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Influencing policy and decision makers...
Clinks is represented on a number of policy forums including:
- NOMS Faith Alliance Steering Group
- NOMS Stakeholder Forum
- NOMS VCS Advisory Group
- Third Sector Commissioning Advisory Group
- South East Probation Women Offenders Strategy Group
- Service User Forum
- Skills for Justice England Cross Sector Forum
- National Body of Black Prisoner Support Groups Steering Committee

Provide information, support and training...
- Dedicated staff to help and advise
- Weekly e-bulletin with CJS and VCS news and events
- Quarterly newsletter with news, views and developments
- Various training courses across the country
- Training Packs and resources
- Conferences and Events
- Hosts Grantfinder

Malcolm Thomson
NOMS VCS Engagement Project 07977 221 349
- Works with NOMS Voluntary Sector Unit
- Enhance relationship between service commissioners and providers
- Provides VCS perspective on key NOMS strategy
- Promotes Compact, diversity, monitoring and effectiveness of services, and high risk offenders

Lynne Laidlaw
London VCS Development Project 07977 208 462
- Works with existing network of PiRR contacts
- Helps to influence policy affecting the VCS
- Supports the VCS to deliver services effectively
- Exploring constructive partnership work
- Includes a focus on the BME sector and small organisations

Martin Sollars
South West VCS Development Project 07717 666 090
- Supporting the development of NOMS in the region
- Developing the capacity of the offender-related VCS
- Promoting collaboration partnerships
- Working across the statutory, private and voluntary sectors
- Cover regional, sub-regional and local collaboration and service delivery

Nathan Dick
Community Chaplaincy Project 07870 384 569
- Partnership with Prison Chaplaincy HQ and NOMS
- Developing Community Chaplaincy work in communities and prisons
- Building the capacity of existing projects and developing new and innovative schemes
- Creating national networks and building skills for a prosperous future for community chaplaincies

Katie Aston
Service User Task Force 020 7608 2503
- Opportunity for offenders, ex-offenders and their families to say how best they can contribute to policies and services that can affect them.
- Will culminate in recommendations to policy makers both inside and outside government

Joe Gardham
Clinks Communications Network 07973 378 909
- Facilitating a network of over 2,000 contacts working in Criminal Justice
- Information sharing, news and updates specific to the offender-related VCS
- Weekly “Light Lunch” e-bulletin
- Training and Events
- One to One support and visits
- Promoting and sharing good practice and innovation
There continues to be a disproportionate representation of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in the criminal justice system (CJS). In this edition of Clinks News, we focus on this issue and ask what can be done?

BME communities are over-represented in relation to stop and search, charged with more serious offences for similar behaviour and given longer sentences for equivalent offences to their white counterparts. This has contributed to the current situation where, although only comprising almost 9% (2001 census) of the population of England and Wales, BME offenders make up 20% (HMPS 2004/05) of the prison population.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons undertook a thematic inspection of race relations in prisons and found that BME prisoners experienced what is best described as covert racism in the ways in which they were treated. Although recognising that there had been considerable improvements, the findings of a number of focus groups – conducted as part of the inspections – confirmed that BME prisoners felt they were not given equal access to treatment and services and that their daily interaction with prison staff was unhelpful and sometimes hostile.

These issues continue following release. The difficulties and barriers for all released prisoners are well documented, but the added problems of discrimination based on race and ethnicity make resettlement for BME prisoners even more problematic. A lack of awareness of language and cultural barriers by public sector agencies, coupled with outright discrimination on the part of the general population, means that the extent to which BME offenders experience racism and prejudice in the community and society as a whole is unquestionable.

The experience of BME groups in the CJS is integrally linked to the barriers they face in society. BME communities are often located in the most deprived areas of the country. They experience poor levels of public service which result in low levels of educational attainment, high levels of unemployment, substandard housing and poor health. They are more likely to be victims of crime and suffer disproportionately from hate crime and other violence.

But Clinks and its partner organisations working with BME communities can point to examples of meaningful, successful and effective work done by (often small) BME organisations. They achieve successful outcomes for their clients despite the barriers they face. For instance:

- BME VCS organisations can feel unfairly treated by funders who hold stereotypical perceptions of the way in which they work.
- There is a lack of awareness of the challenges facing the sector – particularly with regard to organisational capacity – by both funders and service users.
- Funders focus on service delivery and don’t recognise the significant role BME groups have in building social capital and social inclusion.
- Small voluntary organisations, particularly BME groups, find it difficult to access funding – especially core funding.

A recent House of Commons report (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmhaff/181/18107.htm#a42) on young black people in the CJS states that voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations are closer to their communities and engage with local issues more effectively than statutory agencies. Acknowledging that VCS organisations are already providing solutions to the problems of young black people in the CJS, the report notes that lack of sustainable funding hampers the efforts to address this issue. Encouragingly, the authors recommend that “…adequate funding… consistent over time” form a key part of the Government’s strategy in this area and, in particular, to ensure that smaller VCS organisations are also included in funding considerations. We would like to see this principle replicated in the NOMS Commissioning Strategy.

