

## Research Report DCSF-RR013

# Engaging Effectively with Black and Minority Ethnic Parents in Children's and Parental Services

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.



# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1 Purpose and structure .....	6
1.2 Policy background .....	7
<b>2 METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2.1 Literature review .....	9
2.2 Case studies .....	9
<b>3 LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>11</b>
3.1 Recognising diversity .....	11
3.2 Challenging racism and promoting different cultures .....	12
3.3 Addressing barriers .....	13
3.4 Culturally appropriate: targeted and mainstream services .....	14
3.5 Empowering minority ethnic parents .....	15
<b>4 GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES</b> .....	<b>17</b>
4.1 AMBER Project.....	18
4.2 BabyFather Initiative.....	23
4.3 Barnardo's Parent Partnership .....	27
4.4 Bruce Grove Primary School .....	32
4.5 Coram Parents' Centre.....	35
4.6 Leeds Traveller Education service .....	40
4.7 Soho Children's Centre .....	44
4.8 Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities .....	48
4.9 Tower Hamlets Local Authority.....	55
4.10 William C Harvey special school.....	59
<b>5 CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>62</b>
5.1 Common factors in successful engagement .....	63
5.2 Challenges to further engagement .....	64
5.3 Conclusions .....	65
<b>ANNEX – BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>67</b>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GHK and ETHNOS were commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills<sup>1</sup> to undertake a research project to explore how children's and parental services can engage effectively with black and minority ethnic (BME)<sup>2</sup> parents.

### **Method**

There were two key phases in this research: a literature review and qualitative fieldwork undertaken in ten case study settings.

The literature review involved identifying research, programme evaluations and other publications (e.g. practitioner publications) containing significant findings relating to engaging minority ethnic parents in service provision. The literature was assessed in terms of relevance and the robustness of research. This was intended to identify the most relevant documents that practitioners and policy-makers could refer to in relation to engaging minority ethnic parents.

This phase of research was undertaken in discussion with a number of staff at the DCSF involved in children's and parental services and a small number of individuals that had been involved in producing some of the literature that was reviewed (including senior staff in the National Evaluation of Sure Start, at the Race Equality Foundation and OfSTED). This helped to ensure that all relevant literature was taken into consideration.

A long list of examples of good practice from across children's and parental services were identified primarily through the literature review. In order to ensure identification of good practice was as rigorous as possible, only instances of good practice which already had some external recognition (e.g. through OfSTED assessments or external evaluations) were included. The final sample was also intended to cover a diverse range of contexts of service provision.

In May and June 2007 a team of researchers from GHK and ETHNOS then undertook semi-structured interviews in each of the ten sites with a mix of senior managers, delivery staff and minority ethnic parents. In some instances parents did not speak any English and researchers communicated in languages including Urdu, Punjabi and Mirpuri.

### **Key findings**

Five key themes around engaging with minority ethnic parents emerged from the literature review:

- **Recognising diversity within and across minority ethnic groups:**  
Individuals from within and across different minority ethnic communities should

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<sup>1</sup> The DfES became the Department for Children, Schools and Families in June 2007 and will be referred to as the DCSF throughout the remainder of the report.

<sup>2</sup> During this research it was found that the term 'Black and minority ethnic' (or BME) was an unhelpful label both for service providers (in terms of lumping together all non-White British people) and people from a minority ethnic background who disliked being labelled as 'BME'. While the DCSF is in the process of changing the terminology it uses, the original title of the research project has been retained as the term is still widely recognised by practitioners. However, except for quotations from other sources, the term is not used in the remainder of this report.

not be viewed as part of larger homogeneous groups that can be labelled or stereotyped. The label 'BME' was found to be unhelpful where service providers come to see all minority ethnic groups as being a single group. There is evidence that values and attitudes (particularly towards education) vary widely across different minority ethnic groups. The starting point for engaging minority ethnic parents is to recognise this inherent diversity and to tailor services appropriately (in contrast to taking a 'colour blind' approach).

- **Challenging racism and promoting different cultures:** Services need to tackle negative perceptions associated with minority ethnic groups and to actively promote the diversity of cultures among the families of service users. There is evidence that staff in children's and parental services tend to make assumptions about minority ethnic parents on the basis of their background, which tend to be unfairly judgemental. In terms of parenting programmes, culturally specific programmes which strengthen cultural identity and aim to raise parents' confidence in their cultural heritage were found to be important in improving attendance.
- **Addressing barriers:** Minority ethnic parents are likely to be disproportionately affected by barriers such as lack of time, distance to travel and cost. In addition, some minority ethnic parents face significant barriers where language needs exist. As a result, services should consider affordability (where relevant), times of service provision, location (where possible), and ensuring that information is communicated in a number of languages. Some services, such as Sure Start and some multi-ethnic schools, provide language classes for parents. Other ways of facilitating engagement included undertaking outreach, schools implementing effective home-school liaison and providing interpreters for parents.
- **Culturally appropriate services:** This can represent a dilemma for service providers in terms of whether targeted (culturally specific) provision is required alongside or instead of mainstream (universal) services. There is no single answer to this, except in the cases where targeted provision is essential (such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes). While targeted services may be more culturally tailored, there is also a danger that where services are not sufficiently integrated with other mainstream services they may become compartmentalised and minority ethnic parents have less involvement with other families.
- **Empowering minority ethnic parents:** A substantial amount of evidence shows that minority ethnic parents are keen to be involved in the services they access, and particularly in decision-making. While Sure Start is based around such involvement, minority ethnic parents' involvement tended to be limited in practice. However, there were instances in which minority ethnic parents had been recruited in innovative roles such as volunteer ambassadors to the community. Schools can effectively involve minority ethnic parents through, for example, setting up parent councils, parent groups and networks and linking with community organisations (such as religious or musical groups).

Whilst each case study is individual in terms of the type of service provision, whether it is targeted or universal, where it is located and which minority ethnic communities are being engaged, each of these issues was apparent in a number of case studies. As a result, there was significant continuity between the findings from previous research and from the qualitative fieldwork conducted for this project.

In addition to this, there were several consistent findings from across the case study examples both in how to engage effectively with minority ethnic parents and the remaining barriers to this.

Key factors in successfully engaging with minority ethnic parents include:

- **Taking a holistic approach:** Addressing all the major issues facing families, rather than just those which are directly relevant to each individual service helped to develop strong, trusting relationships with parents which facilitated close engagement.
- **Dedicated resources:** Having a member of staff dedicated to parental engagement allowed services to provide a regular point of access and someone who can act as an advocate for them. A location specifically for parents to use provides a non-threatening space in which parents can meet each other and raise issues.
- **Recruiting from local communities:** Staff recruited from local communities helped to undercut negative perceptions among some parents of a 'them and us' view of services. In these case studies professional staff (such as teachers and health professionals) were not ethnically matched to local communities. Rather, minority ethnic parents were employed to undertake outreach and build relationships with other parents, acting as a bridge between services and communities.
- **Building social capital:** Helping parents to meet each other helped to reduce feelings of isolation and a lack of confidence. Often parents talking together helped to create a mini community of engagement around a service.

There are also several areas of challenge to further improving engagement with minority ethnic parents which have emerged from this research. These include:

- **Fathers:** Virtually all of the case studies found engaging with fathers more challenging than engaging with mothers. The reasons for this were a mix of practical issues (such as limited time due to being the main breadwinner) and cultural attitudes in which gender roles are clearly defined and raising children is delineated as being a predominantly female activity.
- **Limited resources:** Voluntary and community sector providers all expressed concerns about the damaging effect of limited and uncertain funding. Mainstream public service providers (such as schools and the Children's Centre) sometimes found it difficult to fund additional activities related to engaging with parents.
- **New communities:** New communities (including refugee and asylum seekers) are more likely than established minority ethnic groups to have a limited understanding of public services, lack confidence in accessing them, have restricted social networks of support and face severe language barriers. Services found engagement difficult due to a lack of staff from these communities with informal links to other parents and a lack of staff able to speak the same language.
- **Measuring effectiveness:** None of the case studies had monitoring data specifically on engagement with minority ethnic parents which had been effectively benchmarked or used comparatively against other similar providers. This illustrates the difficulty of providing objective measures of effective engagement with parents.



### ***Conclusions***

From both the literature review and the qualitative fieldwork, it is clear that there is no single and objective method of measuring effective engagement with minority ethnic parents. This is not a criticism of the service providers that we visited but a reflection of the difficulty in quantifying this. Indeed, when asked what lessons staff had learnt and would share with other practitioners in similar positions, these centred around 'soft' issues such as treating parents as equals and respecting different cultural backgrounds. There is a great deal that can be learnt from sharing good practice. However, if parental engagement is to become a national priority then it is essential to find robust ways of measuring and validating how effectively this is being undertaken.

Finally, it is clear from the literature review and from the sample of good practice examples identified, that there is an important gap in the existing research relating to engaging with minority ethnic parents in children's and parental services in rural areas. This is an area which would benefit from further research in the future.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose and structure

GHK and ETHNOS were commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills<sup>3</sup> to undertake a research project to explore how children's and parental services can engage effectively with Black and minority ethnic (BME)<sup>4</sup> parents.

The first stage of the research was a review of the existing literature. The primary purpose was to provide an overview of key findings from research, evaluations and other sources of information such as practitioner publications. This was undertaken in discussion with relevant research and policy staff at the DCSF and with outside individuals involved in producing some of the literature that was reviewed (including staff in the National Evaluation of Sure Start, the Race Equality Foundation and OfSTED). The findings are presented in Chapter 3, with a list of references provided in the Annex at the end of this report.

The second stage of the research involved conducting qualitative research in ten good practice case studies. These were chosen through a combination of the literature review and the discussions with DCSF staff and other experts in the first stage of the project. The choice of case studies was also intended to reflect the diversity of children's and parental services, a wide range of minority ethnic groups as service users and location across England. The findings from each of these are presented in Chapter 4. The services visited were:

- AMBER Project;
- BabyFather Initiative;
- Barnardo's Parent Partnership;
- Bruce Grove Primary School;
- Coram Parents' Centre;
- Leeds Traveller Education Service;
- Soho Children's Centre;
- Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities;
- Tower Hamlets Local Authority; and
- William C Harvey Special School.

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<sup>3</sup> The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) became the Department for Children, Schools and Families in June 2007 and will be referred to as the DCSF throughout the remainder of the report.

<sup>4</sup> During this research it was found that the term 'Black and minority ethnic' (or BME) was an unhelpful label both for service providers (in terms of failing to differentiate between different minority ethnic groups) and people from a minority ethnic background who disliked being labelled as 'BME'. While the DCSF is in the process of changing the terminology it uses, the original title of the research project has been retained as the term is still widely recognised by practitioners. However, except for quotations from other sources, the term is not used in the remainder of this report.

Finally, Chapter 5 draws conclusions from both the literature review and the case studies. In particular, it draws together common factors in successful engagement with minority ethnic parents and the remaining barriers to further engagement.

## 1.2 Policy background

The Children Act (2004) and *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*<sup>5</sup> programme have underpinned an important shift in the manner in which services for children and young people are conceived and delivered. *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* sets out the need for integrated front-line delivery, processes, strategy and governance based around the needs of children and young people, their parents, families and community as part of the national framework for local change. Parents, carers and families are also explicitly recognised as being integral to achieving each of the five outcomes (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing) for children and young people.

The DfES also recently published *Every Parent Matters*<sup>6</sup> and, in conjunction with HM Treasury, *Aiming High for Children: Supporting Families*<sup>7</sup>, both of which reflect the importance placed on parents, carers and the home environment as critical factors in every child's development. They also recognise that different types of parents (including different minority ethnic groups) will have different needs that services should be responsive to. However, both documents also acknowledge that there are gaps in some minority ethnic parents accessing and benefiting from services (*Every Parent Matters*, for example, refers to findings from the National Evaluation of Sure Start).

In terms of minority ethnic parents engaging with services, there is a great deal of evidence (as documented in the literature review in Chapter 3) that they are likely to face some different and additional barriers when compared with White British parents. Largely, these stem from discrimination in service provision<sup>8</sup> as well as the effects of a higher likelihood of experiencing deprivation<sup>9</sup>.

In 1999 the MacPherson Report<sup>10</sup> highlighted the need for public agencies to examine the extent to which services respond to the needs of minority ethnic groups. Following this, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (RRAA) 2000 places a positive duty to combat discrimination on all public bodies, including schools, social service departments, health services and the police. This positive duty involves organisations conducting a race equality audit of their systems, structures and practices in order to identify whether particular groups are disproportionately affected.

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<sup>5</sup> HM Government (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* London: DfES

<sup>6</sup> DfES (2007) *Every Parent Matters*, London: DfES

<sup>7</sup> DfES & HM Treasury (2007) *Aiming High for Children: Supporting Families*, London: TSO

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Chahal, K & Ullah, I (2004) *Experiencing ethnicity: discrimination and service provision*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which provides an overview of research evidence.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Kober, C (ed) (2003) *Black and Minority Ethnic Children and Poverty*, London: End Child Poverty

<sup>10</sup> Macpherson, W. (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, CM 4262-1, London: TSO

However, in July 2000 the Department of Health and Social Service's Inspectorate document *Excellence Not Excuses*<sup>11</sup> found that most authorities did not have strategies in place to deliver appropriate services to minority ethnic communities. There were identified barriers in terms of language (which resulted in unfair treatment and inappropriate services) and understanding the nature and offer of services. The investigation found that families from Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Caribbean in particular had lower take up of family support services than the White British community.

In addition, there are a large number of recent government initiatives that have been targeted at underachievement and social exclusion, with an implicit focus on ethnicity.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, this includes Sure Start and the Children's Fund for parents and younger children and initiatives with schools such as Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant.

In relation to schools, the Commission for Racial Equality has produced a great deal of guidance literature setting out the general and specific duties entailed by the RRAA and a Race Equality Impact Assessment publication<sup>13</sup>. However, despite this there continues to be wide variation in the attainment of learners from different ethnic backgrounds. While learners from some minority ethnic backgrounds achieve more highly than their White British counterparts, many perform less well.<sup>14</sup> It is also clear from research commissioned by the DfES that parental engagement is strongly related to better outcomes for children<sup>15</sup>. Understanding how to engage minority ethnic parents across children's and parental services is therefore of great importance.

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Health (2000) *Excellence Not Excuses: Inspection of Services for Ethnic Minority Children and Families*, London: DoH

<sup>12</sup> Parsons et al (2004) *Minority ethnic exclusions and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*, London: DfES

<sup>13</sup> Information is available at: <http://www.cre.gov.uk/duty/reia/index.html>

<sup>14</sup> DfES (2006) *Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils Aged 5-16*, London: DfES

<sup>15</sup> Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Literature Review*, London: DfES

## 2 METHODOLOGY

There were two key phases in this research project: a literature review and qualitative fieldwork undertaken in ten case study settings. These are outlined in more detail below.

### 2.1 Literature review

Documents were identified for this report through searching on-line for research, programme evaluations and other publications (e.g. practitioner publications) containing relevant findings relating to engaging minority ethnic parents in service provision. In particular, the websites of the following organisations contained research that has been included in this report: DfES, OfSTED, National Evaluation of Sure Start, Race Equality Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Barnardo's and National Children's Bureau.

The literature was assessed in terms of relevance (with virtually all being post-2000) and the robustness of research. This was not intended to be a systematic review but to identify the most relevant documents that practitioners and policy-makers could refer to in relation to engaging minority ethnic parents. As a result, the criteria for judging each document were not intended to be overly restrictive but primarily to exclude those that were not directly relevant to this research and to help distinguish which ones should be emphasised.

This phase of research was undertaken in discussion with a number of staff at the DCSF involved in children's and parental services and a small number of individuals outside DCSF that had been involved in producing some of the literature that was reviewed.<sup>16</sup> This helped to ensure that all relevant literature was taken into consideration.

The literature that was included in the research is detailed in the Annex, with short summaries of the most relevant research and a longer list of references.

### 2.2 Case studies

There is no existing database of good practice on engaging with minority ethnic parents and objective evidence from named service providers is also quite rare. A long list of examples of good practice from across children's and parental services were identified primarily through the literature review. However, some examples were also identified initially through discussion with staff at DCSF and other experts that were consulted in relation to the literature review. In order to ensure the identification of good practice was as rigorous as possible, only instances of good practice which already had some external recognition (e.g. through OfSTED assessments or external evaluations) were included.

The final sample was also intended to cover a diverse range of contexts of service provision. Specifically, the ten case studies were chosen to reflect a range of:

- provision across children's and parental services;
- minority ethnic communities as service users;

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<sup>16</sup> This included senior individuals involved in the National Evaluation of Sure Start, at the Race Equality Foundation, Human Scale Education, OfSTED and Barnardo's.

- targeted and universal services;
- locations across England (though it should be noted that all of the good practice examples that were identified were in an urban setting); and
- types of provider (including public and voluntary and community providers) and sources of funding.

Once the sample had been chosen, the service providers were contacted and asked to participate in the research project. Two declined and were replaced by other similar providers that were undertaking comparable work with minority ethnic parents.

In May and June 2007 a team of researchers from GHK and ETHNOS then undertook semi-structured interviews in each of the ten sites with a mix of senior managers, delivery staff and minority ethnic parents. In some instances parents did not speak any English and researchers communicated in languages including Urdu, Punjabi and Mirpuri.

This report summarises the findings from the literature review and case studies. The remainder is structured as follows:

- Chapter 3 presents the findings from the literature review;
- Chapter 4 describes the ten good practice case studies in more depth (looking at what steps have been taken to engage minority ethnic parents; what has been found to be successful; the remaining barriers; evidence of effectiveness; and learning that staff have found helpful in their work); and
- Chapter 5 draws together conclusions from the literature review and case studies.

### 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a summary of key findings from the existing literature. The robustness of the research varies across the documents reviewed and, whilst the findings from all those that were deemed to be relevant have been reflected in this section, findings from higher quality research have been emphasised.

The findings presented below relate specifically to engaging minority ethnic parents in children's and parental services. There is a great deal of literature on engaging parents generally and on engaging minority ethnic individuals or communities more widely. Here, however, we have tried to focus on findings and good practice which have been produced directly in relation to this group.

The findings have been grouped under five headings: recognising diversity; challenging racism and promoting different cultures; addressing barriers; culturally appropriate: targeted and mainstream services; and, empowering minority ethnic parents.

One additional finding that has emerged from the literature search itself is that there is extremely limited existing research into engaging with minority ethnic parents in children's and parental services in rural areas. As a result, it should be acknowledged that, while some of the findings in this chapter may be transferable to a rural context, they are based on services in urban areas.

All references can be found in the Annex, which contains short summaries of each of the documents directly referred to in this chapter and a further list of references that are relevant to the topic.

#### 3.1 Recognising diversity

Several reports highlight the importance of recognising the heterogeneity both within and across minority ethnic groups. Lloyd and Rafferty (2006), for example, concluded that: "*BME communities should not be viewed as a homogeneous whole. The diversity both within and between ethnic and cultural groups should not be overlooked*" (p.36). Indeed, the label 'BME' was found to be unhelpful where it blinded service providers to the different values, cultures and needs of distinct minority ethnic groups of parents.

An illustration of this diversity can be found in Moon and Ivins (2004). The research was based on a large scale telephone survey of over 1,700 minority ethnic parents from Black African, Black Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and mixed heritage parents, in relation to involvement in their children's education. The authors found important differences in how involved parents were in their children's education (which included large gender variations); the degree to which parents felt that their child's education was their responsibility; and how likely parents were to engage with their child's school. For example, Black African men were more likely to be involved in their child's education than their partner, while men from Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean backgrounds were least likely to be involved. Black African and Black Caribbean parents were also least likely to say that their child's education was the responsibility of the school.

