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The Disproportionality Project:

Addressing issues relating to the disproportionately high representation of Islington's and Haringey's BAME young people in the Criminal Justice System

An Evaluation Report by the Centre for City Criminology, City, University of London
May 2020

Co-funded by the Youth Justice Board
and the School of Arts and Social Sciences,
City, University of London.



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Foreword by Curtis Ashton

Acting Director, Youth and Community, London Borough of Islington

May 2020

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations from the second partnership project involving Islington Borough Council and criminologists at City, University of London. The first project, *Enhancing the work of the Islington Integrated Gangs Team*, was published in 2019. This second project involved evaluating a programme designed to tackle key issues and outcomes relating to the disproportionate representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people in the Criminal Justice System and beyond.

The programme was attended by multiple agencies from two London Boroughs – Islington and Haringey – and sought to strengthen the multi-agency approach to addressing disproportionality. Attendees from Islington included Youth Services, Youth Offending Services and the Integrated Gangs Team. Attendees from Haringey included Youth Justice Service, Early Help and Youth Service. Police and Probation officers also attended sessions.

Members of the research team attended all of the practitioner workshops, which took place between August and November 2019. Interviews with a cross-section of the frontline practitioners who attended workshops were conducted at YOS sites in Islington and Haringey, respectively, in late 2019. A number of parents' workshops, which took place at neutral venues, were voice recorded for the purposes of evaluating the project and identifying parents' lived experiences with regard to disproportionality. Finally, young people engaged in the Criminal Justice System were interviewed at YOS sites with a view to capturing their experiences of criminal offending and victimisation, discrimination and disproportionality.

The research team evaluated the delivery, outputs and, where possible, outcomes of the Disproportionality Project. The recommendations are listed below.

Recommendations

1. Structure and Approach

In any future disproportionality programme involving staff training, consider using full-day rather than half-day sessions, move ice-breaker activities to after the session outline, specify the cumulative nature of learning from session to session, and incorporate 'learning into practice' action planning after each session.

2. Dissemination

Disseminate this project's key findings regarding the challenges and obstacles faced by young people and parents to relevant staff members, including senior leaders, and beyond.

3. Use of academic research

Make fuller use of key social science research insights into implicit bias and the transmission of discrimination, particularly as these relate to race and ethnicity, in future iterations of the programme.

4. Young People's and Parental engagement

Continue capturing the voice of young people in relation to disproportionality and consider offering a more extensive programme of parents' forums, including parent-practitioner sessions moderated by a third party.

5. Being responsive to local factors

Combine ad hoc forums in response to specific incidents and events with more regular outreach programmes that both draw on and share expertise from relevant services.

6. Review the safety and risk implications of YOS procedures

Consider whether the routinisation of young people's movements created by YOS procedures/protocols may increase risk of harm.

7. Reporting on and scrutinising disproportionate court outcomes

Explore the possibility of compiling regular reports for local courts detailing disproportionate outcomes for BAME young people from Haringey and Islington – particularly remand and custodial sentences – and introducing an annual or biannual scrutiny panel, including local court representation, to scrutinise those reports.

8. Replicating an action-orientated training focus

Prioritise the identification and dissemination of good practice, which can have an immediate impact on practitioners' day-to-day work, in future iterations of the programme.

9. Boosting parental trust and engagement

Consider strengthening whole-family working practices and models, including the creation of parenting worker roles where these do not already exist.

10. Increasing accountability for school exclusions

Consider identifying and collating longer-term outcomes for excluded BAME young people, and disseminating this information on a school-by-school basis.

11. Police relations with young people

Police Borough Command Units should continue working to strengthen relations with BAME young people.

Issues for Future Research

Future research should:

1. Engage with young people and their families / carers in greater depth to understand better the complex interdependencies of serious youth violence (SYV) and enhance the local multi-agency approach to addressing it.
2. Examine the role of 'county lines' as a contributor to gang affiliation and SYV in Islington and Haringey.
3. Co-produce with Islington, Haringey and community partners an inclusive, sustainable and citizen-centric research agenda to address disproportionality and wider inequalities, and contribute value to people's lives.

Foreword

All children and young people in our society are equally important. They need to be valued, nurtured and provided with the support that they need to thrive and achieve their fullest potential. However, we know that some cohorts of children and young people are more likely to be disadvantaged and to experience poorer short-term and long-term outcomes. These inequalities, which exist in various areas and systems, have been well-documented for some time. This report explores inequalities in relation to the youth and criminal justice arena and interdependent systems where Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young people are overrepresented. In Islington and Haringey, this is particularly applicable to Black groups and to Black males in particular. With support from the Youth Justice Board, both Boroughs decided to develop a project which would help to identify, address and tackle the reasons why this disproportionality is so prevalent.

One of the main areas where young BAME are over-represented is the secure estate. This is particularly worrying as outcomes for children who have been sentenced to custody are significantly worsened. At the beginning of the unprecedented pandemic in March 2020, when we were devising arrangements to ensure that we could continue to support our children during 'lockdown', one of my YOS caseworkers mentioned that one of her young people (K) had shared some very frank thoughts about being a young Black man in today's society. His words and feelings, which he has given permission to use here, are so powerful that they say all that needs to be said about the need to tackle disproportionality and discrimination.

K – my thoughts of being in custody

I feel like I'm another Black male in the system. Also known as a statistic.

Being Black and in custody, I feel like my voice is less heard because there are so many Black males in the system, and we're all judged and looked at the same.

This is having an impact on my emotional and mental well-being.

I feel angry, and then I'm viewed as an angry Black male in the system (statistic).

I feel my opinion is disregarded when my charge and colour of skin is taken into consideration. The reason why I believe this is because there are so many Black males of similar backgrounds and of similar charges.

I'm not oblivious to the fact that there are Black males who are guilty of their crimes. However, this should not have an impact on all Black males because some of us are caught in this unjust system.

Thanks to Chris Greer, James Rosbrook-Thompson and Gary Armstrong for producing this report. In Islington, thanks to Angela Wilson, Marcus Miller and Valejia Komar for helping to develop ideas for this project, and to Councillor Kaya Comer Schwartz, Catherine Briody and Karolina Bober. Thanks to Linzi Roberts-Egan and Carmel Littleton for pushing equalities matters. In Haringey, thanks to Matthew Knights for helping coordinate, and to Ann Graham and Councillor Mark Blake. Thanks to Anthony Scott, Rebecca Smith and Donna Murray-Turner from AIM High. Thanks to Liz Westlund, Charlie Taylor, Natasha Richards, Dominic Daley, Harriet Casey, Sarah Brimelow and Colin Allars at the Youth Justice Board. And a huge thank you to K for allowing his YOS caseworker L to write up his thoughts and share them with us for this Foreword.

Curtis Ashton, Acting Director, Youth and Community, London Borough of Islington.

Introduction

This evaluation is the second project from an ongoing partnership between Islington Borough Council and criminologists at City, University of London. In late 2017, Criminologists at the Centre for City Criminology invited Islington practitioners, mostly attached to the Integrated Gangs Team (IGT) and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), to the University to discuss existing research on serious youth violence (SYV), the current situation in Islington, and the practices of and challenges faced by the IGT. This initial event resulted in a series of discussions around how City Criminologists might add value to the work of the IGT by conducting a short research project. The resulting report, *Enhancing the work of the Islington Integrated Gangs Team*, was published in 2019.¹

In the summer of 2019, City Criminologists were approached by the same Islington Borough Council partners with an invitation to engage in further partnership working. This second project involved evaluating a programme designed to tackle key issues and outcomes relating to the disproportionate representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people in the Criminal Justice System and beyond. Geographically focussed in Islington and Haringey, the programme sought specifically to:

...improve awareness and the capacity of staff working with young people in Islington to address the issues around the disproportionately high numbers of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) offenders and the poor outcomes they face in the Criminal Justice System that have been drawn to the attention of successive governments, voluntary and public sector agencies for decades. This will be achieved by training for staff working with young people in Islington and a capacity building and engagement programme to parents and carers in local communities from BAME backgrounds.

A set of four service aims were defined accordingly. These were:

1. To provide training around Adverse Childhood Experiences within BAME communities. Training for staff will highlight cultural and community competence, staff conscious and unconscious bias and a return to an understanding of institutional racism and how it impacts on individuals and communities.
2. Setting up an initiative whereby parents from BAME backgrounds have a safe space to discuss the pressures associated with their children's involvement in ASB and/or offending behaviour and the structural and societal pressures they face. These support forums, 'safe spaces' with no Local Authority Staff present, will be utilised to raise and resolve issues as they experience them.
3. It is hoped the service covered by this specification will help to better support young people and their families from the poor outcomes and lack of opportunity which unfortunately, is more prevalent in BAME individuals and families.
4. This intervention ultimately is about strengthening communities who have been marginalized. This intervention will look at disproportionality at a local level. Supporting the community from a cultural approach, where experiences are shared, will strengthen the community. It will also influence Islington and Haringey to shape and improve the services provided, so that young people and their families are supported to (improve outcomes and opportunities so they can) 'live their best life'.

¹ Greer, C., Rosbrook-Thompson, J., Armstrong, G., Ilan, J., McLaughlin, E., Myers, C., Rojek, C. and Taylor, E. (2019) *Enhancing the Work of the Islington Integrated Gangs Team: A Pilot Study on the Response to Serious Youth Violence in Islington*, Centre for City Criminology: City, University of London. <http://repository.essex.ac.uk/27442/1/2019-04%20-%20IGT%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

The programme was delivered by Anthony Scott, Rebecca Smith and Donna Murray-Turner of the charity AIM High following a formal procurement and commissioning process which was led by Islington Council.

