



Supporting and Strengthening BAME Families

An evaluation of the Parents in Partnership Programme (PiP)

(Executive Report)

Karl Murray
November 2011

The Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG), supported by the Department for Communities and Local Government's *Tackling Race Inequalities Fund (TRIF)* programme, undertook action research into the support needs of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic families (BAME) with vulnerable young boys. BTEG, working in partnership with the 100 Black Men of London (100BMOL), contributed to piloting a parent support project that ran alongside the 100BMOL's established young people's mentoring programme. The interpretations and views expressed in this report are those of BTEG.

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1.0 Introduction

In October 2010 the Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) published its report on understanding the support needs of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families with vulnerable boys (BTEG, 2010)¹. In that report we drew attention to the context and challenges facing BAME families, in particular black parents (i.e. those of African and Caribbean heritage).

This Executive Report² is focused on the Parents in Partnership (PiP) programme; an action research programme which was developed in response to the needs identified by black parents during BTEG's initial research. The PiP programme was developed by the 100 Black Men of London (100BMOL) charity. BTEG worked with 100BMOL to support the development and delivery of the programme and to design an action research model to evaluate the lessons learned from this approach. This report looks at the findings emerging from the pilot PiP programme, which was established as a support group for parents wanting to develop awareness and understanding of their parenting skills and to build their confidence as parents. The aim was to explore approaches which could make a difference to parents in how they support their children's transition into adulthood. BTEG sought to address one of the key themes captured in the Phase 1 report summarized aptly as *'it takes a village to raise a child'*.

2.0 Parents in Partnership (PiP)

The aims of the PiP programme were to:

1. **Engage** parents in building a community movement to influence, challenge and create effective practice within their own family, homes, schools and local areas that will extend to improve the lives of others within their communities;
2. **Energize** parents by encouraging them to pursue healthier lifestyles for themselves and their children in order to be stronger mentally, physically and spiritually;
3. **Equip** parents with information, tools and access to people and opportunities to help them better understand the world which their children inhabit;
4. **Enhance** the prospects of parents to aspire and achieve in accomplishing their personal educational and professional goals in order to create opportunities for themselves, their families and their community;
5. **Empower** parents to recognise their own abilities to become leaders in order to create the solutions required to create their own mutual support networks and retake their rightful place – back in charge of raising their own children.

¹ The Phase 1 Report is available to download via www.bteg.co.uk

² The full report from which this executive summary is drawn is obtainable on request by contacting BTEG on 020 7843 6113.

The rationale for the programme

The purpose of the programme was to provide a support group for parents, to explore with them challenges and solutions. The vision of the programme designer was both simple and pragmatic. *'As parents'*, she wrote, *'...navigating children through the various aspects of life is a bit like being a novice explorer in uncharted territory. Whether the specific issue is education, relationships, or life, the navigational trials could apply to any subject faced by any family'*.

The starting point for embracing a bottom-up approach had its antecedents in the emigration expectations of the 1950s and 1960s. As the coordinator argued, when the first generation parents arrived in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s they came seeking a better life for themselves. The history of the 1960s to 1980s showed how hard they worked, swallowing their pride and overcoming much in order to ensure that their children enjoyed the fruits of their labour. They established extended 'families' by making 'Aunties' and 'Uncles' from non-blood relatives around them. They extended cash-flow by forming '*pardner*' or '*sou sou*' (i.e. informal savings clubs), and extended themselves by working more than one job so that they could provide something, often from nothing or very little. It was these traditions, amongst others, that have long since morphed into the oral stories told by the older generations while at the same time seeming to have little or no impact on the now generation. It was, in part a reaction to this loss of culture borne out of migration, and in part, a response to the rise of individualism with increased investment in the '*it's-all-about-me Personal Development industry*', which now appear to have replaced a sense of community - the village mentality if you will. And just as generations graft on the lessons of the previous, this has now become the new cultural legacy for the 21st century child, and parenting.

Main characteristics of participants on the programme

The programme operated from November 2010 to June 2011. It delivered eight, two hour sessions, which took place fortnightly. A graduation ceremony was held in July 2011. Forty-seven parents participated in the programme. They had the following characteristics³:

- The majority of parents (70%) were aged between 40 and 60 years. This reflects a greater interest by the more mature parents about raising children and maybe an indication that more people were having children later in their years;
- Most parents were from the Caribbean (50%) and African (26%) communities;
- There were more female parents than male parents on the programme (81% and 19% respectively);
- There appeared to be a higher proportion of lone parents on the programme;⁴
- Only 17% of parents on the programme indicated playing an 'active'⁵ role in their child's school compared with 79% who indicated that they were 'inactive'.

