



Good Practice in Action

CVS working with BME groups



01

Advancing local voluntary
and community action

01

Good Practice in Action

Kicking off the series

This is the first in a series of Good Practice in Action leaflets which will highlight and celebrate CVS work with particular groups or communities of interest. CVS work with Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities can, at times, be as hidden as many of the communities themselves. However, CVS across England are visibly demonstrating their commitment to the values enshrined in NACVS Statement of Values and Equal Opportunities, which states: *NACVS believes that priority should be given to working with communities and groups whose full participation in society is limited by economic disadvantage or institutional discrimination.*

Naturally, CVS' responses to the needs of their local BME communities are as diverse as the communities they serve. No two areas are alike; no two approaches will be the same. Some CVS are working with long-established and distinct communities; others, particularly in London, are working with a whole 'melting pot' of communities. However, there are certain threads and themes which emerge and which demonstrate CVS' commitment to opening up their services to the most socially excluded amongst their constituencies.

Too many CVS to mention have one or more development workers or small groups workers whose focus is 'hard-to-reach' groups. As a result many are involved in intensive development and capacity building work with BME communities. Other posts based within CVS are issue based. Exeter CVS, for example, recently appointed a Diversity

Officer, funded by the Consortium on Opportunities for Volunteering, to encourage volunteers from Black and minority ethnic groups to engage in voluntary work and community action.

Profile-raising

Other CVS have sought to raise the profile of their services amongst ethnic groups to encourage their take up. Voluntary Action Sheffield has a long track record of working with different ethnic groups, offering general support, committee skills, training, management development, finance, community accountancy and legal services. Statistics from its Legal Advisory Service show that in the past two years, 106 out of 585 groups taking advantage of the service have come from minority ethnic communities.

A number of CVS are actively trying to recruit workers who speak community languages to give their services a better reach. Interestingly, CVS-Arunwide in West Sussex is supporting the development of work with the local Portuguese community and is employing a bi-lingual Portuguese Community Worker who will be based with a local Sure Start initiative.

In some areas, particularly rural ones, work is focused on identifying and supporting individuals, rather than groups. The Community Development Officer at Waveney Community Forum CVS in Suffolk has undertaken an intensive piece of development to identify refugees and other new arrivals in the local community and respond to their requests for support. Six months down the line an extremely culturally diverse support group is up and



running and is now hosting a voluntary English language class at the local library.

Research based

CVS across the country have used research as a springboard to more focused work with their local BME communities. Recent research commissioned by Mansfield CVS looked at the issues of race and faith in the town. A separate piece of research in the same area identified a lack of specialist services and patchy attempts to engage with the Black community and led to the CVS developing a Race Action Plan.

Voluntary Action Leicester took the bold step of engaging a consultant to evaluate the support offered to BME communities by their sizeable organisation development department. They have taken on board both the positives and negatives from the report and developed an action plan for the future. Other research, such as that in Lancaster and North Warwickshire, has looked at quality of life issues for minority ethnic communities.

In Northumberland, Wansbeck CVS' Our PART (Participatory Action Research Team) project trains local residents to design and carry out research into the experience, ideas and opinions of their own communities around the issues that affect their lives and the decisions that policy makers and service providers make about them. Our PART members include young people and adults with different abilities, of different ethnic origins and sexual orientations. They form Working Parties to focus on particular pieces of research. These include: The BME

Residents Issues and Needs Working Party, The Equality and Diversity Issues Working Party and The Young Travellers Working Party. The Project won the Institute for Public Policy Research and Guardian Public Involvement Awards 2002.

Diversity networks

Many CVS have been instrumental in setting up diversity networks and subsequently hosting them; a natural extension of the CVS engaging with local BME communities. In Warrington, this has been the case. About two years ago the CVS identified a need for more in-depth support to the small, loose groupings of people from ethnic minorities. They took every opportunity to engage, from the most formal, such as links with the REC, to the less formal, such as with individuals using the CVS' services. The CVS has now been approached by the communities to lead the development of a BME network. This will be a focus for activities and help raise the profile of BME groups.

The neighbourhood renewal agenda has provided fresh opportunities (and funding) for CVS to work alongside BME networks and communities. Enfield Voluntary Action has taken a very direct approach to ensuring the needs and perspectives of the 'melting pot' of communities within the Borough are heard by the Community Empowerment Network. It has proactively approached BME communities to offer them training on effective representation. Such training not only allows representatives to effectively voice concerns coming out of their groups, but also builds capacity in their own organisations.

The benefits of such an approach are tangible, in that 30% of the people on the Community Empowerment Network are from ethnic communities.

The London Borough of Barnet has recently been awarded Beacon Status for Community Cohesion. Barnet Voluntary Service Council has been an active player in supporting its local BME communities. Just one example of this work was in bringing three very small groups together – a group for elderly Asian people, a Somali group and an Afro-Caribbean group – to form a multi-cultural centre. BVSC provided the project management and co-ordination skills to get the three groups to a point where they were able to find the right premises and fundraise. The centre has celebrated its second birthday and is providing a hub for at least 40 other community groups which use its facilities on a sessional basis.

Targeted support

Some projects started with a specific focus and have grown from there. Scunthorpe has a stable and long-established Asian community. *Apna Sahara* (Urdu for ‘our support’) was established 13 years ago by Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire (then Scunthorpe CVS) as a support service to help BME communities access health and social care services. From there it has developed into an organisation which offers training, direct services and children’s after school provision, to name but a few. It has succeeded in building capacity in the true sense of the word, supporting the development of individuals within the BME communities to take on the running of these activities.