Anthony Scott, Project Lead, is a qualified counsellor/psychotherapist with 17 years' experience of face-to-face work with young people, families, communities in both statutory and voluntary services. He has extensive experience of working with young people at risk of offending, serious youth violence, and in the design and delivery of training which is respectful, truthful and challenging. Anthony is also an Assistant Trainer for the Anna Freud Centre's AMBIT programme and an experienced trainer in the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities parenting programme.

Rebecca Smith qualified as a Probation Officer in 2001 and has since worked with adults and more recently young people in the criminal justice system. For the last five years, she has coordinated the Ending Gang & Youth Violence (EGYV) Team for Wandsworth Youth Offending Team. The EGYV Team targets gang-affected young men up to the age of 25. During her career Rebecca has also specialised in developing interventions and training packages. She is currently employed by the Anna Freud Centre as a Lead Trainer in the Ambit approach – a psychologically informed model that supports work with the most complex and hard-to-reach young people and families.

Donna Murray-Turner is a qualified social worker who has extensive experience of community engagement. Donna founded Another Night Of Sisterhood (ANOS), a Croydon-based community interest company that specialises in community engagement through creating safe spaces for communities to come together, express their voices and access support. They have a specific focus on supporting marginalised communities to change negative narratives. Donna has recently featured on a number of high-profile campaigns highlighting the importance of community engagement..

The Evaluation and Report Structure

This report is based on visits to key sites related to the Disproportionality Programme and the lives/needs of its user groups, observing work, conducting in-depth interviews with identified individuals and/or groups, and reviewing relevant documentation. The semi-structured nature of the interview process created a flexible space from which a range of salient topics emerged.

The report contains the following elements:

- A review of the relevant literature on disproportionality, including academic studies and landmark policy documents at national and local level.
- A brief quantitative analysis of Participant Evaluation Sheets and an online survey completed by Haringey and Islington practitioners.
- Analysis based on observation of practitioner workshops.
- Analysis based on observation of parents' sessions.
- A brief assessment of the programme in relation to the Service Aims identified in the Grant Agreement and Specification document.
- An assessment of the programme in relation to the expected Service Outcomes identified in the Grant Agreement and Specification document.
- Analysis based on interviews with practitioners, parents and young people.
- A series of recommendations based on the report's findings and analysis.

Literature Review

Though the issue of disproportionality along ethno-racial lines has only recently entered mainstream political debate in the UK – largely as a result of 2017’s Lammy Review (see below) – systematic studies of disproportionality have been conducted in the United States for forty years. In 1982, American criminologist Alfred Blumstein lamented what he called ‘grossly disproportionate race-specific incarceration rates’, seeking an explanation for the fact that while Black Americans comprised roughly one-eighth of the US population, they represented about one-half of the country’s prison population. ‘This disproportionality has been a source of major concern’, Blumstein remarked, ‘largely because it suggests the possibility of gross injustice in the criminal justice system (1982: 1259).²

Statistics on the ethnic background of UK prisoners began to be collected in the mid 1980s, with disproportionality being identified at that stage and becoming more pronounced over time. This led researchers to focus on disproportionality at all stages of the criminal justice process, including searches, crime reports and arrests, and develop explanations for the over-representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people across these stages. For example, in 2004 Marian FitzGerald, along with colleagues Chris Hale and Jan Stockdale, constructed a model which sought to account for long-standing ethnic differences in criminal statistics.³ The resulting model focused on street crime in a number of London boroughs, identifying two overriding explanations for area differences: deprivation and population turnover. In elaborating this model, the researchers stressed the need to be vigilant regarding possible amplification of pre-existing disadvantages via the criminal justice system (CJS) and, more specifically, the unequal exercising of discretion by those working within the CJS.

Disproportionality is widespread and is not restricted to young Black men. Though ‘Gypsies’, Roma and Irish Travellers represent just 0.1% of the population, they account for around 5% of the male prison population, while Muslims are represented in the prison population at three times their proportion of the general population. As Jolliffe and Haque (2017) point out, ‘ethnic and cultural characteristics’ aren’t a feasible explanation for the dramatic increase in the number of Muslim prisoners, from 5,500 in 2002 to 13,200 in 2016. As they point out, ‘the rise in prison numbers (128% increase of Muslims) does not reflect the rise in the general population (74% increase of Muslims from 2001)’ (2017: 3).⁴

After being commissioned by the then incumbent prime minister David Cameron to investigate racial discrimination in the CJS, Tottenham MP David Lammy’s subsequent review was published in 2017.⁵ Though the report and its findings pertained to the over-representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals in the CJS, in presenting his review Lammy stressed that understanding the roots of such disproportionality required wider consideration of the complex intersections between racial and ethnic background and other forms of social division and structural disadvantage. As he put it (2017): ‘poverty, lone-parent families, school exclusions, and growing up in the care system. And what more is there left to say about stop and search?’ The review itself contained a litany of damning statistics:

² Blumstein, A. (1982) ‘On the Racial Disproportionality of United States’ Prison Population’. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 73(3): 1259–1281.

³ FitzGerald M., Stockdale J. & Hale C. (2003) *Young People’s Involvement in Street Crime*. Youth Justice Board. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4158137.pdf>

⁴ Jolliffe, D. & Haque, Z. (2017) *Have prisons become a dangerous place? Disproportionality, safety and mental health in British prisons*. London: Runnymede Trust. <http://www.iscre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Prisons-report-2017.pdf>

⁵ Lammy, D. (2017) *The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*. London. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf

- 41% of young offenders in custody in 2016 were from BAME backgrounds (up from 25% in 2006).
- Despite only 3% of the general population being Black, 12% of adult prisoners and 24% of children in custody are Black.
- 41% of BAME defendants plead not guilty in Crown Court, versus 31% of white defendants.
- BAME people comprise 25% of the prison population.
- 19% of young people offending for the first time in 2016 were from BAME backgrounds, up from 11% in 2006.
- The estimated cost of the over-representation of BAME people in the CJS is £309m per year.

In seeking explanations for these statistics and ways to address disproportionality in the CJS, Lammy outlined three principles. Firstly, since fairer treatment is achieved through transparency, decision-making procedures must be subject to external scrutiny. Second (and relatedly), work must be done to improve trust in the CJS among BAME communities. As things stand, a trust deficit partly accounts for the disproportionate number of BAME defendants pleading not guilty (and thereby foreclosing the possibility of reduced sentences and any intervention strategies which are contingent on a guilty plea), plus higher reoffending rates (with research showing that prisoners who believe they are being treated fairly are more likely to respect rules in custody and less likely to reoffend on release [Beijersbergen et al. 2016⁶]). Finally, people and agencies outside the CJS – including parents and local communities – have a responsibility to support those who have entered the CJS. These principles informed a set of 35 recommendations, including:

- If CJS agencies cannot provide an evidence-based explanation for apparent disparities between ethnic groups, then reforms should be introduced to address those disparities. This principle of ‘explain or reform’ should apply to every CJS institution.
- A ‘deferred prosecution’ model should be adopted which provides interventions before pleas are entered rather than after.
- The system for sealing criminal records employed in many US states should be adopted. Individuals should be able to have their case heard either by a judge or a body like the Parole Board, which would then decide whether to seal their record. There should be a presumption to look favourably on those who committed crimes either as children or young adults, but who can demonstrate that they have changed since their conviction.
- The MoJ and Department of Health (DH) should work together to develop a method to assess the maturity of offenders entering the justice system up to the age of 21. The results of this assessment should inform the interventions applied to any offender in this cohort, including extending the support structures of the youth justice system for offenders over the age of 18 who are judged to have low levels of maturity.

There have been various statutory responses to the report. In 2018 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) published fresh statistics on race and the CJS.⁷ These statistics reinforced the picture painted in the Lammy Review, with BAME groups being over-represented at many stages throughout the CJS.⁸

⁶ Beijersbergen, K. A., Dirkzwager, A. J. E. & Nieuwbeerta, P. (2016) ‘Reoffending After Release: Does procedural justice during imprisonment matter?’ *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 43(1): 63–82.

⁷ Ministry of Justice (2018) *Tackling Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System: 2018 Update*. London. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/747335/tackling-racial-disparity-criminal-justice-system-2018-update-web.pdf

The greatest disparity was evident for stop and search, arrests, custodial sentencing and the prison population, with Black people being over-represented most acutely. Another update was published by the MoJ in early 2020. *Tackling Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System: 2020 Update* sought to address the principles and recommendations of the Lammy Review directly. It reported on the formation of a trust working group within the Home Office and the Cabinet Office Race Disparity Unit (RDU). This group commissioned the Cabinet Office's Open Innovation Team, which promotes closer relationships between policy and academia across government, to survey the existing evidence on trust. Furthermore, Edward Argar, the Minister with responsibility for race disparity, held a two-part roundtable with external stakeholders from BAME-led and -focused organisations, including those with lived experience of the CJS, to listen and record any examples of best practice in restoring confidence.

The working group found that trust in the ability and intentions of CJS staff and representatives was key, though sounded a slightly defensive note in contending that, however well-intended or progressive a set of processes may be, many people will still be unhappy about their experiences in the CJS because of their association with negative outcomes. Strategies for boosting levels of trust included 'explaining in simple terms what is happening, why, and what to expect next' (2020: 10), and increasing the number of human interactions (including a greater number of restorative 'human behaviours' such as apologising and admitting fault).

