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Community Conversations as a Strategy to Prevent Hate Crime: Facilitators' Reflections

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Abstract

Hate crimes damage social cohesion and undermine the security of societies. Persistent high levels of hate crime demand new and effective pathways for change. The aim of this article is to consider the value of 'community conversations' for preventing hate crime at the level of local communities, based on the perceptions and experiences of facilitators. Drawing on the evaluation of the 'Citizens at the Heart' project, this article discusses community conversations and their core components and effectiveness, and highlights the promise of this approach for tackling hate crime at its root: prejudice. Drawing on interviews and focus groups with the facilitators of community conversations, the findings show that community conversations can be a valuable instrument for challenging prejudiced views and behaviour, through bringing local people together and the protective impact of creating counter-narratives. Intergroup Contact Theory posits that through meaningful, collaborative interactions between members from different social identity groups, prejudice can be reduced. It will be concluded that by using community-based approaches, we can deal with bias and prejudice more proactively, before it escalates to more serious forms of hate. However, a longitudinal evaluation, which also draws on community conversations attendees' perceptions, would be necessary to capture the long-term effectiveness of this approach.

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Bias, community conversations, counter-narratives, hate crime, intergroup contact theory, prejudice

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to showcase community conversations as a unique methodology and a promising avenue for preventing hate crimes based on the perceptions and experiences of facilitators. The concept of 'hate crime' is now widely recognised for its societal significance, attracting attention from academics, policy makers, criminal justice practitioners and activists globally. 'Hate crime' is the umbrella concept used in its broadest sense to describe criminal offences that are motivated by some form of identity-based prejudice (Walters, 2022). Prejudice is defined as 'bias that devalues people because of their perceived membership of a social group' (Abrams, 2010). Emphasising its multi-faceted nature and underlying antipathy, Brown (2010: 7) defines prejudice as 'any attitude, emotion or behaviour towards members of a group which directly or indirectly implies some negativity or antipathy towards that group'. Perpetrators of hate crimes are not always motivated by a single type of prejudice or hatred but can be influenced by a combination of different prejudices (Walters et al., 2016).

Legal definitions of 'hate crime' and of 'hate' at the conceptual level vary from one country to the next, and even within countries (the United States, for example). In England and Wales, the central point of reference is the operational definition offered by the College of Policing (2014), which identifies hate crime as offences that are motivated by hostility or prejudice on grounds of race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and transgender identity. Other countries recognise further forms of targeted victimisation, including age (Canada), political affiliation (Poland), and health (Belgium). 'Trigger' events such as Brexit, terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom and globally, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and far-right counter-protests following the death of George Floyd in the United States, and the global COVID-19 pandemic as well as the Israel-Gaza conflict have led to spikes in recorded hate crime in the United Kingdom (Williams and et al, 2023). More recently far-right riots occurred in the United Kingdom from 30 July to 5 August 2024, following the tragic murders of three children in Southport on 29 July 2024. The riots across England and in Northern Ireland were fuelled by false claims circulated by far-right groups online that the perpetrator was a Muslim and an asylum seeker (BBC, 2024). By 30 August 2024, the police had made a total number of 1,280 arrests and identified hundreds more suspects in connection with the riots while the CPS had brought a total of 796 charges so far (NPCC, 2024). The Muslim Women's Network surveyed its members on how safe they felt in the United Kingdom before and after the riots. Seventy-five percent of respondents stated that they were worried about their safety, compared with 16% before the riots – a rise of almost 60% (Press, 2024).

There is a substantial theoretical and empirical evidence base on hate crime and its individual and collective harms (Paterson et al., 2019). The evidence demonstrates that hate crimes often have a disproportionate impact on the victim on the basis that they are being targeted because of their identity. Hate crimes not only impact the individual victim but also the wider community to which the victim belongs. Whether one-off events or a series of repeated and targeted offending, hate crimes can send reverberations through communities as they reinforce established patterns of bias, prejudice and discrimination. Referring to the powerful symbolic nature of hate crimes, Chakraborti and Garland (2015) state that hate crimes transmit a 'message' not just to the immediate victim but

to fellow members of their minority community that reminds them of their 'othered' status: that 'their kind' are not welcome. The hate crime literature indicates the inherent limitations of hate crime legislation to tackle prejudice-motivated offences (Brax and Munthe, 2015; Schweppe, 2012) as well as alternative criminal justice responses to tackling hate crime such as restorative justice (Walters, 2014). To date, there is a gap in knowledge surrounding 'what works' in tackling hate crime. In this regard, the evidence base is especially limited in 'realist evaluations' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), for example, what works, how it works, for whom and in what circumstances.

To contribute to existing debates on tackling hate crime, this article draws on the perceptions and experiences of facilitators to explore the potential value of community conversations in preventing bias, prejudice and 'hate' through the protective impact of creating counter-narratives, especially at the level of local communities. The term 'community conversation' entails discussions among local people, guided by a trained facilitator, in the context of bringing communities together and solving social problems through dialogue (Kotzé et al., 2013). Community conversations involve posing questions and thinking points about why problematic social situations are the way they are, what actual and latent local responses and strengths exist in the community to tackle these, and how problematic social relations could be improved (Campbell et al., 2013). Community conversations have been used to address a range of issues including mental health stigma among racially minoritised communities in Scotland (Knifton et al., 2010), promoting inclusion for people with severe disabilities (Carter et al., 2012), promoting educational alignment for young children (Rogers and McComas, 2010), identifying rural health care needs facing rural and Native American residents' care (Moulton et al., 2007), building on the strengths and resilience of elder Southeast Asian refugees (Grigg-Saito et al., 2008) and managing HIV/AIDS in rural Zimbabwe (Campbell et al., 2013), to name a few examples. Importantly, a common thread among these studies is the positive outcome of community conversations. For example, Kotzé et al. (2013) examined community conversations as a community engagement tool within the South African context by exploring the perceptions of the facilitators. The findings indicated that community conversations increased community members' awareness of community resources and allowed for community members to voice their shared concerns and discuss matters that they deemed to be most relevant in their community. Also, the community conversations were interpreted as promotive of relationship-building and collaboration opportunities among community members, and between community members and external stakeholders. Community conversations were also considered to have created a participative environment in which community members and external stakeholders could discuss potential solutions to identified problems, thereby laying a foundation for future action (Kotzé et al., 2013). As such, community conversations created a participative environment in which community members and external stakeholders could discuss potential solutions to identified problems, thereby laying a foundation for future action (Kotzé et al., 2013). However, community conversations have not been used in the context of hate crime.

