



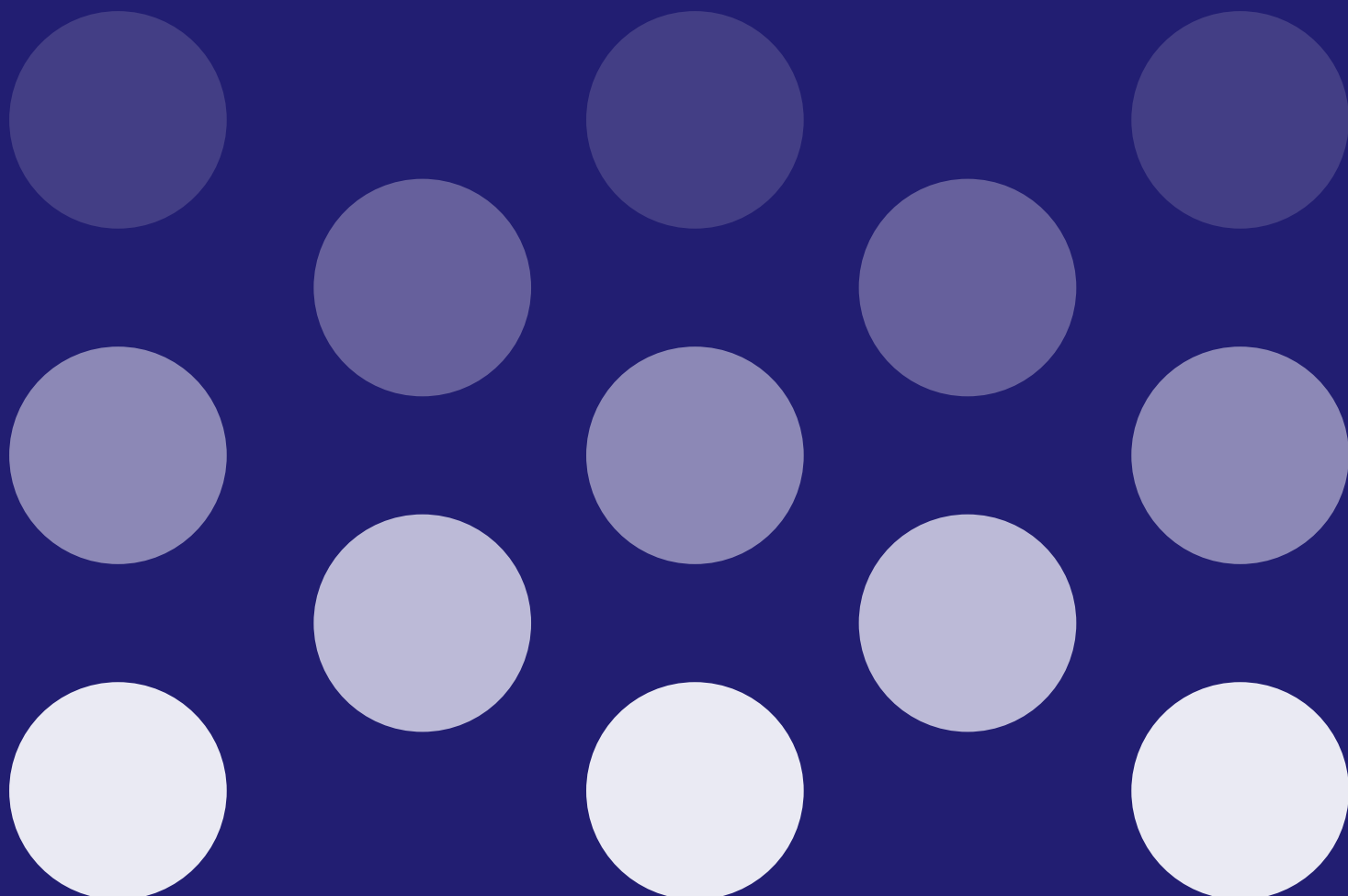
Connecting Futures Through Film

The evaluative story of the focUS – connecting futures participatory video project

By Katherine Mann

February 2006

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Executive summary

Project description

In July and August 2005, twenty-five young people from Peterborough and Coventry came together in their respective cities to become film-makers. Between them, they made six short films exploring who they were, where they lived and the things that were important to them. In a participatory process facilitated by professional film-makers, the young people took responsibility for every aspect of the film-making, from script-writing and story-boarding, to filming, floor-managing and shouting 'CUT!'. The ideas contained in the films they made were entirely their own.

focUS – connecting futures was designed to bring young people together with those they may have felt different from or unfamiliar with, and to build understanding. At the beginning of the summer, there were two groups of young people in each city, one made up of young people from the local community and the other of young asylum seekers and/or refugees. Initially, each of these groups made a first film. Halfway through the project, via a team-building day, they came together to make another.

Having a common creative enterprise gave the young people a reason to get to know each other. They were not only involved in film-making but in activities, games, discussions, and interviews, in exploring themes of community, stereotyping and belonging, in chatting over lunch and in hanging out together.

The focUS project was as much about documenting and analysing the process of building understanding as it was about building understanding itself, as much about telling the important story of the film-making process as simply facilitating the making of films. The result was a rich and complex combination of research and video practice. The detailed story of this process, along with other project information, can be found at www.icar.org.uk/focUS

focUS – connecting futures was a partnership project between ICAR, the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees, Frontline AV and Living Lens, and was funded jointly by the Camelot Foundation, Comic Relief and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Introductory note

focUS – connecting futures was not, and did not intend to be, representative in terms of its participants, and it is not possible, therefore, to generalise from the small-scale and specific findings of the project. However, a number of key themes emerged during the research process and the video-making, which are likely to be of more general interest and relevance. Although the team, on account of the very specific nature of the project, cannot make recommendations as such, a great deal was learnt during the planning and running of the project. Readers are encouraged to engage with the themes, considerations and dilemmas described below as a point of departure for their own project planning rather than as a list of key ingredients or truths set in stone.

Main findings

As had been anticipated, the young refugee and asylum seeker participants on the focUS project were, in general, more isolated than their 'host' colleagues, although this varied according to the nature of their migration experience. Those who had more recently arrived, who had arrived as unaccompanied minors and who had not lived in other countries before arriving in the UK tended to lack both friends from the local community and friends in general. Those who belonged to established refugee communities and who had grown up in other European countries prior to coming to the UK felt less of a sense of difference and separateness from their 'host' colleagues. Most, however, appeared to be negotiating multiple identities on account of their 'migrant' backgrounds, regardless of the immediacy of their migration experiences.

Some of the new arrivals attributed their feelings of separateness and isolation from local young people to a lack of opportunities to meet and mix. It was also clear that this separation was fuelled in some cases by fear and prejudice, with perceptions of local people resting on negative past experiences and encounters. These included experiences of violence and racist harassment. Local people were perceived as being both uncomfortable with the arrival of asylum seekers into their communities and ignorant about issues of immigration and diversity.

Knowledge of issues relating to asylum and immigration amongst the young locals was varied, but generally fairly limited. Many were able to define an 'asylum seeker' as a person fleeing from problems in his/her home country, yet in

certain cases, standard misconceptions on the issue abound. Perhaps understandably given their young age, many had underdeveloped thoughts about the issue. Some participants, while seeming a little uncomfortable about their lack of knowledge, seemed either too unconfident or simply unwilling to venture opinions on an issue they saw as controversial or highly-charged.

When first exploring the notion of stereotyping, most of the participants were reluctant to generalise about others or to dwell on the negative. Many preferred to take people at face value, and to accept that there were 'good' and 'bad' in every society. This reflected the openness with which the young people approached the project, and the sense that, on a certain level, perceptions of and relationships with others really can feel that simple. As the project progressed, however, and the participants were encouraged to reflect on the 'filters' through which they saw the world, a range of stereotypes, prejudices and misconceptions about others began to emerge.

The host groups from both cities portrayed a range of views about new arrivals, with those in Coventry sharing on the whole more negative perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees than those in Peterborough. In general, all were aware that these terms were often negatively-loaded in public space, with some having clearly been influenced in their perceptions by hearsay and media-driven stereotypes. Issues relating to loss of British identity and pressure on resources were raised, as were the stereotype of the 'sponging' asylum seeker and the sense that the UK was being 'overrun' by new arrivals. Some felt the typical asylum seeker squandered his/her welfare benefits on drugs, cigarettes and alcohol, and others, mainly the young female participants, described some new arrivals as being sexually intimidating or inappropriate towards local women. A small number of the young host group displayed a clear sense of 'us and them' in relation to asylum seekers and refugees.

Negative preconceptions about young locals included that they smoked and drunk too much, that they had too much freedom and didn't know how to manage or appreciate it, and that they were materialistic and greedy. The view was expressed that locals were inclined to make negative or inaccurate assumptions about new arrivals. Positive preconceptions about young locals were also expressed, and these included that they were sophisticated and knowledgeable, and more relaxed and less likely to be racist than older people. Some of the new arrivals felt that the UK was one of the least racist and most open societies in Europe.

Perceptions of others were often expressed in terms of whether or not a person belonged to a certain youth subculture rather than whether or not they were an asylum seeker or refugee. This was particularly the case in Coventry, where the specific nature of the young new arrivals' experience of migration meant that they were more inclined than the more recently arrived Peterborough group to regard themselves as similar to the local communities which had received them. The 'other' in the case of focUS Coventry was the 'goth' or the 'gangsta'. When encouraged to reflect on the dynamic between locals and new arrivals in their city, the young locals tended to speak in terms of a generalised 'other', a foreign presence. The ways in which other kinds of people were labelled exposed the young people's confusion and limited knowledge, with terms such as 'asylum seeker', for example, being used almost interchangeably with a range of other descriptive categories, such as 'foreigner' and 'Kosovan'. The Coventry young locals, on the whole, did not use or understand politically-charged categories such as 'asylum seeker'.

Many of the young locals expressed concern for the difficulties often faced by new arrivals to their city, suggesting they would be more likely to be bullied and to have trouble fitting in. They believed, on the whole, in being welcoming, friendly and supportive to those who may be trying to gain acceptance in a new society. Interestingly, however, when during discussions the term 'new arrival' was replaced with the term 'asylum seeker', some of the young locals were less inclined to voice support and welcome. The term 'asylum seeker', then, clearly had negative connotations for some of the young locals, who felt that asylum seekers were different from and less deserving than a straightforward 'new arrival'.

Participants from both the newly arrived and the host groups felt that projects and organisations facilitated the building of friendship and understanding. Without a reason to come together and a place in which to do so, the young people felt it was far more difficult to reach out to others with whom they wouldn't normally spend time.

Participatory video-making, as facilitated by the focUS practitioners, was recognised by the young participants as an effective way of bringing people together. Some described the importance of everyone having an assigned and valuable role within the film crew. Some saw that overcoming the challenges associated with creating a film gave one courage and a general sense of possibility. Some felt it was simply good fun. The participants described the

project as having built up their confidence, developed their groupworking skills, and boosted their aspirations. It was, however, noted that video equipment could be expensive and that video-making required specific technical skills. Opportunities for access, then, were not felt to be the same for all.

The process of building understanding was a balancing act for many of the participants. Whilst wanting to reach out to everyone in the group, and to know and be known by each one, some described feeling more comfortable with those with whom they felt they shared cultural common ground, such as religious belief, language, or ethnicity. This was the case for both locals and new arrivals.

Building understanding involved treading a line in other ways too. The need to accept others at face value, and to be and feel 'normal' was pitched against the difficulties the participants sometimes encountered in exploring and expressing differences in culture, language and life experience. Many of the participants, particularly the newer arrivals, welcomed the opportunity to be taken not as asylum seekers, refugees, 'black people', 'others', but simply as human beings. Some felt particularly uncomfortable being labelled as asylum seekers in a public climate which conflated asylum with terrorism and crime. However, leaving difference at the door meant that it was susceptible to remaining unexplored. A number of the host film-makers, for example, felt awkward about broaching certain issues with the new arrivals, some of whom, in turn, felt unable to convey themselves and their life experiences in a true and open way.

Issues related to language were strongly expressed in both cities. One of the main themes raised was that the lack of a common language or the speaking of languages other than English was an obstacle to friendship, was bewildering, excluding, even threatening. The speaking of different languages within the groups was at times a source of conflict between the participants, with the Coventry locals in particular feeling intimidated by the articulacy and multi-lingual abilities of their new arrival colleagues. The importance of language to a young new arrival's sense of his/her cultural heritage came across strongly. Those speaking in languages other than English enjoyed a sense of solidarity and 'at-homeness' with those with whom they shared that language, a way of feeling safe, understood and 'normal' in an otherwise new and unfamiliar environment.

The young film-makers undoubtedly shared a memorable summer. For many, it was clearly powerfully mind-opening and extremely rewarding, allowing them to make the kinds of connections both socially and in terms of learning and understanding they would not necessarily have made otherwise. Although the project enjoyed many successes in terms of building understanding between the young participants, the process of exploring opinions, addressing prejudices and stereotypes and building a group sense through the making of participatory films was inevitably mixed. In some cases, the project seemed to have affected the young peoples' views with respect to their fellow participants, but did not cause them to question the validity of the stereotypes which had informed their initial preconceptions. It is likely that, while they may have reached a kind of understanding with the focUS new arrivals through rubbing shoulders with them for a few weeks, some of the focUS host participants left the project with the same prejudices, preconceptions and fears of others they harboured at the beginning. This, it seems, is the difference between 'hanging out' and 'finding out', between an event of meeting between 'strangers' which results in meaningful understanding through the exchange of accurate information and one which allows misconceptions to persist or grow worse. The focUS team's decision to generalise notions of belonging and community during the workshops rather than relate them specifically to asylum very possibly helped the development of understanding between the groups in one way while hindering it in others. It was acknowledged, however, that building understanding between groups takes time and is characterised by about-turns and regressions in learning and change as much as by openness and progress. Understanding itself is changeable and inconsistent, varying from one day to the next, affected by any number of experiences and accidents. It is not a skill or piece of knowledge that can be learnt and fixed for life, rather a moving process than a thing. The development of understanding depends, moreover, on the desires and willingness of those involved to share personal thoughts and experiences, and this can neither be taken for granted nor forced. Given these constraints, it is clear that focUS was successful in many ways in the face of numerous and complex challenges.

Additional learning for practitioners

Running a joint research and participatory video project is a great challenge, particularly where aims and objectives are multi-layered and ambitious. Where research and video elements are running side-by-side, they can contribute a great deal to one another, but will also involve compromise. The central tension on the focUS project lay in the desire to research specific themes whilst at the same time facilitating a truly participatory project. The one, it was felt, involved bringing an agenda to the project, leading the participants to consider particular ideas or

subjects. The other, by contrast, was felt to require a degree of openness and improvisation, and aimed to facilitate the young participants in setting their own agenda. There were a number of other challenges relating to the joint nature of the project. These included the limited time available for conducting the research alongside the film-making, and fluctuating attendance on the part of the participants.

Conducting research amongst young people, where some of those participating are also young refugees or asylum seekers, involves various ethical and practical considerations. These primarily stem from the power discrepancy between a young research participant and an adult researcher, a discrepancy which must affect the nature of the research methods used, the process of negotiating consent, the building of rapport with the young participants, and the conducting of the research sessions. Particular sensitivity is required when researching amongst young asylum seekers and refugees.

The unusual structure of focUS, the fact that participants worked initially in separately defined groups before joining together as one, allowed a sense of trust and solidarity to build, particularly amongst the new arrivals, and provided a strong foundation for the development of cross-group understanding. Although the team was concerned that this separation might foment a sense of difference that would not otherwise have existed, the two-group dynamic enabled the participants to explore their thoughts and experiences with those with whom they were likely to feel comfortable and accepted.

The team was aware that there were differences within the groups of participants as well as between them, and whether or not participants were newly-arrived to the city or well-established there was only one way of identifying them. The team reflected on the importance of bearing in mind the fact that young 'locals' and young 'new arrivals' are not separate homogenous groups whose members share matching histories, needs, and characteristics. Running a project where participants are defined at the outset as 'local' or 'newly arrived' involves treading a line between commonality and difference, between understanding others in terms of their background and origin, and taking them at face value.

Labelling was a persistent consideration and point of dilemma for the focUS team, during recruitment, when explaining the project to the participants at the start of the workshops, when introducing the participants to one another and throughout the research. It was felt that using direct terms such as 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' to refer to group members would prejudice the participatory process and unsettle the building of trust between group members. The team decided that more neutral terms like 'new arrival' should generally be used when referring to the young refugees and asylum seekers. In a related way, rather than discussing asylum directly, themes to which everybody could relate were explored. These included community, belonging, and stereotyping. This, it was hoped, would allow the young participants to define their own identities and their own paths through the project. The project was, however, concerned with building understanding specifically between asylum seekers and refugees and their locally-based neighbours. Failing to name these important political and social issues risked preventing the groups from acknowledging or exploring the notions of difference relating to these very specific issues. The direction taken by the team on this issue, in pursuing commonality and more generalised issues of belonging and community, possibly made it difficult to challenge specific prejudices expressed by the young participants. The research element of the project enabled more direct discussion of these issues, however, and contributed to the development of understanding within the main workshops.

Recruitment is a balancing act in which responsibilities to funders, to prospective participants, to 'gatekeeping' local contacts, and to the spirit of the project itself must be fulfilled with sensitivity, tact and a sense of meaning. It is not a straightforward course of 'cherry-picking' from 'target groups', but must involve engagement with issues of labeling, selection, and eligibility. The focUS team found that building links with local partners was crucial not only in ensuring a positive reception for the project, not only in enabling the aims of the project to be taken up locally following the withdrawal of the focUS team, but also, and importantly, in the facilitation of the recruitment process. Locally based 'gatekeepers' were integral to the recruitment of participants. Difficulties relating to the recruitment of 'harder to reach' young people were encountered by the team, as were those concerned with gender, ethnicity and age group. Recruitment was a continuing issue throughout the project, with the team managing the various challenges associated with fluctuating participant numbers and dropout.

Differences between young locals and young new arrivals, in terms of skills, characteristics and personal qualities, are neither straightforward nor clearcut. The focUS project, for example, found that the more recently arrived focUS asylum seekers and refugees, on the one hand, generally brought less video-making experience to the

project than their host colleagues, yet on the other, showed, in some cases, remarkable levels of cine-literacy. Some described having watched TV and films in order to learn a new language and familiarise themselves with a new culture, which may have accounted for their facility in this area. Whilst in their separate groups, the young refugees and asylum seekers tended to show greater maturity in discussion and a sense of the 'bigger picture', whereas the young locals tended to be less politically-aware and in some cases less able to focus. The latter, however, tended to be more playful, more confident with the cameras and more willing to experiment. In Coventry, some of the young locals, contrary to expectation, had experienced trauma and upheaval more profound than their refugee colleagues, which showed the team the importance of not making assumptions about either group. The differences between the groups were possibly derived as much out of the contrasting socio-economic backgrounds of the young people than of their immigration status. They are also very likely to have been unique to focUS.

Ensuring the appropriateness of both the venue and the location for a project is very important. Remaining sensitive, for example, to the possibility that some participants will feel uncomfortable and even unsafe in certain areas or places is essential if recruitment and retention of participants is to be successful. The importance of creating a 'safe space' for participants to be themselves and feel comfortable is crucial to the building of understanding with others, and this starts with venue and location.

The building of a group sense on the focUS project was facilitated greatly by a successful team-building day which brought together the respective cities' two separate groups. A successful project balances the everyday and familiar, the need to take activities to participants and work within their comfort zones, with the need to inject a sense of magic. The team chose to take the participants out of their cities on a day of outdoor activities, including canoeing, raft-building and abseiling.

As well as the film-making proper, various activities, games and discussions were facilitated by the practitioners, allowing group members not only to bond with one another, but to question their own and other's opinions in a supported way, to get to know each other's views, to build trust and confidence, and to appreciate one another. A key activity involved the devising of a 'team agreement', which allowed the participants to explore and set their own project ground rules. Other activities involved the discussion of stereotyping and perceptions of others, the consolidation of skills learnt on the project, and the placing of oneself within one's city and community. It is unlikely that without these kinds of activities the process of film-making on its own would have led to the richness of understanding and the strong group sense experienced by many of the focUS participants at the end of the project.

Allowing an opportunity for participants to spend informal 'down-time' with one another and without the adult practitioners can greatly facilitate the process of building a group sense and developing understanding. For focUS Peterborough, food and mealtimes became an important focus for 'down-time', whereas for the Coventry participants, it was the pool table.

A project's success depends fundamentally on the skills, abilities and personal qualities of those who facilitate it. Experience of groupwork with young people, well-developed participatory video skills, and an awareness of asylum and immigration issues are essential in anyone running a project like focUS. Building understanding between groups of young people is an ambitious and challenging task, one that requires a high level of honesty and self-awareness on the part of a practitioner. It is vital, too, that practitioners acknowledge the limits of both their expertise and their responsibilities. Establishing partnerships with locally-based agencies who will oversee the psychological, health and welfare needs of the young participants, particularly any new arrival participants, is imperative. An arts project of this kind cannot and should aim to address these wider needs. In terms of style and approach, participatory video practice requires that a practitioner be able to hand over control to participants, to trust their ideas and respect their voices. Projects like focUS gain richness from a practitioner's ability to be as open as a young participant to learning and risk-taking. In terms of personnel, a facilitator of each sex can be a great asset to projects involving participants of both sexes.

Although the quality of the focUS film product was important, the emphasis in participatory video-making is on the process. Although the practitioners very much hoped the young participants would be proud of their work, they acknowledged the importance of remaining realistic about the quality of film it is possible to produce when the participants are neither trained actors nor technicians. They recognised the need to trust that a high quality process will more often than not lead to the creation of a good film product.

Given that the project had not budgeted for media awareness training for the young participants, the focUS team felt that it was inappropriate to seek media coverage for the project, particularly where that would involve interviews with the participants. It was felt that the glare of the spotlight would likely be uncomfortable for those taking part in a project, particularly young refugees and asylum seekers, who would tend to be made vulnerable when asked to recount personal information by journalists probing for a 'human interest' story.

Although the tight timescale made the project at times very intense, from a participatory video-making point of view, it was appropriate. A project timescale must balance what needs to be achieved with what can reasonably be expected from participants in terms of time commitment. The focUS team felt that the intensive nature of the project was more effective in terms of maintaining momentum and energy than a weekend-based term-time project would have been. Although planning the project to take place during the summer holidays was a risk in terms of recruitment and retention, the team also saw that during this period, young people would more likely be at a loose end and looking for something to do. In the event, this was particularly the case for the young new arrivals, who at that time of year lacked the structure usually provided by their schools and colleges and appreciated being given a new focus.

The enthusiasm shown by audiences at focUS screening events confirmed to the team the importance of creating a forum for the showcasing and discussion of the products of projects like focUS. Organising a film screening, for example, not only allows participants to express pride in their work in front of a public audience, but also stimulates in that audience a sense of excitement, purpose and possibility. The positive and celebratory atmosphere generated by the showcasing of a successful project can be a seed-bed for action and for new ideas, can assist in a 'ripple effect' of increasing understanding.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

For all those involved in the focUS – connecting futures project, the summer of 2005 was a truly memorable one. In July and August of that year, twenty-five young people from Peterborough and Coventry came together in their respective cities to become film-makers. Between them, they made six short films exploring who they were, where they lived and the things that were important to them. With the help of professional film-makers working to a participatory method, the young people took responsibility for every aspect of the film-making, from script-writing and story-boarding, to filming, floor-managing, lugging equipment and shouting ‘CUT!’. The ideas contained in the films they created, the voiceovers, the humour and improvisation, the lighting, camerawork and framing from the good to the downright wobbly, were entirely their own.

