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Trust, Peace and
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The
Faith
& Belief
Forum



Building Closer Communities

An evaluation report

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Foreword



In many communities across the UK, people from different faiths, beliefs and cultures live alongside each other but often do not develop relationships of trust beyond their 'own'. The Faith and Belief Forum's (F&BF's) work uses encounter-based dialogue to create a connected and supportive society where people of different faiths, beliefs and cultures have strong, productive and lasting relations. We believe that prejudice is best lessened by meeting and building trust with people who are different to you. Historically, a lot of our dialogue work has been delivered in schools and universities across the UK with young people. But more recently, there has been a pressing need to bring our interfaith dialogue methods to wider community spaces, not least given the rise in community

tensions since the EU Referendum, and our government's resulting policy focus on building integration through 'meaningful social mixing'.

The Building Closer Communities project that this report excellently evaluates, taking place in Birmingham and Barking and Dagenham and funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Faith, Race and Hate Crime scheme, marked F&BF's second substantial Community Dialogue project. The other being the Walsall Community Dialogue programme which ran from 2019-21. For both of these projects, F&BF adapted a tried and tested linked dialogue model, that we have run in schools for 15 years, where two institutions of different faith and belief characters meet and build friendships and trust through a series of conversations.

This report highlights the positive impact of encounter-based learning through dialogue and comes at an important time, as we take stock of F&BF's community dialogue work to date, and anticipate the next stage of MHCLG's Integration Area Programme. We would like to thank Dr Lucy Peacock and the team at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University for

their important work on this paper. The report asks important questions about the length and format of community dialogue work, whether it works online and who might need it most. Internally, this report points to areas of development which will further improve our model as we make plans for replication, whilst nationally also asking important questions about the best ways to connect our diverse societies.

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Contents

1. Introduction	6
2. Building Closer Communities: Overview	7
2.1 Programme design and Covid-19 adaptation	7
2.2 Target areas	10
2.3 Evaluation design	11
3. The impact of community dialogue	12
3.1 Providing opportunities to mix	13
3.2 Encouraging integration	15
3.3 Promoting feelings of safety	19
3.4 Developing comfort and skills for dialogue	21
4. Community Connectors: Engaging current and emerging community leaders	24
4.1 Perceptions of integration and safety	25
4.2 Personal change	27
4.3 Tackling social tensions through dialogue	29
5. Building faith awareness in local authorities	31
6. Engaging young people through school resources	34
7. Barriers to impact	36
8. Conclusion and recommendations	38
8.1 Summary of findings	38
8.2 Implications for replicability	39
8.3 Recommendations	41
References	42
Appendix	43
Item 1: Detailed evaluation methodology	43
Item 2: List of participants	44
Item 3: Timeline and content of Community Connector training and community dialogue sessions	45
Item 4: Timeline and summary of youth dialogue sessions	46
Item 5: 'Guidelines for dialogue' – resource by The Feast	47
Item 6: Detail of local authority Faith Awareness training	48

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 2.1: Visualisation of four strands of project delivery	9
Figure 3.1: Proportion of community dialogue survey responses that reported feeling more strongly after community dialogue that there are opportunities for contact with other faith and belief communities within their neighbourhood	14
Figure 3.2: The proportion of survey responses that agreed with statements indicating that the community dialogue sessions developed social cohesion, social trust, social capital and social belonging	16
Figure 3.3: The proportion of survey responses agreeing with indicators representing feelings of safety	20
Figure 3.4: The proportion of community dialogue survey responses agreeing with indicators representing the development of dialogue skills	21
Figure 4.1: The proportion of Community Connectors agreeing that people pull together to improve their neighbourhood(s)	26
<hr/>	
Table 4.1: Demographics of Community Connector survey respondents	24
Table 4.2: Community Connectors' baseline and endpoint median scores for indicators relating to integration and feelings of safety	25
Table 5.1: LA staff perceptions of relationships between faith communities and local governance in LBBD	32

1. Introduction

This report details the design and delivery of the *Building Closer Communities* programme evaluation. This external evaluation was led by Dr Lucy Peacock from The Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry university.

Building Closer Communities was a Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funded programme delivered between November 2020 and March 2021 by interfaith charity The Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF), in partnership with youth interfaith charity The Feast. The programme was designed to 'promote shared values among people of all backgrounds through sustainable social integration and meaningful civic participation' in the two 'target areas' of Birmingham and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD).

As the report shows, the programme was largely very successful in meeting this aim; a subsequent, longer programme is recommended.

The report presents the evaluation as follows. Section 2 introduces the programme, detailing programme delivery, providing contextual information about the target areas of delivery (Birmingham and LBBD) and outlining the design of the evaluation. Sections 3-6 detail the evaluation findings; Section 3 describes the impact of the most comprehensive strand of the project (community dialogue) and Section 4 the individual-level impact on 'Community Connectors' (current and emerging faith community leaders who were trained to co-facilitate programme delivery). Section 5 relates to impact at the level of local authority (focusing on LBBD), and Section 6 to the school-focused strand of the programme. Barriers to impact are addressed in Section 7. Section 8 summarises all findings, discusses implications for programme replicability and provides recommendations. The report closes with references and a comprehensive appendix of programme- and evaluation-related further information.

2. Building Closer Communities: Overview

The Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF), was awarded funding from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in October 2020 to deliver a multi-stranded programme, *Building Closer Communities*. The purpose of the programme was to address Aim 1 of the Faith, Race and Hate Crime Grant Scheme: *to promote shared values among people of all backgrounds through sustainable social integration and meaningful civic participation*.

The programme's objectives were threefold:

1. To strengthen understanding and trust within and between faith communities through encounter-based learning.
2. To build skills of community and statutory authorities to engage more effectively together to mitigate social tension.
3. To provide opportunity for emerging young leaders across faith communities to develop skills and lead intergenerational projects within and between faith communities.

The programme was delivered between November 2020 and March 2021 in Birmingham and London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD) in partnership with The Feast, a national youth-centric interfaith organisation based in Birmingham.¹

Delivery took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, elements of the programme as originally proposed were adapted ahead of, and during, programme delivery.

This section outlines the programme design, introduces the target areas of Birmingham and LBBD and summarises the approach to evaluation.

2.1 Programme design and Covid-19 adaptation

To meet the objectives listed above, programme activities were delivered in four strands:

STRAND 1: Community dialogues and Community Connector training

The largest strand of the programme was a community dialogue project, which connected communities within the target areas of Birmingham and LBBD (in pairs or groups of three), to participate in two dialogue sessions. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the sessions took place online via Zoom.

Each community was accessed through an individual (a current or emerging community leader), recruited by F&BF and trained as a 'Community Connector' through three online sessions. The Community Connectors acted as a link between F&BF and their local community and assisted F&BF in the facilitation of the community dialogues.

In total, F&BF engaged 20 community groups (13 in Birmingham and 7 in LBBD) encompassing local faith communities, places of worship and local divisions of faith-based organisational networks (both national and international).²

The Birmingham connections were:

1. Islamic organisational network and Church of England church.
2. Shia Muslim mosque and Church of England church.
3. Hindu community and Church of England church.
4. Ahmadiyya Muslim women's organisational network and mixed faith women's organisational network.
5. Local Catholic faith community and Buddhist centre.
6. Humanist organisational network, Jewish student society and Hindu community.

1. For more information about The Feast visit: <https://thefeast.org.uk/>.

2. The implications of recruiting and connecting different 'types' of community group will be discussed in Section 8.2.

The LBBB connections were:

1. Largely Christian African diaspora network and Sikh women's organisational network.
2. Mosque and non-denominational church/community centre.
3. Largely Christian African diaspora network, local Ahmadiyya Muslim faith community and Hindu organisational network.³

In addition, an open dialogue was held in LBBB for community members of all religions and beliefs (including those with non-religious beliefs) who were involved in local social action projects.

Appendix Item 3 details the timeline and content of the Community Connector training and community dialogue sessions. Sections 3 and 4 of this report summarise the evaluation findings relating to this strand.

STRAND 2: Youth dialogues

Originally conceptualised as a 'youth council', three 90-minute 'youth dialogues' were delivered in March 2021. The adaptation was driven by the Covid-19 pandemic forcing school, college and university closures, severely limiting recruitment outreach. The dialogues explored themes of identity, social justice, and social action. The dialogues engaged 9 participants aged 15-26 years old. Following the three dialogues, the participants created a presentation to deliver at the final celebration events (strand 5).

Appendix Item 4 details the timeline and content of the youth dialogue sessions. Issues relating to recruitment and data quality prevented the researcher from evaluating the youth dialogue strand in depth. However, data relating to the youth dialogues are represented by a staff focus group in which the youth dialogue facilitators reflected on the strand's impact. These reflections are integrated into Section 3 where possible.

STRAND 3: Local authority Faith Awareness training

The programme proposed to deliver 14 hours of 'Faith Awareness' training in each target area engaging approximately 60 local authority (LA) staff in each target area. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic disrupting participant recruitment, 10 hours of training was delivered in LBBB only.

Appendix Item 6 details the timeline and content of the training workshops. Section 5 summarises the evaluation findings relating to this strand.

STRAND 4: School workshops and curriculum resources

The programme initially proposed to deliver 40 'Encountering Faith and Belief' workshops⁴ in each target area. The Covid-19 pandemic's devastating impact of school closures compelled F&BF to adapt the workshops to a 'virtual speaker bank' resource of online videos. One school in Birmingham, however, was able to deliver the original workshops online to six Year 4 (8-9-year olds) classes. The virtual resource was made available online to schools that had signed up for a workshop; access was later widened to include all users of the Faith and Belief Forum's education materials.

Section 6 summarises the evaluation findings relating to this strand.

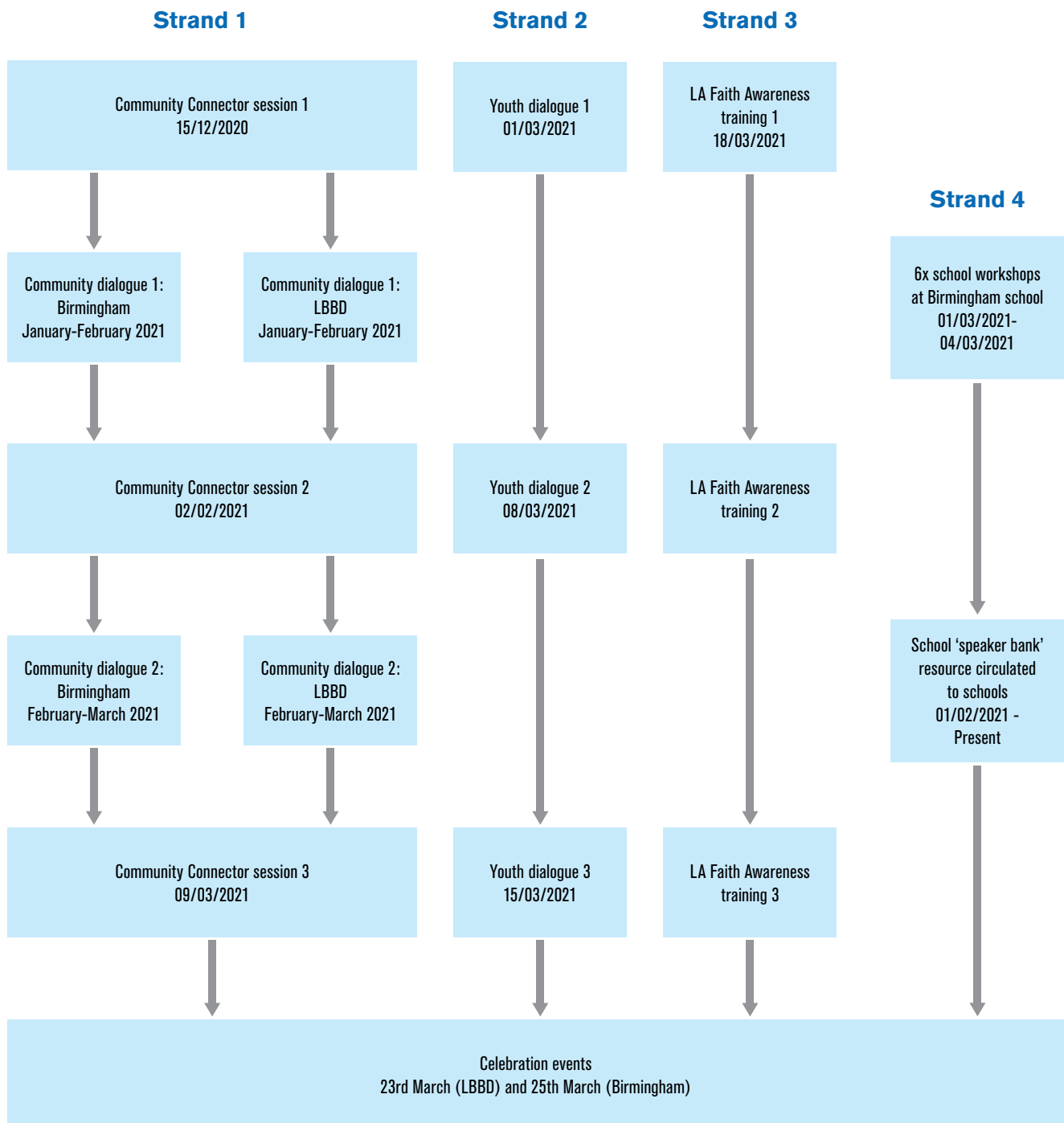
The strands were brought together at one 'celebration event' in each target area. The celebrations were held on Zoom and participants included programme stakeholders from all strands. The events were shared publicly across social media within the target areas and on events website Eventbrite. 110 participants attended the events (63 in Birmingham and 47 in LBBB). In the events, community dialogue participants shared creative performances, youth dialogue participants presented on social change, and each target area hosted a 'key speaker' representing local government.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the five programme strands with delivery dates.