This article reports the findings of the evaluation of a community conversation programme in Nottingham drawing on the perceptions and experiences of facilitators. Specifically, the objectives in this paper are to: (1) understand the experiences of those involved in facilitating community conversations; (2) evaluate the efficacy of the community conversation approach in this context (e.g., based on facilitators' perspectives). Findings presented in this article are based on the evaluation of the 'Citizens at the Heart: A Citizen Centred Approach to Tackling Hate Crime' project, a 2-year project, funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2020–2021). Drawing on the evaluation of this project, the article discusses community conversations, their core components and their potential effectiveness in preventing hate

crime. In the current project, the aim of community conversations was to equip local people with the tools, skills, and confidence to respond to prejudice, and provide alternatives to harmful narratives before they developed into hate crime. Although other elements of the 'Citizens at the Heart' project were reactive to hate crime – namely, what happens once a person has been a victim of a hate crime and what can be done to improve victims' experiences of hate crime – community conversations focused on prevention; therefore, trying to tackle hate crime at its root. Drawing on facilitators' reflections, the findings indicate that community conversations were considered to be a valuable instrument for tackling prejudice, which occurs at the base of the Pyramid of Hate (ADL, 2018). At this stage, those expressing prejudiced attitudes have not yet entered the criminal justice system; but are likely to do so unless challenged. Within the framework of Intergroup Contact Theory, the findings demonstrate that community conversations provide a forum which brings different communities together, encourages attendees to 'break the silence' about the issues that affect them and encourages them to develop constructive strategies for change in collaboration with local organisations. However, the article is not seeking to make any claims about whether such strategies may or may not be implemented following the community conversations, and their effectiveness. Also, the article does not claim a linear or causal pathway from community conversations to behaviour change. Rather, the article argues that community conversations can provide social spaces for communities to come together, to develop strategies that could be implemented by people and organisations in the local community, often using existing community resources. This way, using innovative and cost-effective approaches such as community conversations, can equip local communities with the skills and resources to tackle hate crime more proactively, at an early stage. Also, considering that facilitators can only offer their own, potentially biased account of the community conversation process, it is important to acknowledge that the findings documented in this article only reflect one dimension of the conversation process. A longitudinal evaluation, which also draws on community conversations attendees' perceptions, would be necessary to capture the long-term effectiveness of this method.

Understanding hate crime

As alluded to in the introduction, there is no common definition or shared understanding of the concept of hate crime across different countries. The Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) – which comprises 57 participating States that span the globe, encompassing three continents, North America, Europe and Asia – defines hate crimes as 'criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people' (OSCE, 2024). Hate crimes comprise two elements: a criminal offence and a bias motivation. According to OSCE (2024), this bias does not have to manifest itself as 'hate' for the offence to be thought of as a hate crime or be the primary motive. Rather, it refers to acts where the victim is targeted deliberately because of a particular 'protected characteristic . . . shared by a group, such as "race," language, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or any other similar common factor' (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2009: 16). From this perspective, hate crime has taken place when a perpetrator has intentionally targeted an individual(s) or property because of one or more identity traits or expressed hostility towards these identity traits during the crime. People or property associated with – or even perceived to be a member of – a group that shares an identity trait can also be targets of hate crimes, such as human rights defenders, community centres, or places of worship (OSCE, 2024).

Along similar lines, the hate crime policy framework in England and Wales has been set out in the operational hate crime guidance produced by the College of Policing (2014). In line with OSCE's (2024) hate crime approach, the College of Policing (2014) framework makes specific reference not just to hate but to prejudice and hostility. In this context, a hate crime is defined as 'any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic' (College of Policing, 2014). Police forces in England and Wales are required to monitor five strands of hate crime: race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and transgender identity. These five strands are described as the minimum categories that the police are expected to record, and the guidance issued by the College of Policing (2014) stipulates that police forces can extend their local hate crime policy responses to include other forms of targeted hostility. By way of illustration, Nottinghamshire Police made history in April 2016 when it started recording misogyny as hate crime (see also the evaluation of the 'Misogyny Hate Crime policy' by Mullany and Trickett, 2018).

The Home Office publishes annual figures showing the number of hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales. According to the latest police recorded crime data (Home Office, 2024), in the year ending March 2024, there were 140,561 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, a decrease of 5% from the year ending March 2023 (147,645 offences), and the second consecutive annual fall. Prior to the falls seen over the last 2 years, police recorded hate crime offences rose between the years ending March 2013 and March 2022; this prolonged period of increasing offences was thought to have been driven by improvements in crime recording and better identification of what constitutes a hate crime. As in previous years, the majority of hate crimes were racially motivated, accounting for 7 in 10 of all such offences. Religious hate crimes increased by 25%, from 8,370 to 10,484 offences, and this was driven by a rise in offences against Jewish people and to a lesser extent Muslims, and has occurred since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas conflict. There were falls in the other three strands of hate crime; sexual orientation hate crimes fell by 8%, disability hate crimes by 18% and transgender hate crimes by 2%. Given these figures, it is important to highlight that hate crime remains a hugely underreported crime across society, and thus they are likely to only reflect the tip of the iceberg.

Community conversations

Hate crimes are deeply rooted in prejudice. Community conversations have the potential to be a valuable tool in preventing hate crimes as they challenge the root cause of the problem: prejudiced attitudes, emotions and behaviours. Bates and O'Connor-Bones (2018) define community conversations as 'an action research methodology delivered through structured participatory dialogues around a topic of importance to a local community'. Along similar lines, Carter and Bumble (2018) states that community conversations are an asset-based approach for engaging a diverse range of stakeholders and community members addressing an issue of importance to their local community. Although some researchers loosely use the term 'community conversation' to describe an informal focus group, community conversations are generally considered to be a unique and new intervention type that is distinct from focus groups (Campbell et al., 2013). A key difference is that community conversations aim to develop participants' critical thinking to formulate solutions to local issues; hence they are action planned and orientated while focus groups are research oriented, aiming to gather information about social relations and understandings (Campbell et al., 2013). From this perspective, community conversations are an opportunity for a diverse group of

stakeholders and community members to come together to identify, discuss and generate potential solutions to a pressing issue facing the local community. As such, community conversations are a means to facilitate engaged conversation, mutual learning, reflection (individually and as a group) and collective thinking (Bates and O'Connor-Bones, 2018). Therefore, it is posited as an asset-based and capacity-building approach that can lead to increased self-determination through active and informed contribution to decision-making and policy implementation at the local level (Bates and O'Connor-Bones, 2018).

