

Polmont Young Offenders Institution

**Polmont
Young Offenders Institution**



Culture of Two Halves

The programme, developed within the Outlet Youth Centre at Polmont which is managed by YouthLink Scotland and staffed by Maraid O'Neill and Lisa Hogg.

Lisa Hogg wrote an application to Young Roots, a Heritage Lottery Fund initiative to finance an anti-sectarian project within Polmont YOU. This came about from discussions with the young people about possible ideas for issue-based projects. The young people expressed a need for sectarianism to be addressed within Polmont and so the application focused on this.

The programme was named 'Culture of Two Halves' running from September 2003 to September 2004. Due to the success of the programme the prison authorities are keen to find ways to extend the programme when funding comes to an end.

Ten young people have been involved in the 'Culture of Two Halves'.

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Project Outcomes

In addition to the outcomes stated in the project proposal Lisa Hogg and Maraid O'Neill described how the project had given them the opportunity to address intolerance and disrespect on a broader scale. Following on from in-depth discussions about sectarianism the young people have also discussed other forms of prejudice such as racism and asylum issues. As a result the youth workers have been able to really challenge the young people to look at their own prejudice and address 'intolerance' and this has been a great asset to the project.

Project Aims

The Culture of Two Halves was designed by a group of young people in Polmont YOI to investigate what impact bigotry and sectarianism has on Scottish culture, and in particular on Scottish football culture. The intended outcome is that the young people involved will have the skills and experience necessary to facilitate awareness-raising workshops for other members of Polmont Young Offenders Institution.

The aims of the project are as follows:

- Research the historical perspective of bigotry, sectarianism and religious intolerance focusing on how religion embedded itself in Scottish football.
- Through the medium of music, art and drama produce a short video to be used for training purposes with young people in custody.
- Complete a National Certificate in Peer Education. This will allow young people not only to achieve a recognised certificate but to deliver workshops to their peers.

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Research

A partnership with the Scottish Football Museum was established and the Director of the Museum worked with the young people to help them explore the following issues:

- the meaning of the word sectarianism
- history of Celtic Football Club
- history of Rangers Football Club
- lyrics of traditional songs and football songs
- politics and beliefs of Irish Nationalists
- other examples of sectarianism in Scottish football
- how Scottish football is effected by the 'Old Firm'
- effects of 'Old Firm' relations on the national team
- groups accused of sectarianism – their connection to football
- the media: in what ways do they contribute to sectarianism?

In addition, relevant guest speakers were invited to meet with the young people. Invited guests included the organisation Nil by Mouth and Donald Gorrie MSP.

Group members were set a variety of tasks including research, reading and homework which was agreed with the youth workers.

At the end of the first 16 weeks the participants had acquired a good background knowledge of the issues surrounding sectarianism and in particular football-related sectarianism.

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They were able to address the following questions

- what does sectarianism mean?
- who is responsible for sectarianism?
- which organisations promote sectarianism?
- are we part of the solution or part of the problem?
- which organisations should be tackling sectarianism?
- what is the solution to sectarianism?
- who is responsible for finding a solution?

Video Production

Introduction

The second aim of the Culture of Two Halves was to produce a video which would be used in anti-sectarian training. The video is to be used as a training tool to assist with anti-sectarian classes and it will be used to teach and encourage positive debate within young offenders' units. A video production company was identified to assist the young people and the following tasks identified:

Research

Conduct research by finding out about the knowledge, experience and participation of individuals, organisations and groups who have relevant and positive contributions to make to the film. Archive footage of particular incidents and periods of history also acquired.

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Suggested interview groups

Victims of sectarian violence
Footballers – Rangers and Celtic
TV personalities / entertainers
Politicians
Pop stars

The group felt that examples of past films by community groups for tackling sectarianism were of a good standard but dry, and the young people suggested using sound effects and original in their video.

Filming

Filming carried out when and where suitable and will include interviews with significant parties and footage of places of interest.

A professional film maker will be employed to produce the video.

Final output

The film's running time of 30 minutes.

The final product on DVD, including graphic navigation, chapter index and book sleeve. 15 copies will be made – one for each member of the team plus additional copies for the centre.

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Peer Education

The young people will complete an National Certificate in Peer Education. Following this they will then be able to facilitate anti-sectarian work with other young people in Polmont. This peer education programme will be run by the Youth Outlet Centre at Polmont. Maraid O'Neill said that the benefit of peer education is that it helps 'young people think about their actions and respect other people for who they are, seeing them as individuals'.

Other information

The Culture of Two Halves video will be made available to other YOIs and prisons. Additional copies of the DVD can be requested through Maraid O'Neill (a small fee for copying and postage may be required).

GOOD PRACTICE INDICATORS

- The young people at the Outreach Centre recognised that sectarianism was an issue in the prison and were prepared to challenge it. They were encouraged and assisted by their youth workers who secured financial support; however, the programme itself has been led by the participants.
- The youth workers have supported this programme and facilitated discussions and seminars that actively challenge sectarianism and other forms of prejudice.

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- The programme has used a number of methods to explore and challenge sectarianism, including:
 - discussions, seminars and the involvement of external speakers;
 - using arts and crafts to develop a timeline of sectarianism;
 - developing scripts to make a video.

This video will be used to encourage debate and discussion about sectarianism with other groups of young prisoners. This will help widen the anti-sectarian programme to involve greater numbers of young people.

Characteristics of good practice for the Culture of Two Halves

It develops **critical thinking**. The young people are encouraged to think about issues like sectarianism and racism from other people's perspectives. The youth workers have reported that young people involved have learnt to listen to opinions that differ from their own. So there has been a **real change in behaviour**.

The programme has not only challenged sectarianism but provided the opportunity for research about the historical and contemporary influences. So, the young people **are more knowledgeable about possible causes and effects**.

The programme has allowed the young people to explore how discrimination can be personal, cultural and institutional. The youth workers have been able to raise other issues of discrimination such as racism.

They have **an intellectual perspective on sectarianism and can make comparisons to other forms of discrimination**.

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The project was designed so that anti-sectarianism would become an issue that is raised with other young people through **peer education**. Therefore, anti-sectarianism is **not a ‘one off’** at Polmont. A peer education programme will continue when A Culture of Two Halves finishes.

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