

## Wisbech Interfaith Forum

### A critical friend

#### Introduction

Wisbech Interfaith Forum (WiF) was founded in October 2005 in response to a terrible earthquake in Pakistan. Wisbech joined with the Peterborough Lord Mayor's appeal to raise money for the victims, and £1500 was raised locally in a matter of weeks. To show their thanks members of the Peterborough Muslim community visited a local church. This started off what has become a solid partnership between both communities.

WiF's aim is to promote good relations between the Christian and non-Christian faiths both within the faith communities and the wider Wisbech community.

Over the years WiF has sought to increase awareness of the diversity of faith in modern Britain and provide a safe place for dialogue to occur. It has

- arranged conferences
- hosted speakers at Public meetings
- funded trips by both adults and young people to different places of worship
- brought a number of exhibitions to the town

Its members have visited a number of schools and the Wisbech campus of the college of West Anglia to help students understand the different cultures and faiths which inhabit modern Britain. The group has no paid employees and is led volunteers.

#### Getting to the heart of the problem

Over an extended period CCVS were able to provide a series of interventions that helped the group move forward by giving the knowledge and support they needed to address their issues.

##### 1. Involving more people and future of group

WiF first made contact with CCVS at a Fenland Support session in Wisbech in December 2013. They felt that they would benefit from a conversation initially around IT; they needed help with their use of Apple Macs and in developing a website. We were able to identify a group in March that used Apple Macs that may be able to help and suggested approaching several of the local churches who had websites to see if they could help.

The conversation quickly moved onto the need for more volunteers both for the committee that ran WiF and at WiF events. The organisation had run a number of positive events but this success was putting a lot of pressure on the main co-ordinator and the small committee that ran the organisation. We were able to talk through possible strategies to alleviate this stress and to help them look at how the organisation might be run in the future as well as how they might attract new volunteers.

The principle co-ordinator who had attended the meeting wrote

*“I want to put on record my appreciation of the help and advice provided by (CCVS) at the surgery today in Wisbech. This was stimulating, helpful and hopefully will enable our small group to function more effectively”.*

This theme of volunteers and volunteer recruitment was continued at a second one to one session at the end of February 2013. The discussion included helping the co-ordinator to think about what motivation volunteers might have and how they could organise the Forum to get best from people. Once again the opportunity to discuss options, and the ability of CCVS to act as a critical friend and challenger had given rise to new ways of thinking.

*“I found our session yesterday helpful. The questions you posed e.g. About how to get the best value from committee members, the role of the coordinator as opposed to me personally have given me pause for thought. I plan to have a discussion with my committee about the optimum method of running our organisation”.*

The theme was finally picked up again in October 2014. The discussion centred on the progress the committee had made went on to look at some innovative ideas about how things might continue to change. Although there was no correspondence about how this had been implemented 2015 saw WiF run several very successful events, which may indicate that the committee had put some of the ideas into practice.

## **2. Safeguarding**

January 2015 saw a much more straight forward enquiry for assistance being made. WiF were looking for information about developing a safeguarding policy to ensure that their work reflected best practice and kept volunteers and those they work with safe. After a phone conversation CCVS were able to send WiF guidance and model policies that had been developed with Cambridgeshire County Council that explained safeguarding and clearly set out what the committee needed to do. The CCVS role is to support groups by providing advice and information that allows them to make an informed decision

*“I have now had a chance to read this more carefully. It seems to me that our organisation falls in the category of Safeguarding for voluntary groups without paid staff who have infrequent or limited contact interactions with children or young people, and as such we don't need to be vetted.*

*I am minded to adopt the model policy which you have kindly sent me. We can discuss more fully on Monday. In terms of a named person I will discuss this with the committee. If no other suitable person comes forward I am willing to be the named person”.*

## **3. Funding**

Funding is always an issue for groups, and often they are not looking for vast sums but need small pots to fund particular projects. In November 2013 the co-ordinator of WiF attended a 'Making Good Funding applications' workshop at the Fenland Funding.

A few months later WiF requested a Funding Proposal Form from CCVS. This is a tool demonstrated at the workshop they had attended. This form developed by CCVS is to help groups to design a project, and prepare the information which can be used to complete a funder's application form. This tool gets the group thinking about the project, the budget and the outcomes and helps them to apply to carry out the work they have identified as being important rather than simply 'chasing funding'.

In August 2014 WiF sent their draft proposals to CCVS for review. Member organisations are able to ask CCVS to read their proposals and act as a critical friend and whilst we can not guarantee success we are able to ensure that the proposals make sense to someone removed from the project. Following this review CCVS received the following email.

*“Many thanks for (the) frank assessment of my grant proposals.  
Nobody can accuse (you) of beating about the bush.”*

The hard work of the group to develop a good proposal was highlighted when we heard that WiF had been successful in a number of grant applications.

*“Thought you would be interested to learn that we have received grants totalling £4300 from local trusts .... All in all very good news.  
Thank you for your guidance, it helped considerably. “*

### **Real change - helping a group to grow and prosper**

The main impacts for the group came not from CCVS but from the hard work and dedication of the co-ordinator, committee and volunteers of WiF. CCVS were able to provide information and knowledge, but more importantly were able to help the group start to think in a different way about their work. Through the conversations, workshops and meetings they attended with us they were able to find new solutions that worked for them.

By providing some guidance, some tools and acting as a critical friend CCVS enabled WiF to grow their work, raise their own funds and increase their impact.

*“Two pieces of advice given to us that made a big difference to our thinking were;  
Don't just chase funding, have a plan; and to put ourselves in the role of a potential funder and view our application from their perspective”.*