

'Promoting Diversity and Resilience'

**Improving the life chances of children looked after from
Black and other minority ethnic sup-groups**

South West Region

September 2003

Diversity and resilience: Improving the life chances of children looked after from Black and other minority ethnic communities

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1. Introduction

There has been increasing recognition of the way in which the needs of children looked after from Black and other minority ethnic groups have frequently been systematically ignored, misinterpreted and denied. This has posed particular challenges for those working in the South West region. The fact that there are relatively small numbers of Black and other minority ethnic group residents in most parts of the region has sometimes been falsely equated with the idea that 'there is no problem here'. This report sets out to challenge such complacency and to support those working with children looked after to get the best possible start in life.

The report developed out of work undertaken by a South West social services regional working group that looked at how the life chances of children and young people looked after from Black and other minority ethnic groups could be improved (see appendix 2). The report has three aims:

- To consider available evidence about services to this group of children in the South West
- To share information about best policy and practice within the region to help Black and other minority ethnic group children who are looked to be confident, secure and successful.
- To look at how inclusive and challenging organisational cultures can be created that will support practitioners, managers and elected members in improving service quality.

The report also reflects some of the rich and challenging discussions that took place at a regional conference in June 2003. Ravinder Barn's keynote speech to the conference drew attention to some key trends and issues, including that in the South West 50% of Black and other minority ethnic children and young people are of mixed parentage. Importantly, of these children, only 5% are in 'same race' placements. Supporting trans racial placements is thus of considerable importance. (see Appendix 3).

Lord Laming's report on the Victoria Climbié Inquiry sharpened our focus again on the complexities of 'race' and ethnicity and their impact on the quality of life for individual children. More recently the changes proposed in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (September 2003) reinforce the necessity of effective collaboration across all agencies involved with children. It is for that reason that the report aims to stimulate debate and encourage good practice in all agencies involved with children looked after, including education, health services, and voluntary and independent sector agencies.

2. Setting the context – opportunities and challenges

The difficulties that may be experienced by Black and minority ethnic children looked after and their families were highlighted in 'Overcoming the Obstacles' (Family Rights Group, 2000). This report highlighted some of the stark contrasts between services that demonstrated good practice and those that did not. Importantly these differences were not generally related to the size of authority, or ethnic composition but much more to the leadership on these issues that was given by managers and elected members

'Overcoming the Obstacles' highlighted how often professionals felt at a loss as to where to start when working with Black children and their families. Relatively low numbers of Black and minority ethnic children were not infrequently cited as the rationale for not having basic good policies and practices in place.

The findings in 'Overcoming the Obstacles' were echoed in 'Excellence not Excuses' (Social Services Inspectorate, 2000). This spotlighted the findings from SSI inspections of services to ethnic minority children and families in eight local authorities (none of which were in the South West). The report came to a number of important conclusions including:

- Whilst many authorities had anti-racist and equal opportunities policies and strategies there was little evidence that they had been implemented
- Racial harassment policies did not cover issues of racism relating to children, young people and staff.
- Anti racist and anti discriminatory issues were often given insufficient attention in training.
- Consultation often relied on fragile links with voluntary and community groups
- Practice in relation to recruiting and supporting black staff was variable
- Families seeking support often experienced difficulty in accessing services because they did not understand the role of social services, particularly if English was not their first language.
- Workers had varying levels of understanding of the situations of ethnic minority families.
- Assessments were often partial and rarely covered parenting capacity, the child's needs and family and environmental issues.
- There was little evidence that care planning took a lifelong view of the situation of ethnic minority looked after children.

These reports pose particular challenges for South West region authorities given that there has often been a reluctance to acknowledge fully that racism and discrimination are all too often a feature of the way in which public sector organisations operate.

Rural Racism and Discrimination

In 1992 the Commission for Racial Equality published 'Keep Them in Birmingham' – Challenging Racism in South West England. The report presented a disturbing picture of racial prejudice and discrimination directed against minority ethnic residents. It found that while a few organisations and individuals were taking positive steps to promote racial equality, there was widespread complacency in statutory, voluntary and private sector organisations and in the wider majority white community.

