



More than just a song

Tollcross YMCA ran a 12-week music programme where young people explored the issue of sectarian songs that are sung on the football terraces, public marches and on social media sites. The project also created an opportunity to link with the 134th Glasgow Battalion Boys' Brigade for the first time on a youth lead project to explore the issue of sectarian songs. Although they meet in the same building they operate independently. The Stand Up project was an opportunity to work together on a shared project.

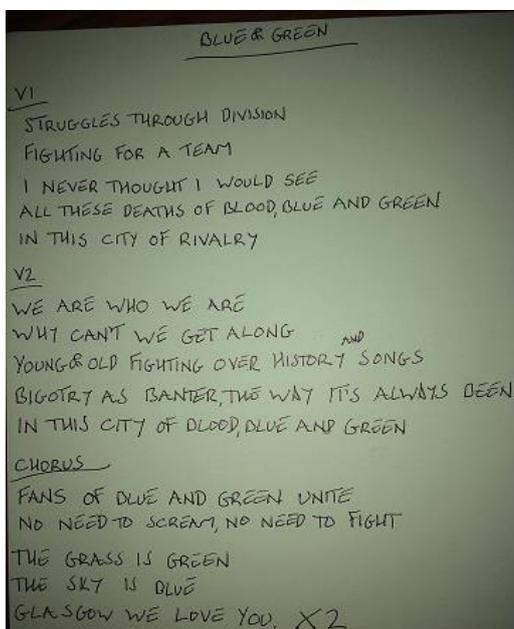
The issue

Tollcross YMCA ran a successful multi sports programme for young people, but found that there was a problem with strong sectarian viewpoints expressed by some of the participants. Through discussions with the young people it was apparent that they saw singing and chanting as '*just a laugh and a bit of banter*' and they failed to understand or recognise how this is an issue. For many young people, these songs are passed down the generations and are sung with little understanding of the negative impact they have for other young people and the community. Exploring these issues increased awareness and generated material to write and record the group's own anti-sectarian song [Blue and Green](#).

The project

- A group from the YMCA took part in 6 workshops to explore: the rivalry and division between football teams, the protestant/catholic religious divide and Scotland's relationship to sectarianism through political songs, chants and flute tunes.
- Young people from the Boys' Brigade also took part in the 6-week awareness raising programme which helped them to explore sectarian issues that divide Glasgow and how this affects them at school, in the community or when they go to the football.
- For the YMCA group, six more workshops focused on song writing skills to write, record and perform the group's own anti-sectarian song.
- The song was recorded and has been played on Radio Clyde and Sunny Govan, and is being promoted at a Celtic Game.

"I would do it again; it was a good experience even though it was hard." Young person



An achievement was writing the lyrics of the song and a high point of the project was hearing the final recording. Everyone contributed to writing the song. A surprise was the interest and enthusiasm from the primary age groups that got involved.

"Writing the words to the song – we had never thought about sectarianism or anti sectarianism before, it was a difficult topic. We had to try and tell a story about anti-sectarianism."

Young people

What difference has the project made?

For young people:

- Raised awareness about sectarian issues and how sectarianism affects their daily lives.

"It helped them to think – how does this impact on me as a person?" (BB leader)

"It helped me to see it (sectarianism) differently; I used to think it was just about Celtic and Rangers. It is much more than that and you don't realise the stuff that it's causing." Young person

"It was relevant because of where we are (Glasgow); you see it every day at the football and at school." (Young person)

- Developed new skills and confidence in writing song lyrics, using recording equipment and working as a team.
- For individual young people, there was a clear journey from 'not wanting to be involved' to 'being glad that they did'. This was particularly evident from their increased confidence in performing and the positive feedback they received.
- Helped raise awareness of the opportunities that are available through the youth group (the music groups) and that these can lead to wider opportunities (recording in a professional studio; performing at the commonwealth games).

"We hope it's changed their views, and hope it has raised discussions at home that we don't know about, like thinking about their family, and recognising sectarianism and discrimination when they see it."

Youth leader

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

Young people and leaders were all aware that sectarianism is a deep rooted issue and that this project provided a small catalyst for positive change.

"I think it's good, but it's not going to change the views of the majority of people."

"Maybe if the song gets played more it might help to change people's views."

"It is a small cog in the wheel that grows and needs to be continued."

Post script – What next for the YMCA Project?

Following this project, the YMCA has plans for the future including:

- Collaborating with other nationalities from the commonwealth living in Scotland. Writing, recording and making a video together.
- Performing at the athletes' village as part of the commonwealth games.
- Exploring more shared activities with the BB group.
- Repeating the project with younger age groups.
- Ensuring that they celebrate and recognise young people's achievements in the future, which was a learning point from this project.