3. The Hindu organisational network was originally paired with an Apostolic church local to LBBB, but the church withdrew from the programme without explanation.

4. For more information about the Encountering Faiths and Beliefs workshops, visit <https://faithbeliefforum.org/programme/school-workshops/encountering-faiths-beliefs/>.

Figure 2.1: Visualisation of four strands of project delivery



2.2 Target areas

The decision and justification to deliver the programme in the 'target areas' of Birmingham and LBBD was driven by a) existing F&BF contacts, staff and resources, and b) social research, including work previously undertaken by F&BF to triangulate levels of inequality, diversity, changing demographics, faith-based hate crime and social tension.

In Birmingham, F&BF's Education and Learning team has been working in schools since 2016, and The Feast has been delivering youth work since 2008. F&BF staff have seen an increasing number of pupils being withdrawn from school-based programmes in areas where there are significant demographic differences in neighbouring wards. Other data indicate tension along religious lines; media reporting states 2020 saw an increase in racially or religiously aggravated hate crime reported to West Midlands Police, representing the most common type of hate crime in the area last year (Birmingham Mail 2021).

In LBBD, F&BF worked with the LA and Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum between 2018 and 2020 to make it a 'faith friendly beacon borough', requiring extensive consultation with faith communities. During the consultations for F&BF's Faith Policy, local Muslims, Sikhs, and black Christians talked about 'not feeling welcome' in their neighbourhood (a measure of 'sense of belonging', one of the outcome indicators in this evaluation). The borough has also experienced high demographic change. The black and minority ethnic (BAME) population rose from 15% to 50% between 2001 and 2011 (LBBD 2016: 15) and has a history of far-right activism. Wood and Fowlie (2010) state that the BNP were previously popular in LBBD, although they lost all 12 of their councillors in 2020.

Shorthouse, Lampier and Sarygulov (2019) recognised both areas as having low levels of social trust, one of the outcome indicators of 'social integration'⁵ measured in this evaluation. LBBD was identified as the LA with the sixth lowest predicted level of neighbourhood trust

in England. Similarly, "large urban areas located in or near [...] Birmingham" (2019: 14) were stated as having significantly low levels.

It is important to recognise, however, that not all experiences of living in these areas will align with this research; Section 3.1 describes how individuals' experiences can vary. Indeed, studies have showcased work that has fostered positive relations within and between faith communities and LAs either prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (for example Gruescu and Menne's 2010 report into how communities, including those in Birmingham foster social capital, an outcome indicator measured in this evaluation), or as a result of the pandemic (for example, Rees et al.'s 2019 report into responses to the pandemic in the West Midlands, including those among faith communities).

5. Defined as "communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities." (MHCLG 2019: 10)

2.3 Evaluation design

The activities outlined in Section 2.1 were designed to deliver the following programme outcomes:

1. Shared British values that champion tolerance, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and equality of opportunity between and within faith communities, with communities of no faith and between different ethnic groups.
2. More integrated communities utilising the practical skills, knowledge, confidence, and networks needed to positively and sustainably participate in local governance structures and broader civil society.
3. Improved skills and capacity amongst cultural, faith and community leaders, enabling them to challenge inappropriate behaviour, promote cohesion and prevent faith and race motivated hate instances or hate crime.

The evaluation was designed at the programme proposal stage to measure specific indicators of these outcomes. These nine indicators represent changes in attitude, skills or behaviour at the individual, interpersonal and intergroup level. Recognising that 'success' means different things for different stakeholders, the applicability of indicators to different participants varied.

Four indicators represented MHCLG's (2019) outcome indicators for 'integrated communities':

- Increase in social cohesion
- Increase in social trust at a neighbourhood⁶ level, and between faith and race communities and local governance representatives
- Increase in social capital or sense of responsibility to neighbourhood and local area
- Increase in a sense of belonging

Two indicators were developed for the programme in relation to feelings of safety:

- Increase in feeling able to practice religion freely within the community
- Improved feeling of safety/reduction in perceived threat of anti-religion hate incidents, prejudice or microaggressions

One indicator was developed for the programme in relation to dialogue skills:

- Improved skills for talking about faith and belief sensitively and effectively

One indicator was developed for the programme in relation Strand 3 (local authority training):

- Increase in confidence of local governance representatives to work with residents of different faiths, beliefs, and backgrounds

One indicator was developed for the programme in relation to Strand 4 (school engagement):

- School students engaged in dialogue with those they would not ordinarily meet, demonstrating sensitivity and empathy

The evaluation data collection and analysis consisted six online surveys, interviews, focus groups and observation (see Appendix Item 1 for details). The subsequent sections of this report present the evaluation findings in relation to the outcome indicators outlined above.

6. In all indicators, 'neighbourhood' is defined in this evaluation as the target area (Birmingham or LBBD).

3. The impact of community dialogue



Screenshot from online dialogue session between a largely Christian African diaspora network and Sikh women's organisational network.

Between January and March 2021, F&BF facilitated 33 community dialogue sessions (11 in LBBD and 12 in Birmingham), reaching 153 individuals. As Section 2.1 outlines, individuals were invited by their Community Connector to attend two dialogues; in total there were 248 Zoom logins to the sessions.

Of the 153 individuals who took part, 143 attended the first dialogue and 105 the second, representing an average 'drop off' rate of 27% (39% in LBBD and 16% in Birmingham). The higher drop off rate in LBBD can, in part, be explained one community withdrawing from the programme after their first dialogue session.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the community dialogues, participants were asked to complete an online feedback form at the end of each session. Furthermore, the researcher and research assistant observed five sessions (two in LBBD and three in Birmingham).⁷

The online survey achieved 71 responses across the two dialogue sessions, representing 29% of all Zoom logins.⁸

The 71 responses can be broken down into the following demographics:⁹

- 77% from Birmingham and 23% from LBBD
- 61% after the first dialogue and 39% after the second dialogue
- 37% Christian, 17% Humanist, 16% Hindu, 14% Muslim, 6% Jewish, 4% Buddhist and 4% Sikh
- 56% up to and including 50 years of age, 44% over 50 years of age¹⁰
- 32% male and 66% female
- 35% from a white background and 65% from a black and minority ethnic (BAME) background¹¹

It is impossible to tell the extent to which these demographics are representative of all participants, since F&BF did not collect this data. However, by collecting data in the

7. The five observed sessions represented Sikh, Christian, Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Buddhist and Muslim individuals.

8. It is unknown how many individuals the 71 responses represent since some individuals will have completed the survey after both of their dialogue sessions.

9. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

10. One respondent chose not to reveal their age.

11. BAME backgrounds were further aggregated into more detail, however due to the sample size the variable of 'BAME' is used collectively in the statistical analysis.

evaluation forms, it was possible to infer statistically significant relationships between demographics and programme outcomes.¹² Moreover, statistical analysis findings can be understood more meaningfully when supported by qualitative data collected during the observations, staff focus groups, as well as insight into the community dialogue sessions provided by the Community Connectors in their interviews. As per Appendix Item 1, the researcher was unable to study the youth dialogue strand of the programme in detail. However, insights from a staff focus group on the impact of the youth dialogue sessions can broaden the relevance of this section's findings to younger community members.

The key outcomes of the community dialogue sessions are detailed below in the following five sub-sections.

3.1 Providing opportunities to mix

In order to measure the impact of the community dialogues against the indicators specified in the evaluation design, it is essential to recognise that **reported levels of social mixing in the target areas vary per individual**. Community Connector interviews demonstrated the extent to which perceptions of social mixing differ among community members. The following quotes from Community Connectors in Birmingham illustrate varying levels of awareness of the diversity of faith and cultural communities in the area, and the levels of mixing within and between them:

I personally know a lot of Muslims because of the area. There's a lot of Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims and so on. But not really that many Hindus
– female, Christian, Birmingham

I think we've [the Hindu 'community'] been quite secluded and we don't really interact too much
– female, Hindu, Birmingham

I think it's a very mixed society without too much in the way of obvious tensions. [...] But I think in big parts of the city, there's just not an awful lot of interaction between different religious communities and that goes along ethnic lines as well [...] there are also pockets of Birmingham where there is quite a lack of diversity and an in-depth homogenous or ethnic community, and I don't think that's very healthy. [...] I think there could be better understanding and integration between communities
– male, Humanist, Birmingham

The church is very multicultural in that really... for me, it's quite odd because there's African Caribbean, there's English, there's people with Irish backgrounds, there's quite a lot of African people, Zimbabweans and Nigerians as well
– female, Christian, Birmingham

I don't think there's a lot of community relationships and community meetings and so on. I think people live side by side but not actually together. [...] So, most people would know who their neighbours are, but they wouldn't know anything about them apart from the fact they're neighbours
– female, Christian, Birmingham

Whilst the contextual information in Section 2.2 infers that the target areas are areas of 'need' of intervention, it is essential that the following evaluation findings are interpreted within the context of a complex sociocultural environment. As one Community Connector in LBBD stated, "don't take every statistic as fact".

In the years following some of the research referenced in Section 2.2, the Covid-19 pandemic has further influenced individuals' and groups' perceptions of social mixing. For one Community Connector, it had a positive impact:

...because of the pandemic, we've been linked up to a lot of different faith groups. Through the pandemic, we've made really good links with different Muslim organisations, different religious groups, through the response we've done with food parcels. Every ward in Dagenham and Barking was assigned a locality lead and we were responsible for three wards but, for example, in Barking there were a couple of wards that were headed by a mosque
– male, Christian, LBBD

For a Muslim participant in a community dialogue session, the pandemic has negatively impacted views of his faith community:

I think to a certain degree the pandemic has negatively impacted my faith community because [...] the perception that we haven't taken it seriously has probably had a negative impact in terms of how we are viewed on a wider scale in my opinion. I think there is more talk going around because certain mosques haven't adhered to the social gathering rules or they haven't followed the strict and stringent procedures that they should be

12. When reporting on statistical significance, the 0.05 significance level (p) is used (standard in social science research), which means that one can be 95% confident that findings have not occurred by chance.

following. You see this on social media that goes around and influences people's views and opinions – male, Muslim, Birmingham.