Islington Borough Council has designed and implemented a number of programmes with a view to addressing the disproportionate representation of the Borough's BAME young people in the criminal justice system. Its overarching strategy for a 'Fairer Islington' focuses 'on creating a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life'. This approach is consistent with the local authority's commitment to make Islington one of the safest boroughs in London, where children become neither victims nor perpetrators of crime.

The borough's Children and Families Strategy 2015-25, *Giving Children the Best Start in Life*, centres on the commitment to "better identify and address risk and vulnerability, and provide timely and targeted youth support to reduce offending and reoffending".⁹ This is part of a wider strategy, the Stronger Families Programme, geared to finding and assisting families who have multiple problems. The rationale for this programme is that 'families with multiple problems achieve better outcomes when their needs are addressed collectively', with 'all professionals working with children and families with multiple problems ... expected to use the Stronger Families approach'. Islington's Youth Safety strategy, *Working Together for a Safer Islington* (2017), also focuses heavily on the need to keep young people and the community safe.¹⁰

Haringey Borough Council has also made attempts to address racial disproportionality in its Youth Justice System. Recognising that 47% of the caseload for its Youth Justice Service come from the Black community, despite this group representing only 28% of the population in the borough, members of Haringey's Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel were asked to conduct a review which sought to identify the reasons for the overrepresentation of specific minority groups in the Youth Justice System. The Review's aims were aligned with Haringey Borough Council's Corporate Plan and, more specifically, Priority 1 ("Enable every child and young person to have the best start in life, with high quality education") and Objective 5 ("To work with partners to prevent and reduce more serious crime, in particular youth crime and gang activity").

⁸ For more on the disproportionate representation and experiences of diverse groups as victims and offenders, see: Davies, P., Francis, P., Greer, C. (eds.) (2017) *Victims, Crime and Society: An Introduction*, second edition, London: Sage; Greer, C. and McLaughlin, E. (2017) 'News Power, Crime and Media Justice', in A. Liebling, L. McAra and S. Maruna (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, sixth edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹ https://www.islington.gov.uk/~/_media/sharepoint-lists/public-records/childrenandfamilieservices/businessplanning/strategies/20142015/20150303islingtonchildrenandfamiliespreventionandearlyinterventionstrategy20152025.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.islingtonscb.org.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Working%20Together%20Youth%20Crime%20plan%202017.pdf>

The subsequent report, *Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel’s 2016/17: Scrutiny Review on Disproportionality within the Youth Justice System*,¹¹ made 12 recommendations, including: increased partnership working; a review of processes to ensure that all duties are being performed in accordance with the Equalities Act; extra efforts to work with headteachers and school governors on the issue of school exclusions; and the introduction of a reverse mentoring scheme, whereby police officers who are new to the area are mentored by a local young person.

It is in the context of these strategies that the objectives of the disproportionality programme were agreed. These were to: provide training in relation to Adverse Childhood Experiences within BAME communities; provide a forum wherein parents from BAME backgrounds can discuss the pressures associated with their children’s involvement in ASB and/or offending behaviour plus the structural and societal pressures they face; and help staff to better support young people and their families through the poor outcomes and lack of opportunity which, unfortunately, are more prevalent in BAME families.

The various practitioner sessions offered as part of the programme are summarised in the table below.

Session Title	Content/structure	Location/date & time	Number of Participants
Disproportionality and Implicit Bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racial disparity in the UK • Institutional racism and unconscious bias • Blocked trust – what might contribute? • The Lammy Review • Trust exercise • Stereotyping – a human condition • The psychology of stereotyping • Implicit stereotypes and unconscious bias • How to overcome our biases • Privilege • So what can we do? 	George Meehan House, N22 8YX 16/09/19 – 9.00am	17
		George Meehan House, N22 8YX 16/09/19 – 1.30pm	21
		Brickworks Community Centre, N4 4BY 19/09/19 – 9.00am	25
		Brickworks Community Centre, N4 4BY 19/09/19 – 1.30pm	16
Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma from a BAME Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergenerational trauma • Mechanisms of transmission • Recovery / resilience • Adverse Childhood Experiences • Adverse Community Environments • ACEs: A BAME perspective • IMPACT • Final reflections 	George Meehan House, N22 8YX 21/10/19 – 9.00am	9
		George Meehan House, N22 8YX 21/10/19 – 1.30pm	25
		Brickworks Community Centre, N4 4BY 24/10/19 – 9.00am	31
		Brickworks Community Centre, N4 4BY 24/10/19 – 1.30pm	25
Working with BAME Clients to Develop a Therapeutic Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Epistemic trust • Carl Rogers • What young people say... • Five planning groups (five tasks) • Empowerment intervention • Task • Feedback from planning groups • Next steps • Final reflections 	George Meehan House, N22 8YX 18/11/19 – 9.00am	19
		George Meehan House, N22 8YX 18/11/19 – 1.30pm	20
		Brickworks Community Centre, N4 4BY 28/11/19 – 9.00am	20
		Brickworks Community Centre, N4 4BY 28/11/19 – 1.30pm	16

¹¹ <https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/S96560/Scrutiny%20Report%20October%202017.pdf>

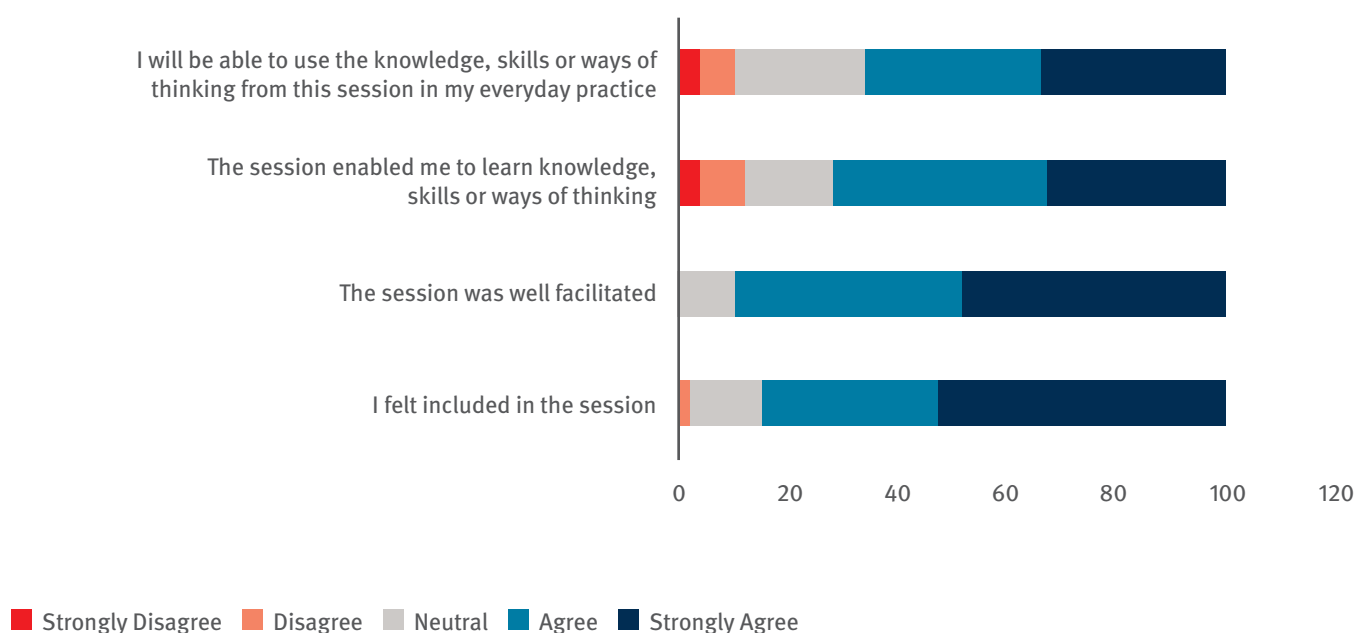
The kitchen-table sessions offered to parents took place between 6.00pm and 9.00pm. Three sessions were offered in each Borough, with session themes mirroring those covered in the practitioner workshops. For example, in the first session, parents were asked what disproportionality meant and what it looked like in the context of their own lived experiences. Subsequent sessions addressed themes such as Adverse Childhood Experiences, Adverse Community Environments and intergenerational trauma. On average, five parents attended each session.

While sessions were oriented around the themes listed above, parents were given the space to discuss and explore their experiences. The issues they raised included their children’s treatment in prison and other custodial institutions, the approach of particular case workers, learning difficulties, stop and search, social media, and school exclusion. AIM High’s three facilitators drew on their own experiences as professionals and parents in unpacking the parents’ stories, pointing to commonalities and (where appropriate) possible solutions. After 75 minutes, each session broke for dinner. After dinner, the sessions followed a less structured format, with breakout discussions initiated according to parents’ shared experiences. At the end of each session, the lead facilitator summed up by revisiting core themes and gathering up the various threads of discussion developed by parents throughout the evening.

