

Summary of Themes raised by Regional BME Parents Reference Group

Background

The Regional BME Parents Reference Group (PRG) links directly to the BME Sub-Group as part of the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) framework.

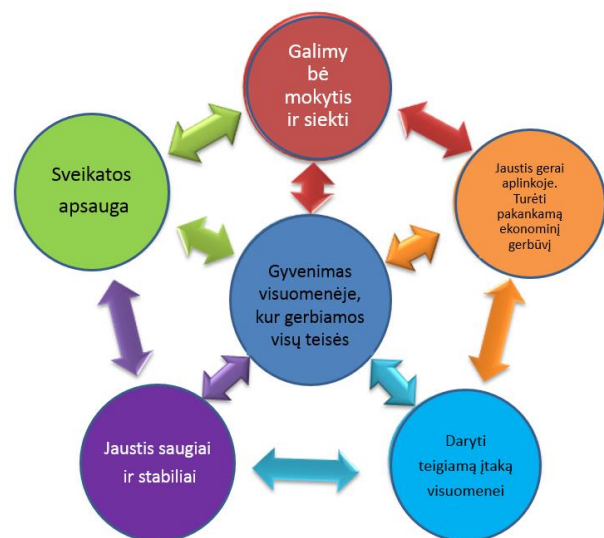




The BME PRG has met three times since it was set up in October 2012 – the 1st meeting provided an opportunity for parents to identify good practice, concerns and suggestions about the 6 Outcomes; the 2nd meeting focused on the proposed Action Plan; and the most recent meeting enabled parents to assess whether their views have been included into the Action Plan. There have also been 3 additional meetings with other groups of parents from the BME community in relation to the consultation on the proposed Action Plan.

This summary provides an overview of the key themes in each of the 6 outcomes raised by BME parents across all meetings to date. There are currently 67 parents in the BME PRG.

The role of the BME PRG is to participate in the planning process which seeks to improve outcomes for BME children living in Northern Ireland.



The BME Parents Reference Group includes Chinese, Ghanaian, Irish Travellers, Indian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Pakistani, Polish, Portuguese, Quechuas, Romanian, Russian, Sudanese and Vietnamese; as well as a number of parents who are asylum seekers.



 	<p>Chcemy takiego samego pozytywnego, emocjonalnego i fizycznego zdrowia oraz dobra dla wszystkich dzieci i młodzieży BME tak jak dla ich rówieśników. (Polish)</p>
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Parents were generally complimentary about health and social care services in Northern Ireland. Their key concerns were:


- **Difficulty accessing GP services** due to current appointments system; waiting times for A&E, specialist services, and test results; need improved services for children with a disability
- **Poor access to primary health care services for Roma families;** subsequent over-use of A&E in order to access basic medical help
- Access to interpreters improving, however **quality of interpreters** a major issue including ability to correctly convey medical details and to show respect for BME patients; parents also asked for consideration of a more accessible telephone based interpretation service or other technology based solutions
- While most parents praised HSC staff, some felt that **staff attitudes and cultural awareness could be improved;** also specific reference to need for sensitivity with BME families who had experienced distress/trauma in their past
- Issues raised by smaller numbers of parents included need for **more understanding of mental health concerns; cost of dental services;** and **specific points about maternity services** such as need for more than one birth partner and improved staff awareness of cultural influences on breastfeeding

 	<p>所有BME的兒童和青少年我們都歡迎和支持他們學習與成果。藉此亦更會尊重他們個人的文化背景。(Chinese)</p>
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There was general appreciation of access to education and the high standard of education in Northern Ireland. Concern expressed related to:

- Wanting children to have **more access to opportunities** including homework clubs, after school activities and summer time activities – some parents would also like to be involved in these activities
- Need for easy access to interpreters if required for Parent Teacher meetings etc.,
- Need for **easy to understand information about how the education system works that is available in other languages, eg**
 - some parents unaware of need to register child early for transfer test to ensure post primary choices
 - unaware that child may be able to study own language as a GCSE subject

- **More practical help for families in financial difficulties** including access to breakfast clubs, subsidised uniforms etc
 - **More awareness and respect for diversity** of BME cultures and more opportunities for BME children to speak their own language in school
 - Consideration of wider issues pertaining to **ongoing education for** specific BME communities: need for creative support
- for families who would like children to continue their education eg Roma families and Traveller community
 - Some parents said children more prone to illness in winter months and relate some of this to children sitting in wet uniforms in school. **Consideration of weather appropriate school uniforms & footwear and option to wear coats in winter;** need for locker space to store these belongings

