

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROJECT Camden Safeguarding Children Board

This case study demonstrates how a partnership between Camden Voluntary Action a mainstream infrastructure organisation and a series of local BME and faith groups led to better services for BME Children and Young People in the borough.

About Voluntary Action Camden

Voluntary Action Camden (VAC) is Camden's Council for Voluntary Service. They work with the people of Camden to support, develop and promote voluntary and community activity. They support local organisations so that people and communities can continue to benefit from a thriving voluntary and community sector.

Key Stats

Income- £1.32 million

No. Staff- 21 staff members

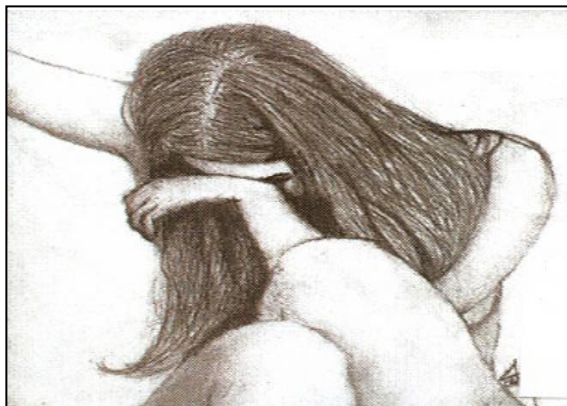
Coverage: Borough wide- Camden

Type of Organisation: Local Infrastructure

Nature of Collaboration- Joint service delivery - informal subcontracting

The Programme

Since 2006 the Community Partnership Advisor Project (CPA) of Camden Voluntary Action has delivered a programme in partnership with local BME organisations to engage local minority ethnic communities and faith groups in safeguarding their children. This programme has focused on 4 specific areas of child abuse; female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to beliefs in spirit possession/child witches and child trafficking and exploitation.



VAC realised that they were working against a whole host of experiences faced by the communities they were trying to engage which manifested themselves as barriers to the delivery of the project as well as key areas to tackle as part of the project. These included;

- Schools are there to snitch on us as parents
- Police are biased against immigrant communities and take advantage of us as vulnerable communities

- Laws are not there to protect our children but to stigmatise traditional cultures practices by our communities
- Our rights as parents are being taken away in favour of the children
- Social services will take our children away

This partnership has been successful in engaging local communities through BME and faith groups and has worked between October 2008 to March 2012 with 52 local community and faith organisations as well as supplementary schools reaching 677 people. The Community Partnership Advisor has spent time building relationships with community leaders or group to ensure the developed of a meaningful partnership.

The Nature of Collaboration

The programme was delivered jointly by CPA-VAC as the lead organisation and the plethora of community organisations that they have worked with over the years. CPA-VAC was accountable to the funders, responsible for



the budget and ensuring the delivery of activities and the community organisations were responsible for supporting the development and delivery of activities, shaping the direction of the project and outreach to the communities.

The community groups were identified initially through networking and referrals CPA-VAC approached a few organisations that they already had links with and started to deliver the project with them. Subsequently other groups heard about the work and approached CPA-VAC to be part of the programme. This saved time scoping out organisations for and ensured that the community groups were committed to partnering with the lead organisation to deliver the work.

VAC was funded as a lead organisation to deliver this programme of work; they worked in partnership with community groups to ensure a participatory approach to the project. The roles and responsibilities of CPA-VAC and the partner organisation were clear and allocated based on expertise, time, resources, capacity and ability. Although VAC was the organisation with access to the money and the decision making to some extent, the community groups involved felt a sense of empowerment and ownership of the project based on the nature and process of engagement. The partnership has raised awareness of service providers & communities on a range of aspects of safeguarding (eg. cultural, law,

etc). Moreover, the advisory role that the Project had enabled the statutory service providers to understand the community role in safeguarding children as well as the underpinning cultural limitations of services provided.

Benefits of the Collaboration

Minority communities make up 15%¹ of the local population. They are not accessing mainstream services and are not on the radar for social services. The project targeted these groups as many parents did not have access to the information and services to protect their children.

The aim of the project was to reach some of those described as “hard to reach” communities and the process by which the project was delivered allowed access to a variety of communities that hadn't been engaged before including; Bengali, Sudanese, Somali, Eritrean , Kurdish, Congolese, Kosovars, Cote d'Ivoirean communities amongst many others. The benefit in working like this meant that the community were engaged in a way that made them part of the solution rather than subject to a solution developed by others.

“The community is not seen as part of the solution but as the issue and you cannot underestimate their potential to contribute to the solutions if you work with them and empower them, in fact there is no solution that does not include them.”
Asha-Kin Duale
(Community Partnership Advisor)

The partnership also allowed CPA-VAC to identify and explore other issues outside of centrally agreed agenda that were important to the community including; runaways, mental health, self harm and suicide. CPA-VAC reacted to this and worked with the community groups to develop activities that would address these additional concerns. Enabling communities to co-own the programme, enabled a further partnership to be developed that would tackle specific concerns voiced by the communities.

The programme recognised that a long term solution was to look at the holistic approach to child protection in the borough was keen to work with partners in the statutory sector as well and formed a steering group of key stakeholders to shape and develop the project as well as to open lines of communication, learning within the community. The steering group was responsible for guiding the Project and was comprised of a youth organisations, social services, the police, the NHS, a community member, school representatives and a member of the community engagement sub committee at the LA. This promoted a shared understanding of the needs of the community and for culturally sensitive services to the relevant stakeholders breaking down barriers, stereotypes and myths. In particular it gave

¹ London Borough of Camden- 2001 Census

the community an opportunity to engage with local authorities and decision makers in a safe and appropriate environment and vice versa.

Challenges

The CPA-VAC identified some particular challenges in working with a variety of BME groups. They found that there were often divisions or internal politics within communities that sometimes prohibited them from coming to work and learn together, with a possibility of damaging existing relationships and networks. This needed to be handled with care and sensitivity, taking the lead from the community and ensuring that you stay neutral.

Another challenge that VAC faced was allocating sufficient time for relationship building. The project only had one Community Partnership Advisor whose responsibility it was to manage and deliver the project, build relationships and networks with a variety of community groups working across a range of culturally sensitive issues. The programme recognised the significance of investing this time to ensure that a culture of trust was built with the community groups.

"I knew the project was successful when parents and community members acknowledged that the laws to protect children were there to protect their own children as well rather than demonise their cultures, traditions and practices"
Asha-Kin Duale
(Community Partnership Advisor)

Learning and Advice

The programme has been successful in delivering its objectives because the partnership has been successful. A number of areas of good practice were identified as part of the programme, including; taking the time and investing the long term commitment in building relationships and trust with community groups, and where necessary addressing issues of mistrust as they arise rather than waiting for them to grow and potentially jeopardise the success of the project. The overall success is enabling everyone's understanding of how harmful practices are rooted and that everyone has a stake to promote the welfare of children.

Reflections...

Our research has found that fairness and equality in partnerships takes a variety of forms based on the nature of the organisations and the piece of work at hand. It is more about relativity, equality and transparency rather than an equal division of finances, risk, workload, decision making etc. This partnership made an attempt to facilitate meaningful rather than tokenistic communication between parties, a space not just to talk to communities but really listen to communities as well as working with the community and its representatives to tackle key concerns in a way that was empowering.