOT, self-referrals • Interschool pupil conflict – mediation, group mentoring	• Facilitation St Pauls Carnival team on communication • 1+1 project – work with isolated Asian women • Pub work – facilitation work with central Bristol pub owners and police to discuss pressures/ tensions • Fridays@Mill - see report (started November) • Support of new Stapleton Road traders association • University of West of England Masters Module – Community conflict, communication and transformation • Work with senior teams in local schools • St Werburghs Centre team facilitation • Mediation skills training for young mediators, youth/ community workers • Street-based team	Reports produced: • Barriers to cohesion – Hillfields Connecting Communities research with University of W England - research disseminated around the country • 'It's all about the here and now' – Why young Bristolians were joining gangs • Talks delivered across city • Research lead for International Alert study of 4 diaspora communities across the UK – Pakistani, Somali, Congolese and Sri Lankan
2011	• Youth training in schools/FE across Bristol/beyond • Fridays @ Mill / Thursdays @ docklands • Development of Mentoring + pilot – young people in Lawrence Hill mentoring others into work/training • 'My New Friends' photographic project with Yr 6 in two primary schools in different 'territories' – see short film of pupils account of project: 'I feel more secure than what I did before'	• Fridays@Mill, food, guidance & open access for 15-25s • Thursdays @ Docklands, as above • Stapleton Road traders association • UWE teaching – delivery of Masters modules • Mediation/conflict coaching for national charity	• CR 'Here and Now' report presentation and & lead,Bristol City Council Scrutiny Day into why young people join gangs • Diaspora communities and conflict - research report for International Alert

Appendix 1 Selection of delivery and activity, 2003-2013

Contents

year	Young people/adults aged 5-25	Community action & adult training	Action research/ dissemination
2011		• Stokes Croft disturbances with BCC / police • Crucial Conversations pilot • I+I Project	
2012	• Fridays@Mill, Easton, food & open access for 15-25s • Thursdays @ Docklands, as above • Ongoing school workshops with police – on weapons, gangs, leadership • School workshops in primary and secondary schools across city • Crucial Conversations, supporting relationships between teens & parents • Mentors+ Lawrence Hill pilot, linked local peer mentors with mentees to get people into work and training • Leonardo da Vinci international placement programme for Mill & Dockland attendees • BBC World in a Day participation • Summer transition programme, primary to secondary schools	• Commission to delivery training in managing community relationships to Community Organisers – see short film on training here • Work with the Forgiveness Project – mutual training, prison delivery • Training staff & volunteers, St Werburghs Centre • UWE Masters modules x 2 – 'Conflict, communication, transformation' • Work with local Housing Associations on numerous resident conflicts • Training for housing officers	
2013 to end June	• 'Who am I?' photographic project with Yr 6s in one primary school, exploring their place and space • Mentors+ expanded Central Bristol programme – see report • Business training course for young entrepreneurs • Schools and institution workshops, group programmes for all ages • Support training for local youth workers	• Hillfields development and support for community initiatives • Tenant facilitation for local Housing associations • Community Organiser training	

Appendix 1 Selection of delivery and activity, 2003-2013

Drawing on international theory and practice

The pressures on UK urban environments are increasing as local authorities have less to invest, populations diversify and resources for those on the lowest income brackets – school places, housing, jobs – become the focus of intra- and intergroup competition. The financial costs of managing the resulting clashes and social conflicts are enormous and set to grow. We need new strategies to deal with contemporary urban realities, strategies that acknowledge the complexities of our cities, the relational challenges thrown up by increasing cultural diversity and population movements, and the mounting pressures between competing individuals and groups of differing value bases and social backgrounds.

Where social conflict is acknowledged within a UK setting – which is rarely, beyond the borders of Northern Ireland or at times of unavoidable disturbances in the form of 'riots' – policy and governance responses are mainly rooted in a legal and enforcement framework, with the police and the courts as the primary bodies which engage with it. While there is a growing acknowledgement of the potential of mediation or restorative justice to provide more informal ways of settling disputes, too little is invested in them by policy makers and statutory bodies to enable them to really take hold. More generally, conflicts of all types are seen as needing instant solutions, to be contained and closed down as quickly as possible, a reductionist approach that often places the blame for conflict situations on the individual, and fails to recognise its complexity both at an individual and a wider societal level.

