

Low Participation Areas: Case Study 7 – Greater Manchester

Improving participation through engagement with ethnic groups



The Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority (GMWDA) engages with ethnic and faith groups across Greater Manchester. This enables them to understand the different cultural attitudes to the environment and recycling and develop targeted communications to improve participation.

GMWDA engages with ethnic and faith groups across Greater Manchester

Background

Greater Manchester is a major conurbation with nine local authorities including the metropolitan boroughs of Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford together with the city councils of Manchester and Salford. Collectively these authorities cover a diverse area with over 400,000 households from rural farming communities to city penthouse apartments. The whole area generates 1.4 million tonnes of waste per year.

The recycling services across Greater Manchester are almost as diverse as the large ethnic communities that live there and the waste collection authorities deliver a range of services including alternate weekly collections with the full spectrum of recyclable materials.

Aim

The aim of this project was to better understand and engage with the six major faith and cultural communities across Greater Manchester and increase recycling participation amongst these groups. Specific follow-up work was then carried out by Manchester City Council with the Chinese community and this is detailed within the case study.

Identifying low participation areas

As a major conurbation, Greater Manchester has a wide diversity of peoples from different ethnic groups and many different faiths spanning Jewish Orthodox to Rastafarian. GMWDA observed low

participation levels in areas characterised by high proportion of residents from ethnic communities.

GMWDA recognised that more work was needed with the six major ethnic and faith communities in order to understand their relationship with the environment and recycling activities. These faith groups were identified as: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism.

A group known as the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), an international independent organisation, was funded by GMWDA to conduct research into the relationships between different faith groups and the environment.

Identifying low participation across the Chinese community

Officers identified three issues that contributed to low participation amongst the Chinese community and these, with the exception of issue no. 2, are likely to apply to other ethnic groups:

1. Reaching the Chinese population at home can be difficult as their members are often widely dispersed amongst the host community i.e. not living in defined geographical areas.
2. Much of the Chinese community is employed within the catering business. Businesses are often family run with residences and shops sharing the same premises. This creates issues of residential and commercial waste being mixed together causing contamination issues for recycling services.
3. Knowledge of disposal practices and recycling is often low as the Chinese community uses its own written, spoken and visual media including radio, newspapers and film.

Understanding the issues

The ARC research identified that members of ethnic minority groups would not respond well to door-to-door canvassing or traditional communication tactics due to cultural and language barriers. ARC was therefore charged with finding more innovative solutions to communicating with these groups and identified the following elements to successful engagement:

- understanding the 'environmental teachings' of the faith groups in your area – this is a fundamental necessity to understand how members of different faith groups regard the environment and their different cultural perceptions towards recycling;
- select influential and respected opinion leaders that have access to contacts and networks within the target community;
- find good communicators (also acting as translators) that have credibility within the target community to deliver the messages; and
- devise a tailored communications programme with activities designed to suit the target audience.

As part of this research, a more detailed project was carried out with the Chinese community (mainly Buddhist although with some Christian and Daoist) which forms a model approach for campaigns with other ethnic and faith groups. This is described in the section covering developing communications solutions.

Defining the target audience

The first step is to define the target ethnic group and identify the faith practised within the community.

Identifying ethnic communities

Ethnic and faith communities across Greater Manchester can be defined by the following characteristics:

- high level of home ownership;
- strong faith groups; and
- strong sense of community (not necessarily a geographic 'community' but social and cultural networks).

Once a group is defined and there is a better understanding of the cultural norms and standards within it then engaging and communicating with them becomes easier.

Developing communication solutions

This section looks in detail at the work undertaken with the Chinese community across Manchester.

Methods of engagement

Within the Chinese community, it was recognised that community leaders were very influential so for any communications to succeed the understanding and support of community leaders was vital. The four communications tactics outlined below were identified as the most effective approaches for the Chinese community:

- running recycling workshops with community groups. Larger workshops with a mix of community groups was considered better than shorter workshops with single groups;
- addresses by faith leaders at faith meetings;
- support from secular organisations e.g. influential community leaders (all directors and chairmen) of Manchester's China Town Business Association (MCTBA);

- support for publicity and targeted communications at cultural, religious and social events and celebrations; and
- use of the Chinese media in the UK.

All the above approaches should form part of a long-term programme of education within target ethnic communities.

The Chinese model workshop

A workshop entitled 'Treasures in Waste' was delivered for the Chinese community in 2005.

廢中取寶 Treasures in Waste

The workshop was sponsored by the Manchester China Town Business Association, Manchester and District Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Wai Yin Chinese Women's Society, Chinese Arts Centre and the Chinese Arts Association. The findings were:

- many of the people attending the workshop knew very little English. As a consequence communications undertaken in English were lost on them;
- in the same way, knowledge about waste disposal and recycling practices had bypassed this community as they used their own media sources (radio, newspapers, and TV); and
- there were misunderstandings about the recycling of materials due to different cultural/lifestyle experiences and expectations.

Solutions to engaging with the Chinese community

The 'Treasures from Waste' workshop identified some useful approaches to reach the Chinese community:

- door-to-door canvassing and survey work is not effective with Chinese people as they would not open their doors to strangers and were uncomfortable with questionnaires; and
- workshops and discussion groups were a more culturally acceptable way of obtaining views and conveying information. Translated leaflets, like the *Somalian leaflet* below, were issued at workshops.

Communications initiatives must:

- include networks between the various Chinese communities located throughout the UK; and
- use the Chinese media including: Sing Tao (paper published daily with UK based features); Chinatown (a lifestyle magazine www.chinatownthemagazine.com for targeting the younger population); Eastern Horizon (BBC GMR Chinese radio, Community access programme); and web sites with community news and information e.g. www.dimsum.co.uk,

www.chinatown-online.co.uk,
www.britishbornchinesedb.org.uk.

Achievements to date

Participation data will be available for the NEBS Tung Sing Housing Association project from end of November 2007. Funding was received from WRAP BCLF £39,000 for a full time project officer to engage with the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and £5000 to carry out 10 BME engagement events.

Lessons learnt

The five key lessons learnt from this project can be summarised as follows:

- start with the ARC research to gain a better understanding of the 'environmental teachings' of respective faith groups and conduct research with leaders of local faith groups;
- engage with local community groups as word of mouth is the most powerful communication tool; and
- recruit outreach workers from the communities to be engaged;
- use translated materials where English is not the first language and ensure a good mix of culture specific media e.g. Chinese radio and press.

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