It was not only the young people’s films that were remarkable, but also the powerful story of their film-making summer, as described in the following pages. focUS – connecting futures was designed to bring young people together with those they may have felt different from or unfamiliar with, and to build understanding. The project saw the coming together of young people from different backgrounds and countries, from separate – even separated – communities, young people with various tastes, views, religious beliefs and life experiences. The young participants were different from each other, however, in one key respect. Whilst some were newly arrived in the UK, had sought or were seeking asylum, had perhaps come alone to the country as children, the others were well-established in the UK, had been born and raised within its shores, and were living in communities receiving and hosting recent new arrivals.

Having a common creative enterprise and a shared experience gave the young people a reason to get to know each other. They were not only involved in film-making but in activities, games, discussions, and interviews, in exploring themes of community, stereotyping, identity and belonging, in chatting over lunch and in hanging out together. The focUS project, in turn, was as much about documenting and analysing the process of building understanding as it was about building understanding itself, as much about telling the important story of the film-making process as simply facilitating the making of films. The result was a rich and complex combination of research and video practice, a project which not only culminated in a blockbusting London launch at Soho’s Curzon cinema but also involved the building of a website, the dissemination of learning and the writing of this evaluative story.

The starting point for focUS – connecting futures was the Understanding the Stranger study carried out by ICAR researchers in 2003-4. This case study research, carried out within a climate of increasing anxiety about immigration to the UK, examined what could be done to reduce tension between recent arrivals to a place and their more well-established neighbours. Emphasising that an established local is as much a stranger to a newly-arrived asylum seeker as the other way around – in other words, that integration is a ‘two-way street’ – the researchers explored the many things those involved in changes of this kind wanted to know about each other. The study’s point of departure was that the active exchange of information through meetings and other meaningful contact typically serves to improve community relations. One of its main findings, however, was that incoming asylum seekers and the communities that receive them are, in many areas of the country, ‘anxious about each other to the point of concern for their personal safety’, and that each group will often neither have nor seek out opportunities for contact of this kind. focUS was designed, in a small way, to address this, to provide an opportunity for meaningful contact to be made between likely ‘strangers’ and to explore how understanding developed.

Aims and objectives

In designing the project, the focUS team was passionate and ambitious, hoping to address issues and effect change on a number of different levels, from the personal and individual to the national. In terms of the young participants, the team hoped to increase understanding, to enable the building of links, to facilitate an integration based on mutual dialogue and a two-way flow of information. Fostering understanding in this way, it was hoped, would serve to decrease the sense of isolation suffered by the young asylum seekers and refugees, to break down stereotypes, and, in turn, encourage more cohesive local communities. In order to build understanding, it was felt that the participants would need first to develop other skills and qualities, would need to be provided with a space in which they felt able freely to share their views and experiences. The team aimed to support the young people, then, in developing self-belief, in learning how to work as part of a group, in questioning their own and others’ opinions and so on, by providing a context in which their thoughts, ideas, and dilemmas were dealt with sympathetically. Encouraging creativity, fun and playfulness was also felt to be key in enabling the young

participants to feel both safe and free enough to take risks with their more entrenched views. From this, it was hoped, the confidence, maturity and openness necessary to build understanding with an unfamiliar 'other' would come. It was not only the young participants who would be engaged in a learning process, but the team as well. Put simply, the project would be deemed to have succeeded if, by the end, the young participants understood each other better and the project team understood how and why.

Having designed and facilitated a successful project with a small number of participants, the team hoped then to engage practitioners, policy-makers, communities and other key stakeholders at local and national levels in the lessons that had been learnt. The team was keen that focUS should not be just a 'flash in the pan', and held that investing time and energy in the exchange and dissemination of learning would give the project meaning and longevity at a wider level. Influencing the policy and practice of local stakeholders in each of the focUS cities, for example, by triggering related community cohesion activities and projects, was a key aim, as was influencing government policy on refugee integration, community cohesion and race equality. It was hoped that the films, when screened with project-related contextual detail, would constitute an alternative source of information about asylum for various interest groups across the country, not least other young people. In providing a substitute for mainstream local and national media representations in this way, it was hoped that the focUS package would not only contribute to a healthier and more accurate picture of the UK's young asylum seekers and refugees but also demonstrate the potential contained in projects like focUS for meaningful and lasting community cohesion.

Approach and structure

One of the central elements of the focUS film-making was its participatory spirit. Definitions of participatory video differ from one practitioner to the next, and focUS was no different in this respect, with the two participatory video organisations involved in focUS interpreting and enacting the method in their own particular ways. Broadly speaking though, participatory video or PV is defined as a group facilitation and video production method that aims to engage a group of individuals in the collaborative generation of a video narrative or message. Typically, the practice involves the participation of those whose voices are not usually heard or valued, of those who may not otherwise have access to technology of this kind, of those who may lack the language skills to articulate a point of view in more conventional ways. Importantly, rather than being directed by the practitioner and steered by his/her agenda, the participatory video process is one which privileges the voices of the participants. Any resulting video narrative includes only what the participants wish to include and includes it only in a way that they deem to be appropriate. Ownership of the process therefore rests firmly with the participants, who are posited as infinitely more expert in their situation than any outside practitioner. The practice famously stems from Donald Snowden's 1967 experimental Fogo Island project in which portable video was used by a group of local islanders to communicate a video narrative on their own terms to fellow islanders and to policy-makers. The so-called 'Fogo Process' saw the opening up of a dialogue between local communities and government on the back of the screening of these films, and resolution in the form of co-operative community development. Indeed, participatory video is a method used frequently in the development sector to catalyse social change, empower disadvantaged groups, influence attitudes, and achieve consensus and commonground between groups with contrasting standings and perspectives.

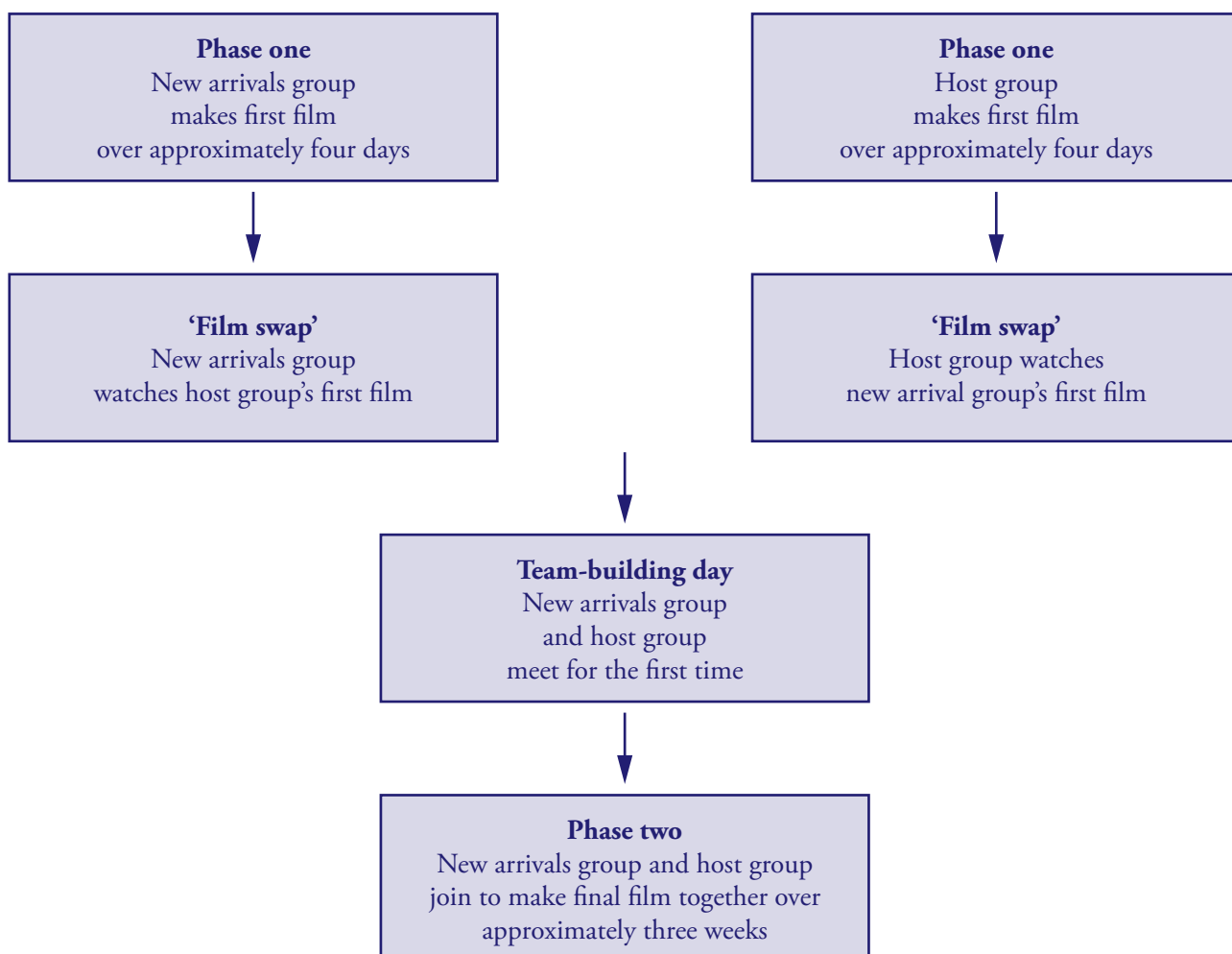
Linking into one of the central principles of participatory video is the notion of 'youth-led' project work which is also not without relevance here. Like PV, which aims to facilitate participants in the communication of a message on their own terms, to assist rather than to lead or direct, 'youth-led' project work challenges adult practitioners to take a backseat and allow younger people to take the wheel. The focUS team was keen to engage with the principles of both a 'youth-led' and a participatory approach, yet it is important at this point to clarify exactly how and why these were realisable in certain respects whilst not in others.

In essence, the film-making element of the project aimed to encourage the young participants to step up, to find their voices, to take the lead, and the resulting films are, in a sense, a celebration of this important process. All were devised, scripted, shot, lit, and approved by the young participants. Although the practitioners edited the material, they were instructed as to what to include and what to omit by the participants, who retained ultimate editorial control. In this sense, the project was true to the kinds of participatory and 'youth-led' principles described above. However, the young people were not involved in setting up the project, in writing funding proposals, in engaging local stakeholders, in managing schedules and budgets. Although, the practitioners did not prescribe the subjects of the films – and indeed would oftentimes sit uncomfortably on their hands while the young participants mooted film ideas, quietly willing them away from Star Wars remakes and anything that involved car chases and guns – the participants very possibly felt influenced to explore certain themes. They

had been told that the project involved both newly arrived and host young people, for example, and were aware that the researcher was interested in knowing the kinds of things that help people from different backgrounds get along better. The activities facilitated by the practitioners encouraged the participants to consider issues like stereotyping, identity, their place and their city, whilst the research sessions involved discussions on themes of belonging, community and, later, more specifically asylum and immigration. Indeed, the team faced a number of ethical and practical dilemmas in juggling, on the one hand, an explicit research agenda and the need to produce a relevant film product, with, on the other, a necessarily open participatory film-making process. Also, where certain participatory methods aim to be free of scripts and unburdened by cinematic convention, the focUS project necessarily remained open to these elements. The young participants were keen to learn the skills and techniques of the film-maker – how to build a script, how to devise a storyboard, how to construct a frame. The educational aspect of the project, the chance to learn from film-making professionals was what drew many of them to participate in the first place. Indeed, the manifold aims of the project made pursuing a purely youth-led and participatory agenda extremely challenging.

The unusual structure of focUS, the fact that participants worked initially in separately defined groups before joining together as one, turned out to be one of project’s most productive and interesting features. At the beginning of the summer, there were two groups of young people in each city, the one made up of young people originating from the local community and the other of young asylum seekers and/or refugees. The participants worked initially in these separate groups, reflecting on the ways in which they viewed their city and their own and others’ place within it. Expectations about the other group were explored prior to meeting, as were preconceptions and stereotypes about other kinds of people in general. Each group made a first film during this phase, which, once complete, was shown to the other group by way of introduction. On the occasion of their ‘film-swap’, the separate groups had yet to meet. After meeting for the first time at a team-building away day, the participants joined together as one large group to make their final film. Altogether, the workshop phase consisted of fewer than 30 days per city. The following graphic illustrates the project structure.

Figure 1: The structure of the focUS project



Although they had a great deal in common, the young people, once they came together, were very aware of the ways in which they were different from one another, whether it was through speaking different languages, regarding different places as 'home', or having different life experiences. In general, the host group had little experience of mixing with young asylum seekers and refugees and the new arrivals group had little experience of mixing with young locals. Of course there were differences within the groups as well as between them, and whether or not participants were newly-arrived to the city or well-established there was only one way of identifying them. The team was conscious that the two-group structure, indeed, might foment a sense of difference that would not otherwise have existed between the participants. However, it was also felt that denying these important differences between the young people would have been to prevent them from acknowledging or exploring these differences themselves. A common ground which suppresses or fails to recognise difference, it was felt, is not one that lends itself to clarity of understanding. It was hoped that the young participants would gain a level of confidence through working initially with those with whom they were likely to identify, that they would feel more able to share their thoughts and experiences, that they would feel accepted, valued, treated as 'normal'. The initial separation of the young people into two distinctive groups allowed a sense of trust and solidarity to build, particularly amongst the new arrivals, and provided a very necessary foundation for the development of cross-group understanding.

As well as facilitating the building of trust and understanding, the two-group dynamic indirectly assisted the more agenda-driven elements of the project. Whilst the film-making was participatory in style, and in that sense, agenda-free, it was nevertheless hoped that the young people would produce material of some relevance to the themes of migration, belonging, community, and so on. Subsequent screenings of the films to youth groups, policy-makers, practitioners and others would be substantially less meaningful otherwise. Starting off the film-making with the young participants divided into the newly arrived and the local meant that these kinds of themes almost inevitably arose. The new arrivals in particular, for example, when asked simply to think about the cities in which they lived, reflected on issues like settling in, feeling different, and experiencing prejudice. The two-group dynamic not only enabled them to express the kinds of thoughts and experiences particular to their situations, then, but also stimulated discussion of the very themes the team was seeking to explore.

Roles and responsibilities

focUS – connecting futures was a partnership project between ICAR, the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, Frontline AV and Living Lens. Whilst ICAR was responsible for overall project management and the conducting of the research, Frontline AV and Living Lens took charge of designing and facilitating the video workshops. Collaborating in this way was a rich learning experience for all of the team members, only two of whom had worked together before. Frontline's Fran Porter engaged Sean Spencer, an independent film-maker, to work with her on focUS Coventry. Amy Barbor and Rose McCausland of Living Lens, long-time friends and working partners, temporarily upped sticks from London to Peterborough to run the summer workshops there. Beth Crosland, as ICAR-based project manager, steered the project from the centre, with her colleague Katherine Mann, the project researcher, floating between London, Coventry and Peterborough to record the events that would form the project story. Finally, Candida Blaker, an experienced arts practitioner and evaluation consultant, provided the project with independent advice and strategic direction.

For more about the team, refer to Appendix 8.

Chapter 2: Generating the project story

Why research?

From its very early stages, the focUS project was designed to work concurrently as a participatory video project and a research project. While the video practice was intended directly to affect and engage those young people who had participated in the summer workshops, the research element, it was hoped, would give some longevity and added meaning to this important process. In furnishing the video element with description and research analysis, then, the aim was both to build a process of record and reflection into the workshops themselves, and to take the project beyond those who had directly participated. Those working in similar fields, whether as practitioners, policy-makers, or film-makers, it was intended, should find something interesting and helpful in the focUS story, particularly where they had lacked the resources to explore such questions for themselves. While the young film-makers involved were not numerous enough for definitive generalisations of any kind to be made, the many themes that arose out of the research process provide a suggestive and powerful insight into the dynamics of building understanding between groups of young people from different backgrounds. The role of the project's research element, then, was to explore the following key questions:

- What helps young people from 'host' and migrant communities understand each other better?
- What information do these young people think is necessary in order that they gain a greater level of understanding, and where and to whom do they go to acquire it?
- And how effective are participatory video projects in enhancing this understanding?

Dilemmas and constraints

In general, the research and video elements of focUS were richly integrated, gaining and feeding a great deal from and to one another. Achieving a balance between these two elements, however, was challenging at times, particularly where the priorities of the one did not entirely overlap with those of the other. On one level, the research was concerned with what participatory video practice specifically could contribute to the building of understanding between groups of young people from different backgrounds. Participatory video practice was felt to be an unusual, fun, and potentially powerful context for bringing together groups of young people and the research aimed to describe fully whether or not and how this was the case. This involved straightforwardly observing, recording and reflecting on the workshops as they unfolded, and involved no particular balancing act on the part of the team. On another level, however, the research aimed to explore in general the kinds of things that help young people from different backgrounds understand each other better. Rather than investigating whether or not and how film-making itself could bring about increased understanding, then, this element of the research cast the net wider, asked broader questions. Film-making, in this context, was intended to be the vehicle or the medium for addressing these broader questions, the lens through which a number of broader issues might be understood. As well as being an end in itself, then, video practice on the focUS project was intended to function as a means to something else. It was this that, at times, unsteady the balance, confused the boundaries, between the film-making priorities and those of the research.

Perhaps the most fundamental of these challenges was the desire to research specific themes whilst at the same time facilitating a truly participatory project. The one, it was felt, involved bringing an agenda to the project, leading the participants to consider particular ideas or subjects. The other, by contrast, was felt to require a degree of openness and improvisation, to aspire to a situation in which the young participants rather than the team members were leading, taking control, feeling autonomous. Addressing those research questions set out in the original project design, then, presented persistent difficulties in respect of this tension, and demanded a large amount of team planning and co-operation. It was felt that, ultimately, the participatory spirit of the project should prevail. The focUS team believed wholeheartedly in the principles of participatory work and felt it was this that had given the project its distinctive and meaningful character. It was hoped that those themes of relevance to the research, namely migration, belonging, community and so on, would naturally arise as a coincidence of the project's unusual structure, one which involved the young people working initially in two distinctive groups. As a result of the desire to foster the participatory spirit of the project, as well as of more practical issues, it was necessary that the research element bend to accommodate the priorities of the project's video element.

The prioritising of the participatory approach affected not only what could be brought to the project in terms of a research agenda, but also how much time could be taken up in conducting the research. The challenge of producing the six films alone in such a tight timescale, afterall, was not inconsiderable, the research aside. Difficulties relating to the vagaries of fluctuating attendance were also anticipated. Ideally, all those participating in the film-making activities would participate in the research activities. However, participation in the research

was likely to be fairly fluid and chancy, based less on planning than on whether a given participant happened to be able to attend on a given day. If a participant missed a key research discussion, a crucial interview, or a particularly important research activity, the tight timescale would generally not permit recap or diversion. Unlike standalone research, then, the focUS story largely and necessarily depended on others for its direction and shape. focUS was neither a typical research project nor a typical participatory video project, but a rich, multi-layered, complex, and sometimes infuriatingly knotty combination of the two.

Young people and the research process

The nature of the focUS project, in involving and influencing young people, demanded that the team be aware of a range of practical and ethical dilemmas associated with researching this group. A number of academics, researchers, and practitioners have explored these kinds of issues in the surrounding literature (cf Thomas & O’Kane (1998), Cree, Kay & Tisdall (2001), Punch (2002), Stanley (2003)), and various agencies such as The National Children’s Bureau, Save the Children and the ESRC, have produced practical and ethical guidelines for researching these potentially vulnerable groups. In terms of difference in age, perhaps the most immediately obvious consideration was that of the likely power disparity between the adult researcher and the young research participants. Unequal power dynamics leak into every area of research, particularly research involving young people, and a level of mindful clear-sightedness on the part of the researcher in both designing and conducting research in this context is key. In planning the research, it was necessary, first and foremost, that a more generalised position be taken over how to regard the young participants in respect of their age. Conflicting philosophies exist on this issue. Some schools of thought urge that young people should be, and can cope with being, treated ‘just like adults’. Others, on the other hand, consider young people to be at a very different developmental stage to adults, and that research amongst them, therefore, requires a range of specifically tailored techniques and approaches. A particular challenge associated with focUS was that the exact age group of the participants was not known at the research design stage. Although the team was aiming to recruit young people between the ages of 16 and 18 to take part in the project, a number of variables associated with recruitment meant that it was not possible to predict or control this in advance with any certainty. Where recruits were not forthcoming, for example, or where the team was relying on city-based partners to act as gatekeepers in the recruitment process, it was sometimes neither realistic nor comfortable to be rigidly selective. As it turned out, although the average age across the groups fell within the target range of 16 to 18 years, the participants’ ages in fact ranged from 12 to 25 years. Creating tailored approaches in terms of the research, then, was challenging to say the least, and brought again to mind the many complexities and compromises associated with running a combined video and research project.

Prior to conducting the research, and in spite of not knowing the exact ages of the participants, it was clearly necessary to engage with age-related power differentials as an issue. It was possible, for example, that the young participants would be unused to the experience of adults treating them as equals, and that this would affect both how they felt able to behave and how fully they felt able to contribute during discussion sessions and interviews. Other factors likely to influence a young person’s ability or willingness to participate fully in a research session included where and when those sessions took place and who would be present. While the importance of building trust and gaining rapport with a young research participant goes without saying, it is not always easily achieved and cannot be taken for granted even when these various ethical points have been considered. The notion that young research participants are typically less likely than adults to respond at any length to open-ended interview questions was also not without relevance to the focUS research design. Similarly, it was possible that some participants would be unfamiliar with an adult they didn’t know well communicating with them or asking questions of them in a one-to-one setting. This level of unfamiliarity can lead a young person into saying what they think a researcher wants to hear, into being compliant or ‘good’, into feeling anxious about whether or not they have given the ‘right’ answer. Indeed, remaining particularly sensitive to boundaries was felt to be key in the context of the focUS research. It was acknowledged that young people do not always have very well-developed strategies for what to share and what not to share, and that sharing too much during a discussion out of a desire to please and ‘do right by’ an adult researcher can sometimes leave a young person feeling vulnerable, uneasy and exposed. The amount of time the focUS researcher spent simply ‘hanging out’ and building rapport with the young participants during the workshops was intended in some way as a guard against this. Not only was this important in terms of the participants themselves, but also in terms of the integrity of the findings. Where research participants feel comfortable enough to be open and honest in their reflections, research findings will be that much more meaningful and credible.