With our partners – particularly the National Body of Black Prisoner Support Groups – and in consultation with users, we have identified key concerns and needs of the BME VCS. This includes the need for:

- CJS-specific capacity building, training and discussion forums;
- Guidance on the new funding regime related to commissioning;
- Guidance on consortia and partnership building and the chance to explore such opportunities;
- Producing and sharing of evidence of outcomes and good practice;
- The opportunity to communicate and their voice be heard with statutory authorities and build an understanding and appreciation of the diversity within the BME communities.

This edition of Clinks News seeks the views of VCS professionals working with ethnic minority offenders and their families. They share with us examples of good practice and highlight areas and issues that remain ignored in relation to improving service delivery to ethnic minority offenders.

These articles are supported by NOMS and HMPS detailing how they intend to improve services for ethnic minority offenders at a strategic and operational level.
Prisons are large and complex institutions. It is important that voluntary and community sector staff working in them have a good working knowledge of policies and procedures, in order to work effectively and safely.

The Prison Service provides a range of induction and training programmes for their staff, but it is often the case that voluntary and community sector staff delivering services to prisoners are less well equipped and informed.

The Yorkshire and Humberside HMPS Area Manager, Tony Hassall, along with the Clinks Director, Clive Martin, identified that the voluntary and community sector in the region would benefit from access to training in four particular areas: diversity, safer custody, health and safety and prison awareness.

On 11 July, an event was organised by HM Prison Service, Serco and Clinks where these issues were addressed by a relevant HMPS training officer.

This event was an excellent example of cross-sector partnerships in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, with public, private and voluntary and community sectors working together. As a national organisation supporting the offender-related voluntary and community sector, Clinks was ideally placed to market the event to delegates and provide expert event planning and administrative support.

In addition to the specific training sessions, best practice of how to engage with the voluntary and community sector inside an establishment was provided by the VCS Co-ordinators from HMP New Hall (Lindsay Blenkharn) and HMP Doncaster (Geraldine Smith).

Lisa McBride, from HMPS Area Office, co-ordinated the event and ensured that the day was very well received, with all delegates evaluating the day as 'good' or 'excellent'.

A planning group has identified a range of other useful events, which might include:

- Basic prison awareness;
- Drugs in prison;
- Effective inductions;
- Assertiveness when working with prisoners;
- A prisoner’s journey through the prison system.

The full report can be downloaded from www.clinks.org/askham.aspx. To discuss holding similar events in your region or establishment, please contact Clinks Communications Co-ordinator, Joe Gardham. E-mail joe.gardham@clinks.org or call 01904 673970.

Partnership brings successful training

Volunteering with offenders in the community

Clinks recently ran its popular Volunteering with Offenders in the Community course in Cambridge. This train-the-trainer course provides participants with the knowledge, expertise and skills to deliver training to volunteers.

The course is delivered by highly experienced freelance trainers who provide motivation and techniques for delivering training to your volunteers. The resource includes written materials, hand-outs and role plays, supported by sharing experiences and concerns. It is suitable for training new and existing volunteers.

Most delegates believed it was more user-friendly than other courses available. Although they had all worked with offenders in the community, delegates valued the learning and presentation style, saying they would use the course to compliment current training and that it would help in the selection of suitable volunteers.

Since attending the course, participants have begun disseminating the learning across their organisations. The resource pack has become a constant point of reference and training sessions have been set up and successfully delivered to new and existing volunteers.

For information on up-coming courses visit www.clinks.org/events.aspx. Resource Packs available from info@clinks.org.

“Although I’ve worked with offenders for 9 years in communities, I learnt so much in a day.”
All change at the top

Ministry of Justice


At its launch, Lord Falconer, Lord Chancellor and first Secretary of State for Justice, said: “The Ministry of Justice provides the opportunity for the whole justice system to work together better than ever before. The justice system is here to serve the public and we must give the public the system it deserves. Justice needs a Ministry of Justice.” Since then, Jack Straw has been appointed as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State of Justice.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

On 28 June 2007, the DfES split into three new departments: The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR).

Department for Children, Schools and Families

The Department will raise standards so that more children and young people reach expected levels, lifting more children out of poverty and re-engaging disaffected young people. In addition to its direct responsibilities, the department will lead work across Government to improve outcomes for children, including work on children's health and child poverty. This department has joint responsibility, with the Ministry of Justice, for offenders under the age of 18.

New head for voluntary sector team

Clinks would like to welcome the new head of the NOMS Partnerships Unit, Voluntary and Community Sector Team, Tina Jenkins, to her new post in September 2007.

The NOMS Partnerships Unit, Voluntary and Community Sector Team, has the overview on NOMS policy and actions in relation to the third sector (maximising third sector contribution to reducing re-offending), acting as a driver of change working with the voluntary and community sector, senior managers, ministers and across government.

