

Frontline A.V.

Frontline AV has been working with community arts and media to try and bridge the deep divide between the young migrants and teenagers from deprived local estates in Coventry.

Coventry became a dispersal area for refugees and asylum seekers in 2000 but, as in many other locations, the dispersal of often needy and vulnerable groups of refugees to a largely white urban community already experiencing deprivation and unemployment has resulted in tensions and an increase in hate and race crime.

Frontline started working with new arrivals in the mid-1990s and this has led to work on integration, cultural diversity and race crime. Recent work has included a documentary on people's attitudes to immigration; a film-based oral testimony project with refugees with Coventry City Council; and a music making, sound recording and music technology project enabling unaccompanied young refugees to work alongside other young.

But a major impetus for growth was a partnership in 2005 with the Information Centre on Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) on *Focus*, a participatory film project to build understanding between young refugees and other youngsters in Coventry and Peterborough.

The project stimulated such interest that Frontline was approached by the neighbourhoods officer of the local council to continue the work, and this has led to a joint film projects with young people at the Coventry-based Refugee Centre, and the youth group of a community centre at Stoke Aldemoor, one of the deprived estates in the city.

The project, Viewfinders, has worked with around 16 largely male youngsters aged between 13 and 18 from the local estate, as well as from Serbia, Iran, Iraq, Chad, Somalia and Afghanistan. Both groups chose their own themes for their video projects, the refugee group focusing on football and teambuilding, and the other group on crime, peer pressure and violence. The culmination of this project was bringing the two groups together for the first time for a residential weekend.

For Frontline Projects Manager, Frances Porter, it was an unexpected relief to get a knock on the door late at night on the first evening from one refugee and two children from the local estate to ask if they could take over filming the project. 'I didn't see the cameras for the rest of the weekend and they came back seven tapes of footage,' she commented.

Also unexpected was the role reversal during the weekend, with the young refugees taking the lead and encouraging youngsters from the estate to participate and try new things. "We noted a real lack of confidence among the young people from the estate, so the refugees found themselves leading and boosting their esteem – their spirit was infectious.'

The project resulted in presentations of film footage and exhibitions for Refugee Week that both groups attended at each others' centres, and there are plans to enable them to do more joint projects together. As a result, there has been a noticeable rise in interest and a desire to get involved among other young people on the estate. Frontline is now planning to expand work with young female refugees and extending the project into other deprived estates in Coventry.

The film and arts activity is, says Porter: "An understandable way in. We do not believe in teaching from the front about refugee and migration issues. The creative element of the project allows people to find their own approach to these issues. Kids are naturally creative. All they need is the tools and the space to do it. Viewfinders is offering a voice to kids that would not otherwise have it, both to white local kids and to new arrivals.'

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