Navigating the notion of ‘informed consent’ was also an important part of the research design process. Providing

clear and accessible information about the research element of the project both at the outset and again at any other point of meaningful contact, was felt not only to be a point of standard good research practice, but also in keeping with the spirit of respect and collaboration that characterised the project as a whole. As a part of this approach, the participants were, for example, informed about the background to the project and to the research, they were told what would happen to any information they shared during research sessions, they were reassured that they could rightfully remain anonymous in the project story and that they could withdraw anything they'd shared but not felt comfortable sharing, and so on. An initial compromise was made on this front, however, as a result of the need to maintain the participatory spirit of the project. The video practitioners were concerned that using direct terms such as 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' at an early stage to refer to group members would prejudice the participatory process and unsettle the building of trust between group members. If the participants were aware that the project was exploring how understanding could be built not just between those from different backgrounds but more specifically between asylum seekers, refugees and more well-established locals, they might have felt both uncomfortably pigeon-holed and overly steered into making a film about this theme. Transparency was, at the same time, felt to be of crucial ethical importance, that the young participants should fully understand the nature of the project they were embarking upon. After discussing this dilemma at length, the team decided that more neutral terms like 'new arrival' should initially be used when introducing the project to the young participants. This, it was felt, would allow the details of the project's various elements, including the research, to be explained adequately, whilst respecting the young participants' right to define their own identities and their own paths through the project. Later on in the workshop phase, themes relating to asylum and immigration were raised more directly, particularly during research sessions. Indeed, where the participatory group-working less easily incorporated direct discussion of this issue for the reasons described above, the one-to-one research sessions gave the participants a chance to explore more private thoughts, to reflect more openly on less comfortable subjects. Many of the participants appeared to find this process extremely rewarding, a space to reflect and to understand better the relationships they were forming with their new colleagues. Indeed, this was one of the most powerful ways in which the research and the participatory video processes complemented one another.

The dual characteristics of focUS, in being part research project and part video project, affected the issue of consent in other ways too. For example, it is usually a principle of consent that it can be withdrawn at any time, that it remains the prerogative of a research participant to withdraw from an interview or discussion session if he or she wants to and without giving a reason. Not only including but also celebrating young people's voices, young people's right to choose, moreover, was key to the ethos of the project, and was felt to relate as much to the research as to any other element of the process. However, it was necessary to require of the focUS participants that, in the context of the project's wider video element, they agree to commit for the long-term. Without this degree of commitment, the film-making process simply wouldn't bear fruit. Although the workshops were not characterised in any sense by an atmosphere of compulsion, the fact that the young people had signed up for the film element of the project meant they were pretty much stuck with the research element too. Similarly, the likelihood that many of the participants would be drawn to the project purely out of a desire to make films, rather than out of any particular desire to explore or engage with wider issues was also anticipated. Like many of the considerations and dilemmas described here though, it was not easy to take action as such. In many cases, simply being aware of a potential problem or tension was, and had to be, enough.

Young migrants and the research process

As well as being simply young people, a large proportion of those involved in focUS, moreover, were young asylum seekers and refugees, some of whom were unaccompanied minors. The fact that a number of participants were likely to have experienced some form of forced migration, then, had possibly fled from extreme and traumatic personal and political situations in their home countries, added to and made more complex the demands described above. Again, many academics and practitioners have explored the issues facing researchers working in the migration sector, and a useful range of literature is available to guide those embarking on research in this field (cf Kohli & Mather 2003, Ahearn (ed) 2000, Jacobsen & Landau 2003). While engaging with these many considerations, it is important to hold in mind that young asylum seekers and refugees, just as other young people, are not one homogenous group with matching histories, needs, and characteristics. As one of the Peterborough 'new arrival' film-makers so eloquently reflected during the project, 'There's nobody in the world that is just like you. There are those that are similar, but there are not others that are just like you. You are unique'. The issue of 'labelling' was a thorny one for the focUS team, not least in terms of the very structuring of the workshop phase, which was to bring the young film-makers together only after they had worked in two separate and distinctively labelled groups. Treading a line between commonality and difference, between understanding others in terms of their background and origin, and taking them at face value, were central themes of the project. The research process was no different.

Whilst it was necessary on a fundamental level, then, to regard and accept the ‘new arrival’ film-makers simply as young people, it would have been both inappropriate and inadequate to ignore the likelihood that they would bring to the project a range of very different and potentially traumatic experiences as a result of their status as forced migrants. There was a strong possibility, for example, that they would have painful memories they would not wish to revisit during interviews or discussions, particularly where their arrival in the UK had been characterised by a ‘trial by application’ at the hands of the immigration authorities. Similarly, it was necessary to be aware of the difficulties this group might experience simply in ‘being themselves’. Managing a strong yearning to belong, to succeed, to ‘hold things together’, whilst at the same time feeling disorientated and ‘different’ was a tension very likely to be experienced by the young ‘new arrivals’. It was important to remain aware that these various desires and needs would likely at times outstrip the young participants’ very capacity to satisfy them, given the typically draining and destabilising effects of those losses and trauma associated with forced migration. The possibility that these young people would be characterised both by enormous resourcefulness, maturity and resilience and, at the same time, by a level of youthful naivety and vulnerability meant that research activities had to be planned with both sensitivity and consideration.

Methods and approaches

Given that the research process and the perceived powerfulness of the researcher was likely to tie tongues and pose challenges in the ways described above, it was important to consider less conventional and more ‘people-friendly’ methods of generating research material. Being mindful of the fact that, on occasion, less conventional research methods are at risk of yielding less than useful data, a range of possible sessions and approaches was planned, from standard interviews and discussions through themed games and project diaries to graffiti walls and ‘project post boxes’. The participatory nature of the overall project had profound implications for the research design however. A more conventional research design would incorporate a research frame or overview, including themes to be explored, questions to be asked, methods to be used, participants to be involved, and so on, along with various research materials devised in advance of the data-gathering process. However, the extent to which these kinds of plans and materials could be generated ahead of time was relatively limited on the focUS project. Its participatory spirit meant that each step, in terms of the film-making and therefore the research, very much depended on what went before. If consultation, particularly with the young participants, was to be a meaningful part of the project, too much detailed advance planning, too rigid an approach, was likely to cause the entire participatory process to become stifflingly over-prescribed.

In the event, a picture of the project was built up using a number of methods, including participant observation, themed games and activities, the use of a ‘project post-box’ where the film-makers could post private thoughts and ideas, and interviews and group discussions. Rather than conducting one-off interviews, it was planned that an ethnographic-style approach be taken, which would see the researcher attending as many workshops as possible in order to develop a fuller sense of the process. In the event, this high level of contact time was also beneficial in building trust with the young participants, who came to regard the researcher as ‘just one of the group’. The kinds of ideas and personal reflections the young film-makers felt able to share during these sessions showed not only a generosity of spirit and sense of group commitment that characterised their approach to the entire summer, but also a willingness to engage with a range of sometimes very challenging issues. The research process was consequently extremely rich, helping the focUS team towards a better understanding of these young people’s worlds. It had initially been hoped that the research could, like the video practice, be participatory in character, involving the young participants in the shaping of priorities and methods, in the conducting of the research itself. Time constraints and conflicting priorities, however, meant that, in spite of steering the overall project with their ideas and experiences, the young people were involved in the research element as subjects rather than as collaborators. In order to address this power imbalance, to encourage the participants to feel a sense of ownership over a project story to which they had contributed so generously and which was, after all, fundamentally about them, a number of additional workshops were held in both cities in the months following the film-making. These workshops provided an opportunity for the research findings and themes to be shared with the participants. Discussions about the balance of the project story were facilitated and the participants were invited to make comments, suggest changes, describe the things they liked and didn’t like, and so on. The workshops also provided a chance for the participants to talk as a group about some of the issues they had not felt able to raise during the film-making, including whether understanding between the groups had really been achieved and what this meant. In terms of the research, these workshops were felt to be very important, not least on an ethical level. They were a powerful example of the way in which the research added value to the main film-making element of the project, in encouraging and creating space for self-reflection and self-questioning.

It was not only the young film-makers, but also the team members, who were involved in this reflective process. Following each stage in the project, from individual workshops to meetings with key contacts in each of the cities, team members would complete an entry in a project diary in order to record and process what they had learnt. In addition to this, the video practitioners in both cities were interviewed, and regular team evaluation meetings held, at key points during the project. A group of stakeholders was also built up in each city, incorporating key local figures in the fields of arts practice, and youth and asylum/refugee-related provision. These groups not only served as invaluable sounding-boards before and during the project but also provided important information about the project's local contexts.

Chapter 3: Developing the project

The cities

The film-making phase of focUS was centred throughout the summer on the Cambridgeshire city of Peterborough and the West Midlands city of Coventry. These cities, their characteristics, their people, provided the inspiration for many of the discussions and film ideas generated during the project, as well as the backdrop for much of the filming. In both focUS Coventry and focUS Peterborough, the young film-makers took advantage of the many sights, sounds and colours of the places they knew best. Peterborough's beautiful Cathedral Square, its picturesque and historic centre, its surrounding playing fields and suburban areas, Coventry's striking and unusual cathedral, its Godiva Statue, and its notorious ring-road, for example, infused the project with a strong sense of place. The focUS cities came to be known affectionately by the team as 'Pet' and 'Cov', each with a distinctive presence, each with a unique set of things to offer.

Back in 2000-01, and according to the terms of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999, Peterborough and Coventry were designated immigration 'dispersal areas'. In order to relieve pressure on the overburdened parts of England's south-east corner, namely London and Kent, asylum seekers in need of support were to be dispersed throughout the country 'on a no-choice basis'. Dispersal areas were selected according to certain key criteria. These were that suitable housing should be available, that an established multicultural population should exist in the area, and that local community and voluntary sector support organisations should have adequate scope for development in order to accommodate the needs of new arrivals. Peterborough and Coventry, in meeting these criteria, and along with a number of other towns and cities across the UK, were deemed suitable for the purpose. According to the most recent Census data (2001), nearly 90% of Peterborough's total population of 156 061 describe themselves as 'white', with the largest minority ethnic groups being Pakistanis (4.5%) and Indians (1.8%). The city is also home to a range of other national and ethnic groups, including those from Ireland, Italy, Poland and the Caribbean. Although the Census does not gather specific information about a person's immigration status, we can tell from these recent statistics that 2.8% of Peterborough's population was born elsewhere in the EU while nearly 7% was born outside the EU altogether. Given that the 2001 Census was conducted on the cusp of Peterborough's becoming an immigration dispersal area, it is likely that the city is now characterised by somewhat greater ethnic diversity. The city was initially prepared to expect 350 asylum seekers under the dispersal scheme, and those using the cities newly developed support services have, in the years since, included Iraqis, Czechs, Portuguese and Sudanese. Coventry, meanwhile, has nearly twice the population of Peterborough, at 300 848 people. Its most significant minority ethnic groups are Indians (8%), Pakistanis (2.1%) and Black Caribbeans (1.1%). Nearly 4% of the city's population was born elsewhere in the EU and 9.1% outside the EU. According to the city's immigration strategy published in 2004, the city is currently host to 927 NASS-supported asylum seekers under the dispersal scheme. This figure has in the past been higher, and, like the numbers for Peterborough, includes neither refugees nor those asylum seekers who have not had to apply for NASS support. It is perhaps important to note here that numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, both in these cities and in the UK at large, are notoriously difficult to estimate, given a lack of adequate data.

At an introductory project meeting in late July, Peterborough's stakeholders helped to flesh out this view from afar with local stories and personal perspectives. Although a range of provision existed across the city both for young people and for young refugees and asylum seekers, including the Young People's Office, the Healthy Living Partnership, and the New Link Centre, some of the stakeholders described provision as 'fragmentary', 'disjointed' and uneasily reliant on unpredictable, inadequate or short-term funding streams. Some noted a lack of investment in youth services in general, and referred to the problems the city had experienced in recruiting youth workers. One described Peterborough's 'inherent insularity', a characteristic which both cut it off from its regional neighbours and prevented those working within its limits from forming meaningful partnerships with one another. Another felt that Peterborough's network of community and sports centres was not being exploited to its full potential. The notion of integrating mainstream youth provision with those services aimed at young refugees and asylum seekers was a crucial point of interest for the focUS team. The importance of providing meaningful opportunities for people from different backgrounds to meet and build understanding was a key point of departure for the entire project. In terms of immigration, and therefore of youth provision in a context of immigration, Peterborough was described as being 'in transition'. Many of the stakeholders described the city's residents as being uncertain about immigration and as feeling 'swamped' by incomers. Misunderstanding and misinformation were felt to be fairly commonplace. Some of the stakeholders acknowledged that change had indeed been rapid, and that established Peterborians had found it difficult to adjust. A number of these concerns were echoed at focUS Coventry's first stakeholder meeting. Here, the group described a number of

projects currently running in the city, including the Welcome Project, One Voice and the Eight Project, but many explained that services were typically over-stretched and precariously dependent on short-term funding. The difficulties associated with recruiting from particular 'target groups' were also noted.

The participants

From the very early stages of the project, it was clear that the young focUS participants were a bright and varied group of individuals. From Michael Jackson fans to Evanescence fans, from free-runners to martial artists, from Muslims to Christians to agnostics, from footballers to dancers, from 'goths' to 'gangstas' to 'skater-chavs', from pizza-haters to 'Subway' sandwich-lovers, the young people were a vivid and varied mix of likes and dislikes, passions, interests and beliefs. In terms of the project story, the characteristics of the young participants gave scope for fruitful contrastive analysis, comparing not only the youngsters themselves but also the two cities involved in the project. In Coventry, for example, those film-makers starting out in the 'new arrivals' group were all of Somali origin. Although they clearly had a powerful sense of their Somali heritage, most had grown up outside of Somalia, some in parts of Europe. They all either knew or knew of each other beforehand, and lived within an established refugee community in the city. Peterborough's 'new arrivals', on the other hand, had more recently arrived in Europe and the UK. Most had only a temporary right to remain in the country and one was still in the process of claiming asylum. Nearly all had arrived in the country as 'unaccompanied minors', that is, without any family members and aged under 18. They came from a variety of countries, including Iran and Burundi, Nigeria and Rwanda, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Uganda. Although some went to the same church, they mainly had not come across each other before. Between the two cities, then, it was clear that a variety of experiences of migration would be likely to emerge. Likewise, the groups of 'host' film-makers were broadly different across the two cities. In Coventry, many in this group were friends with one another already, having met at the youth club where the focUS workshops were taking place. In Peterborough, however, more time was spent in building trust and togetherness amongst the group, as the young people had largely not met one another before. The experience of the one focUS city, then, was in many ways quite distinct from the other. The ways in which the film-makers identified themselves and one another, whether as friends or strangers, as 'other' or 'just normal' was central to the project. The various points of difference and commonality described here were an important starting point for both the film-makers and the team in terms of making links and building understanding.

Recruitment

Reflecting on a busy summer of film-making, the team considered the recruitment of participants to have been one of the project's most important stages, a balancing act in which responsibilities to funders, to prospective participants, to 'gatekeeping' local contacts, and to the spirit of the project itself had to be fulfilled with sensitivity, tact and a sense of meaning. It was something that was planned initially, then explored in practice and adapted. Its demands ran throughout the film-making phase, both in response to fluctuations in attendance on the part of the participants and on account of needing to explain and justify to others the various dilemmas and decisions associated with it.

The recruitment process in each city was different, not only because of the contrasting natures and make-up of the cities themselves, but also, and mainly, because the video practitioner organisations were differently linked to their host cities. While Living Lens, the organisation responsible for delivering the Peterborough branch of focUS, was based in London, and had to build up contacts within a city which knew nothing of them, Frontline AV, the second practitioner organisation, was already well-established in the host city of Coventry, and enjoyed a good reputation amongst local youth workers and others for delivering projects of this kind. There were complex management issues associated with overseeing a project recruitment process in an unfamiliar city, where key local practitioners and policy makers on the one hand and the focUS team on the other were not very well known to each other, if they were known at all. The geographical distance only added time and complexity to the planning process. Several visits were made to Peterborough in the lead-up to the project in order to inform and engage with key local figures in the field. The visits were a chance to get a sense of the local landscape, from the practical to the political, from local sensitivities on the one hand, for instance, to appropriate workshop venues and caterers on the other. Crucially, it was hoped that the local contacts would act as 'gatekeepers', in approaching prospective participants on the team's behalf. The team felt strongly that engaging local stakeholders in this way was not only necessary in terms of achieving access to potential participants but was also simply good practice. The team members recognised they were essentially 'outsiders' to the city and were keen not to charge blindly in with demands and expectations. The team's visits to Peterborough, in fostering the building of rapport with those already undertaking related projects in the host city, seemed to facilitate a very necessary sense of shared ownership and interest. From the very beginning, it was hoped that focUS would not be merely a 'flash in the

pan', but that its aims, its template, its spirit would enjoy some longevity in the two partner cities. Without investing in the building of links, in the sharing of information, in the seeking and valuing of local advice, the team considered it very unlikely that focUS would ever be more than just a one-off. Visits to Peterborough, then, began four months or more in advance of the first video-making workshop, and the team members were delighted by how warmly and enthusiastically they were received by Peterborough's local practitioners and policy-makers.

Coventry was a slightly different story however. Given Frontline AV's well-established reputation within the city, investing a similar amount of time and energy in building links with local stakeholders was not felt to be as key to the recruitment process as it was going to be in Peterborough. In retrospect, the team agreed this was possibly a mistake. Importantly, it was recognised that cities hosting projects of this kind vary, sometimes greatly, in their receptiveness, in their levels of interest, support and enthusiasm, and in the time and resources they are able to invest in getting involved, and that any project organiser must, in effect, prepare for the worst. Taking time to speak to and seek advice personally from those likely to have an interest in a project, apart from anything else, communicates respect and reduces the likelihood of opposition. There were no drastic problems stemming from the team's misjudgement over this, but merely a sense on the part of the Coventry stakeholders that consultation had come rather late. It is possible that some felt suspicious or critical of the project for other reasons, but a certain goodwill factor would likely have overridden this had more time been spent on getting to know and on building rapport. The inevitable complexities associated with partnership working – in this case, the collaboration between ICAR and Frontline AV – perhaps contributed to this dynamic. Assuming Frontline's local connection and not wanting, therefore, to tread on toes, ICAR had supported and been more heavily involved in the recruitment process in Peterborough. With hindsight, sharing time more evenly across both cities would have perhaps been preferable. The different ways in which the recruitment process played out in each of the two cities, both in this and in other respects, were a lesson to the team both in the management and support of collaborative working, and in the compromises and difficulties inherent in it.

Recruitment, particularly where gatekeepers are involved, is a notoriously difficult process to control or prescribe, depending as it does on the kinds of prospective participants local gatekeepers happen to know and on which of these happen to be interested and available, and on the ways in which the gatekeepers communicate the details of the project. In the case of focUS, it was necessary for local gatekeepers to know, moreover, whether or not the young people they were helping recruit to the 'new arrivals' group were refugees or asylum seekers. It is one thing to write a project proposal targeting a particular group, it is entirely another to go about recruiting this particular group on the ground, whilst dealing with the difficult issue of labelling, whilst treading carefully around participants' multiple and complex identities, whilst avoiding the 'Would you like to take part in our project – and by the way, are you an asylum seeker?' kinds of exchanges. In order for this to occur in a comfortably respectful way, the local gatekeeper, it was felt, would need either to be in a role which demanded they be in possession of this kind of information, or at least to be close enough to the prospective participant to know without asking, without needing to pose intrusive and insensitive questions regarding status and eligibility. The role of the intermediary, then, was key from both a practical and ethical point of view. Managing numbers of participants was another tricky element of the process. It was decided that a greater number would initially be targeted in order to counterbalance a likely falling away of participation during the project. However, again, numbers were not something the team could control, particularly given that reliance on gatekeepers was intrinsic to the process. Potential stumbling-blocks included the prospect, on the one hand, of having too few young people show an interest, and on the other hand, too many. Attendance was something about which all team members crossed their fingers, and the anxiety of 'Is anyone going to turn up?' dogged at least the first few workshops in both cities.

These kinds of variables meant that the recruitment process was more an unwieldy process of making do and improvising, of treading on unfamiliar terrain and doing one's best to satisfy commitments to funders whilst balancing the needs, interests and sensitivities of prospective participants, than it was a neat course of 'cherry-picking' from target groups. Nevertheless, the generating of parameters by which to steer as much as possible the assistance of the gatekeepers was felt to be an appropriate point of departure. The aim, then, was to recruit around 10 young people to each group, within an age bracket of 16 to 18 years, and with an even gender spread. It was intended also that the ethnic mix of the 'host' group reflect the respective city's demographic as a whole. It was also felt that an understanding of the English language was necessary. Whilst regretting this kind of exclusivity, the team considered that engaging young people without these skills would present unrealistic and unmanageable challenges. The project aimed to provide an opportunity for young people to meet, and, through working creatively towards a common goal, build mutual understanding. The team aimed, in addition, then, to target as

far as possible those young people not typically given the opportunity to be involved in projects like focUS, who'd perhaps had little experience of the youth and community world, who were not in a position to parrot the buzz phrases associated with integration or multiculturalism, who were, for want of a better phrase, 'harder to reach'.

In Peterborough, as well as making visits to the city to engage key stakeholders in the recruitment process, Rose and Amy of Living Lens later carried out 'taster sessions'. Although the team learnt about other recruitment methods during these visits, for example that of Peterborough's Unity Youth Project which widely advertises its schemes, interviews prospective participants, and uses selection criteria based on behaviour, attendance, skills and enthusiasm, the 'taster session' approach was felt to be most appropriate. The sessions took place at key locations throughout the city, including the regional college, and enabled prospective participants to find out about more about focUS and get some hands-on experience with the cameras. The sessions were a good opportunity not only for sharing information and for engaging would-be participants, but also for gauging interest. The numbers of young people at the taster sessions and the degree to which they entered into the activities indicated how far along the recruitment path the focUS team had come and what still remained to be done. In other words, if take-up was good and enthusiasm strong, the task of generating interest and securing commitment would be regarded as nearing an end. Gatekeepers were invited to support their young contacts by coming along themselves to the sessions, which created a feeling of safety and legitimacy.

In spite of investing time in this process, and, for example, in telephoning the gatekeepers throughout to confirm likely numbers, the team nevertheless experienced some problems with keeping participant numbers at a suitable level in Peterborough during the early part of the workshop phase. On the evening prior to the first weekend of workshops, for example, Rose and Amy were informed by one of the gatekeepers that two of the confirmed participants had withdrawn 'for personal reasons'. The following day, then, saw only four participants arrive. Although the combined group at the close of the project contained a healthy fourteen participants, only half of these had been present since the beginning. Bringing in participants once a project has begun does not come without difficulties, particularly where time has been spent on generating a sense of trust and team spirit, as had been the case in Peterborough. New participants, simply through joining after relationships have started to develop, are likely to unsettle group cohesion, as well as to lack the technical skills already built up by the more established participants. It can be more difficult for newer group members to break into the group socially. It was testament to the skills of the practitioners and the openness of the young participants, however, that by the end of the project, it was difficult to remember who had joined at the beginning and who later on.

In terms of recruitment criteria, the team realised quickly how difficult it was going to be to gain access to 'harder to reach' young people, who are, by definition, less likely to be engaged in existing provision, less likely therefore to be known by gatekeepers, and perhaps less likely to take up the opportunity to participate in projects like focUS. In Peterborough, for example, in spite of aiming for 'harder to reach' young people, one of the resulting group was a Community Champion, another two were youth leaders involved in the local Young People's Office and in a community sports project, and another still was aiming to be Head Boy at his school. In Coventry, too, the team experienced similar kinds of challenges.