Tina’s role includes working directly with NOMS regional commissioners and ensuring constructive relationships with the Third Sector. She is currently leading on work to co-ordinate and deliver a new NOMS Third Sector Action Plan and contributing to a wider Ministry of Justice Third Sector Strategy, engaging with the development of commissioning and procurement policy and delivery to ensure that both documents reflect the needs of the Third Sector.

The Voluntary and Community Sector Team provides the key interface with the voluntary and community sector, including management of advisory and stakeholder forums and Tina leads for NOMS in their work with the Office of the Third Sector (OTS), ensuring our commissioners and providers benefit from OTS programmes.

“Before joining the Home Office in 2002, I worked for 18 years in the voluntary and community sector, including positions as assistant director of a large health and community centre and as CEO of a national charity,” said Tina. “I have also been a member of various cross-sector working groups at local, regional and national level and a trustee of local and national voluntary and community sector infrastructure agencies.

Within the Home Office Active Communities Directorate (now the Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office) I previously led a team to create a cross-government strategy and programmes to build the capacity of the voluntary and community sector.

Since 2006, I have worked in the Commissioning and Partnerships Directorate in NOMS, leading on co-commissioning and, more recently, the Faith Alliance and third sector issues in relation to commissioning.”

In 2002 there were more African Caribbean entrants to prison (over 11,500) than there were to UK universities (around 8,000).
Criminal justice briefings

Imprisonment for Public Protection Sentences (IPP’s)

These are effectively life sentences for persons convicted of serious violent or sexual offences for which the maximum sentence is ten years or more and where the judge assesses that the offender poses a risk to public safety.

The difficulty with these sentences lies in the setting of the tariff (i.e. the minimum term to be spent in custody to satisfy the punishment element of the sentence). For instance, if an offender is convicted of grievous bodily harm the determinate sentence might be 3 years. But, if the judge imposes an IPP, then the offender cannot be released until their risk to the public is assessed as being significantly reduced. However, the tariff for the offence might be set at 3 years and it would be expected that the offender would be a candidate for release on license at any point after that, as long as the risk they posed had been reduced or eliminated.

If however, there are no opportunities for the offender to address their risk factors prior to the tariff date, then they remain in custody until they have completed whatever courses, programmes, etc., that are considered relevant to their offending behaviour. This was the background to the case in Hull, where the prisoner successfully sued the Government for not providing the opportunities to address his risk factors and hence he had to remain in prison long past his tariff date.

These sentences are contributing significantly to the rising prison population, with over 3,000 inmates currently subject to IPP’s.

Early Release Scheme

Prisoners can be released up to 18 days prior to their normal release date if they pose no risk to the public. They are subject to license conditions but have had little chance to plan for their resettlement.

There has been an anomaly regarding their access to benefits in that they cannot ‘sign on’ until they have finished their sentences. Hence they are often having to rely on a discharge grant, which is nowhere near adequate for their needs for the 4 week (and sometimes more) period between release and their access to benefits.

The Government have come up with a couple of short-term solutions that have proved to be inadequate and inconsistently administered. Some offenders released under this scheme have re-offended and been returned to prison. This scheme had an immediate effect in lowering the prison population by about 1500 or so, but the numbers have recovered since its implementation.

Additional capacity

There have been two tenders issued to design, build and manage new prisons. It will take well over a year for the bids to be submitted, assessed and for the work to be completed and the prisons become operational. This is further evidence that it will not be possible for the Government to build its way out of the overcrowding crisis. It needs to be remembered that a significant proportion of the 80,000 currently in prison are sharing two to a cell and there is still a lot of slopping out going on.

Prison, Probation and the VCS

NOMS has recently reported on the progress made by the National Probation Service towards achieving the target of spending 5% of their operating budget on voluntary and community sector services. A small minority of services achieved the 5%. It is very unlikely that any will achieve the 10% target for 2007/08.

The budget settlement for probation is extremely tight and this has put added pressure on achieving the target for 2007/08. Any large scale outsourcing (e.g. accredited programmes) will inevitably involve large scale Transfer of...
Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (known as TUPE) arrangements. Also, the specifications for the delivery of the accredited programmes mean that there is little if any scope for innovation.

This is a stark example of transfer rather than transform. There are probation areas that have very positive track records in relation to commissioning services from the voluntary and community sector. These are now focusing on the importance of relationship building, etc., as being the priority at this point. Significant levels of outsourcing and commissioning of services by the Probation Service will not take place in the short term.

The Prison Service does not have a target for VCS spend and, worse than that, it has been confirmed that there is no way of obtaining accurate information about the level of expenditure on VCS services – and of course HMPS has to find £60 million of savings in this financial year.

Finally, there was the recent industrial action over pay for prison officers. In addition to its impact on prison regimes, any improvements in pay (however justifiable) will inevitably place added pressure on prison budgets and further constrain the delivery of resettlement and related services.

Liberal Democrat peer, LORD DHOLAKIA, speaks out on the disproportionate number of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in the criminal justice system. Here’s what he told Clinks News...