The literature review also found evidence that some children's services in the UK have taken positive steps in recognising cultural differences. In a review of literature on childcare, Bell et al. (2005) found that providers were aware of, and responsive to, ethnic and cultural differences. This contrasts with a 'colour blind' approach (taking no

account of the ethnicity of service users) which the authors found to be dominant in other countries such as Australia.

Reflecting this, Williams and Churchill (2006) found that Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) were more effective in engaging parents when the programme was tailored sensitively to the diversity of needs. For example, recognising that, historically, women from Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities have not commonly accessed services and trying to address this.

### **3.2 Challenging racism and promoting different cultures**

Related to this, the review showed that it is important for services to challenge negative perceptions and images of minority ethnic groups directly while also positively promoting the diversity of cultures found among the families of service users.

In reviewing the literature on minority ethnic parents and childcare provision, Box et al. (2001) found evidence of staff with “*ambivalent attitudes to race, which influenced their treatment of black and minority ethnic children and their parents*” (p.6), with little respect for the concerns of Black parents in particular. The authors advocate training to help staff to respond more positively to minority ethnic families.

Also in relation to childcare, Williams and Churchill (2006) found that where staff in SSLPs unfairly stereotyped minority ethnic parents, with negatively judgemental views such as holding a lower view of their capacity as parents and blaming them for not taking full advantage of the services on offer. Related to this, the authors found minority ethnic parents could be reluctant to access services because of the negative perceptions associated with being needy. One parent said:

*“We don’t like to be labelled. We are not happy to be labelled the worst off. We are not the worst off in this city. We are parents doing our best, we may not be very well off but we look after our children well.”* (Williams and Churchill 2006, p.45)

There is substantial evidence that schools recognise that racism is a key issue and substantial steps have been taken to tackle it. Blair and Bourne (1998) found that racism existed in some multi-ethnic schools and was a major obstacle to communication with minority ethnic parents. Some parents interviewed as part of the research, felt that teachers made racial assumptions about different ethnic groups which prevented them from engaging with them as equal partners in their children’s education. Where it exists, racism was described by the researchers as being unconscious rather than overt, and is based on assumptions staff held about different ethnic groups. Bhopal (2004) argues that this is most acute in relation to the Traveller community, with children often continuing to suffer from racism and bullying, reinforcing the negative perceptions of schooling that Traveller parents frequently hold from their own childhood.

OfSTED reports on primary<sup>17</sup> and secondary<sup>18</sup> schools that are managing the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) effectively (based on strong attainment of minority ethnic pupils, senior staff with a strong understanding of Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) issues, effective EMA staff and good use of the fund) provide

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<sup>17</sup> OfSTED (2004a) *Managing the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant: Good Practice in Primary Schools*, London: DfES

<sup>18</sup> OfSTED (2004b) *Managing the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant: Good Practice in Secondary Schools*, London: DfES



anecdotal examples of good practice in tackling racism. For example, leadership from the top is important, with Headteachers addressing the problem of racism directly and, in some cases, producing and promoting explicit anti-racist policies for the school. One parent said:

*“The new headteacher has made his stand on these issues very explicit and the atmosphere has changed in the school for the better. It really helps the children to feel at home.”* (OfSTED 2004a, p.28)

Equally important is positively promoting the different identities of children and parents from different ethnic backgrounds. Parents of children at one of the schools said:

*“I really appreciate the way the school celebrates the cultures of all the children...” “I have been happy to contribute dolls and artefacts from my own country...” “We really enjoy the Christmas Fair when parents bring food from around the world to share with others.”* (OfSTED 2004a, p.35)

OfSTED’s evaluation of this school was extremely positive, praising the level of engagement with minority ethnic parents and the genuine celebration of the school community’s linguistic and cultural heritage.

The importance of positively promoting different cultures applies equally to parenting programmes. Barlow et al. (2004) conducted a comprehensive literature review on the experiences and outcomes of parenting programmes for minority ethnic groups. Whilst it should be acknowledged that the majority of evidence was based on research from the US, the report found that, overall, drop out rates on parenting programmes were much higher for minority ethnic parents. However, this was countered in (culturally specific) provision where courses explicitly recognised the values and identity of target minority ethnic groups. The Effective Black Parenting Programme, for example, attempted to help parents to counter negative images of Black people that they and their children encounter and to promote positive images and role models.

Finally, Beirens et al. (2006) found that strengthening cultural identity and raising confidence in their cultural heritage is critically important for families accessing preventative services for asylum seeking children.

### **3.3 Addressing barriers**

Barriers to accessing services such as time, distance to travel and cost apply to all potential users. However, minority ethnic parents may be disproportionately affected due to a higher likelihood of experiencing deprivation<sup>19</sup> and may face additional barriers in communication where language difficulties exist. Such barriers to engagement with services are widely reported as being a particular issue for minority ethnic parents and apply equally to engaging with childcare provision and schools.

In relation to minority ethnic parents accessing childcare, Bell et al. (2004) find that affordability, availability at convenient times, the location and a lack of awareness and information were key barriers. The authors found that this resulted from minority ethnic families being more likely than White British families to grow up in poverty, work atypical hours and experience language difficulties which means that even where information is provided it is often not understood.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Kober, C (ed) (2003) *Black and Minority Ethnic Children and Poverty*, London: End Child Poverty

Williams and Churchill (2006) argued that it is important for childcare to be more flexible and, therefore, accessible for minority ethnic parents. Examples of good practice included:

- providing services and activities at a number of local sites;
- providing a transport service for those with mobility constraints;
- taking services to people through home based service delivery;
- free or low cost provision; and
- information translated orally or as texts for minority languages.

Communication is a key issue in engaging with minority ethnic parents, especially where language difficulties exist. One method of overcoming this is to provide language classes for parents. Beirens et al. (2006) found this to be particularly helpful for parents that are refugees or asylum seekers due to low levels of English language proficiency. Once parents are engaged in these classes it is also easier to provide them with additional information on service provision.

Another key method for overcoming these communication barriers is undertaking outreach with minority ethnic parents. Williams and Churchill (2006) found that, when undertaken sensitively, outreach can reinforce the universal nature of services, help to develop awareness of what is available to parents and help services to understand and respond to needs they had not previously encountered.

Similarly, according to Chamba et al. (1999), minority ethnic parents caring for a severely disabled child that are in touch with a key or link worker are less likely to report unmet needs for information and experience fewer difficulties as service users.

Schools are able to engage minority ethnic parents through effective home-school liaison. Blair and Bourne (1998) found that home-school liaison staff can help schools to encourage parents to contact the school about their own concerns and those of their children. The authors found that it is important to have one identified person in the school that parents are able to contact and can express their needs to. This is particularly helpful for non-English speaking parents and Traveller parents.

Other points of good practice from this study which help to overcome communication barriers with minority ethnic parents included:

- providing interpreters at parents evenings;
- regular newsletters and other literature available in each major language; and
- personal phone calls, where possible, instead of letters to discuss their child's progress.

### **3.4 Culturally appropriate: targeted and mainstream services**

Providing culturally appropriate services to minority ethnic parents can present a dilemma for a number of service providers: whether or not to offer targeted (culturally-specific) provision alongside mainstream (universal) services in order to increase engagement with minority ethnic parents.

In some cases targeted provision is essential, for example, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes provided through Sure Start and schools are, by definition, specifically for parents for whom English was not their first language. However, Lloyd and Rafferty (2006) also included the following examples of targeted provision offered by SSLPs:

- bilingual breastfeeding support for Bangladeshi women;
- swimming sessions targeted at Muslim families, alternating between fathers only and mothers only;
- Jewish mother and toddler groups with children's books in Hebrew;
- a 'self-esteem' training course directed at Bangladeshi and Pakistani women; and
- a weekly drop-in group for refugees and asylum seekers.

Clearly these are not essential in the same way as ESOL classes and are intended to offer culturally appropriate provision in order to increase the engagement with minority ethnic parents. The authors found that such targeted provision was generally viewed positively by parents and increased inclusion. However, they also noted potential issues where provision is not sufficiently integrated with other mainstream Sure Start services as the support can become compartmentalised and minority ethnic parents may have restricted involvement with other families.

Barlow et al. (2004) provided similar findings for parenting programmes (again based on research predominantly from the US). They found that culturally-specific programmes generally offered a more positive experience for minority ethnic parents, while mainstream services were usually (unreflectively) based on the values and needs of White British parents. However, in determining the impact of different types of parenting programmes the authors also noted that mainstream provision could also provide a positive challenge to cultural norms, if handled sensitively.

### **3.5 Empowering minority ethnic parents**

There is a substantial amount of evidence which suggests that minority ethnic parents are keen to be involved in the services they access, particularly in decision-making. Parents generally respond positively where this happens as it taps into the positive aspirations for themselves and their children's future (Williams and Churchill 2006).

Parental involvement is at the heart of the Sure Start approach but actual involvement in decision-making about the service is relatively limited. According to Williams and Churchill (2006), several SSLPs have mechanisms in place to include minority ethnic parents in planning and decision-making, supporting them with a crèche facility, transport and committee training skills. However, the authors found that, in practice, the agenda is still dominated by programme managers. More positively, minority ethnic parents had also been utilised innovatively as volunteer ambassadors, representing Sure Start to the local community and acting as a role model to other parents. In another example, provided by Lloyd and Rafferty (2006), minority ethnic parents were used as researchers by one SSLP, helping external evaluators to co-ordinate a survey of the community.

By contrast, the literature on parental involvement in schools provides numerous examples of how minority ethnic parents have been actively involved. Lower level engagement included seeking their views and inviting them to contribute to school life (OfSTED, 2004). Blair and Bourne (1998) found that primary schools, in particular, were open to involving minority ethnic parents in provision, welcoming them as helpers (e.g. to read stories in their own language), regularly hosting parents' assemblies, and even training and paying for some parents to work with small groups of children needing extra support.

Beyond this, Turner (2005) and Carnie (2005) provide an insight into the process and benefits of establishing parent councils. The project was largely based in schools with large minority ethnic populations and increased engagement through parents being seen as genuine partners and democratically involved in the running of their child's school. Whilst Turner (2005) found that building the necessary trust among parents to believe they are genuinely being involved can take a considerable length of time, the increase in engagement has been highly positive.

Underpinning this greater involvement of minority ethnic parents are other helpful practices, including facilitating parent networks and fostering links with other organisations (third sector providers and businesses, for example).

The evidence suggests that parent networks are not necessarily valuable per se. However, they can provide an important source of mutual support and a source of capacity building for parents to involve themselves in a school or childcare. Beirens et al. (2006) cite one example of a parents' network set up for parents of asylum seeking children in response to their low educational attainment. Together these parents set up a homework club to improve attainment and home-school relations, as well as offering advice sessions to increase awareness of mainstream services. Blair and Bourne (1998) and OfSTED (2004b) also found that parents' meetings and parents' associations had a positive effect and had helped to give a voice to otherwise marginalised minority ethnic parents.

Beirens et al. (2006) also found that community-based organisations are well placed to deliver or support the development of responsive services for asylum seeking families and for minority ethnic families more widely. In one example of a community project to deliver therapeutic services for refugee and asylum seeking children, parents and children found it to be an accessible and safe environment which also drew upon cultural traditions. Similarly, Blair and Bourne (1998) found that schools can effectively tap into community organisations and their cultural understanding by working with them to help raise the profile of cultural diversity. Examples provided in OfSTED (2004b) among secondary schools included links with the local mosque and community groups (including African drumming, Indian dance and story tellers from different minority ethnic backgrounds). Parsons et al. (2004) also found that community links can help to encourage parents to support their child's school more actively and recommend that such links are further developed by schools.

## 4 GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

This chapter sets out the findings from the qualitative fieldwork undertaken in ten good practice case studies. The ten case studies are:

- AMBER project;
- Babyfather Initiative;
- Barnardo's Parent Partnership;
- Bruce Grove Primary School;
- Coram Parents' Centre;
- Leeds Traveller Education Service;
- Soho Children's Centre;
- Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities;
- Tower Hamlets Local Authority; and
- William C Harvey Special School.

## 4.1 AMBER Project

### *Introduction*

The AMBER (Adult Minorities Breaking Educational Restrictions) project has been running in schools (and now in one local Sure Start) in deprived areas of Nottingham since 1996. The project was set up to address low parental engagement with schools among a large and diverse minority ethnic population in the city. This consists predominantly of Black Caribbean, Asian Pakistani and Asian Indian families as well as a small number of asylum seekers and refugees. More recently, the city has also seen a growing number of Eastern European (particularly Polish) migrants settle.

At the outset, AMBER was targeted specifically at supporting minority ethnic parents. However, it has subsequently broadened out to engage with parents from all ethnic backgrounds (including White British).

Funding for the project was initially provided from several sources, including the Learning and Skills Council, European Social Fund, New College Nottingham (NCN) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU). Currently, the project is administered from NCN premises and receives direct financial support solely from the NRU.

### *Engaging parents*

AMBER is built around its staff of approximately 50 Parental Involvement Co-ordinators (PICs). PICs work part-time, spending between 10 and 14 hours per week in primary schools or 20 hours per week in secondary schools in deprived areas of Nottingham as well as undertaking five hours per week of training. All PICs are parents drawn from the locality, with approximately half from a minority ethnic background. The staff act as a link between home, school and community through encouraging parents to be as involved as possible in their child's education and their school.

Specifically, AMBER attempts to:

- *support parents as partners in learning* – helping parents to engage with their child's school and to understand homework and the curriculum;
- *influence the culture of the school* – supporting schools to be more welcoming to parents and to help broker good relations between the school and parents; and
- *support parents, carers and families* – providing parents with the opportunities for social networking, access to training courses and signposting to relevant public and voluntary and community services.

The PICs' first task is to introduce themselves and befriend parents at the school in order to build relationships and trust. Typically, this will start out with inviting parents to attend coffee mornings to meet each other and get to know the PIC. At these social meetings there is no agenda and no pressure on parents to take their involvement any further. As a first step, this helps parents to discuss their experiences and any issues that they may have as well as building their confidence through making new friendships. One parent said, "*if you had asked me six months ago I would never have thought I would do this, but I got to know some of the other mums and it's really built my confidence.*"

PICs also provide an informal and confidential point of access for parents to raise any issues that they encounter, no matter how personal. This often means that they are able to engage directly with parents in a way that school staff reported being unable to because of time constraints. In one example encountered during the research, a

distressed mother was unable to order a repeat prescription for her husband, who suffers from epilepsy, because she could not speak English. As is commonly the case, the PIC was bilingual and quickly helped to resolve the matter. More broadly, PICs cited a wide range of issues they had encountered from how to address a child's behavioural problems to domestic violence.

PICs regularly arrange workshops and events for parents in order to help break down barriers at the individual and community level. In addition to the coffee mornings, PICs have helped to organise very successful day trips (to Butlins and Center Parcs, for example) which they felt provided a break from normal routines and get parents and children at the school to mix. AMBER staff also help out at parents' evening and have put on events for parents to attend including fashion shows and different cultural events (such as an Eid festival and a Ramadan Club) aiming to help parents and children from all cultural backgrounds to understand each other better. This is always organised with the school's consent and helps to bring parents into school grounds, reinforcing the message that they are welcome and that their culture is respected at school.

Crucially, PICs try to move parents through a 'journey' to get them more involved in their children's and their own education. The vast majority of parents expressed a desire to be able to help their children with their schoolwork but many felt unable to do so because of language difficulties or because they did not have enough knowledge about the subject. PICs are able to provide specific information relating to special educational needs or other specific issues, but parents' own learning was seen by staff and parents as being critical.

As with the social events, PICs felt that it was important not to put too much pressure on parents to start with. 'Fun' courses (such as bellydancing in one school) are designed to encourage parents to engage. When PICs think parents are ready, they are encouraged to undertake specific courses. These are usually confidence building, basic skills, literacy and numeracy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or ICT. Parents are signposted towards available provision (usually delivered by one of the main FE colleges) or, where there is a large enough group and an available location, tutors will deliver to a class of parents at the school. While the numbers of parents undertaking accredited courses is relatively low as a proportion of all parents in the school, many that have studied have gone on to volunteer at their child's school and, in some cases, taken on formal roles as a teaching assistant or school governor.

**Case study – Asian mother who joined Amber and is now a team leader:**

*"I began to work for the AMBER project from the outset in 1996. My role was to get as many ethnic minority parents as possible involved in the daily school life. I began by having coffee mornings and by going out onto the school yard and talking to parents, explaining my role and how I could help them. At first not many parents came to my coffee mornings but after a lot of perseverance the numbers began to rise, parents began to open up and wanted to know if I could help them learn to read and write English as they found it difficult to communicate with staff and they wanted to help their children do well in school. I began to look at how I could also better myself and help my children. I found out that the school was doing a NVQ course for women returners. I found that when I was at home my children would also study alongside me. The school then employed me as a bilingual instructor and I began to work with small groups of children who had English as a second language and with special educational needs. I began to realise how important education for my children is and started doing more and more with them and they began to look up to me as a role model and began to compete with each other.*

*Asian parents also wanted to go onto the course and find work in the school as they found that it helped build their children's confidence and self esteem when they saw them working in the school. I then became a team leader for the project which helped me support other workers. The project has taken me through a journey that has helped me become successful, and also helped me to empower other people and my own children to do better in life."*

**What works?**

The key factor in all of AMBER's work is the recruitment of staff that are parents themselves, are part of the local community and reflect a range of minority ethnic groups (e.g. Black, Asian, Chinese and Mixed). Staff are seen as "one of us", as one parent put it. The ethnic diversity of the PICs is a major strength, helping to spread cultural awareness across the team. Any new issues and success stories are also fed back by individuals to the team so that learning is constantly updated. This helps parents to feel that their culture and background is both understood and welcomed into the school, rather than being ignored. More directly, the diversity of the team can help to engage with communities where schools have struggled. As the Deputy Headteacher of one school explained, "it can be hard to break the ice with new migrants. It really helps when you have someone who speaks the language and has time to talk to them at school".

AMBER staff created very personal relationships with parents and felt strongly that the best way to approach this is through a delicate balance between treating parents as individuals and avoiding labelling them, while also respecting different cultural traditions. AMBER started out by working exclusively with minority ethnic parents, but shifted to engaging with parents from all backgrounds early on. Since then, AMBER has tended not to provide targeted provision for minority ethnic groups as it is seen to create division and tensions among parents (both White British and minority ethnic) when some groups are seen as being 'different' because eligibility is based on ethnicity rather than need. The only exceptions were for ESOL speakers, some classes being restricted to Muslim women who felt more comfortable in this environment.

Promoting diversity requires a level of understanding of different cultures and taking positive action to show that these are respected and welcomed. This contrasts with either ignoring cultural differences (the 'culturally blind' approach) or being judgemental



about them. Events for parents of all backgrounds both in and beyond the school were extremely successful in bringing individuals from different communities together. In particular, PICs found that events based around religious festivals or different cultural aspects (such as cookery) but open to all parents were an effective way of breaking down barriers.

In terms of engaging in their children's and their own learning, the main barrier among parents was a lack of confidence. This was thought to be the case particularly among parents that did not have a high level of education themselves, had not been in employment for some time and/or had some difficulty with English. Yet, these parents were also keen to learn both for their own benefit and so that they could help their children and provide a good role model. This is a complex issue to address and can be very individual. However, PICs were careful not to put pressure on parents but to engage them in dialogue and help them to meet other parents at first. In terms of parents' own learning, it was felt to be important to start with courses that are not too difficult or that require a large time commitment. Once parents had begun to undertake their own learning, PICs found it much easier to encourage them to take further courses.

