

Effective Commissioning to Reduce Re-offending

A Black, Asian and minority ethnic case study

November 2008

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Executive Summary

In September 2008, Race on The Agenda (ROTA) in partnership with Independent Academic Research Studies (IARS) were commissioned by CLINKS to carry out research into young Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) offender resettlement. Service provision in the area of training and employment was the topic to be researched specifically in this London focussed study. Working together, IARS drew upon their expertise of working with young people and ROTA, London's BAME community. After two months of research and gathering evidence and data, ROTA concluded the project presenting the findings in this report.

A number of themes ran consistently throughout seven case studies which emphasised the needs and the gaps within employment and training service provision for young BAME offender resettlement. Many of the salient issues exemplified by the service providers working with BAME ex-offenders were reiterated by the BAME service users and funders.

The main findings are highlighted below:

Practitioners

The practitioners who were interviewed for the study consisted of representatives from the seven service provision organisations in London that were used in the case studies. The organisations represented work in offender resettlement by providing services, mainly to BAME ex-offenders in helping them gain employments and training. Each practitioner offered information into the services offered by their organisation and their views regarding the current gaps in provision and examples of what they have found to be effective working in the area of employment and training assistance available to BAME ex-offenders.

The main findings from this group were as follows;

- **THE NEED FOR A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPLEX NEEDS OF YOUNG BAME EX-OFFENDERS**

The recurring theme which emerged from the study was the requirement for the services provided to BAME ex-offenders to account for the basic needs of clients and pitch their services to meet these needs. Building self esteem, encouragement, attitudinal change and being mindful of clients' state of mind cannot be neglected in the drive to move the client group directly into training or employment.

- **THE NEED FOR CONSISTENCY IN THE APPROACHES FROM BEING IN PRISON THROUGH TO FINDING AND GAINING EMPLOYMENT**

Any support which is provided by an organisation working in offender resettlement needs to be consistent throughout the process, from being inside prison to beyond the point when the BAME client enters employment. The case studies exemplify the difficulties inherent in providing 'through the gates' services for the BAME client group

➤ **THE NEED FOR SKILLS ATTAINED IN PRISON TO BE TRANSFERRABLE TO THE WIDER LONDON LABOUR MARKET**

Young BAME London offenders are often located in prisons outside of London which can often result in ex-offenders having acquired skills in a rural setting which are not easily transferred into the mainstream labour market.

➤ **THE NEED FOR A TAILOR-MADE APPROACH FOR EACH BAME INDIVIDUAL**

The existing availability of only generic services for the purposes of searching for employment opportunities was highlighted as an issue in the case studies. This was problematic when considering the specific needs of young people and BAME communities. Whilst recognising the general basic needs of offenders it was thought vital to acknowledge the uniqueness each client brings and treat them with a tailored approach taking into consideration cultural and individual needs.

➤ **THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE AND COHERANT PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

A recurrent theme throughout the case studies was the limited amount of effective partnership work that takes place between third sector and statutory agencies which in turn creates difficulties for service provision. Problems in this area were varied, though many centred on organisations not taking referrals and not offering to share expertise. There were also issues raised over how some organisations choose to accept referrals, adopting a bias selection process which only sought to improve performance monitoring statistics, this very issue was also highlighted in the 2007 ROTA report 'The Visible and Hidden Dimensions of London's Homelessness: A BAME Account'.

Service Users

The service users interviewed were made up of BAME ex-offenders living in London who accessed the services provided by the organisations used in the case studies. They offered their views and experiences of using such services and what they considered to be helpful and detrimental in the process of offender resettlement.

The main findings from this group were as follows;

➤ **THE NEED FOR CLEAR AND UNDERSTANBLE INFORMATION TO BE AVAILABLE PRIOR TO LEAVING PRISON AND EFFECTIVE MODES OF COMMUNICATING SERVICES AVAILABLE TO BAME OFFENDERS UPON RELEASE**

The case studies through the service users highlighted the lack of guidance and information available about each phase of the employment and training process to BAME offenders. It was felt that the BAME client group could often be bombarded with large amounts of information all at once about various services, yet the specifics of services that are actually on offer were less apparent. Most BAME clients who were interviewed remarked how they only found out about the services they had used or were using through word of mouth from a friend, rather than any formal channels of communication which could be established to inform inmates and those who are serving community orders. The importance of having information available in community languages and styles which were accessible to the needs of some BAME offenders was considered vital in ensuring that they were armed with the correct information.

