



Raising Awareness on Gender Equality Issues and the Gender Equality Duty

A one day workshop for frontline Black Minority Ethnic
Organisations in Buckinghamshire

Workshop Report

Wednesday 25 March 2009

Aylesbury Vale Multi-Cultural Centre, Aylesbury

Background

The workshop was organised by the Uni Network in collaboration with Aylesbury Vale Equality and Human Rights Council, Wycombe Racial Equality Council and Chiltern Racial Equality Council and was held in Room 19-20 of the Aylesbury Vale Multi-Cultural Centre in Aylesbury. The workshop was facilitated by Shirini Heerah, a freelance Gender Specialist who works with the Black Minority Ethnic Community Partnership in Brighton and she was supported by Tayo Owodunni, one of Uni's Network Co-ordinators.

Aim and Approach

The aim of the day was to raise awareness on gender equality in an effort to help frontline organisations working with BME communities in Buckinghamshire to mainstream gender equality into their work.

The expected outcomes were to increase knowledge of gender equality issues, to improve understanding of gender concepts and specific gender equality issues for BME men and women and to help participants identify areas that they could change in their own organisations.

The workshop used a variety of techniques including group work, plenary discussions and presentations and each participant received a welcome pack.

PROGRAMME

Introduction

Tayo Owodunni began the day by introducing Uni, explaining the background to the training and how Uni came to be working with the facilitator. Shirini then introduced herself, giving some background to her work and to why she was involved with gender and set the scene for the day, explaining the aims of the workshop and the expected outcomes. Ground rules were then agreed by the group. They were to respect each other, listen, give constructive feedback, respect confidentiality, encourage participation from all, to take care of yourselves, be honest, be yourself and enjoy!

What is Gender?

To help participants relate to gender, the group was asked to think of early or significant gender experiences in their lives and then to share their stories in single sex groups, one male and two female. Tayo helped facilitate the men's group. Participants then came together to discuss the different expectations of women and men. In the next exercise, participants were asked to talk about what they liked and disliked doing that was typical of their gender, what they liked doing that was typical of the other gender and finally what they admired about the other gender. They then came together in the plenary to talk about what they had learnt.

These exercises generated a lot of discussion and people felt relatively at ease in talking about either themselves or people that they knew. It was an effective way of raising a range of gender issues, some that were general and others that were specific to some BME groups. The facilitator tried to stay away from homogenising different communities eg, "the Asian community is like this or that", as this could have been divisive.

From the two exercises, all of the main points important to understanding gender emerged. A definition of gender was then given, the main points summarised and the participants given a handout.

Identifying Gender Equality Issues in the UK

After a break, the group discussed the likely impact of gender on women and men's lives looking in particular at education, employment, poverty, public life and health.

The group went through each topic and pulled out the main issues they thought were pertinent to gender and this was followed up by facts, figures and explanation from the facilitator. Information was then given on the impact on BME groups with the use of two tables, one for education and performance at GCSE level and the other for different types of employment.

Participants then received a handout with all the statistical details that were covered.

History of Gender Equality Legislation in the UK

Having outlined the gender inequalities that exist in the five areas, Tayo then gave a presentation on the history of gender equality legislation in the UK, entitled 'History of Gender Political Struggle: Seeking Equality'. Beginning with the 1900s and the suffragette movement and moving through the history decade by decade, Tayo brought home the enormity of the struggle and the substantial work that has been undertaken in the effort to secure women's rights and gender equality over the years. Tayo offered to send out the presentation to those who were interested.

The group then broke for lunch which offered both English and Caribbean food.

Gender Equality Duty

After lunch, the facilitator gave a powerpoint presentation on the Gender Equality Duty (GED). Participants had a copy of the presentation to follow. Areas covered included: the background to the GED, the aims of the legislation, the reasons it was introduced and some of the tools and strategies

for implementation. The talk was then followed by a plenary discussion on the GED and how it could help participants in their work.

There was some debate as to how useful legislation was. It was all very well to have laws but often they weren't implemented. Although the limitations of legislation were acknowledged, participants also saw the value in having something that underlined the importance of the issue and also the legal obligation that comes with it. This could only help to reinforce and underline gender equality work. The GED was in effect another tool with which to challenge institutions that were negligent and it was particularly useful for Equality and Diversity Officers in raising awareness on gender at local government level.

With regard to consultation, something public bodies are obliged to do, it was pointed out that this was where the voluntary sector had an important role to play. Inputting into processes can put a lot of pressure on local bodies. However, it was also accepted that the voluntary sector was not always given the resources to take part in advocacy work and there was a feeling of consultation fatigue, especially when the end results did not take on board advice and information given. Tayo highlighted the government's new consultation on Violence Against Women, details of which can be found on the Uni website.

