



**Consultation Feedback Report 1 of 3:  
Views of Parents attending BELONG event  
on  
BME Children and Young People  
Draft Action Plan  
(with a focus on OUTCOMES)**

**Parenting Forum  
13 April 2013  
(Clarification on 170613)**

## Introduction

For the first time in Northern Ireland, all of the main agencies for children and families have agreed to work together on a plan to improve the lives of all children who live here. This multi-agency group is known as the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP). The CYPSP structure incorporates a number of sub-groups, one of which is the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Sub Group. The term BME is described as "settled BME communities, Travellers, Roma, refugees, asylum seekers, migrant worker communities (including undocumented people), unaccompanied children and children of mixed parentage" ([www.cypsp.org](http://www.cypsp.org)).

The BME Sub Group consists of a range of representatives from community, voluntary and statutory agencies. The aim of this group is to improve the lives of BME children and young people. In order to achieve this aim, the BME Sub Group has agreed to:

- "plan what needs to change to address the rights and needs of BME children and young people and improve their outcomes, focussing on those issues that must be addressed at a Northern Ireland level.
- produce an action plan that will set out what it will do to ensure that the outcomes for BME children and young people are improved.
- decide on a set of indicators which will be used to measure how well BME children and young people are doing in Northern Ireland over time. This will help the Sub Group know if its joint work is changing the lives of BME children and young people for the better.
- work closely with the Outcomes Groups to ensure that outcomes for BME children and young people are addressed at local level as well as at Northern Ireland level" ([www.cypsp.org/bme](http://www.cypsp.org/bme)).

The CYPSP identified that the new plan for improving children's lives through better outcomes for children should incorporate meaningful engagement and participation by children, young people, their families and other stakeholders involved in the lives of the children and young people in Northern Ireland:

**"children, young people, families and communities will be enabled to participate in the planning process. Listening to [them] is key to understanding what works well".**

## **The Parenting Forum**

The Parenting Forum, a project within Parenting NI, was asked to develop a model that would facilitate and support parents from across Northern Ireland to become involved in the planning process. As a partnership organisation, the Parenting Forum has over 1,500 individual parents and family support organisations on its membership list.

The Parenting Forum also has considerable experience in carrying out numerous consultations throughout Northern Ireland and is well placed to carry out real and meaningful consultations with parents within an agreed frame-work. Besides consultation and advocacy work with and for parents, Parenting NI also provides a free telephone helpline service and Parenting Education and as such is also in a position to offer additional support structures to assist parents to be actively involved in the participation process.

## **The Participation Process**

As agreed with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, Parenting Forum has recruited a group of parents from across Northern Ireland to sit on the Regional BME Parents Reference Group. The aim of the Parents Reference Group is to act in a consultative role in responding to any documentation, plans or initiatives as directed by the BME Sub Group.

The Parenting Forum has also undertaken to consult and seek the views of additional groups of parents who may not be able to participate in the Regional BME Parents Reference Group. The Parenting Forum has undertaken a number of additional consultations – including this consultation with a group of Parents who were attending a Children's Court and Creative Showcase event organised by BELONG on 13 April 2013.

Consultation with parents requires highly skilled and experienced facilitators who are capable of working sensitively with diverse groups. A Parenting NI Facilitator worked closely with interpreters and a member of the BELONG Programme team to ensure that parents could fully participate in this consultation.

## **Consultation Methodology**

A facilitation pack was designed to reflect both the needs of the BME Sub Group for feedback on the proposed Action Plan and consideration of the circumstances of the parents which included the need for information to be made as accessible as possible. For this reason, this consultation focused on obtaining parental views about improving lives of their children rather than detailed consideration of the proposed actions and milestones. The facilitation pack incorporated a brief overview which provided parents with the context and rationale behind the CYPSP and the planning framework. This overview was available in Polish and Lithuanian as well as English and further details and examples provided by the Facilitator were translated by the interpreters.

A focus group approach was used as the data gathering method because it brought parents together in an informal way which enabled them to share their experiences and their opinions. Parents worked together using guided handouts which sought their opinions on each of the better outcomes for children. Parents were asked “When you think about each of these six ‘outcomes’ in relation to your own family experience of living in Northern Ireland ...

- what is good?
- not so good?
- and what needs to change in order to improve the lives of your children ?”

Information about each Outcome was outlined by the Facilitator. Interpreters were asked to pose the associated questions, and responses were verbally translated and conveyed in English either to the Facilitator who recorded notes or were written up by the interpreters. The Facilitator, Interpreters and member of the BELONG Programme team worked together to ensure that all parents were able to fully participate in the consultation. Encouragement and reassurance were given to parents that information shared would be treated in confidence and that report back mechanisms would not include names or personal details. The member of the BELONG Programme team was also available to provide support and signposting to parents in relation to any issues or distress arising from the discussions.