Community conversations involve two key actors: facilitators and participants. The role of the facilitator is to create a constructive space for meaningful dialogue; promote discussion and ensure all participants have an opportunity to participate; encouraging critical thinking, open discussion and respect for all viewpoints; guide the direction and flow of the conversation and maintain group focus (Carter and Bumble, 2018). Participants provide grassroots insight into local community issues; give voice to the potential outcome and impact of government/policy decision-making; and offer suggestions and solutions that are meaningful and achievable in a local context (Carter and Bumble, 2018).

According to Bates and O'Connor-Bones (2018), key principles of community conversation involve, *inter alia*: transparency of process; a degree of structure to prevent unproductive conversations; open-framed guiding questions to encourage fluid conversation; acknowledgement of, and respect for, local knowledge and perspectives; active listening leading to frank and open dialogue; mutual recognition and respectful understanding of differing viewpoints; shared discussion, reflection and negotiation; emerging rather than imposed ideas and actions; identification of potential solutions that align with the community's culture, priorities and resources; guided encouragement towards the development of shared group understanding; solution-focused and action-oriented discussion so that participants can see its value; participant awareness of its purpose so that potential solutions are realistically framed within the context and resources of the community; and last but not least, assurances of confidentiality and any other ethical assurances to ensure the highest standard of research ethics and gain the trust of participants.

Bates and O'Connor Bones (2021) discuss how community conversations can be used to give communities a voice in policy decisions in deliberative democracy. Their paper is a response to the challenge of engaging citizens in inclusive, meaningful dialogue and deliberation on sensitive policy topics that affect their lives and to create a bridge between individual, community and policy perspectives. Bates and O'Connor-Bones (2018) developed the community conversation toolkit, which provides a methodology that is designed to be a bridge between individuals and communities on one hand, and policymakers and statutory stakeholders on the other. Bates and O'Connor Bones (2021) illustrate how this approach can close the gap between parents/communities and policy stakeholders in the context of educational change and sustainability in Northern Ireland. Specifically, they demonstrate how community conversations can a) give individuals and communities a stronger voice in key decisions affecting them and b) provide stakeholders involved in public policy and decision-making with a genuine evidence base which they can use to inform their work. Bates and O'Connor Bones (2021) illustrate the value of community conversations in enabling constructive dialogue on sensitive topics. They concluded that 'for deliberative democracy to produce effective outcomes, there needs to be a strong connection between the citizenry engaged in the dialogue and the stakeholders responsible for decision making' (Bates and O'Connor Bones, 2021: 44). To this end, the strength of community conversations is that they give voice to communities, while providing a robust evidence base for those involved in decision-making and policy development/implementation.

Furthermore, research studies have applied community conversations to explore a wide range of community issues including health care, family supports, mental health, community development, education, immigration and violence against women (de Melo and Alarcão, 2015; Housel et al., 2018; Bumble et al., 2018; Molfenter et al., 2018; Terry et al., 2015). For example, De Cao et al. (2017) examined whether community conversations contributed to a change in thinking about harmful traditional practices against women in Ethiopia and found that this approach was a valuable instrument to induce a change in social values to empower Ethiopian women. Given that a community conversation approach can form a 'co-produced' methodology, it is also useful to refer to Legg and Nottingham Citizens' (2021) paper which demonstrates how the in-depth community conversation approach might complement a broader hate crime survey. This paper is also relevant given that it shares the focus on Nottingham Citizens' experiences of hate crimes through a community-led research approach. Specifically, this paper recounts the Hate Crime Commission carried out in 2014 by Nottingham Citizens, which is a 'Chapter' of Citizens UK, the largest British proponent of community organising. This paper provides an insider account of a piece of community led and co-produced research into the experiences of and under-reporting of hate crime in Nottingham, and the relative success of the commission in forcing policy changes and inspiring future leaders and campaigns. It details a responsive methodology that evolved over the year long campaign, which collated over 1,000 questionnaire surveys, interviews, focus groups and expert submissions. Legg and Nottingham Citizens (2021) outline the religious, educational, civic spaces in which mobilisation took place and the pressure points (both private and public) that were used to create change, especially regarding the successful campaign to have misogyny recognised as a hate crime.

Theoretical and conceptual framework employed in this paper

Hate crime is deeply rooted in prejudice. This infers that to prevent hate crime, it is important to tackle its root, prejudice. Although definitions of 'hate crime' vary from one country to another, the consensus view is that it is a prejudice-motivated crime which occurs when a perpetrator targets a victim because of their (actual or perceived) membership of a certain group (Chakraborti and Garland, 2015; Walters, 2022). As Jenness and Grattet (2001) point out, hate crimes cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the wider processes that contributed to the problem.

The aim of this article is to consider the potential value of community conversations for preventing hate crime at the level of local communities, based on the perceptions and experiences of facilitators. Indeed, the aim of community conversations in this project was to facilitate and support people to hold meaningful conversations, and equip them with the tools, skills and confidence to respond to prejudice, and provide alternatives to harmful narratives before prejudice develops into hate crime. The 'Pyramid of Hate' (ADL, 2018) demonstrates how prejudice can grow from biased attitudes to genocide. The Pyramid of Hate (ADL, 2018) depicts the escalation of hate: biased attitudes, acts of bias, discrimination, bias-motivated violence, genocide. A description of various levels of the pyramid is provided below. The first level, 'Biased Attitudes', is the base of the pyramid indicating biased attitudes in everyday life. Syed and Ali (2021) note that these biased attitudes may appear benign but, if left unchallenged, these can easily grow into sustained feelings of 'hate' about a specific group. The second level, 'Acts of Bias', demonstrates how prejudiced attitudes may manifest into prejudiced behaviours such as bullying, name-calling and offensive jokes. The third level, 'Discrimination', involves treating others differently because of certain identity characteristics which results in the impairment of equality of opportunity and treatment for

