

**Transition, inclusion and diversity: interview transcript**  
**Jo Homan, TT Finsbury Park**  
**29 June 2010**

*Brief explanation of project.*

*I've noticed that 'inclusion' and 'diversity' seem to be used interchangeably. I wondered if you could talk a bit from your experience in Finsbury Park what do those two words mean?*

To be honest I haven't thought about distinguishing between those two words and I would kind of use them interchangeably myself. To me inclusion is almost to do with the rights of everyone to be included, so anyone should be able to get involved in things unless there are reasons not to. So for example with the meditation group we've kind of kept it closed and don't advertise it because it's part of our own care for ourselves that we're having this meditation group. But generally, I suppose inclusion would be just making sure that everyone can turn up to things, whereas diversity would be... I suppose thinking about whether there's a good reflection of the local community...in participants on projects, which there isn't at the moment. So yeah, I suppose they are different.

*In FP have you had conversations about inclusion and diversity? Is it something that gets talked about?*

Yeah it is, because I mean that's how things started off thinking about it. We wanted to make sure it was...now I'm not sure which word to use!...and that we ended up with a diverse group of people on our mailing list. So at first we agonised about what events to have, didn't want to have too many events that would end up recruiting people who are already converts to the cause as it were, so we almost avoided having loads of things at the Islington Ecology Centre, say. We haven't really hosted any events there even though it's on our patch because we feel that the people who go to Islington Ecology Centre are already, you know, aware. So that's very much the way we started out but a year and a half on I'm at the stage where I'm happy to have anyone who's prepared to be committed to projects and get them going. I guess the way it's affecting what we're doing at the moment is that when we plan events we are still trying to plan events that are in an appropriate venue, and that have fun on the agenda, and family involvement as well, rather than peak oil and climate change. So although we do have regular film screenings that have those messages, a lot of the events we do are just family participatory type things. So growing projects, we do a lot of growing stuff, that people can bring their kids to. And we see that as being our way in.

*So what I'm hearing is that it's about the events themselves and also the venue that they're at. It sounds as though a lot of your events are quite participatory. Has it been explicitly discussed about when you talk about deciding where to do your events do you as a group discuss it explicitly?*

Yeah, we did. It's something you can't really ignore in our area, so yeah, of course.

*And in terms of the mailing list and so on, you mentioned that you're happy now to have anyone so has that changed the way that you operate the mailing list or anything like that?*

I suppose one of the things is that....[food arrives]

**[2<sup>nd</sup> audio file]**

*So we were talking about the difference between inclusion and diversity and you were talking about some of the things you'd done around events to try and make sure that they're open so that people are able to attend. Does that..? When you have your events and activities do you feel that you do have more diversity of people at events when you have them?*

At things like school events, then yes. Yeah, that's a captive audience as it were, so that's diverse. As for events, we haven't really done any big events recently. I suppose it's, it's really different because we had one at a church... yeah, that wasn't that great...it definitely makes a big difference where you have it. Also things like planting days - we've had quite a few planting events and they're not particularly diverse. Like the best we've done was when we had a planting day at Jamboree play huts which is right in Finsbury Park and we were just grabbing people who were walking past and getting them to help move earth into the wheelbarrows. The people who've kind of opted in and are on the mailing list do tend to be mostly white, middle class. There's a few people who aren't but generally it's that. Recently though I've noticed in my wanderings around the area that I've started getting to know some other people who are diverse from a different point of view. People who are...someone who is, I think has got mental health problems - definitely has a drink problem - but who really wants to get involved in growing stuff. And ok it's only one person but I think it's the start of tapping into a different kind of...

