

Are We Listening Yet? Working with minority ethnic communities - some models of practice - Summary

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Published: 2002

Introduction

Barnardo's and its work with minority ethnic communities

In 1966, a working party was set up to report on the 'position with regard to children of non-European descent in Dr Barnardo's, whether in residential care or otherwise; to examine the problems arising and to make recommendations'. (Barnardo's, Working Party on Racial Integration, 1966: p 13). The report referred to 'coloured' children (the term used by the working party was that prevalent at the time) where one or both parents were not of European descent. Records of children in the care of Dr Barnardo's were examined from 1955, when 515 'fully or partly coloured' children below school leaving age -7.73% of the total- were in the care of Barnardo's or were receiving family support. Ten years later, the percentage had increased to 20%. This increase was attributed to dual-heritage children of English mothers and Black American servicemen, born during and after the Second World War, and the children of immigrant families from Commonwealth countries.

The working party regarded 'colour' to be a factor which was 'related to certain special child care needs and problems', while asserting that all children had certain basic needs and that 'basic principles of good child care' (p4) applied equally to all children. Of the 70 recommendations made by the working party on developing the work of the organisation with children from minority ethnic communities, one directed staff dealing with 'immigrants' to familiarise themselves with their culture and way of life. Other recommendations included avoiding being influenced by the racially prejudiced views of financial supporters; evaluating the outcomes of the work undertaken with 'coloured' children; and considering inviting universities and trusts to undertake such research (p40).

Barnardo's today is one of the largest voluntary child-care organisations in the UK. Its services provide a range of support to over 50,000 children and families. The number of children, young people and families receiving social care or educational support from Barnardo's services is, however; not a constant. Furthermore, Barnardo's is in the midst of refining and developing its data recording procedures on ethnicity. Therefore, it is not possible at this point in time to provide exact numbers of service users from minority ethnic communities, and estimates only can be given. At the time of writing, we estimate that around 20 per cent of the total number of children, young people and families accessing Barnardo's services throughout UK are from Black and Asian communities (which includes people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, African or Caribbean origin).

Since the 1966 report, which scrutinised Barnardo's service provision to users from minority ethnic communities, each of Barnardo's eight regions and nations (five regions in England and the three nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) has undertaken research and strategic policy work to inform and modify its practice to ensure responsiveness to the needs of its minority ethnic service users. Examples of policy/strategy documents include: Race Equality Strategy for South Wales/South West England (1990); Race Equality Strategy for Scotland (1995); and Race Equality Standards

and Strategy (1997) for Barnardo's children's services throughout UK. Some of the recent research projects undertaken by Barnardo's staff or commissioned by Barnardo's have included evaluation of services provided to minority ethnic children, young people and their families in Barnardo's Midlands region (Caesar et al. 1993); a study into the effects of racism on service provision to minority ethnic families in Northern Ireland (Mann-Kler, 1997); a survey of service provision by Scottish Local Authorities and voluntary organisations to minority ethnic children in Scotland (Singh and Patel, 1998); and a qualitative study of South Asian young carers in the Midlands and Yorkshire (Shah and Hatton, 1999).

To counter disadvantage faced by individuals, families and communities, Barnardo's is committed to developing and delivering innovative services that are adequate, appropriate and sensitive to the needs of its users. To ensure that Barnardo's service users from an ethnically diverse population are satisfied with the services they receive, the organisation has to value differences and cater appropriately for those differences. Although it is not claimed that Barnardo's has developed 'best practice' in all its area of work with Black and minority ethnic communities, it can justifiably be regarded as an organisation with a useful contribution to make to the arena of practice development with these communities. In its 130-year history, the organisation has gained valuable practice experience of working with disadvantaged families and communities from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This has been the impetus for this collection of some models of practice in social care provision which have been developed by professionals working in partnership with children, young people and families from minority ethnic communities.

To provide a context for the contributions included in this collection, an historical account of the development of service provision to minority ethnic communities in the United Kingdom is provided, after the rationale for the terminology used in this collection has been considered. A quick glimpse at the legislation introduced in the UK over the last few decades, to effect improvements in service provision to minority ethnic communities, is then followed by a brief review of research undertaken to examine the efficacy and appropriateness of service provision to these communities. This chapter continues with an overview of the five contributions included in this collection, and concludes by pointing a way forward.

What Does Research Tell Us

Research undertaken to examine the level and quality of service provision to minority ethnic communities has unequivocally revealed the gaps between the needs of the service users, and the level and quality of service provided whether the service provider is from the voluntary or the statutory sector.

A review of provision of services to Black families by the NSPCC's child protection teams, carried out by Jones and Butt (1995) led them to conclude that a great deal of confusion and inactivity surrounded work with Black families, and interestingly, although 50 out of 61 teams surveyed were working with Black children and families, the organisation was seen as a white organisation providing services for mainly white clients. It was argued by the researchers that although there was evidence of specialist Black projects being established, and of recruitment of Black workers, there was little indication of how the mainstream social care services were to be altered to meet the needs of Black children and families.

These findings are echoed in the research undertaken by Barn, Sinclair and Ferdinand (1997) in three social service departments. The purpose of their study was to examine how the departments were meeting the needs of minority ethnic families and children. One of their findings was that local authorities needed to develop adequate management information systems centring on race and ethnicity, including information on religion, language and diet, in order to address and meet the needs of minority ethnic children appropriately to promote their welfare and ensure their protection.

