



# UBUNTU

## BULLETIN

Black Perspectives in Community Development Training

SPRING 2003

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEARNING: TRAINING FROM BLACK PERSPECTIVES

### BVSNW – CULTURAL DIVERSITY TRAINING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**T**he Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales originally designed the course in 2001, which came about in response to the growing need for training and learning opportunities that reflect Black perspectives in Wales.

The course is currently undergoing accreditation through Welsh Open College Network, and is designed to be delivered over two days, or run as a one-day session. BVSNW have also designed and delivered a number of thematic workshops on developing inclusive practice within and between Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), communities and organisations.

Whilst community development from Black perspectives promotes principles that advocate participation, self-determination, reflection and

social justice, for example, the reality is 'mainstream' organisations struggle when it comes to truly developing and embedding 'inclusive practice' in terms of:

- Developing equal partnerships with BME organisations and communities.
- Consulting with BME communities.
- Delivering appropriate services to BME communities.
- Employing and retaining BME staff.

As part of the training programme BVSNW examine the contributory factors that underpin this continuing lack of success. Part of the process includes exploring and reflecting on individual notions of 'race' and culture(s) ('Black' and 'white') and how these

Welcome to the **UBUNTU** Bulletin, a newsletter on Black perspectives in community development learning and training.

**UBUNTU** Bulletin is a regular feature of **The Community Work Training Bulletin** but is also sent to all members of **UBUNTU**, the interest group of the **Federation of Community Work Training Groups for Black and Ethnic Minority community workers and activists**.

If you would like more information about joining **UBUNTU** please contact **Carol Jones, Development Officer Black Perspectives, at the Federation of Community Work Training Groups** on

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realities impact on our *own* self-image and our interactions with others: challenging perceptions of BME and 'white' culture.

What are the barriers to BME integration/co-existence in British society?



By discussing the history behind the movement of BME communities globally and how Britain's current diverse population came about, we highlight how the subsequent treatment and exclusion of these communities have undermined attempts to establish a shared culture that celebrates difference and supports social justice. Drawing from these perspectives course participants can begin to critically assess legislation and policy development. Moving to a personal perspective, participants can then begin to identify how historical perceptions and expectations embedded in our sub-conscious and within organisational and political structures, combine and interact to strengthen the status quo.

By the end of the course it is intended that participants will have a clearer understanding of how their ethnicity, socialisation, cultural norms and awareness influences individual values systems, beliefs and practice. Participants will also understand the importance and added-value of organisational structures and process that support and promote the active inclusion of BME and other marginalised communities.

**If you would like to find out more about the course, please contact Tony Hendrickson at BVSNW, tel: 02920 450068, or you can email: [info@bvsnw.org](mailto:info@bvsnw.org)**

## PROFILE: BME COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKERS, TRAINING AND LEARNING

**S**aima Arshad Mahmood is a Community Development worker employed by Action for Arthur's Hill Ltd., in Newcastle. I spoke to her about her work and experience of the NVQ in Community Development Work level 2 – aimed at those who are relatively new to the field – which she is currently working towards. Saima has been involved in community development work for the past seven years, two of which were as an unpaid worker. She was drawn to community development work through an interest in working with diverse communities. As a Neighbourhood Assistant, Saima was able to combine and put to good use and combine knowledge gained through unpaid work with her considerable experience of administration.

Since last year the Occupational Standards for Community Development Learning, which underpin the NVQ, have been revised and significantly improved. Saima is part of one of the last groups to undertake the NVQ in its original form. She decided to begin the NVQ because it recognised the skills and experiences she had gained over the previous seven

years and allowed her to continue working, whilst gathering evidence towards a nationally recognised qualification.

The NVQ presented Saima with challenges from the outset, not least because of its unwieldy nature. The language – too much jargon – was a problem she felt that would prevent those with English as a second language from attempting the NVQ. Despite the obstacles, so far Saima has found doing the NVQ useful as it has helped to identify her skills and knowledge gaps, and options for addressing them.

We then moved on to discuss Black perspectives of community development work. I asked Saima if she felt there was a difference of approach to community development work with and within BME communities. Overall she felt there were differences and in an effort to address this in a systematic way Saima, along with colleagues, has developed a small research project involving women from diverse communities, including white working class. The project aims to examine the challenges to and opportunities for joint working within and across the communities by using a



qualitative approach, including interviews and focus groups. The project will run until October 2003 after which a report will be produced.

Finally I asked Saima about her plans for the future, and whether she would recommend the NVQ in

Community Work. She hopes to become more involved in advisory/advocacy work and fundraising. As for the NVQ Saima had mixed feelings. She felt that there needed to be underpinning knowledge training and/or mentoring available for inexperienced practitioners that could be

accessed before embarking on an NVQ.