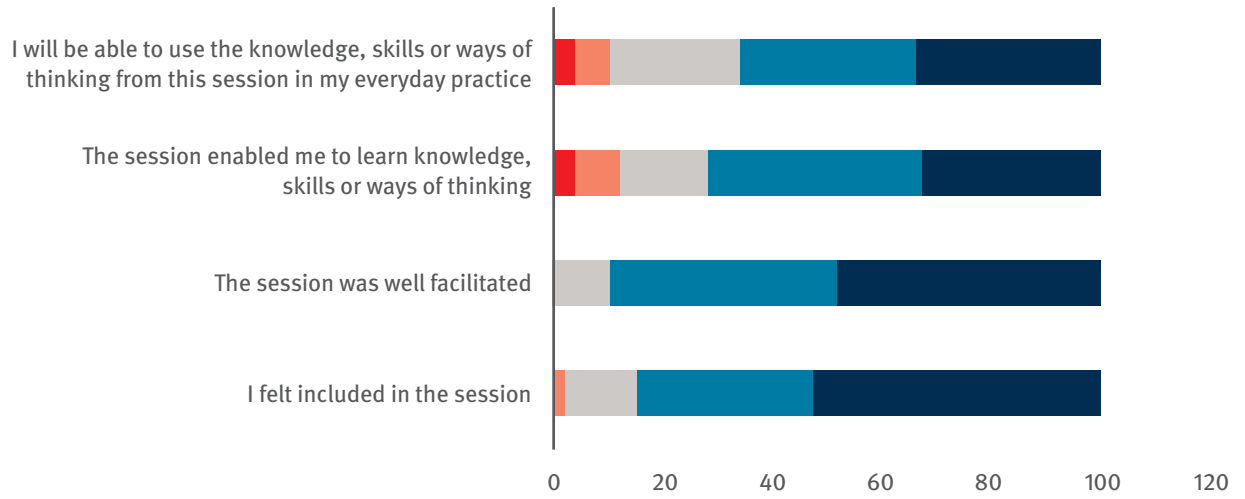
Analysis of Participant Evaluations and Survey Data

At the end of each session with frontline practitioners and their line managers, participants were asked to complete an evaluation which asked questions about their perceived level of inclusion in the session, the standard of facilitation, the extent to which the session enabled participants to learn knowledge, skills or ways of thinking, and the extent to which participants felt they would be able to use the knowledge, skills or ways of thinking from this session in their everyday practice. Responses to these questions have been collated and are presented in graphical form (by session) below.

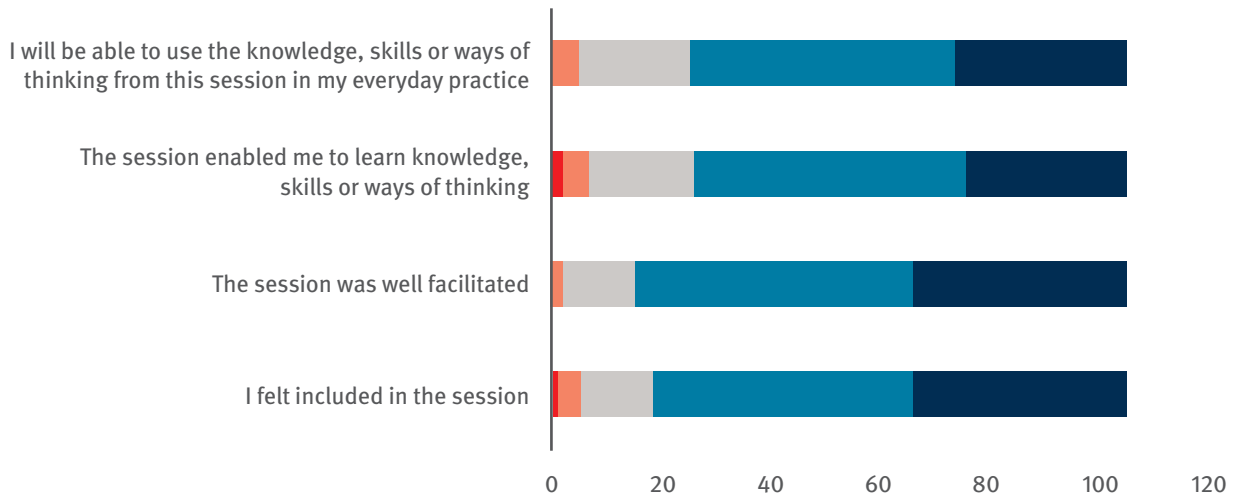
Participant Evaluations: Session One (%)



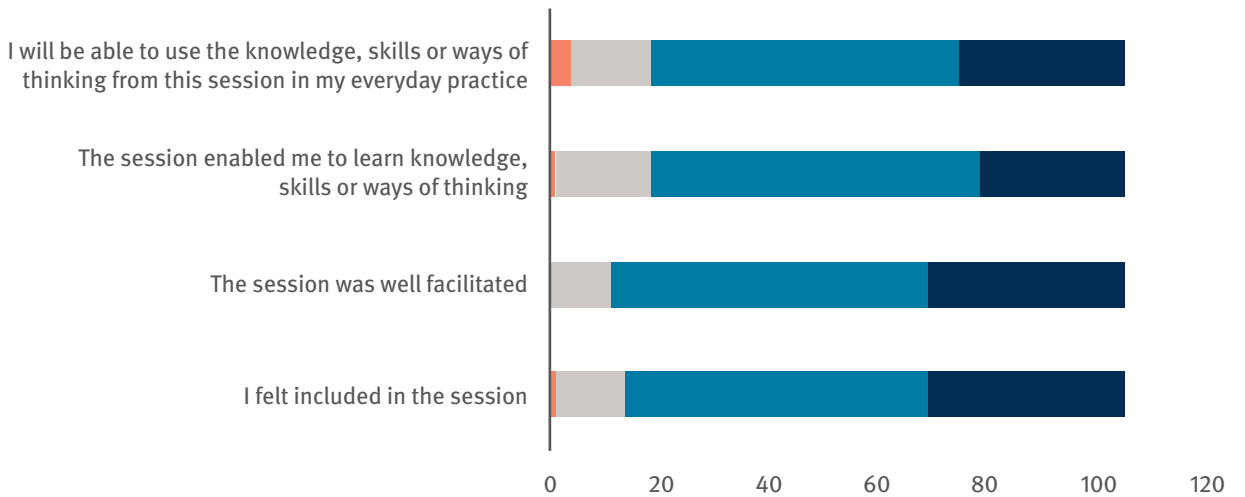
Participant Evaluations: Session One (%)



Participant Evaluations: Session Two (%)



Participant Evaluations: Session Three (%)



■ Strongly Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Agree
 ■ Strongly Agree

Commentary on Participant Evaluations

- There was broad consensus among participants that all three sessions were well facilitated (with a slight dip for Session Two).
- Free-text comments were relatively consistent in requesting more material that could impact on everyday practice. Facilitators were responsive to this feedback, with participant evaluations recording a general uplift from session to session with regard to impact on everyday practice.
- This upward trend peaked in Session Three, which scored highly for knowledge and skill exchange. The final session also scored highest for perceived level of inclusion, implying that pooling and drawing on practitioner experience and expertise – and thereby sharing best practice – works effectively in impacting everyday practice.
- Free-text comments ranged across a number of issues, with many remarks and suggestions being reinforced during interviews with practitioners. These issues included the number, length and timing of sessions, and omissions in terms of who was invited to participate.

In addition to participant evaluation forms, practitioners were asked to complete an online survey – also created by Aim-High – containing questions on a range of issues relating to disproportionality. The results of the survey, completed by 66 practitioners across the two boroughs, are summarised below.

- 86% of practitioners felt that young people of different races are treated unequally in the criminal justice system.
- 87% of practitioners felt that difficulties regarding racial issues are not ‘a thing of the past’ in the local community.
- 70% of practitioners felt that racial issues create conflict in the local community.
- 83% of practitioners either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: ‘At work I find it challenging to build trusting relationships with Black and minority ethnic service users’.

Outline of Practitioner Workshops

All of the practitioner workshops which took place between August and November 2019 were attended by a member of the research team. They both observed and fully participated in these sessions, paying particular attention to issues relating to timing, attendance, delivery, content, and participant engagement. This section of the evaluation addresses these issues while identifying particular 'Strengths' and 'Areas for Reflection/Improvement'.

Strengths

- All sessions were delivered in a timely manner, with members of AIM High arriving early to set up the room, distribute any learning materials and lay out refreshments. Sessions began and ended on time (though there was confusion over start times in more than one instance), with the facilitators acknowledging the arrival of latecomers without disrupting the flow of the workshops. An appropriate number of breaks was incorporated into each session.
- Timing issues during the workshops pertained to discussion segments, particularly where practitioners were asked to reflect on their own experiences. These exploratory discussions were sometimes challenging to manage, especially when it came to drawing discussion to a close. That said, these segments were crucial in ensuring the sessions were inclusive and dynamic, and effective in bringing the experiences of participants to bear on workshop content, and vice-versa. The facilitators exercised good discretion in allowing some of these segments to overrun so that all participants who wanted to contribute were given time to do so.
- The AIM High team members present at each session varied with availability. While this variation did not compromise the quality of delivery, having all three members present made for a richer dynamic plus more variety in the mode and tenor of delivery. Any absences were clearly explained to all participants, with members of the team able to make clear contributions consistent with their particular areas of expertise. The project lead was present at every session, which provide an important element of consistency in the delivery of the programme as a whole.
- Levels and rates of attendance were relatively stable across the three sessions. There was a slight dip in Haringey for session two – particularly in the morning delivery – with some practitioners being unable to attend because of childcare commitments (this session took place during half-term).
- Levels of attendance were slightly higher in Islington than in Haringey.
- Attendees were more likely to arrive late for morning sessions, with facilitators making a clear effort to inform any latecomers of material they had missed and to integrate them into ongoing groupwork and discussion.
- Each session was delivered at an appropriate pace, with introductory principles given sufficient attention and more time allocated to the discussion of complex issues and concepts, like implicit bias and institutional racism. In some sessions it was necessary to accelerate the speed of delivery to ensure all of the content was covered. In most cases, this was due (as noted above) to some discussion segments being allowed to overrun to accommodate the wide range of participant accounts and contributions.
- As per the service specification, there was an ethnic mix and diversity within the staff group and this seemed important in terms of eliciting honest accounts and opinions from practitioners during the course of the sessions.
- Each session was structured logically and thoughtfully. Ice-breaker activities were very effective in putting people at ease and both introducing and involving the various teams who attended the workshops.