members of certain communities. The fourth level, 'Bias-Motivated Violence', indicates that when biases and discrimination are unchecked or rather encouraged and expected, these may result in violence towards individuals, places or symbols of worship (Syed and Ali, 2021). The fifth and final level, 'Genocide', is the top level of the pyramid. In its full form, genocide is reflected in the act of or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire people (Syed and Ali, 2021). Although not every act of bias may result in genocide, it is important to realise that every historical instance of genocide began with benign prejudiced views (Syed and Ali, 2021). The Pyramid of Hate (ADL, 2018) shows how prejudiced views can form a basis for hate crimes. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If the behaviours on the lower levels are not challenged, this results in the behaviours at the next level of the pyramid becoming more acceptable and 'normal'. The most effective opportunity to stamp out hate is when such biases or behaviours are witnessed at the lowest level of the pyramid. By challenging prejudice at the base of the Pyramid of Hate (ADL, 2018), community conversations can prevent prejudice from escalating to serious forms of discrimination and violence.

The 'Pyramid of Hate' (ADL, 2018) draws on Allport's (1954) Scale of Prejudice. Allport's Scale of Prejudice includes different stages of bias and prejudice. These include: Antilocution (stereotyping, 'jokes' and negative media portrayals of groups); Avoidance (individuals in the 'in-group' distance themselves from people perceived to be in the 'out-group'); Discrimination (individuals and groups are denied access to opportunities and services); Physical attack (individuals and property are subjected to attacks) and Extermination (systematic killing of a group). To challenge prejudice before it escalates to serious forms of discrimination and violence, Allport (1954) proposed 'Intergroup Contact Theory' as a method for reducing all components of prejudice. Intergroup Contact Theory posits that through meaningful, collaborative interactions between members from different social identity groups, prejudice can be reduced. Indeed, there is evidence to support this proposition (Aberson et al., 2021). Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-analytic test of Intergroup Contact Theory that included 713 independent samples from 515 studies. The meta-analytic findings showed that intergroup contact typically reduced intergroup prejudice. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) argued that although devised originally for racial and ethnic encounters, intergroup contact can be extended to other groups. They recommended that future research should examine whether negative factors prevent intergroup contact from diminishing prejudice as well as the development of a more comprehensive theory of intergroup contact (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

In response to this recommendation, Stephan et al. (2009) proposed Integrated Threat Theory, which posits that ingroups feeling threatened by outgroups drives prejudice. There are two key forms of 'threat' relevant to Integrated Threat Theory, 'realistic' threats and 'symbolic' threats. Walters et al. (2016) suggest that despite dissimilarities between types of hate crime, most, if not all, hate crimes are linked by perceptions of 'threat'. In other words, hate crime perpetrators are likely to be influenced by their perception that certain groups pose a 'threat' to them. In line with Integrated Threat Theory, these threats can be divided into 'realistic' threats and 'symbolic' threats. Realistic threats include tangible conflicts of interest such as perceived competition over jobs, housing and other social/state resources, and physical harm to themselves or others; for example, a perpetrator of racist or anti-immigrant abuse fears that minority ethnic groups are encroaching upon his or her dominant group identity as well as 'unfairly' taking, jobs, housing and social welfare (Walters et al., 2016). Symbolic threats relate to people's social identities, such as the ingroup's 'way of life', including values and social norms. In a meta-analysis, Riek et al. (2006) examined the relationship between intergroup threat and negative outgroup attitudes. They found that there is

a positive relationship between realistic and symbolic threats, and negative outgroup stereotypes (Riek et al., 2006). Similarly, other studies have found consistent threat-prejudice relationships (e.g. Aberson, 2015; Kanas et al., 2015; Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016; Pirlott et al., 2016). Aberson et al. (2021) note that in the same way that positive contact experiences reduce prejudice, negative contact experiences can increase prejudice. By way of illustration, Stephan et al. (2002) found that negative contact experiences led to more negative racial attitudes and negative stereotyping. However, Aberson et al. (2019) found that positive contact experiences reduce prejudice more than negative contact experiences increase it.

Before examining the current findings of using community conversations in the context of hate crime, it is useful to provide an overview of the project and its methodology.

The community conversations programme

Overall, the aim of the project 'Citizens at the Heart: A Citizen Centred Approach to Tackling Hate Crime' project was to tackle prejudice and respond to hate crime in Nottingham. Led by Nottingham City Council, the project sought to improve the way that police, council and voluntary sector meet the complex and varying needs of hate crime victims while also supporting communities to resist narratives of hate crime, extremism, bias and intolerance. This was in line with the five themes of the UK Government's (2016, 2018) national action plan on hate crime, namely: (1) Preventing hate crime by dealing with the beliefs and attitudes that can lead to hate crime; (2) Responding to hate crime in our communities with the aim of reducing the number of hate crimes and incidents; (3) Increasing the reporting of hate crime; (4) Improving support for the victims of hate crime; (5) Building our understanding of hate crime.

The project took place in 2019 to 2021 and comprised two streams of work: 'Communities Tackling Hate' and 'Enhanced Options Model for Victims'. Due to word restrictions, this article focuses on the findings based on the 'Communities Tackling Hate' element of the project (specifically, community conversations) while an article focusing on 'Enhanced Options Model for Victims' is in progress. The aim of 'Communities Tackling Hate' was to equip communities and citizens to challenge intolerance and hate and to produce counter-narratives, functioning to build community resilience and promoting individuals and communities as active agents of change. Key activities of 'Communities Tackling Hate' included the 'counter-narratives', which were delivered via community conversations. Community conversations covered a variety of relevant topics, for example, misogyny, racism, disablism, Islamophobia, Antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, Black Lives Matter, COVID-19 hate crimes, modern-day slavery, female genital mutilation, and the rise of the far-right. Relatedly, community conversations were often facilitated with the support of local organisations, including, *inter alia*: Communities Inc, Small Steps Big Changes, Nottingham Women's Centre, Karimia Institute–Trust Building Project, Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Peace Foundation, New Art Exchange, ChalleNGe Nottingham, Nergiz Kurdish Women's Group, Nottingham Muslim Women's Network, Equation, Disability Support, Nottinghamshire Mencap, and the National Holocaust Centre.