As a result of this report the National Association of Citizen's Advice Bureaux in partnership with the Rural Development Commission set up the Rural Race Equality Project (RREP) to support initiatives aimed at tackling racial discrimination in the South West. In 1999 the RREP published 'Challenging Racism in the Rural Idyll'. In spite of some progress in organisations responding to the needs of Black and minority ethnic people in the South West, the report concluded that there had been no dramatic shift in attitudes and behaviour across the region and there was no widespread recognition that issues pertinent to race equality had been accepted and acted upon. More recently Dorset Race Equality Council published '*Racism and the Dorset Idyll*' (Dorset Race Equality Council, 2003) and provided further evidence of the way that Black people in rural communities are often targeted, marginalized and subject to great hostility. In Wiltshire a report '*Hidden Voices*' (Wiltshire County Council 2002) similarly found considerable evidence of racial inequalities and racism.

The Macpherson Enquiry

It is in this context that South West local authorities have been responding to the findings of the Macpherson enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and to changes in race relations legislation.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report (Macpherson, Sir W, 1999) had a major impact on thinking about institutional racism and prompted many public sector organisations to evaluate the extent to which the findings of the Inquiry were 'true for us'. Institutional racism is defined as:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage ethnic groups. (Macpherson, 1999)

The Macpherson Inquiry placed the onus on public institutions to evaluate their policies and procedures and to recognise their responsibility to be

proactive in identifying and tackling the often subtle but unremitting ways in which Black people are socially marginalized and diminished. Sir William Macpherson's report also emphasised the need for effective and systematic ethnic monitoring of service provision, for anti racism training and for achieving a representative workforce. Four years on it is relevant to question the extent to which the Inquiry's challenging messages have resulted in tangible and significant benefits in the way that public services are delivered to Britain's Black communities.

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 strengthened and extended the Race Relations Act 1976 by placing on public authorities a new duty to promote race equality and race relations, as well as outlawing race discrimination in any of its functions. The 2000 (Amendment) Act covers the provision of services and facilities as well as employment, and is therefore very relevant to children's services. Public authorities are now required to ensure that they:

- consult with representatives of minority ethnic communities
- take account of the potential impact of policies on these communities
- monitor the actual impact of policies and services (existing and planned)
- take remedial action when necessary to address any unwarranted disparities
- monitor their workforce and employment practices to ensure that the procedures and policies are fair.

Local authorities are now required to produce Race Equality Schemes to help and focus their attention on key priorities.

Social Services authorities are also expected to report to Government on race equality issues in a systematic way, for example, in performance assessment statements, and through the children in need census. As a result there is considerably improved management information about access and performance. However, a great deal more work needs to be undertaken to improve the quantitative and qualitative information that is available, including through feedback from children, young people and their families. We must listen to their views and experiences, and give young people a strong voice in relation to the decisions affecting them.

There are also signs of real progress in the South West. This report highlights that there is much good practice but also that a great deal more needs to be done. The impact of racism and race inequalities on life chances for children in need and for children looked after has often been underestimated. It should not be. Issues about placement choice and stability, and making sure that children get a really good start in life are crucial for all looked after children,

but they can be particularly challenging for children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

The context within which services are provided also continues to evolve and change. For example, the rise regionally in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children needing services has raised questions about the resources, skills and knowledge that practitioners and carers need in order to provide high quality and sensitive services. Children arriving from war and conflict ridden states such as Iraq or Kosovo may have additional and sometimes quite complex needs as a result of the trauma and geographical dislocation that they have faced.

This report sets out to challenge any lingering complacency about these issues and to help those working with children looked after to develop competence and confidence in developing best policy and practice.

Key questions

1. Are members and senior managers providing the required leadership and direction on race equality and diversity issues? Are they public advocates of diversity?
2. Is action on diversity and equality actively managed?
3. Are local authority Race Equality Schemes addressing the specific needs of children and young people looked after?
4. Is there a strong and clear commitment to responding sensitively and purposively to incidents of racial harassment and discrimination amongst service users and staff?

3. Evidence about needs and services in the South West

Introduction

This section considers data and statistical evidence in order to highlight some key issues in relation to Black and minority ethnic children looked after in the South West region.

It is important to note that throughout the South West the Black and minority ethnic population is relatively small and consequently small variations in numbers can give rise to large statistical changes. It may also be significant that published ratios of Black and minority ethnic groups to the main population are still based on 1991 census data that may not accurately reflect subsequent changes in the population as a whole.

