

Care Leavers Association Speaking Out BAME Project Report

Background

The CLA was asked by The Tudor Trust to consider exploring the issues faced by BME young people in and leaving care. This involved making use of funding that had previously been allocated to another group for such a purpose. Since that group had folded, The Tudor Trust considered the CLA as the most appropriate organisation to take forward such work. The CLA responded positively to this invitation and in May 2009 The Tudor Trust awarded the CLA up to £20,000 to “research, prepare and put on a really first-class event around this issue and then to facilitate a young person’s group and publish the results of the event and their follow up”.

Project Delivery

Steering Group

As outlined in our original application, we recruited a steering group of young people from BAME backgrounds to oversee the planning and development of the project. We were successful in recruiting six young people from the Greater Manchester area for this steering group. We also consulted with other young people about the planning of the event through the use of a short questionnaire and via the Barnardo’s Leaving Care Service in Manchester. The steering group met 3 times before the delivery of the event, once immediately after the event and 3 further times in 2011 to build on the event report. There was, therefore, extensive involvement of care-experienced young people before, during and after the event.

Research and Development

Initially getting groups and individuals involved proved to be difficult. Young people from the care system often find it difficult to make long-term commitments and can be reluctant to engage in projects for which they often, wrongly, feel under-qualified. As a result we built on our connections with the local leaving care service at Barnardo’s in Manchester. They were able to help us contact other leaving care services and organisations working with care leavers in the North West and throughout the UK. We conducted initial meetings with key figures in the field and conducted desk-based research in order to give the project a thorough grounding in the known research literature on the concerns and issues facing black, asian and minority ethnic care leavers and looked after children in the UK.

Once a suitable event was chosen publicity materials were developed and sent out to a wide range of groups and organisations.

The Event

The Event was held at Pure in the Manchester Printworks on 2nd June 2010. In all 92 people attended the event. 72 of those attending were young people from or in care. Others attending included support workers and participation workers. This still remains one of the largest gatherings of BAME young people in care. The day was facilitated by Annette Zera using the Open Space participation technique which allowed young people to shape the agenda of the day themselves. Annette had been recommended to us by The Tudor Trust. Her technique allowed far higher participation by young people than one would normally expect at large-scale events of this kind. It proved extremely effecting in maximising contributions from young people, allowing even those young people who lack confidence or skills in a public setting to locate their views and experiences within the wider discussion. As you will have seen from the report of the event, large parts of the day consisted if young people working together in groups with relatively little adult or professional input. During the event a whole range of issues were raised and discussed, stretching from foster care placements to age assessments. Each young person's group came up with a series of recommendations that they thought would tackle the problems discussed. At the end of the day, all delegates voted for the recommendations that they thought were the most important.

The event report was sent to The Tudor Trust and other organisations, as well as to the young people who participated in the day, shortly after the event. That event report is attached to this final project report. The main areas covered in that report were:

Top 5 Broad Issues

1. The need for more financial support for care leavers
2. The need to challenge and end racial discrimination
3. Inconsistency and unfairness in the services provided in different areas
4. The future of the care system in light of the shortages of carers
5. The need for support for care leavers after the age of 21

Top 5 Recommendations from young people in the Event Report

1. Some of us are left in isolation - we need good connections to our community and culture
2. All care leavers need access to an open and honest website about entitlements - no secrecy
3. Extend the age of support available for all care leavers
4. There should be more advice about financial support available. It should be standard for everyone
5. The service given should be the same for everyone

Other important and specific issues included:

The need for a better quality of care in relation to fostering and other carers for example:

- More appreciation of the cultural and religious needs of young people
- More focus on the emotional needs of young people

- Financial support for leaving care needs to be clearer and more consistent
- Better age assessments
- More involvement in Care Plan reviews
- The importance of Home Office Regulations and policy on immigration
- Passports

Other possible actions to be taken:

- Additional support such as mentoring by and for BME young people
- Better training for carers and professionals
- Annual conferences led by BME young people

During the feedback session at the end of the day many young people spoke positively about having been given the opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns and expressed the wish that this should become a regular event.

Event Report

The event report was disseminated to all of the leaving care teams in the UK and to 20 key policy makers in government and the public sector. It was also distributed to all those participants for whom we had relevant contact details.