### ***Remaining barriers***

Engaging effectively with fathers has proven substantially more challenging for all PICs. Just as the diversity of the AMBER staff helps to engage with minority ethnic parents, so the lack of male PICs makes it more difficult to involve fathers. In order to address this, one female PIC had recruited five fathers to work alongside her in different informal capacities which helped to motivate other fathers to get involved. Another PIC had established a specific fathers' group because the group was heavily dominated by mothers.

Staff have also found engaging with recent immigrants from Eastern Europe challenging. The AMBER workforce does not yet include any staff from this community and the level of English proficiency is generally low which makes it difficult to start a dialogue with these parents.

### ***Effectiveness***

The AMBER project is an example of a voluntary and community organisation that is recognised for its good practice in supporting parental involvement in schools by the Standards Site.

AMBER's impact is difficult to measure as it cannot readily be quantified. However, it appears that the programme is achieving its aims. Minority ethnic parents that were engaging with courses or had received support from their PIC were all extremely supportive of the programme and many said that they would not have got involved at school without the PIC's presence and support. The most important impacts were: helping parents to build their confidence, engage with their children's school and participate more fully in their children's and their own learning.

In 2006 a small scale beneficiary survey was conducted as part of a project evaluation. 180 questionnaires were sent to parents through their children's school, with nearly a 25% response rate. As the number of responses is relatively low and are not disaggregated for minority ethnic parents findings should be treated with caution. However, when asked "How would you be affected if the service AMBER provides wasn't available?" 55% of parents said they would be less likely to go to school and 81% reported that they would feel less confident in approaching the school if they had a problem.

From the school perspective, senior managers and teachers were extremely positive about the role of AMBER in helping them to engage effectively with minority ethnic parents. The Headteacher at a primary school in which the majority of children are minority ethnic described how the PIC at the school had helped to foster trust between the school and the parents through speaking to them in their own language and signposting them towards adult learning opportunities. OfSTED inspections for those schools with AMBER workers tend to be extremely positive about their engagement with parents and frequently praise the project explicitly. One report notes that:

*“The school has improved its communication with parents since the last inspection. Of particular note is the work of the AMBER project... The project leader works in school and has a base from which to help with a wide variety of education courses... Many take up these opportunities. The project leader’s language skills also give excellent support to parents, for example during meetings at the school or with understanding aspects of the curriculum.”* (OfSTED Inspection Report, Berridge Junior School, 2003, p.14).

Finally, AMBER was nominated for an award at the European Parents’ Association in 2004. The project has also hosted visitors from other local authorities across England and even from international visitors interested in learning more about it.

### **Learning**

When asked what AMBER staff had learnt through their experience, they listed the following:

- practitioners can successfully increase social capital by creating trusting, reciprocal relationships and providing a forum for parents to meet each other on a regular basis;
- practitioners should not assume superior knowledge as a professional, but listen and be responsive to parents;
- there is a fine balance between befriending parents and challenging them to raise their aspirations. It is important not to be overbearing with parents that lack confidence initially and to take the time to build a relationship before pushing them to be more involved in their own and their children’s learning; and
- persistence is vital as it takes a long time to become established, build networks and to produce tangible results.

## 4.2 BabyFather Initiative

### *Introduction*

The mid 1990s saw the publication of 'Babyfather', a book focusing on issues of parenthood for African Caribbean communities and, specifically, on the issue of fathers who are separated from their children. After receiving a number of enquiries as a result of the book, the author, Patrick Augustus, set up the Babyfather Alliance to continue addressing these issues and providing support for Black fathers (African, Caribbean and mixed heritage fathers). A member of staff at Barnardo's felt that the publication had the potential to engage Black fathers further, and in partnership with BabyFather Alliance, Barnardo's helped to set up the BabyFather Initiative (BFI) in 2003.<sup>20</sup>

For Barnardo's, the focus was the negative impact that living without a stable and positive relationship with a father could have for children in terms of their achievement, attainment, mental health and the quality of their relationships in later life. A series of awareness-raising events, styled as "An evening with Patrick Augustus" were run in 2004. Funded by Home Office, these acted as an open forum (held at local theatres and other arenas) which local community organisations promoted. The event focused on issues facing Black men (e.g. over-representation in the criminal justice system and mental health services as well as debates around fathering). This acted as a forum to flag up the commitment of local people and organisations to these issues and to begin to capacity-build interested parties at a local level.

### *Engaging parents*

BFI have developed and run a series of courses and events to engage with Black fathers in the local community. In 2005 the BFI focused on developing training programmes aimed at delivering learning directly with African and Caribbean fathers themselves and helping them to develop key parenting skills through the African Caribbean Fatherhood Programme (ACFP). The programme is a series of 10 self-contained modules which can be delivered according to the balance of need and focus of fathers and services. It is an accredited programme that focuses on relationships, sex, wellbeing, how to nurture and support the Black male self, and how to gain physical/spiritual/mental or emotional health. In addition a sister course, the African Caribbean Fatherhood Training Programme (ACFtP), has been developed for professionals who want to have a better understanding of, and engagement with, African and Caribbean fathers. Both of these programmes can be run on a bespoke basis with individual agencies or organisations around the UK.

In addition to the programmes and education provided directly through BFI, staff also work closely with other local voluntary and community groups to deliver workshops and events. Staff from BFI regularly speak at events, are panel members and organise follow up sessions where interest is generated. One such organisation is Break the Cycle (an organisation funded through the Parents Fund) which is based in Nottingham. The organisation ran a conference on Black men and their position as fathers and their intersection with criminal justice, education and health services. This

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<sup>20</sup> This project has been included in this report for the good practice it has undertaken in engaging with minority ethnic parents. However, DCSF does not endorse the use of the term 'Babyfather'

ran parallel to workshop sessions from ACFP delivered by the BFI manager at a local venue in Nottingham.

### ***What works?***

The success of the BFI stems from three main features: firstly events are run by staff who are themselves men of African, Caribbean or mixed heritage background; secondly, all events are run with a flexible and informal approach, characteristic of the African and/or Caribbean style of interaction; and thirdly, provision is culturally targeted exclusively towards Black fathers.

BFI staff identified that a main barrier to engaging Black men is acknowledging the societal expectations placed on them in British society and the complexity of their position as fathers in the African and Caribbean communities. Historically, staff identify that there has been an unbalanced relationship between Black men, on the one hand, and public services on the other (for example over-representation in criminal justice, mental health and looked-after services). This has made Black men suspicious of services and practitioners that may wish to engage in the absence of few positive models of engagement. Additionally, negative stereotypes of Black fathers being absent have become pervasive in such services.

In this sense, staff identified that it was crucial for the workshops to take cultural and gender identity as core and that all of those involved were themselves men of African, Caribbean and/or dual heritage. Discussions about paternal responsibility, lone parenthood and non-resident fatherhood status can be very sensitive and in this context it was considered that adverts for the workshops sessions would convey that they were 'for Black males only'. Without this, staff feel that Black fathers would not have been engaged and frank, honest and open discussion not have occurred. As one father said, "*We're all guys, we're all Black and we have certain common experiences in terms of life, work, discrimination and our aspirations and we can challenge each other and reflect on this*".

The style of the workshops were deliberately informal and interactive with delivery of workshop content by the manager and (facilitated) open, sometimes heated and often humorous discussion following this. This is important given that the characteristic of African and Caribbean styles of interaction tends to favour informal environments with the space to challenge, debate and counter-challenge in a free and open manner with use of humour and colourful, colloquial language – this is a cultural vernacular that may not translate as well in other more formalised programme or workshop contexts.

Use of a broad facilitated approach to workshops meant that fathers could learn from each other's experiences through which the group could begin to build trust and learn from each other as well as understand that they had expertise in the fatherhood skills that they already had. This ethos is exemplified in the BFI strap-line that 'it takes a whole village to raise a child'.

There was flexibility in the way workshops sessions were held. All sessions were held in the evening with some flexibility about timing meaning that they were able to attract men who were juggling responsibilities of work and childcare. There was also flexibility in attendance so that if people were only able to attend for part of a session they were encouraged to do so. A small number of fathers also brought some of their own elder children with them.

This flexibility framed a sense of ownership in the group – because they were choosing to remain part of the group beyond the workshops and could help influence the direction of this they felt empowered within the sessions. As one father said, "*The issue*

*about ownership is important. We are fully involved in the decisions that are made. The YMCA initiated it but does not own us as members”.*

### **Remaining barriers**

It was evident during the research that BFI was driven by a single and highly dedicated manager. Staff identified this as a potential issue in relation to the sustainability of the programme. However, the manager was aware of this and was working towards production of online resources based on the workshops to help mitigate this in the longer-term (with people able to access resources to set up their own workshop delivery).

The project manager of BFI recognised that ‘Babyfather’ is a contested term that may hold negative connotations for some African, Caribbean and wider community members. Here, the project name derives from the title of the Patrick Augustus book (‘Babyfather’), which led the author to receive an overwhelming amount of enquiries from Black males, professionals, mothers, carers and others in the wider community concerned about the impact that absent fathers may be having at a micro and macro level on the Black community and society in general. Whilst the term remains controversial, for BFI it has served to engage fathers in the African and Caribbean community and sustain debate.

### **Effectiveness**

The ACFP course is accredited, with parenting skills taught relating to the Every Child Matters agenda supported by Parenting UK. Those attending the course can collect evidence toward literacy key skills at level 1.

In terms of impacts for fathers themselves, attendees identified that workshop sessions had represented one of the first times they had discussed fatherhood issues at all. As one father said, *“this is the first time I’ve ever talked about how to be a father and what it means to be a father in the Black community”*. Other fathers commented that female friends and relations in the Black community were highly supportive of this initiative.

Fathers identified that they had taken some of the ideas discussed in the sessions and used them with their own children. One father said *“I went back and I asked my children to list the ten things that they liked about Dad – to see the areas that I do well and understand the ones that I could do better on”*. Another said *“I sat down and, after we had said about listening, I deliberately listened to my daughter talking about her boyfriend. I normally switch off and just walk away! [laughs] But I think that I’ve got to understand that if I want her to listen to me than I have to listen to what she wants to say as well”*. In this sense, the immediate impact of the sessions inheres in small improvements in the quality of relationships of fathers with their children.

Attendees of the BFI workshops have continued to meet beyond the sessions themselves and now form a core membership for Break the Cycle as an organisation. Break the Cycle staff identified how these fathers will continue to help shape and inform the way in which the organisation will develop over the next two years and will act as promoters of the initiative within the African and Caribbean communities. Staff and parents felt this was significant since there has been no organisation focused on fathers from the African and Caribbean communities in the Midlands area and very few across the UK as a whole.

### **Learning**

Fathers and staff felt that workshop sessions needed to be flexible and informal in order to sustain open and honest discussion. Similarly, consideration needed to be

given to having single sex and ethnicity groups where very specific single topic areas (such as Black fatherhood) are being discussed.

Staff identified that Black men are not a hard-to-reach group from services that they feel are inclusive of them. However, the historical legacy of their experience with public services, the persistence of pervasive cultural stereotypes and contemporary factors framing fatherhood within the African and Caribbean communities have conspired to make Black fathers suspicious of services seeking to engage with them as parents. Time needs to be spent to build trust to counter these negative stereotypes, using local ethnic community organisations and experienced independent facilitators from these communities. This can also be supported by having open and transparent groups in which fathers feel that they are part of the decision-making process.

### 4.3 Barnardo's Parent Partnership

#### *Introduction*

The Bradford Parent Partnership Service (PPS) was set up in 1995 and became a statutory service in 1996<sup>21</sup>. Initially set up to reduce conflict between parents and the Local Education Authority (LEA) and minimise the number of special educational needs (SEN) tribunals, the PPS works with parents of all children and young people who have SEN.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that parents in their area have access to a PPS. Education Bradford<sup>22</sup> took the decision to outsource the PPS to Barnardo's to distance it from the Education Service and to ensure parents viewed the PPS as being independent. Bradford PPS is jointly funded by Barnardo's and Education Bradford. It is a small project with 3.5 full-time equivalent staff, which includes the Children's Services Manager, two Parent Partnership Officers (PPO's), and a Choice Advisor who recently joined the team.

Bradford PPS is a universal service available for all parents with children with SEN. However, the PPS has made specific efforts to engage with Bradford's ethnic minority communities who make up 21% of the city's population; the largest group being of Pakistani origin that now makes up 15% of the total population. The City is also home to the 'traditional' Traveller community established in Bradford since 1988, and more recently the city has seen the arrival of new communities mainly from Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia.

#### *Engaging parents*

Bradford PPS aims to help parents to make informed decisions about their child's education through ensuring that they have the appropriate advice, information and support to make these decisions. The support provided by the PPS is intended to be accurate and neutral, informing parents on the full range of options available to them so that they can play an active role in their children's education.

Parents are allocated a key worker (who is a trained professional known as a Parent Partnership Officer) who provides ongoing support and advice about special needs provision and the decisions affecting their child in school. The PPO works with parents providing information, training, advice and support to enable parents to work alongside practitioners to enable parents to access the best education for their children. In practice this includes:

- providing access to information regarding: SEN provision in schools, the Statutory Assessment process, statements, specialist provision/support services, appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST);
- helping to explain the content of reports/correspondence;
- making telephone calls on parents' behalf and supporting them to write letters;

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<sup>21</sup> When the Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) amended the 1996 Education Act, adding section 332A.

<sup>22</sup> Following Bradford LEA's condemning OfSTED inspection in 2000 Bradford Council decided to sub contract school-based education to Serco. Serco took responsibility in July 2001 under the name of Education Bradford. Serco was awarded a ten year contract.

- supporting parents with appeals processes (such as an appeal for a place at a particular school or against an exclusion);
- supporting parents to arrange meetings with school and other professionals and attending the meetings with parents to discuss concerns/review progress;
- accompanying parents/carers on visits to alternative educational settings;
- liaising with schools, the local authority and other agencies to promote positive relationships with parents;
- equipping parents with the skills and confidence to work with professionals; and
- signposting parents to other sources of support e.g. voluntary organisations, parents groups, help-lines.

Staff at the PPS identified that the South Asian community was not engaging fully as a result of language issues and the lack of knowledge about the service. A female Pakistani PPO was recruited to engage specifically with Bradford's South Asian communities. On first contact with Bradford PPS, South Asian parents are offered the choice of working with the Pakistani PPO. Many South Asian parents tend to prefer to work with the Pakistani PPO even if they do not have language difficulties. One parent stated *"she [Pakistani PPO] can speak Urdu which is helpful for parents who can't speak English, but she also understands other issues – she knows where you are coming from and you don't have to explain everything all the time"*.

As well as directly supporting parents, the Pakistani PPO undertakes outreach work to raise the awareness of the PPS amongst minority ethnic parents. The PPO identifies schools with a high percentage of pupils who come from minority ethnic communities and visits these schools to inform parents of the support the service can offer.

#### ***What works?***

One of the main barriers preventing engagement from South Asian parents has been language issues. Recruiting a Pakistani PPO who is from the local community has been very effective in engaging with minority ethnic parents. The Pakistani PPO is able to speak several South Asian languages and has a cultural knowledge and understanding of specific issues that these parents face. The value of having a practitioner who speaks community languages was highlighted by one parent: *"My daughter has speech problems and the school she was going to didn't have specialist Speech Therapy Provision so I wanted to move her to a school that did. I contacted Barnardo's [PPS] to support me to write a letter. I was so relieved someone could speak Urdu it made it all so much easier I could explain everything in detail. [The Pakistani PPO] helped me write a letter and took me to visit the schools that had specialist Speech Therapy Provision. Without her it would have been very difficult for me"*.

SEN processes and legislation, in particular, can be very technical and parents found discussing this with practitioners quite daunting. For parents who do not speak English it is even more difficult to engage in the decisions affecting their child's education. This is one of the main reasons why PPOs work on the principle of empowering parents, increasing their confidence and developing their skills to enable them to engage with schools and professionals. The Pakistani PPO stated that:



*“Many of the parents I work with have language issues and don’t have the confidence to attend meetings with schools. Sometimes it seems that schools make all the decisions with little parent input and parents assume that schools are making the best decisions and don’t challenge these decisions. I work with parents on a personal level encouraging them to question decisions. I also accompany them to meetings so that they can be part of the decision making process for their children’s future”.*

In one example, a South Asian mother who was not able to speak English was not engaging with the school and left them to make all the decisions about her child. The school decided to place her blind daughter in a special school. Because the young girl was placed in an environment where the other children had no speech she started to lose her speech and started to mimic the sounds she was hearing from other children. The girl was in the school for three years before the mother realised this and contacted Bradford PPS. The Pakistani PPO worked with the mother supporting her and giving her the confidence to challenge the school. The girl was moved into a mainstream school and has been making good progress since.

Bradford PPS has established close links with other agencies in order to engage with particular minority ethnic groups. The PPS has good links with BRADNET<sup>23</sup> a voluntary advocacy service which aims to empower disabled people and their parents. This agency in the main works with the South Asian community and the links developed have been effective in referring parents to the PPS and vice versa. Partner agencies such as Education Bradford and BRADNET have been very positive about the effectiveness of the PPS in supporting parents to engage with professionals and to become involved in decisions about their children’s education. Moreover, parents were positive about the perceived added impact that PPOs had when engaging with other services - *“they make other service accountable for the things they are supposed to do, which is a great help because they can make things happen. No one listens to us, especially if you can’t speak English”.*

### **Remaining barriers**

Engaging with recently arrived migrant workers and asylum seekers has been a particular challenge for Bradford PPS – particular issues have been around language, building relationships and having the time and resources to address these challenges. One senior manager *stated “this is a huge challenge but one we are responding to”.* One method the PPS has adopted to address this challenge is by working in partnership with the Education Service for New Communities and Travellers (Education Bradford). The Education Service has a good understanding of the Traveller and new communities in Bradford and has a team of workers who reflect most of the relevant communities they work with. The Education Service identifies families who could benefit from the PPS and refer the families to them. The Education Service workers accompany the PPO on the first visit to the families to introduce the PPO and help them to establish trust with the families. Once the families are comfortable with the PPO they can visit the families on their own. The PPOs can also draw on the Education Service’s team of in-house interpreters for language support.

Raising awareness among minority ethnic groups is a key issue, especially given the limited resources of the PPS. Parents were extremely positive about the service and

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<sup>23</sup> BRADNET (formerly known as Asian Disability Network) is a user-led organisation that seeks to empower and enable disabled people to lead their chosen lifestyle by providing appropriate services which include outreach and advocacy.

made a number of suggestions including recruiting more minority ethnic staff, leaflets, working with community centers and having a pack containing useful information and contacts when children with SEN start primary school. One parent said, *“parents want to use services but it’s the lack of knowledge that prevents them from engaging. You need to publicise services more in community centres so parents are aware of them”*. Bradford PPS is in the process of consulting with parents/carers and professionals on the content, circulation and range of community languages needed for publicity materials.

Senior managers are aware of the need to promote the service to minority ethnic groups, however, capacity issues and meeting the demand this will create is holding the service back, as the service has only 3.5 full-time staff to meet demand for the whole city. One senior manager stated *“we have thought about promoting the service and have lots of ideas but we wouldn’t be able to meet the demand. We are just about coping with the demand now”*.

### **Effectiveness**

Bradford PPS monitors the ethnic background of its service users to ensure that they are effective in engaging with all the relevant communities in the City. In September 2007 Bradford PPS was working with 223 families, of which 34.5% were from minority ethnic groups. This is higher than the minority ethnic proportion of the population in Bradford (approximately 21% according to the 2001 Census), suggesting that the service has been effective in engaging with minority ethnic parents.