Methodology

The aim of the wider evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the project (measured against its overall aim, namely, to tackle prejudice and respond to hate crime). The evaluation, conducted by the authors of this article, was commissioned by Nottingham City Council and the

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Participation in the study was voluntary. In total, 484 individuals took part in the study. Access to participants was facilitated by Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire Police. With regards to evaluating the effectiveness and impact of 'Communities Tackling Hate', the research methods included: (1) a survey with 72 facilitators of community conversations; (2) a survey with 59 individuals who received community conversations training; (3) creative methods with 106 individuals who attended community conversations; (4) a survey with 49 individuals who attended online community conversations; (5) 14 individual interviews and 5 focus groups with facilitators of community conversations and members of the team leading the project.

The focus of the current article is on the evaluation of the usefulness of the community conversation methodology, with two objectives: (1) understanding the experiences of those involved in facilitating community conversations; (2) evaluating the efficacy of the community conversation approach in this context (eg based on facilitators' perspectives). The evaluation of community conversations is not an outcome evaluation of hate crime, measured by changes in the volume of hate crime and incidents, particularly since the programme aimed to intervene pre-hate incident. Rather, the article explores the potential value of community conversations for preventing hate crime at the level of local communities – through challenging prejudice at the base of the Pyramid of Hate (ADL, 2018) and Intergroup Contact Theory, based on the perceptions and experiences of facilitators.

Ontologically, the evaluation adopted a 'critical relativist' approach, which asserts that 'reality' depends on participants' knowledge and experiences, and how they interpret the world. This means that knowledge is constructed and there are potential multiple 'realities' interpreted by participants in the project. Epistemologically, the data analysis in this evaluation was conducted using a 'contextualist' method, which recognises the way in which participants' perceptions of prejudice, bias and hate are influenced by their personal and/or occupational experiences of hate crime. These ontological and epistemological positions tie in with the authors' aim to stay close to the participants' worldview and to this end, view the world through their eyes (Braun et al., 2014). The research instruments were designed to capture this theoretical orientation. Qualitative data were subjected to Thematic Analysis (TA), which is a qualitative method used for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). Braun and Clarke (2022a, 2022b) highlight that there is diversity within the different types of TA, which differ in their underlying conceptualisations of qualitative research, meaningful knowledge production, and key constructs such as themes and analytic procedures. Braun and Clarke (2021) note that there are three main 'schools' of TA – coding reliability, codebook, and reflexive. The current project used reflexive TA, which emphasises the subjectivity of data coding and analysis, and the researchers' active role in coding and theme generation. The authors used the six phases of the analytic process of reflexive TA, namely, familiarisation with the data, coding the data, generating initial themes from the codes and coded data, reviewing and developing themes, defining, naming and refining themes, and writing up the report (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This approach was taken in line with the ontological and epistemological positions employed in this project.

Themes refer to specific patterns of meanings found within the data set. In TA, themes can be identified either inductively from the raw data (also called the 'bottom up' way) or theoretically/deductively from the existing literature (also called the 'top down' way) (Boyatzis, 1998). The approach used in this evaluation was inductive (data-driven). Specifically, there were three overarching themes in the interviews and focus groups with the facilitators and project leads of

community conversations: (1) Understanding community conversations as a powerful tool to connect people; (2) 'What works' when facilitating community conversations; (3) Challenges when facilitating community conversations. This article draws on the data from the interviews and focus groups with the facilitators and project leads of community conversations. Accordingly, the following section draws on illustrative extracts from the individual and focus group interviews and surveys (presented as indented quotes in this article) to provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data.

Ethical considerations

The research team acted in accordance with relevant professional guidelines provided by the British Society of Criminology. Ethical approval was obtained via the authors' University Ethics committee. Consent was obtained for all participants before they took part in the study. The form stated the purpose of the study and ensured participants of the anonymity of the interview/survey data. Confidentiality could not be offered for the surveys, interviews and focus groups as extracts of participants' quotes would be presented as part of publication write-ups. Participants were fully aware of this and were provided multiple opportunities to withdraw. In order to ensure participants' anonymity, their names and any other identifying information were anonymised.

It is important to note the limitations of the evaluation when considering the findings, namely its non-probability sampling and the lack of longitudinal data (especially when trying to measure attitudinal change in the long term). Because of the project's non-probability sampling, it is not possible to generalise the findings among all the facilitators of community conversations and/or the members who attended the community conversations (online or in-person). Moreover, access to participants was facilitated by Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire Police which means that some individuals, especially those working in these organisations or partner organisations, might have been restricted in how much information they could share, for example, to avoid promoting a negative image of the council or the police. Finally, the evaluation results were collected only for the duration of the project itself. As such, longitudinal data are not available for this evaluation. This limits the authors' ability to measure the long-term effects of the project.

Findings

Theme 1: understanding community conversations as a powerful tool to connect people

The findings from the individual and focus group interviews with the facilitators and the project leads, demonstrate that community conversations were a powerful tool which brought communities together, and helped to start a positive dialogue between people from different communities that did not usually engage with each other. The consensus view among participants was that 'there was a lot of appetite' in the community to have these conversations, yet communities did not normally have such opportunities to come together and discuss these issues. As demonstrated in the following quotes from individual interviews, facilitators highlighted that community conversations provided individuals with a platform to have a dialogue about sensitive topics in a safe space.

> People want to talk about these issues and we're giving them a platform.

> Most of them [people attending community conversations] said that they want to do more, they want more of these events. People want to talk, and that's across the board. The appetite is huge. We have this need to talk which is currently unmet.

> The biggest success, and that's across all of the events, is the realisation that people are desperate to talk. Quite often, people are reserved and unsure initially, because they are afraid of the repercussions of saying something or what might be asked of them, or they don't want to offend anyone and be told off, but once you can create a safe space, if that works, and generally it has worked, people just want to talk, and they talk about some very personal stuff.

