

# Good idea – Fill the Gap: challenging stereotypes of religion

At St. Brendan's Sixth Form college a group of students worked with Envision, an external partner who encourage volunteering and work in the College, on a week of activities challenging the stereotypes of different religions.

## What was your project?

The project started with the Interfaith Officer for the Student Union, Liyamol Milton and the College Chaplain organising an event for Interfaith Week in November in which different people from different faith communities came in and talked to students in an informal way over lunch and also in tutorial groups and shared their experiences etc. The idea was to then launch an Interfaith students' group. This was advertised and met on a couple of occasions but there was not great take up, and so it was felt that the NUS funding should be used in a more creative way .

A group of students then agreed to work with Envision, an external partner who encourage volunteering and work in the College, on a project designed to challenge the stereotyping of different religions.

This was entirely developed, created and run by the students themselves. They organised a week of activities when organisations like the Bristol Muslim Cultural Society came in and shared experiences and had a stall in the refectory, culminating in a conference and event for students and staff and external visitors with food, speakers and interactive activities and music on Weds March 19<sup>th</sup>.

Website: [fillthefapftg.wix.com/fillthegap](http://fillthefapftg.wix.com/fillthegap)  
Twitter: @fiILthegap  
Facebook: FillTheGap

## How did you ensure students were involved in the development of your project?

The initial ideas for the Interfaith Week were developed by the Student Union Interfaith Officer with the Chaplain.

**The Fill The Gap event was totally student led. They conceived the idea following street surveys where they found a significant amount of stereotyping was taking place of particular religions and of religious people and felt they wanted to do something.**

They planned all the events, secured additional funding through Envision, dealt with all the practicalities of the organisation (room bookings, food ordering, programmes, evaluations) sought external speakers and internal support in the college and presented on the day etc. They also created all the publicity posters, set up a Facebook, Twitter and Website presence. The only other involvement was minimal support from college staff (the Student Liaison Officer and Chaplain) and external support from a mentor from Envision who helped them with the event planning and promotional aspects.

What impact did this project have on students you work with and within your students' union or college?

The event was well promoted around the college and clearly raised awareness of different faiths presented (Judaism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism). It presented academic arguments about the causes of stereotyping which participants found useful and which students illustrated through role play and through use of powerful video clips. Evaluations said that participants said they had learnt more about other faiths and had their own stereotypes challenged, but also that they understood better the negative impact stereotyping could have through the video.

What lessons did you learn in delivering the project that might be useful to other students' unions?

**Any work of this sort needs to be student-led and flexible so if the enthusiasm of the students and their interests lead it in a different direction from the original plan it just needs to be allowed to develop organically as the outcomes will be better.**

The students showed the power of the use of social media as an important element of the project and this was clearly their chosen mechanism of engagement.

Do you have any feedback from participants at your event?

Participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form and feedback was very positive particularly from student leaders who organised the event and felt so appreciative of being given the chance to

develop themselves and work on issues that mattered to them.

The poster features a yellow header with the text 'Fill THE GAP' and 'Stereotypes within RELIGION'. Below the title are four religious symbols: a purple cross for Christianity, a red and white Om symbol for Hinduism, a white Star of David for Judaism, and a green crescent moon for Islam. The main text reads: 'Come and join our conference on WEDNESDAY 19TH MARCH, 2014 where we will be discussing & dissecting the common misconceptions about religions.' It specifies the venue as 'The theatre, here @ St. Brendan's', the time as '4:30pm - 7:30pm', and 'FREE ADMISSION' with 'Free food & beverages also provided!'. It encourages attendees to 'Come along, join the fun & learn something new! Guest speakers, video presentations, live music, open discussion panel & more!' and asks them to 'Please RSVP as soon as you can individually or as a group'. Contact information includes 'RSVP: fillthegap@nusuk.org.uk' and 'Contact in person or via email: Angel Capilli, Fiona Sim or Thaba Adeniyi!'. A vertical URL 'http://fillthegap.com/fillthegap' is on the left side.



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