



Participation Event

City of Manchester Stadium, 26th March 2009



**Equality and
Human Rights
Commission**



SPEAKING OUT
Supporting the Sector to Influence Policy

Report of the event with young refugees and asylum seekers about what works for them, what doesn't work and what more should be provided in relation to services such as education, safety, health and housing.

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Background / Planning for event

Through their regional network structure, Children England (CE) made contact with colleagues in the North West (NW) and following discussion at a regional meeting, The Children's Society (TCS) came forward as a partner for the event.

Discussion at this meeting highlighted issues for young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and also noted that this is a group who are under-represented in children and young people's participation structures. Therefore it was agreed that this theme would be the focus of the NW event.

The NW Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) whose children's subgroup terms of reference include 'ensuring that the voice and views of migrant children are represented throughout' was supportive of the event and made a financial contribution to be used towards young people's travel.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) NW regional office also financially supported the event. The focus of the event links with their strategic priorities and 'New Voices' theme. EHRC recognises the importance of issues facing young migrants being heard by decision makers and this event aimed to develop and empower them to have a greater say in policy and service provision in the region.

TCS were able to support the event through their Opportunities for Volunteering (DOH) funding as part of their evaluation process for this piece of work, and CE supported the event through their Speaking Out project.

After discussion at initial planning meetings it was agreed that the outcomes for the event would be:

- Young people to have participated in and contributed to creative workshops

- Young people to have prepared (with creative facilitators) and delivered feedback to the decision makers and agencies about their views and experiences of services
- Discussion and dialogue initiated between young people and relevant regional decision makers and agencies around issues facing young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants
- Young people would have opportunity to find out more about what decision makers and agencies do and how they do it
- Young people would learn more about how to influence decision makers and agencies
- Decision makers to have listened to children and young people's views and to better understand their experiences
- Decision makers to agree to take away at least one action to change or influence improvements for children and young people within their team, service or agency
- Consideration is given at the end of the event as to how this 'dialogue' could develop in the future.

CE explored with partners (and they in turn consulted with young people) which aspects of and issues relating to young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants would be most useful to discuss at the proposed event.

From this exploration, issues such as (access to) education, safety, discrimination, young parents and access to services generally e.g. housing, health and childcare were raised.

It was agreed to commission an arts company, Action Factory to facilitate the event and the workshops.

The Event: What Happened?

Thirty-two young people from five different projects across the NW region attended the event, as well as thirty-one decision makers and agencies. The event started with two speakers:

- Sophie Griffiths, Policy & Information Officer, Children England
- Amal Idriss, Youth MP for Blackburn with Darwen



Sophie welcomed everyone and Amal (*left*) spoke about issues affecting young people in the UK, including education and travel costs.

Warm up exercises were run by Action Factory, designed to 'break the ice' and energise everyone to take part in the practical workshops.



Participants were then divided into one of four workshops: Music, Drama, Writing / Spoken Word and Visual Arts. Each lasted one hour fifteen minutes and looked at identifying the main issues of concern to the participants. Facilitators used the artforms to assist participants in expressing these issues in a creative way.

After the arrival of decision makers and agencies, everyone enjoyed a buffet and was then welcomed back by Vivienne Stone (Operations Manager, EHRC) to the plenary to watch a projected slideshow of images from the workshop. Creative presentations from each of the four workshops followed, with the audience being asked to record their messages and pledges.

Finally the organisers thanked everyone for attending before participants embarked on a tour of Manchester City stadium.

Workshop 1: Music

Facilitator: Ben Gray



The Process:

The participants identified issues that affected them in the NW region. From these, short phrases were created then set to rhythms for the performance. The words used reflected both positive and negative experiences. Examples of the phrases are: 'Acceptance gives a sense of belonging'; 'I like when all is blue'; 'Right to work for asylum seekers'; 'Dispersal orders-there's no choice;'; 'I like Manchester because different languages spoken.'

The Presentation:

Each participant was given a different sized drum or percussion instrument and asked to fit their phrase to a beat. The group built up a short piece consisting of the gradual layering of voices, phrases and rhythm to a powerful crescendo.