- The content of each session had been carefully designed so that it aligned clearly with the central aims of the participating services and was divided appropriately across the three sessions.
- The facilitators made very effective use of their past experiences in bringing materials to life. These accounts spanned a number of areas including trust, inter-generational trauma and adverse childhood experiences, grounding discussion in concrete detail and inviting practitioners to reflect critically on their own experiences. This method was also used effectively in concretising more abstract concepts like implicit bias.
- The breadth of methods and material used across the workshops was impressive. The range of materials used included slides, worksheets and videos, and in many cases these underpinned or corresponded with varied methods including small- and large-group discussion, breakout activities and group tasks. This combination catered well to a range of preferred modes of learning.
- Ice-breaker activities were effective not just in generating discussion but in encouraging people to think outside their own organisational structures and teams.
- All group discussions were thoughtfully set up and expertly moderated.
- In many cases subject matter was personal, emotive and potentially divisive, and the facilitators' experience and expertise was evident in how they guided the discussion across what was often difficult terrain. All issues were treated with the necessary gravity and sensitivity, with an open, enabling environment being created and sustained.
- All discussions were kept on track, with the purpose of an activity being revisited and underlined where necessary. This was achieved while making each participant feel they had made an important and valuable contribution.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- Participants operated at different speeds in terms of knowledge and experience. Many had attended similar training before, and were vocal in their preference for identifying and discussing concrete examples of best practice. A clear statement about how each session would build on the content of preceding session(s) in the Disproportionality Programme, underlining the cumulative nature of the programme, would have been helpful in this respect.
- In relation to the previous point about identifying connections between sessions and stressing the cumulative nature of content across sessions, some tweaks in terms of structure could be made. For example, delivering the ice-breakers after the session outline would set tasks in a clearer context, giving narrower boundaries for discussion and thereby helping to contain the activity in terms of time and topicality.
- Much of the session content was underpinned by the findings of relevant academic research, including theoretical models and more purely empirical work. This research was presented clearly alongside a full exploration of its relevance for the issues being discussed. Obviously the nature of the research incorporated reflected the academic specialisms of the facilitators, with research around trauma and ACEs being especially well explained and explored, while the social scientific research on institutional racism could have been more contemporary.

Recommendations

Structure and Approach: In any future disproportionality programme involving staff training, move ice-breaker activities to after the session outline, specify the cumulative nature of learning from session to session, and incorporate 'learning into practice' action planning after each session.

Outline of Parents' Sessions

Sessions for the parents of young people engaged in the CJS were held on the same day as practitioner workshops in each borough, and followed a semi-structured, kitchen-table format. Each round of sessions was attended by a member of the research team. Our observations and analysis are presented below, while again we have identified particular 'Strengths' and 'Areas for Improvement'.

Strengths

- Holding sessions at neutral venues rather than, for example, in Youth Offending Services buildings, created a more relaxed atmosphere for the parent participants.
- Serving food at the sessions worked well in terms of bringing parents and facilitators together and putting parents at ease. This mode of delivery struck up and sustained an informal tone that parents obviously found enabling.
- While the kitchen-table format gave the sessions an informal tone, facilitators ensured that the discussion was structured around a series of questions listed on a flipchart at the centre of the room. This also allowed any parents arriving late to apprise themselves of the session's key aims.
- As with the sessions for frontline practitioners, the neutrality of AIM High staff was important in eliciting honest accounts from parents. Many of these accounts were critical of various state agencies and procedures, and the same level of honesty may not have been achievable had sessions been facilitated by representatives of the two respective boroughs. Should this element of the programme be rolled out, using a third-party to facilitate discussion may again prove advantageous.
- Parents appeared to feel comfortable sharing accounts of their own and their children's experiences of engagement with the CJS, including discrimination. These accounts were moving and emotive, and facilitators moderated the discussions with sensitivity and skill. As far as possible, facilitators framed these stories in terms of a set of key questions around disproportionality that shaped the service specification.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- Only a small proportion of the parents invited to the sessions attended. The limited engagement by parents was despite the best efforts of practitioners and members of AIM High, who reached out to them via telephone and email. With parents bearing various responsibilities including work and childcare, attending evening sessions may have been challenging.
- Most of the parents who attended workshops faced significant challenges in raising their children and in interfacing with the CJS and local authority services. These included poverty, family breakdown, domestic abuse, school exclusions, mental health problems, drug misuse, and lack of childcare provision. Their accounts provided significant insight into the ACEs faced by young people and, as noted elsewhere in the report, encompassed structural and systemic issues. The facilitators made a clear effort to identify connections between these issues and (where appropriate) their disproportionate impact on BAME communities.

Recommendations

Dissemination: Disseminate this project's key findings regarding challenges and obstacles faced by parents to relevant members of staff, including senior leaders, and beyond.

Service Aims

The Grant Agreement and Specification document, co-signed by AIM High and London Borough of Islington's Youth and Community Service (on behalf of Islington and Haringey), identifies four service aims. Below we address each of these in turn, again identifying key 'Strengths' and 'Areas for Reflection/Improvement'.

1. To provide training around Adverse Childhood Experiences within BAME communities. Training for staff will highlight cultural and community competence, conscious and unconscious bias and a return to an understanding of institutional racism and how it impacts on individuals and communities.

Strengths

- Session two centred on **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** and trauma from a BAME perspective. Topics covered included intergenerational trauma and how to recognise signs of trauma in BAME clients. The section on intergenerational trauma incorporated video material and covered the key mechanisms of this trauma. Crucially, the workshop covered both Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adverse Community Environments and, using the research of Ellis and Dietz (2017), explored the dynamic between the two. The issue of **cultural/community competence** was covered in the context of Adverse Community Environments and led to rich group discussion on some of the shortcomings of existing community environments, how these might exacerbate trauma for young people and their families, as well as the more positive elements of community life that could be built on and supplemented. The first session included an engaging, comprehensive section on **implicit stereotypes and unconscious bias**, including the Implicit Associations Test and the relationship between unconscious bias, institutional racism and trust. The activities incorporated in this section of the workshop were effective in prompting reflection on participants' implicit biases and how these figured in their day-to-day lives. The first session included a detailed and informative section on **institutional racism**, its impact, and its connections with implicit bias. The section covered the Scarman and Macpherson Reports, connections with persistent forms of racial disparity and issues of blocked trust.
- The multi-agency training sessions were attended by a diversity of services – Children and Adolescent Mental Health, Police, Probation, Youth Offending Services, among others. This diversity encouraged exchange, debate and a good degree of healthy challenge as systemic cultures and operational mindsets – and the tensions between them – were outlined and explored.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- In addition to using hypothetical scenarios to tease out connections between biases and the (re) production of unequal outcomes, in future the facilitators may wish to refer to the GEMM Project's (2019) research on discrimination against ethnic minorities by employers (based on 3200 fictitious job applications).¹²
- Future iterations of this workshop may be enhanced by considering various forms of institutional racism/discrimination and their transmission as outlined by Robert Reiner (2010).¹³ Contemporary issues such as the mistreatment of 'Windrush-generation' migrants could also be used to illustrate the operation and effects of structural racism.

¹² http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Are-employers-in-Britain-discriminating-against-ethnic-minorities_final.pdf

¹³ Reiner, R. (2010) *The Politics of the Police*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Recommendations

Use of academic research: Make fuller use of key social science research insights into implicit bias and the transmission of discrimination, particularly as these relate to race and ethnicity, in future iterations of the programme.

2. **Setting up an initiative whereby parents from BAME backgrounds have a safe space to discuss the pressures associated with their children's involvement in ASB and/or offending behaviour and the structural and societal pressures they face. These support forums will be utilised to raise and resolve issues as they experience them.**

Strengths

- As noted elsewhere in the report, the parents' workshops were effective in providing a forum wherein people felt comfortable discussing their experiences in an honest, exploratory manner. Parents identified a number of pressures relating to their children's involvement in **ASB and/or offending behaviour**. Many of these pressures concerned issues covered in the practitioner workshops, including intergenerational trauma and a lack of trust in statutory processes, systems and representatives. The other issues identified by parents included **structural and societal pressures** relating to racism, poverty, substance misuse, family breakdown, mental health issues, unemployment and/or low-paid, precarious employment in the service sector, procedural and interpersonal issues with local authority services, the care system and the prison service. The facilitators struck a fine balance between listening, sympathising and pointing to **possible resolutions in relation to the issues raised**. In some instances this was extremely difficult, as parents seemed to want others to acknowledge the intractable nature of the problems they faced. However, as noted elsewhere in the report, facilitators were consistent in framing conversations according to session themes, pointing to possible sources of support and working towards solutions wherever possible.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- Although the workshop had clear benefits for those parents who participated, levels of attendance were low. Obviously there are many competing claims on parents' time, and it is difficult to determine a time/location for workshops that is suitable for the majority. This challenge underlines the desirability of more regular parents' forums. These would widen and deepen engagement with parents, offer a more varied range of times/locations, and allow for the tracking of issues over time (as opposed to getting a 'snapshot' via discrete accounts).