Bradford PPS sends out evaluation forms to all parents they work with to monitor the effectiveness of the service. The vast majority of forms are completed and returned. The Pakistani PPO completes the evaluation form over the phone with parents who have language needs. The results of evaluation forms are fed into the service’s annual report. The feedback from parents shows that parents have usually had a positive outcome and are very satisfied with the service they have received. Even if the outcome is not what they had wanted, parents are still happy with the service they have received.

Apart from supporting parents to ensure they access the best education for their children, other impacts the service has had on parents have been increased confidence of parents in *“engaging with professionals and to have an informed discussion with schools”*, and feeling they have an advocate for their needs - *“you don’t feel on your own, you know there is someone there to support you”*.

### **Case study – Pakistani father who was supported to contribute to decisions about his daughters education**

*“My eldest daughter - we noticed she was developing late. She walked late, she teethed late – there was a delay in her development, but physically she was fine. The doctors couldn’t diagnose her but at the age of three she couldn’t do what other children were doing. We had no support and we didn’t know where to go. The Children’s Development Centre gave me the number for the PPS. I contacted the PPS and they [PPO] helped me with everything - every little issue. I wanted my daughter to be statemented but the school wouldn’t agree. We had a meeting with school and they said she was fine. The PPO gave me the confidence to argue with the school and not to give up. Finally we got her statemented but it took 3-4 years. I would have given up long ago without the support from the PPO. I get so nervous and I can’t speak in groups especially in front of professionals. The PPO talked me through everything and told me I could do it. I spoke in front of a group of professionals which was a big achievement for me”*.

### ***Learning***

Bradford PPS staff had the following learning to share with other services:

- practitioners should evaluate how they engage with parents. They should aim to empower parents by recognising their strengths and supporting them to develop their skills;
- flexibility and consistency are vital in responding to parents individual needs;
- treat parents with respect. Be honest and do what you say you will do - don't make promises you can't keep; and
- go out and meet people and build relations and trust. Be aware of different communities and cultural backgrounds and be sensitive to their needs.

#### **4.4 Bruce Grove Primary School**

##### ***Introduction***

Bruce Grove is a large primary school in Haringey, which is one of the most diverse and deprived boroughs in London. Over 40 languages are spoken by the school's 450 pupils. There is a mix of more established African-Caribbean and Turkish pupils (who may be second and third generation or more) as well as newer communities such as Somali and Kurdish, many of whom are refugees and asylum seekers.

The school is proactive in engaging with parents, with the Parent Council forming one aspect of the overall work that it does with parents. The Parent Council is a group facilitated by an appointed member of school staff to engage with parents and allows them an opportunity to speak freely about what they consider to be their priority issues in their and their children's lives

##### ***Engaging parents***

When the Parent Council was launched the intention was for it to resemble that of a student council, with parent representatives drawn from each class attending. However, it quickly became obvious to the Headteacher that such a structure was too rigid for parents given the other pressing issues felt to be present in (some) parents' lives such as accessing appropriate housing, employment and benefits for instance. To this end, a number of workshops were offered including ESOL and literacy and numeracy classes for parents at Key Stages 1 and 2. The school also offers other non-academic classes such as keep fit and art as well as IT. Workshops take place throughout the three academic terms, running every week for 6-8 weeks depending on the course chosen. Meetings are based at the school and are led by the Home School Coordinator (who has focus on establishing relationships with parents) and the Learning Mentor (with a focus on barriers to learning).

The Parent Council itself has at its core a small number of committed parents who keep the project going (and are also Parent Governors and/or on the Parents Teachers and Friends Association (PTFA)). Every year, the Parent Council sends out a letter at the start of the academic year introducing the Council, explaining its function and inviting parents to an initial meeting. The invite is sent out as part of the school newsletter and a reminder notice is also sent. This process is co-ordinated by the school Learning Mentor.

##### ***What works?***

Parent Council members were clear that the foundation of engagement with parents is the school itself operating an 'open door' policy. The Parent Council members identified that this was led by the Headteacher who actively promoted the accessing of the school by parents in specific sessions and parents days. The school also had parent notice-boards inside and outside the school to leave comments and a specific family room within the school where workshops and other classes are held. This is all intended to promote the school as a welcoming and supportive place for parents.

The nature of engagement with parents is also varied with some events being quite formal (through pre-arranged parent conferences for instance), while the Parent Council itself has a big focus on informal engagement. For example, the Headteacher identified that while she could give messages out to parents in the playground this is never going to be as effective as parents doing this themselves. As one Parent Council member said, "*there will always be some parents who may be intimidated by the Head*

*coming up and saying 'why don't you come to X group or workshop' but they will listen when other parents suggest it".*

The menu of workshops were initially set in consultation with parents. Parent Council members felt that these courses not only enabled parents to become proficient at English or mathematics, for instance, but also enabled them to understand what their children were doing when studying these subjects at school. This meant that parents had greater engagement in their children's education and felt more confident in supporting them in their homework. One minority ethnic parent said "*I now feel much more confident in speaking in English and talking at the school*", and another commented that "*I now understand what my children are learning and that the school is open for me*".

### **Remaining barriers**

Parent Council members identify that, once initially engaged, parents see the school as accessible, however, there is an issue around achieving sustained and continuous engagement between parents and the Parent Council. Some parents have initial issues addressed by the Council (such as understanding more about their children's learning in school) and are then happy not to engage again unless a specific issue arises in their children's education, such as special educational needs or behavioural issues. This was described by Parent Council members as "*informed non-engagement*", rather than disengagement.

Funding for the Parent Council is an issue; it was set up and funded by £5,000 of DfES monies towards the end of 2004 for 12 months. In order to sustain the Parent Council following on from this, funding was sought from a local regeneration budget in Haringey. Parent Council members identified that it takes time to build up trust and contact with other parents can be undermined by the short-term timescales of such funding streams. While other funding sources were accessed by the Headteacher, Parent Council members felt that there was potential for all the goodwill built up through the Council to be lost. There was also the risk of undermining parental engagement if parents perceive a service as being taken away from them.

Another barrier was that Parent Council members were almost exclusively mothers, which makes engaging with fathers more difficult in some cases. While specific father groups may be one way of facilitating this, it is not something that has yet been promoted at the school. In terms of parent communities the Parent Council wishes to target, particular challenges remain in engaging with the Turkish community. This community is well-established in the area, however, issues around educational attainment rates and parental English proficiency remain.

### **Effectiveness**

The most recent OfSTED inspection of Bruce Grove<sup>24</sup> mentions the work of the school in working with parents. It found that parents "*value the school overwhelmingly*" (p.2) and that the school worked effectively with parents on a range of issues related to attendance and underperformance among some minority ethnic groups.

Parent Council members consider that a main axis of success for the Council lies in the improved relationship of the school with the parents. For Parent Council members, this is demonstrated by the high rating received from OfSTED but also from very positive feedback from parents. The Parent Council members identified that they have

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<sup>24</sup> OfSTED Inspection Report, Bruce Grove Primary School, November 2006

also seen an increase in the number of parents coming to parents evening, a parents conference and school concerts. Parent Council members were clear that the Parent Council also has symbolic importance, for parents know its presence indicates that they can contact the school at any time.

Parent Council members identified a range of wider impacts for parents in terms of their experience of the quality of support for their children, greater confidence in social interaction and accessing of services and even gaining employment. However, these impacts are hard to track within a process of evaluation and hard to prove as attributable to involvement in workshops (such as literacy and numeracy classes).

### ***Learning***

Members of the Parent Council reflected that it had taken time to build trust with different communities of parents and this can be a slow process. Activities of a Parent Council need to focus on a stepwise approach in terms of engaging parents, with community-specific work only as an initial way to involve parents on a broader level. A focus on inter-community interaction reflects the experience of children and young people when at school.

## 4.5 Coram Parents' Centre

### *Introduction*

Coram Parents' Centre was set up in 1997 in the Kings Cross area of Camden, London. It is part of the Coram Community Campus, a group of voluntary and statutory organisations working together for children and families in the area. Within the immediate local Camden area of the Parents' Centre, the Bangladeshi community is the dominant ethnic community. While the Centre now has significant Bangladeshi attendance, this was not the case at the outset when it had very low levels of participation from the community. The Parents' Centre needed to understand the barriers that were restricting Bangladeshi parents in accessing services, given that high indices of deprivation amongst the community and large average family size and extended family structure would indicate that there would otherwise be high service need.

### *Engaging parents*

The centre provides:

- help and advice for parents on all aspects of bringing up children and young people;
- information to enable parents to understand what their children are learning – at home, nursery or in school – and how they are learning it;
- help for parents who want to work or study; and
- high quality childcare: crèches with all groups and classes and an after school activity club.

Services provided at the Parents' Centre include Japanese and Bangladeshi drop-in sessions for parents, baby massage, music therapy, ESOL, and parenting and childcare courses. In all, there are more than 20 different activities identified in its summer activities schedule for 2007 and there are just under 20 Parents' Centre staff supporting these activities.

A main driver of engagement with the Bangladeshi community was the appointment of a Community Development Worker who had previously been Deputy Director of a local Asian women's organisation. She started in early 1998 shortly after Coram Parents' Centre was set up. At that point, staff in the organisation were predominantly White British and the recruited practitioner (now Community Education Coordinator) was the only Bangladeshi person employed there. This practitioner had a wealth of experience with the Bangladeshi community and had built up trust through her close relationship with the community over the years. In addition, she had in-house knowledge of the benefits system forged through over a decade's worth of experience working for the then Department of Social Security (DSS) and had good relationships with local law advice centres. When asked what she felt was the main reason that the Parents' Centre was not drawing in members of the Bangladeshi community at the time she was recruited, she identified that the centre was not dealing with the community's own issues: "*You have to deal with people's priorities and then draw people in*".

Her first step to achieve this (with the active support of the Parents' Centre) was to call a meeting involving key Bangladeshi people in the local community, neighbourhood council workers and Coram representatives. In this meeting it was identified that in the community, women were the main carers and they were busy ferrying often several children to doctors, GPs, dentists. Frequently, their husbands worked long and

unsocial hours (e.g. in the catering industry) so the main time they had for themselves was in the afternoon. It also became apparent that the 'play agenda' at the Centre (i.e. play as having an important social and developmental role for children) was not considered as great a priority by the Bangladeshi community as having a drop-in session for Bangladeshi mothers. This needed to be in the afternoon rather than mornings (as it then was). This convinced Coram that rather than having something centred on play, they needed to start from the needs of the community and so a Bengali drop-in centre was established with sessions occurring in the afternoon. As the practitioner commented "*this was the carrot to get people through the door as play alone was not going to work as this was seen as more frivolous – that their children would do enough of this at school*".

The drop-in centre offered health activities, advice on a variety of topics such as diabetes and drugs which were given by professionals who came in to speak with the (almost exclusively) mothers. These were certificated and the lead practitioner acted as an interpreter for those who struggled with English. The sessions were 30 minutes in length and allowed for chat with other mothers afterwards so that the experience was as positive and relaxed as possible. Due to her DSS and law experience, the lead Bangladeshi practitioner was also able to deal with welfare issues and signpost people onto other services.

The Parents' Centre has since developed a wide array of provision including ESOL courses, childcare, parenting groups, health seminars, and outreach projects with the Bangladeshi and other communities as well as developing outreach workers from the local community, supporting parents to become practitioners in the centre and working proactively with local schools and developing strong working links with a variety of other local community centres in the area.

#### ***What works?***

What clearly worked for the Centre was having a motivated and committed individual who had the respect of the community and who they trusted to act in their best interests. Moreover, it was important this staff member was supported by her organisation and that her aim of increasing Bangladeshi representation was clearly something that the Centre was committed to. When speaking to parents it was clear that they were very positive about the Centre and that their focus point for engagement was usually a health visitor and/or a staff member based at the Parents' Centre. One parent summed this up by saying "*the staff are key – when they are like family members, it really doesn't matter who runs the service*".

In order to sustain engagement with Bangladeshi parents (beyond one dedicated member of staff), a number of volunteers from the Bangladeshi community have come to support the dedicated worker over the years. After volunteering for a couple of years, an outreach worker is in position to support the Community Development Worker. The outreach worker's role is to go out into the community and engage people who would otherwise not be accessing services (as well as getting referrals from health workers, social workers and other professionals). Other volunteers have also been trained up for this role – with 10 Bengali women now working as assistant outreach workers. This was developed in partnership with a Bengali women's health project and a women's employment association and these volunteers are now paid in their role.

For staff, it was of crucial importance that the centre listened to the needs of the community. For example, the Centre's after school club (for 5-11 year olds) originally had no minority ethnic young people attending when it was established. This was



because Bangladeshi parents felt that their children had enough unstructured play when they were at school and they did not see why they needed to continue this after school. The practitioner identified that offering classes in which young people could learn the Koran and their mother tongue would get people through the door and so she ran an hour class teaching Bengali. This meant that Bangladeshi attendance came to account for 50% of spaces at the after-school club.

While there are differences in culture between ethnic communities, staff at the Centre have found that focusing on the similarities (for example in terms of family structure, habits and issues around gender) has helped to demonstrate that there are greater commonalities between communities than there are differences and, according to staff, the upshot of this has been an increase of social cohesion and identification with other communities.

Significantly, all services offered by Coram are free. Given the socioeconomic profile of the community it would be challenging for paid-for services to have the same level of success in securing such high attendance.

### ***Remaining barriers***

Within the Bangladeshi community, staff and parents identified that there is frequently a patriarchal view of parenting and childcare issues, and there have been very few fathers attending the majority of the sessions run at the Parents' Centre. While courses have been run with mothers, there has been little work done with fathers due to the difficulty inherent in engaging men as parents from this community. Staff anticipate that where such work does take place it will be through other vehicles such as via basic IT classes for men for instance. The centre has recently appointed a part-time Bengali Fathers' Worker based at a local Kings Cross Sure Start, together with Boys II Men and Sure Start Euston.

Often, due to language issues and family structure, women can not go out and engage in, or work with, wider society without thinking creatively about the nature of engagement or employment. For example, workshops run in conjunction with Camden Council have focused on helping women to make handmade bags. The women will receive some money for their time and any extra money will be reinvested in a further project. This issue also has to be carefully balanced individually for each family. Mothers often do not want to threaten their and their children's attendance at the Centre if any suggested activities would make their partners question the kind of work going on at the centre (for example if they suggested to their husbands that they attend courses looking at parenting).

Staff identified that while there has been a focus on the Bangladeshi community as the largest ethnic community in the immediate area, less is known about the newer communities (e.g. Polish) and their needs.

### ***Effectiveness***

The Parents' Centre had a clear focus on increasing the number of people coming through its doors from the Bangladeshi community. This has been more than achieved given the high attendance figures from the Bangladeshi community, not only at Bangladeshi-specific drop-in sessions, but also in terms of the mainstream provision at the Centre (e.g. after school club now having 50% attendance from none a few years ago).

At an operational level, staff felt that an indication of success was the involvement of the local community in terms of volunteers who have come to work as community

outreach workers or working at the Centre as crèche workers. These people are seen as having the necessary organic networks and links and as being best placed to identify what the need of a household may be. For example, local health visitors in the area had identified that there were many mothers from the Bangladeshi community who were not coming for their three and six month check ups. Staff felt that in such situations older family figures (e.g. mothers-in-law) may question why such check-ups are needed. Community outreach workers were felt to be able to explain the need for check-ups in a non-threatening manner which resulted in an increase in the number of Bangladeshi mothers coming in for check ups.

In personal terms, parents strongly valued the support with schools that they had received from the Centre. This was in terms of help in placing children in schools or contacting the school on behalf of parents where there were any problems or issues at school (as well as the more general provision of after school clubs). The centre runs a crèche from 9:30am to 12pm Monday to Friday allowing parents to access various sessions being held at the same time. The overall impact for parents was that it had increased their levels of confidence. As one parent said, *“earlier I did not know how to go out of my house, now I come for all these classes and I can speak English”*. The wider impact of this for the community will be in terms of attainment of children at school, increased financial support (for example if mothers do start working) and general increased accessing of services and increased social cohesion and engagement with the wider community overall. However, this is more challenging to measure.

### **Learning**

Staff felt that listening to the needs of parents was crucial. While service providers have their own agendas these may not reflect those of their target community(ies) and consultation needs to be conducted - with the proviso that the service needs to have the capacity to follow through and accommodate what communities themselves identify as their most pressing needs and concerns. As important is the need to have a dedicated member of staff who is responsible on leading on this issue (rather than it being part of the portfolio of several team members, for instance).

Workforce diversity has been key in terms of engaging parents. The Centre manager identified that, while it is simply not possible to ensure that the ethnic mix of staff reflects every part of the community, it works well for a majority community (such as the Bangladeshi community in Camden). An issue for the Parents' Centre is now to recruit a Somali worker and a Polish worker. However it remains the case that even though parents may not see themselves strictly represented in a service, having workforce diversity sends a clear signal that a service has an inclusive ethos.

Having tangible and measurable targets provided a useful service focus – Centre staff identified that they would not want this to be the sole measure used but it does provide a useful overall goal to work towards in developing a service ('keeping your eye on the ball').

Different groups may use different services and this will need to be well-managed. For example, it was initially found that baby massage classes were attended almost exclusively by White British middle class women. Through promotion with other groups, including Bangladeshi mothers, attendance has been diversified. Staff also felt that free-at-point-of-access provision is important for minority ethnic communities and service managers need to consider whether they will prioritise services for those who would not be able to pay for them any other way. For example, this could mean local ring-fencing of budgets for particular services. All of this points to the need to have

flexibility and that it is not possible to be prescriptive about the way in which one service is configured.

**Case study: Yasmin (not her real name) is a Bangladeshi parent who has become a crèche worker through her contact with Coram. She has lived in London for 18 years.**

*“When I first came here I lived in a joint family with my in-laws and brother-in-law and his family. I was very scared to go out and always stayed at home. My in-laws did not encourage me to go out of the house too often. Now we all have our own house and we live close but not in the same house.*

*I have four children, my eldest is 13 years old and my youngest is 3 years old. My youngest child has Down’s syndrome, and will start school this year. I met [the lead Bangladeshi practitioner] in school, where my children study. She had come there for a coffee morning with parents at school. She told me about the Centre and asked me to come here to Coram to see all the facilities it offered. Initially, I was scared but my husband really encouraged me every step of the way.*

*At first, I did some ESOL classes. Then she told me that I should do the crèche worker course, I was afraid and I said that I can’t do it but she made me. She said just try and see. She is just like a member of my family. As soon as I finished the crèche worker course, I started working here as a voluntary worker. I am very proud that now I am a permanent worker in the crèche, for the last three years. Before this I was a sessional worker here in the crèche as a supply worker. I have been associated with this crèche for almost seven years. My whole family is very proud of me. I am always a little sad about the fact my daughter has Down’s Syndrome; we all feel sad. Working in the crèche is great as it allows me to be near my child. On the days when I cannot bring her in, my husband takes care of her. The Coram centre has been really good to me and my family, bringing out the best in me and by helping me to manage my home and work life.”*

## 4.6 Leeds Traveller Education service

### *Introduction*

The Traveller Education Service (TES) was set up in Leeds in 1975 with a single teacher to support the Traveller and Gypsy communities. Six years on the current head of Leeds TES took over the reins and undertook to build relationships with the communities in and around Leeds. Since then the Local Authority has responded proactively to the particular needs of these groups: currently there is a team of 16 staff, all of whom have well established relations with Traveller, Gypsy (and now Roma) families living at the official site of Cottingley Springs, on private sites, on the roadside and in housing.