However it is significant that in 2001-2 a significantly higher proportion of children in need in the South West were from Black and minority ethnic groups than in any other region in the country (Department of Health Performance Assessment Framework Indicator E45). Similarly the equivalent ratio for the representation of Black and minority ethnic children in the looked after population in the South West was also very high in 2001-2.

Starting from those ratios, this section considers other available data and draws upon the results of a survey commissioned for this report, in order to understand and highlight the significance of the data.

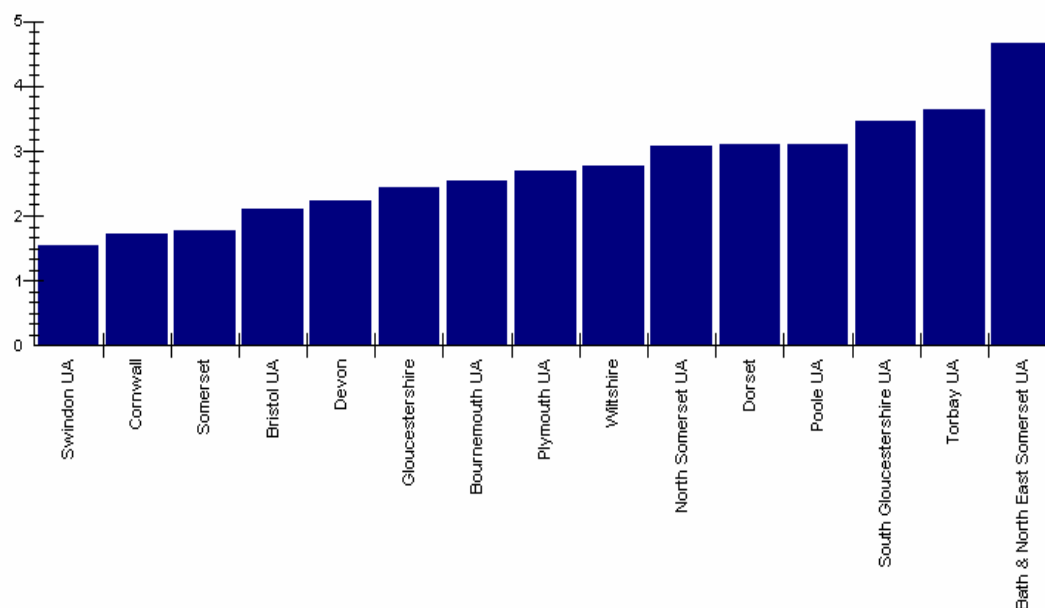
Performance Assessment Indicators

The Department of Health Performance Assessment Framework indicator E45 shows the ratio of the percentage of children in need that were from minority ethnic groups to the percentage of children in the local population that were from minority ethnic groups.

If children in need from minority ethnic communities were represented to the same level as the general population, the indicator value would be one. A ratio between 1 and 2 is seen as good performance because people from minority ethnic groups are more likely to be disadvantaged than the population as a whole.

Councils with a ratio in excess of two may need to question their performance. High values may mean that there has been a change to the size of the ethnic minority population, that they are managing to reach those in need or that they are disproportionately identifying people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Ratio ethnic minority % child in need to % child in local pop (2001/02)