*That's interesting. How did you get him to come on board?*

Well, she actually came to Jamboree play huts and was talking to the person who runs that project and we told her about what we do...So it was just from that really. And then there's someone else I've been seeing around the park, who's - he always looks like this real kind of 'dodgy bloke' - hanging out on the pavement, walking really fast or looking kind of shifty, but I've him around **a lot** and eventually I got to the stage when I say hello. And then when I went to the site that I looked at for the community tree nursery he was there, helping the volunteers with gardening stuff and I got talking to him and realised he's just quite happy to, he wants to do gardening, and we started to chat, found out his name, hopefully you know we can get him involved in stuff as well. I suppose it's one of the things I've really learnt is that it is these personal contacts that even if you've got 500 or 1000 people on the mailing list the people that're going to turn up at the event are the ones that you saw the day before or even the two days before and said 'oh are you going to come along' and they're like, 'oh yeah yeah yeah', and you're almost, you know, friends, or you are friends . So it makes it really hard work for us because everyone's got to step out of their kind of safety zone of their friends that they like to go and talk to, ie people who are like them, and go and talk to or gradually try and build up things for people that are not in that group. That's the only way to do it but not everyone has the ability to...the luxury of being around in the day and the confidence to go and talk to other people. So it's not an easy thing.

*When you've - cos you mentioned the Jamboree huts, the activity there and the fact that there were people passing, brought them in. I just wonder whether there's anything you can tell me about how the other Transition people who are*

*there, how they react to other people outside of Transition walking past. You know, were people going up and approaching them?*

Yeah, I mean there are some people in the group who are just naturally, who are very extrovert and so they'll just chat to anyone! They'll just talk to them. They're quite happy, so yeah. There hasn't ever been any kind of like 'oh, who's this outsider?' kind of thing going on. It's always very...there's a lot of love at our events. I mean, there is. That's the only word for it really. Everyone's here because their volunteers, they're doing it because they want to do it. And it's only for the reward, kind of thing, of the pleasure of getting something constructive done. So, yes.

*Is that - can you tell me any ways in which - is that ever acknowledged? That there's a lot of love, that that's the way people are?*

No, it's never explicitly talked about, it's just something I've noticed.

*Do you get a sense at all of whether that's something that might be special to Transition? Or is it about the people? It's difficult...*

I suppose the whole underlying values...or not values, - approach of Transition is that it's a positive movement, so I suppose you'd be more likely to get people who are wanting...who are positive people, and are proactive people. People like that, yeah, tend to have a lot of love. They're not negative, down on themselves, or full of anger and stuff like that. I suppose it comes up. There are some people who get cross - I mean everyone gets cross - but, when there's something going on and we all know what we're doing then it's usually pretty positive.

*And is that, kind of, regardless of whether it's a film showing or an activity to get involved in?*

I suppose it depends, yeah, like a film showing - I haven't been to all of them - but the one I went to it was about - we saw a film called 'collapse' and it's a documentary about an activist in America who is bordering on really paranoid but also hitting the nail on the head in terms of our dependence on oil. But kind of, he's thinks about the role that security plays and things like the reasons why the war in Iraq happened, that are to do with oil and money...I suppose that an event like that can bring out the other emotions in people - just sort of like fear and powerlessness and helplessness and despair and I think there was a bit of that afterwards and it is quite hard to show a film like that and afterwards just say 'ok, so, we're growing some apple trees next week' because you just feel like the whole fabric of your society is about to be ripped away from you because... so although I know that awareness raising is an important part of it, I kind of, I'd rather stress the actual tangible projects that we're doing as a way of trying to get people involved. Because I just don't think it helps.

*And is that reflected in how many attendees you get or how engaged people are? For example, have you noticed people react differently to Transition if they're introduced to it via getting involved in something versus watching a 'doom and gloom' film?*

Oh, I don't know. I haven't measured it or...I would say that the events that feel more successful are the ones that are you now the kind of positive constructive ones.

*More upbeat?*

Yeah. We did manage it once where we had the one in St Thomas's. Ok it wasn't a massively inclusive crowd because it was in a church congregation, but what we did was we showed a sort of middle of the road film, 'the story of stuff' that does raise the issue of consumerism but then had some workshop activities that were to do with re-skilling, all about valuing our material resources and repairing stuff and preserving foods. And because of that and because it was very skilfully chaired, well not chaired, led, by someone it just worked really well as an event. It didn't hit too hard but it did raise the right kind of issues.

In terms of like things we're planning on doing that are more targeted at particular groups, there's something going on in the Muslim Welfare House. They're...the guy from the Transport group has managed to get money from the London Cycling Campaign to do a bike cleaning and bike training thing so I think they're going to be linking in with the youth group at Muslim Welfare House. Sounds really brilliant actually.