There is a large and long-standing Traveller and Gypsy community in Leeds. Since 2004, there has also been a smaller number of Roma families that have migrated to the area from the accession countries in Eastern Europe. Leeds TES staff feel that the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities are the most marginalised and maligned of all minority ethnic groups, frequently neglected even in initiatives to help other minority communities. There are critical issues with the low attendance and attainment of Traveller children in schools, and with parents' low levels of literacy, numeracy and general engagement with public services. From speaking to Traveller parents as part of this research, it was clear that without exception they face explicit and ongoing racism, low expectations for their children and generally felt they held a marginalised 'outsider' status.

### *Engaging parents*

TES staff address these issues by helping communities to access services and by supporting public services to understand and respond to their needs. The TES is organised into three teams:

- *early years* – supporting access to pre-school and reception provision, monitoring attendance and progress and encouraging the development of good home-school links. TES staff work alongside other early years providers and identified a gap in local Sure Start provision, with no Traveller, Gypsy or Roma children having engaged with the service in three years after it was set up. In response, the TES worked in partnership with Sure Start to create the Traveller Sure Start Initiative. Through this there are now four full-time outreach visitors to work with Traveller children aged 0-3 and their parents or carers. A mobile nursery also provides a stepping stone between the home and early years settings, providing appropriate learning experiences on Traveller sites and camps.
- *access* – outreach is brought to the community, with a teacher and support worker using a mobile classroom to meet families new to the area and to ensure that all families can express their needs for educational and other services. The access team also helps with induction for children entering school and support for those young people that have disengaged from school.
- *attainment* – Leeds TES provides advice and support to schools to increase the attainment of Traveller children. INSET has been delivered to roughly half of all Leeds schools, with plans to engage with all remaining schools.

In addition, the TES has produced a number of resources for schools to use with the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities. In 2000, TES staff, alongside members of the Traveller and Gypsy communities, compiled a book entitled *Gypsies and Travellers*

*in Their Own Words*<sup>25</sup>, which is a collection of pictures and stories from individuals and families in the community. Collecting and publishing such personal information from the Traveller communities is, according to TES staff, extremely rare, reflecting the level of trust in the service. It is also felt to be an important resource in helping other professionals working with Travellers to understand the culture and engage with the community. More recently, in 2006, the TES produced a learning resource for schools entitled *Open Roads, Open Minds* which includes a DVD and a series of accompanying learning materials based on Travellers' storytelling which can be used at school and accessed online<sup>26</sup>. This helps to celebrate Traveller culture among children, but also helps Traveller parents to feel that they are welcome and their way of life is respected in school.

#### **Case study – Traveller mother in Leeds (referred to as Diana)**

Diana grew up in Leeds in trailers as part of a highly mobile Irish Traveller family living on roadside camps. She was unable to attend any primary school for more than a week or two at a time, and so absorbed little education. As is usual in Traveller families, Diana married early and had two children. The TES became involved through a teacher who followed the movement of the family and helped to teach her daughters. An excellent relationship developed between Diana and the TES, with the teacher able to get Diana and her sister into secondary school and then onto a bakery course at a Further Education college. Diana had a positive initial relationship with the college through undertaking taster courses, however she was not accepted onto any of the courses she was interested in due to having low levels of literacy and numeracy. She asked another tutor to teach her to read and write and was determined that her children receive the best education possible. Diana's children have a very good attendance record, they are achieving well at school and have high ambitions.

The TES also works with the community to raise parents' confidence. Staff reported that some families are vulnerable and in danger, with low life chances. As a result, they felt it was important to raise parental aspirations and to ensure that services are brought directly to the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities. TES staff know the communities and are in frequent communication so they can proactively address any issues. In addition, parents are aware that they are welcome to call the TES with any issues they might come across. More widely, the TES works in partnership with several other services and groups. This includes feeding into a Traveller Health Partnership in the area, addressing health and accommodation needs, as well as working with the library service to support its staff when taking a mobile library out to the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities.

#### **What works?**

TES staff and Traveller parents felt that mutual suspicion was relatively common between Travellers, Gypsies and Roma and other communities living in the area, especially when there are not enough designated sites available. Traveller parents interviewed in this research felt that they were victims of racism and tended to be wary of outsiders. As a result, more than with virtually any other community, developing trust is the critical issue in engagement. This can only be gained through winning the commitment of the community through engaging directly and developing personal

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<sup>25</sup> Saunders, P., Clarke, J., Kendall, S., Lee, A., Lee, S., Matthews, F (eds.) (2000) *Gypsies and Travellers in Their Own Words*, Leeds: Leeds Traveller Education Service

<sup>26</sup> This can be accessed through [www.travellersinleeds.co.uk](http://www.travellersinleeds.co.uk)

relationships. As one parent put it, *"I've known [head of TES] since I was a little girl, we've grown up with him and that means a lot to us."* Having one person who has spent 30 years relating to the Traveller community and to have developed such strong relationships is clearly an unusual (potentially unique) situation which is extremely difficult to replicate. However, continuity and establishing long-term personal relationships are the important factors and this goes much wider than one individual. All staff enter the communities (on designated sites, with road side families and with Travellers in housing) to meet new families and to come to understand their culture and needs. It is this that gives them the confidence to let their children engage with the TES. One parent said, *"I trust them with my children, so when they organise something like a trip away I'll let my kids go on it..."*.

With this level of trust established, TES acts as a contact point for the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities and brings services and resources directly to them. The TES has been innovative in creating and helping to support resources such as a mobile nursery and a mobile library which are taken directly to the communities. According to TES staff, an important part of this (which again relates to maintaining trust) is ensuring that any resources and contact with the community must be provided on a reliable and continual basis, not set up and then removed soon after. Similarly, staff at the TES provide a reliable and well established point of contact that Traveller parents feel confident in accessing.

### **Remaining barriers**

Despite the success that the TES has had in increasing the numbers of Traveller, Gypsy and Roma children that regularly attend school, a number of parents reported having low trust in schools due to negative experiences that they and their children had suffered. Some parents mentioned that they had faced explicit racism and that schools did not understand their children's needs. Cultural issues, such as opposition to any kind of sex education, also played an important role in some parents' decisions to remove their children from secondary school.

In addition, staff have found that it is an ongoing challenge to raise some parents' low aspirations for their children and address their scepticism towards the value of education. One father said, *"Once they can read and write, why do they need to learn anything else? It's not like they're ever going to be a lawyer or a doctor"*. This was not a view held by the majority of parents that were interviewed as part of the research, but reflected the views of a substantial minority.

Fathers remain a difficult group to engage with, despite the relationships that the TES has built with the community. Staff found that, whilst some fathers are strongly engaged in their children's education, there are generally strongly entrenched gender roles among the Traveller community, with males being the main breadwinner and highly independent while leaving parenting and educational matters primarily to mothers.

Since 2004, with the accession of Eastern European countries to the EU, there has been an influx of Roma families (predominantly from Czechoslovakia, Slovakia and Poland). Staff found that these families frequently end up in areas of Leeds with very poor housing, face additional language barriers and are isolated from formal support, due to not knowing how to access services and, particularly, language courses. The TES is starting to build relationships with Roma families through working with advocacy groups and communicating with translators. However, this remains an important challenge.

### **Effectiveness**

The TES has annual objectives and performance targets set in conjunction with Education Leeds. One of these for 2007-08 is to further develop partnerships with parents and their engagement with services and other agencies. It is too early to determine success or failure but the TES has a target of increasing Traveller, Gypsy and Roma parents involved in Family Learning and active engagement with schools, nurseries and Early Years settings by 10%. A positive start to this has already been made with several parents participating in a personal development 'STEPS' (Steps to Excellence for Personal Success) course, which is delivered by trained facilitators from TES.

Since its inception the TES has helped to foster a marked increase in Travellers' engagement with schools in Leeds. The head of TES noted that there were fewer than five Traveller, Gypsy and Roma children attending school when he took over. Now, the vast majority of Traveller children regularly attend school and the remainder take up elective home learning. One parent said, "*if it wasn't for [Leeds TES] then none of these children would be at school – they'd all be running around [the Traveller site at Cottingley Springs] day after day*".

In addition, DCSF and the National Association of Teachers of Travellers (NATT) have chosen *Gypsies and Travellers in Their Own Words* and the *Open Roads, Open Minds* learning resource as part of a purchase of Traveller resources to enrich the curriculum in all schools. The resources will be delivered to 680 schools across the UK.

### **Learning**

TES staff felt that:

- more than virtually any other community, it is crucial to develop trust with Travellers and to build ongoing relationships with parents. Outreach work needs to take place in the Traveller sites and homes;
- working with the community is key: "*it's vital to work in partnership with the community, to be enabling and empowering, and not to impose on them or only offer services that don't fit with their needs*"; and
- staff training is important to improve cultural awareness and help services to be more welcoming of Travellers and their lifestyle.

## 4.7 Soho Children's Centre

### *Introduction*

Sure Start Soho Children's Centre is a new building which developed out of Winson Green and Handsworth local Sure Start Programme. The Soho ward is located in the west of Birmingham City, with 76% of the local population from a minority ethnic background according to the 2001 Census. The largest minority ethnic group in Soho is the Indian community, followed by the Black and Pakistani communities. In recent years Soho has also seen an influx of new communities which include refugees mainly Somali and Kurdish people and economic migrants from Poland. Soho is also a deprived ward, with high unemployment, a high proportion of single parent households and poor health outcomes such as high infant mortality rates and low life expectancy rates for males.

### *Engaging Parents*

Aiming to address these issues, the Children's Centre (CC) provides 'one-stop' integrated services delivered by multi-professional teams for all families with children under five. Services delivered by the CC have been developed around a strong sense of multi-agency and partnership working. Many of the staff working from the CC are employed by partner organisations from both the voluntary and statutory sectors. This degree of partnership working gives the CC the flexibility to develop services that respond to the needs of parents and families. As one senior member of staff said, "*Partnership working is absolutely critical. You need a shared understanding of working with families and sharing information in order to develop appropriate services*".

The service provided by Sure Start Soho Children's Centre has four core areas:

- *early years and childcare* – the CC has a nursery with 60 childcare places and a qualified teacher on site. Other early years services include mother and toddler groups (Stay and Play) both at the CC and at outreach venues and advice and support to parents and children with disabilities and additional needs. The CC also offers parenting support groups to help parents manage their children's behaviour;
- *family support and outreach services* – a team of Family Support Workers offers parents a range of support which includes confidence building, befriending and support to access local services. The CC holds a 'Welcome Group' where refugees and newly arrived communities can access information about support services and meet other families to develop networks;
- *health services* – this is delivered alongside health partners and includes a child health clinic, ante natal and post natal support, speech and language support for children, and there is a GP on site. The Centre offers lots of other support to parents: potty training, weaning, healthy eating and smoking cessation; and
- *training and employment support for parents* – the CC offers parents a range of courses including confidence building, basic skills, ESOL, computing and a range of NVQs. The CC also has links with Jobcentre Plus to support parents into employment.

Alongside this, the CC has taken specific measures to enhance parental engagement. It employs a team of Family Support Workers (FSWs) that have been recruited from the local community and reflect the different ethnic groups served by the CC. Taking referrals from other professionals, mainly Health and Social Workers, the role of FSWs



is to support parents to engage with services. On receiving a referral, FSWs undertake a home visit to introduce themselves to the parents informing them of the reason for the visit and the support they can offer. FSWs undertake a number of home visits working with parents on a one-to-one basis to develop relationships, build trust and support parents to access services. Through working with parents an action plan is developed that tailors services around the individual family, taking into account the needs of the parent and child and any cultural and language issues.

The CC has also established the Parent Parliament (PP) which is a forum where parents meet to talk about the running and direction of the centre, share ideas, feed back successes and concerns. Having raised and discussed issues at the PP some of the parents attend the Sure Start Board to put across parents' views to the Board. The Sure Start Board, however, has recently ceased to exist. It will be replaced by the Soho 0-19 Partnership Forum which is an amalgamation between the Children's Centre Board and the Extended Schools Steering Group. This new forum will have four parent representatives from the Parent Parliament to feed the views of parents to the forum. This new structure will have Working Groups around different themes (such as health and children), and parents will be represented on the working groups ensuring they are party to decision making.

Another important issue is engaging refugee and asylum seekers. The CC employs a Refugee Support Worker (RSW) through the voluntary organisation Community Integration Partnership. The RSW befriends isolated families who are not accessing services to encourage take up of services. A 'welcome group' is held weekly to support families with any issues they may have and to raise awareness of different services. The RSW also supports parents to attend college, parenting groups, and health and well-being services.

### ***What works?***

The CC has incorporated engagement of parents into every element of how it is run. This begins with the CC presenting itself as an open and welcoming place to parents. As one member of staff said, *"the way the whole centre presents itself to parents is very important in engaging parents. Our centre has an open, accessible approach and is responsive to what parents are saying"*. Parents are consulted at all stages of developing and delivering services. A member of staff reflected that, *"It's about how you engage with service users from day one. You have to consult with them to find out what parents' needs are and then you can get it right. We have changed times of sessions, changed toys we offer and we have changed the courses we offer to cater for what parents want"*. Parents also reported that the CC was taking onboard their suggestions, setting up new services (a recent example being a support group for refugees) and making changes to existing ones.

In addition to consulting with parents, Sure Start at the Children's Centre also places strong emphasis on involving parents directly in planning and delivery of services as a means to increasing engagement. The Board has 50% parent representation (though not all the places are always taken up). Parents have taken up the role of the Vice Chair at the Board and in some cases have chaired the meeting in the absence of the Chair. Parent representation at the high level of decision making has been very effective in establishing parents trust in the service demonstrating that the service is serious about listening to parents.

Recruiting staff from the local community is also a real advantage in terms of engaging with minority ethnic parents since the workers are able to gain the trust of parents more quickly as a result. It also helps to address a reluctance to engage with professionals

because parents view the FSWs primarily as members of the community. FSWs also speak community languages which helps to address one of the main barriers facing minority ethnic communities in accessing services. Commenting on the FSWs one parent said: *“friendly staff that reflect the community is good because it makes you feel comfortable. Straight away the barriers are broken because they can speak the language and understand the issues we face”*.

Another effective approach adopted by the CC has been to draw on existing parent service users to attract non-engaging parents. Firstly, parents from the PP spread the word of services to other parents and bring them along to try services. This is particularly effective in engaging those parents who are reluctant to come to the CC and are unsure of how they would benefit. Parents from the PP stated they have brought other parents along to sessions for the first few times until they developed the confidence to come on their own.

The CC has also trained some parents as ‘Parent Listeners’, who go out into the community to tell their stories to other parents to encourage them to access services. Staff feel that this is effective because the message is coming from parents from similar situations not from professionals who some parents may feel do not understand their circumstances.

**Case Study – Mixed parentage lone parent (referred to as Chanelle) who was supported by the CC and is now part of the Parent Parliament:**

Chanelle is a lone parent of mixed parentage (Asian and African Caribbean). She has two children under the age of 5. Chanelle was new to Soho, she had no social networks and felt very isolated. She was referred to the Family Support Workers team and was offered one-to-one support. A Family Support Worker together with the Early Years Worker undertook home visits and offered support in the home to make Chanelle aware of services which she could access (such as registering with a GP and applying for nursery places). Once the workers had established a rapport with Chanelle and built trust they introduced her to services at the CC which she began to access. She was made aware of training opportunities and enrolled on a number of courses, some of which were OCR accredited. Chanelle went on to join the Parent Parliament (a forum where parents can input to developing and delivering services) and from this she represented parents’ views on the Sure Start Board – decision making management board.

***Remaining barriers***

The recent influx of newer communities (including Polish migrant workers and refugees/asylum seekers) has created challenges for local services. One of the main issues facing newly arrived families is lack of awareness of local services and therefore they do not know where to go to access support. The dedicated Refugee Support Worker helps to address these issues for parents that are refugees or asylum seekers and the CC attempts to disseminate information about services in a range of ways including a quarterly newsletter, displays in local schools and community venues and undertaking outreach work. However, staff find that engagement with parents from these communities remains a challenge.

Engaging effectively with fathers is another area which the CC would like to further develop. Up until now engagement with fathers has been ad hoc with short bursts and one off events. The Centre Manager stated *“we are now starting again... the idea is to promote fatherhood in a positive way”*. A male Asian worker has been given the responsibility to oversee all the work undertaken at the Centre to engage with fathers, which will help to develop a more coordinated approach. Consultation work with fathers has already been undertaken which resulted in the formation of a fathers’ group. The purpose of the group is for fathers to promote fatherhood and act as advocates to

recruit other fathers. A Parent Listeners course will be held specifically for fathers, following which a DVD aimed at fathers will be produced where fathers from the local community will tell their stories about how they engaged with CC service to achieve better outcomes for their children.

### **Effectiveness**

Soho ward in Birmingham has a large minority ethnic population which the Children's Centre has been successful in engaging with. In the three months between April and July 2007 Soho Children's Centre worked with 426 families, 95% of which were from a minority ethnic background. The Refugee Support Worker has a target to work with 20 new families every month, which she achieves. She also works with 15 families on an on-going basis who require longer term support.

Parents reflected that the CC was serious about the involvement of parents; their voices were being heard and changes were made as a result. This process has established the trust of parents in CC services compared to other services that, they felt, only paid lip service to parental involvement (schools were mentioned). One parent commented: *"Getting parents' views is an agenda item on the Board. We raise issues and changes take place. I don't know of anywhere else like this. It makes a difference to see action taking place"*.

In addition, the FSW team consistently receives referrals from various different agencies and the fact that partner agencies have seconded staff to the CC highlights the effectiveness of the CC in engaging with parents.

### **Learning**

Staff reported the following key messages from their experience of engaging with minority ethnic parents:

- knowing your community is crucial to delivering appropriate services that meet the needs of service users: *"the important thing is to know your area and then target services to where the need is. You can't assume that you are meeting all the needs of communities. You have to constantly look at data and conduct needs analysis to identify needs and gaps in service provision"*;
- staff need to understand the needs of different communities including different cultural sensitivities: *"ensure staff understand the needs of different communities and are aware of different cultures. Offer staff lots of training to deal with issues that may arise. Also do not be afraid to tackle difficult issues like September 11<sup>th</sup> and issues between Indian/Pakistani and White/Pakistani. Deal with the issues as a team"*;
- hold regular consultation with parents: *"involve parents from the outset in setting up services"*;
- empower parents: *"try to empower parents to help themselves. Show them where to access information which helps parents engage with services"*; and
- get first impressions right: *"first impressions for parents are crucial. Reception staff are key, if we get this wrong we will lose parents"*.

## 4.8 Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities

### *Introduction*

The Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC) programme was developed by the Race Equality Foundation (REF; formerly Race Equality Unit). REF was established in 1987 and was originally part of the National Institute of Social work, providing advice, training and information on minority ethnic communities. It has since grown significantly in size and remit, providing extensive support to a large network of voluntary and community organisations throughout the country. In the mid-1990s, REF focused on parent education interventions as they found that minority ethnic parents were not accessing programmes or were dropping out of programmes early. There was a clear gap in parenting services for minority ethnic families, despite their suffering disproportionately high levels of deprivation.

REF, supported by the Home Office, looked to the US 'Supporting Multi-Ethnic Families' programme. Working with UK professionals and parents, REF revised the content and structured SFSC as a UK-focused community-based parent education programme. The programme aims to:

- promote engagement of minority ethnic parents who traditionally had not engaged with parenting services or programmes;
- promote some of the protective factors associated with 'good parenting' (such as developing close and warm relationships between parents and children, using disciplinary methods that support children);
- address some of the parenting practices that may be associated with increased risk for children (e.g. harsh discipline and limited supervision); and
- promote capacity-building of the Black and minority ethnic voluntary and community sector through training and delivery of the SFSC model.