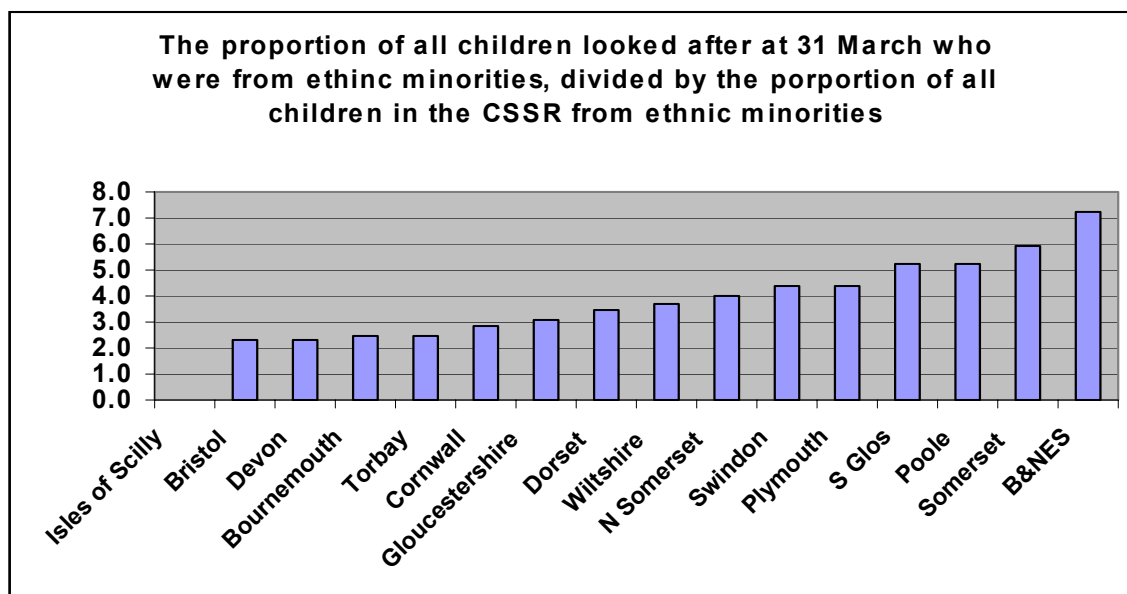
Twelve councils in the South West showed a ratio in excess of two. The average ratio for the South West on this indicator is the highest in the country.

Quality Protects Indicator

The Quality Protects indicator QP10 shows the proportion of all children looked after who were from ethnic minorities divided by the proportion of all children in the council area from ethnic minorities.

For this indicator a ratio of one would show that minority ethnic children were as likely to be looked after as their peers from the majority white community. With only two exceptions, all councils in the South West had a ratio in excess of two, while the two highest councils had a ratio of seven or higher. This suggests that in the South West, children from minority ethnic groups are at least twice and possibly up to seven times as likely to be looked after as white children.

Again these figures have to be treated with caution because of uncertainties about the size of minority ethnic populations. However the regional ratio is still the highest in the country and it is important that councils in the region attempt to gain an understanding of the figures. Confirmed high ratios may raise questions about the availability of family support services to minority ethnic families.



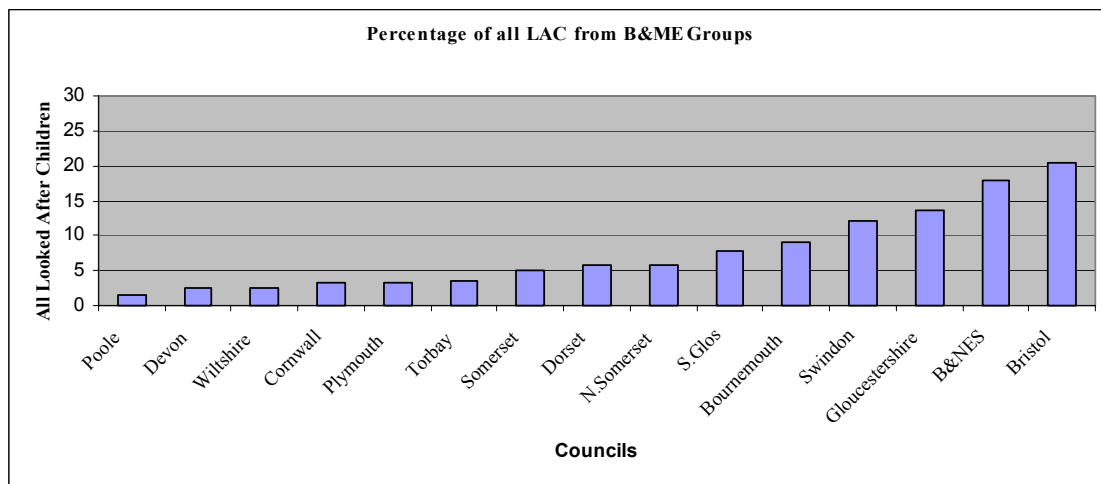
Children in Need Census

The Children in Need (CIN) Census completed in October 2001 is the most accurate and up to date information available. The CIN census showed that of all children in need receiving services in the census week in the South West region 81% were white, and 5% were from Black and other minority ethnic groups. The ethnicity of 13% was not stated. The comparative figure for England was 73% white, and 17% from Black and other minority ethnic groups. The ethnic origin of 10% was not stated for England as a whole.