## Parent Profile

Twenty four parents were involved in this consultation representing Lithuanian (n=13), Polish (n=6) and Traveller (n=5) parents. This group had children who ranged in age between 6 weeks old and 19 years old including children with additional needs. Most of participants lived in small to medium size towns in rural areas (n=17).

### Total Number of Parents : 24

<b>Gender:</b>	<b>Male</b>	5	<b>Female</b>	19
<b>Ages of Children:</b>	<b>0 - 5 years</b>	<b>6 - 10 years</b>	<b>11 - 17 years</b>	<b>18+</b>
<b>Number of Children</b>	5	20	7	1

## Feedback from Parents about the workshop

At the end of the sessions parents were thanked for their time and contribution. Parents clearly valued the opportunity to be consulted on the draft Action Plan and readily contributed their views and their experiences. A number of parents subsequently spoke to the member of the BELONG team to ask if they could become involved in the Regional BME Parents Reference Group as they were interested in participating in an ongoing process which sought views of parents to improve lives of children.

## The Report

Data collected during the focus group session was collated using a qualitative content analysis approach. Feedback from parents has been summarised and presented below using a visually accessible format developed by the Parenting Forum.

### **A note about the findings**

Parental opinions, experiences and suggestions provide a rich source of data. Qualitative information obtained from parents can enhance the statistical service level data and evidence based research available for planning purposes. This triangulated approach helps to ensure that outcomes based planning is based on robust and comprehensive information.

Comments made by parents (both positive and negative), have been incorporated into this report and submitted to the BME Sub-Group as part of the CYPSP planning process. The role of the Parenting NI Facilitator is to report issues raised by parents, not to resolve specific problems identified. However, if appropriate, parents may be signposted to a suitable source of support. Parenting NI Facilitators will not share contact details relating to individual examples given by parents, except in relation to child protection concerns.

Anonymised, experiential accounts, shared in good faith by parents, may provide opportunities to understand where systems can be improved at policy, strategic or practice level, to ensure better outcomes for all children.

## Outcome 1 - Healthy



### Good

- Some parents were happy with the GP service and felt that their medical issues were listened to and dealt with.
- Free prescriptions, dental treatment for children and pregnant women, free scans and tests
- Good social support
- Some Clinics were very good about helping to make appointments straight away
- Maternity services were good. There were contrasting views expressed about breastfeeding, which appeared to be related to cultural norms.
- Fruit given to children in school was regarded as having a positive influence on children. More inclined to ask for fruit when shopping.



### Not so good

- Appointments system – appointment could be a week away
- Appointment system not consistent – different response if local person rings on behalf of ethnic person, local person able to secure a sooner appointment
- Attitude of receptionist when trying to book appointment with interpreter – parent was told as she had been living here more than 7years she should not need an interpreter
- Key point is that interpreters who are incompetent, inadequately qualified do not properly convey issues to the doctor. In one example, interpreter was actually using his smart phone instead of concentrating on what was being said. Parents do not know where to complain about this.
- Many complaints about hours spent waiting to be seen and treated in A&E, particularly worrying when with children



### Suggestions

- Need to improve GP appointment system in some areas
- Need to treat ethnic and local people the same regarding access to appointments
- Need for better quality interpreters
- Need for system that encourages/enables BME communities to give feedback about interpreters
- Traveller Women said maternity system would be better if allowed more than one birth partner. Women specifically identified mothers or sisters to also be present, but currently only allowed one birth partner, which tends to be the husband. One woman said “a woman needs her mother at this time”
- Better access to test results - More tests carried out by GPs?
- Shorter waiting times to see Specialists
- Shorter waiting in A&E

## Outcome 2 - Enjoying, Learning and Achieving



### Good

- Appreciation for all the language clubs run on Saturdays
- Good that there are training courses for parents
- Uniforms good idea
- Parents felt that in general education is good in NI and there are good future opportunities for their children
- Positive feedback on more opportunities for young travellers to get involved with after school including homework clubs and activities with 'settled' clubs such as boxing etc



### Not so good

- Not enough activities after school (arts, music etc)
- Not enough information for parents on how education system works in NI
- Comment – neither good nor bad – Traveller women explained that girls tend to leave school @ age 14 years, as part of culture. There are some exceptions to this, and some girls do continue with their education. "Outside work" by women is generally not approved of by traveller community, however if it involved helping other travellers such as after school clubs, this would be acceptable.
- Not knowing whether to trust whoever is running the clubs



### Suggestions

- After school activities for BME children – ask kids themselves what they would be interested in
- School Lockers for children or place to store personal belongings such as coats
- More information events for parents regarding educational system
- Additional English support for newcomers in each school
- Opportunity for children to keep up own language via language clubs
- More information about training opportunities

