

NEWHAM YOUTH SACRE

When I started as the RE Adviser for Newham five years ago, I inherited from Kathryn **Wright** (the previous adviser) a Student SACRE which had four or five schools which together with Kathryn had pioneered this new venture. I have just finished working for Newham and writing this gives me a perfect opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved over the last five years and the incredibly rewarding time I have had personally through working with Newham young people from a wide variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds who are all passionate about RE.

I have seen attendance at our half termly meetings in different secondary schools around the borough develop to a regular 50-60 young people. All fifteen secondary schools are now getting involved in being part of the group. I have seen a Junior SACRE develop, where 40 primary schools meet in cluster groups to learn and debate religious and ethical issues. Next year for the first year, we are launching our Infant version.



One of things I wanted to see was this group being part embedded into the wider CYPS organisation. So, Student SACRE (who elect their own chair, vice chair and secretary), and Junior SACRE (who elect their own chair and vice chair) regularly attended adult SACRE meetings where each reported to adult members on their group's activities, as well as giving their views on whatever was on our agenda. This added a new vibrancy and impetus to many of our meetings as we heard the voices of the children and young people present presenting their thoughts and opinions to councillors, teachers and faith representatives. The chair and vice chair of each group also had places at the young mayor's cabinet and the children's parliament respectively, ensuring that their groups had other

avenues of influence on LA policy and practice.

Student SACRE has worked with the BBC to produce short films on gang violence and peace. Through receiving grants from NASACRE and Westhill, they have produced a DVD that supported faith sensitive sex and relationships education in Newham schools, and have influenced practice throughout our schools in this area. They have written prayer room guidance to schools and headteachers, and this last year worked with a local artist to produce sculptures and display boxes that unpacked their ideas on identity and belonging. These are now on display in 10 schools around Newham. They have also worked with Middlesex University and the Runnymede Trust on research issues involving young people. We have been offered a place for people within the LA to come and find out the thoughts of young people and a place where the young people themselves have gone out to influence and change practices within schools.

These groups give students and children the opportunity of developing leadership skills, and headteachers have always seen this as one of the strengths of our practice. The groups have always sought to **promote dialogue** between young people of differing faiths and secular backgrounds and cultures, supporting collaborative work and **contribute to community benefit**, as it seeks to develop young people's skills in understanding their concerns and providing a place for them to learn to become initiators and developers of solutions.



Having been made redundant, I decided that one of the things that I didn't want to see disappear was this vibrant group of children and young people meeting regularly and being empowered as future leaders and influencers in their local community as the LA would no longer fund this work between schools. Therefore Student SACRE has now become Student RE Matters, Junior RE Matters and Infant RE

Matters and hopefully with the support of schools, will continue to be a place where children and young people can come together across schools and work together on ideas and issues which are of concern to them.



Claire Clinton