*Yeah*

Cos they'll get training - they'll actually train up a couple of people from there in bike maintenance so they'll be able to sustain the project themselves. So yeah, it's good but, I haven't had contact with that project myself so I don't know whether it's...because my experience in the past of trying to do something with North London Central Mosque...is that you really have to talk to all the stakeholders there, otherwise it won't work. You might think you've spoken to the person in charge and that therefore the whole mosque will be on board but it really isn't like that. You have to talk to every single person who could have an impact on it and make sure they know what's going on and that they agree with it and that they're going to promote it.

*So are there like at the mosque for example, are there lots of different people and leaders that you need to engage with?*

Don't publish this [CONFIDENTIAL DO NOT REPRODUCE: there's internal power struggles. So there's an imam and then there's a board of trustees so you need to make sure that you're talking to them all.]

*Presumably that's quite challenging if you're not within that structure yourself?*

Yeah, we have got some people that are Muslims that are part of our group but they don't necessarily go to that mosque. There's a mosque on Manor House - it doesn't look like a mosque it's just someone's house but one of the things I've learnt is that this mosque is...it's to do with language. So Muslims from that group are mostly from India or Bangladesh, whereas the North London Central Mosque there's more ...er what's the groups...I think it's, well, Algerian, um, Kurdish was one of the other languages he said and Somalian. So it's just kind of different. So they are brilliant places to target.

*But it sounds as though targeting a mosque is not going to target all the Muslims in the area. There are people with different denominations and cultures, and languages.*

Yeah and also some groups – obviously faith centres that’s another way in but obviously it doesn’t touch everyone, just as schools don’t touch everyone. But you know – it’s like effort and output. The amount you put in...

*Yeah, you’re never going to be able to reach everybody with one thing.*

We’ve got a local group of older women that have lived in the area for years, as well, and they started a choir. It’s very informal. But they’re kind of on board with the Transition thing as well, like one of that group is going to be running the knitting training stuff in [?] which is also the home of the homeless families project. So they’ve been a really good contact. They’ve had a supportive not necessarily that activist-y but will help with things like teaching us how to make chutneys and promoting events and that sort of thing.

*So did the choir already exist or were there people who were involved in Transition Finsbury and then started a choir?*

No they already existed as a – they’d meet up every few weeks and just have a bit of a singsong and bring some food but it was a friendship based thing. When they started having a monthly choir which was I think three months ago now, they opened it up – it’s still a women’s thing – the person who started it [name] she’s part of the Transition group as well, so she’s one of the members of the growing group, so she’s kind of it is – it doesn’t really matter what it’s called – but we advertise it in the local things in the paper. So um, I had a few conversations recently with kids talking about cycling and Turkish mums as well. One of the Turkish mums at school was saying that she thinks there’s a whole group of mums that’d like to learn to ride bikes at the same time as their children, and then one of the kids on the estate at the end of my street was going on about how she’d really wants to get a bike and is desperate to learn to ride, as is her younger brother. And so at the moment – sometimes it happens like this, for me anyway, that the things just sort of happen. And then something – different conversations will seem to tie together and go in a direction so it’s nice to be able to initiate projects based on that.

*And those conversations, are those conversations just things that happen through your daily life? Being at the school, or being in the street, or...?*

Yeah, the bike conversation with the Turkish mum was just at school, and the conversation with the little girl was, I went along to, I took one of a friend’s daughter to this big celebration at the homeless families project which has been going 25 years. And when I came back to the estate to drop her off there were all these kids there, it was like 9 o’clock at night, so I was just kind of telling them ‘what are you doing out of bed?!’ then they started just talking and just saying that they wanted to learn to ride. It just made me think there’s a real possibility here. Doing something through the school, or...

*It’s really interesting, I’m finding it really interesting as you talk that so many of these reaching out to different people seems to happen as a result of your daily life and being around.*

Exactly, yeah. I recently went for a job with the London Wildlife Trust, and I don’t think I got it – they said they would let me know last week and I haven’t heard anything – but it was called, the post was ‘community outreach officer’ and I was thinking, if only I could just be paid to carry on doing what I’m doing now,

because that was what I'm doing, but I don't think - they've got their own kind of agenda so in a way I'm kind of pleased I haven't got that job because I can carry on doing this. I guess I'll have to get a job at some point: something to make ends meet.