There is ample research evidence to confirm that the treatment of BME groups in the criminal justice system has been less than fair. Over the last 15 years, there has been considerable investment in the training of service providers in the criminal justice system.

However the fact remains that one quarter of women in custody are black, and that 17-18% of the male prison population are from BME groups. The facts are made all the more telling because they make up just 7% of the UK’s population.

The question we must ask ourselves is: Why have we produced this discrepancy of over-representation of the BME community in the criminal justice system?

We need to ensure that there is adequate representation of BME groups, not as victims but as part of the service provider. It must be realised that we repeatedly failed to make the target of recruiting BME representatives into many parts of our criminal justice system.

Secondly, offender management and rehabilitation organisations are vital in reducing BME prison numbers. Whilst there are both private sector and charitable organisations which take equality seriously, there are some whose record is poor. We must scrutinise the equality and diversity practice as a priority, and we should make this a legal requirement.

In addition to this, any racial stereotyping could be detrimental to offenders. A focus on recruitment of BME representation into the criminal justice system and a legal requirement to put all agencies’ equality practice under check is what we need to tackle this issue.

Educated in India and Tanzania, Lord Dholakia came to Britain to study at Brighton Technical College. From 1976 he served as member of the Commission for Racial Equality and has been involved in the Sussex Police Authority, Police Complaints Authority and Howard League for Penal Reform. He is the current President of NACRO. From 1997 to 2002 he served as a Liberal Democrat whip in the Lords, and since 2002 he has been a Home Affairs Spokesman. In November 2004 he was elected joint Deputy Leader in the House of Lords. dholakian@parliament.uk

Too many BME people in the system, says peer
Combating racism

Clinks is working to address the racism experienced by black and minority ethnic (BME) individuals in the criminal justice system. The issues arising from the investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, and the inquiry into the HM Prison Service in relation to the murder of Zahid Mubarek, reinforced the importance of promoting equality and anti-discrimination for all organisations working with offenders. The rates of stop and search, arrest, conviction, and sentencing for members of the BME community are hugely disproportionate to their presence in the general population. This discrimination is also reflected in the lack of funding and support for BME voluntary and community organisations generally and especially for those working with offenders. We believe that all criminal justice agencies should ensure that their human resources practice, and their service delivery arrangements address the factors contributing to racist outcomes. Clinks will work with other voluntary and community organisations and with the public and private sectors to promote racial equality.

The experience of BME groups in the criminal justice system is integrally linked to the barriers they face in society. BME communities often live in the most deprived areas of the country. They experience poor levels of public service which result in low levels of educational attainment, high levels of unemployment, substandard housing, and unsatisfactory health outcomes. They are more likely to be victims of crime and suffer disproportionately from hate crime and other violence.

Support for BME organisations

Clinks serves on the steering group of National Body of Black Prisoner Support Groups (NBBPSG) and with NBBPSG jointly manages a project to increase the capacity of the BME sector. We worked together with NBBPSG in the Southwest Region to help deliver a capacity building ChangeUp project that helped to connect the BME voluntary and community sector with the prison and probation services in the region.

Clinks will seek opportunities to assist BME voluntary and community organisations to enhance their capacity to deliver services and to influence policy decisions on a local, regional and national level. Through its involvement with the NOMS Voluntary Sector Advisory Group and other communication networks, we will ensure that NOMS maintains a central focus on the needs of BME offenders and the organisations that support them and their families.

Commissioning policy and practice

Clinks is currently developing commissioning and procurement practice for NOMS, Prison and Probation commissioners to encourage them to invest in BME voluntary and community organisations that seek to work with BME offenders in particular. We also recommend that generic voluntary and community organisations are required to comply with race equality legislation including implementing robust monitoring arrangements that evidence fair and equal access to services.

Clinks works to identify positive practice and promote this in the public, voluntary, and private sectors. ‘Get Linked’ was published by Clinks in 2004 and provides practical guidance for staff working in prisons in engaging with BME voluntary and community organisations. More recently we worked together with NBBPSG to produce a ‘Good Practice Guide for Working with the BME VCS’ to enable public sector organisations to work effectively with BME organisations. Wherever possible we seek to ensure that HMPS and Probation Service policies and practice relating to voluntary sector engagement enhance the capacity and opportunities for BME groups to work with prisoners.
GODFREY ALLEN, Chief Executive of the Apex Trust, says developments based on good practice are key to successful outcomes in tackling discrimination in the criminal justice system.

Apex Trust has for decades supported thousands of offenders. We’ve helped them find their way into legitimate employment or self-employment, improve their educational and vocational attainment, find housing and move away from a life of crime.

The work is highly specialised and takes place in prisons, young offenders institutions and in the community. A detailed knowledge of the legislation which governs the rehabilitation of offenders is essential. The ability to address (often sceptical) employers concerns – and the wider public’s concerns – around knowingly dealing with offenders is also a prerequisite to obtaining successful outcomes. These achievements are life-changing for the ex-offenders themselves and hopefully their families, friends and associates.