Post-Event

Initially work on the post-event activities proved difficult. Whilst young people were engaged with the event, once it was over they were less inclined to remain involved in the project. Our difficulties in follow-up were also affected by the resignation of the National Director of the CLA in the summer of 2010. The former National Director had been managing the project and it was only when her successor was appointed in October 2010 that we were able to fully continue the follow-up work.

However, a small steering group of 6 young people was created to take the messages from the event further. The steering group met in August and December of 2010 and in February and April of 2011. There is another meeting scheduled for June of 2011. The following activities have taken place since the 2010 event:

- We facilitated a meeting with young people to discuss solutions to the event recommendations
- We have worked to develop a second report/policy briefing that focuses on solutions
- We made the Report and event information available on CLA web site, which led to it being downloaded many times.
- The Event report and an explanatory email was sent to all leaving care teams and policy officers in England as well as to Children In Care Councils at local authority level.
- We met with Tim Loughton MP, Children's Minister in the new Coalition Government. He promised to take the issues further with his department and to promote the outcomes of the project

- We gave evidence, informed by the project, to the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry on Education for Care Leavers in 2010/2011
- We attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and were able to inform them of our work in this area.
- We have developed a media project to produce short films highlighting issues for children in care and care leavers that will include the findings of our BAME event and the issues raised around it in the steering groups and elsewhere.

Further Work

As noted, we have a further meeting of the Steering Group in June. Thereafter, we aim to continue to support the steering group to meet, thus ensuring that the issues raised by the event are carried forward. We will do this at our own expense, as part of our current work plans. The group will finalise the media project and establish a web presence within the auspices of the CLA. The web space will highlight the project and the event, continue to provide for downloading the event report and any related policy briefings, publish short films made by young people and publish stories and other personal experiences from young people with a BAME background. We will raise awareness of the web space amongst all in care and leaving care teams and other organisations working with young people in care. We hope to have this section of our website online at the end of May or beginning of June 2011.

Difference

The event itself made an enormous difference to the profile of issues highlighted by the young people who attended. The focus of the event was “the young person’s voice”. For some it was their first chance to talk about their experience and have somebody listen and respond. It gave many young people an opportunity to reflect on the past and to think about their own support needs. Amongst the Steering Group and the event participants it also fostered a sense of wellbeing and altruism by providing them with a mechanism to use their experiences to help to improve the current care system.

Membership of the Steering Group provided a personal development opportunity for some young people. They were able to develop new skills in relation to research, producing an event and campaigning. Through these means, they gained increased confidence and self-esteem. They also benefited from meeting the UK government’s Children’s Minister and engaging with policy officers at national level.

Initially we found that there was little published information on the needs of BAME children in care. This project has made a new contribution to the debate and raised awareness of the issues throughout the care and leaving care sector. The project has an increased likelihood to be of benefit because it foregrounds the voices of young people. The solutions which form

the 2nd report have been developed by young people and are grounded in their lived experience.

Being able to meet with the Children's Minister, Tim Laughton, was important in reinforcing the success of the project. The Minister, having heard the voice of young BAME people, gave assurances that their ideas would be taken forward at a national policy level. We will use the Steering Group to hold the Minister to account in the future.

Increasingly cultural and racial issues are becoming more prominent in the care and leaving care sector. For example, there have recently been a number of government announcements concerning placing BAME young people in non-BAME foster placements. The Speaking Out project makes a positive and important contribution to such debates.

The CLA and the Speaking Out steering group will continue to promote the outcomes of the project and to raise awareness of the issues. For example, we will work to ensure that local care and leaving care teams implement solutions that provide BAME young people with an appropriate and supported care experience.

Since the instigation of this project the issues affecting BAME young people in or leaving care have become more prominent. Those responsible for service delivery to this group have a greater awareness with regard to just how important a connection to, or indeed lack of connection to birth culture can affect a young person in care. There are examples of good practice up and down the country which we will highlight in a policy briefing to be produced in June. However more needs to be done particularly in areas where there are less BAME communities and fewer, more isolated BAME young people. The CLA will continue to promote a view which is based on the experience of BAME care leavers that will assist care and leaving care services to provide the most effective and supportive levels of care to all BAME young people.