For children looked after the CIN census showed that in the South West 92% were white compared with 81% nationally. Children from Black and other minority ethnic groups formed 6% of the looked after population in the south west compared with 17% nationally. The higher percentage of looked after black children in the South West confirms the over representation of this group in the looked after population.

The regional survey (appendix 1) completed in the summer of 2002 confirmed that 6% of children looked after in the South West were from Black or minority ethnic groups.

There was significant variation between individual councils in the proportions of children looked after from black and minority ethnic groups ranging from 1.5% in Somerset to 20.5% in Bristol. No clear pattern emerges of similarities within urban or rural areas. Plymouth (3.3%) was very low for an urban area, while Gloucestershire (13.5%) was high relative to other shire counties in the region.



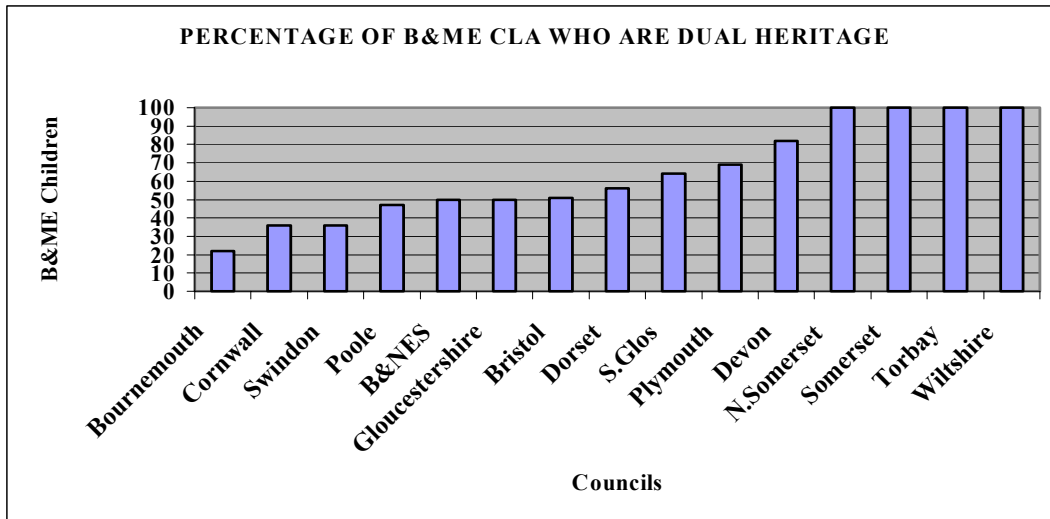
Regional Survey

(a) Dual Heritage Children

A significant proportion of Black or other minority ethnic children looked after in the South West are dual heritage. Nationally the CIN census showed that 33% of Black and minority ethnic group children looked after were of dual heritage or mixed parentage. The CIN figure for the South West councils was 49%. This higher figure is reflected in the questionnaire results. Apart from Swindon (36%) and Poole (47%), in all reporting councils in the South West 50% or more of Black and minority ethnic group children looked after were dual heritage. Three councils, Torbay, Somerset and North Somerset had 100% of their Black and minority ethnic group children who were looked after children from dual heritage backgrounds.

Importantly also there needs to be debate about whether the very term 'dual heritage' is appropriate. One of the lessons from a recent project in Bristol (see section 5) is that many children and their parents did not find the term helpful or useful, particularly when they have multi ethnic origins, and so sometimes preferred the term 'mixed race'.

These figures suggest that dual heritage children in the South West are significantly over represented in the looked after population. Councils may need to pay particular attention to addressing the needs of dual heritage children and their carers.