Recommendations

Parental engagement: Consider offering a more extensive programme of parents' forums, including parent-practitioner sessions, ideally moderated by a third party.

3. It is hoped the service covered by this specification will help to better support young people and their families from the poor outcomes and lack of opportunity which unfortunately, is more prevalent among BAME individuals and families.

Strengths

- Although it is too early to determine the extent to which the services in Islington and Haringey will enhance support for BAME young people and their families, there are grounds for optimism. Participant evaluations from the practitioner workshops show that a clear majority of participants felt that they had learned lessons which could have an immediate impact on their everyday practice, with levels of engagement remaining high across the three sessions.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- With so many of the poor outcomes identified and explored during practitioner and parent workshops being underpinned by persistent structural inequalities, interventions such as this do not represent a ‘magic bullet’.

4. This intervention ultimately is about strengthening communities who have been marginalized. This intervention will look at disproportionality at a local level. Supporting the community from a cultural approach, where experiences are shared, will strengthen the community. It will also influence Islington and Haringey to shape and improve the services provided, so that young people and their families are supported to (improve outcomes and opportunities so they can) ‘live their best life’.

Strengths

- The hallmarks of a **cultural approach** were evident in the way that parents’ sessions were designed and conducted. In some cases, parents had taken their own initiative in organising neighbourhood forums, with these instances highlighted and explored by facilitators. Parental accounts were grounded in local conditions, including territorial enmities between young people and the particularities of local services.¹⁴

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- The centrality of local factors and conditions in parents’ accounts points to a need for local authorities to be proactive and reflexive in organising forums and other initiatives in response to events at a local level.
- More generally, it might be helpful to include details of each Borough’s cultural/ethnic breakdown as part of the wider Local Authority training programme, so staff can develop a deeper understanding of the Borough they are working in from the start.

Recommendations

Being responsive to local factors: Combine ad hoc forums in response to specific incidents and events with more regular outreach programmes that both draw on and share expertise from relevant services.

¹⁴ For more on territorial enmities between young people in London, including attempts at resolution, see: Armstrong, G. & Rosbrook-Thompson, J. (2017) ‘Squashing the Beef’: Combatting Gang Violence and Reforming Masculinity in East London. *Contemporary Social Science: Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences*, 12 (3-4): 285–296; Armstrong, G & Rosbrook-Thompson, J. (2016) ‘Faith, Space and Selfhood in East London ‘Youth Gang’ Culture’. *Urbanities: Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 6(2): 18–38.

Service Outcomes

The Grant Agreement and Specification document, co-signed by AIM High and London Borough of Islington's Youth and Community Services, identifies five service aims. Below we address each of these in turn, while again identifying key 'Strengths' and 'Areas for Reflection/Improvement'.

1. Islington Targeted Youth Support/YOS/Integrated Gangs Team and Haringey Youth Justice Service/ Early Help/Youth Service to have factual insight and awareness of BAME communities and issues that marginalize them and how to respond supportively to the young people they are working with.

Strengths

- Evidence from observations and participant evaluations indicate a clear attempt to impart factual insight and awareness of the issues that affect and marginalise BAME communities and individuals. The practitioner workshops were effective in pooling and exploring participants' experiences and expertise around these issues. While these were not always distilled into instances of 'good practice', in most cases because responses needed to be carefully tailored to the specificities of a particular young person or family, each response demonstrated a sensitivity to the challenges faced by BAME communities. That said, many practitioners identified blockages at institutional level which, in their opinion, limited their ability to offer truly effective responses.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- As noted above with regard to parents' forums, it would be helpful to disseminate the findings of interviews with young people (in addition to this evaluation report) to a wide range of local authority staff. The lines of questioning pursued in these interviews led to issues being raised that may not be addressed in young people's routine engagements with local authority services.

Recommendations

Dissemination: Disseminate this project's key findings regarding challenges and obstacles faced by young people to relevant members of staff, including senior leaders, and beyond.

2. Improved engagement with local parents and young people.

Strengths

- The parents' sessions and interviews certainly facilitated improved engagement with local parents and young people. Improved engagement over a prolonged period of time would likely require the delivery of a wider range of sessions at a range of times and locations, in order to boost attendance. Another possibility would be to support and perhaps supplement existing parent initiatives. As with the other sessions offered as part of the programme, the neutral status of AIM High staff was important in eliciting honest accounts including the identification and exploration of challenges faced by BAME families. Any rolling out of the programme (or elements of it) would benefit from the continued presence of a third-party in a broker/facilitator role.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- The virtues of this position were underlined during parents' and practitioner sessions, as well as interviews with practitioners and young people, when it came to identifying frustrations and challenges – especially those that were procedural or systemic. Additionally, with persistent problems such as school exclusion, poverty and childcare arrangements being identified by many participants and interviewees, perhaps greater acknowledgement of the connection between underlying structural inequalities and forms of racial disadvantage in routine dealings with local families and young people would be beneficial.

3. Young people and families will be more willing to engage with support services to prevent poor outcomes, and will have greater confidence that they will be treated fairly by services and that staff have an awareness of their cultural needs.

Strengths

- It is too early to make any meaningful judgement in relation to this outcome. However, providing a forum for families and young people to discuss the challenges they face is certainly a step in the right direction, and the initial signs are positive.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- On the issue of awareness of cultural needs, while some of the points raised by parents regarded shortcomings on this issue, young people were wary of (potentially clumsy) attempts to profile them and their needs and/or lifestyles.

4. Reduction in breaches instigated by the YOS (in Islington and Haringey) indicating impact of project on engagement

Strengths

- Again, it is too early to make any meaningful judgement with regard to breaches instigated by YOS in Islington and Haringey. However, every young person interviewed expressed a desire to avoid breaches and make positive changes to their lives.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- One particularly powerful interview with a young person underlined the importance of seeking to improve engagement with young people within appropriate forums. This young person's account raised the possibility that the procedures and routines of some services may put particular young people at risk and also increase the likelihood of breaches occurring. In this instance, a 16-year-old who was required to visit the YOS office regularly was attacked en route by a rival group who were aware of his daily movements. He therefore travelled to and from the YOS building with his own entourage, increasing the likelihood of subsequent altercations between the two groups. Naturally the young person was anxious and feared for his own safety, which adversely affected his levels of engagement. Demonstrating a greater awareness of these issues may improve engagement and, more specifically, encourage young people to engage with the aims and objectives connected with a particular procedure, as well as the procedure itself.

Recommendations

Review the safety and risk implications of YOS procedures: Consider whether the routinisation of young people's movements created by YOS procedures/protocols may increase risk of harm.

5. Islington and Haringey to explore alternative ways of maintaining and increasing young people's engagement.

Strengths

- The programme's interviews with young people provided some encouraging signs with respect to engagement. Young people seemed encouraged by the open-ended exploration of the issues they faced which took place during interviews.

Areas for Reflection/Improvement

- It bears repeating that choosing the right forum for engagement is important. During some interviews with young people, it became clear that some were effectively carrying out their own risk assessments, weighing risk of failure to attend appointments against risk of harm at the hands of other young people. Once again, the fact discussions were facilitated by a third party, with young people's responses indicating that facilitators were perceived as neutral, was important in exploring the challenges and frustrations they face.

Interviews

Interviews with a cross-section of the frontline practitioners who attended workshops were conducted at YOS sites in Islington and Haringey, respectively, in late 2019. A number of parents' workshops were also voice recorded for the purposes of evaluating the project and identifying parents' lived experiences with regard to disproportionality. Finally, young people engaged in the CJS were also interviewed at YOS sites with a view to capturing their experiences pertaining to offending histories and any issues around disproportionality. Our analysis of these interviews/discussions is presented below and addresses issues raised by practitioners, parents and young people, in turn.

Practitioners

Police attitudes

Some practitioners described having to challenge the police's 'set view' of particular families and individuals in a multi-agency context:

The young person that I'm working with just now ... if you speak to my colleague – police colleagues – they say, he's no good, he's no good, he needs to be locked up, he needs to be locked up. That's the only thing they knew about him. (I12: 2)

Sentencing practices

An important question for practitioners concerned racially disproportionate outcomes in some courts and, more specifically, how to translate acknowledgement into action without further exacerbating outcomes:

It's how we challenge that around remands, which is one of the biggest areas. Because it's quite something to go into a court and take on a Judge and essentially kind of highlight that specifically that court has been giving negative outcomes for young people, with the only clearly defining aspect the fact of their background. So that is not a comfortable conversation and one that I think is going to require some prep, both for the court and for staff about how we kind of do deliver that challenge. Because otherwise you run the risk of alienating the court even more and getting worse outcomes for young people. (I2: 3)

The need to communicate effectively with the courts in order to foreground issues pertaining to disproportionality was underlined by another practitioner:

... in terms of things like sentencing I think it's really important – young BAME people are more likely to be remanded and all those kind of things. So I think, thinking about how we communicate that with the courts and get it in the forefront of their minds when they're making those decisions. (I3: 6)

Recommendations

Reporting on and scrutinising disproportionate court outcomes: Explore the possibility of compiling regular reports for local courts detailing disproportionate outcomes for BAME young people from Haringey and Islington – particularly remand and custodial sentences – and introducing an annual or biannual scrutiny panel, including local court representation, to scrutinise those reports.