Furthermore, in a focus group (FG1) with the project leads, it was emphasised that these are challenging times that we live in and therefore, bringing different communities together to discuss these issues is vital, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

[Participant A, FG1:]	We are in very divisive times, there is a lot of resentment, people feel like they cannot voice their frustrations and resentment. In my work, it became clear that people wanted to take control of the narratives around their communities and hate crimes. It became clear that if all these people talked to one another they would realise they have a lot in common. People were desperate to have this space to explore these issues and talk to one another without being shut down and shamed for what they say.
[Participant B, FG1:]	It is key that this [community conversations] is embedded in the communities themselves.
[Participant A, FG1:]	When we did the application [for the project], we did a mapping exercise. We mapped points when people come across hate. It starts much earlier than hate crime itself.
[Participant C, FG1:]	People have loads of common issues. It is easy to think about someone as 'Other' when you have not met them. It is about creating connection and reducing fear and hate. We want to get people that are 'different' together and talk about stuff. People do feel stifled in the community, and no one is sure what they are allowed to say and what they are not. It is providing that confidence that means people can talk and then find ways to do effectively to one another and be open to questioning.
[Participant B, FG1:]	Conversations are very complex and complicated. Supporting people to have those difficult conversations is important.

Theme 2: 'what works' when facilitating community conversations

During interviews and focus groups, a theme that emerged was 'what works' when facilitating community conversations. As indicated in the following quotes from focus group 2, facilitators argued that 'knowing your audience', using language appropriate to the audience, creating a safe space for everyone to share their views, and managing conflict in the discussion were important elements for community conversations to be successful.

[Participant A, FG2:] You need to know your audience, and why they are there. If you sound too professional, if you sound too formal, people will not open up. You don't need to have a very formal, structured setting to facilitate an event. This puts people off. You can't put people on the spot, this could drive them away from coming again. We need to create a safe space for everybody to say what they want to say. As facilitators, we try to be impartial.

[Participant B, FG2:] There is space for everyone to practise their identity and share their views. We need to set the rules to facilitate the event.

[Participant C, FG2:] How will we manage conflict in the discussion? I come from a place where conflict is thriving there, I've seen it with my own eyes, people go from peaceful demonstrators, very open and modern, slowly go down that road and become radicalised by ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria]. As society, we need to understand that process, we need to have these discussions. These men don't feel part of our society, they don't feel they belong here, they feel the need to travel to another country where they feel they can identify with ISIS and support their cause.

In another focus group (FG3) with the project leads (some of whom were also facilitators), issues such as space, event set up (e.g. open in-person space where people can come in and out, although this might not work for certain sensitive topics), order of the questions, and speaking to people who are 'hard to reach', were highlighted as important elements for these events to be successful.

[Participant A, FG3:] Location is important. There are places where everyone would go and agree with each other.

[Participant B, FG3:] The biggest challenge is reaching the people whom we want to talk to most. [Anonymised] event was really good, because we had food, and it was in the library. People came and talked for 3 hours.

[Participant C, FG3:] It was unannounced and organic, and people did not feel like they were set up for something. Feeling relaxed is important.

[Participant D, FG3:] Sometimes we don't get the people we need to talk to, we need to build relationships with people. The targeting is key, geographically, using open spaces where people would come out of anywhere.

[Participant B, FG3:] But for some of the conversations, open spaces do not work at all. For women's voices that needs to be closed and safe space.

[Participant C, FG3:] It is important to think about the order of the questions – do it gradually. Commit to saying something vulnerable quite early but gently.

[Participant D, FG3:] We have also experienced where people got into difficult conversations very early and then everyone responds, and the conversation flows differently. If there is someone who opens up, and make themselves vulnerable, it changes the flow.

Theme 3: challenges when facilitating community conversations

Another key theme that emerged from the interviews with facilitators was what challenges they faced when facilitating community conversations. Throughout interviews, facilitators emphasised the importance of providing local people with the opportunity to share their views in a safe environment at these events; however, the main challenge was how to respond to prejudiced views, emotions, and behaviours shared in this safe space.

> People have their own agenda, they want to escalate it. One chap came in with all his google searched notions about Muslims and regurgitated to antagonise the conversation. So that's the challenge, that you have a safe space and then if you advertise it and the wrong people are brought in who simply want to sabotage the conversation. But then again, this is also important because we can then challenge these false stereotypes, and in challenging the other people in the room learn a lot more, so sometimes it helps to have an antagonistic person to sort of provoke that discussion. I challenged him by addressing what his question was, but also bringing him back to the expectations of the session. Refer them back and making them aware that we were moving away from what this was all about.

Throughout interviews, facilitators shared how they used active listening, asking questions and expressing one's feelings to challenge prejudiced attitudes in the community conversations that they facilitated, as indicated in the following quotes.

> One way would be through Socratic logic to ask more questions, so that they could start to unpack their own beliefs, rather than having other people unpack them. In these sessions you cannot change opinions, all you can do is manage them and stop them going in the wrong directions.

> A really effective way to challenge this is to express your feelings about how that makes you feel. So, you own it as your own feeling and this has been shown to connect rather than disconnect. We need to recognise the impact of saying nothing. . . . Because it's very tempting to walk away, so maybe it's about giving people different tools, so that 'if I walk away now, what's the pros and cons of each'. So, the pro is that if I walk away now then I don't have to deal with that person, but the con is that if I walk away then I'm contributing to a culture where this is acceptable or that this person thinks I agree with them, and this has challenges for authenticity. . . . There's a difference between ignorance and intentional harm. Trying to listen – empathic listening – trying to understand what's actually going on, and what has contributed to someone saying something.

> There are differences in approaches that you can have. One approach is that every time something comes up that it should be challenged, you know, that it's not acceptable and we should have zero tolerance policy on all comments, not in a cruel way, but in an education way, every time something controversial is said, we should take that opportunity to educate. Alternatively, each interaction is a small step, and we can't change everything in somebody's views in one interaction and we want to form a connection with them even if they said something shocking. These two approaches do conflict. I don't think there is a right or wrong answer to that. Do we always challenge? Is there an answer to that question? I think it's a judgment call. . . . Not everybody has the confidence to challenge. You might have an alternative skill such as humour or storytelling, maybe let that comment go unchecked but then use storytelling as not a direct challenge to that comment but finding another way to respond. We need to recognise that as people, we all respond differently given the context.

