



Images of sectarianism

Move On is a homeless prevention charity working with young people through peer education and training. Their Stand Up project focused on young people exploring their experiences of sectarianism in Edinburgh. The project has used the media of photography to create a series of still photographs to depict places and statues that contribute to the discussion on sectarianism in Edinburgh. Three of the young people involved also participated in the Stand Up peer training residential.

The issue

From the start of the project, young people found it difficult to see how sectarianism influenced their lives unless it involved football! They could see parallels between racism and sectarianism, but it was a challenge to find meaning and relevance within young lives dealing with more pressing issues of homelessness and marginalisation. From the start the project had to be flexible to the changing needs and interests of young people, and adapted for a changing group. There needed to be some gain or value in each session whether it was having fun, learning photography skills, finding out about historical locations, and/or making links to sectarianism.

The project

- Three stages to the project: Exploring the subject of sectarianism; the visual recording stage – taking the photographs; and finally, gathering the images to see what can come from them.
- The group visited Edinburgh Camera Obscura to highlight history, buildings and visual perspective.
- The group worked in two teams to complete a photo trail treasure hunt linking historical sites in Edinburgh and making a visual record. Sites included:
 - Greyfriars Bobby and the Kirk ... the signing of the covenant.
 - The Magdalene Chapel on Cowgate.
 - St Giles cathedral and the old tollbooth heart.
 - John Knox's house ... hero of the reformation.
- Visiting the Hidden Door exhibition to learn about different visual presentations.

"It made me think – the first thing you think about sectarianism is football but there is so much more to it."

Young person



The Heart of Midlothian

Achievements of the project were ...

"... taking a look at the history that's around us; engaging with that history and the buildings, finding out what's behind the doors; looking at the reformation and what it's got to do with today." Youth leader

Challenges for the project were ...

- Keeping everyone engaged in the activities.
- Making sectarianism relevant and meaningful to people's experiences.

What difference has the project made?

For young people:

"Definitely learned a lot – I didn't appreciate it all when I was younger."

"You start to realise that you need to care more about other people."

"I know more about sectarianism as a result of this project."

Young people

- Raised awareness about sectarian issues in Edinburgh.
- Learned about historical places in their local area and the connection with sectarianism.
- Gained new skills and confidence in taking photographs that they can use for taking their own pictures.

"The photography – using a good camera and taking lots of different angles, never done anything like that – looking forward to doing the developing."

Young person

"Getting their voice heard is very important, learning that their voice matters, it is a good confidence booster."

Youth leader

The group have met people in their community, especially older people. They have learned from them and chatted about the historical sites in ways that they would not normally do.

"I was surprised and shocked at how much sectarianism there was in Edinburgh. I think that coming to the project has changed the way I see people in Edinburgh. I have more tolerance now than before."

Young person

Impact on sectarianism – How has the project contributed to tackling sectarianism?

Young people were aware that sectarianism is deep rooted and historical. This project may have sewn a few seeds in raising awareness and changing attitudes.

Young person's comment:

"The sectarian thing, it is important to think about but I don't think that this project is going to make a lot of difference, sectarianism's been happening for hundreds of years what's one little project going to do?"

And another young person's response:

"It might change some people's views, because if you can get some people to change then they influence others."

Post script – What next for the Move On Project?

- The photographs can be used in presentations and maybe a comic strip.
- Skills and confidence in using the camera and images are a useful resource for the group to explore and research other topics like housing.
- Learning about planning for future projects and relating them to young people's experiences. Topics like culture and migration, prejudice and discrimination might provide a relevant focus.