The programme facilitators were trained and delivered the first course in 2000. SFSC has subsequently grown to support the running of 110 programmes every term with over 2,500 facilitators trained so far.

### ***SFSC programme***

SFSC programmes are run by a number of different agencies: these range from statutory agencies to the voluntary and community and charitable sectors and from small to large organisations. Involvement of smaller voluntary and community organisations works to increase their own capacity and that of the sector more widely. Programmes themselves can be targeted towards particular communities or be delivered to an ethnically diverse parent group. Agencies include Coram Parents' Centre (referred to earlier in this report), Dalston Youth Project, Newham African, Caribbean and Asian Advocacy Project, Worldwide Mission Fellowship, Barnardo's Parenting Matters, Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources, Single Parent Action Network and Holloway Parents Centre. The programme has been run through Social Services and Education Departments, Youth Offending Teams, Sure Start and On Track projects and Schools and Family Centres. Programmes have run throughout the UK.

Of central importance within the programme is a focus on the ethnic roots and cultural identity of parents and how this impacts on their parenting practices and expectations around parenting in the UK. Many programmes bring together a diverse set of parents within individual groups (including White British). REF has identified this as an explicit

focus given that relationship-building is itself intrinsic to parenting. However, due to language (and other) issues, some SFSC programmes do target groups specifically so the programme has a balanced approach reactive to need and circumstance.

Typically, between 8 and 15 parents attend each SFSC course. The programme is delivered in three-hour sessions (and an information session) across a 12 week period. It is accredited through the Open College Network and a final certificate is given to participants in the following week.

### ***Strategic approach***

At a strategic level, a key feature of REF's approach has been to target minority ethnic led voluntary and community organisations. Through SFSC, these organisations are offered free training and work alongside REF as equal partners in delivering the programme. Accessing local voluntary and community organisations is felt to be vital by staff since it is these grassroots organisations that community members are thought to trust, as well as having accessible local venues for delivering the programmes.

SFSC hosts an annual conference to discuss emergent issues and experiences across the range of organisations delivering the inclusive parent programme. In addition REF runs sessions for facilitators to consider specific issues, such as how to deliver SFSC with fathers.

Across the programme, parents are encouraged to become facilitators. The programme prioritises giving free facilitator-training places to those who have previously attended courses as parents (where possible) and this is very much an explicit aim of programme delivery.

One important issue for the programme is limited capacity among small organisations, which may find it difficult to enable staff to attend training sessions. In addition, funding contexts can make the finance required for training sessions difficult (which is reflected in the case studies below). In addition, those organisations in more remote and/or rural locations face challenges in accessing peer support groups and conferences.

### ***Effectiveness***

SFSC has established a Quality Assurance system which is integral to monitoring and developing the programmes. This data includes programme and parent registration forms and questionnaires for each programme that facilitators run. The grassroots sign-up to evaluation is seen as a tool to ensure best practice in delivering to minority ethnic parents. Collated returns form the basis of an annual report on the SFSC programme as a whole. Evaluation reports are produced for all SFSC training and video diaries of parents are collated over time.

In terms of national recognition, SFSC is one of three programmes that the Government has chosen to invest in as part of its Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder programmes to be delivered across 18 local authorities. This national initiative aims to deliver parenting support to parents of 8-13 year-olds at risk of poor outcomes (such as educational underachievement and health issues). This has brought an extra £3m funding in six UK Government Office regions in 2007.

Two examples of SFSC programmes – Plymouth Open Doors for asylum seekers and refugees and Wai Yin Chinese Women's Society based in Manchester – are described below.

#### **4.8.1 Plymouth Open Doors**

##### ***Introduction***

In 2000 Plymouth became a 'dispersal destination' for asylum seekers and refugees (a government initiative to disperse asylum seekers and refugees across designated cities throughout the UK). Project staff identified how asylum seekers and refugees had frequently left their own countries of origin in difficult circumstances and now faced challenges of integrating with differing cultural and linguistic traditions, as well as a different approach to parenting.

In July 2004, two practitioners working with asylum seekers and refugees (one working for a local language school and another for the Devon & Cornwall Refugee Support Council) were offered the opportunity to partner with Open Doors (a charity supporting asylum seekers and refugees) and Cornwall County Council to attend SFSC facilitator training and deliver courses in the local Plymouth area. In 2005 they delivered their first course. This was financially supported by Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) and REF. The programme was then extended with funding from Cornwall County Council.

##### ***Engaging parents***

Asylum seekers and refugees included parents from a wide range of places, including Ivory Coast, Congo, Kosovo and Hong Kong. In all, the two sets of workshops have been attended by 26 parents of 16 different nationalities.

Both facilitators had strong networks in the Plymouth area that they could draw upon. All parents have attended this course voluntarily (as opposed to referrals from social services for instance). Some parents identified how they had no other means of support, nor spoke English when they were first dispersed to Plymouth. They met the facilitators either through being taught English at the local language school or at a local Refugee Support Centre.

Open Doors was also an important partner as they were well known and trusted by asylum seeker and refugee parents in the area. One such parent said that, *"it's somewhere I know well and feel comfortable in as I have used it so much over the years"*.

##### ***What works?***

Frequently parents did not know each other before attending the workshops, but the facilitators reported that they soon began to speak freely and build relationships. They felt that this was mainly the result of the informal and friendly environment which emphasises the importance of learning from each other. When asked, parents said this made them feel that they were not the only ones trying to bridge the gap from their own upbringing in their country of origin to parenting practices in the UK. One parent said *"it was good to listen to other people speak about their own problems. I would not say I understand all about everybody's backgrounds now, but I do have a lot more idea of the things that we all face as parents"*.

Facilitators were also clear that key to the programme is the emphasis on cultural identity – of parents valuing and respecting their own traditions and culture – as well as taking on board new issues regarding parenting in the UK.

##### ***Remaining barriers***

While the mixed ethnic composition of the workshops was positive for most groups, the facilitators also felt that there were times when mixed groups were not as effective due

to religious or cultural differences. For instance, staff thought that having gender specific groups was important for some groups (such as Muslim communities).

Uncertainty over funding is an issue for the project as cutbacks to funding mean that the crèche facility will not be provided in future. The facilitators thought that this would put off parents as childcare can be expensive.

### ***Effectiveness***

The changes that parents identified concerned the quality of their experience in having:

- better relations with their children through learning how to negotiate rather than being confrontational;
- a better understanding of the importance of play in their children's lives; and
- increased confidence from communicating in English and meeting other parents with similar issues to themselves (i.e. that they were not alone).

Practitioners saw the impact for parents in three main ways:

- self-awareness - in terms of the impact of their own upbringing and the impact their parenting strategies can have;
- self-value – that the parenting and community knowledge they possess is valuable and should not be lost but the best parts be synthesised with parenting practices in the UK; and
- self-confidence - that the cultural focus of the workshops ensures parent participation and validates everyone attending the group. This can also have knock on effects, such as better accessing of services more widely.

More broadly, engaging with this number of asylum seeker and refugee parents can be seen as a measure of success given the difficulties in reaching these communities.

### ***Learning***

The facilitators felt that it was important for services to build a strong rapport with attendees and ensure that they are not just providing a one-off series of workshops but also signposting people onto other areas afterwards so that it becomes a growing experience for them. Asylum seekers and refugees have a range of issues that will have motivated their migration (e.g. political, ethnic or religious persecution). Staff reported that trust in government representatives in general may have been undermined by their experiences in their countries of origin. This will mean that it may take more time to build trust than with parents from well established minority ethnic groups in the UK.

## **4.8.2 *Wai Yin Chinese Women's Society***

### ***Introduction***

Wai Yin Chinese Women's Society was established in 1988 by a group of Chinese women who were concerned with helping other women in the Chinese community who had suffered domestic violence and the breakdown of family life through offering practical, social and emotional support. The Society has now developed into a community centre for the Chinese community located in central Manchester. It has more than 40 staff members and provides a number of different services including welfare advice, health and social care, training, employment and education. Wai Yin's SFSC programme is supported by North East Manchester District Commissioners.

### ***Engaging Parents***

In 2003 Wai Yin conducted a survey that identified concerns about a generation gap between Chinese parents and their children. Staff described the traditional Chinese family as being patriarchal in structure, encouraging obedience of children to their parents and wives to their husbands. From this, there is the potential for conflict between generations when children are being brought up within a different cultural backdrop at odds with familial expectations. For some parents, a lack of networks of friends and family and low English proficiency act as barriers to accessing mainstream support services. In addition, facilitators identify that newer migrants may work very long hours in minimum wage catering environments, for example, resulting in reduced contact with their children during the week.

All workshop sessions have been delivered in Cantonese. All facilitators have been bi- or tri-lingual (Cantonese, Mandarin and English) and course materials have been translated into Cantonese for the purposes of delivery. Parents that have attended the workshops have been a mixture of new migrants and those longer established in the UK and have included some fathers as well as mothers (though in fewer numbers). Recruitment of these parents has mostly been through Wai Yin networks with a small minority of parents referred via social services (e.g. where there is child protection involvement and there has been a requirement for the parent to attend a parenting course).

Wai Yin used the SFSC programme as a means to set up a wider parent project that would include support to parents from the Chinese community. A parents club was established in 2004 with a specific focus on those families experiencing difficulties with their teenage children. It met regularly each month and focused on different issues in each session such as drug awareness, stress and depression and Sure Start services. The Parents Club also organised a series of family leisure and cultural activities. Wai Yin also established a Fathers Club in 2005 to address some of the issues concerning the traditional image of the father in Chinese culture and its tensions with the contemporary roles that may be expected of men as fathers and husbands in the UK. A male support worker was recruited to support this.

### ***What works?***

Facilitators felt that having the workshops in Cantonese was important. While it raises questions over those who have English as their first language and those who speak Mandarin, facilitators feel there are clear service barriers for some parents from within the Chinese community in terms of their accessing of services. Facilitators felt it was unlikely that Cantonese-speaking Chinese parents would access parenting classes if they were conducted in English. Due to cultural differences they also felt it less likely that these Chinese parents would attend mixed ethnicity groups. Facilitators were not in favour of using translators as they would not be SFSC trained and may provide their own interpretation rather than a direct translation of what parents say.

Facilitators emphasise the usefulness of an evidence-base with the Chinese community, with research demonstrating why a particular approach (e.g. negotiation rather than shouting) could be more effective when dealing with children. They also identified the importance of confidentiality in the sessions, addressing concerns among Chinese parents about talking about personal issues at the beginning of the workshops. Facilitators stressed the importance of creating a safe space to overcome these concerns.



### **Remaining barriers**

Wai Yin identify that parenting is a difficult issue to raise awareness of within the Chinese community as there is a strong code of honour and shame with a preference to deal with issues oneself, rather than seeking advice. This is especially emphasised amongst men, who also tend to hold a strong belief in parenting being a female responsibility.

Facilitators felt that certain elements within the programme (such as role play) may work with some ethnic communities but appear to be less successful with Chinese groups. Facilitators identified that other forms of interactive work need to be considered and a creative approach taken. This could include, for example, taking the parents out of the class environment altogether for specific sessions.

Funding remains an issue for Wai Yin as a voluntary and community organisation. A temporary funding gap in 2005 meant the loss of key expertise, including parent facilitators. However, Wai Yin considered the parenting programme so important that other sources of funding were used to fund the SFSC programme.

Facilitators believe that there is a seam of hidden parents and children within the Chinese community – especially those that may be asylum seekers or working illegally. These people will have great unmet needs but remain difficult to identify.

### **Effectiveness**

At an organisational level, workshop facilitators identified that the Wai Yin SFSC programme was the first parenting programme they had experienced that was specifically tailored to the Chinese community. Given the perceived barriers to accessing mainstream programmes due to issues of language and inter-ethnic mixing (described in the previous section), they felt that workshops had engaged Chinese parents in a way that mainstream programmes would simply not be able to do.

Workshops have led to the production in 2006 of a DVD entitled 'Together We Can'<sup>27</sup> in which the experiences of teenagers and their parents are explored (in Cantonese with English subtitles). Wai Yin have shared this good practice with a variety of networks (including REF and other Chinese organisations such as Chinese Health & Information Centre in Manchester).

Through previous SFSC workshops, people taking the course as parents have gone onto become facilitators themselves and engaged in mutual learning not only in their immediate area but with Chinese parents in other regions. As one facilitator recalled, *"I went on the first parenting course run by Wai Yin in 2004. After completing it was an honour to be recommended to become a facilitator. Wai Yin has an important role since it acts as a mutual bridge between parents. During the last few years I feel glad I have been able to meet with parents and build mutual support and trust in differing areas of the UK"*.

Parents identified how attending the programme has made them feel differently about parenting and the way in which they were raised. They felt the programme had promoted better relations with their children through negotiation and not taking a confrontational approach. One parent observed *"I have three children between ten and fifteen. Teaching children of such an age is a bit difficult. I felt as if I couldn't breathe and really did not know what to do. Since taking the parenting course I have found the*

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<sup>27</sup> For further details see: [www.waiyin.org](http://www.waiyin.org)

*parenting tips are really useful. I hope that, as I use them more, I will be able to get along more with my children”.*

They also felt that they had an increased understanding that their children and grandchildren needed admiration and praise (e.g. through the use of reward strategies) and the need to have special time with them. One parent commented, *“I was brought up in a traditional Chinese family. Parents were authority. They expected us to listen, to obey and to accept what they arranged for us. I found Chinese parents spared their words of admiration to children so I didn’t know how to admire my children. I have learnt a lot from this parenting course”*. Parents also commented that doing the course with other Chinese parents was important and that they did not feel that they were alone but that other parents and grandparents struggled with the same parenting issues as themselves. One parent also won an REF award in 2005 for her participation in the SFSC programme.

### **Learning**

Facilitators emphasised the importance of recognising the diversity of the Chinese community as well as the generic factors which influence engagement. Newer migrants are more likely to have English language issues and potentially little time available due to working long hours, which could mean little contact with their children. They may also have a relatively traditional household set-up. Even for those more established in the UK, English proficiency could still be an issue and this may exacerbate relations with their British born children.

## 4.9 Tower Hamlets Local Authority

### *Introduction*

Tower Hamlets is a London borough with high ethnic diversity and high levels of deprivation, yet it has had a long history of parental involvement across its different services.

The 'Working with Parents Consortium' was established in 1996 by practitioners working across different sectors and in different services who were working with parents in the borough. The consortium produced a directory to enable practitioners to effectively signpost the parents with whom they had contact. This directory is published annually (see [www.parentsmatter.tower-hamlets.lgfl.net](http://www.parentsmatter.tower-hamlets.lgfl.net)) and informs the Tower Hamlets Family Support and Parental Engagement Strategy, which is in the latter stages of development.

In June 2006 Tower Hamlets published a self-evaluation tool (SET) aimed at providing support to schools/settings working to actively engage parents. The tool has six major themes:

- ensuring that parents have a voice;
- supporting children's learning and development;
- developing a welcoming school setting;
- communicating with parents;
- parents' own learning and development; and
- parents, families and the community.

Through use of the SET, training was identified as an area for development in Tower Hamlets and so courses were developed in response to this need. Using Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) monies, curriculum-focussed workshops for parents have been developed often working alongside bilingual members of staff within schools to support Bangladeshi parents of children and young people.

The borough publishes a regular newsletter for all staff in schools and early years settings called 'Parents Matter' (pre-dating the recent DCSF publication of a similar name). This promotes good practice across the borough in engaging with parents as well as advertising seminars and training courses supported by the council. The council also runs a Parent Involvement Partnership and a Parents Advice Centre (a service for parents of children experiencing special educational needs) as part of its wider Parent Partnerships Service.

Last year, staff within the Tower Hamlets Children's Services department considered the kinds of projects that they felt would be good to provide in terms of supporting parents and their children. After consulting with parents, more than 30 potential projects were identified. The department has been successful in securing £4m of NRF funding to support many of these projects.

Within the context of the numerous services, projects and initiatives being offered within Tower Hamlets, the following commentary focuses on an extended school which has made extensive efforts in engaging with Bangladeshi parents.

### *Engaging parents*

An extended school co-ordinator was recruited into post two years ago at a junior school located in a cluster of three co-located schools in Tower Hamlets. Reflecting Tower Hamlets more widely, the majority ethnic group of pupils across the three schools is Bangladeshi, who comprise at least 70% pupil composition in each school.

The extended school co-ordinator is a post funded by the DCSF Extended Schools initiative. In addition to these monies, the co-ordinator has also accessed NRF monies for the different activities (including workshops, funding for translators and school trips) that she has set up while in post

When the co-ordinator arrived at the school she conducted an initial audit of the activities that were ongoing across the three schools involving parents. However, she found that while there were lots of activities for young people, there were relatively few for parents. In addition, she discovered that none of the three schools ran a crèche, which she felt was necessary in engaging parents in activities based at the schools. An initial focus was to set up localised crèches at the junior and secondary schools. She has also established parent rooms in each of the schools. This, the co-ordinator feels, was important to ensure that parents had a room that was designated as theirs within the schools.

The coordinator felt that it was important to consult with parents themselves and identify what they wanted to see happen in the schools. However when the co-ordinator conducted a survey of parents, she found that initial response rates were low. She went around the playground and spoke to parents. The co-ordinator felt that not being a teacher contributed greatly to parents reacting positively to her, being more willing to open up about their concerns. To ensure greater returns on the survey the practitioner adopted an innovative approach, incorporating a free prize draw at the school where pupils could win a soft toy. The survey also carried an invitation to a pantomime that would be put on by pupils later in the term. All of this incentivised parents to return their surveys and resulted in a higher response rate from parents.

The co-ordinator set up Friday morning meetings where parents could come and speak informally. The sessions were intended to act as open discussion for parents but have turned into a regular sounding board for issues of concern to them. The co-ordinator, supported by the school Headteacher, identified the need for a translator (Sylethi is the dominant language spoken by parents). The translator is present at these Friday sessions at which issues, such as the healthy schools strategy or diabetes awareness, are discussed. The sessions also function as a platform to promote other workshops or courses. At the start attendance was relatively low but now, through speaking to parents in the playground and promoting the group as much as possible, they attract between 20 and 60 people. The group is highly valued by parents. As one parent commented *“the Friday morning meetings are good. We can talk about things or even to ask for the introduction of any new courses. We feel that we can participate in the school decisions if we want to”*.

From her experience in adult education the co-ordinator understood that the offering of workshops, particularly those offering ESOL would be beneficial. She developed a menu of workshops through initial consultation with parents and from this initial work a range of different classes, workshops and activities have been developed such as ICT, keep fit, family learning and parenting courses.

#### ***What works?***

The co-ordinator's enthusiasm, commitment and 'not being a teacher' status seem to have been important in engaging Bangladeshi parents with the schools. The co-ordinator feels that sometimes it is important to be seen as someone outside of the teaching profession in order to have a certain perspective and objectivity – *“and sometimes they trust you because of that”*. However, she also acknowledges that this has to be balanced. While this may work in particular cases (for example ESOL workshops) she also identified that for other more sensitive matters this may not be

appropriate. For example, the co-ordinator identified that when associating young Bengali people with drug and alcohol problems, she herself would not talk directly to parents about their children and Islamic positions in relation to this, but would work with partner organisations to do so.

Through the development of regular Friday morning meetings, attendees know that their views are being actively listened to. For the co-ordinator, provision of ESOL courses is a necessary first step: *“ESOL is the building block as without this parents cannot engage with the school as meaningfully. It really is a basic skills agenda – just getting them up to the point where they can make an appointment at the doctors”*. Parents identify how classes have helped them to learn the language, become more confident and independent. As one parent said, *“at the very least, it helps us to go to the doctors, supermarkets, and help other elderly people in their families who cannot speak English”*. Other mothers identified that there are always others in the community who may make them feel guilty about taking time away from home for self-improvement. However, as one mother identified *“when most see their families benefit from the courses, in terms of allowing the women to be more independent and able to take up more responsibility at home, going to the doctor, helping older people, then they and the whole community are more supportive”*.