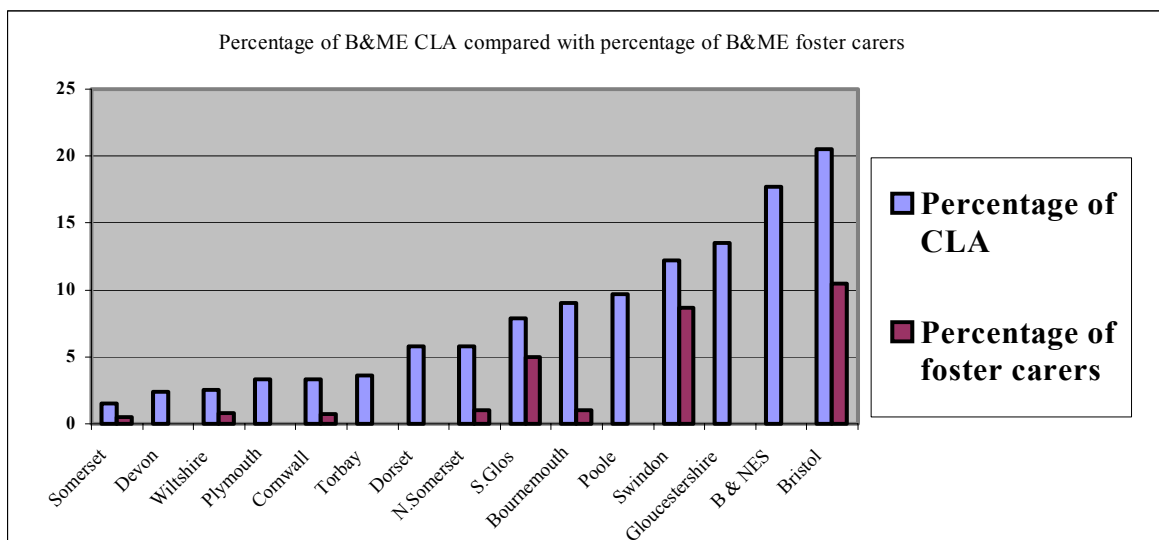


(b) Foster Care

Across the South West an average of 80% of Black and minority ethnic children looked after are in foster care. This is in line with the regional figure of 82% for all children looked after in foster placements.

Ten councils were able to report on the percentage of foster carers from Black and minority ethnic groups. Two councils reported that they had no Black and minority ethnic foster carers. Bristol had the highest percentage of Black and minority ethnic carers at 10.5% of its carers. None of the councils in the South West had a proportion of Black and minority ethnic foster carers that equated to the proportion of children looked after from Black and minority ethnic groups. Swindon at 0.71, followed by South Gloucestershire at 0.63 and Bristol at 0.51 had the closest ratios.

The fact that five councils were unable to report on the ethnicity of foster carers suggests that there is a need for improved ethnic monitoring in this area.



Note: Councils not reporting on foster carer percentages are shown as 0

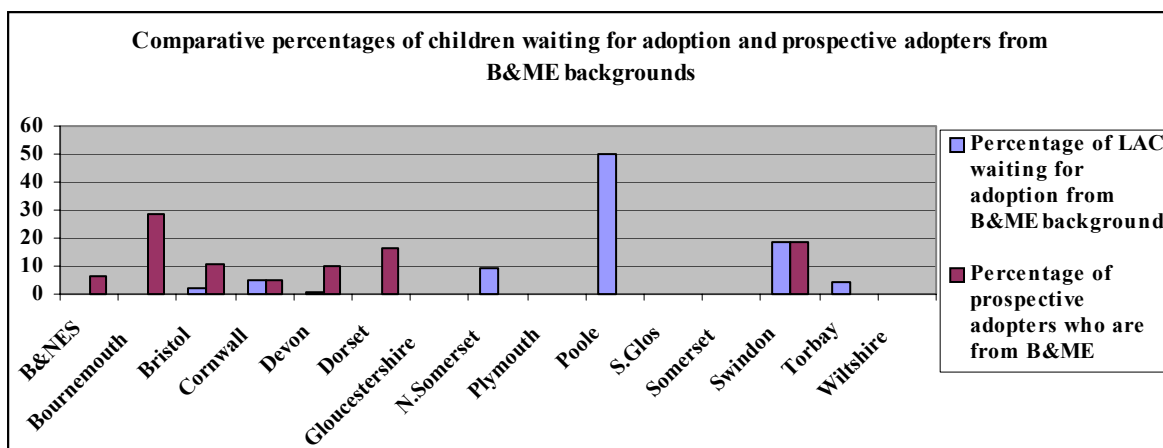
Councils were asked what percentage of Black and minority ethnic children were placed with foster carers from the same ethnic group. Only eight councils were able to answer this question. Four of these councils had not been able to match Black and minority ethnic children with carers from the same racial origin. Four councils, North Somerset, Poole, South Gloucestershire and Swindon had been able to achieve ethnic matches to give a regional total of 11 children. This means that of the 288 children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds placed in foster care, only 5% were known to have been placed with carers from the same ethnic origin.