Another key challenge suggested by facilitators throughout interviews was leading community conversations on particularly sensitive topics such as Islamist terrorism and radicalisation, relationships and sex education in Muslim faith schools, LGBT and religion, and abortion.

> Probably controversial aspects of Islam, such as jihad. To have that conversation in a confident manner is not an easy thing.

> The RSE [relationships and sex education] discussion in Birmingham between the Muslim community and the LGBT community, in terms of how it has been handled by the media, the Muslim community and the LGBT community have been pitted against each other to fight things out. Some of the schools have not been allowed to talk about it, and media are making things a lot more extreme whereas having conversations on this topic will be really useful, and maybe there is not so much conflict if we talk about it.

> I realise there are some extremely sensitive topics. Without intention, using the wrong words, or body language can have a huge impact. For example, LGBT, I'm not aware what is right or wrong, so I would need to do a bit more research before facilitating a session on LGBT. Another one is religion, because I don't understand the subject very well. Some facilitators don't feel they need to know the subject very well, but for me, to help people open up, I need to understand and forecast what type of area could be dangerous territory. What do I need to avoid, to manage it properly? That's why I like to know the topic more.

Discussion

Drawing on the perspectives of facilitators and project leads of community conversations, the evidence presented in the evaluation demonstrates that community conversations were a 'powerful tool which brings communities together'. Participants argued that community conversations 'work' in terms of challenging and responding to prejudiced attitudes; thus preventing prejudice at the base of the Pyramid of Hate from escalating to hate crime. In line with Integrated Threat Theory, participants highlighted that positive contact experiences led to reduced realistic and symbolic threats and to this end, prejudice (which was a positive outcome); however, if community conversations were not organised and managed well, negative contact experiences could have led to increased perceptions of threat (prejudice). In other words, participants acknowledged that there was a risk of community conversations 'doing more harm than good' on the basis that negative contact experiences can lead to more negative stereotyping and prejudice (Stephan et al., 2002).

To prevent the risk of increasing perceptions of realistic and symbolic threats, facilitators in the present project organised and managed community conversations with five key elements in mind: (1) building connection and trust; (2) listening to people's intentions and the meanings behind what they are saying; (3) avoiding using shame and blame in conversations; (4) an emphasis on stories and feelings rather than simply facts; and (5) offering a different perspective or way of looking at the issue. Facilitators in this project argued that this approach was not always about explicitly 'challenging' and confronting other people's prejudiced views; rather, it was about having honest and non-judgemental discussions to facilitate empathy and create safe spaces where people from often isolated, 'hard to reach', segregated communities felt 'heard'. This is based on the belief that if people talk more and share their views and concerns in a safe space, that might help them reflect upon their prejudices and help to change them. This approach also recognises that prejudice exists in all people, and part of the reason that prejudice exists is because of lack of engagement with other communities.

Facilitators highlighted that the value of community conversations stems from their creation of social spaces for dialogue, which can enable marginalised communities in the local community to connect and challenge hate crime at its root, prejudice. In this regard, two key aspects emerged as important in relation to using community conversations to tackle hate crimes through positive intergroup contact: Awareness Building and Shared Commitment. With regards to

awareness building, as strategies were shared and ideas exchanged, attendees at community conservations also learned about resources, opportunities, and connections in their community of which they were previously unaware. This approach can help to prevent and/or respond to hate crime by increasing awareness of what is hate crime, how it can be reported, how victims can get support and other forms of community participation. The presence of diverse community members and the identification of different ideas can foster a sense of shared commitment towards preventing and/or responding to hate crime. Facilitators highlighted that in a field marked more by silos than collaborations and partnerships, the sense of isolation felt by many communities diminishes as they meet and engage with each other, so other people are invested in similar goals. However, it is important to note that community conversations were one-off events, with potentially short-term impact.

Based on the strength of the present evaluation, the article argues that community conversations were successful in terms of creating safe spaces in which local people might 'break the silence' and connect, to critically think about the persistence of realistic and symbolic threats and how they are related to prejudice. Such dialogue is a vital, if not a sufficient, precondition for supporting behaviour change (Campbell et al., 2013). To this end, community conversations can provide a vehicle for effective civic engagement and recognise the importance of local, grassroots experience in challenging prejudice. However, the article does not claim a linear or causal pathways from community conversations to behaviour change. As Campbell et al. (2013: 3) point out, although community conversations hold great potential in terms of helping communities recognise their potential strengths and capacities for responding more effectively to social problems, community conversations are not 'a magic bullet'.

Political and media rhetoric that demonises minority groups can diminish the positive work by local initiatives such as community conversations. In the wake of the recent far-right riots in England and Northern Ireland, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged the British government to pass measures to curb hate speech and racist, xenophobic rhetoric used by British politicians and high-profile public figures which had played a direct role in fuelling these riots (The Guardian, 2024). The UN Committee members declined to name which politicians or public figures had made comments triggering the Committee's concern but added that the Committee 'is concerned about the persistence and in some cases sharp increase of hate crimes, hate speech and xenophobic incidents' (Reuters, 2024). This included racist and xenophobic speech by politicians and public figures in print, broadcast, and online media.

As a methodology, the community conversation does not presume to have all the answers or to resolve a particular issue but, as a process, it can challenge prejudiced perspectives, contribute critical insights and thereby provide strong evidence to inform the direction of policy opinion and implementation (Bates and O'Connor-Bones, 2018). Its simplicity and transferability to a range of social issues means that the community conversation methodology is an innovative, yet cost-effective model of engagement. As a means of engagement, a community conversation approach can be particularly valuable in tackling prejudice, where communities often remain segregated. From a community engagement perspective, community conversations bring people together, cutting across perceived divides of race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and transgender identity. Following this line of argument, a hate crime model that is informed by local practice on community conversations might lead to a policy decision to invest more and engage with local communities. If the lessons from community conversations can be learnt and applied, then the field of hate crime provides the chance of developing local initiatives that could have real and meaningful impact in tackling the root cause of the problem.