Regrettfully, work in this area is characterised by one or more of the following: small scale service provision; funding fragility; institutional marginalisation; limited involvement of black and minority ethnic (BME) beneficiaries in the design, development and evaluation of the work; limited comparative impact and cost benefit analysis assessments.

Examples of good practice need to be contingent on those characteristics mentioned earlier not being in place. Sustainability and ease of replication – two hallmarks of good practice – also depend on the absence of those characteristics.

I expand the definition of the word ‘ignored’ to include the paying of lip-service to the issues. The barriers to better service delivery faced by BME offenders have the inherent dimensions of race, ethnicity, culture, etc., to add to their complexity, when compared to non-BME offenders in society.

The over-representation of BME people serving sentences, as victims and perpetrators of crime are well publicised. The absence, by my definition, of examples of good practice of work that address these – and other related issues – is a key barrier to better service delivery.

But there are other issues on the, ‘pay lip-service’, list:

- BME people need to be better represented, in leadership roles, as part of the solution and not the problem within government, its agencies and other providers of services to BME offenders.
- All offenders remain subject to the outdated requirements of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Current criminal record checking arrangements, police disclosure practices and data protection requirements have created a confusing framework – when interpreted alongside the Act – for rehabilitating offenders of any kind.

BME offenders are disproportionately affected by these issues which undermine the effectiveness of services delivered to this group.

Godfrey Allen became Chief Executive of Apex Trust in 1995. An experienced and respected public service manager, he has over twenty-seven years experience within the charitable, private and public sectors. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Directors, Chartered Institute of Management and the RSA. He began his career in 1980 as a race equality officer in Southall, West London, in the aftermath of the inner city riots of 1979. Godfrey is a regular radio, press and television contributor on management, crime and current affairs. He also serves a local magistrate and holds a masters degree in public service management from South Bank University.
Director of Female Welfare Prisoners Project and Hibiscus, OLGA HEAVEN, says BME and foreign national women have had rough justice in the criminal justice system, but there's hope for improvement if we build on the work of the best practitioners.

Over the past twenty years I have seen the problems of black and minority ethnic (BME) and foreign national women increase significantly within the criminal justice system. But I have also seen genuine and concerted attempts by dedicated practitioners to come to terms with, and provide solutions for, these problems.

Throughout the criminal justice system – from the official in the Home Office and Inspectorate of Prisons, to governors, probation officers and many others – practitioners have attempted to increase their knowledge of, and sensitivity to, other cultures and traditions, and so improve their practice.

Female Welfare Prisoners Project/Hibiscus have assessed this process. We've acted as catalysts, providing information and designing programmes of good practice tailored to the special needs of the women we work with, in particular foreign nationals.

Although the consensus of the women is that sentences are arbitrary, inconsistent, unjust and too long for first-time offenders, the fact is that sympathetic members of the judiciary do take Hibiscus’ input into account. The same is true for the Prison Service, once the women are sentenced. Seven prisons are currently in partnership with Hibiscus to provide services specifically tailored for the foreign nationals in their custody.

Where ethnic minorities are sparsely represented, staff are in greater need of sensitivity training in cultural, ethnic, religious, national and racial differences.

Some of the services Hibiscus provides include:
- Helping the women maintain contact with loved ones at home;
- Counselling, through structured meetings and discussion groups;
- Practical support to dependants;
- Liaison with immigration, police, customs, courts, probation and other relevant services.

There are many ways to help improve the system, including:
- More events to publicise the problems faced by black and foreign national women in prisons and place these on the political agenda.
- Focus on good practice on race related issues in the British criminal justice system, with a special emphasis on first-time and young offenders.
- Recognition of the diversity of life in the UK and compulsory training in sensitivity to racial, ethnic, cultural and religious differences for all practitioners.

Olga Heaven MBE began social work in Tower Hamlets in 1976 and realised there was a big gap around services for women in prison. Olga set up the Female Welfare Prisoners Project (FWPP), to work with young women in the prison system, in 1986. Hibiscus was set up in the 90’s to identify the problem of drugs mules at source – first in Nigeria, then later in Jamaica, winning the overall prize at the 2006 Charity Awards.
There’s reason to keep faith in progress to support black and minority ethnic prisoners and their families, says FARIDA ANDERSON, MBE, Chief Executive Officer of POPS.

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) as an organisation, and myself on a personal level, have campaigned for many years to raise the profile of the specific needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) offenders in the criminal justice system. And for many years the noise we were collectively making went largely unheard or perhaps ignored.

But do not lose faith – I am proud to say that, from my perspective over the last few years, there have been a number of important achievements. Many of these have, and will in the future, positively impact on BME offenders in the criminal justice system. Important initiatives include:

Black Prisoner Support Project
POPS Black Prisoner Support Project (BPSP) was set up in 1996 after a family member – receiving support from our Family Services – realised the urgent need for specific support for black offenders. Over the last 10 years, BPSP has developed to meet the needs of its beneficiaries and has established mentoring, casework and group work services:
- Advisory functions, via representation on the HM Prison Service Race Action Group, HM Prison Service Performance Board and IMPACT Ascend Project;
- Innovative projects, such as Routes2roots, group work courses for BME prisoners, resettlement leaflets and other printed materials.