School exclusions

A similar frustration about acknowledgement and action was expressed with regard to school exclusions:

... we're not being ballsy enough in [that] we're not going up to schools and saying, you need to sign up to zero exclusions. You know, I feel that we in a room acknowledge what the issues are but I think perhaps we – I don't know whether or not I'm low – I'm down here, so I'm not aware enough of the strategic conversations that are happening to try and make some changes for these young men. (I5: 8)

This desire for action is borne out by research on school exclusions. A recent report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime (APPG 2019) noted a significant increase in the number of permanent and fixed term exclusions (70% and 54%, respectively, across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools) between 2012/3 and 2019 and underlined the possible links between school exclusion and serious youth violence. Citing research by the Mayor's Office for Police and Crime (MOPAC), the report noted that pupils in alternative provision are more likely to know someone who carries a knife than those in mainstream educational settings. Other research shows that exclusions are racially disproportionate, with children (especially males) from African-Caribbean, Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma backgrounds three to four times more likely to be excluded than other groups (Timpson 2019).

Creating a space for critical discussion

While practitioners described issues relating to disproportionality being alluded to in their day-to-day work, especially in the context of team-based work, the Disproportionality Programme workshops allowed for detailed, exploratory discussion of these:

I think what was good was like it was – you know, space to have a certain conversation. Because I feel like all organisations should continuously have those conversations because these issues aren't going anywhere for now. (18: 1)

So it was valuable in the sense that there's not many times you're going to have a whole workforce really have to sit and think about discrimination and really look at it and really think about it in a way that that training forced colleagues to. So I found that very, very helpful. But the first and second allowed a dialogue to be opened. So it really allowed us to talk about things that people don't like to talk about generally. (14: 1-2)

I think a lot of the things we talked about were like – it was all really interesting and I think it just brought a lot of it back to the forefront of like all of our minds, like having those conversations. (13: 1)

Furthermore, practitioners appreciated learning about their colleagues' experiences (in both a personal and professional capacity) and were encouraged that the sessions had not been prompted by a particular flashpoint (i.e. they were motivated by an ongoing concern about disproportionality and the adverse impact on children and young people being worked with).

While talking to everybody else, their experiences were really awful from the start. So having those discussions with you about the people's perceptions and experiences, it opens kind of really the mind of other people's experiences. (110: 3)

What I've found – what it did really bring to focus for me was how many of my colleagues are carrying around so much from their own experiences. And it's not something I guess I don't know, but something that very much brought into focus that, which wasn't particularly comfortable I don't suppose, but quite healthy as well. (12: 2)

Yeah. I think it's made me like think about and sort of feel more confident in like having the conversations with young people about their experiences as well. (13: 5)

Whereas this way was a balanced, controlled – no-one was in trouble, no-one was being accused of being a racist, so it wasn't off the back of something. Whereas society I find as a whole generally only really acts in a big way, in a reactive way. (14: 2)

Differing levels of experience and expertise among practitioners

Whereas all practitioners identified at least one element of the workshops that they found helpful, many pointed to areas where there was some repetition of content covered in training sessions they had attended previously. In light of this, some would have appreciated the option of attending sessions selectively (based on self-assessment of knowledge/skills). Not all staff participants attended all three workshops, for a variety of reasons, though this would have been preferred in order to benefit from the cumulative nature of the learning. Participants offered suggestions about how the structure and content of workshops could be refined.

... it's very difficult if you have not grown up around diversity, to then be in a position where you are forced to be able to deal with diversity and then be able to just hit the ground running and understand the families and understand the young people and understand all the little nuances and be able to build these brilliant relationships ... if anything I think two-thirds of the training was done from a very theory point of view and I would have liked maybe one training theory and two of the trainings very practical. (14: 4-6).

I almost found it, are you saying that I don't know how to work with this cohort? Are you saying that I'm struggling to engage this cohort? Are you saying that I'm not quite appreciating the traumatic, you know, trans, you know; are you saying that I'm – that's not coming through in my work hence why I'm here? And I almost – it was a bit like I was looking around for some – yeah, some sort of validation about why I'm (here) (15: 8).

But what I felt is that we kind of skimmed a lot of different subjects. We got a basic introduction to lots of different areas, some of them which we've all had lots of training on. So I felt that it would have been more beneficial. ... it probably would have been helpful ... to have a conversation, not in terms of where the service is at, prior to actually designing the training. You know, the discussions that I've had with other sort of managers and also with other practitioners is that they felt they could have been pushed a bit more. Maybe for it to be a little bit more controversial. (16: 4 & 7)

Other suggestions included delivering the workshops over two full days (partly on the basis that practitioners who attended afternoon workshops were less fresh and carried the mental baggage of a full morning's work) and to spend more time focusing on workers' intergenerational trauma.

Recommendations

Format of programmes: consider using full-day rather than half-day sessions.

Issues with content

Though all practitioners were in broad agreement about the need for the workshops, a small number took issue with session content and/or the way it was presented. It was suggested that workshops should cover manifestations of institutional racism across society (to balance the focus on police through Macpherson, etc.), while there was also some scepticism in relation to intergenerational trauma. (No quotations have been included here in order to preserve the anonymity of practitioners.)

Disproportionality as an issue in upper echelons of local authorities

Some practitioners talked about racial disproportionality within many local authorities, and particularly at management level, which in their view necessitated an ‘inside-out’ approach to addressing the problem. This observation was related to suggestions that workshops should be attended by as many employees as possible, including those in senior management positions, and that procedures (as well as attitudes/approaches) should be examined with a view to reform:

It's then, kind of undermined by the fact that obviously it's systemic and process-driven as well ... So it's a real – it misses, especially these days I think, because there has been a distinct movement in the last five years or so to a more therapeutic, strengths based approach. But the legislation and things like inspection criteria obviously always lags behind by a few years. (12: 5)

... actually it's an internal issue, what am I doing about what's going on internally from my colleagues and how they feel. And then in challenging things that are a bit closer to you I think you become better equipped at challenging those things that are outside of you, you know. (18: 6)

The strongest session – best practice-based and action-orientated

Many practitioners thought the final workshop was especially helpful and productive:

But it was that kind of practical, healthy discussion about what we can actually do was something that I really enjoyed in that last session without a doubt. (12: 3)

The most helpful thing I found was maybe the last session, in being able to develop some agency around kind of collective responsibility in the room and us all thinking about what we could all be doing differently, tangibly, you know, realistically, in terms of trying to make a change. (15: 2)

Recommendations

Replicating an action-orientated training focus: Prioritise the identification and dissemination of good practice, which can have an immediate impact on practitioners’ day-to-day work, in future iterations of the programme.

Parents

Trust, communication and use of information

Parents were confident in describing their engagement with local authority services, but some identified issues regarding trust. In one case this concerned communication, information sharing (in a multi-agency setting) and the possibility of being judged:

I have in the past had phone calls and they're saying, oh have you heard from your daughter, have you heard this, or, do you know this, and you may know what the information – you may have the answer to what they're looking for, and then... but when it flips the other way they said, yeah we've seen her. So I said, well are they okay, yeah she's okay. Oh well what are you working on at the moment? What are you doing? Or, I've emailed you. Oh yeah well yeah we've seen her, but it's very, very generic; they're not really – whereas you want to talk, you want to have that dialogue with them, but it's just not happening ... And the other thing is, when you're giving this information, you also feel that you're being judged ... You feel that you're being judged and because they're not feeding back to you, it makes it even worse. What are they hiding? Why aren't they communicating with you in a way to make, you know what, it's actually quite good that you're engaging with us, or, we can see that you want to work with us and it's not you, it's just how the situation – they don't give you any form of encouragement.

Yes which I think for me, it's not something that parents are even aware of. I think naively, yes, we know they must record it somewhere, but I think, as a parent, if we're working with any sort of like, professionals in that way and they're recording personal information and they're sharing that kind of information, they need to tell us, because we're not told that (I1: 2-3, 5)

This was an important concern, given it could colour parents' view of working in partnership with local authority services:

I was quite an avid supporter of working in partnership and working in partnership again but looking back at it, it just feels like hold on a second, now I'm thinking, somewhere in this system you've got all this information about me and people close to me, and what's that about? What have you done with it? How has it been used? Where's it been passed to? Does it then – do you understand what I mean? (I1: 6)

At its most acute, this perception could lead to partnership working being understood according to a 'them against you' dynamic:

... there can be at times so many interventions all going on at the same time ... And you think well, what's going on? Why are we here? What's the progress and to get that interaction and get an update when there's an intervention here, there's a psychologist, there's nurses, there's case workers, there's all kinds of different people involved and it's just them against you. (I1: 3)

The role of parent co-ordinators

A possible remedy for this was the 'Parent Co-ordinator' role – at present only available in Islington – through which parents could be empowered, and levels of engagement and communication could be boosted. The forums created via this role may also help to combat the feeling of loneliness that some parents felt with respect to the challenges of parenthood. As one parent commented:

... from my own personal experience, I think if the YOS team engage well with the parents it will hopefully produce better results. But how we do that, but in a constructive way, I think we need to just focus on like the case workers, working with the parents and I'm sure a lot of them do. But I think just like you're doing parent support, I think the YOS workers needs to adapt some of that as well where they're working with the parents. I don't know, I didn't get that, I personally didn't get that and I think just like what you're doing years later, I think that that's something that they should be thinking about, working – I don't know if they have something like that now. (I1: 7)

The limitations of individualised interventions

Another observation concerned the locus of intervention, with some parents feeling that family-focused interventions failed to attend to wider societal issues:

Because I know from personal experience it's very, very distressful when you've got a young person that's been arrested, going to court and all the rest of it, and it's not you, a lot of parents it's not them; it's the society that we live in. (I1: 8)

Recommendations

Boosting parental trust and engagement: consider strengthening whole-family working practices and models, including the creation of parenting worker roles where these do not already exist.

