

Stronger Communities on the street



Charles Fotso, who works for the organisation Minorities of Europe, wants to help build a stronger community by creating activities that can happen at a street level.

Legacy House, home of Minorities of Europe, was set up 7 years ago to enable people to transform their ideas into projects. They support people who have ideas for the common good but who are unsure of where they can go for help. This quote sums up Legacy House's mission: *'where ideas are helped to be transformed into action'*.

Charles works at Legacy House on a project which promotes 'community cohesion' in Coventry as well as nationally. The project brings together people from different cultures so that they can gain an understanding of each others' lives. *'People often lead parallel lives, living in a street without knowing each other. This can lead to fear - fear of the other people you don't understand,'* he explains.

Charles' believes the idea of 'street ambassadors' could help to tackle this problem. The ambassadors would be volunteers who could welcome new people to the street and tell them about how they can get things done. This person could also encourage street activities so that people can gain an understanding of each other.

'I know that community cohesion is working at a street level when I see the relief that people have on their faces, and that they have begun to greet and talk to each other,' says Charles. Once tensions have begun to dissipate in the street people can begin to share their skills, experiences and knowledge through activities.



Minorities of Europe (MoE) is a 'Pan European Inter-minority network' which seeks to support and assist co-operation, solidarity and exchange between different minority communities and young people in Europe.

Community Cohesion

"Sharing a common voice for the future of communities based on equality, trust and respect for diversity"
Cohesiveness within and across communities is central to MoE's vision and they are currently a lead organisation in the promotion of intercultural relations in Britain.

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A Coventry Community Empowerment Briefing

These activities could include:

- A walk around the neighbourhood so that people would then get to know each other and find out about the local area, shops and services around
- A 'cleaning up the street' afternoon so that people feel better about their environment

Once people become involved in an activity they would be encouraged to come up with their own ideas. *'This is the turning point that tells us when a person who was once a stranger is a resident, a person whose journey towards becoming an active citizen of this city or country is set,'* says Charles.

Neighbourhood Management

Neighbourhood management structures and workers like Street Wardens could help people by developing positive activities at a street level, but says Charles, *'they need to show a willingness to be involved. According to Minorities of Europe, 'It doesn't need lots of money. Through natural interactions we can build trust and respect.'*

Charles also thinks Ward Forums could be an opportunity to create activities that bring the streets together. *'We could use the forums as an opportunity to create positive actions that bring people together. There is too much self-interest happening at present though, with discussions held by a small number of people on issues*

Positive action between Neighbourhood Wardens and Neighbourhood Management through street activities could bridge the gap between people who live in an area and neighbourhood management structures.

Conclusion

Charles' idea brings together groups of residents based in a street. Then street by street, a natural neighbourhood is built that is able to consider positive action and achieve a stronger community as well as a safer one.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" Helen Keller

The views expressed in this article are those of the people interviewed, and not necessarily those of Coventry Community Empowerment Network

Toolkit and Resources Pack

Minorities of Europe runs a 'Champions programme' for young people. A champion can contribute to Community Cohesion or promoting interfaith relations. A range of resources like posters, DVDs, exhibitions, books etc are available. To support effective use of the resources, a Train the Trainer toolkit is also available.

MoE work locally, nationally and across into mainland Europe. The work is supported financially by many sources such as the UK Government, Council of Europe, European Commission, foundations and Big Lottery, and locally by organisations such as the Community Cohesion Institute based at Coventry University.

MoE activities are designed to promote tolerance, beginning personal journey towards respect and honouring of differences between people, in and across communities

Other Projects based in Coventry include;

- 'Streetwalkers' - Paradise Residents Association,
- 'Street Pastors' based in Hillfields.