This report - and the organisation's work as a whole - starts from the position that the dynamics of conflict are 'universally similar, culturally distinct and individually unique' (David Augsburger 1992), and that conflicts that at any level - between individuals, group or nations - demonstrate recognisable patterns of escalation. Drivers of conflict will always be deeper than the apparent 'presenting' cause (think 'straw that broke the camel's back') and will include a particular of-the-moment conflation of 'out of sight' triggers, ranging from historical, social and financial contexts, cultural frames and emotional responses to individual and group experiences around identity, belonging and power relations.

International conflict transformation theory and practice, with its focus on the rebuilding of civil society post violent conflict, offers lots of leads on how to build resilient, sustainable structures for civil society. Building on traditional conflict resolution approaches, conflict transformation took a fresh

look at power relations in conflicts, questioned the gendered and culturally specific frames of 1970s and 80s win/win conflict resolution models, and promoted the need to work with a systemic understanding of conflict over an extended time period. Conflict transformation theorists and practitioners see social conflict/change as an ongoing dynamic process which requires both building and rebuilding relationships across divides while simultaneously addressing the structural blocks that impact on those relationships.

Just two standout ideas for Community Resolve - among the many, many useful insights which UK practitioners might engage with - are a) the concept of identifying and working with what Lederach calls 'insider partials', individuals who bring a deep understanding of local environments and the potential to cross difference and divides; and b) Galtung's digestible and useful ABC model which addresses the idea of out-of sight triggers to conflict, as well as reminding us that conflicts need to be understood and addressed at a behavioural, attitudinal and contextual level.

This briefest of introductions to the idea of conflict transformation in no way sums up the ideas and practice over the last three decades in the most challenging of international environments. It is simply here to introduce UK frontline practitioners and managers to a basket of useful thinking and experience that they might like to explore further in relation to managing diversity within pressured UK environments.

A few influential thinkers

Kevin Barge,
Berghof Foundation, Berlin
Veronique Dudouet
Danny Burns
Simon Fisher
Diana Francis
Johan Galtung
Paul Hoggett
Michele LeBaron
John Paul Lederach
Jake Lynch
John Winslade
Norman Fairclough

Research and participant information

Appendix **3**

Research team

Lisa Tozer
Cecile Jagoo
Phoebe Beedell

Advisor:
Professor
Paul Hoggett

Who did the research? The research team all had a history of work as community activists and project managers, as well as experience in qualitative research. Advising the team was Professor Paul Hoggett, Professor in Social Policy at the University of the West of England.

Who took part? Community Resolve had built trust over years of working with and for the participants in this research, which was reflected in the numbers that agreed to take part from every type of engagement the organisation – workers, volunteers, service users, partner agencies, commissioners and funders.
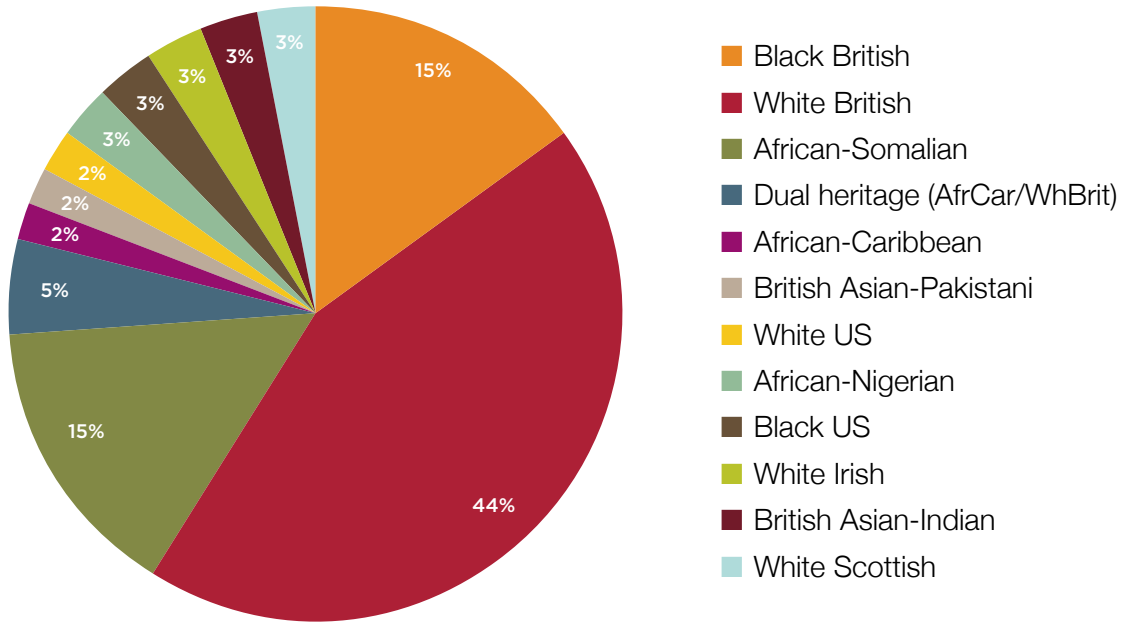
Structure of the research It was agreed between Community Resolve and the researchers that a snapshot qualitative approach would be used, combining ethnographic observation and 1-1 semi-structured interviews over a 3-month period. The intention was to collate data from those who knew, commissioned or worked with the organisation, and to extract best practice and implications relevant to working within diverse and complex central city environments. Each researcher interviewed a number of participants in person, on the phone or via Skype. All interviews were digitally recorded and uploaded onto a secure site accessible only to the researcher team. Written summaries highlighting the key themes emerging from the interviews were added to the field notes from the interviews.