³ See Appendix 2 within the full report for details

⁴ A high proportion of participants (68%) did not indicate their marital status and so it is not possible to be any clearer as to the overall status of the participants. However, based on discussions, participant observations and interviews, there was a high proportion of parents who were single and not in a cohabiting/married relationship.

⁵ Active participation was defined as 'volunteering, parent governor or having regular meetings with teachers'. Parents were therefore inactive (or passive) where they were not engaged in any formal or systematic way over a period of time (not one-off parent evening event).

3.0 The 100 Black Men of London: an overview

The 100 Black Men concept originated in New York City in 1963, when a group of Black men came together to develop a local organisation for the purpose of pooling their resources to implement programmes designed to improve the quality of life for their community. These founding ‘fathers’ included David Dinkins, who went on to become Mayor of New York and Dr Bill Haley and other community luminaries. As a result of the success of the New York organisation, other chapters were inspired to start all over the USA and subsequently internationally, including two Chapters in the UK: Birmingham and London.

The 100 Black Men of London (100BMOL)⁶ provide a wide range of programmes and events, including its Community Mentoring Programme (CMP), Black History Challenge, Education Through Film, 100 Book Club (Real Black Men Read), Youth Debate, Quality Time, Family Fun Day, Schools Programme, Black Heroes Walk. The focus of this evaluation and report is PIP, which is part of the overarching Community Mentoring Programme (CMP).

4.0 Methodological approach

The first thing to note is that the action research approach entailed BTEG playing both an enabling role, as an active member of the ‘programme development team’ as well as an evaluator of the programme and process. By action research we simply mean *‘learning by doing’*, whereby we take an issue or problem and establish a collaborative process developed with partners and participants to evaluate the efficacy of a particular approach, usually in the form of a pilot programme, in finding solutions and hence replicability. O’Brien (1998) offers a succinct and useful definition which has guided our approach in that *‘...action research is the study of a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is regarded as a desirable direction. Accomplishing this twin goal requires the active collaboration of researcher and client, and thus it stresses the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process.*

Secondly, in the development of the approach and methods for engaging with parents on the Parents in Partnership (PiP) programme a number of concerns had to be addressed by the programme development team. These were:

- The need to ensure that a developed process and approach was in place that truly engaged with those who were to be the object of the enquiry; that is, to find a way to ensure that their voices and utterances were presented – and in some cases retaining the languages and phrases of their lived experiences as far as possible;
- That the research process was not too over bearing and so straight-jacketed peoples’ responses and reasons for engaging in the programme. That is, not to make the participants feel they are part of some external experiment where

⁶ In 2008, 2010 and most recently, 2011, the 100 Black Men of London was awarded the title of *International Chapter of the Year* by the 100 Black Men International Inc for Leadership in Mentoring and its pioneering work within the ‘100 Family’ with parents (i.e. the PiP programme).

they are being done to, rather than being part of a process of co-constructing the reality of the situation.

- To ensure that involvement was true to the values of the 100BMOL as they work to develop a programme and service that delivered their objectives and supported their development and evaluative requirements that would help them over the longer term (especially as they were experimenting with a new approach to parental engagement that has so far not been a feature within the complementary education sector, operating within and alongside a mentoring framework). In other words, there needed to be the avoidance of parachuting-in solutions to the particular social issues they were grappling with.

Third, the research approach included desk research and group work activities, survey questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews.

5.0 Analysis and evidence

Whilst there was a feeling that the programme had a positive influence on the participants, and hopefully the wider community, the nature of the project, with its emphasis on attitudinal change and shift in cultural practices, makes quantifying outcomes and demonstrating impacts in the short term extremely difficult. However, in the main, the evidence showed that:

- Some parents felt better informed in some areas and are now able to take greater control of their lives and access information that they need. For example, many parents found the 'checklist *and questions to ask schools*' template invaluable (see the full report for a copy). Another parent commented on learning about the legal aspect of social networking sites and who actually owns the images that are uploaded on to these sites.
- The theme of 'building the village' through participation and involvement was a strong value based principle that motivated parents and should be developed further (i.e. that community could be virtual and not based solely on immediate family ties).
- Parents reported that they had gained insights into the impact of their parenting, making them more conscious of the need to communicate with their children in more effective ways (e.g. creating the environment and opportunities for effective communication to take place with their children as well as more widely within the community).
- For some parents, there were signs of improved communication skills and developed confidence (e.g. parents reported making changes to their child's social networking activities as a result of what they had learnt).
- Some parents reported that they were more aware of ways to become involved in their child's environment and feel better prepared to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning and community involvement (i.e. being proactive in being part of a solution rather than been seen as part of the problem).
- Some parents reported that they were more aware of the things they can do (and should have been doing) in prioritising education and skills development

in their children to enable them to access opportunities as they develop. One parent remarked that the programme gave him the '*...opportunity to show [his child] how important education was*' as it was not just his child learning something as he felt that he was being a '*mirror of good practice – learning alongside his child*'.