[chat about potential paid work opportunities]

*You said you'd lived here for seven years, before. Before you worked in Transition, did you used to know many people, did you used to have these conversations?*

No, no. Transition has... Like last year we organised Training for Transition so I had to research venues in the area and even that, just that walking around to places, you know, just getting to know what's there, has just been brilliant. On Sunday I went to a community garden open day thing near Haringey Green Lanes, and I accidentally walked into the Kurdish community centre, I didn't know it was there, because they have got a garden at the back, and I thought it was the community garden, and it was like, 'oh...'. But it was just that physically walking around the space and travelling to other people's houses for meetings and things like that just means I feel much more part of the area.

*Would you say that that's partly as a result of being involved- I mean you mentioned going to meetings and things like that - but whether as well as the kind of logistical part of Transition meaning that you're going out and seeing people physically, is there anything about the feeling of being in Transition that you think has made you talk to people more than you would've before?*

Yeah, definitely. I don't really talk to people about peak oil and climate change, but I just get to know people and try and get them involved in projects and...I'm just thinking something I ought to mention as well is one of the people in our steering group has been on the training course - the Capacity Global training course on diversity, and she has made some suggestions about what we should do, saying we should actually formally research the area, look at the demographics, cos we've all got our sense of what the area's like and we do have one person's study when they looked at one particular ward, Brownswood Ward, which is probably about a quarter of the geographical area, but we need to kind of set out - we need to be clear in ourselves I think what our area really is. What the proper ethnic breakdown is, what people earn,...the languages spoken. At the moment, the Jamboree playhuts project we had signs in five languages...And that's what I put in the funding application, and I just kind of guessed what those five languages were. Based on my informal knowledge but it'd be good to have the actual statistics. So yeah, and also, we're taking part in the diversity pilot project.

*Oh ok with Catrina?*

We've got a workshop I think in a couple of weeks' time which a few people will go to.

*Do you feel there are groups that are - particular groups - that are under-represented in T Finsbury?*

Yeah. People who haven't got any English, so recent immigrants, blokes - a lot of the people who are involved seem to be women but not many blokes. There's a

lot of ...involved. There's a few single people that are kind of young-ish. I suppose. There's a few older people as well. I suppose mostly people in the group are either students or employed. There aren't really unemployed people. No disabled people. What other things...We've got a couple of gay people on our steering group. We've got an Indian person and a Chinese person as well ....what else can I say...

*Just wondering if there were any particular groups you felt were under-represented*

But like I say, it's getting better.

*Is there any particular part of the community which the Transition group is particularly keen to engage with or feels particularly guilty about not?*

The Turkish group would be an easy win in a way because most of the Turkish community has got - the language isn't necessarily a barrier. You know, it's getting there. And the Turkish community is massive, at least that's my perception and certainly at school anyway, and there's already, within that community, there's already very positive attitudes to growing stuff. I mean ok, you might do better if you look at a bigger range than that...but there's a lot more Turkish interest and experience. I guess we could do more with the religious, the faith groups. It's just difficult having the time to do that as well as the sort of just running the projects.

*I think it's really interesting if you do any kind of outreach it would probably make sense for Stokey to try and do it maybe not to do it together but to try and tie in with each other because we must have quite similar demographics...*

Possibly, possibly, not necessarily. I suspect there's a younger population in Stoke Newington. Actually I say that but there is actually the Brownswood report research that someone did, there's a lot of Victorian houses that have been converted into flats so there's a lot of flats that are used by students. But I get the sense when I wander around Stokey that there's more kind of families that are...

*In parts...I mean if you go around Church Street there are loads! ...In Stokey there's a huge Turkish community and something that we're really wanting to try and link up with more than we have as well.*

Yeah, down at Stoke Newington Green there's a Community centre there, isn't there. Which we haven't approached as it's your patch, but they'd be an obvious place to go to, try and do a gardening thing. Maybe on the Green itself, that'd be a nice...