To counterbalance the citywide character of Peterborough's recruitment process and to address the needs of a particularly deprived and rundown area of Coventry, it was intended that the Frontline-led branch of focUS centre its activities in the neighbourhood of Wood End. This area, described intermittently as a police 'no-go' zone, had in recent years been the site of much social unrest, from fire-setting to drug-related crime to racist harassment, and had very little in the way of existing community provision. To recruit in such an area presented obvious challenges, not least that without some kind of youth and community infrastructure, it was difficult to find a 'way in'. City stakeholders pointed out, too, that the area had been targeted by various groups over the years, for example, from the church, and at times 'Wood Enders' felt resentful and suspicious. The team was warned to 'expect resistance'. A number of possible recruitment strategies were mooted. In order to access 'harder to reach' young people in the area, Fran of Frontline toyed with the idea of approaching the Youth Intervention Project, a locally-based branch of the youth justice programme. However, it was felt that obliging young people to participate in focUS as part of their 'rehabilitation' would be highly unlikely to inspire motivation and enthusiasm. Similarly, Fran considered engaging race hate perpetrators on the 'host' side of the project, particularly given Coventry's high-profile campaign against and ongoing work in the area of race hate crime. However, she quickly acknowledged that expecting the 'new arrival' participants to bear the likely extremes of view and action that participants of this kind would bring would simply be too much to ask. The very project itself rested, after all, upon the capacity of the two groups of young participants to come together as one larger group partway through the film-making. Hostility at the point of meeting could be disastrous.

On the one hand, it was felt that recruiting young people who already had experience of mixing with people from different backgrounds, who had participated in community projects before, and for whom engaging with issues of difference, community and belonging might, because of this, be less meaningful, would be to miss a trick, to miss the point of the project. However, targeting 'harder to reach' young people by moving too far in the other direction, for example by approaching YIP, brought into relief the ethical and practical challenges of cohering a group of diverse young people in order to generate a creative product within a very limited timeframe. The team, in other words, had to be realistic. Many of the young people Fran came into contact with during the recruitment phase, in any case, were simply not interested in participating, and the team was obliged to concede that if 'the people don't want, they don't want'. Gatekeepers were also hard to find, given the lack of an infrastructure in the area. Where they were found, moreover, they did not always show enthusiasm for the idea. Various schools in and around Wood End were contacted, for example, yet when the contacts realised the project would be taking place out of term-time and could not therefore be tied in to school-based activities and projects, interest tended to wane.

Eventually, Frontline took recruitment out of Wood End and into another area, Foleshill. Fran had made contact with a local Somali community organisation, Solcom, and with the manager of a brand new and extremely well provisioned youth centre in the area, the Broad Street Centre. These contacts were invaluable to the recruitment of the Coventry's focUS participants. The 'host' film-makers were made up entirely of Broad Street youth group members, most of whom had participated in summer schemes and other activities at the centre. Consequently, and unlike in Peterborough, many of the group members knew each other already, were friends or at least acquaintances. The team well-understood that recruiting from already established friendship groups would generate different group dynamics from a situation which brought together people not previously known to one another. In terms of learning, it was felt that the contrast between the two cities in this respect would be suggestive and stimulating. Another thought-provoking contrast between the cities was manifest in the 'new arrivals' group. Whereas in Peterborough, the members of this group came from a number of different countries, the Coventry 'new arrivals' were all of Somali origin. The Frontline team had met the members of Solcom at a separate event, at which they were able to approach and engage with a number of the community's young people. Remaining sensitive to the traditions and etiquette of that community, Fran first cleared participation with the community elders, who in turn, as gatekeepers, lent enormous support to the project. Even as Coventry 'insiders', however, the Frontline team unwittingly ran into problems. Another Somali community organisation in the city, for example, expressed anger at not having had any of their own youngsters selected for participation. Rumours spread that the young participants were virtually all related to one another and that this was unfair and exclusive. Others claimed the groups were representative neither in terms of gender nor nationality. These unfortunate events showed the team the importance of investing time in communicating clearly and in advance the aims and scope of a project, and accepting that, at times, even communicating clearly is not enough. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations always remain an uncomfortable possibility.

Securing participants within the 16-18 age bracket was also a criterion that was difficult to meet. In Coventry, for example, two of the three older participants, all aged in their early-to-mid twenties, left the project after the making of the first film. Possibly, the prospect of working closely with others as young as 12 over a long period was not particularly appealing. Indeed, others mentioned this more explicitly, a fact which showed the team the importance of peer relationships. As one of the Peterborough participants explained, "If they're around your age, they're going to try and be your friend, but if they're younger or older, then sometimes they won't want to, because, you know, everyone feels more comfortable with people of their own age". A similar view was voiced in Coventry: "I think it was nice to get to know them but I don't think I will contact them after because there is an age difference". The aim of developing understanding, and perhaps longer-standing friendships, between the young participants should, in the light of these kinds of sentiments, perhaps have made the age criterion a higher priority. Again, however, the lack of control and real choice which tends to characterise recruitment to projects of this kind meant that 'cherry-picking' 16 to 18 year olds was simply not achievable.

Chapter 4: Beginnings

In order to trace the trajectory of the project and evoke distance travelled, it is necessary to give some sense of where and with what the project started. Although by the end, the young focUS participants had built a range of skills and learnt an enormous amount, they initially brought with them to the project many different life experiences, skill levels, and personal qualities and attributes.

The new arrival participants: social networks and settling in

An assumption held by the focUS team as they devised the project was that young asylum seekers and refugees, in having only relatively recently arrived in a place and in possibly being unfamiliar with local languages, traditions, and ways of life, would be more likely than locally-based youth to feel socially isolated and to lack a secure and established friendship network. One of the aims of the project was to decrease the sense of isolation experienced by those young asylum seekers and refugees who were taking part. Of course, in reality, the picture was not only more mixed, more nuanced than this, but also incorporated elements the team had not expected. While many of the young new arrivals, particularly in Peterborough, shared feelings of isolation, others did not. In many cases, these stories understandably emerged only as the project progressed, as the young participants came to feel safer both within their groups and within the research sessions. While it is possible that those who did not describe feeling lonely simply weren't, it is also possible that they did not feel able to admit to loneliness as this would have crumbled a fragile sense of belonging, a thin semblance of 'normality' and of being just like everybody else. It is also possible they simply did not feel migration and its effects were a strong part of their identity, which instead was built upon other foundations, like youth culture, music taste, religion and so on. The young refugee and asylum seeker participants were all very different from one another, some more extrovert than others, some with a better grasp of English, some having been too young to remember leaving their countries of origin, others with vivid and painful memories, some having lost relatives in traumatic circumstances and others still living with extended families in the UK. Most had been resident in the UK for at least a year, and most were in full-time education.

Unlike the Coventry new arrivals group, many of whom had come to England with their families following long periods in other European countries and all of whom had since enjoyed the welcome of Coventry's established Somali community, the Peterborough refugees and asylum seekers were in general relatively isolated. Many were only in the early stages of building roots in Peterborough, and described the process of settling as at times uncomfortable, stressful and lonely. Even some of those who had lived in the city for longer periods described continuing to feel cut off and lacking in friendships.

To be honest, it's just people from college, because I don't have many friends here in Peterborough. In fact I don't have any friends.

Some at first talked of having friends, but rather than peer relationships these were friendships with older people the participants had made through belonging to a church or other religious community. The young people clearly gained strength from these relationships, at times describing the wisdom and sense of welcome provided by their older friends. However, they at the same time respectfully described the limits of these friendships, with one of the young male participants blushing explaining, for example, that they were not the kind of friends you could talk to about girls. It seemed that the Peterborough new arrivals would class almost any person within their small social networks as a friend, including pastors, social workers and teachers. Some talked of lacking friends their own age.

To say the truth is, this is like the first project I have attended. I've not associated with very many youth. It's my first project to be with youth, so I have no experience.

Others regretted how separate they felt from local people. In Peterborough, many of the young new arrivals group were housed in accommodation reserved for asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. Opportunities to mix with locals were rare.

For me personally I don't have more opportunities to go out and meet other people from... Those people that I do meet and make friends with are in my world, my fellow asylum seekers, fellow refugees. But I cannot go into the other classes, the natives, the 'Fergusons', you know, the typical English names, and it's sad to see that there is that gap.

Some of the participants described the ups and downs of making friends in a new city, a new country and a new culture. One explained that rather than feeling isolated, he felt a sense of inequality, as though those around him were judging him to be inferior simply because he was an asylum seeker. Rather than seeming lonely, then, this young person seemed separate, seemed to be struggling to overcome a strong sense of injustice which made it difficult for him to befriend local people. This same participant, however, described feeling heartened and energised by the many events set up within the city to celebrate diversity and multi-culture, including Refugee Week, and an intercultural football tournament. Remembering another event, Peterborough's International Food Festival, he described the importance of feeling accepted as part of a community:

I've seen so many British who are going to taste other foods, and to me that was a joy, that they have something to gain from the other culture. And also there are dancers from Sri Lanka who came to dance. And I was really amazed to hear the crowd cheering 'Heyey, hey hey!'. It's like you feel included in part of the community. Although you are an asylum seeker, you are included.

Another participant movingly described feeling out of tune with local people and sometimes rejected by them.

I am not feeling comfortable, but I have no solution for that. You have to just keep on, you have to just persevere and learn the situation. You have to just keep talking to different people, you know, learn them, until you reach a point and you feel comfortable. You know, the more friends you get, the more comfortable you become in the society. But when you've just come, you just wake up every morning, you go to the city centre, on the way you don't talk to anyone, and then you just go back home, sleep, then you wake up and the same again. For months and months. That's why many Africans say they are stressed here. And that has happened to me, just staying, finishing a whole week in my room, stressed. Sometimes, it's like going into the park, you sit down, you see people having fun and everything, and you don't have anyone you can talk to...it's like someone sees her young kid coming to you, and the mother comes and picks her away as if you were going to do harm to her. You feel hurt but you have to just ignore it because you have nothing you can do for it.

Other focUS new arrivals talked of the process of making friends in rather contradictory ways, sometimes reflecting positively on their social networks and at other times sharing feelings of isolation or separateness. One of the Coventry youngsters, for example, initially described having 'loads of different friends from loads of different nationalities' including British friends, but later said, 'I've only got a few British friends, I ain't got much. I've got more Somali friends than I've got British friends'. Although these inconsistencies very possibly stemmed from the natural fluctuations of childhood friendships, they perhaps betrayed the participants' need to appear well-adjusted and 'normal'. A sense of feeling 'normal', for some of the Coventry 'new arrivals' group, indeed, appeared to completely override any sense of feeling isolated. One explained that he didn't feel isolated because, 'people are normal to us. They are no different from us and we don't feel different from them'. Another added that it depended on the person involved, that if he felt a person or group was actively trying to isolate him, 'you will do the same. You will stick to yourselves and stay away from them'. The notion of 'normality' was an important one for the Coventry young people, particularly the new arrivals, who raised it time and again in relation to themselves and others. Being 'normal' was desirable and meant one 'fitted in'.

Some participants' experiences of building social networks in the UK caused them to reflect on their home culture and on the different ways in which things were done in the places they knew best. For some, this constituted an uncomfortable contrast.

When we are home, and we see anyone who is white, people really feel it a great thing, you feel happy. It's like back home in church or in school, anyone who comes when he's white, you know, everyone wants to greet that person, wants to talk to that person. It's something great that people treasure so much, that someone has come: 'He's from England! He's from England!'. Everyone must, may be, feel the skin of that person, you know, talk to that person. May be if it's in church, everyone wants to have a seat with that person. If he has come to school, every kid wants to talk to that person, every kid wants to be given the opportunity to introduce himself. But that has not happened here. I've never seen anyone like that here, 'Ah I want to talk to him'. Except if you have spent more time with that person, then you can begin chatting and everything. But that has not happened here. I've never seen it.

The young new arrivals brought to the project not only their experiences of building social networks, but also their experiences of settling and of the UK in general. In some cases, the young people described feeling afraid, victimised, and dogged with anxiety about their uncertain futures. When reflecting on her asylum application,

one participant, for example, said,

Sometimes you think about it and feel nervous, you don't know what the end result will be. You know, like if you've met good people who have helped you, put you in school, and at the end of the day you think about it like if you don't get a positive answer, that means everything will come to an end and then you have to go back to where you started.

A number described occasions when they or people they knew had experienced prejudice, hostility and harassment. Although they displayed understanding about the dynamics of these situations and were often otherwise very positive about their new lives and local communities, the young new arrivals at times expressed the kinds of fear, anxiety and separateness associated with an 'us and them' view of the world.

One of the housemates I was living with, their house was attacked because they were living near a pub and people from that pub learnt that their house was just for asylum seekers. They came and smashed the windows and everything. They were lucky they escaped. Then they had to be dispersed to other houses and that house had to be closed down. That's why he came to live with us. He was from Iran. And I learnt about that story from him. And up to that point I didn't realise that people could be violent with asylum seekers.

Others talked about problems they'd had fitting in at school.

Since I started at my school, I've had ten fights, because they started on me, some white kids, yeah. I've never been racist in my life, but they were like, 'You black bastard!', so my mates, yeah, they said, say to him, 'You white bastard', but I didn't, I just ignored him and walked away. And he came up to me and pushed me and said, 'Why you walking away, you black fuckin' bastard? Go back to your country!', and I said, 'Shut up before I bite you'. And he punched me, but I didn't back, and I got into trouble. And all the kids went, 'He started it' – to me. I got into trouble. The teacher sent me home for three days. I got excluded for three days.

The host participants: backgrounds and experiences

It was not only the new arrivals who brought a range of positive and negative experiences to the project, but also the young 'host' participants. Whilst they, as had been expected, generally enjoyed friendship networks more well-established than those of the new arrivals, some had experienced difficulties and trauma of their own. Some of the Coventry participants, for example, came from broken homes, and indeed appeared to have backgrounds at least as turbulent as their refugee counterparts, if not more so.

My parents don't really talk to me. I don't get on with my parents.

I'm fostered. I don't really speak to my parents a lot. I speak to my dad sometimes, and I just stay the hell away from my mum.

Some had used their past experiences to reassess how they viewed the world, even where these experiences had been traumatic and destabilising.

Well, I left my dad because there was a lot of violence, and at the end of the day, I accepted that he was gone and there weren't a lot I could do about it. I didn't like living with him, and it was good to get away and it still is, and all that violence that I had to put up with, you know, it's not right, and I suppose it's changed me a lot, and it's made me think that violence doesn't solve nothing.

Although the Peterborough participants generally brought fewer personal, social and behavioural problems to the project, some, too, referred to past difficulties, including the experience of mental illness in the family.

Skills, qualities and characteristics

On the whole, the participants, particularly those amongst the new arrival groups, had had relatively little or no experience of using video prior to taking part in focUS. A small number had been involved with film-making during drama workshops and courses at school, although this had tended to be in front of rather than behind the camera. Some, particularly of the 'host' participants, had used video cameras at family parties or holidays, or had made films with friends. In terms of their flair for film-making, the participants contrasted interestingly from the one city to the other. In Peterborough, it was the young locals who appeared to bring to the project

a sense of sure-footedness in relation to film-making, who, in early workshops and whilst still in their separate groups, handled the discussion of film ideas, grasped notions of mood, sequencing, narrative and so on, more quickly and with more certainty than most of their new arrival colleagues. An example of this occurred during a planning session for their first films, when the participants were left alone by the practitioners to brainstorm and devise themes and ideas. The new arrivals group dealt relatively awkwardly with this sudden autonomy, unlike the young host participants, who, during the equivalent session in their workshop, both more comfortably adapted to the task and appeared better to understand the concepts and requirements. The new arrivals very possibly felt uncomfortable for other reasons too, not least a relatively heightened need to belong, fit in, do well, and so on, along perhaps with cultural differences and the language barrier, but it seemed nevertheless that their familiarity with a visual medium both on conceptual and technical levels, was less than that of the young locals. In Coventry, however, it was the new arrivals group who brought to the project a more sophisticated understanding of film-making conventions and of the scope of visual language. Their remarkable levels of 'cine-literacy' were exemplified in the first film they made, for which they very instinctively generated a smooth narrative coherence, and for which they very naturally came up with ideas and a sense of the complete product. The young host group, by contrast, struggled to plan and to visualise in this way.

There seemed to be broad differences, too, in the characteristics of the separate groups. In Peterborough, although the majority of the participants were able to reflect and participate in a mature way, the new arrivals in particular seemed inclined to engage in a wider, more philosophical way of seeing the world. Often, the team were surprised to learn the ages of the new arrivals, believing them, on account of their apparent maturity, to have been much older than they actually were. The new arrivals, for example, spent around an hour devising their first 'team agreement', the ground-rules by which they planned to work, engaging in bigger issues like ethics and confidentiality, dictatorship, and love. The young locals, by comparison, were more robotic, trotting out concepts like 'co-operation' and 'good communication' without seeming fully to understand their meaning. Differences between the groups were particularly marked in Coventry. In early diary entries there, the practitioners noted the relative maturity and cohesiveness of the new arrivals when compared to the young locals, who were unruly and lacking in focus by comparison. Evoking their frustrations at the chaotic energy and short attention spans of the host participants, the practitioners said that facilitating sessions was 'like trying to lasso up random groups of runaway ponies'. The many behavioural issues associated with the Coventry participants created at times a very challenging environment, one not overly conducive to calm self-reflection and understanding. Workshops with the new arrivals were quieter and easier to manage. There were probably many reasons for this imbalance. One was clearly that the young Somalis were, on average, older than the young locals, with three aged in their early twenties. Moreover, the practitioners felt that the new arrivals' wider cultural community was characterised by a strong respect for elders. The younger participants, therefore, responded to and respected the quietly disciplining words of their older colleagues. The support provided by the new arrivals' wider community, and their interest in the project, indeed, very probably caused the young participants to feel a wider sense of commitment and responsibility, which, in turn, affected their behaviour on the project.

Indeed, the participants had varying levels of support from friends and family in relation to their participation in the project. Many of the young people, particularly in Peterborough, talked of their families' and friends' excitement and interest.

[My family] said it's a great thing to do, because I said we were going to try to solve some problems of people from other countries, and then make those two groups to communicate with each other much better than before. So when I said that, they said it was a great idea.

Everyday I come home and my dad keeps in saying to me, 'What's the project about again?', because he's so excited. They say, 'When are we going to see it?' and stuff like that. My mum's really proud obviously. My sister's, like, 'Oh, what are you wearing today? You better look nice! Wear enough blusher because it doesn't come up on the camera!'. They're all excited about it and they can't wait for the end result.

Everyone likes it, everyone has encouraged me to do it, instead of being idle for the holiday, waiting for school and just going back to college. Everyone has encouraged me.

Some of [my friends] get excited and they want to swap – 'I'll go for you today!'. And I'm like, 'Too late, too late!'.

Although the Coventry participants were supported by their friends, families and communities, particularly

those in the new arrivals group as described above, the Peterborough participants seemed on the whole to enjoy greater support and interest. This disparity was demonstrated at the local screening of the films. Although the screening event in Coventry was intended to be more low-key, attendance was relatively poor, and only three sets of parents were present. In Peterborough, the audience was more than two hundred-strong, filling the town hall's grand reception room, with audience members' support for the event translated into numerous enthusiastically completed feedback forms.

The host participants' understanding of asylum

Although some had friends of different ethnic backgrounds born both in the UK and abroad, the young locals varied in their levels of awareness about issues relating to asylum and immigration. A small number knew a certain amount, sometimes basing their knowledge on personal contact with asylum seekers and refugees they had met, but many lacked awareness. Some were able approximately to define the term asylum seeker, although at times there was confusion about this.

Researcher: *So do you know what an asylum seeker is?*

Participant: *Someone who goes round people's houses and knocks on doors trying to get money out of them... I don't know... I don't know really.*

Researcher: *Okay. Who told you it meant that?*

Participant: *Because they always knock on my door. What does it mean?*

Researcher: *Maybe I'll explain it to you afterwards. I'm just interested in finding out what you think first.*

Participant: *I think it's the people that come round saying about god and that... I can't remember whether they try and skank money off you or whatever.*

Researcher: *Right, so you think they're some kind of religious group or something?*

Participant: *Oh no, wait, I'm getting mixed up with Jehovah's Witnesses.*

Many, particularly in Peterborough, expressed a sense of regret, embarrassment or frustration that they didn't know more about the issue. Some, while seeming a little uncomfortable about their lack of knowledge, seemed either too unconfident or simply unwilling to venture opinions on an issue they saw as controversial or highly-charged, preferring instead to emphasise the importance of generalised acceptance and of taking others at face value.

I don't even know what the meaning of asylum seeker is, so I just kind of take them as... I see them all as people that have come from somewhere else for many different reasons.

Perhaps understandably given their young age, many had underdeveloped thoughts about the issue, sometimes verging on the flippant. One participant, for example, said he couldn't understand why anyone would choose to flee to the UK, given its poor climate, diminutive size and unpopularity with other European powers. Others, though more mature in their reflections, had thoughts that somehow lacked the flesh of direct experience.

I don't know too much about it, but I do think immigration is a good thing. It's fair. But at the same time, you can have too many immigrants, so they should sort of accept people, but not all at once. Because there's, what, 250 countries or something, so they don't all have to come here. There are other places that they could go to. I think a lot of them get the choice to go somewhere where they want to go or where they'd prefer to go, and I think that they shouldn't necessarily be given that choice. So just as long as they're going from, like, the place where they're leaving from to somewhere that's safer, then that's all that should matter, just as long as they're safe.

In certain cases, misconceptions abound.

I think it's England only who does immigration isn't it?

In England there's, like, one in four. In every four people, there's an average of one asylum seeker.

In other cases, the young locals expressed contradictory positions on the issue. This seemed at one level to demonstrate their confusion, the likelihood that they had been led in many different directions on the issue by parents, friends, the media and so on, and had yet to fully understand and form an opinion of their own. Inconsistencies perhaps also stemmed from a desire to suppress views the participants might have been aware were 'un-PC' but nevertheless could not contain. One participant, for example, in spite of stating that the granting of asylum to those fleeing war and terror was both fair and good, said in his next breath,

I reckon there is too much asylum seekers in Peterborough. I don't know why but there's plenty. On my street, there's too many particularly. Like, nearly every house is full of them.

Perceptions, preconceptions and stereotypes

At the beginning of the project, particularly during the stage before they met, the young participants were asked to explore their perceptions of other kinds of people they had seen or met in their cities. As part of these discussions, they also explored their perceptions and preconceptions about the kinds of people who made up the group of focUS participants they had yet to meet. During these early stages, the young locals, then, explored what they thought of asylum seekers, refugees and other new arrivals to their city and the new arrivals explored what they thought about the members of their host community. A number of interesting views emerged during these discussions, views underpinned at certain times by understanding, maturity and consideration and at others by misinformation, confusion and misguided prejudice. Some had clearly been influenced by hearsay and by media-driven stereotypes whereas others struggled to balance out their own personal experiences of others in order to form a view. When first exploring these issues, the majority of the young participants were reluctant, however, to label or prejudice others or to generalise in any way. Some emphasised that there were 'good' and 'bad' people everywhere. Others said they tended to accept people at face value.