Data analysis After initial interviews, the research team met to discuss the findings. A selection of summaries were compared and new levels of understanding about the participants emerged, clarifying their relationships and perspectives to Community Resolve.
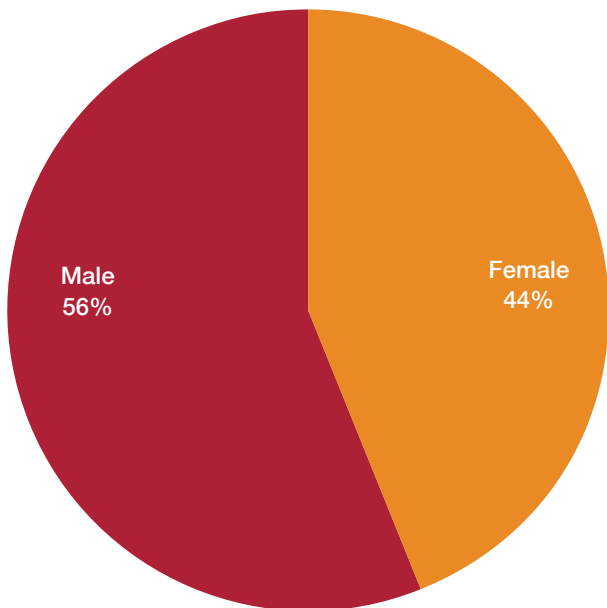
Ethical concerns All participants received an email outlining the aims of the study, guaranteeing anonymity and confirming that the report would written in a way that ensured that no opinions could be traced back to an individual participant. At the interview itself, participants discussed and signed a consent form agreeing to take part.

Limitations of the research design For several reasons, fewer service users were interviewed than initially planned, and the complexity of participant relationships to the organisation, ie in multiple categories, was not captured by the interview questions as this emerged later, in the analysis of the data collected.
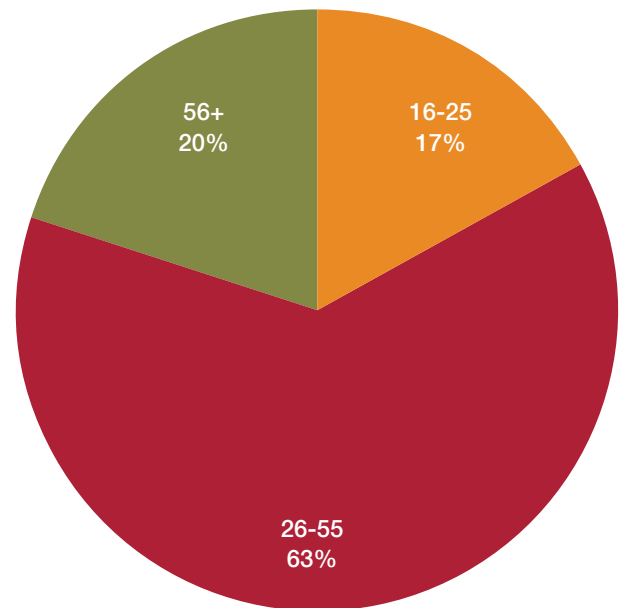
Ethnic breakdown of research participants (self identification)