## Outcome 3 - Experiencing economic and environmental wellbeing

 	 <h3>Good</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some parents have received help to resolve housing and financial problems through organisations like Belong, STEP</li><li>• Some parents able to get practical support such as benefits and school uniforms for children</li><li>• Parents who have jobs appreciate these opportunities</li><li>• Additional options such as beauty /hairdressing /practical skills for young people who do not want /cannot stay on at school</li></ul>
 <h3>Not so good</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parents say these are often lower paid; perception that they are cheap labour</li><li>• Have to pay for English language classes, used to be free or reasonably priced</li><li>• Cuts to benefits – this will have an impact on families</li><li>• Some families have been refused benefits – at time did not know rights</li><li>• Parents experiencing discrimination at work – impact of this stress on parents and subsequent impact of parental stress on children</li><li>• General perception that job opportunities for BME are lower than NI residents</li><li>• Environmental housing concerns – depends on area you live in - Some areas are difficult to live in</li></ul>	 <h3>Suggestions</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More flexible working shifts for parents so that they can have some more family time</li><li>• More nursery and pre-school places to enable parents to work</li><li>• Free breakfast and after school clubs for families who are experiencing poverty</li><li>• More flexibility from ELB about allocating free uniforms and free school dinners – some families who are really struggling financially are not able to avail of these sources of help</li><li>• Deal with discrimination/racism in the workplace</li><li>• More information about sources of help for BME parents regarding improving economic and environmental wellbeing</li><li>• Free or reasonably priced English classes</li><li>• Could schools help by running English classes for parents?</li><li>• Language support at work; Inductions should be available in respective languages; signage should be in other languages</li></ul>

## Outcome 4 - Contributing positively to community and society

 <p>Contributing positively to community and society</p>		 <p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some schools are a good location for integration</li><li>• Families helping each other out – for example if someone is short of money, everyone else ‘would rally round them’; ‘you would n’t see them stuck’; ‘they would do the same for you’</li></ul>
 <p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ignorance creates barriers between cultures</li><li>• Not being able to travel around as before, being stuck in one place, whereas ‘before you could go off around the place, meeting everybody’</li></ul>		 <p>Suggestions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More voluntary work and clubs for BME children</li><li>• Some schools could be more proactive</li><li>• Need for more community events/activities for everyone to get involved – proactively include mixed nationalities</li><li>• Summer times can be ‘lonesome’ for some children – some families need help to make sure children and young people are occupied and happy during long summer holidays</li></ul>

**Note: this outcome generated less discussion than other outcomes. This could be related to the limited time as this was the final outcome discussed or it may reflect some difficulty in engaging with the concept ...**

## Outcome 5 - Living in safety and with stability

 	 <h3>Good</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Belong is perceived as being supportive of BME families and children</li><li>• STEP commended for advocacy work</li><li>• Traveller Support in Coalisland received a lot of praise for work they do with families</li><li>• Some areas in Northern Ireland are welcoming; tolerant of all backgrounds</li><li>• Some schools commended for their leadership towards diversity and in how they deal with racism</li><li>• Leaders/coaches in after school activities have been helpful in dealing with bullying etc</li></ul>
 <h3>Not so good</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some children have been bullied because of religious differences as well as ethnic background</li><li>• Parents described a lack of clarity about the process of reporting racial attacks. One family contacted police after a physical attack on a child. Statement was taken by police, but since then, there has been no further contact or follow up with family. Family unsure if any action taken against perpetrators. Child still afraid to go out to play.</li><li>• Examples given of children being bullied at school and having to move to different schools. In all these cases, the new schools were very accommodating and sympathetic.</li><li>• Some BME children have experienced racial intimidation by local children in the street where they live; in one case, despite forwarding video evidence of house being attacked, Housing Executive wrote to family to say they did not consider it to be “a major issue”.</li></ul>	 <h3>Suggestions</h3> <p>All schools should have similar consistent approach to bullying</p> <p>Clear message from Housing Executive about unacceptability of racial harassment. More sympathetic and proactive response required in cases where children and their families are being intimidated.</p> <p>Clearer reporting procedures, consistent action towards perpetrator/s and pro-active follow up by Police. Need to inform victim and family what is being done to tackle harassment and racial attacks</p>

## Outcome 6 - Living in a society which respects children's rights

 	 <h3>Good</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child protection systems appear to be good</li><li>• Generally BME children receive good support and respect from teachers</li><li>• Children being informed about their rights in schools</li><li>• Good access to Social Services</li></ul>
 <h3>Not so good</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not allowed to talk in their own language at school</li><li>• Feeling of losing culture</li><li>• Discrimination and lack of awareness of cultural differences by social services</li><li>• Complaints by BME families not taken seriously by authorities</li><li>• Some parents gave examples of their children being followed around shops – not trusted by security staff</li><li>• Parents concerned about children 'using' their rights to get what they want</li><li>• Poor access to school psychology services</li><li>• Social Services have too much power</li></ul>	 <h3>Suggestions</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More language support for BME children</li><li>• Cultural Awareness training for teachers and others who have contact with BME children</li><li>• More opportunities and facilities for play for children</li><li>• More school psychology services</li></ul>