➤ **THE NEED TO COMBAT THE EXISTING PRE CONCEIVED NEGATIVE ATTITUDES OF YOUNG BAME OFFENDERS TOWARDS SERVICE PROVISION THROUGH PROVIDING A GOOD SERVICE**

The perception and experience of the services made available within the prison setting was generally negative, with comments suggesting that courses were too basic and unsuitable for the varied BAME target group. There were also a large number of negative accounts relating to the services provided by probation for BAME offenders.

➤ **THE NEED FOR CONTACT BY SERVICE PROVIDERS TO BE MADE PRIOR TO RELEASE**

The point at which members of the BAME client group come into contact with the service provider was thought to be particularly crucial. When this contact was made early it was strongly felt that strategies could be put in to place which contributed to a successful transition during resettlement. When integrated and using the services offered by the service provider each member of the client group responded positively. However, many of the BAME offenders commented that problems had been encountered when attempting to access a service in the initial stages which they found to be frustrating and often disheartening. This problem was exacerbated for the young BAME offenders or those who were serving short term sentences.

➤ **THE NEED FOR THE MULTIPLE LAYERS OF NEEDS OF OFFENDERS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION THROUGH A MENTORING APPROACH**

The mentoring style approach adopted by some service providers proved extremely effective in meeting the multiple needs of the BAME ex-offenders. When services recognise or take into account accommodation and other needs (but not necessarily provides) it can contribute to achieving a positive experience.

Funders

Representatives from four funding bodies were interviewed in order to gain a greater understanding of what they consider to be effective commissioning and exemplars in the field of training and employment for young BAME ex-offenders. All four funding bodies had a history of providing funding to the area of offender resettlement in London and so offered a useful view of good and bad practice.

The main findings from this group were as follows;

➤ **THE NEED FOR BAME EX-OFFENDER SPECIFIC PROVISION**

Although there is an over-representation of BAME communities within the prison estates, services which are oriented to deal with this client group are small in number. The commissioners identified organisations working successfully in this area and acknowledged that more organisations are needed catering for the needs to BAME ex-offenders.

➤ **THE NEED TO ADOPT A GENTLER APPROACH TO ALLOW BAME EX-OFFENDERS TO HAVE ALL THEIR NEEDS MET BEFORE EMBARKING ON EMPLOYMENT**

Affording the BAME client group a transition period where their very basic needs (eg, housing, health) are appropriately taken care of, without too much emphasis being placed on urgently moving the client into full time work or training was considered critical.

➤ **THE NEED FOR THE MENTORING APPROACH TO BE USED AS AN EXEMPLAR IN THIS FIELD OF WORK RELATING TO BAME EX-OFFENDERS**

Adopting a mentoring style approach was viewed as an effective method to ensure that the basic needs of BAME ex-offenders are identified and attended to.

➤ **THE NEED TO EQUIP BAME EX-OFFENDERS WITH SKILLS RELEVANT TO THE WIDER LABOUR MARKET**

It was identified that much work remains to be done in relation to providing the client group with skills pertinent to the market and the industry within which they wish to pursue a career.

➤ **THE NEED FOR CONSISTENCY IN SERVICE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY**

Problems were outlined surrounding the inconsistent levels of service quality and availability of provision, a problem which was thought to disproportionately impact BAME individuals who were moved around prison estates regularly. BAME ex-offenders highlighted the different levels of quality in service in different prisons.

➤ **THE NEED FOR LESS EMPHASIS ON TARGET DRIVEN PROJECTS**

Organisations can focus too heavily on targets. Operating a target driven environment can result in some service providers only choosing BAME clients who are likely to succeed in entering employment or training. This leaves groups of young BAME ex-offenders who require additional support searching for services.