

## UPF / WFP Birmingham, UK Promoting Character Education in the Community

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September 26, 2019



There are a number of very disturbing influences impacting on children and young people in British society at the moment, which are hard to address, for a variety of reasons. These influences include pornography, celebrity culture, the abuse of social media, and family breakdown.

The current economic and political climate has also created much uncertainty for young people, and the divisive nature of the Brexit debate has highlighted the lack of public figures who have the desire or qualities necessary to generate compromise and consensus. This divisiveness does not help the many religious and ethnic communities in our society to have any kind of vision for coming together, building bridges or cooperating around common issues.

A particular case in point is the highly controversial Relationship and Sex Education curriculum which the UK Government is planning to introduce into Primary and Secondary Schools, with no parental right of withdrawal, in September 2020. Many concerned parents believe that parts of this curriculum will introduce wholly inappropriate material into the lives of 4, 5 and 6 year old children, with no accompanying framework of values, and will contribute to an increasingly individualised, and sexualised, society.



On two recent occasions, we brought together a number of people representing different religious and ethnic communities, and introduced them to the Character Education material originally developed in

Russia, by the International Education Foundation, after the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989, and with widespread use and application when it is contextualised for other cultures and circumstances.

Many of those present expressed an interest to find out more, to discuss further, and to explore the possibility of using this material to help their young people:

- a) Navigate their way through these very challenging and uncertain times, and
- b) Have a framework of values which can guide their thoughts and feelings towards leading a fulfilling life, which balances personal desires and goals with a sense of public responsibility.

The curriculum has a central focus on internal, spiritual growth and character development, primarily in the family, and then impacting on all areas of society. This naturally provides the framework to understand the Principles of Peace which are at the heart of our Peace Federations, and which have inspired so many people to study further with us, and to work together for our common aims and purposes.

We hope to continue the discussion, bring this wonderful material into different communities, and allow people who share the same concerns and values, particularly around the area of the family, to come together in support of one another, and in shared action to try and counter the negative forces, mentioned earlier, in our society.