In every community, from what I understand, from what I've been told since I was a child, there are the bad and the good, and you cannot draw a line and say, 'well, the British are bad, all these are good, all these are bad'. No, it doesn't come out of that because where the bad are there, the good also exists.

I've seen a lot of bad things from people here and I've seen a lot of good things from here. You know, every city in every country has bad people and good people, so that's the nature of the city.

They're just people. People are people, it doesn't matter. It's what's inside that counts.

I don't have any negative views about people. If there are bad things about a person, I tend to ignore it, I don't really mind.

Perceptions like these revealed the openness with which the young people approached the project, their desire to meet others, to make friends, to have fun in a group, and not to ask questions. However, as the following paragraphs show, their views were almost always more complicated than the simplicity of their initial statements suggested.

The host participants' perceptions of 'the other'

The host groups from both cities portrayed a range of views, with those in Coventry sharing on the whole more negative perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees than those in Peterborough. In general, all were aware that these terms were often negatively-loaded in public space.

I think a lot of people kind of look at the word 'asylum seeker' as sort of an insult. It's not an insult, but I think people kind of frown upon it, like it's a bad word or something.

A number of the young locals referred to a sense of the UK being overrun by an influx of asylum seekers, some having clearly been influenced by others, including the media, their families, their friends, and their communities. Related perceptions, such as loss of British identity and pressure on resources, were also raised during these discussions. Some participants were unclear about their opinions, feeling they lacked accurate information or feeling this issue was in some way distant from their own lives.

When I hear people talking about it, they say they're getting all the nice newly built houses and stuff, and things like that. But I don't know if that's actually true or not, so I just... I don't really pay much attention to it because I don't know what to think about it, if you know what I mean. It's hard.

I think there should always be a limit [on numbers of asylum seekers] because, I don't know, I think someone should always say, okay, we can't exactly accept all of them because there's people here that have lived here for their life and they want to be able to be free to do what they want, they want to be able to feel free to keep... make, like, their family name to keep going through. We could be seen as turning into, slowly, a different place and not Britain, if you know what I mean, as it was known.

Some of the participants, particularly those in Coventry, subscribed to the stereotype of the 'sponging' asylum seeker.

They all get their money for free, off like the council and that. And like they don't have to pay taxes and that, and we have to.

Half of them come over here and they don't even work! They sit on the dole! It's really annoying. They come over here, they sit on the dole, and do absolutely nothing. They think the world owes them. Arseholes. They get these, like, coupons to buy food, but most of them buy fags, alcohol and drugs and stuff like that. You can see them going into supermarkets and they're supposed to be buying food and they've got stacks of alcohol and fags. It's just like what's the point? They're cheeky bastards.

Others talked of feeling uncomfortable around some kinds of new arrival, and felt that 'foreigners' could be intimidating towards women, could be sexually inappropriate or threatening. Some based this perception on personal experience. One participant, for example, described certain new arrivals as 'sleazy', explaining, 'I've been around town and I've had them follow me for no apparent reason, just because I'm walking along doing my shopping.' Others had similar views.

I always get, like, when I'm walking down the street, people whistling at me and trying to get my attention and making weird noises. It happens all over the place. It's like blokes on the street being all flirty when you don't want to, or like when you're just walking home. [They're] people that can't speak English because they mainly try to get your attention by whispering at you or saying something really, like, flirty or something to do with sex or whatever, and that really annoys me.

In Coventry, these judgements were expressed in relation to certain groups of new arrivals in particular, namely 'the Kosovans'. In a discussion with two of the Coventry participants, Kosovans were described in no uncertain terms as 'perverts' and 'rapists'.

They always start whistling. They started going to my sister, 'Whoaa, do you want to come into my bed with me?'. And it's, like, that's why I think they shouldn't allow some people into the country. Because of that. Because it's bringing danger. Even, they're telling all the mothers to...because all of these paedophiles coming from different countries...I know some of them ain't but some of them are...and they're all coming from different countries, and it was said on the news...or it said somewhere that women should go in at 8 o'clock for their own safety.

Perceptions of 'foreigners' behaving in a damaging or anti-social way spread into other statements made by a small number of the young locals.

Half of them...no offence, but half of them take drugs.

Many talked about media portrayals of asylum seekers and other new arrivals, with some more aware than others of the possibilities of media misinformation. The following statement was made by one of the young locals who joined focUS after the two groups had met and begun working together. The contrast between the views she arrived at the project with and those she quickly developed are clear, as is her realisation about the pervasiveness and power of media narratives.

I can just imagine now, The Sun paper, and it's got a massive cover of these three men running over the rail tracks, and it says something about asylum seekers. And it is striking it is, because it is, like, the front page. With stuff like that, it's consistent isn't it, because The Sun is, like, a tabloid newspaper. You have that stereotype because of what you hear, and what is said in the papers. They come with, 'Oh, this is what's happened, and this one's escaping, and they're causing riots, and there are fights and stabbings, and they're all terrorists'. When I passed somebody...because you can tell when someone is from abroad, can't you, when you're walking down the street, you think, 'They're not from our area', and I used to be really, like, wary of them, you know, what if they attack? Because that's the picture that's been portrayed, that they're poor and they haven't got any money, so they're willing to do anything to get money, and stuff like that.

Some participants had had negative experiences of befriending new arrivals, and it was clear in a small number of cases that an extremely destructive sense of 'us and them' had built up.

You try and talk to them and they're like 'You're English, go away.'

Although they at times were clearly articulating opinions about asylum seekers specifically, it seemed at other points as though the young locals were describing a generalised 'other' or were using the term 'asylum seeker' interchangeably with a range of other descriptive categories, including 'foreigner', 'terrorist', 'Kosovan', 'migrant worker' and so on. Some did not know the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee. Some appeared not to differentiate between people who'd been born abroad but who had moved to the UK, and 'second-' or 'third-generation' people from black or ethnic minorities. It seemed that the young people, particularly those in Coventry, often simply did not speak in terms of these kinds of categories. Where they did differentiate between people, the categories they used were either confused or did not necessarily reflect whether or not a person was an asylum seeker, from an ethnic minority, from overseas and so on. Opinions often seemed to rest on more impressionistic or intangible foundations, like whether or not that person looked or felt different, whether they liked the same things, whether they had the same style or music taste, what friends thought of them, what parents thought of them, how they'd been described in a one-off media article, and so on. Difference was at once, on the one hand, very present and raw, and, on the other, somehow unimportant, confused and colourless.

In spite of these numerous confusions and misconceptions, many of the young locals were able to empathise with new arrivals to their cities and wanted, where they could, to support their integration.

I wanna help them get more established. I don't like all this... anyone who says racist stuff or anything against people coming to Peterborough.

It must be harder for them because I've lived here all my life and I know Peterborough like the back of my hand and if someone said, 'where's this place?' I'd be able to tell them. I think it would probably be quite hard to be an outsider to Peterborough, and just not knowing all the people and, like, the social view of everything. I don't really know any different I guess because I've lived here so long, I've grown up with the way people are here. And, like, you go to other cities and you realise how different they are, and what things they do different to where you live. I remember going away for about two weeks and when I got back one of the things that I remembered appreciated seeing the most was seeing a bus going by with a place on it that I knew, and that I recognised the name. So, little things like that can make quite a big difference.

I feel sorry for them, because people like that they could be bullied.

You see people who are just as genuine as everyone else and you just think, 'Fine. They're here. They just want a new start.'

Others had had extremely positive experiences of mixing with visitors and migrants from overseas.

I know quite a few Polish people, and Portuguese, a few Iraqis... most of them tend to live in this area, well a lot of them live in this area. The main place where I've met them is probably the mosque. And other than that, I've known a few who are from work. I also work in a corner shop which is owned by one of my relatives. A lot of them are very good customers there. And some of them are my neighbours. And from what I know they're really good people.

Some people that have come from other countries and other societies are really, like, really interesting, and they've got loads of interesting things to talk about.

The new arrival participants' perceptions of 'the other'

Just as the views expressed by the host group were mixed, so were those voiced by their newly arrived counterparts. It was clear to the new arrivals that the kinds of negative feelings expressed above by the young locals were fairly common currency amongst their new neighbours and the UK public at large.

The other day in the news, I heard this guy saying that all these refugee people and asylum seekers are just a waste of time and a waste of space, and they're wounding our country, and that.

They think we're eating their money. Some people, they say, 'Oh they just have to sit back and get a free house, free

money. And this is our country, not your country – and we have to work!.

This in turn fed into their own preconceptions and expectations about young people from the local community. The assumption was that young locals would be likely to behave in a superior way, would judge new arrivals harshly, would be misinformed or ignorant about the circumstances and cultures of people coming from abroad.

The British young people – I'm not saying all of them, just a few – already have an opinion that when they see you are an asylum seeker, they think about the common stereotype of an asylum seeker who comes here – he's illiterate, he doesn't understand a thing, he is just an economic migrant. They don't know why you came here. It's not easy making friends with the British.

What the people don't know is, they see black hair, they think 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker', and they put everyone as the same. They say if that guy is refugee, that means that guy with the black hair is refugee as well, so I just wish people could change their mind about seeing other people.

Personal experiences also contributed to this perception.

Actually when we people come here, what we are expecting is to interact, to socialise with people from here, you know, get to know more about them... [But] you feel uncomfortable. You are looked at as a stranger, as someone who is going to do harm to the society. Such things have happened, really. People tend to ignore you.

I have a neighbour who has a cat. He is young, he is 21. And when the cat plays outside, it comes to the garden on our front door, and when it plays there I sometimes go out and just try to pat it. The boy just gets out of his house, opens the door, calls the cat in, shuts the door! And it has happened twice. And from that time I didn't approach the cat again. Oh my god – do they think that I eat cats, where I am coming from?!

Others tried their best not to judge or feel crushed by these kinds of hostility, endeavouring instead to find some reason why local people might feel unable to accept the presence of new arrivals from overseas. The '7/7' terrorist bombings in London occurred whilst the focUS film-making was taking place, and caused some participants to reflect on the regular conflation of 'asylum seeker' with 'terrorist' in the media.

When I had just come – I came as an asylum seeker – I never knew much about how those people have lived with the white people, how they've lived with the British people, how they've lived in this society and everything, I never knew how much they were criticised. But now I know many people, many people, who look negatively on it. You have nothing you can do for that. If you need life and living, you have nothing you can do. But many people – and I don't blame them, I don't blame them really – are looking at it negatively because I think even now it's reaching a turning point that many people who came in as asylum seekers are now the people who are doing bad. I don't blame anyone to look at that negatively.

I know something about Peterborough that it didn't have the population of people from other countries till something like 10 years ago. So it's kind of new for people to see a lot of foreign people coming to their city. The next thing is, as many people come here, the crimes go up, so sometimes it gives them a bad image, if you know what I mean.

Some participants expressed confusion and ambivalence about the ways of life of those who had been born in the UK to black or ethnic minority parents, people with whom on some level they could identify but from whom on another level they felt alienated and different. Some clearly struggled to understand, manage or articulate the complexities of their own identities.

There are some kids, yeah, when they was born here, they change their culture and that and they take different culture, like if they was from Somalia or any other country, they change their culture and that, and they aint supposed to do that. They are changing the whole thing, their religion, their culture, their attitudes – the whole thing. They should stay here and learn everything, but this should be like the second country. This should be like the second country, so they should love the people, because this is where they were born, this is where they were raised, but they should go to their country every year, once a year, like in the summer holiday, like for a month or something, they should go back to learn more about their culture and everything. They shouldn't stay here for the whole time. They should go back to their country and learn a bit more and then come back and stay here.

'Born-here blacks', they go on with white people as though they are brothers and sisters, because they are really born here and everything, they have grown up with them.

Another view expressed by the new arrivals in both cities was that young English people have a great deal of freedom, sometimes too much, and they don't often either appreciate it or know what to do with it. Excessive drinking, smoking and material acquisitiveness were cited as typical characteristics of an over-indulged young generation.

I think the government, or even their parents should be careful because you see ten-year kid smoking, drinking all the time, and I've seen a lot of kids who don't go to school. So I think they should be careful with their future, I mean, smoking and drinking is not going to bring anything for them, you know.

Typical English kid, they've got everything. They're, like, used to having everything. For them, cinema and clothes and supermarket, all that, is nothing to them, but when they live in Africa for ten years and come back here, I think they'll accept it more and see how they've got more things and about how millions of kids in Africa haven't.

One of the Peterborough new arrivals had expected to be leaving modern life for the Victorian age following his dispersal from London.

I was very reluctant to come here from London thinking, 'I'll be taken to Englishmen there, what will they do to me?'. I expected people to be going with carts and ox and horses, ladies making English tea, Yorkshire cakes, ginger cakes! Really, I expected that! Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire, you know, those typical English-style places...people walking with canes, you know...

Just as was the case with the young locals, many of the new arrivals, in spite of their many negative experiences and perceptions, had a number of more positive views and experiences. Some described people from the host community as friendly and open, and the country as freer from racism than other countries.

I think one of the stereotypes of people who are actually born in Peterborough is that they're nice and friendly – not all of them, but a lot of them are. And some have their own problems but if you talk to them and let them know what's going on, then there might be a change.

This is the most best not racist country in the whole of Europe. There's more black people, so they've got used to it. In the other places there aren't a lot of black people so they think that you're weird and that.

Other countries haven't had much connection with Africa or the world, but the British, you know, the history of the British being in Africa and all that, they know the people, they know their cultures may be more than the others do. So here, you can basically do what you want, it just depends on you. You can go to the top if you want to.

Although some had experienced racism at school, they also recognised that it was not easy to generalise about the views of their classmates.

In school it's really difficult, because they're mostly white and they're mostly racist, so they don't even want to be friends with me. [But] I know a lot of white people who are really, really good. You could never say they are racist. Never.

Chapter 5: Building understanding

Foundations of a successful project

Having completed a summer of workshops, the team was able to reflect on some of the ingredients that had contributed to the smooth-running and success of the project. While many of these components were fairly straightforward to introduce or consider, they provided strong foundations for the building of understanding between the participants.

The practitioners in both cities, for example, noted the importance of finding the right venue for the workshops. In Peterborough, the workshop base was initially the Iqbal Centre, a bright, light, airy community venue, and later, a large room at the top of the local NSPCC building. The Coventry participants came together at the Broad Street Centre, a brand new and very well-equipped youth and community centre in Foleshill. Very helpful staff teams based at each of these centres gave generously of their time and local knowledge. All of the practitioners described how important it was to have a venue that felt homely, comfortable, and welcoming, with no interruptions and nobody coming in and out. The need to create a 'safe space' was key in the meeting of project objectives, in allowing the young people to feel relaxed and open and able enough, therefore, to reach out to others. The practitioners from both cities reflected in their project diaries on the ways in which the venues they had chosen met this need and came to feel 'like our space'. The location of the venues was also important. Most crucially, the young participants needed to feel safe, comfortable and confident walking through and being in the areas that surrounded the venues. The Coventry practitioners recognised, for example, that using Broad Street as a base would likely help the young participants to feel at home on the project, given that the centre was in their area and many of them already regularly attended activities there. It is possible that an early member of Peterborough's host group, by contrast, who withdrew from the project after two sessions had felt uncomfortable being in the neighbourhood in which the project venue was located. Before leaving, she had described feeling a little intimidated and out of place in the area, with a sense that 'people round here follow you'. Although it was too late to change plans, the team had also been advised that, on account of racial tensions, the vicinity of the centre could be an uncomfortable place for young black women. In the event, there were no problems with this latter point, but the team was reminded nevertheless that a happy project could depend a great deal on its taking place not only in the right venue but also in the right location.

Numbers of participants and fluctuations in participation, it was felt, could also have an impact on a project's success. Both focUS Peterborough and focUS Coventry lost participants along the way with Peterborough also gaining new ones. In terms of numbers, all of the practitioners described the challenges of facilitating such an intense and involved project with such relatively large numbers of participants. In Coventry particularly, the practitioners faced enormous challenges in organising and maintaining the interest of their group, whose behaviour was sometimes chaotic, attention-seeking and disruptive and whose attention spans were sometimes very short. Smaller numbers of participants were felt to be clearly more desirable in these kinds of circumstances. Indeed, towards the end of the project, when numbers fell away, the practitioners were pleased to be able to give the remaining participants more individual attention and support. In Peterborough, it was necessary, out of the need to meet funding requirements, that more participants be brought into the project after the start. The challenges associated with this, the disruption of a strongly-established group sense being the most central, confirmed for the team the problematic nature of fluctuating participation levels. Drop-out was also something the practitioners were obliged to manage, sometimes losing key team or cast members at very short notice. Of course, no practitioner can expect to avoid losing participants during a project, but the focUS experience confirmed to the team the need to engage a realistic and comfortable number of participants at the outset and, as far as possible, stick to it. Although it is impossible to know exactly who will walk through the door on the first morning of a project, the importance of engaging with the likelihood that participants will be as unruly as some of them were in Coventry is key. Planning numbers not only of participants themselves but also of practitioners or facilitators must relate closely to the likely characteristics of those groups targeted for participation in order for a project to in any way reach its potential.

Another small but focal element of the project in both cities, but perhaps particularly in Peterborough, was food. Sharing mealtimes gave the participants an opportunity to come together informally and 'hang out'. Important conversations took place when food was on the table, with this time of sharing allowing the participants to take forward on their own terms the things they had learnt about each other during the workshops. For some of the new arrivals, moreover, the chance to take away leftovers to eat at home met a need that seemed to be more than just practical. The basic act of sharing food in this way brought about a sense of solidarity and caring, with the

young new arrivals, in many ways so resourceful, so mature, and so necessarily independent, smiling quietly to themselves at being supported and provided for as they put the boxes of leftovers in their bags. The importance of choosing appropriate foods was also something the team had cause to reflect on during the project, because of ordering pizza when some of the participants disliked pizza, because of once overlooking the need to buy halal foods and so on.

Just as food had served as a focal point for group connection in Peterborough, the pool table enabled the Coventry participants to 'hang out' together and bond. Increasingly, it functioned as a meeting point, introducing an important element of play into the building of relationships between the young people, who gathered around it after workshops, during lunchtimes and during 'downtimes' and breaks. Sports and games can, in this way, enable young people to be together in a very simple way, with bonding not arising out of the sharing of private information but out of being team members or competitors enjoying an activity separate from personal concerns.

In a related way, for those projects that aim to bring about a sense of togetherness and connection amongst participants, an activity-filled team-building day can provide an opportunity for bonding as well as for an exciting injection of magic. The focUS participants in their respective cities met on such a day, with the Coventry groups enjoying a day of canoeing and abseiling and the Peterborough groups embarking on canoeing and raft-building at Rutland Water. The active element of the day challenged everyone to take part, giving everyone individually and the group as a whole a great feeling of accomplishment and pleasure. Largely, the activities were not ones the young people had participated in before, and to that extent everyone was on an even keel. Importantly at this early stage, then, the day provided an opportunity away from the inequalities and conflicts of everyday life for everyone to feel on the same level. In both cities, participants continued throughout the remainder of the workshops to refer to the team-building day as a truly fantastic and memorable highlight. It was a day on which any anxieties the participants might have had about meeting their new colleagues were reduced to nothing through fun, team spirit and some singularly tight and extremely glamorous wetsuits. For some participants in particular, the timing of the team-building day, in being the occasion of the groups' first meeting, was pivotal. A small number of the Peterborough new arrivals, for example, not only were non-swimmers but also had never been on boats or in water before. One fell into the water during an activity and panicked, only to be supported and 'rescued' by two fellow participants. This experience, although at first quite frightening, gave the participant concerned a powerful indicator of the supportiveness of his fellow participants. In an effervescent presentation to camera the following day, he described feeling 'so supported and safe', was full of praise for the group and in particular the two participants who had 'saved my life'. Another of the non-swimmers also fell out of her canoe but by the end was jumping from the end of it and not wanting to get out of the water. The practitioners noted that the courage these participants in particular displayed on the team-building day seemed to have impact and meaning for the group as a whole, signalling that people were taking big risks, were regarding the process of meeting and bonding to be important. The courage of this small number seemed, then, to catalyse courage and openness in the rest. One, for example, described in the practitioners' early diaries as 'the quietest in the group' revealed a flair for leadership during the team-building day, a flair which she took back into the workshops, facilitating games and activities for the group and guiding newer group members through subsequent film shoots. On first meeting, the participants were relatively shy, sticking to their original groups. The team-building day functioned as an ice-breaker, however, and allowed them to act on their curiosity about one another. The practitioners fostered this process. In Peterborough, for example, the participants were encouraged on the coach journey home to sit next to someone they didn't know and find out three things about them. This reinforced the team-building process and supported the participants in reaching out to one another.

Of course, a project's success depends on the skills, abilities and personal qualities of those who facilitate it. The non-practitioner members of the focUS team observed and admired the work of their practitioner colleagues throughout the summer, realising the extensive skills-base required for project facilitation of this kind. Training and experience in groupwork with young people, as well as a sensitivity to and understanding of asylum and immigration issues was felt to be very important. Being aware of some of the preoccupations and priorities typically expressed by young people, including those who are claiming or have claimed asylum, enabled the focUS practitioners to support and to communicate more easily with the young participants. focUS was not only about film-making but also about building a group sense amongst diverse participants, and this was no small task. Skills in participatory video facilitation were of course equally key. Conscious that the nature of their interaction both with one another and with their groups set an example to the young participants, the practitioners had to communicate well at all times, admit their mistakes and show their vulnerabilities, take risks, be honest, respectful and committed. While exploring the theme of stereotyping with the Peterborough new arrivals, for example, the

practitioners described some of the prejudices and ways of seeing they had had to address in their own lives. This level of honesty and commitment caused openness, safety, and a sense of meaningfulness to drive the film-making process. The ways in which a practitioner positions him/herself in relation to young participants, indeed, is also very important. The focUS practitioners were keen the participants should not regard them as friends. A degree of separateness was felt to be healthy and a truer reflection of the real-life dynamics of an adult-child relationship. However, the practitioners equally did not regard themselves as having a parental relationship with the young people, feeling that pursuing such a role would likely have stifled the participants' progression towards autonomy. Indeed, allowing the young participants to take a lead, whilst containing attendant feelings of things being out of control was also felt to be a necessary quality for those facilitating projects like focUS. In terms of the ways in which the participants related to the practitioners, the Coventry experience was marked by the female participants tending to gravitate towards the female practitioner, and the male participants to the male practitioner. The Coventry practitioners saw this as an indication of the importance of same-sex role models to young people, and the need, therefore, to include a facilitator of each sex on projects of this kind.

Although the quality of the focUS film product was important, the emphasis in participatory video-making is on the process. Although the practitioners very much hoped the young participants would be proud of their work, they acknowledged the importance of remaining realistic about the quality of film it is possible to produce when the participants are neither trained actors nor technicians. They recognised the need to trust that a high quality process will more often than not lead to the creation of a good film product.

Given that the project had not budgeted for media awareness training for the young participants, the focUS team felt that it was inappropriate to seek media coverage for the project, particularly where that would involve interviews with the participants. It was felt that the glare of the spotlight would likely be uncomfortable for those taking part in a project, particularly young refugees and asylum seekers, who would tend to be made vulnerable when asked to recount personal information by journalists probing for a 'human interest' story.