	<p>Visi EM vaikai ir jaunimas turi būti saugūs, turi teisę į savo etninę kultūrą ir gyvenimą be rasinio priekabiavimo. (Lithuanian)</p>
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While parents commented on the kindness and friendliness of people in Northern Ireland, many families had unfortunately experienced racism including verbal and physical attacks. Key themes relate to:

- **Racism in the education environment** – some schools actively promote zero tolerance of racism, however this is not consistent across all schools. Some parents described their children’s experiences of racism at school, and this seems to be predominantly occurring in some post primary schools
- **Racism in certain housing estates** which has manifested as verbal insults, physical attacks, broken windows, burnt cars etc and has resulted in many families living in fear of further attacks on themselves or their homes
- **Tolerance of racism in some communities**, identified by parents in examples of non intervention by other members of the community who witnessed racist attacks. Racism by some staff in public services or agencies was also identified
- **Lack of clarity about reporting procedures about racism.** Some parents identified that systems currently in place, such as via the Police and the Housing Executive, were not always satisfactory, with some families left feeling that nothing was actually done to address the situation/incident. There was also reluctance by some families to report racial incidents for fear of further reprisals.
- With regard to safety of children within families, some parents identified **need for access to parenting support;** parenting programmes that provided information about positive discipline and managing children’s behaviour.
- **Accessible information and support** for children who are experiencing problems at home.



Wszystkie dzieci i młodzież BME cieszą się z bezpiecznego, zdrowego i zintegrowanego środowiska, wolnego od ubóstwa, niezależnie od prawnego statusu tożsamości etnicznej rodziców. (Polish)

Some families were happy with their housing and employment situation, and grateful for the help received from support agencies. However there was general consensus that many BME families are experiencing financial and environmental difficulties. The key themes were:

- Some asylum seekers are **homeless** and are dependent on others for basic shelter
- Some families are living in **cramped, poor quality housing** including single glazed houses which are hard to heat
- **Need for access to play areas and green spaces** for children in some housing estates
- **Personal safety** a concern in some housing estates, mainly in relation to racism
- Some families **struggling financially**, often not enough money for food, uniforms and school costs, and high rents if not in Housing Executive Accommodation
- Main **barriers to employment** regarded as lack of opportunities, need for better English language skills, child care costs, lack of qualifications
- Asylum seekers and Roma parents **not legally entitled to work**
- Some parents have experienced **discrimination and racism in the workplace** including exploitive working conditions





**所有決策都了解到BME的兒童和青少年
都和其他社會角色被定型 (Chinese)**

Some families described their BME communities as close knit and where people help each other out; however for others, this was not part of their experience. At times this was a difficult and emotional concept to discuss. The key themes were:

- Need for **more gatherings for cultural purposes** in order to engender relationships and understanding with local communities
- **Lack of sense of ‘community’** for those families who feel isolated and separate from indigenous population
- **Enthusiasm for concept of volunteering**, seen as opportunity for young and older people, chance to improve local environment, enable better cultural understanding, help occupy children and young people during summer
- Need for **more opportunities for BME communities to have their voices heard**



Visi EM vaikai ir jaunimas, žinodami ir suprasdami savo teises, turi pagrįstai tikėtis, kad jų teisės būtų gerbiamos, apsaugotos ir vykdomos. (Lithuanian)

While some parents felt that Northern Ireland society was generally respectful of children’s rights, other parents did not feel that this was the case. The key themes were:

- Awareness that some **schools are playing a big role in informing children about their rights**
- Concern that **BME children’s rights are not respected in relation to high levels of racism** experienced in Northern Ireland
- **Debate about ‘children’s rights’ in relation to ‘discipline’**. Parents agreed with concept of children’s rights, but some parents felt that “children have too many rights” which challenged traditional cultural approaches to discipline
- Parents identified **need for education for everyone about children’s rights**

Views of the BME Parents Reference Group are submitted to the BME Sub-Group as part of a wider process to improve lives of all children living in Northern Ireland (www.cypsp.org). The BME Sub-Group has specific responsibility for improving lives of BME children and welcomes the participation of parents in this process.

Interested in joining or finding out more about the BME Parents Reference Group?
Please contact Maria Herron at Parenting NI; mariah@parentingni.org or 028 90310891 (July 2013)