National Body of Black Prisoners Support Groups
The National Body of Black Prisoners Support Groups (NBBPSG) was established in 1998 from various groups of practitioners in the criminal justice system that worked directly with BME offenders. They came together to support one another in the delivery of services. NBBPSG addresses the isolation experienced by these organisations and works to create a positive and supportive environment in which to tackle the issues affecting BME offenders.

HM Prison Service Race Equality Advisory Group
This group consists of members of voluntary and community sector, private and public sector agencies coming together on a bi-monthly basis to review and advise the Prison Service Director General on any issues surrounding race and equality.

Commission for Race Equality (CRE) audit of HM Prison Service
The audit concluded that HM Prison Service was institutionally racist, a point which the Service was quick to respond to, acknowledge and accept.

A long way to go
Unfortunately, there are still a number of issues that have gone untouched. Many of these boil down, in simple terms, to integrity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. In my experience, both agencies and individuals working with or on behalf of BME offenders also face racism and associated barriers that BME offenders face within the criminal justice system. This adds to the already difficult and challenging environment we are working in and makes me to ask “Are we not passed this yet?” How do we expect to provide for BME offenders if we still do not understand or respect the diverse world we live in?

At this point, raising issues that affect BME offenders, BME offender support groups and the BME workforce has to be a priority for those working in the criminal justice system. But I must repeat that acceptance, by the Prison Service, of the existence of institutional racism, has been a major step forward. There is still a long way to go to ensure that policy is transferred into practice and we continue to strive towards ensuring equality of service for BME offenders in the criminal justice system.

Farida Anderson established POPS in 1988. POPS now runs outreach services in 7 prison Visitor Centres, Family Services via 10 Family Link Workers, Prisoners Families Helpline and Black Prisoner Services. In 1998 she was invited to join the Prison Service Headquarters Race Relations Advisory Group and several Race Relations Management Teams at various prisons. Farida has been a member of the National Probation Service and is a Board Member of NACRO. In 2004, Farida was invited to become strategic advisor on the IMPACT project North West. She chairs the National Body of Black Prisoners Support Groups. Farida was awarded an MBE for services to prisoners’ families in the Queen’s New Year Honours List, 2000.
Equality and diversity are core principles for NOMS, says MARJORIE HARRIS, Head of Equality and Diversity, NOMS.

NOMS aspires to be a flagship for best practice in equality and diversity, driving up standards across the criminal justice system and moving beyond simple legal compliance. We will only achieve our core business – of addressing diverse offender needs to reduce re-offending and protect the public – if we exemplify these principles.

We are taking this forward with strengthened governance arrangements and resources devoted to enable us to comply with the public equality duties. Under these arrangements Helen Edwards, Chief Executive of NOMS, chairs an Equality and Diversity Stakeholder Engagement Board to enable stakeholders and partners to shape and influence this agenda. Julie Taylor, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships, is leading a Task Force to drive this agenda at national level. At regional level, every partnership plan includes an equalities focus, and we are funding pathfinders in the North West and East Midlands to address this within our commissioning and partnership arrangements.

We are also working at national, regional and local levels to engage the black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary sector. The ChangeUp Programme gave us an early opportunity to fund SEED 4 BME Offenders through the National Body of Black Prisoners Support Groups. This sought to improve services and infrastructure for the BME voluntary sector in the North West and South West, and its publications include a mapping report and Good Practice Guide (see back page). At the local level, we are aiming to achieve greater diversity of provision through the changes in the Offender Management Act, which allows the local boards and Probation Trusts to sub-contract increasing amounts of interventions and other services to providers that can demonstrate effectiveness and value.

Equality and diversity will be integral to the new NOMS Third Sector Action Plan, being developed for consultation in late November, including over-coming barriers and demonstrating effectiveness when working with diverse organisations. Our grants programme, which has now moved to a three year cycle, has always given priority to applications from groups supporting BME and women offenders. A consultation paper on the contribution faith based organisations can make will be out shortly, and we are considering how to ensure BME communities are properly represented among volunteers working with offenders.

Our work will only make a real impact if a collaborative approach is taken across government. NOMS is working, with others, to help make this happen. This includes a new offender health strategy to ensure equality of access, and taking forward the NOMS Drugs Strategy and Peer Support Policy. In November we begin consultation on a new three year cross Government Strategic Plan for reducing re-offending, to take forward new shared targets that focus on safer communities and social exclusion. The consultation will enable us to review our work with the voluntary and community sector and in relation to diversity and identify good practice to date and challenges for the future.

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was established in 2004 with the primary purpose of reducing reoffending. NOMS' work includes local partnership through Regional Offender Managers (ROMS), commissioning of services to offenders, end-to-end offender management, and the pathways out of reoffending. More information on NOMS can be found at: www.noms.homeoffice.gov.uk
In January 2007 a number of significant changes were made to the structure of the Prison Service’s Race Equality Action Group (REAG), the group responsible for taking forward and driving the Service’s work on race equality issues for prisoners, reports SORAYA COTWAL, Community Engagement Manager for HMPS.

