

**BMECS's Comments to the Children
and Young People's Plan –
consultation with children and
young people from BME
communities.**

November 2010

BME Community Services (BMECS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Children and Young People's Plan, particularly on the consultation with children and young people from BME communities in West Sussex.

BMECS is a registered charitable company, established in 2006 to address the gaps and needs in services for individuals, families and groups from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, including refugees and asylum seekers in West Sussex.

The management has a wealth of expertise in working with BME communities with a great track record of working with various partners and also influencing policy on Equality and diversity not only in West Sussex but nationally and at EU level.

Our mission is to be a "Support service for BME groups, individuals and families; encouraging integration, community cohesion, reducing social exclusion and tackling inequalities in West Sussex and beyond."

Amongst our main aims include:

- Promote equality of opportunity and celebrate the value of the diverse communities in our area.
- Promote fair access to opportunities and services that responds to BME communities needs in West Sussex.

BMECS is a Children's Trust Voluntary Sector Steering group partner working with many organisations in West Sussex and nationally to ensure models of good practices on equality and diversity are at the heart of everything we do, this includes ensuring that the most disadvantaged young people from BME communities are represented owing to the double disadvantage that they face. We believe that effective Children and Young people's work always seeks to improve the physical and emotional health of young people taking into consideration many aspects, including cultural.

BMECS is committed to equality and diversity which is in the heart of its values, work etc. BMECS will continue to promote equality of opportunity

and good race relations between persons of different racial groups, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to provide culturally sensitive services that meet the needs of the diverse communities of West Sussex. BMECS will continue to represent the issues of the West Sussex BME Communities with the following in mind.

- **Promoting accessibility**

BMECS will continue to increase BME communities' ability to access support services and ensure through second tier organisations that services are culturally accessible.

- **Valuing cultural diversity**

BMECS will continue to raise awareness of BME culture amongst the public and voluntary and community sector partners. It will support community representatives to advocate on behalf of their community so that policy development and decision making takes account of the distinctive needs of this community.

- **Promoting participation and inclusive communities**

BMECS will continue to increase awareness of BME cultures, building understanding between BME and mainstream communities. Through encouraging participation and engagement of BME communities in local decision-making by identifying and highlighting the needs to the partners so that the young people are included.

- **Promoting equality of opportunity**

BMECS will continue to promote equality for all and advocate for BME communities to be treated fairly with dignity and respect and be given equal opportunity to improve the quality of their lives.

- **Reducing disadvantage and exclusion**

BMECS will continue to develop and deliver programmes and models as tools to enable local partners to identify and tackle exclusion.

- **Promoting better community cohesion and integration**

BMECS will continue to work with communities and partners to ensure BME communities are active and well integrated into mainstream society.

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- **Promoting good practice for better partnership working**

BMECS will continue to encourage public and voluntary sector partners to show commitment to equality and diversity by adopting and implementing models of good practices that are implemented successfully.

BMECS will continue to encourage and support partnerships initiatives that have positive impact on the wellbeing of BAME communities. A great example of partnership working is the work we do with West Sussex Council for Voluntary Youth Service (WSCVYS) and the wider Voluntary Sector arrangement of the Children's Trust.

BMECS welcome the Children and Young People's plan and would like the West Sussex County Council to take note of the following comments it is making particularly on the consultation with children and young people from BME communities.

The plan, as it is presented, attempts to be inclusive and seems to capture important areas relevant to BME children and young people, for instance:

- Consulting young asylum seekers
- The use of performance data on educational attainment

We are mindful that the County Council "*consulted a wide range of children and young people using a variety of mechanisms designed to be inclusive and overcome barriers to participation*". However, we believe that the plan is not comprehensive enough on:

- The issue of equality and diversity
- The use of BME organisations as key information sources
- The commitment to tackle discrimination harassment and bullying
- The importance of culture for BME children and young people
- The use of national and local statistics to raise awareness of the issues faced by BME children and young people

Although we appreciate the plan we recommend that it takes into consideration a number of national policies and statistics on BME young people. We believe, for instance, it should:

- Encompass the recommendations made by OFSTED, which highlighted the need to provide specific services to BME young people and the need to integrate BME young people into mainstream young people provision.

With regards to the methods used, we believe that:

- BME young people themselves could have been recruited, trained and used as researchers or facilitators.

In sum, we believe that the consultation could have taken the form of a review to capture issues linked to the positive and negative experiences and aspects of BME young people in their respective local areas, for instance in relation to:

- Safety
- Violence and experience of bullying and harassment
- Racism
- Isolation
- Access to facilities
- Being able to talk freely and express opinions
- Learning opportunities
- Exchange - international and national
- More opportunities for culturally - mixed provision

The review could also ensure that young people contribute fully to finding the best solution to better address the issues brought about and develop models to focus on, i.e.:

- Creating opportunities for young people from different ethnic background to mix and learn from each other
- Developing more provision for BME young people
- Ensuring safe and accessible venues are available
- Making information available
- Tackling Racism and racial harassment
- Better co-ordination of services
- Involving BME young people in the development of services
- Encouraging cultural understanding amongst young people and practitioners
- Facilitating discussion of sensitive issues such as drugs, sexual health, domestic violence, etc.
- Facilitating dialogue with parents and community leaders

A review would include recommendations from young people and practitioners, such as:

- More resources and support for BME projects
- More safe and accessible venues
- The development of a multi-cultural youth centres
- More BME workers
- Encourage BME young people to become trustees
- Encourage continuous dialogue with BME young people, parents and community leaders
- Anti-racist and cultural awareness training for all youth service staff and young people
- Attract young asylum seekers and refugees to existing services
- Language support provision
- Be sensitive to immigration status
- Emotional support provision

In conclusion, we believe that plan marks the beginning of what we hope is the commitment of local authorities and partners to address effectively the issues faced by BME children and young people in West Sussex. It is important however that, such plan takes into consideration elements that have impact in BME children and young people's lives, including:

- Culture
- Experience of racism
- lack of confidence and isolation
- Fear of being discriminated
- Family relationship
- Educational attainment

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the "*Children and Young People's Plan – consultation with children and young people from BME communities*".

BMECS will continue to play a major role in ensuring that all children and young people in West Sussex are given equal opportunity to access the relevant services and improve the their quality of life regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

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