The pandemic thus added to the complexity of the social background against which the programme was delivered.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the programme's stated target area of 'Birmingham', in practice, extended to areas extending beyond Birmingham City Council. This was due to time and recruitment restrictions¹³ as well as honouring the recognition that individuals and groups do not necessarily worship within borough lines. This had an impact on Community Connectors' reported perceptions of levels of diversity and mixing in their local areas. For example, one Community Connector based in Smethwick, said:

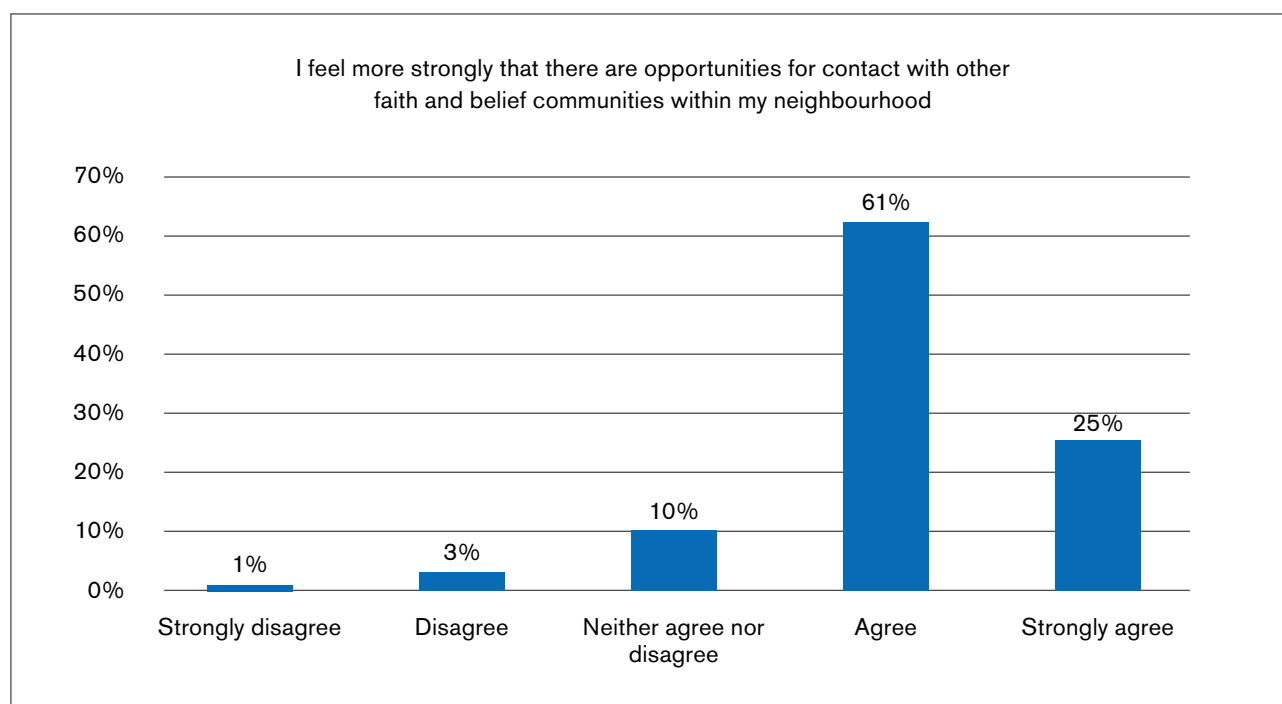
I can't speak for the whole of Birmingham. I can only speak for my locality and I think one of the things is

that a neighbourhood is a narrower thing than the whole city. But in our neighbourhood, in terms of faith leaders and in terms of people who are active in faith, there is a pretty good relationship. So, we work together on various projects [...] Within the larger community, there is an issue that we almost live in parallel but separate lives. So, there's not always a huge amount of interaction between the various parts of the community.

Nevertheless, it remains a key finding that **the community dialogue sessions provided greater opportunity for social mixing in the target areas.**

As Figure 3.1 shows, 86% of responses reported feeling more strongly that 'there are opportunities for contact with other faith and belief communities within my neighbourhood' following the dialogue sessions.¹⁴ That the proportion of participants agreeing with the statement is so high means that there is very little demographic variation in responses.

Figure 3.1: Proportion of community dialogue survey responses that reported feeling more strongly after community dialogue that there are opportunities for contact with other faith and belief communities within their neighbourhood



13. Both of which are discussed in Section 7.

14. Notably, F&BF's ethos and methodology draws largely upon the assumptions of contact theory. The model of 'intergroup contact' (Brown and Hewstone 2005; Hewstone and Brown 1986; Pettigrew 1998) is based on Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis', which proposed that interaction between groups can decrease prejudiced attitudes. Specifically, certain conditions must be met to maximise the opportunity for prejudice reduction. Expert facilitation, such as that provided by F&BF, is thus vital for contact to be successful in its aims.

Interviews with Community Connectors similarly indicated that the community dialogue sessions led to increased awareness of diversity and opportunity for mixing:

I think I have got to know a bit more about the Humanist group, apart from what we read on the internet I had not met any Humanists from Birmingham community. [...] That was really nice to know there is an entire community of Humanists in Birmingham

– female, Hindu, Birmingham

[...] if you didn't have this dialogue session, I don't think many people would know that there were Indians or how many Christians are there or how many other religions. So, at least it's giving us ideas that there [are] other religious traits in this borough.

– female, Hindu, LBBD

We are all, it is like a melting pot of a lot of different cultures, religions, and people generally, once they get to know each other, they get to sort of build that bridge. But when you don't know people there isn't a way of getting to know people, it is always us and them sort of feeling.

– female, Sikh, LBBD

Similarly, the youth dialogue facilitators recognised that many younger residents had not had a chance to take part in any interfaith interactions:

the participants] hadn't necessarily had experience of it [dialogue] so they were positive to develop the opportunity to have that experience of engaging with others and this was going to give them that opportunity which other things in their life had not.

The female, Sikh, Community Connector based in LBBD quoted above stated that the dialogue session replaced previous initiatives that have ceased due to withdrawn or expired funding, illustrating the need for programmes such as this:¹⁵

I have to say, in the past there used to be more opportunities for community to meet, because there used to be funding allowed. But with all the cuts recently, there has been less and less of those cultural or cross way things.

Lastly, a male, Muslim Community Connector in LBBD positioned opportunities for contact as the starting point from which other outcomes can develop:

Well you see, this is actually the first step. Yeah, this is not the last step, this is the first step and the community have to take the following steps. What the Faith Forum has done is socially interlinked us with our neighbours, yeah, who have got, from a religious perspective, come from a different background, but they are people like us. When you are able to connect socially [...] you are able to understand each other socially, respect socially

– male, Muslim, LBBD

That the programme participants overwhelmingly saw the community dialogue sessions as enabling social mixing provides empirical support for the provision of community initiatives as a prerequisite for the development of programme outcomes described in the following sub-sections.

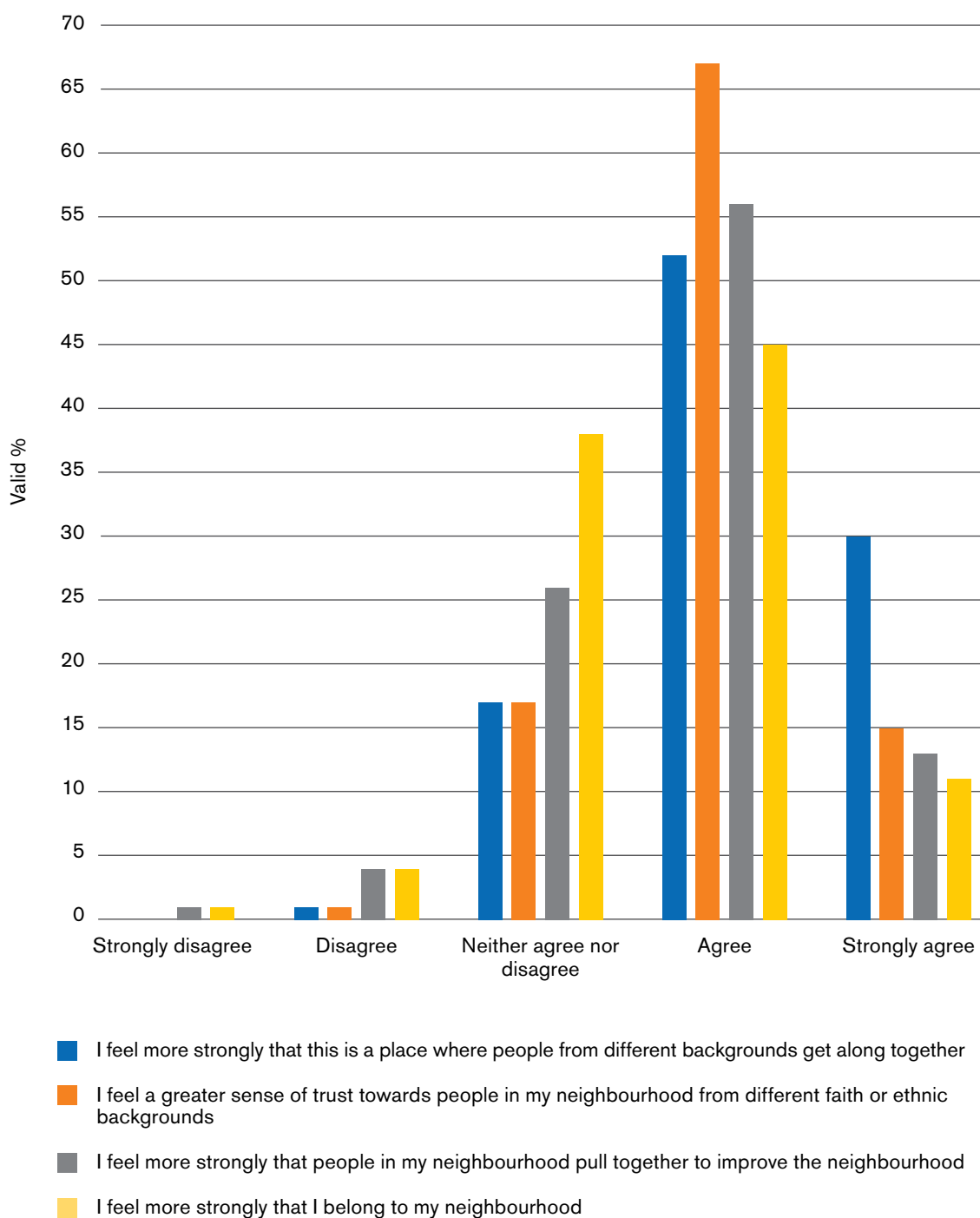
3.2 Encouraging integration

Participants were asked in the online survey the extent to which they agreed with four statements representing indicators of integration (social cohesion, social trust, social capital, and social belonging).

Figure 3.2 summarises the results.

15. The relationship between faith communities and Local Authority will be explored in Section 5.

Figure 3.2: The proportion of survey responses that agreed with statements indicating that the community dialogue sessions developed social cohesion, social trust, social capital and social belonging



Perceived levels of 'social cohesion', defined as the "percentage of people who say that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get along" (MHCLG 2019: 8) were measured by asking community dialogue participants the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'I feel more strongly that this is a place where people from different backgrounds get along together' as a result of taking part in the session. **Over 50% of responses 'agreed' with the statement, and a further 30% 'strongly agreed', providing significant support that social cohesion was fostered through the programme.** Only one participant disagreed. Considering the changes the programme made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this is a very positive outcome.

When dialogue sessions were observed through the lens of participants 'getting on', there were notable instances of this. For example, as the second dialogue session between a Sikh organisation and a largely Christian network in LBBD was drawing to a close, the participants spontaneously sang to each other and made heart-shaped hand signals to their webcams:

I get the impression that no one really wants to leave. One of the participants is going to perform a song for everyone in response to a request for performance at the final celebration event. Everyone is laughing and joking
– researcher's observation fieldnotes

The Sikh Community Connector herself recognised this moment as significant:

What made it interesting was, when we said at the end something, one guy was an artist, he said, well, can you sing a song now at the end of it? And he started a song in Punjabi which is our language. Everyone laughed and it was really nice. That wouldn't have happened in real times.

Though anecdotal, this data is nevertheless indicative of the programme's potential to foster social cohesion amongst its participants.

'Social trust', defined as the "proportion of adults who say most of the people in their neighbourhood can be trusted"

(MHCLG 2019: 8) was measured specifically in relation to this programme by asking community dialogue participants the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'I feel a greater sense of trust towards people in my neighbourhood from different faith or ethnic backgrounds' as a result of taking part in the session. This statement saw the greatest proportion of responses selecting 'agree' (67%) and a further 15% selecting 'strongly agree'.

For the first time, demographics influenced the participants' responses. Participants aged 50 and under were statistically significantly more likely than participants over 50 years old to agree with the statement (93% compared to 67%).¹⁶ A third of the over 50s responded as 'neither agree nor disagree'. This indicates that **social trust towards people from different faith or ethnic background was reportedly developed among dialogue participants, particularly among those aged 50 and under.**

In the interviews, some Community Connectors were hesitant to commit to saying that trust was built. For example, a female, Sikh Community Connector in LBBD said, "It is hard to say, trust is a big thing. I think I would be being a bit flippant if I said yes there was more trust". However, others specifically referenced trust being developed in the community dialogues. A male, Humanist Community Connector in Birmingham said, "there was definitely trust there, obviously trust is quite a complicated word really but yes I think, yes I think trust was definitely there".

In a focus group held with staff members of F&BF and The Feast, the concept of trust was presented in terms of perceived or reported 'comfort'. One staff member explained:

I think trust was established quite significantly, people felt that they were able to say things, they often worded the idea that they felt at home [... in the second dialogue] there was quite a lot of experiences during the pandemic that people talked about and particularly their faith sort of journey and their emotional state in the pandemic that they sort of expressed and they felt able to express those in that space because they felt comfortable. I think comfort is probably the best example of trust that we can have.

16. $P < 0.05$, $N = 69$

The staff members and two Community Connectors quoted above linked the dialogue activity of the 'identity cupboard'¹⁷ to feelings of comfort in vulnerability; it enabled participants to "open up more to each other". These references are testament to the potential for the programme's methods to foster an environment in which social trust can develop.

