



Ethnic Minorities
& Youth Support
Team Wales

Tîm Cymorth
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig
& Ieuencid Cymru

All Wales BAME Engagement Programme

Impact of COVID 19 Crisis on BAME Communities

Topical Forum – BAME Pupils/Students & Children/Young People

8th April 10:30-11:30 via Zoom link

Attending: Rocio Cifuentes (Chair) - EYST, Ginger Wiegand - EYST, Jami Abramson - Race Alliance Wales (RAW), Robert Moore - NWREN, Patience Bentu- RCC, Jill Duarte - ACC, Ali Abdi - Citizens Cymru, Faith Walker, Norbert Mpu Mbutu - Congolese Group Newport, Brian Amos - Gwent Police, Youmna Mouhamad - Swansea University, Robin Benson - Swansea Council, Abu-Bakr Madden Al Shabazz , Sanjiv Vedi - Welsh Government, Samina Khan - Cardiff & Vale College, Sujatha Thaladi - The Mentor Ring, Paula Montez - Swansea Council, Dianne Hockenhull - Bishop Gore School, Rena Ahmed – EYST, Sophie De Marco – EYST, Zuzka Hilton - Polish Community Group Newport, Monica Frackowiak – Community Cohesion Team NE Wales, Pat Dunmore – Swansea CAB, Helen Myers, , Jalal Goni – EYST, Beth Thomas – Swansea Council, Sarah Bowen – Community Cohesion Officer for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Powys, Gary, Tripti Migeri, Michael Smith - Ceredigion Council, David Smith, PC Rae Ellis, Rhian Cook – Gwent Police & Crime Commissioner’s Office, Natalie Wint – Swansea University, Mohammed Hamayun, British Red Cross, Professor Marie Gillespie – Open University, Sarah Miller, Zenia Hamid, Shaheen Sutton, Rajma Begum - WCVA, Dee James, Kim Mamhende, Robert Muza – Newport Council, Ingrid Wilson -Community House Newport, Gary Robertshaw – North Wales Police, Abi Lasebikan - National Assembly for Wales

1: Introductions

Rocio invited participants to talk about the main issues affecting BAME people in Wales in light of the Covid 19 pandemic, as well as to offer and share solutions and best practice. The notes below are a combination of the notes taken and the group chat which was contributed to by participants while the meeting was live. Discussion topics have been themed for ease of understanding.

2: FOOD

Food Access – Free School Meals, Poverty

- Food banks across Swansea have seen numbers of clients decrease as there has been shortage of food to provide them. Extra additional support has been offered by Swansea Council.
- Universal credit claims have increased and the queues for processing have been known up to 40 thousand claims.
- There is much confusion over the discrepancy in how various local authorities are handling FSM and what's allowed.
- Chair encouraged attendees to share links for different local authorities in Wales regarding local food bank arrangements and community initiative in local areas.

3: EDUCATION

Digital Access – Laptops, Broadband

- There are massive concerns about lack of access to Wifi and suitable tech devices in order for pupils to access educational resources provided by the schools;
- Schools may have laptops that pupils can collect, but a lot of children don't have access to Wifi.
- There is a confusing lack of Government guidelines to local authorities on how to support community members/families who lack laptops/broadband to access educational resources.
- Access to online assessments is of particular importance for high school students given shifting grade assessment practices and not being able to access them is very problematic.
- When schools are using online platforms such as email or website updates to communicate information on free school meals or post weekly homework, if pupil doesn't have access to Wifi, they won't receive the communications from the school;
- There was consensus that current Covid 19 disruption offers opportunity to demand Government to consider Wifi an essential household utility and ask for it to be provided not only to asylum seekers but also to other low-income and digitally households as a matter of a human right.
- It was noted that the Government **must** provide laptops/tablets and Wifi access to student who are without them; otherwise it is in breach international law. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children must have access to education. As there is a legal obligation for authorities to provide laptops and WiFi, we mustn't ask the Government these things as a favour; we must demand that they execute their duty under law or risk having a lawsuit brought against them.

Barriers to accessing educational resources – Facilitating parents’ ability to home-school

- Language can be a huge barrier. Accessing school hubs and other online set ups is extremely difficult for parents who don’t speak English fluently.
- There is likely an under-reporting of parents’ concerns over lack of access to laptops and Wifi. Some schools report that they have had requests for laptops from families but not from BAME pupils/families. Are BAME parents not going back to the schools to make these queries?
- Citizens’ Cymru has distributed a letter via BAME community group networks encouraging families to go directly to children’s school if there isn’t a computer at home. They did so after receiving intelligence from community high schools in Cardiff that pupils/families were not requesting digital support, which the schools had equipment to provide.
- BAME community groups can facilitate communication between for parents and schools. BAME groups need to get the word to parents that they should be communicating with schools about any barriers to accessing educational materials. Likewise, BAME groups can facilitate that communication where parents are not able to themselves.

BAME bias in predicted grades Discrepancies in support from schools Discrepancies in definitions of ‘Key Workers’

- Education Minister Kirsty Williams has issued guidance to schools that this year’s grades should be based on a combination of predicted grades and assessments.
- Young people are extremely concerned about predicted grades, long proven to be associated with teacher bias, with teachers underestimating BAME pupil’s actual exam performance. Pupils are concerned that they won’t get the necessary grades to attend university.
- One parent shared her child’s previous experience of passing with As, Bs and Cs, despite being predicted to fail at GCSEs. This same child is having the same experience of low predicted grades and current situation is very distressing.
- There is a lack of understanding around the appeals procedure relating to predicted grades. It is imperative that clear, straight-forward, easily navigable and fair procedures are in place to appeal grades.
- Some young people who do not get sufficient grades to enter university in fall may drop out of university pathways altogether rather than repeat a year.