While this raises questions about the recruitment of carers from Black and minority ethnic groups, it also suggests that in the short term within the region it may be difficult to achieve appropriate cultural and ethnic placements for all children looked after. Considerable attention must therefore be given to training for carers and helping them to meet the needs of children from different ethnic backgrounds, as well to ensuring that Black and minority ethnic children looked after are able to maintain and develop their cultural, ethnic and religious identity.

(c) Adoption

Seven councils reported having children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds who were waiting for adoption. In these seven councils, the proportion of children waiting for adoption who were from Black and minority ethnic groups ranged from 1% to 50%. Seven councils also reported having prospective adopters from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Only four of these councils had children waiting to be adopted. Devon authority had 10% of adopters from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds but only 1% of children waiting to be adopted were from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Poole authority had no black and minority ethnic prospective adopters yet 50% of its children who waiting to be adopted were from ethnic minority communities. Dorset had nearly 17% of its prospective adopters from black and minority ethnic backgrounds but no children from minority backgrounds waiting for adoption. Only Swindon had a similar percentage of children and prospective adopters from minority backgrounds. The regional adoption consortium may have a role to play in addressing these issues.

The questionnaire asked for percentages of children waiting for adoption rather than numbers, so it is difficult to gauge performance in this area and it needs to be emphasised that actual numbers of children are very small. Five of the ten councils that responded to this question had no children from minority ethnic groups waiting for adoption suggesting that the government's target for children adopted from care may not be met as far as children from ethnic minorities are concerned in the South West region.



Summary

- Compared with the national figures the South West has a significantly smaller proportion of children in need and children looked after from Black and minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of Black and minority ethnic children looked after relative to children in need is higher in the South West than nationally. There is a greater likelihood that children in need from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds will become looked after in the South West than in other parts of the country.
- This suggests that preventive or support services to Black and minority ethnic families may be less well developed in the South West than in other parts of the country.
- The ethnicity of 13% of children in need in the South West was not stated in the CIN census. This points to a need for more accurate or comprehensive ethnic monitoring of children in need.
- Information from the Quality Protects MAP confirms that there are significant variations within the region. The over- representation of Black and minority ethnic children in need does not appear to be linked to the type of authority and likely demographic variations. Differences may be related to differences in practice or the availability of preventive services.
- Nearly half of all Black and minority ethnic children looked after in the South West are dual heritage. In some councils all the Black and minority ethnic children looked after are dual heritage. Councils should consider specific responses to the needs of all dual heritage children and their parents or carers.
- A high proportion of Black and minority ethnic children looked after are placed with foster carers. Some councils could not provide information on the ethnicity of their foster carers. No council had a proportion of foster carers equivalent to the proportion of Black and minority ethnic children

looked after. Only 5% of children in the region were known to have been placed with carers from the same ethnic background.

- Ethnic matching of carers with children looked after is going to be very difficult to achieve in the South West. Efforts to recruit foster carer from minority ethnic backgrounds must be maintained. At the same time councils need to address the needs of both children and carers in placements where there is no ethnic match.
- Performance on the adoption of Black and minority ethnic children varies considerably across the region. In most councils government targets for adoption are not being met in relation to children from ethnic minorities. The recruitment of potential adopters from ethnic minorities also varies considerably. In only one council in the region is there a similar level of Black and minority ethnic children waiting to be adopted and potential carers. Councils may need to examine their permanency planning decisions in relation to black and minority ethnic children and take steps to address the apparent shortfall in potential adopters from minority ethnic groups.

Key Questions

1. Is the ethnic composition of children looked after routinely monitored, and are the results reported to senior managers and elected members?
2. Is the over or under representation of ethnic groups in the population of looked after children understood?
3. Have preventative and family support services been developed to meet the needs of specific ethnic groups?
4. Has consideration been given to meeting the specific needs of dual heritage children and their carers?
5. Is the ethnic origin of foster carers routinely monitored?
6. Is the ethnic matching of placements routinely recorded?
7. In cases where it is not possible to match a child with carers from the same ethnic background, does the care plan address the matching issues?
8. Have carers received training in working with children from different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds?
9. Are permanency planning decisions subject to ethnic monitoring?
10. How has the adoption service addressed the needs of Black and minority ethnic children and adopters?