- Black British
- White British
- African-Somalian
- Dual heritage (AfrCar/WhBrit)
- African-Caribbean
- British Asian-Pakistani
- White US
- African-Nigerian
- Black US
- White Irish
- British Asian-Indian
- White Scottish

Gender breakdown of participants

Male 56%

Female 44%

Age groups of participants

56+ 20%

16-25 17%

26-55 63%

Appendix 3 Methodology and participant information

A place of safety and inspiration

'I came here a boy and now I'm a man.'

Among the participants in the research were six young people (5 men, 1 woman) who talked about their experiences of Community Resolve at two open access centres for young adults at the 'hard to engage' end of the spectrum. In both settings, Community Resolve provided a free meal which everyone would eat together, encouraging a sense of intimacy and belonging, as well as providing an optional – but strongly encouraged – programme of personal development activities that had the potential to break entrenched cycles of exclusion. The six interviewees regularly attended and received personal support from Community Resolve workers in the form of training, mentoring and/or becoming mentors themselves over the preceeding two years. Their contributions illustrate the profound impact Community Resolve had on individual lives and the communities around them.

Safety and belonging

All spoke appreciatively of family-like relationships with workers, contrasting their time spent in Community Resolve with less positive alternatives available to them. Key to this familial sense of comfort and belonging was the character of the Community Resolve workers, being 'of the community' and respected by the young people.

'It's a safe place to come... for the boys it was somewhere to chill out for a couple of hours a day with their friends without the police stopping and searching them. If they're together outside, they're a gang. More than 3 people is a gang, we actually have signs around [the neighbourhood] *saying you can't having around in groups of people or the police can stop and search you.'* Partner agency

One young man described how *'there is fear'* among young people he knows and how difficult it is to get out them of their *'comfort zones'* to try new avenues. He emphasized the importance of the rapport between the workers and young people and the ability for those workers to act as role models *'because they are doing it themselves'*.

'It's been really good… all the workers treat you nice, make you nice food... you can sit down and have a chat with them. If it wasn't open on a Friday, I'd probably be hanging out on the streets ... it's the same for most people who come there. There are people in here who are involved in drugs and... they just calm down here'

'It's better than being on the streets... I'm involved in a little bit of...but I come here every Friday, I eat the food, I just relax'

'This place is home, everyone knows it's home... You get a good feeling out of it.'

A few described how they had experience of other settings but there was a difference in how friendly the regular open access sessions were:

[The CR worker] *'is a very helpful guy, like my favourite…he knows me from when I was proper young… The staff are more like older brothers to me. If you do something wrong then they tell us how not to do... '*

'They will play basketball and join in... it's not they just stand there, watch and boss us around, they act like they're your friends'

'It's not like when you leave that door they don't care about you, they actually help you get off the streets to try to make you do things that are productive'

Empowerment, growth and inspiration

Importantly, accounts described how these open access sessions provided more than simply a safe space and respite from negative pressures. They also provided support and encouragement – 'the chance to grow' – and it is important to note that in many cases it has taken months or even years of contact with the organisation for these activities to produce tangible effects in the form of educational qualifications, small business start-ups or opportunities to become mentors and conflict workers themselves:

'I reckon if I didn't come here then I wouldn't be where I am today. I'm doing my A levels at the moment but if I didn't come here years ago when I was 16 then I wouldn't be doing nothing... Everyone advise you to do something positive.'

'With the work experience and the work skills I got… I was able to apply for university.'

'Coming here was a boost up... you get into contact with people and tell them that I've started this and that.'

'There's people I wouldn't get along with in day to day life but in here they taught me to get along with everyone.'

In addition to individual material reward, the positive engagement work undertaken by Community Resolve acted as a springboard for other positive and collective activities. The importance of modelling a different response and a different, more self-aware reaction had begun to establish a sense of responsible citizenship in those they worked with. One young man spoke of the confidence he was given to start running his own youth group on a Saturday:

....

'I look after the community and network when I come here and that's important.'

....

Appendix 4 A place of safety and inspiration

Web links

Embedding skills to address everyday conflict:

A learning report on 10 years of activity in Bristol, SW England