Conclusion

This article focused on the evaluation of the community conversation methodology, as part of the 'Citizens at the Heart: A Citizen Centred Approach to Tackling Hate Crime' project in Nottingham. To this end, the article accomplished two key objectives: (1) understanding the experiences of those involved in facilitating community conversations and (2) evaluating the efficacy of the community conversation approach in this context. However, it is important to clarify that the evaluation of community conversations is not an outcome evaluation of hate crime, measured by changes in the volume of hate crime and incidents, particularly since the programme aimed to intervene pre-hate incident. Although other elements of the 'Citizens at the Heart' project (such as 'Enhanced Options Model for victims') were reactive to hate crime – namely, what happens once a person has been a victim of a hate crime and what can be done to improve victims' experiences of hate crime – community conversations focused on prevention; therefore, trying to challenge hate crime at its root, prejudice. In line with Intergroup Contact Theory as a method for reducing prejudice, community conversations facilitated and supported local people to hold meaningful conversations on issues that might be at the base of the Pyramid of Hate (ADL, 2018), and which could lead to hate crimes whether in the real world and/or in the cyber world if left unchallenged.

The need for effective approaches to tackling hate crime has become particularly pressing in recent years. Thus, identifying promising avenues for preventing hate crime remains a particularly timely endeavour. The ODIHR (2009) identifies the multiple harms of hate crime, including violation of human rights, psychological injury, and increased feelings of vulnerability inflicted upon individual victims, a sense of fear and intimidation transmitted to the wider community to whom the victim belongs, and the security and public order problems that ensue from the widening of potentially explosive social tensions. Despite persistently high levels of police-recorded hate crime, there is a gap in knowledge surrounding the 'what works', in tackling hate crime. To address this gap in the literature, this article explored community conversations as a promising avenue for engaging communities and a vehicle for involving the broader local community in efforts to tackle hate crime at an early stage.

Drawing on interviews and focus groups with the facilitators of community conversations, the article provided a case study of the use of community conversations, using the conceptualisation of Intergroup Contact Theory, as a lens for analysis and action in this field. The findings demonstrate that community conversations are considered a valuable instrument for challenging prejudice, which occurs at the base of the Pyramid of Hate. From this perspective, community conversations are potentially an asset-based approach for engaging a cross-section of diverse stakeholders in addressing an issue of importance to their local community (Carter and Bumble, 2018). This approach recognises that multiple, diverse stakeholders in a community need to work together to tackle a social problem. According to the perspectives of facilitators and project leads presented in this article, it is evident that community conversations produced both perceived and tangible benefits, by promoting a sense of shared commitment and greater awareness, fostering new connections and partnerships among local people and organisations. Community Conversations also assisted in identifying practical ideas for addressing specific and salient barriers in the community. This approach brought together community members, who might not previously have been considered by others or themselves to have either an interest in or a meaningful perspective, to contribute to the issues discussed in these events.

It is important to note that the effective prevention and/or responding to hate crime cannot be only the remit of criminal justice agencies. Local organisations, communities, leaders, and local government must work with one another – and in tandem with criminal justice agencies

– to promote awareness and challenge prejudice. In other words, the complexity of hate crime necessitates a constellation of partners. This approach is also empowering for local communities as it provides them with the opportunity to be the catalyst for change efforts. This approach also encourages ideas to emerge from – rather than be imposed upon – a given community (Carter and Bumble, 2018). Indeed, an element that may be especially important to the success of policies and practices aimed at preventing/responding to hate crime is communities. Although communities are regularly acknowledged as important stakeholders in policy/practice efforts, their active involvement, expertise, and connections, may not frequently be drawn upon within inclusive initiatives (Carter and Bumble, 2018). Thus, community conversations may represent a promising avenue for building social capital in local communities by developing new connections for participants in the longer-term, contributing their own ideas for furthering inclusion and building upon the perspectives of others. However, community conversation events are not designed to substitute other community initiatives, rather they are intended to supplement or solidify any existing efforts. Thus, this approach reflects just one element of what may be needed to prevent hate crime.

Calls for re-framing hate crime strategies beyond a purely criminal justice and legislative narrative have proliferated in recent years (Walters, 2022). Community conversations offer a promising way to draw upon the ideas, insights, relationships, and resources of the local community to generate creative solutions to challenging prejudice. However, several limitations should be considered when interpreting findings from this study.

First, the findings presented here are based on facilitators' and project leads' perceptions and thus future research should also explore attendees' views on the utility of community conversations. Similarly to the current project, both Kotzé et al. (2013) and Carter et al. (2012) reflected on the value of community conversations by interviewing facilitators. According to Kotzé et al. (2013), facilitators may have a unique experience of the community conversations as they are not only responsible for the organisation of the events but are also secondary participants. Facilitators can offer insights into the community conversation process, insights that may not be evident to the primary participants (Carter et al., 2012). However, considering their personal investment in the conversations, facilitators' reflections may be influenced by bias (Kotzé et al., 2013). Therefore, capturing attendees' perspectives would help to generate additional, unique insights that can deepen our understanding of the value and utility of community conversations.

Second, to reduce prejudice, community conversations are potentially a necessary but insufficient intervention on their own. Community conversations cannot comprise the only approach for preventing hate crime through informing community-level change efforts. Third, while community conversations may be effective at generating local short-term changes, they may be less effective at sustaining ongoing change. To date, studies have focused only on the short-term impact of community conversations (Bumble et al., 2018; Carter et al., 2016; Molfenter et al., 2018) and thus there is a lack of longitudinal research. A longitudinal evaluation would be necessary to capture the long-term effectiveness of this method in the context of tackling hate crime. Future projects should also identify how best to incorporate this approach into broader, longer-term change efforts.

Finally, both Aldred (2009) and Carson (2011) have critiqued the method's uncritical assumption that community conversations promote empowerment of local people and effect change. Kotzé et al. (2013) caution that there is a danger of creating unrealistic expectations regarding the positive outcomes of community conversations. The extent to which community conversations can tackle hate crime should therefore be considered carefully. As mentioned earlier, we by no means seek to make claims about linear or causal pathways from community conversations to behavioural change. Rather, our findings suggest that conversations may create social space for

people to connect and reflect on the possibility of tackling hate crime, but a host of other factors will intervene in shaping concrete behaviour change. The wider social, political and economic context will heavily impact on community efforts to tackle local problems such as hate crime (Campbell et al., 2013). Community conversations cannot fully counter the effects of hostile political rhetoric and media stigmatisation of certain communities nor policies that governments implement to demonise certain groups in society. These challenges might limit the capacity of local people to solve the social problems they face.

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