Issues raised:

The weather

Language / speaking English

Culture and religion

Being accepted

Having a different accent

Media – including films and music

Negative publicity

Work permits - access to work

Unequal opportunities-being charged international fees at university

Workshop 2: Visual Art

Facilitator: Cath Ford



The Process:

After warm up exercises involving quick portraits, followed by discussion on issues of concern, the main activity was to create 'Totems' using drawing and collage onto cardboard boxes. These were to include the issues raised in the discussion.

The Presentation:

The 'Totems' were displayed and explained by the facilitator and one participant – this included keywords and images from their discussions around the issues. 'Safety'; 'confusion around rights'; 'needing more information' came up strongly as issues of concern.

Issues raised:

Lack of information on entitlements (within accommodation.)

Money is a barrier to doing activities (leisure activities like going to the gym, doing karate, swimming and drawing.)

The lack of fresh, low-priced fruit and vegetables in the UK.

Personal experience of racial discrimination at work.

Vandalism of refugee / asylum seekers' accommodation.

Education and health; without education you cannot progress to work and without health you cannot do anything.

Financial independence. Once you pay for a weekly bus pass there is almost nothing left over for food, etc.

Lack of confidence from not working. Wanting to pay taxes.

The value of democracy and people exercising their rights in UK.

Workshop 3: Drama

Facilitator: Kerry Tuhill



The Process:

Following introductions and physical warm up exercises, participants were asked about messages they would like to pass on to local decision makers and government. The group recorded and discussed these issues before creating a final piece.

The Presentation:

The final scenes showed media stereotypes, difficulties in accessing education, the boredom that people feel when not being allowed to work or waiting for courses and the strong desire to volunteer and help others. After these, participants built up a physical picture using the messages they wanted to say ('equality'; 'want to learn English'; 'want to help people'; 'want a voice'; 'want to work', etc.)

Issues raised:

Media – stereotyping of asylum seekers.

Education – asylum seekers want to attend university.

They should be allowed to finish education - not deported during it.

The availability of English classes/training - waiting lists are long.

More information about what is available.

People cannot afford international student fees at university.

Asylum seekers want to contribute and want to work voluntarily.

Workshop 4: Spoken Word

Facilitator: Sonia Hughes



The Process:

After discussion of likes / dislikes, participants put these into context within their experience in the NW region. Areas concentrated on were: health, education, being allowed to stay, feeling safe, respected, happy.

The Presentation:

The group performed a piece that simulated calling an automated switchboard and eventually getting through to a human operator. Participants read out different parts of the writing they had created.

Issues raised:

Access to education.

Ability to learn English.

Personal safety: much safer than in country of origin.

People feel pleased to be in the UK, hoping to build a life here.

A few did not feel respected; several mentioned vandalism.

Being shouted at in the street.

One talked about the lack of anyone to take interest, encourage or support them.

A sense of isolation / exclusion and a lack of voice in society.

People want to work and earn money. Struggling on allowances.

Plenary: Postcard Pledges

Each audience member filled in a postcard with the message(s) they had heard from the young people's presentations and a pledge for an action they would take as a result of this. Twenty-four postcards were completed and returned.

Messages the audience had heard from the young people:

- To be **safe** in their homes & society - Want to **learn**; want to be **self-sufficient** - "I **want** my **voice** heard" - Equal **rights**, right to **work** - Young asylum seekers not happy-**waiting** lists for **ESOL** - Allow young people the right to work to promote their effective **independence** - Confusion around **facilities** in dispersal accommodation - Young people's **voices aren't being heard** - Lack of **money** to do activities; nothing to do - That asylum seekers & refugees would like to have voices heard & be treated with **respect** and **dignity** - Young people need **access to information** about their rights - Asylum seekers are **unclear** about what items the housing provider should provide for them! - Young people seeking asylum want to **work, contribute, feel safe** - There are often not enough facilities for asylum seekers to **gain new skills** - Children still experience **grave injustice** - Young people need **support & information** to know what they can expect from Social Services - Young refugees and asylum seekers **need** their **voice** to be **heard** - **Young people feel they are not listened to** -

Actions the audience pledged to take:
***(Audience members will receive an individual reminder of
these in June 2009)***