Dialogue participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'I feel more strongly that people in my neighbourhood pull together to improve the neighbourhood' as a result of taking part in the session. This is a measure of 'social capital', defined as the "percentage of people who agree that people in their neighbourhood pull together to improve the neighbourhood" (MHCLG 19: 9). **Almost seven in 10 responses (69%) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that social capital was built during the community dialogue.** Female participants were overrepresented in the responses in general, but despite this, were statistically significantly more likely to agree with the statement than male participants (90% compared to 46%).¹⁸ This indicates that **social capital was reportedly fostered among women in particular.**

Quotes from female Community Connectors support this finding. One Hindu Community Connector recognised through the dialogue sessions that, "people have ambitions and they want to make [LBBD] an area where people can join in". A Hindu Community Connector shared that the focus of the second dialogue session (which focussed on 'community') fostered a sense of social capital, because "when we speak about the community, what we can change in the community, people feel more free, they say, 'oh, in my area we can do this'".

The second dialogue activity of 'My Place My Space'¹⁹ enabled participants to visualise and articulate their perceptions of social capital. One female, Christian Community Connector described the map as a "very good"

activity to reflect on "what we can improve in the future". Notably, when asked what new building they would like to see in their local areas, many observed participants suggested a 'multifaith centre' or variation thereof.

However, one Community Connector described the second dialogue in general, and the map activity in particular, as "aspirational", and another was realistic in her expectations of a sense of social capital transforming into collective action:

I would say the majority of people were quite keen that there would be a community resource where different groups could use it at a different time or use it or all collectively depending on whatever was being done [... but] things like that don't just fall in place they have to be helped to fall in place and often it needs resources and that resource is not always money. It can be time, it can be commitment [...] It helps to make it happen, otherwise it is just a pipe dream really. It is just tools and to an extent I think like most of us would be annoyed and irritated if it just fizzled out and nothing happened out of it.
– female, Sikh, LBBD.

That the Community Connector is cognisant of the need for funding or support for community-led initiatives is telling; relationships between faith communities and local authority are explored in more detail in Section 5.

All qualitative data referencing social capital relates to LBBD. As noted in Section 3.1, the 'Birmingham' target area in practice extended to surrounding areas. That the communities paired for dialogue were likely to live geographically closer in LBBD appeared to positively influence the effectiveness of the map activity, and by extension the social capital generated in the dialogues.²⁰ The implications of geographic proximity on the development of integration indicators is revisited in the closing section of the report.

17. An activity in which participants are encouraged to explore how they consciously and sub-consciously present their identity to others.

18. $P = 0.01$, $N = 68$

19. In this activity, facilitators asked participants to draw a map of their local area, guided by statements such as 'draw a place which connects with you faith, belief or culture', 'a place where you feel welcome/unwelcome' and 'a building you would like to see'. Participants are then asked to discuss their maps in small groups. During one observed session, the facilitator told the participants, "it would be great if you can think about the same places but from someone else's perspective" during the discussion. This statement in particular illustrates the potential that expert facilitation has in fostering indicators of integration.

20. Notably, one pair of Community Connectors in Birmingham chose not to use the map activity in their second dialogue, since community members were significantly spread around Birmingham and surrounding areas.

Lastly, a 'sense of belonging', defined as the "percentage of people who say that they feel they strongly belong to their immediate neighbourhood" (MHCLG 2019: 8) was measured by asking community dialogue participants the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'I feel more strongly that I belong to my neighbourhood' as a result of taking part in the session. Whilst the findings are not as strong as those relating to the previous statements, over half of responses (56%) either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', indicating **a sense of belonging is developed during the dialogue sessions, though to a lesser extent than other integration indicators.**

There is no demographic influence over participants' survey responses, but qualitative data indicated that participants' perceptions of the extent to which they feel 'welcome' within their neighbourhood alluded to their sense of belonging. As with social capital, a sense of belonging was fostered through F&BF's map activity in the second dialogue sessions, during which participants were specifically asked to share where they feel welcome and unwelcome in their respective neighbourhoods. During one observed dialogue session between a Sikh organisation and a largely Christian society, a Christian participant reflected on the racism she experiences when she takes her child to their local park:

I'm a very confident person but in that place I felt very unwelcome. In one way or another we stereotype people. I'm sad that some of us are very unpleasant towards others.

The participant notably engaged in the map activity and the related discussion, leading her to share the following with her fellow dialogue participants as the session was drawing to a close:

I must say I feel like I belong. I'm not normally one to participate but I must say I was looking forward to this. [...] I learnt so much. So, thank you for welcoming me into the group. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Whilst a sense of belonging to one's wider neighbourhood is difficult to achieve within the context of a dialogue session, it is clear that the dialogues are fostering a sense belonging within the group, that participants may apply to wider contexts.

3.3 Promoting feelings of safety

Section 2.3 outlined that some outcome indicators were developed by F&BF itself. Two of these related to feelings of safety: feeling more able to practice one's own religion freely within their neighbourhood, and feeling less threat of anti-religion hate, harassment, or prejudice within one's own neighbourhood.

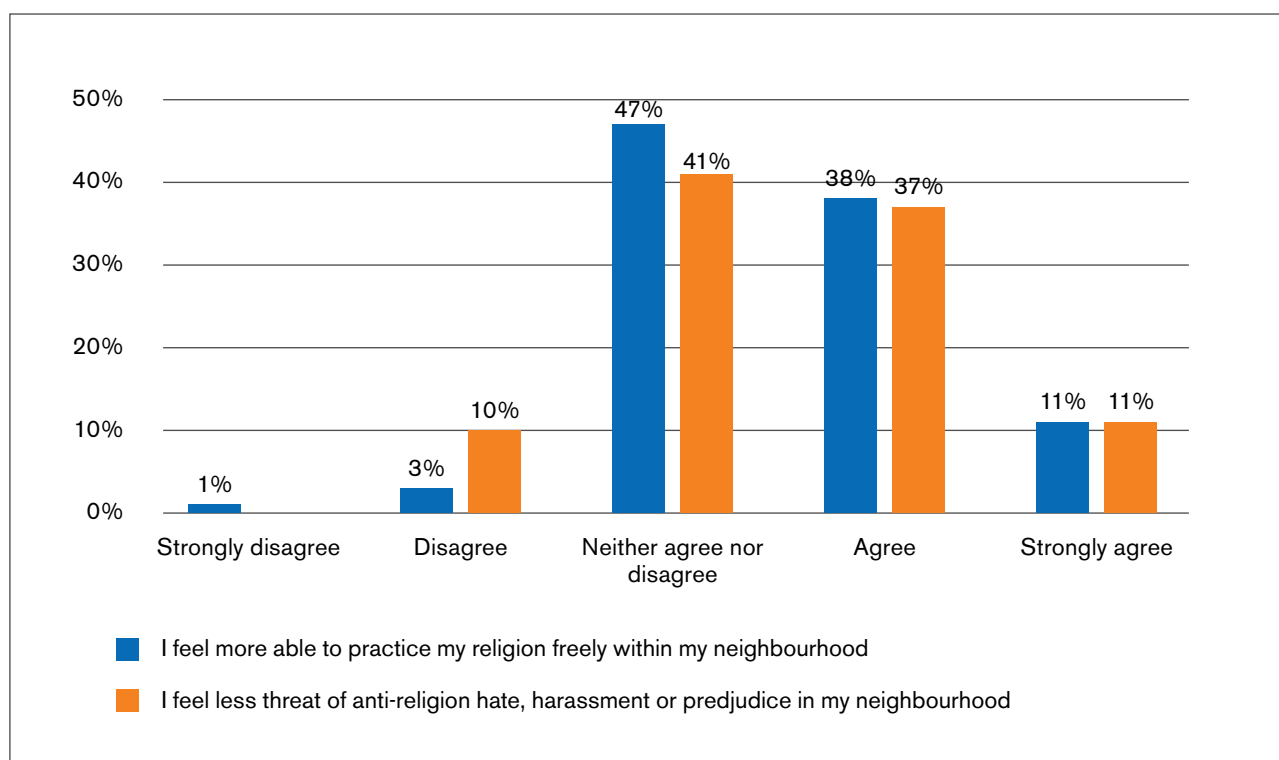
Whilst the qualitative data reveal very few and tenuous instances of discussion relating directly to anti-religion hate, harassment or prejudice, there were conversations during one observed Birmingham dialogue session during which participants discussed a hesitancy to practice or talk about their beliefs (including those that are non-religious) freely:

...often I am quite careful about who I tell that I am Jewish, for obvious reasons. Particularly at university where it is quite popular to be very left and kind of anti-Judaism and things. So, I can be quite careful
– female, Jewish, Birmingham

...there are people in the Humanist group whose families assume they are Muslim, but they don't even own up to that to their families
– male, Muslim, Birmingham

It is extremely positive, then, that perceptions of both safety-related indicators improved during the dialogue sessions. Figure 4.3 summarises the community dialogue participants' survey responses to statements representing the indicators.

Figure 3.3: The proportion of survey responses agreeing with indicators representing feelings of safety



Almost half of the survey responses ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statements ‘I feel more able to practice my religion freely within my neighbourhood’ (49%) and I feel less threat of anti-religion hate, harassment or prejudice in my neighbourhood (48%) following the community dialogue. Another four in 10 responses ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’.

Notably, statistical analysis indicated that participants’ age and ethnicity influenced their responses. Participants aged 50 years or younger were significantly more likely than those aged over 50 to agree with the statement ‘I feel less threat of anti-religion hate, harassment or prejudice in my neighbourhood’ (62% compared with 32%).²¹ The over 50s were more likely to ‘neither agree nor disagree’. Similarly, BAME participants reported feeling significantly

more likely than white participants to agree (61% compared to 25%).²² Over two thirds of responses from white participants ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’.

Moreover, BAME participants reported feeling significantly more likely than white participants to feel more able to practice their religion freely within their neighbourhood following the dialogues (60% agreed, compared to 29%). Again, white participants were more likely to ‘neither agree nor disagree’.²³

In combination, the quantitative findings indicate that **positive perceptions of safety, whilst developed during the dialogues in almost half of all survey responses, were significantly greater for younger participants and those from BAME backgrounds.**

21. P= 0.01, N= 70

22. P= 0.01, N= 68

23. P< 0.05, N= 69

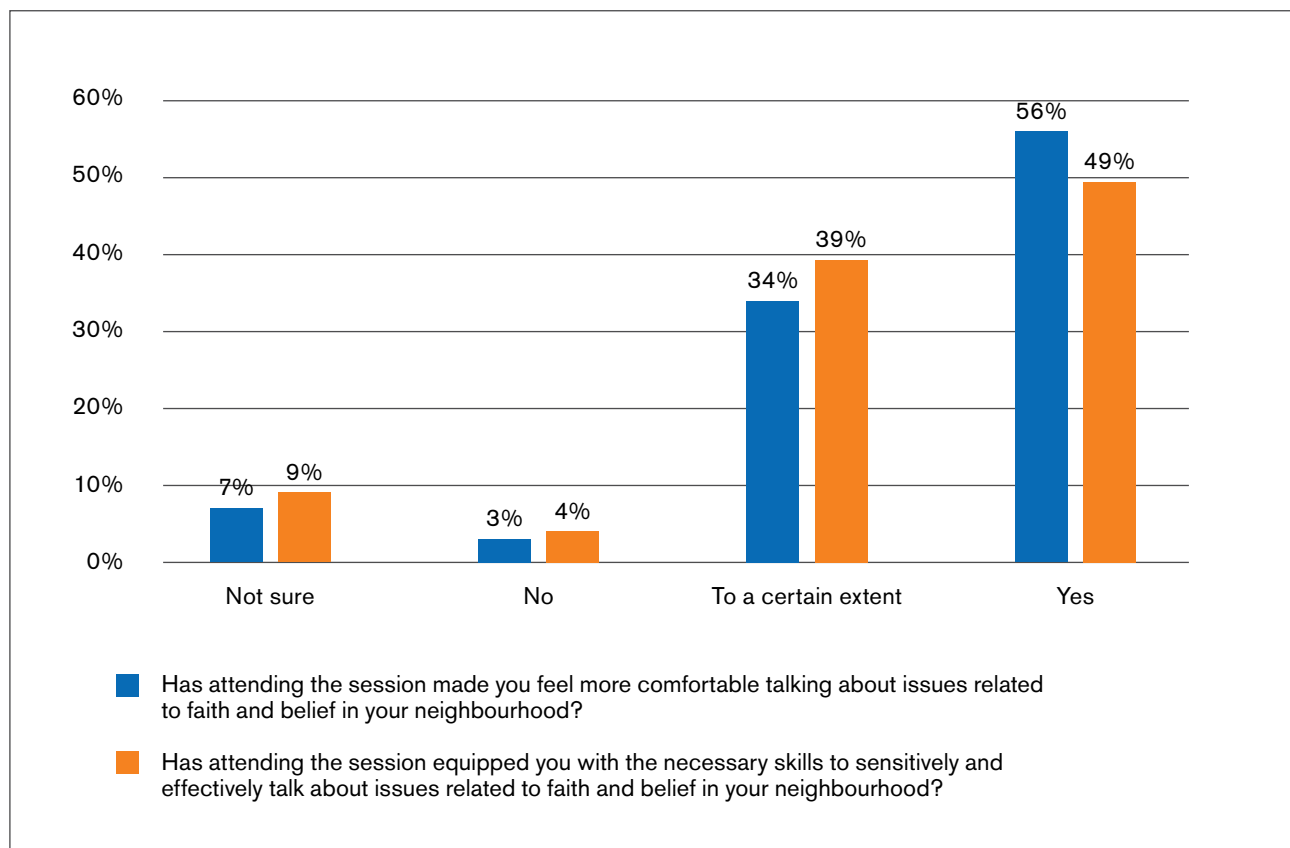
3.4 Developing comfort and skills for dialogue

The two final outcome indicators were measured in relation to the development of participants' dialogue skills.

