Case Study: Jaan Malik and Shantona Women and Family Centre, Leeds



I am a senior practitioner on a 'Building a Stronger Britain Together' (BSBT) programme, which supports community organisations to stand up to extremism. I wanted to deepen my knowledge about how to work with groups, and so I went on the BSBT 'Challenging Conversations' course.

Graeme showed us how to work with a group to develop a question. I found that really useful, especially the layers of effort and energy it takes to get from a rough idea and then to refine it, and refine it, and refine it, until you have a question that you *really* want to answer. That was quite amazing. Graeme had some pictures, and one was of a St George's Cross. We had to say what it brought to mind. Different people said different things. I said it reminded me of the Crusades. Graeme said, 'What's your reason for saying that?' I explained that my neighbours have this flag in their garden, and I find it could be associated with racism throughout history. We then talked about how that affected me as a neighbour. This led to a deeper conversation about my neighbour's understanding of that flag. Is it just to show solidarity with being British? We went on to talk about the UK, how it split up, and the flag in that context. All from exploring one person's comment more deeply.

We all had a go at running the group and developing our own question. This was a bit scary, but we all did it, and it helped see the dynamics of how groups work, how and when to ask questions and how to challenge in a non-threatening way. So if someone makes a comment, how to delve into that deeper without putting that person on the spot.



I used this approach myself with a group of Muslim women. One of my images was of a white-dominated demonstration. The group generated questions and refined these down to a single one: 'Would we be welcome in each others' groups? We then tried to answer this, looking at it from different angles and discussing how people might exclude each other without meaning to.

I learned so much from Graeme, the whole thing was fantastic, especially Graeme, I'm not going to lie – 10/10. I loved the way he ran the group, the way he challenged us and our own stereotypes. I can't criticise anything. He's got a wealth of knowledge, he talks broadly on so many different topics. He completely knows what he's doing, and he's hilarious, even when he's causing trouble. His Community Philosophy approach is tried and tested, and you know it works. I'd recommend it 100 times over. You don't know what people will say or how the story will end, but you know that it's a good tool. Now, when I work with a group, the outcome sometimes isn't what I expect, but we still have a really deep and meaningful conversation, and that's the main thing.