

## **Green Space – Structured Interview – Sandra Wong Project Coordinator, Mothers and Toddlers group, Al Hilal – December 03**

Consultation with:

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We are focusing on ethnic participation in green spaces. We are interested in hearing from all sectors of the community. We are interviewing you to find out about the following:

- What involvement have you as a group had in designing, improving or creating a green space
- What stops you being involved in designing, improving or creating a green space
- What you think can help to increase ethnic community involvement in green space

### **1/ How many members of your group have been involved in improvements to the grounds surrounding the Al Hilal Centre?**

The young children of the group were actively encouraged to take part in designing plans, drawings including drawings for the mosaic area of the corner plot and open green space.

These were then judged internally by the management board and other services users within the Hilal Project including the Chairman, Mr.Salam. SEDI a social enterprise development initiative project providing overall support network and business start-ups took overall responsibility for judging the above competition based within the premises.

### **2/ What type of involvement have you had ?**

- **Designing,**
- **Creating / improving**
- **Maintaining**
- **Using**

I have been involved right from the outset, together with the Mothers and Toddlers group children. The mothers were also involved and were delighted to see their children competing and taking part in what they considered to be a major development and improvement in their immediate environment.

As the Coordinator my role involved encouraging young children in design work, creating new elements to improve the garden and encouraging service users, including local people, to be more active and involved.

I have also had discussions with the mothers and their family members to take an active part in using and maintaining the developed site and its relevance to open space.

**3/ If some members of your group have not yet been involved but hope to in future, please say what they would like to do.**

I hope to encourage members of the Mothers and Toddlers group to use the open space more in good weather and particularly in the summer time.

I would also like to encourage other service users to use the area for chilling out, to have lunch, and possibly to generate some income by selling light snacks / food prepared by the my group for rising funds for service users and for the local community.

**4/ What puts people off being involved?**

Overall I have had support from my colleagues, from my group and from the management committee, and I feel that the project would benefit all who wish to use the space for whatever purposes.

Initially when the work was being carried out I noticed that there were health and safety concerns for my group and other services users, because materials and equipment were left around the building, causing a potential hazard and limiting access to some areas. Maybe these issues could have been thought through prior to the work being carried out.

Sometimes the funding applied for projects takes a long time to come through, and that can put people off.

**5/ What would encourage people to be more involved?**

Quicker decisions and responses from the funders as to whether the project has been approved or not, so that we are able to consider alternative methods of fund raising.

**6/ Does your group's involvement give members opportunities to express their culture?**

Yes, definitely. The children and their parents were involved right from the outset in designing and planning the mosaic project. The children did designs in class and at home encouraged by their parents. The theme was set around Islamic culture based on art, drawings, colours, images, geometrical features and its relevance to Eastern and Western cultures.

The palms trees idea when first introduced was a strange concept, as I understood that here in UK we did not have the appropriate climate to grow them, but when Saleem from the Black Environment Network explained the type of palms and conditions for them to grow successfully and become acclimatized, it began to make sense. The significance of the palms is of great importance in relation to Islam and the Muslim world and a great feature within the local community and the environment

As a result of this the management team has decided to implement a further project next to the existing palms trees, an extension of 6 more planting of similar palms along the main Cheetham Hill Road. The management team themselves raised the necessary funds to carry out the work.

**7/ Who else has been involved? ( Other groups or users of Al Hilal? Wider communities? Environmental organizations? )**

There have been many. Groundwork Manchester, local councilors, Red Rose Forest, Black Environment Network, Manchester City Council in relation to re-cycling. My Mothers and Toddlers group, including the parents, children and other users of the centre, the homework club, community groups within the Hilal building, local groups and service users.

**8/ In what way have they contributed?**

- **Designing,**
- **Creating / improving**
- **Maintaining**
- **Using**

The professional organizations have provided support, advice, guidance, funding as well as practical help in relation to developing ideas and implementing the overall designs and specific features in line with our needs and requirements. They have also given assistance with conducting consultations with service users and the local communities, and provided advice on maintaining the open green space.

Groundwork Manchester has provided contractual managerial agreements with workers, drawings, plans, and by promoting the open space internally / externally within their own organisation and in their newsletter.

Red Rose Forest has provided the funding from their Virido Community Action Fund for the palm trees as well as information and research on the most suitable trees according to the U.K climate.

Black Environment Network suggested the original idea in the first place in terms of design, palms trees and bringing all the relevant organizations together to make this project successful. Without the overall support and encouragement and funding from Saleem this project may not have taken place.

The service users and the local communities have assisted in maintaining the open green space by cleaning, watering, and tidying the grounds when required.

#### **9/ How is the space used and by whom?**

The service users of the Hilal Project as well the users of the community centre and the mosque use the space. The Mothers and Toddlers group have benefited because in good weather conditions we are able to carry out childcare and learning activities in the open space, including picnics. Other visitors and callers from time to time use the open space as a chill out area and for holding short meetings.

#### **10/ What has been achieved overall?**

A relaxing, calming and a pleasant open green space has been created, which I believe is unique to the North West and certainly to Cheetham Hill area. I feel the space created has made a massive impact on the local environment and the community and a positive development in terms of regeneration.

I also believe the various partnerships that were involved worked hard with the centre and with the local community to achieve the objective to benefit Cheetham Hill Road. This

is a main road and a gateway to the city of Manchester and the location of the Hilal Project is on busy road, which is easily accessible and viewable by walkers, cyclists and the on- going traffic.

The project has also provided further opportunities to highlight and debate environmental issues in relation to recycling, tipping, and waste management.

**11/ Are there any implications of being linked to religious building?  
( eg in terms of funding etc)**

Yes, for religious organizations the funders may have pre-conceived ideas, images, stereotypes and from a political perspective this may make it difficult to fund such community type projects. I understand that funders do not grant funding to organizations which have religious connotations and practices. Therefore the Hilal Project, which was and is seen as a community group was able to apply for such funding.

Since 11<sup>th</sup> September I feel people in the Muslim community have suffered personally and professionally. The media could have helped more.

**12/ Anything else you want to add?**

As a result of the project B.EN. (Saleem) has requested if the Hilal Project would be in a position to consider forming a local forum panel comprising of local people to highlight and debate local environmental issues. This is something that I would consider seriously and discuss with colleagues.

I would also like to promote the green space to all communities in the area, developing interaction between local people and communities and be in an advisory position should other community groups or organizations want to develop similar projects.

**Report by:**

Saleem Oppal

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