

## Who We Are

### Swansea's ethnic communities sharing cultural heritage: past, present and future

Ethnic communities often feel that their cultural heritage is not well understood by the host communities in their new homes. They are also likely to lack opportunities to make their views known to local decision makers and planners, who in turn are unable to take into consideration the aspirations of ethnic groups when developing community strategies.

In Swansea, *Black Environment Network (BEN)* tackled this problem by working with the African, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Filipino and Iraqi communities to gather information about their past, present and future in relation to where they live and the surrounding countryside.

#### Past, Present and Future

The Who We Are project focused on stories of life and family history in the five countries of origin; aspects of living in Swansea today and the ways these communities contribute to the look and feel of the city; and their visions for Swansea's culturally diverse future.

#### Making it happen

The 'Balchder Bro' scheme supported BEN to develop a series of workshops within communities, enabling people to share photos and create audio recordings and text aimed at capturing and celebrating their ideas, skills and opinions. These were used to create a website, to share aspects of cultural heritage with the wider community and to inform community planners and other mainstream organisations about how to assist minority communities in realising their vision for the city's future. *Dynamix*, an organisation providing training to support social change, facilitated the workshops and *eCymru* designed and hosted the web site.

#### Pride of Place

Balchder Bro is a Welsh phrase meaning 'Pride of Place' and the purpose of the scheme was to stimulate Welsh communities to consider what is distinctive about their local environment and motivate others to appreciate and care for it. The Who We Are website has allowed a marginalised section of Swansea's population to suggest improvements they would like to see in their urban environment.

For example, one person from the Bangladeshi community describes the contrast between a very peaceful village back home with bamboo buildings,





compared with the rather dull buildings and unsafe streets in some parts of present day Swansea. She dreams of a cleaner city with fewer cars, more trees and safe places for women.

Visting the Who We Are web site you can listen to a Chinese lullaby , learn about the customs and culture of the Philippines, discover the contribution of Iraqis to Swansea life, enjoy a tasty Jamaican recipe, or view a map of the area indicating the high points and low points in the built and natural environment, as identified by workshop participants.

## The Future

An online form allows members of the participating communities to add their own details to the web site. In the longer term, BEN hopes to raise funds to employ a part time worker from within the ethnic communities, to build on the Who We Are project and encourage other communities to develop their own web pages to celebrate their unique cultural heritage and contribution to the future of Swansea's built and natural environment.



## FACTFILE

### ● Funders:

Heritage Lottery Fund and Nationwide through the Balchder Bro scheme, administered by the Countryside Council for Wales and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

### ● Partners:

Black Environment Network, Dynamix, eCymru,

### ● Community Partners:

The African, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Filipino and Iraqi communities in Swansea.

### ● Numbers:

110 people

### ● Resources:

[www.stephenwaldie.net/whoweare/pages/index.aspx](http://www.stephenwaldie.net/whoweare/pages/index.aspx)

### ● Key points:

- Ethnic communities are pleased when mainstream organisations show an interest in their culture. They display genuine pride in their heritage and are keen to participate, sharing stories about their backgrounds.
- Workshops are a good way to bring together people within communities, especially if individuals from the communities can be trained in consultation skills, enabling them to conduct workshops within their own communities.
- A multi-cultural project of this type requires strong co-ordination to oversee the facilitation of workshops and the management of content uploaded to the web site.



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