Taking the Learning Forward

Some of the participants had to leave at lunchtime, and at various times after lunch, so the five remaining participants (Tina, Mohammed, Fareba, Gwen and Ron) used the rest of the time to reflect on what they had learnt during the day and how they could take it forward. This was then shared with the rest of the group.

Much of the discussion revolved around how change happens. Some felt it needed a big movement or the backing of large organisations such as the trade unions. Others felt that although it may be difficult to bring about change, most change does in fact start with the action of one individual. For example, if Rosa Parks hadn't refused to give up her seat on the bus, Barack Obama may not be the President of the United States today. Other ideas were:

- Our roles are advocates. We should seize every opportunity to continue to advocate on gender equality in our spheres of contact.
- We should not shy away from being involved in public consultations on equality and should contribute when we have the opportunity.
- We can take what we have learnt from today back to our personal lives and social networks, not just our work and organisations.
- You don't have to undertake huge pieces of work, doing something small like an International Women's Day celebration can have a big impact.

- We should hold government institutions/ bodies accountable for implementing the GED and ensure they are sensitive to gender concerns in their policies, services and projects.
- We all have a part to play in ensuring that the gender struggle that many fore-runners paid so dearly for, is not lost, but remains on the front burner of the public's consciousness.
- We need more fora and workshops to allow a wider audience to benefit from this kind of training on gender equality.

The day then ended with final thoughts, thank yous and the evaluation.

Evaluation

1. Overall how satisfied are you with the training programme?

Very satisfied – 6; Satisfied – 3; Neutral - 1

2. How satisfied are you with the workshop materials?

Very satisfied – 6; Satisfied – 3; Neutral – 1

3. How satisfied are you with the facilitation?

Very satisfied – 7; Satisfied –2; Neutral - 1

4. How satisfied are you with the training environment?

Very satisfied – 6; Neutral – 3; Not sure - 1

5. What parts of the workshop did you get most benefit from and why?

- Taking the participants into the thinking process.
- Qualifying past experience.
- All aspects were well balanced and very effective.
- The differences between male and female equality and gaining more knowledge.
- All of it was very good.
- The exercises were very useful and informative.
- Activities which raised opportunity for dialogues. Very impressed by Shirini and her ability to keep the discussions focused.
- Group discussions and insight into other individual's point of view – eye opening at times.
- Everything was beneficial because I did not realise the vast difference between gender and culture. It was engaging and extremely knowledgeable.
- Talking to Tayo as I feel he had a deeper insight and was more broad-minded than anyone else present. I think he understood the issue and was happy to listen to and take on board issues raised.

6. What suggestions would you make for future training programmes?

- Give more time to publicise the programme and increase participants.
- A bigger group of participants

- Shorter time and more participants as a good number of participants did not stay for the afternoon session.
- A little more time for group work and discussions.
- Maybe involve more people – otherwise it was brilliant!
- That the history is presented first to lay a foundation upon which the rest can be based; participants need to be a more mixed group re: their age and racial/cultural background and racial/cultural issues should not be such a dominant issue although will cause different experiences and opinions – 'gender' is what should be the central issue.

Shirini Heerah

31 March 2009

List of Participants for the Bucks Gender Equality Workshop

	Name	Organisation	Post
1	Fareba Jones	Buckinghamshire County Council and Bahai Community	HR Assistant (Temporary)
2	Mohammed Ilyas	St Albans City and District Council	Equality and Diversity Officer
3	Ron H S Gardener	Aylesbury Vale Equality and Human Rights Council	Chair
4	Tina Whittingham	Bucks Additional Support Programme	BME Outreach Worker
5	Jacqui Burnett	Aylesbury Vale Equality and Human Rights Council	Equalities Manager
6	Sayd Laskar	Bucks BME Advisory Group	Committee member
7	Kavita Brahmbhatt	Chiltern District Council	Community Cohesion Assistant
8	Maureen Aylmer	Healthy Living Centre , Aylesbury	Community Development Officer
9	Neelam Mahmood	Thames Valley Police	Prevent Engagement Officer – Aylesbury
10	Gwen Tighe	Equality and Human Rights	?Freelancer
11	Shagutta Akhtar	Aylesbury Vale Equality and Human Rights Council	Volunteer
12	Ajaib Hussain	Aylesbury Vale District Council	Equalities Advisor
13	Tayo Owodunni	Uni Network	Network Coordinator (Thames Valley)
14	Shirini Heerah	Independent Gender Specialist	Facilitator