Provision of translated materials is important in this regard. As the practitioner observed *“this has to be a first step in ensuring the ongoing engagement of parents with the school”*. Having access to a translator is also important as it demonstrates the commitment of a service to an inclusive ethos.

Getting parents to engage with workshops has been key, and the practitioner felt that the success of this has been a combination of the fact that the workshops were made available at no cost to the parent, the workshops led to a certificate for the attendees, and a crèche was made available enabling mothers to attend. It is also important to consider the nature of workshops and groups. The co-ordinator emphasised that in some areas workshops may need to be constructively challenging (for example, issues around gender and learning English). Where workshops cover sensitive issues it is important to establish protocols around disclosure and confidentiality. For example, in a course on domestic violence, parents were asked to consider any questions asked by other parents in the course as theoretical, rather than based on people's own circumstances and situations. Emphasis was placed on parents providing mutual support on the course (reflecting community help and support within the community being key principles of Islam). This helped to create a safe space in which disclosures could take place.

### ***Remaining barriers***

Rather than being an ethnic minority, the Bangladeshi community, both in the Tower Hamlets area and across the three schools, constitutes an ethnic majority that the schools have had success in engaging. However, staff were aware that the extended schools did not attract as many Somali, Turkish and Polish parents in the community and that they do not have translators for these groups. From this perspective, staff identified concerns about offering the same kind of equal opportunities for minority groups within this school. Here, this could include the White British community with literacy skills, as well as efforts to ensure this and other minority groups in the area feel that they are an inclusive part of the extended school community as a whole. Staff identified that this is sometimes reinforced by funding bodies who may have monies available for work with ‘BME communities’ – but that sometimes this does not include work with the newer groups such as the Polish community.

As reflected across other case studies, in practice, 'parental' engagement has meant, almost exclusively, engagement with mothers. The co-ordinator outlines how she worked with the local family learning service to provide a Saturday morning course that was focused on football, set up at West Ham football grounds. However, the co-ordinator found that care needed to be taken to ensure that 'fathers' as a term retains a wide definition that can include non-resident fathers and male guardians (e.g. brother, uncle etc.). Initially, some pupils were upset due to their perception that they could not attend in the absence of a resident father. However, overall, such a workshop was an exception to wider delivery.

### **Effectiveness**

On an operational level, parents are now being engaged in high numbers since parent activities and workshops were simply not available before. When asked, the co-ordinator could not identify any courses that had not been well attended which she feels is a reflection of need and validation of the way the service has been set up.

Parents themselves identify the impact of courses in terms of building confidence and also building a better relationship with their children. As one parent commented, *"my daughter is so happy and she says that my mother goes to college"*. This also is seen to apply for those parents who work as volunteers within the school. Staff identify that supporting parent volunteers requires dedication (for example to allow them to run a stall on health food) but has great benefits in increasing their confidence and reinforces that they are not 'just' a parent but have lots of transferable skills that are valued and important as well as benefits for the school. Parents identify that voluntary work in the schools is seen as a perfect way for the children, mothers and teachers to come and work together. As one parent commented *"we can help to build a very good strong relationship with the kids and teachers through voluntary work"*.

A final element of success relates to how other teaching staff view the parents that the practitioner deals with. She said, *"when I started the school they used to say 'your parents are here' now the language has changed to 'our parents, families, communities'. This is an important shift as you cannot do this work on your own, you need outside partners"*.

### **Learning**

Staff felt that it was necessary to look at what parents themselves want from services, as without this engagement cannot be facilitated. They also identified that having a full-time dedicated member of staff as crucial. Headteachers and other teaching staff have multiple responsibilities within a school. This makes it challenging for them to take on extra responsibility for other issues – such as parental engagement.

Parents felt that when courses are being offered to them it is important to provide short 'taster' sessions. These help to give a sense of the course content before Enrolling, which can increase participation amongst those who may otherwise be undecided.

#### **4.10 William C Harvey special school**

##### ***Introduction***

William C Harvey is a special school situated in the inner London borough of Haringey. It caters for children with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils also have additional disabilities such as epilepsy and sensory impairment, while others have behavioural difficulties. The school is co-educational and caters for children aged from three to 19, but remains relatively small with places for 77 pupils. The school serves a diverse range of minority ethnic groups, with the largest communities being Turkish, Black African and Black Caribbean. A relatively high number of refugees and asylum seekers also have children attending the school.

##### ***Engaging parents***

Since the pupils at William C Harvey are not able to articulate their own needs, they depend on those around them at home and at school to act as advocates for them. As a result the school places a strong emphasis on parental engagement, which takes many forms.

Parents are encouraged to take an active role in their child's learning. The school invites them to attend classes whenever possible and keeps parents updated at least weekly with news of all the activities and achievements their child has been involved in. The school uses digital cameras to send pictures home alongside a written summary (which may be in a wide variety of languages if the family does not speak English at home) of how their child is progressing. In addition to parents' evenings, the school also undertakes an annual review of what the child has achieved and parents' aspirations for the future.

Building on this, a 'home school project' was launched recently which aims to gather information about each pupil so that the school has a fuller understanding of their situation. Information is collected relating to each pupil's cultural background, family circle, things they like at home, important times in their life, achievements, festivals the family celebrates and tastes in food and music. This also helps the school to strengthen the link with parents by engaging them in dialogue which is not solely related to their children's education or medical condition. It also helps to increase the involvement of parents in their child's life at school by, for example, asking families to share things from home and explain why they are important to them and their child.

More widely, the school employs a dedicated parent co-ordinator and several translators. The parent co-ordinator attempts to broker ongoing dialogue with all parents and is available to help with the full range of issues that parents may face, not just issues directly related to the school and their child's education. For example, the parent co-ordinator reported helping one refugee family with housing issues when they were close to being evicted from their home but were not able to communicate effectively with the relevant housing service. Translators are also employed directly by the school which help to address language barriers. This is particularly important when dealing with detailed and technical matters relating to the child.

As well as staff, the school has a dedicated location on site which is used as a parents' centre. A parents' group has been run at the parents' centre for over a decade in order to welcome them into the school, to meet each other and to discuss any issues they have with the parent co-ordinator and other staff. The centre has also been used as a base for SNAPS (Special Needs Advice Parental Support), which was set up by two parents of children at William C Harvey, one of whom is Black Caribbean and one

White British. This service has helped to provide support to parents in similar situations in the school and across the borough.

#### **Case study – Black African mother (referred to as Kelly)**

Kelly's son, who has multiple learning difficulties and disabilities, joined William C Harvey in 2004. Her first impression was that the staff were extremely welcoming and she met a number of teachers, carers and senior staff at the school including the Headteacher and parent co-ordinator. One of the first requirements for her son was to have splints made to help him to stand. Kelly was invited to attend, to see the process and how they are used with him. Since then the communication with the school has continued to be very strong, with daily updates on her son's progress.

She also feels that it has been helpful to meet other parents with children at the school. This has taken place in several ways, through attending coffee mornings with the parents' group and coming into the school to talk about an object from her culture that is important to her and her son. More recently, Kelly has set up a support group for parents at the school with the parent co-ordinator on how to communicate with a child with special needs.

Finally, the school proactively celebrates diversity. Cultural and religious festivals (such as Eid, Ramadan and Diwali) are celebrated, often with parents bringing in food for all to share. Links with Creative Partnerships (a creativity programme for schools managed by the Arts Council) have also led to musical events from a range of communities (including Ghanaian and Somali groups) being hosted at the school, with parents invited to attend with their children. Similarly, the school takes part in Black History Month and Refugee Week to raise awareness and ensure that parents from these groups feel welcome in the school.

#### **What works?**

Staff felt that, particularly in a location with such a diversity of minority ethnic groups, cultural awareness is very important in engaging parents. The school employs staff from a range of minority ethnic communities and staff are given regular training. There are also dedicated resources to ensure that the school is appropriate for every community. For example, there is a space for Muslim parents and staff to pray. Staff have found that attitudes towards disability also vary across different cultures and that understanding this is vital to establishing dialogue. Instead of taking a judgemental approach towards different parental attitudes, staff are careful to work with parents and to endorse the worth of the children at the school at all opportunities.

The Headteacher and the parent co-ordinator emphasised the importance of taking a holistic approach towards parents and their children at the school. One member of staff reflected that, "*whilst most places are only concerned with what happens at school and impacts directly on a child's attainment, we look more widely*". It was felt that this wider approach (especially the parent co-ordinator acting as an advocate for parents across a range of services) actually helped to build trust and develop very strong relationships between parents and the school. Having dedicated staff and a specific area on site was also key to this achievement.

One of the key barriers for parents in engaging with the school (and services more widely) is language. The local authority funds translation for specific formal needs, however, the school itself also employs translators that are available at all times. This means that parents that do not speak English as a first language are able to communicate with the school at any point when an issue arises and the parent co-ordinator can contact parents whenever required. All written communication from the



school is translated into a full range of languages and the school tries to send pictures with all of its communication to show what the child has been doing.

### **Remaining barriers**

Staff identified that engagement with fathers is still much lower than with mothers. In part, this was felt by staff to be the result of cultural attitudes. For example, one Turkish member of staff felt that sometimes fathers from this community found it hard to accept that their child has a disability, which could lead to reluctance to engage with the school.

Rapid migration in the borough also makes building relationships difficult. Staff reported that building trust and relationships, particularly with recent immigrants and those that do not speak English, takes time and perseverance. Yet, there is a rapid turnover of parents in the borough, particularly among some of the most disadvantaged such as asylum seekers and refugees. These groups often have low awareness of services that are available to them and find it difficult to access services. While the school helps them to access services where possible, this becomes more challenging when parents move into and leave the borough frequently.

### **Effectiveness**

The most recent OfSTED inspection<sup>28</sup> is extremely positive about parental engagement at the school. The report describes the school as having “*exemplary links with parents*” and that “*parents commented that they feel most welcomed into the ‘extended family’ of the school*” (p.3). In addition, a 2004 OfSTED report on good practice in the use of Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG)<sup>29</sup> identified William C Harvey’s positive approach to engaging parents, particularly through the parents’ group.

Parents were extremely positive about the school and reported that there was excellent communication around their child’s needs and achievements. One parent reflected that, “*I don’t feel like I’m working alone, the school gets involved and helps me with all of the care issues*”. In addition, up to 20 parents regularly attend the parents’ group, with some going on to become governors and others setting up support groups for other parents (such as SNAPS).

### **Learning**

Staff at William C Harvey reflected the importance of:

- being culturally aware and not stereotyping minority ethnic groups;
- welcoming parents into the school on their own terms and not being judgemental about different attitudes and approaches;
- translators, who are expensive but have been vital to engaging with the large number of parents that have language needs, especially in view of the technical nature of their child’s medical needs; and
- parents, especially recent immigrants with low awareness of services available to them and/or language needs, benefiting greatly from having an advocate to help them to access public services.

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<sup>28</sup> OfSTED Inspection Report, William C Harvey School, December 2005

<sup>29</sup> OfSTED (2004b) *Managing the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant: Good Practice in Secondary Schools*, London: DfES

## 5 CONCLUSION

Each of the case studies in this report is individual in terms of the type of service provision, whether it is targeted or universal, where it is located and which minority ethnic communities are being engaged. There were a number of common factors in successful engagement and remaining barriers to further engagement (which are outlined below). It also became clear that there was a great deal of continuity between the findings from the literature review and the qualitative fieldwork, reinforcing the importance of these issues. Each of the key findings from the literature review was an important factor in several of the case studies:

- **Recognising diversity** was a common theme across several of the case studies and featured particularly in the AMBER project and William C Harvey special school. In both of these, service users came from a large number of different minority ethnic backgrounds. AMBER workers were recruited from virtually all minority ethnic groups represented in the city; they regularly shared their own understanding of different cultures and their experiences with parents from different communities. William C Harvey provided regular training for its staff around cultural awareness and there was a strong ethos of welcoming all communities into the school and celebrating religious and cultural festivals;
- **Challenging racism** was an underlying issue across virtually all of the case studies. It was particularly important, however, in targeted parenting programmes such as the BabyFather Initiative and Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities. Both of these services emphasised the centrality of cultural identity in parenting and challenging negative stereotypes associated with minority ethnic groups;
- Staff in most case studies recognised that minority ethnic parents were more likely to face **additional barriers** associated with deprivation. The most extreme example of this is the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities in Leeds. The Traveller Education Service attempted to address this by taking resources such as a mobile nursery and mobile library directly to the community. However, where parents had language needs, this was the most acute barrier to engagement. William C Harvey has addressed this through employing translators on an ongoing basis, as well as sending written communication in the language of choice for parents. Several other case studies, including Bradford Parent Partnership Service and the Coram Parents' Centre project, encouraged and supported parents to take ESOL courses;
- The sample of case studies represents a mix of universal and targeted programmes. Targeted programmes such as Babyfather Initiative and Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities were based on the view that services needed to be aimed at specific groups in order to tackle issues of cultural identity and how that fits in with norms and values in the UK. Universal services, such as Bruce Grove Primary School and the AMBER project attempted to provide **culturally appropriate** services while also recognising the need to provide ESOL classes and some provision for specific groups. There was also a recognition that this could lead to resentment among parents when entitlement to a service was based on ethnic background and/or gender;

- A number of case studies have taken clear steps to **empower parents** and include them in service delivery and decision-making. Bruce Grove Primary School has established a Parent Council, giving parents direct access to staff and governors at the school. Similarly, the Soho Children's Centre has incorporated consultation with parents into every aspect of service provision, with a Parent Parliament acting as a forum for parents to discuss the future direction of the service.

## 5.1 Common factors in successful engagement

In addition to the key findings in the literature review, there were several consistent findings from across the case study examples both in how to engage effectively with minority ethnic parents and the remaining challenges.

Key factors in successfully engaging with minority ethnic parents included:

### ***Taking a holistic approach***

Taking a holistic approach to families' needs and aspirations came through explicitly in several case studies. Staff explained how they had established a dialogue and trusting relationships with parents when they felt able to discuss major issues facing them. For example, the parent co-ordinator at William C Harvey special school was closely involved in helping a refugee family close to being evicted because they did not understand what was required of them by the housing service. Rather than diluting the focus of the school, it was felt by staff and parents that this type of activity helped to build strong, trusting relationships which facilitated very close engagement with parents. Similarly, the Traveller Education Service in Leeds found that by acting as a reliable point of contact for parents, no matter what the issue, they were able to build strong relations with the community and act as a gateway to accessing other public services.

### ***Dedicated resources***

Having a dedicated member of staff and/or location on site for parents to make use of helped to support engagement across a number of the case studies. In the Soho Children's Centre, for example, Family Support Workers and the Refugee Support Worker helped to act as advocates for parents, ensuring that their needs were taken on board and that they were able to access and engage with the range of services that they required. At William C Harvey, the parent co-ordinator was a key figure in engaging with parents, while providing a single room with a telephone and a computer specifically for parents was key to running the parents' group and supporting two of the parents at the school to begin a support network for other parents with children with special needs. It also provided a non-threatening space in which parents could raise issues. In addition, the school provided a dedicated space that Muslim staff and parents could use for prayer.

### ***Recruiting from local communities***

Recruiting staff from local communities helped to break down some parents' views of services being 'other' and to undercut a potential 'them and us' perception. What appeared to be important from this research was not that professional staff (such as teachers or health practitioners) exactly matched the population directly in terms of ethnic composition. Instead, the important factor was finding innovative roles for parents from the community, in which they were not necessarily one of the professional staff but were employed to undertake outreach and build relationships with parents. AMBER Parental Involvement Co-ordinators, for example, are recruited directly from

the community, with at least half from a minority ethnic background. The AMBER staff are seen by parents as 'one of us' while being funded by the school (or other source) and act as a bridge for increased engagement between parents and schools. In another example, the Coram Parents' Centre has successfully increased its engagement with the Bangladeshi community through recruiting and training a cadre of Bengali women from the community to act as assistant outreach workers.

### ***Building social capital***

The head of AMBER described the role of the project as being to "*build social capital*". A large part of this is achieved in an environment in which parents are able to meet each other. Parents reported that this had helped to address a lack of confidence and sense of isolation that some were suffering from. One parent involved in the AMBER project described her reluctance to engage at the outset but, having met other parents at coffee mornings, she became more confident and was able to discuss issues that all the parents had in common. Similarly, in targeted services like Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities it was supportive for parents from the same background to discuss their culture and its relation to parenting in the UK context together. Mothers at the Wai Yin Chinese Women's Society were able to discuss difficult issues such as domestic violence and the breakdown of family life with other parents in a similar situation. Often parents talking together helped to create a mini community of engagement around a service.

## **5.2 Challenges to further engagement**

There were also several areas of challenge to further improving engagement with minority ethnic parents which have emerged from this research. These include:

### ***Fathers***

Virtually all of the case studies found that engaging with fathers was more challenging than engaging with mothers. The reasons given for this were a mix of practical and cultural issues. Fathers were seen as being more likely to be the main breadwinner and, therefore, to have limited time available to engage with children's and parental services. Staff also felt that a number of different cultures had a patriarchal structure and/or clearly defined gender roles in which raising children was delineated as being a predominantly female activity. This came through particularly in relation to Traveller, Chinese and Muslim groups in this research but is not limited to them and is not the case with every family within these communities. The BabyFather Initiative was the only service specifically targeted at fathers and part of the reason for this was that other children's and parental services were seen as being overly 'feminised', making it harder for fathers to engage.

### ***Limited resources***

Limited and uncertain funding was a vital issue for all of the services based in the voluntary and community sector. The Wai Yin Chinese Women's Society, for example, had to release staff and lost a great deal of expertise when it suffered a temporary loss of funding from the Home Office for its work delivering Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities. When this affects the availability of services it can serve to undermine trust that services have worked hard to build. Mainstream public services (schools and the children's centre) did not report any concerns over discontinuous funding, but did find that it could be difficult to find funding for additional activities with parents. Indeed, some of the factors in successful engagement of parents outlined above (for example, dedicated staff and locations for parents) cost money to provide. It is a decision for individual service providers to weigh up the costs and benefits of this.

### ***New communities***

New communities (including refugee and asylum seekers) can be particularly isolated. They are more likely than established minority ethnic groups to have a very limited understanding of public services, lack confidence in accessing them, have restricted social networks of support and face severe language barriers. Engaging these communities presented a major challenge across all of the case studies. Among services which had recruited staff directly from local communities (including AMBER, Coram Parents' Centre and Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities), these tended to reflect the established communities and there remains very little representation of parents that are refugees or from Eastern Europe, for example. The biggest problems were not having staff that were able to speak the same languages as these parents, and not having any informal links into the communities. Outreach (such as the Refugee Support Worker employed by Soho Children's Centre) was one way to address this. However, staff generally felt that it would take time before they were able to penetrate and engage these new communities.

### ***Measuring effectiveness***

One important aspect of this qualitative research has been to ask service providers how they monitor engagement with minority ethnic parents. Clearly, engagement with parents is difficult to quantify and can take many different forms. Indeed, it was clear from the literature review that there were no robust measures of engagement with parents – the closest were proxy measures for related outcomes, such as parental satisfaction surveys and interviews with parents conducted by researchers. Similarly, the case studies visited by the researchers had a variety of measures for engagement of minority ethnic parents based on information gathered through evaluation forms and the numbers attending certain courses or receiving specific services. However, none of the case studies had monitoring data specifically on this topic which had been effectively benchmarked or used comparatively against other similar providers. This is not a criticism of the service providers but a reflection of the difficulty of providing any objective measure of effective engagement with parents.