A fundamental part of F&BF's methodology is to enable programme participants to develop skills for dialogue through interaction within a 'safe space'.²⁴ Similarly, F&BF's partner organisation, The Feast, has developed 'guidelines for dialogue' (see Appendix Item 5). The purpose of these tools is to equip participants with the skills and experience required to talk comfortably and sensitively about issues related to faith and belief.

These indicators were measured by asking community dialogue participants in the survey a) 'Has attending the session made you feel more comfortable talking about issues related to faith and belief in your neighbourhood?' and b) 'Has attending the session equipped you with the necessary skills to sensitively and effectively talk about issues related to faith and belief in your neighbourhood?' Participants were also asked to comment on their responses. Figure 4.4 illustrates the quantitative findings.

Figure 3.4: The proportion of community dialogue survey responses agreeing with indicators representing the development of dialogue skills



24. A video summarising F&BF's safe space principles can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/273167977>.

In response to the question 'Has attending the session made you feel more comfortable talking about issues related to faith and belief in your neighbourhood?', over half (56%) of responses said 'yes' and a further 34% answered 'to a certain extent'. This is very positive, with **feelings of comfort increasing in 90% of responses**. When asked to comment, the responses tended to refer to feelings of support enabling participants to share personal information:

It was great the way both groups were open, relaxed and confidently shared personal Information and their feelings.

I felt others are open to listening.

It was nice to share in a supportive environment.

Other qualitative data support this finding. Community Connectors, in their interviews, gave examples of participants putting themselves into positions of vulnerability. For example, a female, Christian Community Connector in Birmingham reflected, "some people went really quite deep into introspection. Considering it was such a short meeting and they'd only just met [...] they felt secure enough to do it".

As explored in Section 3.2, this evaluation data links feelings of comfort to the development of social trust, emphasising the importance of expert facilitation to ensure the appropriate environment is cultivated.

The one participant who answered 'no' to the survey question stated that the questions "assume some discomfort in interfaith working that needs to be remedied if a positive answer is to be given. Not the case for me". Indeed, others who selected 'to a certain extent' reflected that their feelings of comfort were already high before taking part in the programme:

Prior to the meeting I had no problems with my worldview or in my dealings with other worldviews. So, the very enjoyable interactions didn't increase those much.

The group was self-selectedly outgoing and open-minded.

That the programme participants were more likely to possess positive attitudes and existing skills is identified as a challenge to programme delivery and evaluation and is discussed further in Section 8.

In response to the question 'Has attending the session equipped you with the necessary skills to sensitively and effectively talk about issues related to faith and belief in your neighbourhood?', almost half (49%) said 'yes' and 34% answered 'to a certain extent'. Collectively, **almost 9 in 10 survey responses indicated that the sessions equipped participants with dialogue skills**.

Notably, although not statistically significant, dialogue skills were more greatly developed after attending a second dialogue; 63% of responses after the second dialogue answered 'yes', compared to 39.5% after the first dialogue. It appears, then, that repeat participation in the programme has greater potential to develop of dialogue skills.

When asked to comment in the survey, responses tended to praise the guidelines for dialogue introduced in the sessions:

Dialogue guidelines very helpful. I hope I will be able to communicate effectively.

I feel the rules for dialogue have given me solid guidance on how to engage sensitively with other faiths. I no longer fear putting my foot in it.

Similarly, Community Connectors reflected positively on the guidance in their interviews:

...the way they've taught us how to listen and understand and... I was very in a bubble before and like the whole of my degree as well, spending a lot of time with other Jewish students. So, to be able to start a conversation... to learn how to start a conversation with someone who doesn't necessarily have the same identity and culture as you. That's really taught me a lot.
– female, Jewish, Birmingham

...the rules about engagement and talking to each other, those rules are really something that we really should probably spend a bit more time exploring, because [...] they seem to me to be the things that really will help when trying to engage with other people.
– female, Christian, Birmingham

For the youth dialogue sessions, the facilitators felt that the participants' confidence increased in terms of listening and sharing with others, rather than a specific skill set:

...the main way I feel this would have equipped them for building interfaith relationships afterwards is mostly through sharing stories about other people's backgrounds and so then afterwards maybe they would have a bit more of a frame of reference.

Other survey responses indicated that the dialogue guidance strengthened the skills they already possessed:

The session consolidated my skills.

I feel confident anyway and such dialogue as we've had tonight offers reassurance.

Of the three survey responses that answered 'no' to the question, two declined to comment and the third stated, "I think I already have these skills". Again, this is an indication that **participants may enter the sessions with developed dialogue skills therefore a negative response to the development of skills should not necessarily be interpreted as a programmatic failure.**



Artwork commissioned by a local artist as part of the Community Dialogue project in Barking and Dagenham (© Oreyeni Arts)

4. Community Connectors: Engaging current and emerging community leaders

This section considers individuals recognised by F&BF as current or emerging leaders within their faith communities²⁵, trained as 'Community Connectors'. The programme trained 20 individuals (seven in LBBD and 13 in Birmingham) for this role.

Community Connectors attended three training sessions, two ahead of their community dialogue sessions and one after their second dialogue (see Figure 2.1). Appendix Item 3 details the content of these sessions. As per

Section 2.3, the evaluation was designed to measure changes in Community Connectors' skills and attitudes through baseline and endpoint surveys completed at the start and end of the programme and individual interviews conducted during January-March 2021.

Of the 20 Community Connectors, 14 completed the baseline survey and 10 the endpoint. Table 4.1 illustrates the demographics of the respondents.

Table 4.1: Demographics of Community Connector survey respondents

Demographic	Categories and number of responses	
	Baseline	Endpoint
Target area	Birmingham (10) LBBD (4)	Birmingham (7) LBBD (3)
Religion or belief	Christian (4) Muslim (3) Hindu (2) Jewish (2) Buddhist (1) Humanist (1) Sikh (1)	Christian (3) Sikh (2) Muslim (1) Hindu (1) Jewish (1) Buddhist (1) Humanist (1) ²⁶
Age	Over 50 (8) Up to and including 50 (6)	Over 50 (6) Up to and including 50 (4)
Gender	Female (9) Male (5)	Female (8) Male (2)
Ethnic background	BAME (9) White (4) ²⁷	BAME (7) White (3)

25. See Section 2.1 for an overview of the communities.

26. One respondent selected 'Prefer not to say'.

27. One respondent selected 'Prefer not to say'.

The sample is generally representative of the Community Connectors on the programme. All religion and belief backgrounds are represented. Both target areas saw higher proportions of female and BAME Community Connectors, which is reflected in this sample. The only category which is unrepresentative is the target area; Community Connectors from LBBD are underrepresented in the evaluation sample. Therefore, the inferences are strictly more applicable to the Birmingham context.

4.1 Perceptions of integration and safety

The outcome indicators relating to integration and feelings of safety were measured by asking participants to what extent they agreed with a set of statements before and after the programme (from 1, 'strongly disagree' to 5, 'strongly agree'). These are the same statements presented to community dialogue participants in their survey. Table 4.2 details the results.

Table 4.2: Community Connectors' baseline and endpoint median scores for indicators relating to integration and feelings of safety

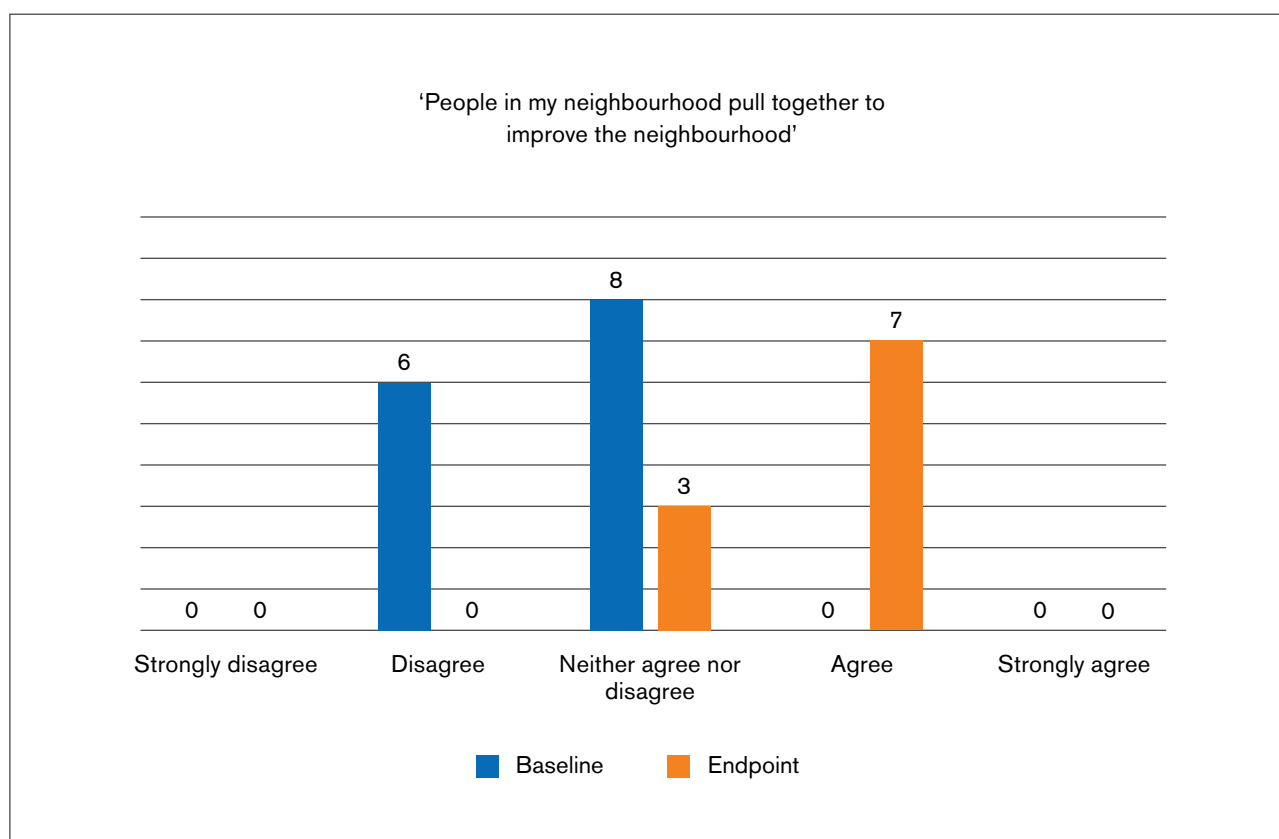
	Baseline median score (14 responses)	Endpoint median score (10 responses)
INTEGRATION INDICATORS		
In my neighbourhood there are opportunities for contact with other faith and belief communities.	4	4
This a neighbourhood where people from different backgrounds get along together.	4	4
Thinking about people in my neighbourhood from different faith or ethnic backgrounds, I believe that they can be trusted.	4	4
People in my neighbourhood pull together to improve the neighbourhood.	3	4
I feel that I belong to my neighbourhood.	4	4
FEELINGS OF SAFETY		
I feel able to practice my religion freely within my neighbourhood.	4	4
I feel a threat of anti-religion hate, harassment, or prejudice in my neighbourhood.	2	2

From the outset, it appears that **Community Connectors enter the programme with considerably positive attitudes to levels of social integration and feelings of safety in their neighbourhoods.**

In terms of measuring *changing* attitudes for this small sample, limited inferences can be made due to the high baseline level. Nevertheless, the change in attitudes

towards one statement proved to be statistically significant. Community Connectors' responses to the statement 'People in my neighbourhood pull together to improve the neighbourhood' on average increased by one point (from 3, 'neither agree nor disagree', to 4, 'agree').²⁸ The statistical analysis thus indicates that **social capital was built among the Community Connectors as a result of the programme.**

Figure 4.1: The proportion of Community Connectors agreeing that people pull together to improve their neighbourhood(s)



28. $P=0.00$, Mann-Whitney test.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the strength of the Community Connector's attitude change in more detail. Prior to taking part in the programme, no Community Connectors 'agreed' with the statement and six 'disagreed'. By the end of the programme, seven 'agreed', none 'disagreed' and the proportion saying 'neither agree nor disagree' more than halved.