The overall purpose of REAG is to ensure the Service meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different racial groups. REAG assesses Prison Service functions, activities and policies for any adverse impact on race equality. It also takes forward recommendations from Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), HMCIP reports and monitors progress of HMPS Mubarek Inquiry recommendations. In order to support establishments, REAG provides practical assistance and advice to establishments and to policy leads.

One of the most significant changes to the group was the creation of a new team to focus specifically on community engagement. The purpose of the team is to create, develop and identify suitable and appropriate community engagement models for the service. Community engagement forms an important part of delivering race equality in prison and is a key strategic priority for the Prison Service Management Board.

What do we mean when we talk of community engagement?

Community engagement is the way that organisations such as the Prison Service, who have only partial knowledge or understanding of the differences that various prisoner communities present, can increase their own knowledge base and improve service provision. By interacting with these groups we can begin to develop an understanding of the needs and issues facing members of these communities, as well as increasing the organisation’s awareness and duty to respond to these.

Community engagement is identified as a way of prisons being able to address the needs of their diverse population by working with those within the outside community who have expertise and knowledge of identified groups such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, or gypsies and travellers as examples. Engagement can be a two way process which can seen as a way of the community getting to know more about what we do and us getting to know more about the community within which a prison sits. This is also in conjunction with the many different and diverse communities that are part of the larger geographical community.

Specifically the team aims to:

- Enhance our service provision to BME prisoners by reaching out to external communities in order to provide expertise and support.
- Provide an independent overview of processes and procedures specifically in relation to the experiences of BME offenders whilst in custody.
- Develop meaningful and sustainable relationships with external organisations that will provide advice and expertise on race equality issues.
- Increase the Service’s awareness and knowledge of BME communities.
- Promote the work being undertaken in meeting the needs of BME offenders with the wider external community as well as raise awareness and increase understanding of the Service’s work to a wider audience.
- Contribute to the wider work of all Criminal Justice Agencies in increasing trust and confidence in the work of the Criminal Justice System overall, specifically with those from BME communities who are disproportionally over represented within it.
- Build on the areas of work already being undertaken by the prison by focusing on providing support to BME offenders whose needs may vary to those of the majority prison population and for which generic services are not appropriate or able to meet those needs.

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The issues faced by individuals from Gypsy and travelling communities within the criminal justice system are varied and complex, says SHERRYLYN TOURAY, Operations Manager for Ormiston Children and Families Trust.

Sadly, despite being some of the oldest minority ethnic communities in the UK, there is still a lack of understanding about the cultures and the issues faced by Gypsies and travelling communities.

Prisoners from Gypsy and travelling communities obviously face the issues experienced by others, including those from other BME communities. These include the need to access information, managing being away from children and families and managing the stress of imprisonment – which arguably is compounded for those with no experience of living in brick built accommodation. However this is often aggravated by other issues such as the lack of literacy in some sections of the communities – which impacts on the ability to keep in contact with relatives, and families being able to negotiate the visiting system.

Direct racism towards individuals from Gypsy and travelling communities is one of the last ‘acceptable’ forms of racism, with individuals and the media continuing to reinforce negative and damaging stereotypes. The criminal justice system is perceived, and often experienced, as being stacked against those understood to be nomadic. These stereotypes contribute to the overuse of custody for Gypsy and travelling communities given that they are less likely to be granted bail or tagging opportunities, and are often assessed as unsuitable for community based sentences.

The Ormiston Children and Families Trust, via its direct practice and its Traveller Consultancy Service, has been working with individuals from Gypsy and traveller communities for over five years. Information about its work and services is available from www.ormiston.org/consultancy or by contacting consultancy@ormiston.org
Equality united

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was launched on 1 October, bringing together the work of the three previous equality commissions: Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), in a single new body.

A single commission will have many benefits, including:

- Bringing together equality experts and act as a single source of information and advice – instead of the current separate organisations;
- Being a single point of contact for individuals, businesses and the voluntary and public sectors;
- Helping businesses by promoting awareness of equality issues, which may prevent costly court and tribunal cases;
- Tackling discrimination on multiple levels – some people may face more than one type of discrimination;
- Giving older people a powerful national body to tackle age discrimination.

CEHR’s Mission Statement...

The CEHR will:

- Be the independent advocate for equality and human rights in Britain. The CEHR aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights.
- Challenge prejudice and disadvantage, and promote the importance of human rights.
- Be a statutory body established under the Equality Act 2006.
- Enforce equality legislation on age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender status, and encourage compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998.
- Work to bring about effective change, using its influence and authority to ensure that equality and human rights remain at the top of agendas for government, employers and society. It will campaign for social change and justice.
- Act directly and by fostering partnerships at local, regional and national levels. It will stimulate debate on equality and human rights.
- Give advice and guidance, including to businesses, the voluntary and public sectors, and also to individuals.
- Develop an evidence based understanding of the causes and effects of inequality for people across Britain, and will be an authoritative voice for reform.