## **5.3 Conclusions**

Following on from this, if engaging parents in services is to become a priority nationally, then it will be essential to find more robust ways of measuring and validating how effectively this is being undertaken. In the absence of this, good practice in this area remains to some extent subjective. Despite this, there is a great deal that can be learnt from the services visited for this research. In addition to the factors in engaging successfully with minority ethnic parents identified above, staff were asked what lessons they had learnt and would like to share with others in a similar position. The vast majority of what came from this related to 'soft' issues. The point which came up most frequently was for staff to treat parents as equals; to treat parents and their cultures with respect, consult with them and, as much as possible, to develop services that are based on serving their needs. Ultimately, engaging with minority ethnic parents needs to be part of a process which is based on dialogue and leads to a reappraisal of how each individual service can be delivered to meet their needs.

Finally, it is clear that there is a major gap in research around the context and needs of engaging with minority ethnic parents in children's and parental services in rural areas. As outlined above, there is very little literature available on this and the search for externally validated instances of good practice did not identify any rural examples. Whilst minority ethnic populations are heavily concentrated in urban areas, it is

extremely important that the needs of parents in rural areas are taken into consideration in future research.

## **ANNEX – BIBLIOGRAPHY**

The following publications have been foregrounded in this research because they are deemed to contain important and relevant findings and the research was found to be sufficiently robust. They are arranged, broadly, so that documents for similar service areas are clustered together.

1.

**Chand, A & Thoburn, J (2005) *Research review: child and family support services with minority ethnic families: what can we learn from research?*, Child and Family Social Work, 10**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

The paper undertakes a review of available, published research on family support services for minority ethnic families relating to three areas: family centres, a home visiting support service and family group conferences. It is addressed primarily to practitioners and closes with findings on the qualities that minority ethnic parents seek in social workers.

***Approach and Methodology***

Review of existing literature.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

- Practitioners are aware of the need to be culturally sensitive, but find this hard to put into practice
- There is insufficient research to determine which approaches are 'better'
- minority ethnic parents generally feel satisfied with the services they receive and that they are treated equally
- However, many minority ethnic parents did not feel that they received all of the services they needed

***Summary or examples of good practice***

- In relation to family centres, minority ethnic parents particularly valued: a welcoming atmosphere, an ethos based on user participation, specifically targeted services, and the role played by staff
- In relation to home-based family support services, cultural sensitivity, a shared language and listening skills have been found to be important factors
- Overall, the important factors for social workers engaging with minority ethnic parents were:
  - attitude – being empathetic and open-minded
  - creating a stable and reliable relationship
  - providing full and accurate information about service provision.
- Ethnically matching staff to parents can be positive due to greater shared understanding. However, it can also be problematic as minority ethnic staff are over-relied upon and the racialised experiences of service use are focused on too heavily.



## 2.

**Box, L., Bignall, T., & Butt, J (2001) *Supporting parents through provision of childcare*, London: Race Equality Unit**

### ***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

This is a discussion paper from the REU minority ethnic Families Policy Forum, which draws together findings from previously available research.

### ***Approach and Methodology***

Discussion paper based on previous research (a proportion of which has been undertaken by the authors). Attempts to outline the diverse and specific needs of different minority ethnic groups.

### ***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Key findings in formal childcare:

- use of formal childcare varies by ethnic group, but is lowest for Asian families
- there has been limited effort to reflect cultural differences in service provision
- some staff do not respect the particular preferences of minority ethnic parents
- the differences within and between minority ethnic groups is not well recognised.

Recommendations:

- commitment to increase investment
- commitment to monitor minority ethnic participation
- commitment to involve minority ethnic families more effectively.

### ***Summary or examples of good practice***

Key factors that can be barriers or enablers in minority ethnic parents from accessing childcare:

- cost
- location
- under-representation of minority ethnic groups among childcare workforce
- language
- provision of accessible information
- lack of minority ethnic participation in planning and development of services.

3.

**Lloyd, N & Rafferty, A (2006) *Black and minority ethnic families and Sure Start: findings from local evaluation reports*, London: NESS**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

The research attempts to draw together lessons from the local Sure Start programmes (SSLP) evaluations in relation to engaging minority ethnic families.

***Approach and Methodology***

The research undertakes a search and review of findings from relevant evaluations of SSLPs in relation to minority ethnic families. Very little was found on asylum seekers and refugees.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Key findings:

- only a small proportion of local Sure Start programme evaluations commented substantially on attempts to engage minority ethnic families
- there was evidence that services (and English language classes) were targeted predominantly at families of South Asian origin rather than African or African Caribbean origin
- lack of proficiency in English can be a barrier to accessing SSLP services
- targeted (or culturally specific) provision generally proved effective at engaging minority ethnic families, but there were problems where this was not integrated into mainstream services.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Summarising the good practice from across SSLP evaluations:

- encouraging minority ethnic parent participation in programme delivery
- overcoming language barriers through using interpreters, a team of interviewers that match the ethnic background of local families and using husbands as translators for their wives
- targeted outreach to engage with 'hard to reach' families
- targeted (culturally specific) services that are also integrated with mainstream services.

4.

**Bell, A., Bryson, C., Barnes, M & O'Shea, R (2005) *Use of childcare among families from black and minority ethnic backgrounds*, London: National Centre for Social Research**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

The report explores the different experiences of childcare across families of different minority ethnic backgrounds in England. It includes a review of the literature on the use of childcare by minority ethnic families and chapters on difficulties with childcare and parents' views of childcare provision.

***Approach and Methodology***

The research includes a literature review and analysis of data from two large-scale surveys (in which more than 10,000 families were interviewed).

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

The literature review suggests the following are key barriers to accessing childcare:

- affordability
- availability and location
- awareness and information
- cultural recognition, inclusion and understanding
- preconceptions of childcare.

The survey shows that there are important variations in the use of childcare. For example, White British mothers are most likely to choose informal provision; Black Caribbean parents are most likely to use formal care; while Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African families are least likely to use childcare provision at all.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Good practice, summarised from the literature review, included:

- staff recognising the diversity within and across minority ethnic groups
- provision available at atypical times and provided at low or no cost as minority ethnic groups face disproportionate barriers
- provision of information in a range of languages and spread through local businesses, religious and community groups
- inclusion and involvement of minority ethnic parents in decisions and provision of services, developing a sense of ownership
- recruiting staff from minority ethnic groups to reflect the local community.

5.

**Williams, F & Churchill, H (2006) *Empowering parents in Sure Start Local Programmes*, London: DfES**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

The research investigates how Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) have attempted to facilitate individual and community empowerment. As part of this, gender and ethnicity are considered.

***Approach and Methodology***

The study employed qualitative, semi-structured interviews with parents, volunteers, staff and other local stakeholders in six case study areas.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Empowering parents in ethnically diverse areas was found to be more expensive and complex, because of:

- a history of lower use of public provision
- costs of translation services
- transient populations
- mobility issues
- lack of awareness of different cultural practices
- the need for sensitivity over competing claims which could create ethnic divisions
- needing to balance culturally specific provision with mainstream provision
- difficulties in having staff with knowledge and experience appropriate to the area.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Summarising good practice across the case study areas:

- involving parents as volunteers (especially as interpreters)
- developing the programme ethos with minority ethnic parents in order to reflect the community in a positive way
- staff that are non-judgemental and recognise the heterogeneity among minority ethnic groups, rather than stereotyping
- staff that were embedded in the community and, particularly, with community development backgrounds.

6.

**Beirens, H., Mason, P., Spicer, N., Hughes, N., & Hek, R (2006) *Preventative services for asylum seeking children: a final report of the national evaluation of the children's fund*, London: DfES RR780**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

To consider different approaches used by Children's Fund partnerships in relation to asylum seekers and refugees.

***Approach and Methodology***

A qualitative evaluation of two Children's Fund partnerships, based on approximately 200 interviews with service providers and asylum seekers and refugees (both parents / carers and children).

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

For key findings see examples of good practice below.

Recommendations:

- developing a 'strategic change mechanism' to help services to work together
- services to recognise the complexity of social exclusion
- providing responsive services
- services to develop and strengthen networks of asylum seekers and refugees.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Good practice in the two partnerships included:

- advice and support for parents in accessing services and filling out forms
- valuable support provided by community based organisations
- providing home-school liaison workers to engage with parents and children
- giving parents the chance to meet others in a similar situation

7.

**Chamba, R., Ahmad, W., Hirst, M., Lawton, D., & Beresford, B (1999) *On the edge: minority ethnic families caring for a severely disabled child*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

Comparing the experiences of minority ethnic parents with one or more severely disabled child with those of White British parents in a comparable situation.

***Approach and Methodology***

The survey is based on a postal questionnaire, with a response of approximately 600 minority ethnic parents. It was designed to build on an earlier survey of over 1,000 White British parents.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Key findings:

- minority ethnic families caring for a severely disabled child were more disadvantaged than White British families, with lower levels of employment and fewer receiving disability benefits
- minority ethnic parents wanted more information about services, in particular those that did not understand English well
- Indian and Black African / Caribbean families reported least support from their extended family (lower than White British families)
- over half of parents reported contact with professionals was positive, especially with a key worker
- reported levels of unmet need were higher for minority ethnic families.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

- Contact with a key or link worker helped to ensure that information was more easily accessed and service provision was more positive.

8.

**Parsons, C., Godfrey, R., Annan, G., Cornwall, J., Dussart, M., Hepburn, S., Howlett, K & Wennerstrom, V (2004) *Minority ethnic exclusions and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*, London: DfES RR616**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

The research aims to investigate the causes of disproportionate exclusion of minority ethnic pupils and to look in-depth at a sample of schools.

***Approach and Methodology***

Findings are presented from two annual sets of PLASC data. In addition, qualitative research was undertaken through a large number of interviews at a sample of 50 schools including school staff, parents, pupils, local authority staff and community organisations.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Key findings:

- community links could be further developed to encourage parents to support their child's school
- Pupil Referral Units and special schools already regard partnership with parents / carers as integral to their work
- community groups can play an important role in addressing the needs of children but few parents knew of them or sought their advice on educational matters.

Recommendations:

- schools and community organisations should strengthen links with parents
- primary, secondary, special schools and PRUs should develop more effective liaison with parents / carers and community organisations.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Good practice from across the range of 50 schools includes:

- partnership with parents (especially Black Caribbean parents)
- attention to community and home issues.

9.

**Turner, N (2005) *Setting up parents' councils project 2004-05*, Human Scale Education**

**Carnie, F (2005) *Setting up parents' councils: case studies*, Human Scale Education**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

Turner (2005) evaluates the Human Scale Education project to set up parents' councils in schools in England against seven key objectives, which aim to improve parental engagement with schools.

Carnie (2005) reports on good practice case studies in two primary and two secondary schools in England.

There was a strong focus on engaging minority ethnic parents as part of this project.

***Approach and Methodology***

Turner (2005) evaluated the impact of parents' councils in two schools (one primary and one secondary) through interviews, participant observation and evidence from documentation.

Carnie (2005) does not explicitly outline her methodology, however it is likely to be similar to Turner (2005).

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Turner (2005):

- The project needs longer to fully embed, but has had a positive impact
- Developing parental capacity to engage with schools is a key issue
- Funding should reflect the true costs of engaging with different groups.

Carnie (2005) found that a wider range of parents were involved in school life as a result of the parents' councils.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Carnie (2005) provides examples of good practice in three schools with very high populations of minority ethnic students.



10.

**Blair, M & Bourne, J (1998) *Parental involvement in multi-ethnic schools*, London: DfES**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

The research attempts to find out about parents' experiences and their involvement in multi-ethnic schools in England. Good practice case studies add to the general findings.

***Approach and Methodology***

Case studies on effective strategies in minority ethnic parental involvement were conducted in three primary and two secondary schools.

Interviews were undertaken with Headteachers, senior management, subject and class teachers, support teachers and classroom assistants, LEA personnel, parents and students. Documents and monitoring records were analysed as well as observation.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Parents and pupils expressed concerns about racism, low expectations of teachers, stereotyping and lack of respect for parents and for students. African-Caribbean parents and students in particular raised issues about unfair practices of teachers. There were problems about poor communication, lack of understanding and missed opportunities for effective partnership between parents and schools.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Good practice to overcome these barriers included:

- leadership and a positive ethos
- communicative relationships between schools and parents
- high expectations from staff and commitment to providing additional support
- schools being seen to be treating all pupils fairly.

11.

**TDA (2006) *Case studies on extended schools: London borough of Tower Hamlets*, available online<sup>30</sup>**

(See also: London Borough of Tower Hamlets *Parents matter: parental involvement in children's learning*)

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

To provide a good practice case study in relation to schools remodelling and, in particular, extended schools. The document is not an evaluation of the provision, but sets out the emerging and promising practice being undertaken in Tower Hamlets.

***Approach and Methodology***

Not specified.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

48% of residents in Tower Hamlets are minority ethnic, and it is one of the most deprived local authority areas in the country. However, the authority has made a concerted effort to involve parents in service provision, including with extended schools. The local authority has created a family support and parental involvement strategy (see *Parents Matter*), which is thought to be particularly innovative and forward thinking.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

The local authority has undertaken the following:

- running workshops and organising networks of staff to work with parents
- 55% of schools have held parent information point (PIP) sessions, engaging 6,000 parents in the borough
- programmes, workshops and events for parents whose children are underachieving
- creating a range of publications (and a website) aimed at parents
- creating a dedicated parental engagement team.

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[http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/extendedschools/resources/casestudies/remodelling/tower\\_hamlets.aspx](http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/extendedschools/resources/casestudies/remodelling/tower_hamlets.aspx)

12.

**Moon, N & Ivins, C (2004) *Parental involvement in children's education*, London: DfES RR589**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

The research attempts to provide a representative survey of parents and carers and to provide findings on parental involvement in their children's education. A 'booster sample' of minority ethnic parents provides robust findings across a range of minority ethnic groups.

***Approach and Methodology***

The main research took the form of a quantitative survey (telephone) of 2,021 parents and carers from all ethnic backgrounds (including White British). In addition, a telephone survey of 1,721 minority ethnic (Black African, Black Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and mixed heritage) parents and carers was undertaken to provide robust findings for each of these groups.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Key findings:

- there are important variations across different minority ethnic communities in how involved parents (and fathers in particular) are with their children's education
- this is reflected in differing attitudes as to whose responsibility their child's education is (i.e. the school or themselves as parents)
- other factors such as social status whether the household has one or two parents are also important
- the main barrier to getting more involved for minority ethnic parents is work commitments, followed by childcare difficulties. However, the most frequent response was that there were no specific barriers.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

None.

13.

**OfSTED (2004) *Managing the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant: good practice in primary schools*, London: DfES**

**OfSTED (2004) *Managing the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant: good practice in secondary schools*, London: DfES**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

Identifying and sharing good practice found in schools that are deemed to have used EMAG funding effectively to raise standards.

***Approach and Methodology***

23 schools (1 nursery, 11 primaries, 10 secondaries and 1 special) were selected to be visited for the work they were undertaking on ethnic minority achievement. A subset of these are written up as good practice case studies in each report.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

A key finding was that partnership with parents and the wider community were central aspects in raising ethnic minority achievement. As a result, parents were aware of, and appreciated, their school's stance on race equality which contributed to the school's success.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Good practice from across the featured schools included:

- involving parents in school provision
- countering negative images and perceptions of minority ethnic groups, and positively endorsing the range of languages and cultural heritage among the children and parents
- effective home-school liaison (especially at secondary level) as well as bilingual teachers and support workers
- running family learning classes

14.

**Bhopal, K (2004) *Gypsy Travellers and Education: changing needs and changing perceptions*, British Journal of Educational Studies 52 (1), 47-64**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

Looking at the change views of Travellers towards education and the impact of this in an educational environment that continues to not be adequately inclusive of this community and their lifestyle.

***Approach and Methodology***

Report is based on research that Bhopal conducted in 2000, which involved interviews with Traveller parents and participant observation. The author also draws on other research on the Traveller community.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Key findings:

- traditional views of Travellers not being interested in having their children educated are outdated and harmful
- Traveller parents frequently had very negative experiences of school due to bullying and racism, which are often repeated with their children and leads to absenteeism
- current educational policy creates disincentives for schools to take Traveller children into schools because of the expectation that attendance and attainment will fall

Recommendations:

- policy should be re-developed to respond to the Traveller community and to take account of children with a nomadic lifestyle
- schools should be more inclusive towards Traveller families
- parts of the curriculum should be made more relevant to the Traveller community, with Traveller culture reflected in textbooks and classroom resources.

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Good practice among schools would include:

- tackling negative perceptions of Travellers and addressing racism, name-calling and bullying
- greater awareness of Traveller culture and employment of staff from the community, including intercultural training for all staff as well as Traveller Education Service teachers
- informal contacts between school and parents helping to improve communication.

15.

**Barlow, J., Shaw, R., & Stewart-Brown, S (2004) *Parenting programmes and minority ethnic families: experiences and outcomes*, Oxford: National Children's Bureau**

***Main focus and objectives of the literature***

This study is English, but is based on evidence from the United States. It addresses three questions:

- what are minority ethnic parents' experiences of taking part in parenting programmes?
- are parenting programmes as effective for minority ethnic parents?
- are culturally specific parenting programmes more effective than 'traditional' ones?

***Approach and Methodology***

A literature of review of, almost exclusively, US quantitative and qualitative evaluations of parenting programmes.

***Key findings and policy recommendations***

Key findings:

- minority ethnic parents benefit from both 'traditional' and culturally specific parenting programmes
- minority ethnic parents reported barriers such as time and work commitments that made it difficult to attend
- culturally specific programmes are more likely to address challenges to minority ethnic parents' value system

Recommendations:

- to provide culturally specific parenting programmes as well as 'traditional' programmes

***Summary or examples of good practice***

Good practice included:

- sensitivity to different parenting practices and values among minority ethnic parents and practitioners make the underlying value framework explicit to participants
- recognising the range of family composition in minority ethnic families
- culturally specific programmes can help to enhance minority ethnic parents' knowledge about their culture.

Other documents we have reviewed but with more limited information on engaging effectively with minority ethnic parents are as follows:

- Barn, R (2001) *Black youth on the margins*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Barn, R (2006) *Parenting in multi-racial Britain*, London: National Children's Bureau
- Bignall, T & Box, L (2002) *Engaging black and minority ethnic families in policy development and implementation*, London: Race Equality Unit
- Centre for Ethnic Minority Studies (2001) *Mental health needs of black and Asian people in Slough*,
- Chahal, K & Ullah, I (2004) *Experiencing ethnicity: discrimination and service provision*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Desforges, C & Abouchaar, A (2003) *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: a literature review*, London: DfES RR433
- Education Commission (2004) *The educational experiences and achievements of black boys in London schools 2000-2003*, London: London Development Agency
- Ellis, A (2003) *Barriers to participation for under-represented groups in school governance*, London: DfES RR500
- Freeman, P et al (2005) *An evaluation of the Devon children's fund*, University of Exeter
- Moran, P et al (2004) *What works in parenting support? A review of the international evidence*, London: DfES RR574
- Morris, K et al (2006) *Preventative services for black and minority ethnic children*, London: DfES RR778
- National Audit Office (2006) *Sure Start Children's Centres*, London: TSO
- Sawtell, M et al (2005) *Reaching out to pregnant teenagers and teenage parents: innovative practice from Sure Start Plus pilot programmes*, London: Institute of Education
- University of Birmingham & Institute of Education (2006) *Working to prevent the social exclusion of children and young people: final lessons from the national evaluation of the children's fund*, London: DfES RR734

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