In their interviews, Community Connectors shared that there was a clear appetite among dialogue participants to meet again and discuss ideas for social change, a notion described in Section 3.2's discussions on the development of social capital in dialogue sessions. The desire to continue meeting among communities was illustrated when Community Connectors were asked in their endpoint survey to reflect on their relationship with their partner. The similarity in the responses was striking, and included, "I hope to continue outside this project", "I do hope the relationship will continue", "we hope to continue the relationship via invitations to events and possibly a joint project down the line", and "I would like to continue learning and working with them".

In their interviews, Community Connectors referenced a need for F&BF and/or The Feast to support the facilitation. For example, a female, Sikh Community connector in LBBD said, "we will still expect [F&BF staff member] to organise it because obviously everybody who was part of it was part of an organisation, they have all got things to do with that and people have got lives to live. They don't want to take on something else". **This illustrates the vital role that programmes such as this have in providing opportunities for, and facilitating, contact.** Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that social capital is being built among Community Connectors to drive collaborative action among faith communities when opportunities arise.

4.2 Personal change

Given the small survey sample of Community Connectors and limited potential for statistical analysis, it is prudent to consider change at an individual level to accurately capture the nuances of the programme's impact. Two Community Connectors in particular provided significant evaluation data in both the baseline and endpoint surveys as well as interviews with the researchers. These are their stories.²⁹

Andrew's story

Andrew is a Musician who lives in Birmingham. He is white, over 50 years of age and was trained as a Community Connector for a Humanist network he joined in December 2020. He was connected with two female Community Connectors from a Jewish student society and from a Birmingham-based Hindu community.

Andrew came into the programme with generally positive perceptions of integration and safety in his neighbourhood but was ambivalent about the extent to which people pulled together to improve the neighbourhood. He shared that he was inexperienced in dialogue, reflecting "I don't feel that comfortable in talking about my own beliefs and lifestyles to other people, unless an opportunity arises".

At the end of the programme, Andrew's confidence in dialogue skills had significantly grown. He stated that he felt comfortable talking about issues related to faith and belief in his neighbourhood, saying he felt "more confident about these things".

Similarly, his sense of social capital had developed; he went away from his final session reflecting, "I'd be disappointed if we didn't maintain some contact between us, and also between our communities".

Andrew also reflected on a change in perception towards members of the faith communities with whom he was linked. He described how the Hindu Community Connector "presented a really nice written summary of typical beliefs of her community", saying "it did change my mind, it did change my views".

29. Pseudonyms are used.

Marion's story

Marion is a retired teacher who lives in Birmingham. She is of Caribbean descent and is over 50 years old. Marion joined the programme as a Community Connector for her Church of England church based in the north of Birmingham. She was paired with a Community Connector from a Hindu community in the south west of Birmingham.

Coming into the programme, Marion felt able to practice Christianity freely within her neighbourhood and that in general there were opportunities for contact with other faith and belief communities.

However, she was ambivalent about whether she 'belongs' to her neighbourhood and whether people from different faith and ethnic backgrounds in her neighbourhood could be trusted.

She disagreed that people pull together to improve her neighbourhood and that Birmingham is a place where people from different backgrounds get along together. She also didn't feel comfortable talking about issues relating to faith and belief in her neighbourhood.

She reflected, "faith communities lead parallel lives. There is contact at senior levels and less personal contact between individuals".

By the end of the programme, all of Marion's ambivalent or negative perceptions had improved to the extent that she agreed with every sentiment in the survey. She 'strongly agreed' that Birmingham is a place where people from different backgrounds get along together, commenting on her dialogue sessions, "the feedback has been very positive and they [her local faith community members] all want to know more about the other community. They were surprised by the considerable overlap in opinions, attitudes and concerns" and "the groups got on very well and were respectful of each other. We hope to continue the relationship via invitations to events and possibly a joint project down the line".

On feeling comfortable talking about issues relating to faith and belief, she stated, "the project has given me tools to engage sensitively with other communities".

The experience also changed her perceptions about members of the faith community with whom she was paired, reflecting, "I think it's probably because I didn't know any Hindus [...] I just assumed [...] they keep themselves to themselves and therefore I've never come across any, where in fact, that doesn't seem to be the case [...] hearing them talk about their experiences, it's really interesting and how outgoing they are. They are a very outward looking community and I haven't got that before".

4.3 Tackling social tensions through dialogue

As per Section 2, a stated programme outcome specific to Community Connectors was 'improved skills and capacity amongst cultural, faith and community leaders, enabling them to challenge inappropriate behaviour, promote cohesion and prevent faith and race motivated hate instances or hate crime'.

To explore this, Community Connectors were asked in their interviews to reflect on whether participation in the programme had prepared them to tackle social tensions in their neighbourhood, and whether they had engaged in challenging conversations during their community dialogue sessions.

Conversations about preparedness to tackle social tensions drew upon the usefulness of the skills for dialogue outlined in Section 3.4:

The social tensions within my community? Yes, to some extent, yes. It [the dialogue] has equipped me. We were talking about how important the usage of words is. So, I think that's important, our vocabulary, what we use and when it comes to social tensions, it's usually the words that can have an impact, the wrong usage of words

– female, Hindu, Birmingham

...there were two aspects of activities and the discussions around guidance for dialogue and how people could constructively go about talking about their own faith and other people's and listening. So, I think there were some useful things there, some useful tools I guess, if I was to encounter somebody who had very different views to me and had prejudices about the views of people like me

– male, Humanist, Birmingham

...the rules about engagement and talking to each other [...] they seem to me to be the things that really will help when trying to engage with other people. Thinking about how we engage, not using preconceptions and not blaming people, just because they haven't got a religion, or bringing

your own baggage with it, what you thought, what you knew about it, rather than what actually is [...]

That's really important

– female, Christian, Birmingham

However, when the interviews explored whether Community Connectors managed challenging conversations in the dialogue sessions, they indicated a desire to go “beyond the surface” into more challenging topics of discussion:

I think they [the dialogue sessions] were possibly not as challenging as might have been expected. We engaged in very useful conversations and it got to a certain depth, particularly when we were looking at the identity cupboard and that part of the exercise [...] But whether it became a challenge at any point, I couldn't say

– male, Christian, Birmingham

I wouldn't say it was challenging in a big way, I think... it depends what you mean by challenging. It was good that we were able to be open with each other. I feel it was a really good opportunity to be open with each other. I don't think it was necessarily challenging though

– male, Christian, LBBD

Staff members from F&BF and The Feast similarly spoke of participants' feedback that the conversations were not challenging enough:

I think the idea of challenge, a few of my participants talked about being more challenged in exploring themselves, their faith, their belief in relation to others and in a context of dialogue, not debate

– female, F&BF staff member

In the staff focus group, the staff members reflected that from their perspective, it is “really important” that participants are not challenged to the extent that they feel uncomfortable; as Section 3.2 demonstrated, feelings of comfort, enabled by fostering a safe space and guidelines for dialogue, are integral for the development of social trust.

One Community Connector recognised this:

I would have been quite happy to be challenged a bit more strongly perhaps, but I didn't feel challenged, didn't feel uncomfortable. Clearly the most important thing with these types of things is that it's over a limited amount of time, that people leave feeling positive. So, it's probably better to leave having had a comfortable experience that was maybe a bit too safe, than the other way around
– male, Humanist, Birmingham

On balance, given the limited nature of the programme, fostering social trust must be prioritised over challenging participants in community dialogues. However, in order to fulfil the outcome of 'improved skills and capacity amongst cultural, faith and community leaders, enabling them to challenge inappropriate behaviour, promote cohesion and prevent faith and race motivated hate instances or hate crime', the programme must cater for this elsewhere. The Community Connector training sessions offer an ideal place to do this exclusively with current and emerging community leaders.

5. Building faith awareness in local authorities

Due to programmatic and evaluation changes driven by the covid-19 pandemic and related time and recruitment constraints, not enough data could be collected to robustly measure the extent to which the local government-aspect of the second programme objective, 'To build skills of community and statutory authorities to engage more effectively together to mitigate social tension', was met.³⁰ The data that have been collected, however, can point to the *potential* of F&BF's activities in meeting this objective.

Qualitative data collected through Community Connector interviews and an LA staff survey indicated, as previously noted in Section 2.2, that **the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to the development of positive relations between LAs and faith communities:**

I think that the pandemic has actually reminded both local government in general and Public Health in particular just how useful the faith communities can be in terms of getting the information out there and offering encouragement and reassurance where necessary. We offer local government an inroad into communities

– male, Christian, Birmingham

I think the work with community groups around the pandemic is one great example of how we work well together

– LA worker, male, Christian, LBBD

During Covid-19 different faith communities came together to support the borough as a whole with food and resources, the borough work hard to have acceptance and understanding

– LA worker, female, spiritual, LBBD

However, it appears that positive relationships tended to develop between LA staff and current or emerging faith community leaders; local residents demonstrated less trust in the LA. Prior to taking part in the programme, Community Connectors, on average, 'agreed' that

they already trust people in their neighbourhood 'who represented local government'. Community dialogue participants, at the end of their dialogue sessions, were asked whether the session improved their feelings of trust towards people representing local government. Of the 71 responses, 21 'agreed' and 7 'strongly agreed'. Whilst this demonstrates that the session went some way towards meeting the programme's second objective, 35 (49%) 'neither agreed nor disagreed' and 8 (11%) 'disagreed'. This statement achieved the highest proportion of 'negative' responses in the community dialogue survey.

To explore the perspectives of LA staff in LBBD, a baseline survey was circulated to all staff (of which 18 responded). Three 'Faith Awareness' training workshops were delivered in March 2021 (see Appendix Item 6 for the workshop details), attended by 32 participants. Following the workshops, the 32 attendees were asked to complete an 'endpoint' survey. Eight responded.

Table 5.1 illustrates the changes in baseline and endpoint responses to questions relating to activity-specific outcomes.³¹

30. Appendix Item 1 details how the evaluation was impacted due to recruitment issues faced by F&BF.

31. Relating to the outcome indicator of 'increase in confidence of local governance representatives to work with residents of different faiths, beliefs, and backgrounds' (listed in Section 2.3).

Table 5.1: LA staff perceptions of relationships between faith communities and local governance in LBB

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
People from different faith and belief backgrounds trust local authority.	Baseline	1	1	10	6	0
	Endpoint	0	0	4	2	1
I feel confident working with residents of different faiths and belief backgrounds.	Baseline	2	0	4	10	2
	Endpoint	0	0	1	7	0
Local authority and faith communities work well together.	Baseline	1	1	5	10	1
	Endpoint	0	0	1	6	1

		Not sure	No	To a certain extent	Yes
Do you feel comfortable talking about issues related to faith and belief at work?	Baseline	0	1	11	6
	Endpoint	0	0	5	2
Do you feel you have the necessary skills to sensitively and effectively talk about issues related to faith and belief at work?	Baseline	0	2	11	4
	Endpoint	0	0	7	1
Do you feel you have the skills and knowledge to ensure residents of different faiths and beliefs are included in your work and their needs are met?	Baseline	0	2	11	5
	Endpoint	0	0	6	2
Do you feel you have the knowledge and skills to deal with challenging scenarios around faith and belief that may emerge in your work?	Baseline	2	7	7	2
	Endpoint	0	0	6	1

The most notable change in response at the endpoint level is that **no participants disagreed with any statement following participation in the workshops.**

Regarding perceived levels of trust towards LA from faith communities, LA staff were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement, 'People from different faith and belief backgrounds trust local authority'. Whilst there were no responses 'disagreeing' following the training, the greatest proportion of responses aligned with 'neither agree nor disagree' in both survey; this indicates that there is a lack of strong feeling towards the levels of

trust between faith communities and local government in general. One respondent commented, "I am not sure how people from different faiths and beliefs trust each other or the local authority".

Considering the programme objective, it is particularly encouraging to see the baseline and endpoint change for the statement 'Do you feel you have the knowledge and skills to deal with challenging scenarios around faith and belief that may emerge in your work?'. At baseline level, almost half of respondents (7) said 'no'; this is by far the most negative response in the survey. Following the

training, all respondents said, 'to a certain extent' or 'yes'. Despite the small response rate, this is a promising finding.