Further evidence that race relations legislation and the Children Act have not yet had sufficient impact on service provision to minority ethnic families emerged from a recent inspection of eight social services departments (SSDs) by the Social Services Inspectorate (O'Neale, 2000). The inspection revealed that most SSDs did not have adequate strategies in place to deliver appropriate services to minority ethnic families, and that children and families were often offered services that did not meet their needs appropriately or sensitively.

Research has also clearly demonstrated that services provided by the statutory sector, although much needed by minority ethnic families, often remain inaccessible to them. A survey of 84 family centres, in nine local authority areas, by Butt and Box (1998), to examine their use by Black families, led them to conclude that although the families using the centres found them to be critical in ensuring their survival, the majority of the centres did not appear to be accessible to Black families in need. This study goes beyond the limited user satisfaction surveys which reveal little about the appropriateness and adequacy of services, since the majority of the vulnerable service users are grateful to receive what little they are given and are loath to criticise services. The study also found that the adoption of equal opportunities policies (EOPs) by the family centres did not guarantee the accessibility of services for Black families. Connelly (1989) has argued that not all statutory service providers associated adoption of EOPs with altered outcomes for minority ethnic communities in their catchment area.

Another study which has explored the use of family support services by South Asian families was undertaken by Qureshi, Berridge and Wenman (2000), in one social services department. They also found that a major barrier to parents accessing family support was lack of information about available services, although comments from Asian parents revealed similar needs for family support and professional help as indigenous families. Other factors revealed by the study which led to a low level of family support for Asian families and a low level of access by these families included: the lack of specific policies focusing on social service provision to South Asian families; very few professionals and no senior managers from the South Asian community in the department; negative assumptions about South Asian families; and lack of confidence and skills in the departmental staff to develop culturally appropriate services.

Some of the gaps in service provision by the statutory and the voluntary sector; such as lack of accessible and appropriate services, have had to be met by the burgeoning Black voluntary sector. The crucial role played by the Black voluntary sector in meeting the needs of Black communities was revealed in a survey carried out by Butt and Box in 1997. The skills of this sector in providing appropriate services in an acceptable way within an environment of trust and underpinned by values shared by their users, were recognised by respondents from a range of agencies in the private and public sectors. However, the researchers cautioned against assuming that service provision by the Black voluntary sector was comprehensive, as some necessary services were not provided by these

organisations. Additionally, they pointed out that these agencies are not in a position to make up for the limitations of social care provision by the statutory sector.

If the needs of minority ethnic communities are to be met in a comprehensive and appropriate manner; then all sectors within the community must co-ordinate their efforts in a more strategic manner as Dutt (1998) has argued. While acknowledging the valuable role played by specific services developed by both statutory and voluntary organisations, she contends that organisations need to develop a strategy to meet the social care needs of Black communities in the short term and the long term before selecting the approach which would help them achieve their strategy objective. She suggests a range of options which the service providers could consider; including the development of specific in-house services; a combination of mainstream services modified to suit the needs of Black communities and specific in-house services; and the development of the mainstream services combined with resourcing the Black voluntary sector to provide social care. The only criteria which should influence the choice of any of these options should be what best serves the interests of the service users.

This brief review of recent research highlights the extent to which the social care needs of children and families from minority ethnic communities remain unmet within an appropriate cultural framework.

Overview of the Book

This collection is not intended to be a catalogue of Barnardo's work with minority ethnic communities, but is a selection of models of practice which have been developed in the context of our work with the most disadvantaged and marginalised sections within the minority ethnic communities, such as young carers, those excluded from schools, disabled children and children without families.

The first paper in this collection, by Lenehan, Morrison and de Berker; is concerned with the model developed by three Barnardo's projects in the East London area to support minority ethnic families with disabled children. In the next contribution, by Newman, the emphasis shifts from appropriate models of care provided to disabled children, to caregiving by young people from minority ethnic communities to their parents or siblings. This chapter identifies some of the issues faced by this group of young people and outlines the work underway in some of the Barnardo's projects to offer a culturally appropriate service to minority ethnic young carers.

Chapter 4, by Curtis, takes as its subject the exclusion of African Caribbean young people and puts forward a model developed in consultation with the local Black community in Bristol to address this issue. The fifth chapter; by Coombe and Maan, focuses on the support provided to the Muslim community in Yorkshire by a project whose staff used the principles of systems theory to develop their practice in consultation with the community.

The final contribution in this collection provides a Scottish perspective on the adoption and fostering of children from the South Asian community. The authors describe an initiative which emerged out of the need to find suitable family placements for an increasing number of children from minority ethnic families, referred by social services to the Barnardo's Scotland family placement project. The 'Khandan' (meaning family) Initiative, the only one of its kind in Scotland, has engendered a great deal of interest from minority ethnic families interested in adopting, fostering or providing respite care

to minority ethnic children. The South Asian worker appointed through funding provided by the Scottish Executive, noted in an article for *Community Care*, that 'the needs of black children can be met when [author's emphasis] a relevant strategy is in place' (Singh, 1999:5).

The conclusion picks up the strands emerging from the five very different models of practice with different minority ethnic communities described in this collection, with the objective of eliciting what appear to be the common ingredients of sensitive and appropriate practice with minority ethnic communities.

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