6.0 Key findings

The evidence shows that the programme met the needs of a number of parents and clearly contributed to the realization of the programme's aims.

Engage:

- Parents became more aware of ways to become involved in their child's environment and understood better how to create an atmosphere conducive to learning and community involvement.

Energize:

- Parents felt confident to identify areas for development to improve the content of the programme such as:
 1. Looking at self care (mind, body and spirit);
 2. Looking at needs specific to African and Caribbean parents;
 3. Capturing the voices of grandparents as well as oral history and 'old time stories' (e.g. sayings from home: 'what mama used to say!');
 4. How to identify personal and parenting skills (e.g. finance and household budgeting).

Equip:

- Parents felt that having a space for them was important especially as some had been introduced to some of the things their children were being exposed to as part of the *Me I Can Be* (MICB) programme and so re-engaged them in learning at the same time as their children (i.e. social networking; coping with peer pressures and education opportunities and strategies). According to one parent, it was an opportunity '*to start getting an understanding of strategies that parents could deploy at home and school*'.
- The information provided was seen as empowering because it created a greater understanding and awareness.
- Some parents wanted to develop and sustain the networks and support structures they had developed over the months of participating on the programme.

Enhance:

- The theme of 'building the village' through participation and involvement was seen as a strong value base which motivated many parents and one that many wanted to see develop further.

- To the question: '*Was attending PiP a good use of their time?*' All participants who responded indicated that attending the sessions were a good use of their time: '*...as I have gained knowledge and insight that I may not have gained otherwise?*'. Another remarked '*...it added value to my family*'.
- Some parents reported that they were more aware of things they can do (and should have been doing) to prioritise education and skills development in their children and so enable them to access opportunities as they develop.

Empower:

- Parents reported that they had gained insights into the impact of their parenting, thus making them more conscious of the need to communicate with their children in a more effective way. One parent remarked that they found the checklist (and old school v new school framework) a helpful reminder as '*it is easy to fall into child as friend situation and therefore relax parenting role until it becomes a crisis. One lesson learnt has been to see things ahead of time and not wait until it becomes a crisis*'.
- Parents commented that part of the journey was due to the facilitation of the programme which was flexible and responsive to the parents' needs in managing the issues that resulted from open discussions. The presentation of '*hard facts, especially in relation to school attainment*' was deemed most helpful '*especially as we could discuss with other parents*'. Another parent remarked that they '*liked moving into small groups, the facts and personal experiences*', all of which made them feel comfortable with the process.

Areas for development

It would be unfair to only reflect on some of the positive outcomes of the programme without reflecting on aspects that need further development. There were areas of the programme that some parents, and indeed the coordinators themselves, felt need to be improved upon.

In no particular order:

1. The use of the reflective diary was not consistently emphasized and followed up and therefore not able to gain the deeper insights into what particularly made a difference in the learning as was hoped. Though many parents embraced the principle and wrote up their diaries, this was not carried through to the end. One parent remarked, '*... I started to fill it out but didn't continue because of other things taking place and therefore not having the time to fill it out*'. Another commented that '*...I tried to use it but because the sessions were bi-weekly, I was getting the dates mixed up (and some were rescheduled) and confused me*'. And another, that '*...I made a start, got into it but I was not organised enough. I could have done with more emphasis on its importance*'. Arising from discussions on this tool and its place within the programme, respondents suggested two broad approaches that they hope would make a difference as the programme develop. First, giving over a slot at the end of each session for them to start writing up the diary entries by way of aide memoire, which they feel would reinforce the message and their use of the tool; second, to consider making writing up the diary a 'compulsory'

element within the programme in a similar way that attendance is a prime indicator within the 'mentoring programme' for graduation.