When asked 'what have you taken away from the training?', participants reflected on language around dialogue skills, reflecting the findings from previous sections. Responses included, "having a dialogue not a debate", "Using 'I' statements based on experience rather than generalisations" and "to ask and not assume". As with the Community Connectors, **LA representatives valued the dialogue skills-development aspect of F&BF's methodology in relation to tackling challenging situations relating to faith or belief.**

Others found the workshops helpful in reflecting on issues around identity. One reflected that "identity is fluid and changes depending on environment and experiences", and another recognised their own potential bias, sharing "I am from a white British background and may be unconscious of issues effecting people who have different faiths or beliefs".

The findings are promising and illustrate the potential for this strand of the programme to achieve meaningful impact at the level of relationships between faith communities and LA. For the outcome indicator relating to this strand, 'to build skills of community and statutory authorities to engage more effectively together to mitigate social tension', to be robustly measured, however, **future iterations of the programme will need to build evaluation into programme delivery to achieve a larger data sample.**

6. Engaging young people through school resources

As per Section 2.3, the evaluation aimed to measure the indicator of 'school students engaged in dialogue with those they would not ordinarily meet, demonstrating sensitivity and empathy'.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly disrupted programme delivery in schools; almost all planned 'Encountering Faith and Belief' workshops were cancelled due to school closures announced in January 2021. In response, F&BF developed an extensive online portfolio of multimedia 'Encountering Faith and Belief' resources³² to enable schools to facilitate the workshops online or when students return to school.

The portfolio was circulated to all schools signed up to the programme in March 2021, giving them exclusive access for one month. During this month, the portfolio webpage had 357 views (from 154 devices, indicating that certain schools or individuals accessed the webpage multiple times). The portfolio included 19 'story bank' videos (10 for primary schools and nine for secondary schools), in which individuals shared their religion or belief background. From 1st March – 1st April 2021, the videos collectively had 210 views. The Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Christian speakers received the highest number of views, suggesting that the resources were used by teachers within the RE national curriculum, within which these five religions are the main focus.

One Birmingham-based primary school³³ conducted a workshop as planned. The workshop took place online with six Year 4 (8-9 year old) classes, reaching approximately 125 students. Five of the six class teachers completed a feedback survey and the Head of religious education (RE) took part in an interview.

When asked the extent to which 'the workshop brought the students into contact with those whom they would not ordinarily meet', four of the class teachers 'strongly agreed' and one 'agreed'. The Head of RE shared that over 90% of the students at the school (and up to 28 in a

class of 30) are from a Muslim background, and "haven't really been exposed to a lot of external sources [...] outside of their family support". She praised the workshop for showcasing other backgrounds "for the kids to kind of understand religions that we don't really teach within or RE lessons".

When asked the extent to which the workshop a) 'encouraged the students to demonstrate sensitivity and/or empathy when talking about faith or belief' and b) 'equipped the students with the skills to demonstrate sensitivity and/or empathy when talking about faith or belief', again four teachers 'strongly agreed' and one 'agreed'. Comments in the surveys highlighted how the workshops "developed their [the students'] listening skills" and "developed their questioning skills". The Head of RE explained how ahead of the workshop the teachers were given three questions to reflect on,³⁴ which enabled the students to develop their confidence and skills in dialogue during the workshop itself. She also recognised that Year 4 is a significant age for students to develop these skills:

...for Year Four it was the first experience they've got to talk to someone and physically actually ask their questions, their wording of it. So, it was definitely one of the first times for them to do it and I do believe it helped them.

Moreover, she **positioned the workshop as a tool to develop curricula elsewhere**; the questions that the students asked highlighted areas of need:

...the children have got their own views and they ask their questions and then from those kind of questions we realise, 'Okay, this might be an area where as a school we need to focus on' [...] It's more their curiosity questions. Someone was Hindu and we were like, 'So, what do you like for Diwali? What do you like to eat? Tell us about the temple', whereas otherwise we would have just gone over the basic facts of it.

32. Available at <https://faithbeliefforum.org/resources/encountering-faiths-beliefs/>.

33. A primary school located to the east of Birmingham. It is a large school with above UK average levels of ethnic diversity (represented by the number of students whose first language is not English) and social deprivation (represented by the number of students eligible for free school meals). The school has been taking part in the workshops since 2016.

34. The three questions were, 'Why do you think it is important to meet people who are different from us?', 'What is the difference between debate and dialogue?' and 'What do you think the difference is between hearing a personal story of someone's faith and hearing facts about a religion?'.

Lastly, the teachers were asked to what extent they agreed that 'the students developed a greater understanding of others' personal experiences of faith or belief'. As with the other statements, four teachers 'strongly agreed' and one 'agreed'. The Head of RE praised the resources' focus on individual stories, contrasting the approach to that of the RE curriculum:

I think we had someone who was Mormon, I mean we would never have even discussed someone being Mormon because we generalise [...] and we don't even go into the sub-groups of it and him being like, 'I believe this and this is how I view it', and, 'I was married in a church and this is my contract with my wife'. I think to have that experience about the religion and having the knowledge and kind of telling the kids about it in a certain way would be better than what we as teachers could do.

Whilst this limited amount of data does not constitute a robust measure of this strand's impact, it provides **valuable anecdotal evidence for the potential of the workshops to meet the impact indicator of 'School students engaged in dialogue with those they would not ordinarily meet, demonstrating sensitivity and empathy'**. Any future iteration of the programme must focus on developing a more comprehensive measurement of this indicator to accurately communicate the effectiveness of the workshops.

7. Barriers to impact

The evaluation identified four barriers to impact, based upon interviews with Community Connectors and the researcher's experience of conducting the evaluation: online delivery, time restrictions, recruitment, and challenges to evaluation design.

Online delivery

The programme was unavoidably disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is unsurprising, then, that **online delivery was identified as a barrier to impact**. Beyond some participants' technical difficulties (witnessed by the researcher during dialogue observation), Community Connectors were either critical of participating via Zoom, describing it as "complicated" and "a bit of a nuisance", or described how it would have been "much better" had the community dialogue been in person:

...if I was to think of my group, some of those 40 women, some of them would never have talked to the other community members. They haven't had the opportunity to talk in their normal life. So, it would have been great to do something over a cup of tea, with some cake, and just sit and talk
– female, Sikh, LBBD

Conversely, a female, Sikh Community Connector from LBBD talked of the advantages of online delivery, saying, "It meant us to give an hour not an hour to travel and an hour to come back and all that". It is reasonable to expect that future iterations of the programme will be delivered in person where possible, however when not necessary (for example, individual 'check ins' with Community Connectors), **online contact can lessen the time and capacity pressure on Community Connectors**.

Time restrictions

Time was identified by Community Connectors as a twofold barrier. First, **participants were critical of the limited number of community dialogues** (two), stating that "more time was needed", and "when you meet someone repeatedly, it definitely helps". Second, **participants expressed a desire for community dialogues to be longer than 90 minutes**:

...it would have been lovely to have a bit more time [...] with our dialogue partners. I think people... I've

felt this and I've had one or two bits of feedback as well from the Humanist participants that it would have been nice to just continue a bit longer and just to have some more time, because we were [...] having some nice conversations
– male, Humanist, Birmingham

For a male, Christian Community Connector from Birmingham, extended dialogue provides a "chance to get to a greater depth" because "when we start talking about working with, as opposed to just who we are, I think that's when certain issues may arise". Reflecting on Sections 3 and 4 of this report, **dedicating more time to individual dialogue sessions may provide greater opportunity to discuss responses to shared issues, thereby fostering a greater sense of social capital**.

Recruitment

Issues with recruitment are multidimensional. First, Community Connectors expressed frustration that their **recruitment for community dialogues was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic**. A female, Hindu Community Connector in Birmingham explained that she had recruited 10 participants, but "when the home schooling was announced, four or five immediately dropped out".

Second, Section 3.4 identified through the community dialogue survey analysis that the participants had self-selected to take part. This is to an extent unavoidable, since the participants, by design, attend at their discretion. However, **self-selection becomes a barrier to impact when the potential for transformation within communities is significantly limited**. One Community Connector recognised this:

I feel like people that would join something like this are the likely people that are already that way minded, do you know what I mean? [...] if you're part of a community like a neighbourhood team or whatever, you're going to be one of the ones that are quite active and quite like in the know whereas the people you want to reach are the ones that you can't get hold of. [...] I picked people who weren't the usual subjects when it comes to interfaith stuff. I wanted to get people who might be reluctant, who might not have taken this step before
– Male, Christian, LBBD

Others agreed, sharing that their dialogues engaged mainly community 'leaders', who might have existing experience of community dialogue. A female, Sikh Community Connector reflected that her dialogue participants included "executive committee members" of the national organisations she represents; she described them "as a different sort of people". **It is vital that a broad cross-section of community representation is included in dialogue to enable shared understanding and maximise opportunity for cross-community action.**

Challenges to evaluation design

As the programme itself experienced, delays, challenges, and disruptions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so too did the evaluation.

Originally, for the Community Connector and LA surveys, for every Community Connector and LA staff member who completed their respective survey, another individual (comparable in gender, age and role in community/LA) who did not participate was going to complete the same survey (with recruitment built into project delivery). However, the number of control group responses for the Community Connector baseline survey was too low to allow for statistical analysis. The LA Faith Awareness training was delayed and delivered in the final month of the programme; it was unreasonable to expect all staff members to complete two surveys.

A future evaluation should seek to build control groups into the design; **analysing control group responses will enable the evaluator to attribute specific outcomes more accurately to project interventions.**

Similarly, the evaluation suffered through lack of data, particularly for programme strands 2, 3 and 4 (see Section 2.1). Low response rates, especially for the LA staff survey, significantly impacted the researcher's ability to state strong inferences about programme outcomes. **Larger sample sizes are required to enable robust statistical analysis of data.** The chances of acquiring larger samples would be increased if more time were available for participant recruitment. Alternatively, evaluation could be more explicitly built into programme delivery, with surveys (or anonymous Zoom polls, if online) incorporated into the start and end of programme activities.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

As outlined in Section 2, the *Building Closer Communities* programme had three objectives:

1. To strengthen understanding and trust within and between faith communities through encounter-based learning.
2. To build skills of community and statutory authorities to engage more effectively together to mitigate social tension.
3. To provide opportunity for emerging young leaders across faith communities to develop skills and lead intergenerational projects within and between faith communities.

To fulfil these objectives, programme activities were delivered in Birmingham and LBBD in four strands:

1. Community dialogues and Community Connector training.
2. Youth dialogues.
3. Local authority Faith Awareness training.
4. School workshops and curriculum resources.

'Successful' delivery of these activities was designed to result in several outcomes represented by various impact indicators, all of which were listed in Section 2.3.

As this report shows, the programme was largely extremely successful in meeting its proposed outcomes and objectives, despite facing significant disruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The success of the programme is represented by data mainly concerning Strand 1 (community dialogue), the largest and most ambitious strand of the programme.

An inability to evaluate, or considerable restrictions to the evaluation of, Strands 2, 3 and 4, have resulted in largely anecdotal evidence. Whilst still valuable, inferences cannot be made about the impact of those aspects of the programme beyond their *potential* for positive change.

8.1 Summary of findings

Section 3: The impact of community dialogue

1. The dialogue sessions offered much-needed **opportunities for social mixing** (86% of dialogue participants agreed that the session provided an opportunity for contact).
2. 8 in 10 participants reported a greater sense of people 'getting on' in their neighbourhood following the community dialogue; **social cohesion** is reportedly fostered through the programme.
3. 82% of dialogue responses reported that a greater sense of **social trust** towards people from different faith and ethnic backgrounds in their neighbourhood was developed through community dialogue. The proportion increased to 93% of responses among those aged 50 and under.
4. 69% of dialogue responses reported that a greater sense of **social capital** was fostered during community dialogue (represented by the perception that people 'pull together' to improve the neighbourhood). The proportion increased to 90% among female respondents. Qualitative data indicate that social capital was more explicitly built in LBBD.
5. A **sense of belonging** was reportedly developed during community dialogue, though to a lesser extent than other indicators of integration (56% of responses indicated that they felt a greater sense of belonging to their neighbourhood following the dialogue).
6. Almost half of all survey responses reported feeling a) **more able to practice their religion or belief freely** within the target areas, and b) **less threat of anti-religion hate, harassment or prejudice** following the dialogue. Perceptions of safety particularly increased among participants aged 50 and under, and BAME participants.

7. **Feelings of comfort and dialogue skills were reportedly significantly developed** during the community dialogues (90% of survey responses reported an increase in feelings of comfort in talking about issues related to faith and belief and a further 88% reported being equipped with dialogue skills as a result of the dialogue).
8. **F&BF activities maximised opportunity to develop specific integration indicators;** the 'identity cupboard' reportedly fostered social trust and 'My Place My Space' reportedly developed social capital and a sense of belonging.