*Yeah. I was just wondering whether you imagine TT Finsbury park in a few years when your tree nursery is all growing and we're coming to collect trees off you for Stoke Newington, if at that point in time Transition Finsbury Park weren't talking any more about being worried that they weren't more open or that it wasn't representative of the local community, what do you think that would feel and look like and be like? What would your vision of inclusion and diversity be?*

I suppose my ideal would be that I would be seeing more people having the kinds of conversations that I'm having at the moment on the street because more

people would know each other, which is what it ends up being about. People making the connections. So that would be the ideal. Just to see more of that mixing...rather than people just brushing past each other. It would be a good sign. And I suppose people... just doing really cool projects that's nothing to do with us. So instead of us trying to lead things and get them going, people just doing. Nothing to do with us, just sitting in these different containers.

*You talked a bit about some of your experiences of spontaneous inclusion that have happened like when people started grabbing people in the park. Are there any other experiences of inclusion - or exclusion - that you perceived.*

I have to admit that at the beginning when I started the Transition Town project I deliberately, I set up the Steering Group, invited people that I knew. I didn't do...I think the conventional model is you have some kind of meeting and then, you know, some of those people end up being on the steering group. And I deliberately just spoke to people that I knew because I'd seen examples of where things have been taken off in the wrong direction or been scuppered right at the start because there have been some very distinct, strong, maybe slightly embarrassed personalities involved but I know that some people object to that approach, that they would say that it is perhaps excluding. And I - I kind of stand by it because I think it worked at the time - and the steering group has evolved, some people have left, new people have joined, so it's not any more under my control type thing. But yeah. Other examples of where people have been excluded or included...I suppose just, like, I suppose one of the things I've learnt with the growing projects is that you have to involve the stakeholders and the people physically located near your project. So the trees don't get nicked and they are watered and stuff like that. So with the project at the doctors surgery and the train station - both of them have involved people who are physically nearby. So the train station one of the guys who works in the station in the shop is dead keen on gardening. Not massively confident in it, you know, will need some training and support, but you know when people are just into their gardening, they just care about those plants, and that's where he's at.

And then at the doctors' surgery, some of the trees were stolen, but two of the cherry trees outside this guy's house, a guy called XX, are still there and he's got involved, and then parents from the local school who live opposite this project have been keeping an eye on the site and watering and when those trees got stolen we planted some pumpkins and stuff...and XX has been watering those with his tree water (as he calls it) every day. I haven't been there recently - hopefully they're still there - but I see him every day. It's not even big enough to be a transition project but we've got - I've been doing a growing project at School, a gardening club on Mondays and we produced so much stuff that we had a plant sale and we still had plants left over, and one of the houses that we walk past on the way to school had this raised bed right out front, south facing, and I know the mum because her son is in my son's class, and I said can I put these tomato plants in here, and these chilli plants, and she's like 'yeah go on then', and so we just did that and then this same parent got involved in helping with that bed, so it's just triggered off a few kind of passionate gardeners, and hopefully XX, the one whose front garden we planted up, hopefully she'll realise how easy it is once you've got a plant going you just water it - hopefully she'll get a few cherry tomatoes and chillies out of it as well.

*And these people who are beginning to water the plants, it sounds as though these are people who weren't really involved in Transition and just sort of involved because they like gardening. Would that be right?*

Yes

*That's lovely*

There's a lot of things like that, so it's just tapping into that gardening. And people just ...we have plant sales so they know about it. I don't know, it's a really nice thing to do.

*We found a similar thing, actually. We haven't got as many projects as you but we have one in a community space and there was sheltered housing opposite for older people and they were coming and watering all the plants and looking after them.*

They've got the time and they're looking at them

*It's nice when that happens.*

It is. They may not get the whole thing about what Transition Town is about but it doesn't matter because they're just [?] with other people and their area in a different way.

*And I find it interesting as well because one of the things that someone mentioned when we were talking about inclusion at the conference was about the language in Transition being quite cerebral and peak oil and climate change and that it's not necessarily that accessible to a lot of people. I don't know if you have any - I mean you've mentioned already that you tend not to talk about peak oil and climate change at your events is that right?*

Not particularly, don't tend to hit them over the head with it. I mean, I just don't think it's a selling point. I really don't. I mean like 'you need to start growing tomatoes because the world's, you know, about to end' they just don't go together. People just switch off if you start talking about those things. And also I think actually they already know about them. If they've heard enough about the world they know, really, and all that happens if you refer to those things is they'll just put up their survival kind of barrier, because there's so much stuff in the media now that the only way you can deal with it is to just shut off. When people want to engage they will engage: the information is there. We're just providing a...possible reaction to it.

*Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about, about inclusion or diversity? Or any questions that you have about the project?*

Well, I would be interested in hearing how you distinguish between those two words.

*Well I haven't - this is from a purely personal point of view, I haven't really been doing any research into this specifically but I feel as though inclusion goes a bit deeper than diversity. When I think of diversity I tend to think of box-ticking, like 'oh we've got the right people of the right ages and the right backgrounds' and one of the things that I've been thinking about is also about how Transition is*

*about creating an alternative for the future, so it's how are people's voices heard in that and how will power exist within that and who will make decisions about how the community is. And so from that point of view I feel that inclusivity should reflect an equality of power and people's voices being heard, not just people kind of being there at the meetings. Do you know what I mean? That's how I'm beginning to think about it.*

Well that's triggering one of the things I've been thinking of is the climate camp model of consensus decision making. I went to climate camp last year and I was really impressed by how well organised it was as a way of getting stuff done and getting people to take on responsibility for carrying out jobs to maintain this really specific camp. Whenever I talk to anyone from the camp and say 'it's so efficient' they just laugh and say you don't know, but as an outsider when I came in that is what I saw (said?) and I just think that that model of local democracy in effect and in one sense survival because they set up a camp with the basic needs being met of water, food, shelter and energy. I think that that would be very useful to model for live communities...So people feel that they know how to organise themselves when they need to rather than just going how the hell do I set up a water filtration system with two baths and some straw bales. Yeah, so that...but the other thing was the whole way that they run their meetings, um, allows for a good range of voices to be heard. And I watched a debate about vegan beer, and whether it should be drunk on climate camp. And there were people there who felt it was ridiculous to even have vegan food, because climate camp has this ethos that all the food has to be vegan, and so some were saying it's fascism to make people eat vegan food, and there are other people saying we shouldn't even be selling any alcohol on this camp this is meant to be anti-consumerist, we shouldn't be trying to make money out of selling alcohol. And the way that the facilitator of the meeting managed to encompass and deal with all of those different views was really amazing, and just because the process worked really well and they ended up with a proposal that most people were happy to go along with. And I thought that would be a good ...that would be how I would like to see things done more generally.

*It's really interesting 'cos I went to a workshop on the Monday morning of the conference on formal consensus decision making and I don't know if it was the same process [hand movements?] No, it wasn't that it was different from that it was where someone does facilitate and you start with a proposal and then you give people the opportunity to brainstorm concerns but you don't debate them, you don't say we should do this because of that. You brainstorm it all and then try to modify the proposal and then you test consensus.*

It's similar, but the climate camp does use these hand signals so you get a sense of what's going on...of the feeling.

*Interesting.*

Did you have the blocking thing?

No

So it was just a simple haggling a proposal until...?

*We ran through it quite quickly but it gives people the chance to voice their concerns and make sure their concerns are resolved, so always testing for concerns and saying are there any unresolved concerns? Until people are at the*

*point where they can live with the proposal and they have formally said that, so if they have concerns they can't really fester...*

There is still scope for the 5% at either end of the scale to really block things, whereas at least with the other way of doing it you can say you'll chop the top and tail off and say you'll go for consensus minus two, so if two people block the decision then their voice is ignored just for the sake of getting something done. But it's hugely contentious, isn't it.

*The other thing I thought - did you go to any of the conflict workshops? I didn't go to them but apparently one of them carried on later on, didn't it? And I heard - second hand - that a lot of conflicts came out, that people were giving voice to a lot of conflicts in their groups and that made me think a little bit about decision making and power and those things. I suppose it just got me thinking about how it's handled and whether it is handled or whether it is just left.*

I think in our group luckily we haven't had to make any difficult decisions yet. But yeah. I can see that those things could easily happen, especially as we got a bit of money at the beginning because XX ran the London Marathon, basically, and got £400 so we had this money, it's gradually getting eaten away and as it gets less and less I can see, you know, shall we spend it on this or that.

*Is there anything else that you'd like to say about inclusion?*

I don't think there's anything else.