Although the tight timescale made the project at times very intense, from a participatory video-making point of view, it was appropriate. A project timescale must balance what needs to be achieved with what can reasonably be expected from participants in terms of time commitment. The focUS team felt that the intensive nature of the project was more effective in terms of maintaining momentum and energy than a weekend-based term-time project would have been. Although planning the project to take place during the summer holidays was a risk in terms of recruitment and retention, the team also saw that during this period, young people would more likely be at a loose end and looking for something to do. In the event, this was particularly the case for the young new arrivals, who at that time of year lacked the structure usually provided by their schools and colleges and appreciated being given a new focus.

Examples of workshop sessions

The practitioners used a variety of techniques and ran a number of sessions in order to fulfil the primary project objective of increasing understanding. In Peterborough particularly, the practitioners were extremely creative in finding ways to bring group members together and to explore key issues and themes. The aims of these sessions were varied, and included building trust between group members, facilitating participants in communicating with and getting to know one another, familiarising participants with the video equipment, creating a positive atmosphere and fostering appreciation of others, allowing participants to reflect on and monitor their progress, and giving participants a sense of the concepts and conventions of the visual medium. A key approach used in both cities was the devising of a 'team agreement' both at the outset of the project and later when the two groups came together. The team agreements enabled the young people to set their own ground-rules and to reflect on what makes a good team. Another session involved the creation of a 'Risks and Skills Graph', where participants would be encouraged to plot on a graph the skills they aimed to develop against the risks they were prepared to take in order to develop them. This graph was continually updated throughout the project allowing the participants and the practitioners to keep in touch with their own aims, needs, vulnerabilities, and progress. Another early session involved the young participants drawing a map of 'their city', incorporating the places they liked to go to, the places they knew best, the places they felt uncomfortable in and so on, and then making a presentation to camera about their map. This session allowed the participants to reflect on their relationship with the city and its inhabitants, providing a foundation for later discussions on community, belonging and stereotypes. A version of the 'Rizla Game' was played in both cities, where each group member had the characteristics of a particular type of person written on a piece of paper on his/her forehead, and through asking questions of others in the group, would guess his/her identity. The descriptions used on the papers were drawn

from discussions the participants had had about the kinds of people they had seen or met in their cities, groups ranging from skaters to muslims, from old people to 'chavs', from gypsies to students. The session required that participants provide three positive and three negative statements typically made about the character displayed on their colleague's forehead, with the session leading, then, to fruitful discussions about labelling and stereotyping. Other sessions encouraged the participants to explore the kinds of skills and experiences they were hoping to accrue during the course of the project, as well as the many things they were learning. focUS Peterborough's 'Magic Tree', for example, was a display picturing an enormous tree covered in leaves the participants had filled with their reflections on the things they had learnt. That city's 'Project Journey' display allowed the participants to consider where they were and where they hoped to be by the end of the project. Sessions that resulted in the creation of some kind of display not only added colour to the workshops, but also functioned as a visible record of aims, progress and things learnt. Peterborough's appreciation games, moreover, gave the participants a memento of the process to take away with them. One of these sessions involved each group member in writing on a piece of paper taped to the back of everyone else a positive quality or something they liked about that person. This was a very affirming experience for the participants. One, for example, talked of how he planned to take his paper home and stick it on his wall.

Developing skills and qualities

In order to build understanding between the groups of young participants, in order to enable them to flesh out or challenge the kinds of preconceptions they held at the beginning of the project, the team aimed to facilitate change on a number of related levels. One of these was in fostering the development of skills and personal qualities on the part of the young participants. It was felt that without confidence in themselves, without a practical awareness of what makes a good team, without knowing how to question their own and others' views in a constructive way, without understanding the process and potential of video-making, the young people would be far less likely to enjoy meaningful understanding with their new colleagues.

Confidence

In terms of building the participants' self-belief, the project was successful virtually across the board. When interviewed at the end of the project, almost all of the film-makers reported feeling a new sense of confidence as a result of having participated, whether this was in talking to camera, in starting conversations with people they wouldn't normally speak to, in sharing their views with others, or in taking risks and making mistakes.

I used to get really nervous, but now it's like I can say anything I like. I really appreciate that, being able to speak and being able to express my view, because before I didn't like it. I used to be so quiet! I wanted to say something, but I just never did. My teachers used to say, 'We know you've got good ideas – just put your hand up!'. And now I can't wait for Year 13 so I can say, 'Now I've got a view!'

I think I've got more confidence. If I was, like, in front of three people...or eight people, I wouldn't have been that confident. But now I can just laugh, make a joke, talk to someone while other people are listening. I couldn't used to do that. I used to be a bit quiet. I don't know, it's just given me a bit more confidence.

Some noted that the courage it took to speak in front of a camera brought far-reaching rewards in terms of their general levels of confidence. Overcoming their inhibitions in this area, they felt, opened up possibilities, encouraged them to believe in themselves in other respects as well as this one.

You know when we first did that Godiva thing, I felt as if everyone was watching me and thinking, 'What a goon!', but now if I did it, I think I'd feel better. I think I've come out of my shell a bit more.

For many, finding the courage to be themselves and knowing that they would find acceptance within the group was enormously powerful.

It was that your opinion was valid and that you should give it. There's nobody in the world that is just like you. There are those that are similar, but there are not others that are just like you. You are unique. That motivated me to present my views. I should just act myself because that is who I am. I cannot hide myself. I cannot pretend to be someone else.

Others realised the importance of pushing themselves beyond their comfort zone, describing afterwards the self-belief which comes from finding the confidence to take risks.

What is the point of doing things, if you are already the best at them, if you are already doing them great? You just do them and make mistakes and the next time you do it great.

For one participant, confidence came from finally finding her loudest voice when directing a shoot. For another, it came from praying in front of the group and having his religious beliefs and practices quietly accepted. Another, still, found confidence in being taken at face value and treated as 'normal' by the group, in spite of experiencing a number of personal difficulties in his life outside the project.

Two of the participants viewed their levels of self-belief in less straightforward ways, one noting that his confidence fluctuated during the project depending on whether he found agreement with others in the group, and the second observing that her confidence levels always dipped when she met new people.

Group-working

Another important skill the young film-makers were able to explore and develop was team-working. Having to work out and realise a film idea over a period of just a few weeks was an immense challenge, one that tested the groups' sense of what it really means to co-operate, to communicate, to collaborate. Many described the openness, sensitivity, and self-restraint they developed whilst working with their co-film-makers.

I've learnt to be patient with people. I've learnt to be diplomatic – oh my god, I've learnt to be diplomatic! I was diplomatic before but I've got the terms to use to settle a person down and reassure him.

I've learnt that if you all communicate better, and be friends and don't argue all the time, you can get more work done, and help each other more, instead of arguing, taking the piss out of each other, not listening to the person that's talking.

Creating a film with a group of 'strangers' was at times challenging for the young participants, many of whom experienced a substantial shift in their understanding of what it meant to work as a team.

I think everybody in life thinks what he or she knows is the best. It's like to me, I thought I knew what was the best. But when someone brings on an idea, you have to look at the idea, and sometimes you really have to agree that someone's idea is better than yours. I've learnt to take on other people's ideas.

Video as a tool

The participants learnt a wide range of video skills during the project, from the technical, through those related to planning, to the conceptual. They developed skills in framing, manual focus, lighting and 'white balance', exposure, sequencing, storyboarding, location planning, timekeeping, appearing and interviewing on camera, and the roles and vocabulary of the film crew. Some participants, of course, picked up these skills with greater facility than others, particularly where those others, for example, had joined the project at a later date. Many talked in interviews of the importance of the educational element of the project and the sense of possibility this had brought them. Most had taken risks to reach their goals, appearing on camera whilst feeling nervous and self-conscious, allowing the use of footage in which they cringed to watch themselves, asking for help and revealing vulnerability in front of the group, even speaking in a loud voice and being a leader when this did not come naturally. The risks taken by the participants were testament both to their increasing confidence and to their sense of commitment to the project, as well as signalling the practitioners' capacity to facilitate the creation of a 'safe space'.

Many of the participants reflected on the scope of participatory film-making for bringing people together, with the final product being seen as constituting a powerful record of that process. Some described the importance of everyone having an assigned and valuable role within the film crew. Some saw that overcoming the challenges associated with creating a film gave one courage and a general sense of possibility. Some felt it was simply good fun.

It's helped our group. When we first came together you could always feel there was a little bit of tension at the very first meeting time. But I mean after the day had finished, it was like we were one big group.

I think it's really effective, because it lets everyone communicate on one thing, it gives everyone a job to do, it lets people do the stuff they enjoy. And also new challenges. If you can challenge one thing, you can challenge another thing. If you can overcome one thing you can overcome another. Doing something together where you have to bring

ideas together and build something together – that brings people together.

I think it's really, really, effective, because it's a method of recording what progress you make. It's a way to bring people together. It's a form of media that can show things like... it's a good way to show your opinions and make it interesting – everyone's opinions. And, like, it brings everyone together. It's fun as well – that's the main thing. I think everyone at some point has wanted to have a go at it, even if it's just to make home videos, it's just fun, so it just pulls everything together.

One participant noted the capacity of film to communicate a powerful message to an audience about other worlds and ways of seeing.

One thing you've got to make sure is that you get the feeling inside of people, so that when people are watching it, they can put themselves in the same position as the persons in the film, so they can actually feel what is going on in the film and in real life. Then you make something that gives people an idea of how things are or what problems other people might have, and you make it look so real they might understand something and try to solve that problem.

Another participant, in spite of feeling that video-making was a powerful way of bring people together and in spite of having developed a great deal of confidence in front of the camera, described the shortcomings and potential problems of the process.

It's effective in bringing people together, in that you film them together, you film them in the process of your life. But people cannot express themselves fully. If you write, you can write something very well to express yourself, but sometimes I feel shy about talking about the views that I have. I think video has some disadvantages in that it captures things from the outside, it does not capture things from the inside. And also it's a sophisticated machine and you really have to know what buttons to push. With light, you can be filming all day and when you put it in the TV, you see it's just a blur or you forgot to do the white balance again. If you had a pen and paper, it's so easy. Whereas a video, it's true it captures images and everything, but you have to have a knowledge of using it and that's the main limitation. And you have to have a camera, and it's expensive, especially the digital new ones.

Reaching out and bridging the gap

After meeting, the groups worked hard not only on their film ideas but also on getting to know one another better. Tracing this process, along with the ways in which the film-makers managed their sense of 'the other', was a key part of the research.

In Peterborough, the film-makers grew close and worked extremely well together as a group. At times, they referred to themselves as a family or a group of housemates, and it was clear the fond regard in which they held each other. The route to understanding was a balancing act for many of them, however. In terms of overcoming and processing the meanings of difference, the young participants were managing a range of sometimes contradictory impulses. For example, whilst wanting to reach out to everyone in the group, and to know and be known by each one, some described feeling more comfortable with those with whom they felt they shared cultural common ground, such as religious belief, language, or ethnicity. This was the case for participants from both groups.

Because half of them I can talk to in my native tongue it's really easy, it's like you already feel the connection over there. And we are from Africa and we have certain things that we do together and certain things that we don't do, and there's a pattern of recognition. You don't feel ashamed when you do something that we recognise as normal, rather than if we do something that boys and girls from UK think is weird, freak, or something.

I think if there are people who know more about you in that respect, like of culture and how it goes at home and stuff like that, you're more likely to get on with them, even if you don't know them.

Similarly, the need to accept others at face value, and to be and feel 'normal' was pitched against the difficulties the young film-makers sometimes encountered in exploring and expressing differences in culture, language and life experience. Treating everyone equally and as though they were the same as oneself, and emphasising the importance of openness and acceptance appeared to be one of the ways in which the young participants coped with differences within the group. Many of the film-makers, particularly the newer arrivals, welcomed the opportunity to be taken not as asylum seekers, refugees, 'black people', 'others', but simply as human beings and fellow film-makers with a movie to make.

From my experience, when you are out, you just want to feel for one minute, one hour, that you are just like everybody else. And what the Home Office wants, the problems you are having with the Home Office, you want to forget them for just one hour, two hours, just to feel normal.

Indeed, for some of the young new arrivals, keeping their identity as refugees and asylum seekers separate from the ways in which their new colleagues or new communities saw them, was very important. The new arrivals appeared to discuss their experiences of immigration far more freely with one another prior to the groups meeting up, than they did afterwards with their new colleagues.

If I met someone on the street, I wouldn't go as far as telling him or her I am an asylum seeker, but if I went to these important offices where they need to know how I am in this country, of course you have to bring it up.

One of the new arrivals felt that being identified as a refugee could sometimes be uncomfortable and undesirable, particularly given his sense that asylum seekers and refugees were being increasingly linked in the public imagination with terrorism and crime.

I'm a person who is not afraid of talking about that. That's how I came in and that's how I'm living here, because of refugee status. I don't have any problem with that. It's only you feel a problem when people look at people who came in as refugees doing bad things. Because definitely my colour and everything will tell that I'm not originally from here, and so if someone asked me where I come from, then I have to tell him. But in situations where someone is asking you negatively due to situations that have been going on, like the terrorism, you feel uncomfortable telling that person. You just tell him, 'No, I have no comment for that', or something like that, 'Maybe I'll tell you later. I'll tell you some other time'. Because maybe that person may turn into being against you or something.

However, leaving difference at the door in this way meant that, as a feature of the group experience, it was susceptible to remaining unexplored. A number of the host film-makers, for example, felt awkward about broaching certain issues with the new arrivals, some of whom, in turn, felt unable to convey themselves and their life experiences in a true and open way.

I think although it's opened up with them and we've started talking, I still haven't reached that point where I can ask them anything. I still feel a bit like, "Oh, should I ask them that?". I still feel you need to be properly close with them, because I don't want to offend them.

I asked [one of the new arrivals] where she was from and what it was like there and why she'd come to Britain and what she was studying, and all these different things. So it did come up in conversation. But some people just point blank don't want to talk about it. I just don't talk to some people about where they came from and what happened there because they obviously don't want to talk about it, so I don't want to aggravate them anymore.

Some of the host group, however, did feel that the project had given them the confidence to ask more personal questions, to talk more openly with their new colleagues, and to judge when it was appropriate to do so: 'It's easier because we've got to know each other better. And because I know them, I'm able to talk to them.'

Many of the group felt that being part of a project, organisation, or common activity was important in the building of friendships with others.

You cannot find someone on the street and say, 'Let's be friends'. But when you are in certain organisations or projects, it's easy to meet people.

If you had, say, a guy from Iran and a guy who was born here being best friends, I think that'd be great. Because whenever you see groups, or in college you have a group that are, say, from here and a group that are asylum seekers, somehow there's a distinctive line – you'll see it. They'll separate from each other. But if there's more work and there's more groups and projects, I think you wouldn't notice who's from here and who's from abroad. I'd be up for that – more projects with different groups!

In Coventry, the process of building links within the group raised different issues. In some cases, young 'host' participants with a level of knowledge and understanding of asylum and immigration issues did not link the

friends they were making over the summer with terms like 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker', terms which for some were quite negatively loaded. Politicised labels such as 'refugee' were virtually never used in reference to other group members. Instead, the main source of perceived difference and the main category of judgment used by the participants in relation to one another came in terms of competing youth subcultures. Indeed, at times, the project was as much about overcoming prejudices towards 'goths' and 'gangstas' as about those towards asylum seekers and refugees or the 'host' community. The theme of navigating difference was, therefore and nevertheless, crucial.

Before I met them, if I heard the word 'goth' I used to think of a person with black make-up, long black hair, black clothes and everything – a weird person. But now, when I see a goth, I just see K_____ and L_____ laughing together'.

I thought she'd be really horrible because she's a goth and all dressed in black and all horrible stuff. But when, like, we started getting to know her, she's quite nice.

Before you meet any person, when you hear about them, you always think something about them. You expect something about them about the way they are and whatever. When we met [the goths], they were, like, completely different than how we thought of them. I wouldn't say they're bad, I'd say they are different. I don't agree with the way they live their lifestyle, the way they dress, but still they are people, so I wouldn't always think when I see them that they're bad. They are just different.

Because of the way they're dressed, because of their hats and everything, like gangstas, I thought they'd be, like, bullies, if you get what I mean. But once I met them, I got on with them and everything. They're all nice, and they're nothing like...they probably are gangstas but they're not them sort of gangstas, the gangstas that beat up people.

One participant was not entirely able to leave behind his preconceptions.

I trust K_____ and L_____ and that, because I see them and I take them as people. But I don't trust all of them.

Some of Coventry's host participants seemed however to merge their new colleagues' identities as self-styled 'gangstas' with their ethnicity or skin colour. At times during discussions, some of the host group would appear somehow evasive, describing the new arrivals as 'not really my type of people that I hang around with'. Very possibly, they felt they had little in common with their new colleagues because they saw themselves as belonging to a different youth subculture. It is also possible, though, that this was a smokescreen for racist views, that the young locals felt more able to express their sense of difference by rooting it in youth subculture debates than attributing it to their colleagues' ethnicity. The links between 'gangsta' style and black hip-hop culture perhaps provided the participants with a kind of by-word, perhaps made 'gangsta' and 'black' synonymous in their minds. Perhaps they did not even realise themselves the origins of their prejudices. Importantly, although discussions frequently revolved around the notion of youth subcultures, judgements were not always expressed in these terms. In attempting to communicate her understanding of stereotyping and in admitting her own initial prejudices, the participant below, for example, betrays a reflex to 'other' her new colleagues as 'them people' or as 'coloureds'. 'Beating up people', linked at other times by the same participant to 'gangsta' status, is here linked to being black.

Once I first met them, those boys, I thought, 'Ah, I don't think I'm going to get on with these.' But I have, I've got on with them. And you know people say, 'Ah, they beat up people round the streets and everything' – they aren't like that at all. They think that. Just say that a couple of coloured go beating up other people, they think that the whole of, like, them people do it, but they don't.

Interestingly, one of the new arrival participants felt that the host group had more to learn from his group than the other way around. The fact that the young locals were part of prevailing British culture meant that a Somali ethnic identity would always be, he felt, more exotic, more 'other', more 'strange'. His view clearly has implications for the meaningfulness of framing integration and community cohesion as a 'two-way street'.

We might not have learnt that much from them because they are like ordinary people, English people, and we see them everyday. But they might have learnt something about us, about our background and culture. They might have learnt that about us. And how we live, and those sort of things. But we can't really learn how they might live and how they are and how their everyday life is.

The theme of youth subcultures interestingly spilled over at times into the ways in which the participants viewed new arrivals to their city. Sometimes, for example, new arrivals were seen as 'other' because of not fitting in with a particular youth subculture.

If they haven't been in Coventry that long, they're going to be different, they won't wear the fashion that everyone else would wear. They get the mick taken out of them.

At times, cultural difference was linked to personal appearance and style, with the young locals conflating their culturally or racially-based prejudices with their perceptions of youth 'in-' and 'out-crowds'. The way a person dressed, for example, indicated whether or not they were likely to be a 'cool' person to be with, and ways of dressing under scrutiny included traditional or national dress as much as the wearing of Adidas trainers and Nike caps.

If they come in saris and stuff then probably no-one will want to know them, but if they come dressed in nice night stuff, then, yeah, people will want to talk to them. So it's not about their colour or their look or anything, it's about the way they dress.

We mainly speak to people who dress the same way we do.

In spite of their differences and preconceptions, some of the participants noted that friendships could build on the simplest of foundations.

At lunchtime everybody just talks to each other. And while we were doing scenes and making up shots, we were all just having a laugh and this and that, and I got to know people better, started talking, making a joke about someone. And them little things just build up into friendships.

Language

Barriers associated with language were strongly expressed in both cities, particularly in Coventry. Some of the participants' comments came on the back of experiences they had had during the project. Others remembered earlier experiences where language had been an issue, experiences that had contributed to expectations and preconceptions they had had about meeting others with a different linguistic heritage on the project. One of the main themes raised was that the lack of a common language or the speaking of languages other than English was an obstacle to friendship, was bewildering, excluding, even threatening. Some of the new arrivals, for example, described the language-related problems they had experienced in the past in settling and in building friendships.

If you don't know the language, everything is difficult. I mean, who is going to be your friend if they know you don't understand what they are saying?

When I came here I didn't know many people, I couldn't speak English much and some people have been nice but some people have just used it, 'he can't speak English, let's get money out of him'. When they see that you don't speak English, they look down on you.

For some of the young Coventry locals, lacking a common language with new arrivals in the past had fed a strongly negative perception of migrants and people speaking languages other than English.

If you try to speak to them, if they come to your school and you try and speak to them, they can speak English but they don't bother. That's what really gets on my nerves. It's like I worked in a place that was full of Indians, I'm sorry it was revolting. Ugh! They'd start off in English and then half way through the conversation it would go to their language, and you're like, 'Eh? I thought you were speaking to me there'. It got really nasty and I hated it.

When asked his opinion about how well locals and new arrivals were integrated in his city, one of the Coventry locals described language difference as a central problem.

I don't think they do mix because some people want to speak their own language and some people don't know their language, so they won't get on well.

Another participant related this perception of language difference to the project itself.

I think if you put people together from different nationalities and who don't know each other and don't speak the same language, it's harder to communicate. If you put 20 Somalis together, I think they'd communicate quite well. If you put 10 Somalis and 10 British people, I don't think they'll communicate that well.

Although all of the participants on the project could understand and communicate in English to a certain level, some of the new arrivals chose to speak other shared languages too, most notably Somali and Swahili. This was, at times, a source of conflict between the groups. For the new arrivals, speaking in a language they knew well with others who shared it was a very bonding experience. Seeking out commonality and 'at-homeness' in this way was, of course, reassuring to those finding their place in a new city, an affirmation of their cultural identity in a climate not always friendly towards it. Although many were keen to improve their English language skills, recognising the importance of this for integration, some simply expressed themselves more fluently in languages other than English.

Because half of them I can talk to in my native tongue it's really easy, it's like you already feel the connection over there.

Some of the host participants regretted the difficulties that lacking a common language meant for them, however, when making friends with their new arrival colleagues.

She's nice. She's a bit quiet, but I think she's a nice friendly person, and if I could speak in her language she'd probably have quite a bit to say. But it's a bit of a shame that I can't really talk to her very much because I know she's a nice person.

One of the Peterborough new arrivals reflected on the disadvantages as well as the benefits of remaining within a linguistic comfort zone.

One of the advantages [of the new arrivals group] is I feel comfortable when I talk with them. If I have problems with my English when I'm talking, they will understand because they have problems with English as well. And the disadvantage is when we go out and we want to try and communicate with someone, they might say, 'Okay, you're English is not very good, how are you going to do this?'. The advantage with the other group is it's their language. People understand them much better when we're trying to make the film.

However, for the Coventry locals, the tendency of the new arrivals group to lapse into Somali was discomfiting and seen as exclusive. Indeed, contrary to expectation, it seemed that the young locals were both intimidated by and less articulate than their bright multi-lingual new colleagues.

The people that we're with, I think they can speak, like, four different languages. And so, just say they're having a conversation with us, and because we don't understand the other words that they know, they could have, like, a private conversation with their friends.

The new arrivals also recognised these problems.

