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When health professionals from southern India arrived to work in Manchester, many were subjected to racial abuse. Carol Jenkins looks at how the local police successfully responded to a problem currently affecting forces nationwide.

## Safe Haven

Economic migrants make a significant contribution to life in the UK - but their arrival can cause tension in communities and lead to increases in racially-motivated attacks.

Greater Manchester Police officers in the South Manchester Division have witnessed at first hand the challenges that can arise when economic migrants arrive unannounced in a community.

Two years ago, a large number of health professionals from the Malayalee community in southern India were recruited by the local health trust to work at Wythenshawe Hospital in a variety of key roles. Within months of their arrival, officers noticed this particular community had become the subject of a disproportionate amount of crime and anti-social behaviour.

In one incident, a young girl had her hair set alight, while others were

abused and jeered at in the street in what were clearly racially-motivated attacks. Further investigations revealed this was just the tip of the iceberg, and that there had been numerous incidents occurring in this particular community that residents felt they couldn't report to the police.

Chief Supt Alan Cooper, divisional commander for South Manchester, explained the problems arose due to the fact the new residents were brought over to the UK without an effective integration strategy being first put in place before their arrival.

"Experience has taught us that when you get a large number of people coming into the country who are employed by a specific employer then they have a responsibility to assist in the integration of those individuals," he explains.

"It is no good bringing them here and expecting them to slot into daily

life without a glitch because it won't happen."

In this case, the lack of an integration strategy led to the existing community forming misconceptions about their new neighbours as being illegal immigrants who were scrounging off the state for handouts. This went by unchallenged and led to the escalation in tension and, as a result, the racially-motivated attacks.

Faced with the crisis in the community, officers teamed up with local partners across the public and private sector to formulate an integration strategy and to address both immediate and long term issues. Their work has been recognised as best practice and led to them scooping two awards. The first was the *Police Review Diversity in Action* award last year followed by the 'First Among Equals' diversity award earlier this month.

**“By the time the officer arrives they are angry and things can get out of hand - even physical sometimes. But when they get to know the facts and their expectations become more realistic then over time attitudes start to change.”**

This recent award is part of the National Public Servants Award organised by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. It was presented to officers from the force and also staff from Manchester City Council and Willow Park Housing Trust in recognition of their effective partnership working.

Central to their approach was to begin to form stronger links with the community and enlist the help of other agencies, such as the council and housing trust to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

In order to foster these valuable relationships, a Race Incident Steering Group was set up made up of local agencies and community representatives



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who worked together to solve any issues as they arose. Regular police patrols were carried out in residential areas and certain locations were put under surveillance.

By officers working in partnership with the community, the hospital, Willow Park Housing and the council, twenty arrests were made, numerous tenancy warnings given and an ASBO handed out. CCTV cameras are now in place and offences have dropped by 70 per cent.

Chief Supt Cooper explains that the first step to effective integration is for the employee to meet with police and local partners to formulate the integration strategy. This involves considering where to house the new residents and the effect this influx of people will have on local school, health and housing provision.

Other considerations include placing new residents in areas where there already are appropriate services such as places of worship. In this case, the Malayalee community are devout Catholics and no thought was put into making sure they had access to a Catholic church. It is also important to identify if members of the same community already live in the area and to encourage the new residents to form links with existing communities in order to make their integration smoother.

Police and partner agencies also provide new residents with key information such as cultural and legal attitudes to drinking, domestic violence, laws relating

to carrying knives as well as other practical facts including transport links, organising insurance for homes and cars in case they are victims of crime and also information on health and housing provision.

Local people were won over when misconceptions were challenged by all partner agencies and they realised just what a contribution their new neighbours were making to the community. Older community members were saving local lives by working as

educate the community about police and to make sure their expectations were realistic. This, she believes, fosters trust and respect on both sides.

“Some residents assume that there are 50 police officers sitting around waiting to respond to incidents and when they don’t get the response they expect they become frustrated, isolated and feel doubly victimised,” she says.

“This means that by the time the officer arrives they are angry and things can get out of hand - even physical sometimes.

of diversity were also conveyed through posters and a brochure placed in public buildings such as the hospital and schools.

For Mazamil, one incident which occurred in the crowd at a St Thomas’ day parade in July this year, illustrated just how much attitudes have now changed.

“Three elderly ladies were watching the parade when a man who was standing next to them began shouting abuse,” she says.



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doctors and nurses, while their young people were driving up standards in local schools by excelling at academic work. Local schools that were failing and in danger of being closed down were suddenly shooting up the league tables.

Community race relations officer Mazamil Bashir, describes her role as acting as a ‘conduit between police and the community.’

One of her tasks was not only to educate officers about the community but also to

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Mazamil was instrumental in setting up surgeries in the local church, organising anti-bullying evenings in schools, engaging local people from all communities in debate through public events such as international evenings, parades, as well as through the local press and radio.

Subliminal messages about the value

“The ladies immediately challenged this behaviour and told him in no uncertain terms that his language was inappropriate.

This definitely wouldn’t have happened 18 months ago. But now we’ve got a situation where the community is actively challenging unacceptable behaviour and for me, this the real indication that all the hard work has paid off and that we have achieved community cohesion.”