Section 4: Community Connectors: Engaging current and emerging leaders

9. **Community Connectors entered the programme with considerably positive attitudes towards levels of social integration and feelings of safety in their neighbourhoods.**
10. **Social capital** was reportedly built among the Community Connectors as a result of the programme, but there was a **reliance on F&BF to facilitate future sessions**, demonstrating the programme's value.
11. Community Connectors reportedly felt **more equipped to tackle social tensions**, but also felt they **could be challenged more** to develop skills necessary to tackle challenging conversations and social tensions in their neighbourhoods.

Section 5: Building faith awareness in local authorities

12. **The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to the development of positive relations between LAs and faith communities.**
13. LA representatives **value the dialogue skills-development aspect of F&BF's methodology** in relation to tackling challenging situations relating to faith or belief.

14. Faith Awareness training has the *potential* to foster social integration indicators, but **a bigger evaluation sample is required.**

Section 6: Engaging young people through school resources

15. The Encountering Faiths and Beliefs workshops were positively received among the six classes that participated.
16. Anecdotal evidence illustrates potential for the workshops to meet the impact indicator of 'School students engaged in dialogue with those they would not ordinarily meet, demonstrating sensitivity and empathy'.
17. **A larger sample size and more comprehensive measurements of school-related indicators are required to accurately communicate the effectiveness of the workshops.**

8.2 Implications for replicability

This evaluation illustrates the potential for this programme to have a significant impact if repeated. There is also appetite from participants to repeat the activities; all 10 Community Connectors who completed the endpoint survey said they would encourage members of their community to take part if the programme were to be repeated. By design, the programme structure and activities are transferable to other contexts. Nevertheless, careful consideration of the design and delivery of a future programme must be undertaken to maximise its effectiveness.

Section 3.1 described how the Covid-19 pandemic added to the complexity of the social background against which the programme was delivered. In the wake of the pandemic, programmes such as this must adapt to the 'new normal' experienced by organisations, as well as potential participants. Living in the latter stages of a pandemic may shape how programme content is delivered; learning points from the disruption caused to this programme must be captured as a basis upon which to make decisions in the future.

That this programme was delivered in two target areas offers implications for replicability. Due to a lack of survey responses from community dialogue participants in LBBD, the underrepresentation in the sample prevented the researcher making statistically significant inferences about the influence of location on participants' survey responses. However, qualitative data indicated that the outcome indicator of 'social capital' was built more explicitly in LBBD than in Birmingham. Facilitated by the 'My Place, My Space' activity (see footnote 19 for a description), that faith communities lived in closer geographical proximity to each in LBBD offered shared experiences of the immediate neighbourhood upon which to build social capital. This was especially the case for places of worship, which may be located on the same street. Thorough research into local-level social climates should be undertaken to identify potential areas in which this programme could be effective.

Of the communities that took part in this programme, eight represented organisational networks. Some of these have national reach. For example, a participating Hindu group represented an umbrella network of 350 organisations with Asian communities across the UK. Capitalising on these contacts (and their knowledge of local communities) could offer opportunities for future work, directing where the programme is replicated.

Lastly, F&BF would do well to map where other dialogue-based or interfaith community work is happening in the UK. As a female, Sikh Community Connector in LBBD suggested, "don't start from the beginning, build on existing community links and faith organisations in the area. This may help to involve more local residents". Staff members from The Feast reflected that it was difficult to encourage residents to participate in areas where The Feast is less known. An awareness of other initiatives may a) identify potential partnerships with organisations who have a strong foothold in, and knowledge of, specific communities, and b) identify areas that are saturated with similar work to avoid.

8.3 Recommendations

Programme content/structure

1. Increase the length of the programme to deliver more sessions over an extended period.
2. Offer 'catch up' sessions with participating communities to maximise the sustainability of the social capital built during the dialogues.
3. Provide space in the Community Connector sessions to explore challenging topics, thereby equipping Community Connectors with the skills to challenge social tensions in their neighbourhoods.

Participants and recruitment

4. Emphasise to Community Connectors the importance of encouraging participants with pre-conceived ideas/stereotypes about people from different faith and belief communities to attend community dialogues.
5. Where places of worship are partnered, make sure they are situated in close geographic proximity to enable participants to share experiences of their immediate neighbourhood.

Considerations for future roll out

6. Ensure that future areas of roll out are comprehensively researched (for social climate and activity among faith communities, and existing interfaith or dialogue-based initiatives).
7. Capitalise on connections made with national networks during this programme.

Evaluation design

8. Allow more time for participant recruitment so a future evaluation can incorporate a quasi-experimental approach and achieve larger sample sizes.
9. Request that community dialogue participants complete baseline and endpoint surveys to more clearly demonstrate change in attitude.
10. Allow time for evaluation documents to be completed by participants within programme activities to combat low response rates.

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Appendix

Item 1: Detailed evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology comprised multiple strands, utilising different methods to capture the change processes outlined in the programme's stated outcomes. The evaluation design was adjusted as the programme was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ethical approval was received by Coventry University.

Quantitative data collection and analysis:

Six online surveys (hosted by Jisc Online Survey) were designed to capture quantitative data. The Community Connectors completed anonymous baseline surveys (before their first training session) and endpoint surveys (after their third training session). All LBBD LA staff members were invited to complete an anonymous baseline survey before F&BF Faith Awareness training, and those who completed the training were asked to complete an endpoint survey. A survey was designed for participants of the community dialogue session to feedback on their experiences. Teachers who were present at the school workshops were lastly asked to complete a short feedback survey.

Completion rates were measured, and the surveys collected demographic data (including age, gender, ethnic and faith backgrounds) to enable the researcher to assess whether and how these factors are interrelated. Location was collected to compare findings within and between target areas. Quantitative analysis was undertaken in SPSS (statistics software).

Qualitative data collection and analysis:

To capture the complexity of outcomes not easily quantifiable, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observation. Interviews with Community Connectors were conducted online to generate example-based evidence (e.g. participants were asked to explore the ways in which they have been able to deal effectively with and mitigate

social tensions, engage in challenging conversations and build positive relations with representatives of local governance structures). Four focus groups were conducted with staff members of F&BF and The Feast to reflect on different themes (e.g. youth dialogue facilitation, Community Connector sessions). Researchers observed first-hand a sample of online community dialogues. Thematic analysis of data was undertaken in NVivo (qualitative analysis software). Appendix Item 2 details the participants of the qualitative research.

Survey and interview questions were designed to capture measurable outcomes represented by the indicators listed in Section 2.3. The four MHCLG-developed indicators were identified from the 'Integrated communities outcome framework' (MHCLG 2019), with survey question wording aligning with relevant questions in the Community Life Survey. The 'social trust' measure was expanded in the survey question wording to cover faith and ethnic communities and local governance representatives. All other measures were developed by F&BF.

Item 2: List of participants

Community Connector interview participants

Area	Faith or cultural background	Gender	Number of times interviewed
LBBD	Sikh	Female	2
	Christian	Male	2
	Hindu	Female	1
	Christian	Female	1
	Muslim	Male	1
	Muslim	Male	1
Birmingham	Humanist	Male	2
	Hindu	Female	2
	Christian	Female	2
	Christian	Male	1
	Jewish	Female	1

Other interview/focus group participants

Role	Gender	Number of times interviewed/participated in focus groups
Head of RE, case study school	Female	1
F&BF staff	Female	4
F&BF staff	Female	3
F&BF staff	Male	2
F&BF staff	Female	2
The Feast staff	Female	2
The Feast staff	Female	2

Community dialogue observation sessions

Date	Connected community groups	Area
18/02/2021	Largely Christian African diaspora network and Sikh women's organisational network	LBBD
22/02/2021	Humanist organisational network, university Jewish student society and Hindu community	Birmingham
24/02/2021	Local Catholic faith community and Buddhist centre	Birmingham
25/02/2021	Islamic organisational network and Church of England church	Birmingham
26/02/2021	Mosque and non-denominational church/community centre	LBBD

Item 3: Timeline and content of Community Connector training and community dialogue sessions

Community Connector Session 1:
15th December 2020

- Introduced to work of F&BF and The Feast.
- Undertook 'identity cupboard' activity as an example of dialogue activity.
- Briefed on role as a Community Connector.
- Additional one-on-one session with F&BF facilitator to plan first dialogue.

Dialogue 1:
January-February 2021

- 90 minute sessions.
- Between 4-10 participants in each session.
- Participants introduced to 'Guidelines for Dialogue' and safe space principles.
- Activity 1: Introduction of special object from faith culture or belief background.
- Activity 2: Identity cupboard.

Community Connector Session 2:
2nd February 2021

- Undertook taster activities for Dialogue 2 (map activity and 'power of language' activity).
- Opportunity to give feedback on Dialogue 1.

Dialogue 2:
February-March 2021

- Map activity: an exploration of participants' shared experiences of the target areas.
- Open dialogue in breakout rooms: How do you engage with your faith or belief community? What is it like to hold a belief in the modern day? What impact has the pandemic had on your faith or belief community?

Community Connector Session 3:
9th March 2021

- Reflection on the achievements of the project.
- Envisioning future collaboration/projects between connected communities post-programme delivery (April 2021 onwards).

Item 4: Timeline and summary of youth dialogue sessions

Dialogue 1:

1st March 2021

- Established safe space.
- Activity: Identity circle (this allowed a participant to select the top four aspects of their identity and then reflect on which one they felt was most dominant and which one they felt had changed most over time).

Dialogue 2:

8th March 2021

- Focus on how identity and experience motivated participants for social change.
- Breakout rooms: creation of 'problem trees' for issues of climate change, homelessness and the challenges of having minority status (in any group, including faith, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation) in the UK.
- Preparation time for celebration event presentation.

Dialogue 3:

15th March 2021

- Focus on transforming motivation into action.
- Session opened by participants sharing a special object that they feel motivates them to act in the world.
- Joined by two guest facilitators from an external organisation (workshop on theory of change).
- Preparation time for celebration event presentation.

Item 5: 'Guidelines for dialogue' – resource by The Feast

GUIDELINES FOR DIALOGUE TRANSFORMING OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH OTHERS

Learning how to talk about our ideas in healthy ways is an important skill.

These simple guidelines ensure a safe place where people can talk openly, make friends and work together to change the world.

**LISTEN
TO WHAT
EVERYONE
HAS TO SAY**

**DO NOT TELL
OTHERS WHAT
THEY THINK,
BUT LET THEM
TELL YOU**

**DO NOT FORCE
PEOPLE TO
AGREE WITH
YOUR VIEWS**

**ACKNOWLEDGE SIMILARITIES AND
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OUR OWN IDEAS**

**SPEAK
POSITIVELY OF
YOUR OWN IDEAS,
RATHER THAN
NEGATIVELY
ABOUT OTHER
PEOPLE'S**

**MAKE EVERY
EFFORT TO GET
ALONG WITH
EVERYONE
REGARDLESS OF
FAITH, GENDER,
ETHNICITY,
SEXUALITY,
ABILITY OR AGE**

the
feast

**DO NOT JUDGE
PEOPLE HERE
BY WHAT SOME
PEOPLE IN THEIR
COMMUNITY DO**

**DO NOT TREAT
SOMEONE AS A
SPOKESPERSON
FOR THEIR
COMMUNITY
OR CULTURE**

**BE HONEST IN
WHAT YOU SAY**

**RESPECT OTHER
PEOPLE, EVEN
IF YOU DISAGREE
WITH THEIR
VIEWS**

**AT ANY STAGE YOU
CAN ASK FOR A
DISCUSSION
TO BE STOPPED
IF YOU FEEL
UNCOMFORTABLE**



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Item 6: Detail of local authority Faith Awareness training

Introductory Faith Inclusion workshop 18th March 2021

- **9 participants.**
- Explored the questions: 'What are the opportunities and challenges of working with residents with a wide range of faiths, beliefs and backgrounds?', 'How can we best support the people we work with to ensure their faith-based needs are met?' and 'How can we communicate sensitively and effectively about issues related to faith and belief, without causing offense?'.
- Access to F&BF's 'Roadmap for Working Together', a set of LA recommendations.

Intermediate Faith Inclusion workshop 24th March 2021

- **6 participants.**
- Explored what meaningful inclusion of people of different faiths and beliefs looked like in the participants' working roles.
- Reflected on how to make work more inclusive through positive change.
- Examined real life challenges that participants might encounter to find possible solutions.

Encountering Faiths & Beliefs webinar 30th March 2021

- **17 participants.**
- A panel of volunteer speakers told stories of their faith and belief life journeys and experiences (Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh).
- Opportunity for participants to ask questions.