**If you would like more information about the Community Development Occupational Standards, or on the NVQ please contact Carol at the Federation office.**

## BRIDGES OR BARRICADES? CONFERENCE REPORT

The conference was organised by the Community Development Foundation, in association with SCCD, Refugee Council, Embrace West Midlands and Ubuntu (the Black practitioners interest group of the Federation of Community Work Training Groups), and sponsored by Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency.

The conference aimed to encourage open up debate around current policies and practices relating to race equality, social cohesion, inclusion and diversity. Participants also explored the challenges and opportunities for community development in a society that is increasingly diverse.

Participants were asked to consider and respond to the following questions:

- What is the role for community development in promoting better

understanding and co-operation in a society where experiences of institutional racism are still common?

- What if anything has changed following the Macpherson Report on the death of Stephen Lawrence?
- What can be learned from anti-racist perspectives and the experiences of Black, minority ethnic and refugee communities in Britain, and
- How does all this relate to other forms of oppression?

### CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEBATE

Dean T. Huggins gave a brief overview of the role of Ubuntu in contributing to meeting this challenge. Dean argues that the focus should be social justice that acknowledges discrimination and inequality, and power differentials within and between communities, and the state.

Shamshar Chohan, Chair of SCCD introduced the concept of the 'house of equality'. The front door or visible work is not necessarily the most productive. Nor does it have the most impact, whereas the back door or invisible work is when the most challenges are to be found, as it is here where perceptions are formed which combine to work against establish diversity as a productive way forward.

Building bridges, as another speaker Ranjit Sondhi notes, is dependent on giving greater attention to the cause(s) whilst continuing to address the symptoms. A possible way forward would be to facilitate debate that seeks answers to questions like 'how do we strive to be different and equal'? Individuals are not 'just' their ethnicity, they have in fact multi-identities. This would contribute towards enabling people to develop a greater awareness (and understanding) of their own and others' values.

Lorraine Martins, Audit Commission, cautioned against



accepting community cohesion at face value. A case in point is recent immigration policy, legislation and citizenship criteria that include speaking fluent English. This could just as easily have an opposite effect and serve to drive a wedge between communities.

Balancing policies and initiatives aimed at regeneration with those that focus on cohesion is fraught with pitfalls. The process can leave some communities feeling excluded at the expense of others. This in turn can lead to conflict and further entrenchment and isolation of the very communities such policies aim to support and open up.

The task of dismantling barricades and building bridges continues to tax government and all those engaged in community development. There are however some fundamental obstacles that have yet to be addressed in any meaningful and coherent way.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FROM BLACK PERSPECTIVES: A RESPONSE TO BRIDGES OR BARRICADES?

How can community development address the reality of the structural positions in which BME communities have been sited? Or put another way, what can be learned from

community development from Black perspectives to address and 'deal' with the lived realities and experience of diverse BME communities?

Community development from Black perspectives respects and acknowledges where the power to represent a particular group's perspectives lie, and that is with the members themselves. Power and control over cultural representation must become a shared responsibility. This goes beyond community leaders or similar 'voice of the people' that can come to represent an almost insurmountable barricade to communities engaging in self define and positive change. Leadership however must be accountable to all sections of the community; otherwise we end up with 'individual development without any community advancement'.

There are also inter-group barriers that demand closer attention. How can BME communities address 'the conflict and confrontation' approach to communication that exists within and between community groups?

Dismantling barricades is dependent on individuals with rights and responsibilities becoming active community members. This is a reality for BME communities and needs to be addressed if responsibility for resources is to be shared and accessed by all.

Dismantling the barricades cannot take place without the willingness to really tackle

social and economic inequalities. This then raises a further question: does the barrier keep some people in, or others out?

## MOVING ON

The BME communities have been at the forefront of drawing attention to the effect of institutional and societal racism and inequality. The challenge now is to collectively identify solutions based on the 'Black' experience. This is not to say however that this isn't happening, but *who* apart from the immediate beneficiaries know about it? And does it matter?

In the meantime the Community Development Foundation, a government-funded agency, is producing a pamphlet that will draw on contributions and learning from the conference.

At a national level the Community Cohesion unit is tasked with integrating strategies and policies across government departments. The government has set up a series of practitioners' reference groups to help develop future cohesion policies. Any one wanting further information should go to [www.communitycohesion.gov.uk](http://www.communitycohesion.gov.uk)

**Additional notes, plus a paper on the theme of Bridges and Barricades can be found at the Standing Conference for Community Development Website.**