Yesterday, the girls were angry about us. They thought we were saying something about them. We said 'spot' in our language, and it means something for us, yeah, and they thought we meant they'd got spots, and they were, like, 'Who's got spots? Who you calling spotty face?'. And we were like, 'We wasn't chatting about you, we were talking in our language'. And they were so angry.

It is quite hard when you speak two languages or three languages to speak one language now and then switch it. It just comes out. You don't know, but the words just come out. Especially when you're with Somali people and you speak English and you just switch to a Somali word or whatever.

For some of the new arrivals, however, having a 'private conversation' seemed to be an important part of maintaining a strength derived of cultural solidarity. Where they were outnumbered by 'locals' in almost every other area of life – at school, at football practice and so on – having the opportunity to enjoy a critical mass was perhaps understandably seized upon by the new arrivals.

If [one of the new arrivals] was talking Somali and [the young locals] said to me, 'Can you explain what they're saying?', I couldn't, like, tell them, I couldn't share that. Because it's our language.

Indeed, the importance of language to cultural heritage and to a person's sense of themselves was particularly strongly expressed by the Coventry new arrivals. It was clear that their status as new arrivals obliged them in a sense to juggle identities, to form a worldview which incorporated numerous sometimes conflicting elements.

When I'm at school, I speak English all day, because I'm the only Somali at school. So being here and speaking Somali with the people I know, it makes me feel good. If you talk English all day, you're going to forget Somali. If you forget your language, how are you Somali. How are people going to know that you're Somali? What are you?

Two years ago I went [back to Somalia]. I couldn't...I didn't speak, you know, a lot of Somali, so they used to, kind of, bully me, you know, 'How come you forget your language?'

Although differing language traditions were mainly described in terms of barriers, they were also seen, by some, as an ice-breaker, that sharing words from different languages and asking another person about their language could be seen as a helpful way to open a new conversation.

Because they're from a different country, they all speak Somali or something, you can start speaking to them. That's what I did when I was on holiday. There were Dutch people and I just started speaking to them saying, 'How do you say this? How do you say that?', and I became friends with them.

Aspirations and looking to the future

In the minds of many of the participants, a new sense of possibility opened up as a result of having taken part in the project. For some, career and educational choices had been affected.

I really wanted to go into law, but from doing this and because I'm doing AS media, things have changed. I want to go more into the media side now.

I've been thinking, when I go to college, yeah, I'm gonna take media. Because at first I didn't even want to look at media, I hated media so much, but now, I kind of feel, 'Pick media! Pick media! Pick media!'

I love film-making and I love being able to be in front of a camera. And I told you before that I wanted to study forensic science, but when I was looking at the subjects on the university books, I actually seen that you can study forensic science and film-making, both together on one course. At the beginning I just wanted to study forensic science, but this project was so nice that what happened was I thought may be I'd go for forensic science and film-making.

Some participants developed other kinds of specific aims as result of doing the project.

In the past I never wanted to be an actor, but now I think I've got a chance of at least becoming an actor. It's easier now that I've done this project.

Some talked of feeling more motivated, both in terms of their educational or career goals, but also in terms of life generally.

I think the project has motivated me to go on with my career. I didn't do any maths practice, but as I started doing the project, I started taking my maths practice and doing it, because I was going on with the project, everyday getting up at 8 in the morning, being there on time and getting the job done at a specific time. All that has made me to go on with my ideas of finishing A Levels, then going to university, because they have motivated me that in life you can do anything. I knew that before, but they reminded me of it, that in life you can do anything, that even though you are limited with resources, that should not stop you from achieving your goals.

I'd like to do more video, like during the holidays, and on projects like this. And not necessarily only video. For now, I'm open to all kinds of projects, now that I've seen this.

Indeed, a number of participants expressed a general excitement about the future, describing the ways in which the project had encouraged them to imagine new possibilities.

[One of the other participants] and me were going to try and set something up, something like this, for next year. It's opened up another route for me to go on, if I wanted to.

The meanings of understanding

The young film-makers were undoubtedly touched by their experience on the project. For many, it was clearly powerfully mind-opening and extremely rewarding, allowing them to make the kinds of connections both socially and in terms of learning and understanding they would not necessarily have made otherwise.

All what we thought before has changed, so we have kind of questioned our own opinions. Like what we thought about bullying or different races or even different styles and dress senses, it's all changed. Don't judge a book by its cover really. That's what I've learnt.

Everyone has totally become one group now, and I actually have to think about who I was in the group with before to be able to distinguish them one from the other.

In Peterborough particularly, there were a number of examples of cross-group connection. One of the young locals went along with one her new arrival colleagues to the latter's church. This new arrival participant talked during the project of her wish to become a pastor, and it was clear that the girls' decision to attend church together in this way constituted a meaningful bond. They both talked of it afterwards and were clearly proud and happy they had taken the leap. Other participants swapped mobile numbers, chatted online or walked home together after workshops. Connectedness was sometimes evident in very small things. One of the Peterborough participants, for example, was very tactile by nature, and while initially his fellow participants appeared to be awkward around this, by the end, they were sharing hugs and sitting closely together. A sense of connectedness between the Coventry groups also emerged, with participants from different groups sitting together during workshops, casually listening to instructions with arms draped around one another and heads leant on one another's shoulders.

Many of the host young people were able to reassess their views about asylum and immigration, to complement their previous perceptions with information, and with the kinds of understanding generated by personal connection.

It's changed my conception of people on the streets, because it's sort of like having an inside view. I've managed to open up that closed part of my mind. It's changed my view on people that are coming in to the city, because they need help. It's a bit of a contradiction if Britain says 'We do accept asylum seekers', and you've come from a rough country, really, really bad, but then when you walk around in the street, the social atmosphere may not be as good. It's made me empathise with them because I've known what they've come from and what they've got to go through to be accepted in society, and the things that they're going to have to learn. It's like learning to walk again really.

I didn't know much about asylum seekers and stuff like that... [but] they're just trying to find peace because it's really bad back at home, and that's why they come here. I was really scared for [one of the young new arrivals] because he was living alone and I think services were saying to him, 'Where do you want to live? Leicester or Sheffield?', and I was, like, 'You have to start your life all over again? That's not nice. Why can't you just stay here?'. And he said, 'Yeah, they might remove me to Sheffield'. So I was trying to look from his view, and I was thinking, 'That's not fair on them, is it?'. It's opened my eyes a bit more about their lifestyle, and how they find it, and how scary it is. Because if somebody comes in alone, they don't know what they're doing. Like [one of the young new arrivals] was telling me, he's doing everything mostly himself and he's only 17! I was thinking, 'Oh my god, I wouldn't want that on my head at that age!' – well this age, because I'm 17 as well.

One of the host participants noted that the opportunity the project had provided for more prolonged contact with the other group had been decisive.

You have, like, a narrow-minded view about one thing because of what you keep on hearing consistently, the same message. If it was a matter of two or three days, my view would have been the same about immigration, but now it's like two weeks and we've been in different places together, like for lunch we all go together and we sit there and talk, and that's why I've opened up a bit more. I've got to know them and my views have changed. I think it wouldn't have changed if it was only a matter of two days.

Some, particularly amongst the new arrivals, struggled to balance their more recently-formed positive perceptions with the knowledge that for every friendly and open person they met, a hostile, rude, or ignorant one was just around the corner.

Not everyone's the same. There might be good people here in Peterborough, but when you go out on the street, you see a lot of bad people. But I wish all the people in Peterborough would be the same as these people that I'm working with right now because they're really great.

The nature of the project's successes was by no means straightforward. The entrenched nature of prevailing hostile public opinion on the issue of asylum was, for some participants, clearly still very powerful, for example. In the following statement, one of the participants struggles to connect the personal with the political, to link the new friends she has made on the project with terms like 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker', and with the negative imagery which often characterises these groups.

You have this picture of asylum seekers, wearing, like, tatty clothes, and probably having blood on their head, and coming running proper scared with terror on their faces, and then you look at people who are dressed like us, having a laugh, and making jokes – you do not think that goes together. And I suppose that image is quite strong about the asylum seekers with terror on their faces. And even though I got to talk to these lot, it's still hard to take that out of your head, because you keep on seeing it.

In some cases, the project seemed to have affected the young peoples' views with respect to individuals, with respect to their fellow participants, but did not cause them to question the validity of the stereotypes which had informed their initial preconceptions. The dilemmas associated with introducing asylum and immigration, as a direct theme, are relevant to this discrepancy in the young people's understanding. Rather than emphasising potentially divisive issues, the practitioners felt it was more appropriate to work with issues with which everyone could identify or which everyone had in common. These included themes of community, belonging, and prejudice. However, without actually naming asylum as an issue specifically, it was not easy to address some of the host participants' strongly-expressed and misconceived views on the matter. Troublingly, for example, there was no space or appropriate time to challenge the extreme views about Kosovans expressed by some of the Coventry locals. It is likely that, while they may have reached a kind of understanding with the focUS new arrivals through rubbing shoulders with them for a few weeks, some of the focUS host participants left the project with the same prejudices, preconceptions and fears of others they harboured at the beginning. This, it seemed, was the difference between 'hanging out' and 'finding out', between an event of meeting between 'strangers' which results in meaningful understanding through the exchange of accurate information and one which allows misconceptions to persist or grow worse. The focUS team's decision to generalise notions of belonging and community during the workshops rather than relate them specifically to asylum very possibly helped the development of understanding between the groups in one way while hindering it in others.

Although many of the participants, particularly in Peterborough, described and demonstrated the ways in which they had engaged with themes of difference and understanding during the project, divisions still existed between the groups at the very end of both cities' workshops. Flushed with the success and relief of reaching the 'rough edit' stage of the final film, for example, the Peterborough practitioners noticed on the last day of the project, as they pressed 'play' on the video recorder and turned to see the reactions of the participants, that, bar one person, all were sitting according to their original groups. In Coventry, the scrapping and arguing that had characterised the joint group from its early stages boiled over on the final day, with a big argument breaking out between one of the Somali boys and one of the local girls. The Coventry practitioners felt this had come about for a number of reasons, one of which being that the participants were expressing in other ways the sadness and anxiety they were feeling about the ending of the project. However, they also noted that the conflict was a likely reflection of the participants' withdrawal into their familiar groups, that the end of the project had led, in Fran's words, to a certain 'recircling of the wagons'. Instances of prejudice, disrespect and stereotyping occurred in both of the cities right up until the end of the project. Tension between two of the participants in Peterborough, for example, led one of them to break down to the practitioners and claim he just couldn't get along with Pakistani boys. Of course, focUS aimed to increase understanding, to humanise 'the other' rather than necessarily to create friendships, and the team understood that there was a difference between these two things. It is possible that group projects in general will tend to trace a certain trajectory, one which sees group members' relationships naturally rise and fall, improve, grow complex and possibly deteriorate. It is also possible that the tensions and misunderstandings that characterised the focUS project at certain times came about simply because of personality clashes rather than anything to do with ethnicity or asylum. However, the divisions and conflicts between the groups of participants caused team members to reflect on the limits of projects of this kind and the importance of problematising outcomes rather than blithely ticking boxes. As ICAR's *Understanding the Stranger* (2004:58) researchers noted, 'Promoting understanding between local people and asylum seekers is neither easy, nor straightforward. There will

always be people who don't like 'strangers'.

Building understanding between groups of 'strangers' is a process that can raise as many questions as it answers. The experience of focUS caused the team to reflect not only on how successful their methods were in building understanding between the participants, but also and fundamentally on what they understood by understanding itself. While the multi-layered complexity of the project's aims and objectives could be viewed as simply over-ambitious, it is also the case that building understanding between groups takes time and is characterised by about-turns and regressions in learning and change as much as by openness and progress. Understanding itself is changeable and inconsistent, varying from one day to the next, affected by any number of experiences and accidents. It is not a skill or piece of knowledge that can be learnt and fixed for life, rather a moving process than a thing. It can, it seems, be a matter of degree, with individuals occupying at different times varying points along an overall continuum. It is possible, for example, that the young focUS participants will not realise the full impact of what they learnt during the video-making workshops until well into the future. The experience of the project confirmed to the team that understanding could also itself be understood and defined in different ways. On one level, it can be seen as a kind of familiarity, a tacit sympathy with others, an ease that arises over time, indirectly, laterally, accidentally, almost by osmosis. Seen another way, however, understanding stems only from conscious self-questioning and the sharing of explicit information. To understand is to realise, to grasp meanings consciously and with the front of the mind. As is clear from the preceding chapters, the nature of the understanding generated amongst the focUS participants reflected both these notions at different times and amongst different individuals, some building a more tacit familiarity that did not overtly challenge their beliefs with others asking direct questions and receiving direct answers. Indeed, however, on a practical level, the development of understanding within a group project setting depends on the desires and willingness of those involved to share personal thoughts and experiences, and this can neither be taken for granted nor forced. Even where people could be said to understand one another, moreover, there is no guarantee that they will get along. As was demonstrated on the focUS project, young people tend to understand and inhabit the world differently from adults, using different categories to describe others, having the kinds of perspectives on politically-charged issues that reflect their different energies, their different ways of seeing, and their relative lack of experience. Typically, and as was demonstrated on the project, they will often not link the personal with the political, will not question overarching perspectives and stereotypes on the basis of personal associations. New friends will either tend to be regarded as exceptions to the rule or not be consciously thought of in the context of that 'rule'. For a project to facilitate just one or two small steps along the way to a more explicit understanding of an issue by groups of young people, then, is no small triumph. In the face of these numerous constraints and complexities, it is clear that focUS, with its unusual structure and the imagination, commitment and good communication of its team members, was successful in many and profound ways.

Wider impact

In addition to its aims to effect change at a personal level, to facilitate the development of skills, personal qualities and understanding in the young participants, the focUS project aimed also to achieve an impact at local and national levels. As noted at the beginning of this story, influencing the policy and practice of local stakeholders in each of the focUS cities, for example, by triggering related community cohesion activities and projects, was a key aim, as was influencing government policy on refugee integration, community cohesion and race equality. In addition, although there was limited scope either to effect or measure this, the team also hoped to engage the families, friends and communities of the young participants as far as possible in the issues raised on the project. It was intended that the project should have a 'ripple effect' by which learning might spread outwards from those who had directly participated, and thereby instigate a more generalised and embedded shift in understanding.

As a result of short interviews, discussions, and film screening feedback forms, the team was able to establish to a preliminary extent the ways in which the project had effected local change, had touched those not directly participating, from city stakeholders to the families and friends of the participants. Most of those involved in these discussions recognised the kinds of issues the young participants had endeavoured to address in their films, with many describing the fragmented and fractured nature of their communities along lines of race, ethnicity and cultural background. A brother of one of the participants, for example, talked of clashes between Iranians and Kurds in his area.

Just because we're muslims, they think we'll all get along, but they were wrong about that. Because where they've come from, they've been killing and fighting, and then they come here and they think it's alright to do that here too. Where they're from, they've never seen girls with blond hair.

Families and friends of other participants saw these kinds of separation and tension as almost inevitable.

There are always gaps between people from different communities. Differences in language, interests, and cultural views and beliefs all make reaching out difficult. Black people and Asians tend to have a conflict between them. There's usually lots of fights.

Unfortunately it is fairly unique to see people from different communities choosing to mix – there is a lot of ignorance here.

Others, in their responses, evoked the gulf of understanding and lack of connectedness particularly between locals and new arrivals within the city.

New arrivals tend to stick to themselves. They totally blank people, but I don't know what they've been through to get here, so I don't judge them.

Peterborough is taking more foreigners than it was if you look a year or two back. It is quite a large jump actually. But when people see them, they class them all as one, just as 'immigrants' or 'asylum seekers' etc. I think awareness needs to be raised about who people actually are.

A friend of another of the participants noted that media coverage on issues relating to asylum and immigration tended to portray new arrivals in a negative light and to be characterised by an alarmist or right-wing agenda. Local people's views on this very pressing matter, he explained, often consisted of 'half-facts picked up from overheard conversations'. He emphasised the importance of projects like focUS for creating balance, for addressing the increasingly noticeable presence of the BNP in the city, and for responding to negative media representations with a positive example of diversity in action. Others also noted the power of negative media coverage.

People only have a stereotypical image of people coming in, that they have new cars and get mobile phones. And it's the media that projects this negative image.

A number of the refugee participants' social workers, housing keyworkers, and religious leaders attended the local focUS screening event in Peterborough. One explained that ignorance about asylum and immigration issues and the situations of new arrivals to the city was widespread, and that media coverage could be negative. He described a local climate that posited new arrivals as free-loading troublemakers, and noted needing to be discreet with those he didn't know about the nature of his job for fear of a hostile response. Echoing the refrain of other respondents, he explained,

Peterborough is a bit cut up. People like to live with others like them. It will become ghettoised eventually, and I don't think we can do anything about it. People like to have their own areas. It's about safety.

Rather than the kinds of issues raised by the project being a surprise to local screening audiences and stakeholders, then, there was a widespread sense that conflict and misunderstanding between different groups, whether locals and new arrivals, or those from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, was all too familiar. However, through communicating so powerfully and with such a sense of celebration the ways in which people from diverse backgrounds can come together and produce something positive, focUS clearly inspired and energised city stakeholders and screening audiences. The project constituted a positive and creative example of integration and community cohesion in practice, and thereby catalysed in those who learnt about it a sense of balance and optimism. Where before there was negativity, controversy, and gloom, audiences, like the young participants at the end of the workshops, left screenings with refreshed enthusiasm and a sense of possibility. Many described how pleasantly surprised they were by the sense of mutual connectedness shown at screening events by the focUS participants, particularly given the obvious diversity within the group.

It's so nice to see a multicultural group presenting the issue. This is unusual, as it's normally one particular group.

It is excellent to see a real mix of young people who have come together, made friends, and really enjoyed working together! Where I live, I don't see different cultures, so it is an eye opener to see them working together.

Some confirmed that these kinds of projects, as the team had hoped, always tended to have a 'ripple effect'.

Participating has had an impact on all the participants, but these young people know a lot of other young people, and taking part in this project is a way of spreading those ideas, because friends talk and socialise, and through that communication, ideas get spread.

Many noted that watching the films and learning about the project had opened their minds, whether this was in realising they were not alone in feeling 'different' from others, in grasping how multiculturally diverse their cities actually were, or in feeling empowered that positive change was achievable.

I didn't know that youths could be so talented. I have dealt with a lot of racism recently, and this project has reignited my belief that change is possible and must continue to be fought for.

The project was so good in its simple humanity, so good in showing how people should live together and care for one another.

The vast majority of local respondents expressed great enthusiasm for the work of the project, and said they would be very interested in attending future events that addressed these kinds of issues and that involved their cities' diverse communities. Both screening audiences and local stakeholders were keen for the young participants to 'keep going' in their work, and were eager to learn about and engage with the 'what happens next?'. This enthusiasm confirmed to the team the importance of creating a forum for the showcasing and discussion of the products of projects like focUS. Organising a film screening, for example, not only allows participants to express pride in their work in front of a public audience, but also stimulates in that audience a sense of excitement, purpose and possibility. The positive and celebratory atmosphere generated by the showcasing of a successful project can be a seed-bed for action and for new ideas, can assist the 'ripple effect'. Indeed, following the completion of the workshops and the screening of the films, a small pool of the stakeholders in each city formed a steering group to take forward the precedents set and the learning generated by the project. Other commitments were also made. These included the promise to integrate young new arrivals better into mainstream services wherever possible. The focUS team was approached on several occasions to carry out replica projects in other cities across the UK and invited to speak about the project to a range of interest groups. This enthusiasm seemed to reflect an underlying need amongst those in the sector for ways through the pressing and difficult problems associated with integration, community cohesion and difference.

Revisiting objectives over the long-term

Although at the time of writing a great deal had been learnt by the focUS team, a small amount of further research in relation to the project is yet to take place. In order to lend integrity to the findings detailed earlier in this chapter, the focUS researcher plans to conduct follow-up interviews with all of the young participants in May 2006. It is intended that these interviews establish whether the experience of participating in the project has influenced outlook and understanding over the longer-term. The team were realistic about the fact that, when flushed with the excitements and successes of the project immediately after it had finished, the young people might be likely to describe in a possibly inflated way the shifts in learning and understanding they had made on a personal level as a result of having participated. Follow-up interviews were felt to be the acid test of meaningful long-term impact. At the same time and for the same reasons, it is planned that local stakeholders be interviewed in order to evaluate whether any meaningful impact has been made at the local level in terms of changes in policy and practice. A meeting involving funders and national policy-makers is planned for March 2006. It is intended that the meeting should function partly as a forum for the discussion of possibilities for national level change and action on the back of the project. Details of the outcomes associated with these various follow-up research activities and events will be added to the project website in due course.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The focUS – connecting futures project took place against a backdrop of controversy, tension and political charge in relation to issues of asylum and immigration, at all levels from the individual through the local to the national. ICAR's *Understanding the Stranger* research evoked the dynamics of misunderstanding that commonly exist between new arrivals to a place and their more established neighbours, and it was the findings of this research that originally informed the design of the focUS project. The fears and misconceptions associated with an unfamiliar 'other' were found to have led in many cases to entrenched hostility and heightened anxiety in many communities across the UK. The typical lack of contact taking place between 'strangers' was recognised as contributing to a climate of uncertainty and misunderstanding, where knowledge of others was generated not by the exchange of accurate information but by myth, rumour, hearsay, and misleadingly alarmist media coverage. When characterising their own cities, the local focUS stakeholders and screening audiences echoed these findings, reporting, in the main, a local picture of suspicion, division, and ignorance. Concerns identified as undermining relations between established communities and new arrivals included the sense that changes relating to immigration and the dispersal of asylum seekers across the UK had happened very rapidly giving local people very little time to adjust. For the focUS stakeholders, youth provision integrating refugees and asylum seekers into mainstream services was, as a result, still felt to be somewhat 'in transition'. The young focUS participants, in a sense, embodied the tensions of their wider communities, expressing as they did the contradictions, the misunderstandings, the desires to connect with others and the fears that inhibit such connections that tend to characterise community relations in general.

focUS aimed to provide an opportunity for meaningful contact to take place between those who were likely to feel different from one another in order to foster the development of understanding. The capacity of participatory video practice to enhance understanding between groups of likely 'strangers', as is evident from this project story, is profound but not straightforward. The vast majority of the young focUS participants championed the effectiveness of the 'PV' method, reporting that having a valued role in a team, jointly generating a creative product, learning new things, having fun, being encouraged to take risks in terms of leadership and self-expression and so on, had greatly facilitated the process of bonding with new colleagues. The educational element of the project, namely the imparting of technical video skills, was important to some of the participants, particularly the young new arrivals, and was a 'concrete' outcome they felt would be valuable for the future. In addition, the driving force of participatory video, the ultimate objective of facilitating the communication of a joint message based on the views and voices of the unheard and undervalued resonated strongly with the young participants, empowering them with a sense of their own rights and responsibilities. The screening audiences who, at the time of writing, had viewed the focUS films responded enthusiastically to the celebration of diversity and community embodied by the project, with many not only grasping the messages conveyed by the young people through their films but also experiencing positive shifts in their own perceptions of the issue.