- This phenomenon may impact an entire cohort of BAME young people, with a risk of rise in NEET young people from BAME backgrounds in coming years.
- It is suggested that attendees at this meeting ask the Education Minister to issue guidance for educational institutions to mitigate bias against BAME pupils. A multi-agency open letter to English Education Minister, for instance, requested schools do equality impact assessments on predicted grades, by looking at overall predicted grades and then breaking them down via ethnicity to analyse if there are any discrepancies.
- Likewise, there is potential to challenge Universities to adapt the way in which they make decisions to fill student places – to ensure that they meet established diversity targets within departments and to assess in alternative mechanisms for recruitment decisions.
- Dr. Youmna Mouhamad, a researcher at Swansea University who runs a BME Engineering student network, asks for examples what can university do about student intake and would be interested in exploring practical actions universities can take and influencing recruitment officials.
- In the current context, universities may easily get distracted with their financial situations, particularly if travel bans and continued “lockdown” or perception of UK’s safety cause loss of revenue from international students.
- There are also concerns about how local authorities are defining key workers and whether families who qualify for key worker childcare are taking up that option. Are BAME families having their eligibility communicated to them and being made confident to consider the offer?
- Attendees are encouraged to share best practice and solutions and recommendations in the comments section of this Zoom meeting.

4: HOUSING

**Poverty – Poor Housing
Overcrowded/ Multi-generational
Lack of Outside Space**

- Social class plays a huge part in whether people have the privilege to socially distance or stay at home.
- BAME individuals may be in more cramped spaces with no gardens and young people in these situations are under more pressure to go outside the home.

- Disproportionate impact on Roma families living in crowded houses where in normal circumstances, adults would expect young people to be outside of the house in daytimes, but they are now required to stay indoors.
- Likewise, there will be a disproportionate impact on intergenerational households.
- Overcrowding will impact young people as they are unable to sit down and do some work.

5: HEALTH

Mental Health Impact Physical Health impact

- Anxiety is a key issue; many young people don't recognise the signs and need to be signposted.
- Some young people may not be very open about these issues and there must be a culturally sensitive way to deal with these issues.
- Cardiff wellbeing service on Whitchurch Road has a Facebook page that is producing regular guidance regularly on anxiety, but the information isn't available in different languages, so parents aren't aware of it.
- Young people who have put everything into preparing for high stakes exams to gain university entrance – there is a huge mental health impact as, all of a sudden, they now feel gaining that entrance is beyond their control.
- A high percentage of people being hospitalised are from a BAME background; this pandemic is having a disproportionate impact unfortunately.
- There is a cumulative negative impact as multiple negative factors add up for BAME individuals and communities.
- Example from volunteers with 'Friends of Sickle Cell and Thalassemia': Members are already marginalised are not getting information from consultants regarding their vulnerability. They haven't received any guidance/letters and are more disadvantaged if they have more regular hospital appointments and aren't aware of processes. She is frightened for her community at this time. "We are looking for ways to get them the information, but it shouldn't be on us. It really highlights how marginalised our communities are."
- Many on the frontline are BAME people ... lose/lose situation. They are at risk and disproportionately affected.
- Proposed solution: Encourage WG to highlight contributions of migrants and BAME people on COVID 19 frontline in its regular communications or as a specific campaign.

6: POLICE

Disproportionate use of Police Powers?

- Gwent Police have a campaign to stop young people going out with their friends. There is a local hashtag #StayinforGwent but there is potential to make this campaign Wales wide.
- A similar approach exists in Ceredigion and Powys, where they also aim to monitor tensions and de-escalate issues before they become problematic in communities. Suggested ways of working together.
- Gwent Police has a fortnightly community dial in chaired by the Chief Inspector where community members can dial in with any concerns.

7: Any other Issues/ Solutions? Next Steps?

Shielding vulnerable individuals: There are concerns that the letters about shielding sent by WG to vulnerable individuals have only gone out in English. Sanjiv VEDI will check the process if someone requests the letter in another language. Doctors of the world website has NHS Coronavirus guidelines in 43 languages:

<https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/coronavirus-information/>. Likewise, Public Health Wales has shielding information in different languages and also in audible version: <https://covid.reciteme.com/nhs-protect/>

Good news from African Community Centre: Recently received funding for counselling for refugees and asylum seekers.

Additional potential solutions

- BAME led media channels which publish content in multiple languages.
- Involve people in BAME communities. "This is a challenging period, but we are part of the solution. Let us work together to come out with positive solution."
- Keep our eyes open to signifiers of hate crime. Point made that in the police community tensions dial-up in Swansea, the community support officer reported that hate crime has significantly dropped during this period. Though that is good news, there is a risk reporting has gone down.
- Find additional allies with power who have common cause and work with them- for instance in trade unions and Commissioners such as Young Person's Commissioner or Future Generations Commissioner (who has power to request response to the

question to public bodies about where their priorities are – and can make specific requests about policy guidelines or lack thereof).

- There is a range of funding opportunities for community groups in response to Covid-19. Anyone who wants to be on Rocio's email list can drop their details in a chat here.

Next steps

- Rocio will draft a letter highlighting issues and evidence and making recommendations to Education Minister Kirsty Williams. She will do this quickly and circulate it with people in this meeting for comments and to agree to. It is imperative that we get the letter to the Education Minister quickly.
- This group will have a follow up meeting in 2-3 weeks – the date will be shared asap. It can't be at this same time on a Wednesday. Will need a different slot.
- EYST will share notes from this meeting along with a transcript of the chat in the next day or so.