2. The importance of parenting and the development of parenting skills need to be given greater emphasis to raise the profile of these areas amongst parents. This was deemed to be a weakness in the programme. Two aspects were identified for possible improvements:
 - a. The PiP programme to have a 'graduating' aspect, in that parents who attend would need to satisfy certain conditions and be awarded some form of certificate or recognition;
 - b. Targeting sessions (and programme) to new parents and/or prospective parents, especially if it is their first child. There was a feeling that parenting is a generational process and that if the village concept is to have salience and longevity, then there is a need to start with the younger generation of parents alongside the 'older and more wiser' heads within the community.
3. Time-keeping was a problem throughout the programme. This was partly due to late starting, as many parents arrived late, and partly due to the amount of information being covered. Another reason was the enthusiasm of the parents who so enjoyed the discussions and had much to contribute. Both the coordinators and the participants felt that two hours per session was not long enough to get beneath the issues and do justice to the discussions and theme being discussed. This is an area that the coordinators have indicated will be reflected on in the development of the next programme. One parent suggested that a possible solution to the poor time keeping situation could be addressed by '*adding additional time for discussions...*'.
4. More fathers attending the programme would probably have strengthened the interaction and shed more light on their understanding of the roles of parents. The following comment from one parent sums this up when he said '*... engage more men in the group*'.

7.0 Conclusion

For the 100BMOL, the journey has just started. The pilot programme demonstrated the need for this provision, especially as it not only looked at personal needs but took into account a community perspective with individuals encouraged to consider the wider community context within which parenting takes place. Parents were very mindful of feelings of estrangement from both the system and within society more broadly; in some instances, feeling inadequate and powerless, while at the same time working hard to provide solutions. Some parents were struggling to ensure their children were being brought up with strong morals and values but were at the same time mindful of the strength of relationships that were out of their control (e.g. peer pressure) and which threatened to undermine the work they were doing in raising their child. Social networking and technology were identified as developments where parental control could be seen as under threat, which was a wake-up call for many as reflected in the emotions that this session evoked for both parents and children (e.g. as witnessed at the Audience With Our Children event). Parents felt this is an issue and development that they will need to pay greater attention to.

The PiP programme is only one step on the ladder of change; it needs to be further developed, taking on board the feedback and short comings found in this first pilot programme. It will not be easy but with support and the continued vision for wanting to make a change, it will go from strength to strength. As the village concept develops (or in the parlance of the Coalition Government, the *Big Society*) it is clear that the 'family unit' is more than just mother and father. It should include other key and influential 'family' and non-family members who could also play an enabling role. It is therefore the strength and value of good parenting that will make the difference. The recommendations identified in the next section will hopefully assist in that process.

8.0 Recommendations for programme development

The recommendations below will enable the programme organizers to build on what they have in place over the next 12 months.

Phase1: 1 – 6mths

1. To seek ways to promote the programme more widely than through the mentoring programme networks. More needs to be done to increase the participation and involvement of fathers on such a programme.
2. To ensure that speakers' hand-outs/notes are circulated as this would enhance people's learning and may help with the write up of the Reflective Diary. The proposed production of a *Parent Handbook/Manual* for those parents who had attended should be completed within three months while the learning is still fresh and before the next cohort starts.
3. Greater emphasis on the purpose and writing up of the Reflective Diary. Consideration should be given to using the final 15 minutes of each session for parents to start writing up their reflections while it is still fresh in their minds.
4. Although statistics can be a good stimulus for discussions, a balance is needed in terms of the level and quantity that are used. While some people can be enthused by numbers, many could be put off by them – due largely to fear of anything 'scientific and numerical'. A balance, therefore, needs to be struck, especially when time is limited.
5. Decide whether to have a fixed number of participants from the start to end of the programme in contrast to the drop-in/roll-on-roll-off approach to engagement.

Phase 2: 6 – 12mths

6. Develop a process to build and enhance relationships within and across the groups such as a 'bridging' or common exercise (e.g. the planning of the seminal debate at the end of the programme could be a focus with time given over at each session to this purpose for the group to work on).
7. Development of joint pieces of work between parents and children on a common theme. For example, developing policies with the Peer Mentors in terms of dress code, attendance, communication as well as behaviour/discipline.
8. The creation of parent mentors especially for the single parents on the programme. This could possibly draw from the experience and model already operating for the children and young people mentoring programme.
9. Consideration of 'Certificates for Attendance and Participation'. This could have the desired effect of recognising the journey of the parents (and possibly raise the profile of the programme);
10. Give some consideration to whether certain messages around parenting need to be targeted to some parents rather than a universal approach. That is, would first time parents gain more from such a programme, or teenage parents, or parents with difficult children?

About BTEG

BTEG is a national charity providing a voice to government for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. BTEG has a successful track record of advising government departments and non-departmental bodies and providing organisational support for local groups. BTEG is a member of several central governmental advisory groups including Department of Works Pension's (DWP) Ethnic Minority Advisory Group, the Department for Education's Third Sector Group and Communities and Local Government's Voluntary and Community Sector Board.

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