Young people

School exclusion

The majority of the young people interviewed had been excluded from mainstream education, with the remainder having voluntarily withdrawn from further education (sixth form colleges).

The reasons for permanent exclusion were varied, and included violence against teachers and knife-carrying in school. In the latter instance, the young person described being bullied by older pupils for three years (between the ages of 12 and 15) – and recalled having expressed a desire to move to another school – with a knife eventually being carried into school for protection:

... some kid in my year threatened me and I got really angry and it was one of those things where when I get angry it's one of those things where I don't remember what I did or what happened, in that sense. Apparently I brought it in, didn't use it on anyone, it was just in my possession to keep me safe. (I9: 9)

Another young person had been permanently excluded twice:

So like my schooling history was like – from Year 6, I got into situations in school, so I'm arguing with my head teacher, being physical and I ended up breaking an elbow and then I got sentenced to a unit in primary school. They sent me back to mainstream in Year 6. I then got kicked out again and I got sent to the unit and I've been in the unit since about Year 10. (I13: 2)

Recommendations

Increasing accountability for school exclusions: Consider identifying and collating longer-term outcomes for excluded BAME young people, and disseminating this information on a school-by-school basis.

Treatment by Police and the Criminal Justice System

While one young person described being treated fairly during arrest, others thought the process was unfair. One young person recalled the circumstances around their arrest:

... they were mugging me off ... taking the mick. (I14: 4)

It should be noted, however, that this young person felt they had been treated fairly after arriving at the police station.

There was a lack of consensus among young people as to whether they had been treated fairly by representatives of the CJS. Whereas some BAME young people thought their background had not resulted in any unfair treatment, others spoke of unequal outcomes with an air of resignation. Indeed, some young people deemed their treatment had been fair when measured against their knowledge and previous experience of prevailing standards rather than against more abstract, theoretical standards of fairness and equality. This was evident in young people's reflections on sentencing:

(In response to a question about the possibility of being treated more harshly as a young BAME male): No. How I've been treated or how I am treated, it doesn't change anything. It's just I guess what happens. (I9: 7)

Another young person recalled their treatment with similar resignation:

I wouldn't say fair, but it (my treatment) was – it wasn't too bad, but because of my role, I don't think I should have got as long ... (In response to a question about whether being a BAME male contributed to his sentence): Possibly. Because that's mostly what happens in the justice system ... You can't say everyone in the justice system (is prejudiced), because like everyone's the same, but the majority of the people, like police and stuff ... It seemed like she (the judge) didn't really take in what we were saying, what I was saying anyway. It's like from the beginning she decided towards the victim. (I15: 5-6)

Discussion of Pre-Sentence Reports also prompted some interesting reflections:

Yeah (I contributed to the Pre-Sentence Report) ... (It was) a true representation ... It helped me not go to jail, yeah ... but what am I doing for a whole year coming here?... But it's punishment. That's it. If you was to give someone a punishment, you'd give them a punishment, that's like at least they learn something ... (I would have respected a punishment) if it was shorter and I actually learnt something. (I14: 6-7)

Recommendations

Police relations with young people: Police Borough Command Units should continue working to strengthen relations with BAME young people.

YOS processes/procedures

Young people offered a number of insights on YOS processes and procedures. One young person described the YOS building representing authority and, more specifically, the Police. As alluded to earlier in the report, some young people raised issues with some YOS processes and, more specifically, were concerned that these may be heightening risk of breaches and/or putting them in possible danger:

Yeah it's been nuts. But I think even today – but I think it's like the fourth time today I've had a situation on the way to come to the YOT... it's only when I come here I get into an issue. I've got to come every day, so it's like yeah they try to help me here but they also set me up as well in the same instance ... I know, but I've become accustomed to it. It's like obviously the first couple of times it happens you panic, your heartbeat's – all of these things but then all you do is get yourself in a worse predicament. But if you're panicking, nothing's going to get done. You can't accept the situation, you can't safeguard yourself, you've just got to – it happens. (I13: 4)

The same interviewee expressed frustration that practitioners could not admit the impossibility of his situation, with this frustration leading to a lack of meaningful engagement with services:

In my position, we've only got two options. We've got to go to jail – more likely you go to jail or you die, because you either don't carry your shank and you get backed into some sort of rivals and then you've got no means to defend yourself, you're dead. Or you carry a shank and you get stopped and searched and you might go to jail. But I would rather be alive in jail than be dead on the road, yeah. So I'd rather have my shank ... They know, but they don't understand what we go through. It's the fact that this building exists. So we come here for them to say to us... well, they're trying to steer us right onto a greater life. So we come here for them to say to us, like, well it's about time you made a change. What do you mean it's about time I made a change? I've been trying to live – that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to stay alive. What, am I not meant to try and stay alive? ... I've always asked them, so what do you want me to do because I'm carrying my weapon, I get arrested, but I don't carry my weapon and I die. You tell me what I should do? They won't answer my question. They just talk quickly; say something and I've got to go. They never want – they can never give you an answer because it's a sticky situation and you have no answer. What are you going to tell me? You're telling me to die. No one wants to tell me what to do. So they do their job and they let me do what I need to do and that's it. Nobody cares about the ins and outs of the situation. (I13: 5-6, 10)

Case workers

Young people were divided on the credentials of an 'ideal case worker'. While one young person insisted this should be 'someone that's been involved', others were less prescriptive. Indeed, for one mixed-race young man, a white female case worker had assumed the role of father:

She's just like one of the – she's one of those staff people that like they don't – how can I explain it, they don't, like, discriminate against you in any shape or form ... I would say she's like my dad. I don't get along with my mum like I used to. Even though I live with her. I don't speak to her properly, I don't respect her. She don't respect me. We just don't have that type of connection ... Race, colour, sexuality, it doesn't mean anything. She's still a human being and we've just got to treat everyone the same. (I9: 5)

Some young people were wary of attempts to engage with them that involved undue profiling:

*... they (case workers) get aspects of me. But as I said earlier, they get certain things like people – I don't know, it's a push and go thing because like – it's like yeah cool, they understand something, but because they understand a little part, like they've understood – ... they understood the first part, they can connect with the second part, they automatically believe that they know you now. So now they've made that small connection on – ah they play basketball, you play basketball too, now they believe they know your whole story. Everything that you do is around basketball and they believe that they know you too much. They end up f***ing up and the whole situation – now you don't have a relationship with them, you just see them as annoying. (I13: 8)*

Involvement in crime and maturational reform

On their offences, while some young people spoke of carrying weapons for protection, others described getting involved in county lines drug distribution through peer groups. One young man was convinced of the power of what criminologists call maturational reform, stating 'Everyone falls away, everyone' (I7: 19). Conversely, this underlines the importance of protecting younger people by limiting their exposure to forms of trauma and exploitation which have a proven association with factors such as school exclusion.

Recommendations

Young People's engagement: Continue capturing the voice of young people in relation to disproportionality.

Recommendations

The recommendations which appear throughout the report are collated below. The aim is to help Islington and Haringey further improve the work they are leading on to tackle disproportionality and the over-representation of BAME young people in the CJS:

Recommendations

1. Structure and Approach

In any future disproportionality programme involving staff training, consider using full-day rather than half-day sessions, move ice-breaker activities to after the session outline, specify the cumulative nature of learning from session to session, and incorporate 'learning into practice' action planning after each session.

2. Dissemination

Disseminate this project's key findings regarding the challenges and obstacles faced by young people and parents to relevant staff members, including senior leaders, and beyond.

3. Use of academic research

Make fuller use of key social science research insights into implicit bias and the transmission of discrimination, particularly as these relate to race and ethnicity, in future iterations of the programme.

4. Young People's and Parental engagement

Continue capturing the voice of young people in relation to disproportionality and consider offering a more extensive programme of parents' forums, including parent-practitioner sessions moderated by a third party.

5. Being responsive to local factors

Combine ad hoc forums in response to specific incidents and events with more regular outreach programmes that both draw on and share expertise from relevant services.

6. Review the safety and risk implications of YOS procedures

Consider whether the routinisation of young people's movements created by YOS procedures/ protocols may increase risk of harm.

7. Reporting on and scrutinising disproportionate court outcomes

Explore the possibility of compiling regular reports for local courts detailing disproportionate outcomes for BAME young people from Haringey and Islington – particularly remand and custodial sentences – and introducing an annual or biannual scrutiny panel, including local court representation, to scrutinise those reports.

8. Replicating an action-orientated training focus

Prioritise the identification and dissemination of good practice, which can have an immediate impact on practitioners' day-to-day work, in future iterations of the programme.

9. Boosting parental trust and engagement

Consider strengthening whole-family working practices and models, including the creation of parenting worker roles where these do not already exist.

10. Increasing accountability for school exclusions

Consider identifying and collating longer-term outcomes for excluded BAME young people, and disseminating this information on a school-by-school basis.

11. Police relations with young people

Police Borough Command Units should continue working to strengthen relations with BAME young people.

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City, University of London
Northampton Square
London
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United Kingdom

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