Actively support agencies to secure funding to **develop advocacy** services to support young people - **Share report** with managers in Education Service - **Help** set up support group - **Sign post** to other organisations - **Lobby** within local Borough, bring it up in **partnership** meetings - **Speak** to management who work with skills/education providers - To **continue to support** young asylum seekers in my work - I will continue advocating on their behalf as I am already an advocate for **young people's rights** - Liaise to ensure **guidance** is **available** and **accessible** for all - To continue to pilot **youth engagement** and for it to **impact** on the decisions made by senior managers involved in **safeguarding** - Consider what **activities** I can develop for young people; what **funding** is available - I will ensure that asylum seeker children and young people are supported to have their **voice heard** in Lancashire - **Help colleagues** to **understand** what asylum seekers and refugee **rights** are - Contact housing providers and ask them to **list entitlements** - Ensure their messages and **needs** are **heard** by our supporters and key organisations and contacts - **Network** with similar existing organisations in Manchester - **Do** my **utmost** to **advocate** at regional level, for refugee and asylum seeking children - Through our advocacy services, we will continue to help young people **access** the **help** and support they are **entitled** to -

We will continue to **raise awareness** of our service to young people looked after by Manchester City Council - We will try to **influence service development** in Manchester about themes that come out as common issues for young people, e.g. **age assessments** - Try to improve how age assessments are carried out in Manchester - Try to provide them with support so their **voice is heard** at statutory reviews - **Take more time and listen to the views of young people and take appropriate action.**

Conclusion, outcomes and follow up

As well as the messages and actions from the postcard pledges, feedback from young people, staff and decision makers (*see page 13*) was extremely positive and it seems as if the event was a great success overall.

The facilitators found it extremely challenging to discuss a range of issues and then create a piece of work in such a short space of time. A recommendation for future events would be to have longer workshops and a simple question on which to focus. As anticipated some participants also had differing levels of confidence in using English, so this made discussion in certain workshops more difficult to balance between those who were able to contribute and those who were relying on professional interpreters or interpretation from other participants. Despite these challenges, the audience at the plenary remarked that they were impressed by how much information and feedback had been generated from the workshops.

Almost all of the event outcomes (*see pages 3-4*) have undoubtedly been met, with the final one hopefully being developed in the coming months as the agencies and decision makers put their postcard pledges into action.

Some young people from different projects and parts of the region exchanged contact details at the event and have been in touch with each other since.

The EHRC are now working nationally with young people, organising annual summer camps in the Lake District. The aim is to provide an exciting week of adventure, challenges, leadership skills training and equality and human rights learning for approximately 100 young people from all backgrounds from England, Scotland and Wales. Following the event, the EHRC wants to continue their work with disadvantaged groups of young people in supporting their advocacy.

Comments from staff and decision makers:

“It was great – full of energy!” “Smiley, happy pictures.”

“The young people were really engaged – they really enjoyed it”

“We’d like to use something like this for our conference”

“Amazing, what was produced in just over one hour....”

“Our young people enjoyed the event and their part in it.”

Comments from participants:

“Ben made it really easy for us.” “Good discussions.”

“We needed more time – it should have been longer.”

“There were no footballers!”

“Really enjoyed it” “Really good”

Contacts

<p>Blackburn Refugee Project The Children's Society 01254 583747 www.childrenssociety.org.uk</p>	<p>Get Connected Refugee Action 0151 7026300 www.refugee-action.org.uk</p>
<p>Brighter Futures Save the Children 0161 2495138 www.savethechildren.org.uk</p>	<p>Leading Edge The Children's Society 0161 2740180 www.childrenssociety.org.uk</p>
<p>Safe in the City (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Project) The Children's Society 0161 2740180 www.childrenssociety.org.uk</p>	<p>Equality and Human Rights Commission 0161 829810 Helpline: 0845 6046610 info@equalityhumanrights.com www.equalityhumanrights.com</p>
<p>Children England 0207 8333319 info@childrenengland.org.uk www.childrenengland.org.uk</p>	<p>NW Regional Strategic Migration Partnership 0161 7412750</p>
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