Several CVS have been working closely with Gypsies and Travellers. The Community Development Agency for Hertfordshire’s Rural Social Inclusion Project works principally with Gypsies, Travellers and homeless young people and aims to raise awareness of their issues with statutory service deliverers, including health, education and social care specialists. It has also done some work around sexual health awareness with Black and minority ethnic communities. Ipswich and District CVS has been helping the Romany Theatre to gain funding and charitable status. The theatre group has been working in schools and sending out positive messages to Travellers and others about integration in the community.

Under the spotlight

Three CVS are put under the spotlight below to show very different approaches which have all yielded positive results. The first has taken an integrated approach to its work with BME communities, the second has worked closely in partnership with an outside organisation, the third was established by a CVS but will shortly move to independence.

From a clean sheet

Tameside Third Sector Coalition, the CVS in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester, is a relatively new CVS. Established in late 2001, it was in the fortunate position to start from a ‘clean sheet’ and has taken a very integrated approach to all areas of its work, not just working with local BME communities. It has worked closely with the local Race Equality Council to ensure a partnership approach wherever possible,



and has recently made a joint bid for Connecting Communities funds.

A dedicated post, funded with Community Empowerment Fund money, is helping to build networks and improve networking between the different ethnic groups in Tameside. This day-to-day work is being supplemented by a number of informal, cultural exchange events which help to build bridges and understanding between communities. A more generic capacity building officer is working closely with the various South Asian communities and supporting refugees and asylum seekers from Africa.

The issue of refugees and asylum seekers was the subject of a joint meeting between the CVS, local newspaper editors, the Chief Executive of the Council and the Cabinet Deputy for Community Cohesion. It was obvious that the CVS had so much expertise to offer that direct links have been made between two local newspapers and the BME networks, ensuring positive column inches for these issues.

Side by side

Derby CVS has a long history of working with Black and Culturally Diverse (BCD) organisations. However, the availability of regeneration funding from the early 90s marked the start of more targeted work in this area. Equalities work has been progressed through needs analysis, action plans, monitoring, training and personal contact. Despite this development work some BCD groups felt their needs were not being met by the CVS and wanted to form their own support and representation service.

Derby CVS provided some funding towards a research project which mapped BCD activities in Derby, examined the issues affecting the growth of the sector and identified strategies for development. Derby Millennium Network (DMN) was formed by people active in the BCD voluntary sector to carry out this work and to develop it further.

The co-existence of Derby CVS and DMN has thrown up some interesting questions for the CVS. In what circumstances should it refer BCD groups to DMN and vice versa? The CVS had a continuing responsibility to ensure equality and diversity in its own work and deliver an appropriate and quality service to BCD groups. In reality, the two organisations often work in partnership. Groups which had used Derby CVS' services over the years wanted to continue to do so, but also wanted to access the specialised services offered by DMN.

The new relationship has not been without its challenges. The CVS has taken criticism on board and sought to learn from it. However, good personal relationships now exist between the two organisations and most importantly it seems that the BCD sector has benefitted. Groups still use CVS services but DMN represents their interests in other areas.

Close to independence

Sompriti (a Bengali word which broadly translates to 'harmony, collaboration and peace') is a project based at South Downs CVS (SDCVS) in Lewes, Sussex. A year long action research project in 1996-97, funded by the NHS Ethnic Health Unit,



looked at the needs of BME people living in a semi-rural area. A report *Get Better Soon* clearly established a need for workers dedicated to the BME communities and a steering committee was formed. However, it was not until June 1999 that Lottery money enabled a worker to be employed.

From this starting point, Sompriti has gone from strength to strength. Initially its work was limited to SDCVS' boundary – Lewes district – but today it covers all five local authority districts in East Sussex. From its small beginnings, its staff currently numbers 18 (mainly part-time) with their work encompassing capacity building, racial harassment, education and employment development. Its successes in these areas have meant that Sompriti has acted as a bridge between the CVS in East Sussex and the local BME groups, providing CVS with access to an ongoing and up-to-date information source on BME groups' activities and concerns.

Sompriti's relationship with South Downs CVS has been a close and collaborative one from the beginning. The project has been given the freedom to develop and be

creative by a Trustee Board which recognised the expertise which lay with Sompriti's staff. At the same time, Sompriti couldn't have got off the ground without the organisational infrastructure offered by the CVS. Plans are now underway for Sompriti to be independent of SDCVS by April 2005.

These case studies and snippets only skim the surface of the extensive and innovative work in which CVS across England are involved with the aim of more effectively engaging with BME communities. Individual articles in NACVS' monthly mailing, *Circulation*, seek to highlight good practice in greater depth under the thematic heading of 'equalities'. Individual CVS produce information examining particular projects in their newsletters or on their websites.

You can find links to all CVS websites via the NACVS website: www.nacvs.org.uk

When referring to local projects, we have chosen to reflect the language used by individual CVS, rather than opting for a consistency of style.

National Association of
Councils for Voluntary Service
Arundel Court
177 Arundel Street
Sheffield S1 2NU

Tel 0114 278 6636
Fax 0114 278 7004
Textphone 0114 278 7025
nacvs@nacvs.org.uk
www.nacvs.org.uk

Registered charity no. 1001635
Company registration no. 2575206

Designed by Emma Bridgeman
Good Practice Series edited by Nicola Mayer
Photographs by Nigel Barker
Printed by Broadley Printers, Goole

Printed September 2003