Delivering at the SHARP end

Services to the children and families of offenders generally, and prisoners in particular, are often critical to successful resettlement and rehabilitation.

For most people, the criminal justice system is a mysterious and even threatening world, and if a member of your family is caught up in this environment, it can be incredibly stressful. Pressure on the families of offenders can lead to the break up of relationships and in many cases the complete severing of contact between the imprisoned parent and their children.

Support Help and Advice for Relatives and Friends of Prisoners (SHARP) is a Shropshire-based initiative, receiving referrals from throughout the UK. It began in 1998 as a telephone help line and has since developed a comprehensive range of services delivered at key points in the criminal justice process – from courts to prison and into the community. As well as regular clinics in prisons in the West Midlands, SHARP has established a presence in magistrates courts in Stafford, Telford, Shrewsbury, Birmingham, and Wolverhampton. These advice desks are staffed by trained volunteers, providing support and information at a crucial time for offenders and their families – when decisions about bail or remand in custody are confirmed. This is the opportunity to provide information about travel arrangements to the prison where the defendant has been sent, details about what items of clothing, etc, can be taken to the prison, and explanations about what will happen next in the proceedings.

SHARP’s latest initiative is Family Support Workers, who will provide ongoing advice, information, and support to families of an imprisoned offender – at court, at the prison, and in the home – the point of delivery being determined by the needs of the family and the circumstances of the prisoner. SHARP’s workers will also attend meetings with schools, to assist in managing the impact of an imprisoned family member for the child, accompany offenders’ partners at appointments with statutory agencies in relation to benefits issues and related concerns, and be available for emotional support at critical times during the sentence.

One of their longer term objectives is to promote models of assertive outreach services to offenders’ families and friends, by providing training and information to prison and probation staff, education providers and voluntary sector organisations. In the longer term it is hoped that mainstream services will regards offenders’ families and children – those serving the ‘silent sentence’ – as a priority group.
Organisations

The National Body of Black Prisoner Support Groups (NBBPSG) was established in 1998 and is concerned with the isolation experienced by BME organisations in their work with offenders and the un-supported environment in which they work. They aim to encourage and promote the development of a nationwide network of support groups and services and act as a voice for BME offender organisations.

www.nbbpsg.co.uk

The Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) is a national networking organisation providing a voice to government for black and minority ethnic service providers. BTEG provide standing conferences, technical assistance, and research which influences policy and practice.

www.bteg.co.uk

Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO) supports the development of the UK’s minority ethnic organisations, communities and individuals. CEMVO provide infrastructure support, voice and leadership, whilst tackling inequalities, strengthening communities and developing national evidence-based policy and research.

www.cemvo.org.uk

Voice4Change England (V4CE) is a coalition of national and regional organisations which aims to provide a co-ordinated voice for the BME voluntary and community sector, resulting in sustained dialogue between the BME sector and government. V4CE also aims to support the development of the BME sector through strengthening regional infrastructure.

www.bteg.co.uk/voice4change-england.htm

Publications

Good Practice Guide - A practical guide for practitioners working with BME communities within the Criminal Justice System


Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations Compact Code of Good Practice.

www.thecompact.org.uk/module_images/Black%20minority%20Ethn.pdf

HM Prison Service Race & Diversity

www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/abouttheservice/racediversity

Bromley Briefing Prison Factfile

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/subsection.asp?id=685

Black communities, mental health and the criminal justice system

www.nacro.org.uk/data/resources/nacro-2007052400.pdf

Challenging Institutional racism: A toolkit for the voluntary sector


Conference spells out priorities


Attended by 24 organisations, the event was chaired by Farida Anderson (NBBPSG) with speakers from HM Prison Service, London Probation and Voice 4 Change – the new umbrella organisation that provides a co-ordinated voice for the black and ethnic minority community and voluntary sector.

The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for participants to update each other on areas of common interest and to provide direction as to where the Clinks’ BME programme of work may go in the future.

Key issues for participants included concerns that policy makers were failing to make diversity, race and discrimination in the criminal justice system a priority. Discussions and initiatives had tended to drift. The need to challenge this is vital, as over-representation of black and minority ethnic offenders in the criminal justice system continues to be an issue.

Priorities to be taken forward were:

- Improving the quality of diversity training and cultural awareness amongst people working with BME and foreign nationals offenders, and within the statutory sector;
- Ensuring proper representation from the voluntary and community sector on strategic race and equality groups where decisions and policy, affecting BME offenders and Foreign Nationals, are made;
- Highlighting the need for diverse services for offenders and their families and ensure that a manifesto of key messages is available for the voluntary and community sector to use in its discussions and influencing activities with opinion formers and policy makers.

A follow up meeting is being held in November to assess the feasibility of taking forward some of these ideas and developing them into a tangible action plan.

To be involved, please contact Lynne Laidlaw, 0207 608 2502.