The fact that the young people referred so frequently to a sense of feeling valued on the project, a sense that their opinions mattered and would be acted upon, reflects an assumption that the focUS team held when designing the project. In order to build understanding, one must first build individual skills and qualities. Without these skills and qualities, people will lack the openness and strength required to move beyond their comfort zone towards an unfamiliar 'other'. The participants regularly linked their newfound confidence, their burgeoning group-working skills, the ways in which they felt encouraged and supported to question their own and others' perceptions, with their ability to reach out to their new colleagues. The building of understanding cannot, though, be described as in any sense the automatic consequence of increased confidence and so on, particularly where other factors are at play. Depending on their personal backgrounds and experiences, on the support they receive from family and friends, on their existing skills, on their age and level of maturity and so on, some participants will require far more one-to-one attention, far more time than others to develop the skills and qualities needed to build an understanding with others. In many cases, however, and as was evidenced by focUS, the development of these personal qualities will greatly facilitate the process. The building of these kinds of skills and personal qualities arises in many participatory video settings, simply as a consequence of the inclusive and supportive nature of the process. Encouraging participants to use their imaginations as part of a creative process in general will often lead to risk-taking, experimentation and shifts in perception on a wider level. The focUS team, however, designed the workshops in order very directly to nurture particular skills and personal qualities in their participants, largely due to the fact that the project aimed not only to create participatory videos but also to build understanding between those who produced those videos. The importance of the focUS practitioners' particular style of participatory video, then, the building of a 'safe space', the facilitation of activities, game and discussions as well as simply video

practice, was key in the realisation of this outcome. It is likely that more straightforward interpretations of 'PV' will lead to a degree of understanding between group members, but where participants are further encouraged through tailored activities to develop the ability to question their own and others' opinions, to explore the ways in which they see the world and everyone in it, more powerful shifts in understanding are likely to occur.

The project enjoyed many successes in terms of building understanding between participants, particularly where the skills and personal qualities of those involved had been nurtured and realised. These were shown in a number of ways, from a simple friendly comment over lunch, a linking arm, a text, a phonecall, to a more informed understanding of the situation of another, a desire and an ability to put oneself in another's position and see the world for a little while through a different lens. Many of the participants were able to articulate the meaningful shifts they had experienced in terms of how they viewed and understood one another. These outcomes, it was felt, rested on various foundations, including the strength, commitment and skills of the focUS team, the design of the workshops, the magic injected by the team-building days, and the fostering of local stakeholder relationships. The complex nature of building understanding between 'strangers', however, the inconsistencies, contradictions and about-turns of those participating in that process, means that project successes of the kind experienced by the focUS team must always come with some kind of caveat. The focUS participants were influenced in different ways and at different times during the making of their films. Rarely was there a neat linear progression from limited awareness at the beginning to enlightened understanding at the end. The 'PV' approach, for the reasons described above, greatly facilitated the development of understanding amongst the young people, yet its 'agenda-free' spirit sometimes made it difficult to hone in on and challenge specific prejudices and misconceptions relating to asylum and immigration. It is clear that the project experienced great success in building understanding between the participants on the project, however, particularly given these various constraints and complexities.

The participants both described in discussions and demonstrated by their behaviour on the project the many ways in which they sought out, found, ignored, absorbed and came upon by accident, information relating to asylum and immigration and to unfamiliar 'others'. Many talked about media coverage of the issue. Some of the host participants described feeling unduly influenced by the power of negative media imagery, both in television broadcasts and newspapers accounts, with some finding it difficult to square this with the positive experiences they were sharing with their new focUS colleagues. Other participants felt uncomfortable with the way news coverage regularly conflated asylum with crime and terrorism. Although they did not always articulate this directly, it was clear that some of the younger participants were parroting the views of friends and family on the issue of asylum and immigration, with some, for example, describing having overheard their parents discussing the issue. Other participants noted that if they wanted to find out about an issue or a community, they would endeavour to speak to people from that community, would go to the library, or would ask people they knew and trusted, for example, parents and favourite teachers. Many had combined information gleaned from media coverage and from the views of those close to them, with their own personal experiences of others. When asked their perceptions of others, participants would often, and understandably, relate an incident involving one of those others as a way of justifying a general perception of *all* others.

In order to understand the kinds of things that help young people from 'host' and migrant communities to understand each other better, it is necessary to understand first the ways in which a younger person might typically view the world and their own and others' place within it. The focUS project gave the team an invaluable, if complex and nuanced, insight into this. Whilst wanting to reach out to others, for example, and to know and be known by all kinds of people, some of the focUS participants described feeling more comfortable with those with whom they felt they shared cultural common ground, such as religious belief, language, or ethnicity. This conveyed a sense that at some level the participants were content to remain 'with their own'. Another balancing act for the participants was the desire to accept others at face value, and to be and feel 'normal' whilst exploring and expressing cultural difference. Many of the young focUS participants did not use the politically-charged labels and vocabularies of the adult world, tending, at least on the surface, to view other young people in terms of their style, music taste, interests and so on rather than as refugees, asylum seekers or 'host' kids. Difference was clearly felt within the groups, for example in relation to language, but was not always explicitly linked to notions of asylum or ethnicity. Indeed, it was not always explicitly linked to anything. The young participants behaved much as would any group of teenagers thrown together on a summer project, mucking about and laughing together, talking about the things they enjoyed, flirting, arguing and falling out, creating rivalries and cliques, sharing personal thoughts, wanting to be liked, helping each other out and sharing the bus home together. While this tendency not to link the personal with the political, in a sense, undermined the nature of the understanding experienced by the focUS participants, their ability and desire to take others as they came and at face value meant

that they were able to enjoy each other's company and contributions in a fresh, open and usually endearingly generous way. Being supported to understand and be comfortable with difference was undoubtedly one of the factors that helped these young people from the 'host' and migrant communities understand each other better, and allowing difference to be voiced was felt to be an important part of the process of building understanding. However, the establishment during the workshops of an exciting, challenging but safe common ground between them showed the young people that the 'stranger' was perhaps not as strange as they had thought.

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Appendix 1: Introductory topic guide for the ‘host’ group

The following questions are designed to find out a bit more about you, about what you think of the project so far, and about how you see life in Peterborough/Coventry.

If it’s okay with you, I’d like to record this discussion, just to help me remember better afterwards what has been said.

Whatever you say to me in the interview will remain confidential within the focUS team. Your name will not be linked in the project story to anything you’ve said to me unless you want it to be.

You will have a chance to look at the transcription of the discussion afterwards if you want to, and to change anything that you didn’t mean or want to say.

You don’t have to answer any questions you don’t feel comfortable answering, and can stop at any time.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Firstly, I’d like to ask you about the project itself.

- What are your thoughts on the project so far? Have you done anything like this before?
- What have you particularly enjoyed doing, and why? Any highlights?
- What do you think has worked less well, and well? Anything you found uncomfortable?
- Is there anyone in your group that you knew already?

Next, I’d like to find out a bit more about how you see other young people in Peterborough/Coventry.

- What thoughts and expectations do you have about meeting the other group next week? (Probe: try to find out where these expectations come from eg parents, friends, media etc. Probe: clarify that other group are new arrivals, have different cultural heritage, are asylum seekers/refugees)
- What is your feeling towards young people who are less well-established or who have only just arrived in Peterborough/Coventry, towards asylum seekers/refugees? (Probe: positive and negative experiences, general perceptions/stereotypes, ask what labels they have for asylum seekers/refugees, any stories/anecdotes, attitudes towards asylum seekers/refugees (1), try to establish whether there are issues the YPs think about at all).

I’d also like to find out a bit more about your friends and the people you know in Peterborough/Coventry.

- Thinking about the friends you have in Peterborough/Coventry, where did you meet most of them? (Probe: college, work, church, youth clubs etc)
- Do you have friends from different ethnic communities or from amongst newly-arrived groups in Peterborough/Coventry? (Emphasise: it doesn’t matter if you don’t, no-one will judge you. Probe: what has been your experience of this, how did you meet them?)
- Do you think there are difficulties around meeting people from other communities? What are these? (Probe: parental/family disapproval, peer pressure).

1 Questions relating explicitly to ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘refugees’ were generally only raised in the Coventry introductory interviews, which took place after those in Peterborough and for which an adapted topic guide could be used. Initially the video practitioners were concerned that using direct terms such as ‘asylum seeker’ would prejudice the participatory process and unsettle the building of trust between group members. To read more about these dilemmas, turn to Chapter 2: Generating the project story.

Appendix 2: Introductory topic guide for the 'new arrivals' group

The following questions are designed to find out a bit more about you, about what you think of the project so far, and about how you see life in Peterborough/Coventry.

If it's okay with you, I'd like to record this discussion, just to help me remember better afterwards what has been said.

Whatever you say to me in the interview will remain confidential within the focUS team. Your name will not be linked in the project story to anything you've said to me unless you want it to be.

You will have a chance to look at the transcription of the discussion afterwards if you want to, and to change anything that you didn't mean or want to say.

You don't have to answer any questions you don't feel comfortable answering, and can stop at any time.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Firstly, I'd like to ask you about the project itself.

- What are your thoughts on the project so far? Have you done anything like this before?
- What have you particularly enjoyed doing, and why? Any highlights?
- What do you think has worked less well, and well? Anything you found uncomfortable?
- Is there anyone in your group that you knew already?

Next, I'd like to find out a bit more about how you see other young people in Peterborough/Coventry.

- What thoughts and expectations do you have about meeting the other group next week? (Probe: try to find out where these expectations come from eg parents, friends, media etc. Probe: clarify that other group are Pet/Cov locals)
- What is your feeling towards young people who are more well-established or who were born in Peterborough/Coventry? (Probe: positive and negative experiences, racist incidents, general perceptions/stereotypes).

I'd also like to find out a bit more about your friends and the people you know in Peterborough/Coventry. I should emphasise here that it doesn't matter if you don't know many people, no-one will judge you. It's more about finding out whether and how we link up with one another and who we link up with when we're finding our way in a new place.

- What sorts of people and friends have you met since coming to Peterborough? (Probe: host/newcomer, same/diff ethnic group, same/diff age, where di you meet them, have they been more in an official/support capacity, where have you most often made friends eg church, mosque, college, work, youth clubs, refugee initiatives etc).
- Has it been easy or difficult to make friends? In what way?
 - Do you think there are difficulties around meeting people from other communities? What are these? (Probe: parental/family disapproval, peer pressure).

Finally, I'd like to find out a bit more about what it has been like for you to adjust to a new life in Peterborough/Coventry.

- What are your experiences about settling into a new place? (Probe: ask whether they think it matters where you have come from, ask what the main difficulties have been, ask what has been easy if anything, ask about language barriers, cultural differences, contrasting interests to host Yps, family constraints etc).

Appendix 3: End-of-workshops topic guide

The following questions are designed to find out a bit more about you, as well as what you think of the project and what you think you've learnt. There are also some more specific questions about asylum and immigration.

If it's okay with you, I'd like to record this discussion, just to help me remember better afterwards what has been said.

Whatever you say to me in the interview will remain confidential within the focUS team. Your name will not be linked in the project story to anything you've said to me unless you want it to be.

You will have a chance to look at the transcription of the discussion afterwards if you want to, and to change anything that you didn't mean or want to say.

You don't have to answer any questions you don't feel comfortable answering, and can stop at any time.

Do you have any questions before we start?

- What motivated you to do the project? Was it explained that you would be working with people from all over the world, people who might be asylum-seekers/ refugees?
- What do you think about the other members of your original group?
- What do you think about the members of the other group now you have worked with them for a while? Who do you get on well with, and why? Is there any difference in how you feel able to work with the people from the two different groups?
- Have your initial preconceptions about the other group changed since you have worked with them? What were your initial perceptions when you met them and have these changed?
- Do you speak to/ spend time with/ text any members of the group outside of workshops?
- Do you think participating in the project has increased your understanding about the situation of new arrivals to _____ / young people who have grown up in _____?
- Has participating in the project encouraged you to share your views and experiences with the rest of the group?
- Apart from technical video skills, what skills has the project helped you develop, if any? Has the project affected your confidence, your group-working ability, your problem-solving skills etc?
- Have you questioned your own opinions about anything as a result of doing this project? Give examples.
- Have you questioned someone else's opinions about anything as a result of doing this project? NB This can be someone inside or outside of the group.
- Have you spoken to family members about doing the project? If so, what did you and they say? Did you tell them you would be working with people from all around the world who might be asylum seekers?
- Have you spoken to any friends about doing the project? If so, what did you and they say? Did you tell them you would be working with people from all around the world who might be asylum seekers?
- How effective a tool do you think video and film-making is in terms of helping people from different backgrounds understand each other better?
- Do you feel less isolated in the city as a result of doing this project? If so, how and why?
- What are your views on immigration to the UK?
- Do you think people should have the right to seek asylum in this country?
- What do you think asylum-seekers coming to the UK should be entitled to?
- Do you think there are too many asylum-seekers in the UK?
- Where do you get your information on asylum from?
- Has participating in the project affected what you think about immigration and asylum?
- What do you think of the labels 'asylum-seeker' and 'refugee'? Are you comfortable or uncomfortable describing yourself as an asylum-seeker of refugee? When does someone stop being a refugee, if at all?
- Have any of the other group talked to you about the fact that they are seeking asylum in this country or are refugees? What was it like to talk about that? Do you see them as refugees/ asylum-seekers? What does it make you think when I describe them as asylum-seekers/ refugees? What stereotypes do you have of asylum-seekers/ refugees?
- Do you see yourself keeping in touch with the other members of the group in the future?
- Has participating in the project affected what you aspire to in the future?
- Your film will be seen by lots of people, especially young people. What do you want it to say? How do you think it might be useful in helping people of your age understand each other better?

Appendix 4: Community viewing topic guide

- What are your impressions of the films you have seen this evening?
 - What do you think is/are the message(s) of the films?
 - Can you relate to any of the feelings/ideas expressed in the films? If yes, which ones and why? If not, why not?
- How do you feel about your child's/friend's involvement in the focUS project?
- Has taking part in the focUS project had an impact on your child/friend? If yes, how?
 - Have they talked to you much about it? If so, what things have they said?
- What do you think of community relations in your area of Pet/Cov or in Pet/Cov as a whole?
 - Are there any minority ethnic/immigrant/refugee communities in your area?
 - What do you know about these groups? What contact do you have with them?
- Do you think there are difficulties around meeting people from other communities?
- Has the film and/or the focUS project made you think differently about the community you live in? If yes, how?
- What media coverage about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK have you come across? What has been your impression of this coverage?
- Would you be interested in attending other events that involve Pet's/Cov's diverse communities? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Other comments?

Appendix 5: Introductory team evaluation topic guide

- What do you think has gone well about the project so far?
- What do you think could have worked better?
- How would you assess the development of the participants' video skills so far? What progress do you think they have made? Give examples.
- How able do you think the participants are to question their own and others' opinions?
- How well are the participants working together?
- What do you think are the main differences, if any, between the two groups in terms of:
 - Video skills
 - Group-working skills
 - Ability to question their own and other's opinionsAnd what do you think are the main reasons for these differences, if there are any?
- What is your impression of each group's knowledge and understanding of the situation of the other? What makes you think this?
- In terms of project and workshop planning, what are the main things you have learnt since the beginning of the project? [Prompt: recruitment, cultural difference, workshop structure]
- What are the main things you have learnt from the participants?
- What expectations, hopes and fears do you have for when the groups meet up?
- Think of five words to describe the project so far.
- Describe some key 'learning moments' that have taken place during the project.

Appendix 6: End-of-workshops team evaluation topic guide

Team building day

- How did the team-building day go? Did it contribute to the project's aims and objectives? If so, how? If not, why not?

Joint workshops general

- Think of five words to describe the joint workshops.
- In what ways have the joint workshops been different from the separate workshops?
- What do you think has gone well with the joint workshops, and what could have worked better?
- What has been the most surprising thing/event about/during the joint workshops?
- What are the main things you have learnt from the experience of the joint workshops so far?
- Describe some 'key learning moments' that have taken place during the joint workshops.

Participants' understanding, links and problem-solving

- Were our initial ideas/preconceptions correct?
- In what ways have the London bombings affected this project so far?
- How well are the participants working together, in your view? What are the new group dynamics and how do you explain them?
- What changes have you noticed in the young people since they began the joint workshops? Have these changes surprised you? Were they what you expected?
- Have you seen an increase in understanding and links between the young people since they met? If so, in what ways and how do you know this?
- Are our original indicators relevant? To what extent are they being achieved? What other indicators are materialising?
- Are we achieving our indicators in relation to the young people's increased ability to find solutions to their own problems and to question opinions?
- What other things have you seen to indicate their increased problem-solving and opinion-forming abilities?
- What is your impression of each group's knowledge and understanding of the situation of the other now they have met each other? How has this changed since they met? How do you know this?
- From your experiences of the separate and joint workshops, what have you learnt about what helps these two groups to understand each other?

Participants' skills

- What progress have the young people made in terms of their video skills since we last spoke? Do you think that any changes are related to the fact that they are working with the young people from the other group? How have you recognised these changes?
- What progress have the young people made in terms of their communication and group working skills? Do you think that any changes are related to the fact that they are working with the young people from the other group? How have you recognised these changes?
- What do you draw from what the young people have chosen to make their films about?

Wider community

- Do you know if the project has had any impact beyond the young people, for example, with friends, families, practitioners or policy-makers? If yes, what impact and how do you explain it?

Project team

- Do you feel that you are able to recognise when and why the YP are making progress in understanding each other and to then devise an appropriate activity?
- Has your role been different in the joint workshops? If yes, how and why do you think this? If no, why not?
- What do you feel you have been able to do well – both personally, and as a team? Where have your skills and experience been well-used? Is there anything you feel you would have needed better preparation, support or training in? Anything for the next phase?
- What expectations, hopes and fears do you have for the rest of the project?

Appendix 7: Project diary format

- Using the form below, make an entry in your diary after each day or, if appropriate, each group of days spent on the project.
- Email e-diary entries to the researcher on a weekly basis.

Date:	Location:	Participants/Group:	Facilitators:
Pre session – Planning, fears and expectations			
What we did – including output			
What went well, why?			
What was challenging, why / what can be done about this?			
What outcomes (cf. goals/project objectives)			
Feedback – comments, quotes from participants, observations about process			
Contact with external groups – project partners, family etc			
What I plan to do next, why?			

Appendix 8: About the focUS team

Amy Barbor began her career in the voluntary sector having worked for some years at Actionaid in the area of information/ knowledge management. In her role as Project Manager she looked at the ways in which experts across the 36 countries that Actionaid worked in could share their experience and knowledge in a way that was sustainable and fitting to the values of the organization. It was in doing this that she became interested in the use of video, and in particular, participatory video. On leaving Actionaid she began to carry out participatory video projects within her immediate community, in particular with young people whom she found took to the medium with enthusiasm and passion. The participatory video medium allowed them to explore new avenues of learning and communication. In collaboration with Rose McCausland Living Lens was formed. Living Lens believes passionately that video can be used as a tool to create community, opening up new channels of communication between individuals and groups.

Candida Blaker is a consultant with over 20 years experience of inter-cultural work, policy analysis, project management and evaluation in the fields of arts and citizenship.

Candida is co-founder and Executive Director of Creating Routes, which promotes integration of refugees and people seeking asylum through the arts. She evaluated Arts Council England (London)'s refugee programme, and is a member of their Southeast Refugee and the Arts advisory group. Candida has been closely linked to Artists in Exile, for which she was responsible for the launch PR.

Candida has produced resource packs related to arts-in-education and to inter-cultural understanding, both for arts organisations and for a local authority. She has also been involved in promoting relationships between the arts and human rights/ governance work, including in an advisory capacity to the British Council in various countries. For a decade from the mid 1980's Candida was involved directly in international development and public policy advocacy, including as Oxfam GB's (Deputy Country Representative in Brazil, and Southern Advocacy Policy Advisor), and ActionAid's Latin America/Caribbean Regional Co-ordinator.

Beth Crosland combined her role as focUS project manager with numerous other responsibilities, including contributing to a case study handbook which drew together the learning of projects from across the UK aiming to mediate tension and build bridges between local host communities and asylum seekers and refugees, and leading on two ICAR partnership research projects concerning UK media representation of asylum. Prior to working at ICAR she completed an MA in Human Rights at the University of London, co-authored a UNHCR working paper on human smuggling and trafficking, and worked for a number of refugee and human rights NGOs. She left ICAR in January 2006.

Rose McCausland is a trained secondary school teacher with a background in broadcast television. It was her time as education officer at Anti-Slavery International that introduced her to the work of Paulo Friere and participatory education methodologies. A workshop run by Reel Time Video introduced her to the idea of using video as a tool in participatory education. Following a number of successful participatory video projects, she set up Living Lens with Amy Barbor to develop and deliver participatory video projects in the UK and other countries.

Katherine Mann (BA Hons English, MA Anthropology and Cultural Process, MRes Anthropology) joined ICAR in May 2005 as the focUS project researcher. Katherine combines her work at ICAR with PhD studies in cultural anthropology at Goldsmith's College, London. Her research there uses the medium of music to examine the experiences of the UK's immigration detainees. During early 2005, Katherine co-ordinated and evaluated a pilot programme of musical activities amongst detainees at four of the UK's immigration removal centres on behalf of the Helen Tetlow Memorial Fund. She has been a volunteer visitor to immigration detainees for a number of years, visiting those held at IRC Tinsley House, IRC Harmondsworth and IRC Colnbrook. Prior to joining ICAR, Katherine worked as a researcher at the Institute for Employment Studies, an independent research institute specialising in employment and education policy research.

Frances Porter has been with Frontline AV in her current role as project manager for 5 years, but has worked with the company on a freelance and part time basis since its beginnings. Prior to her current full time position with Frontline AV, Frances was the Senior Arts & Media Officer with Tamworth Borough Council and initiated the 'Clubskills' projects in the area to tackle excluded young people and youth offenders as part of a new arts

development programme of social inclusion. She has also managed a 'cross community' arts centre in Northern Ireland, fundraising and creating its first annual arts program.

Sean Spencer has been working as a freelance writer and director for the last six years. He has produced a number of short films and documentaries that have been picked up by organisations such as the BBC, ITV, UK Film Council and the BFI. His films have also been screened at film festivals world wide.

Frontline AV has over 10 years experience of mixing community projects and commercial productions in media and arts, and specialises in the design and delivery of participatory media and arts projects and events to young people, working in diverse settings from schools to the streets.

Frontline aims continually to develop creative opportunities for young people in the region, and engage them in activities where they can discover new skills and realise their potential. Frontline AV is also committed to contributing to the sustainable growth of creative industries of the Midlands and the wider region through commercial media and arts production.

Frontline's ethos is to be inclusive – to target young people who for whatever reasons are not accessing mainstream provision, and always to maintain high quality process and product.

Living Lens carries out participatory video projects mainly with young people who have been socially excluded, working with groups to develop video production skills including: camera and sound operation, planning, storyboarding, scheduling and budgeting. Through the use of video groups will develop communication skills including interview techniques and active listening.

Living Lens projects have mainly involved young people, and often groups who wouldn't normally work together. In East London two groups of young people from estates with a history of rivalry worked together on a series of short films. In the Gambia a group of teenagers from East London worked with a group of teenagers from the Gambia. A Trinidad-based project saw teenagers from the North and South of the island come together to produce films.