4. Young people's voices – making a difference

If you are not exposed to it (your culture), how can you adopt it?

Information about my heritage wasn't enough. It's no good without knowing who your parents are whether you have any other family – it's not enough. Without family history what is identity? Part of me is blank, everything went wrong'

I used to cry all the time. I don't want to be Black. I want to be White. I want to have 'normal hair and normal skin'. I still feel it.

I didn't fit in. I was a piece of trash people kicked about.

This interview has helped lift some of the weight off my shoulders. I wonder if my (white adoptive) mum read your report she would recognise anything

These are just a small sample of comments made by young people being looked after by authorities in the South West region. They convey a number of powerful messages, including:

- The strong disconnectedness, loss and lack of knowledge of a positive cultural and racial identity with which children from Black and other minority ethnic communities have to grapple.
- The vulnerable and often explosive nature of their self esteem
- The day by day denial and avoidance by professionals and carers of their experiences

One of the keynote presentations at the regional conference in June 2003 was from a young woman who had been looked after in one of the authorities in the region. She spoke poignantly and powerfully about what had worked for her and what had not. Some extracts from her speech are reproduced here:

Now I'll tell you about the things that have made a difference for me as a black young person in care.

Despite my carers being white they are very sensitive to my issues and needs as a black person..... in my opinion it's the quality of the placement that makes the difference not just if they are the same race or ethnic origin.

My carers give me money to buy the special skin and hair care products that I need and it's really important that carers accept the need to do this. They also show an interest in the food that I like and are prepared to make different eating arrangements for me. They've been really supportive during the course of my AS levels by attending

parents evening and frequently asking questions about my progress.

.....

My current social worker (A) is also from Jamaica and came to England at the same age as me. My previous social workers didn't understand what I was going through but A does and I can talk to him. It really makes a difference, because he can really relate to issues I go through.....

One problem for me being placed with white carers is that when you are out with your carers, or they come to school everyone knows they can't be your real parents and other children ask questions about being in care, or what it's like to live with white parents whereas, if you are placed with a black family people just see you as part of a family. This is something that just takes a bit of getting used to.

Another problem is that when it comes to asking Social Services for things,...it takes years and social workers don't always contact you to let you know what's going on. It is good to be placed with family or friends but that's when it works.This is true even though Social Services didn't have black carers for me, because my needs are met and they're great. Personally I think the reason why black people are reluctant to come forward as foster carers is because of the lack of trust in authorities and in some cases the different upbringing that the government wouldn't take kindly to.

It would be easier in some ways if my carers were black because I could be seen by strangers as part of the family, but on the other hand my carers work hard to meet my needs as a black young person. However, if they didn't understand about my needs as a black person I wouldn't be so happy. Having a black social worker with the same background as me brings me familiarity to my life. I've also got a lot of church friends which I feel I can turn to and that truly support me.

Now, thanks to the hard work from Social Services I am placed in a family that I feel comfortable with and I'm attending a 6th Form College in X where I'm doing AS levels. To conclude, in my opinion, it's not the carer you are with whether black or white, it's the care you get.

It is therefore the quality of care that really counts at the end of the day, and only by continuously listening to the many and very diverse voices of children and young people will services continue to improve.

The regional working group decided not to undertake a specific consultation exercise with children and young people but instead to consider the range of initiatives and projects that have been undertaken across the South West and to distil some of the key messages emerging from these. This section seeks to summarise some of the things that children looked after from Black and other minority ethnic groups have been telling elected members, managers and practitioners. There is also consideration of experiences within the region

of consulting with Black and minority ethnic children looked after, their parents and carers and wider Black and minority ethnic communities.

Councils were asked to provide details of consultation exercises that they had undertaken themselves or that had been carried out by other agencies. Councils were also asked to comment on what had worked best and what should be repeated or avoided in the future. Finally, councils in the region were asked to comment on the key messages about service quality arising from consultation exercises.

Consultation Exercises

Most authorities in the region had either directly conducted or commissioned consultation exercises with some Black or minority ethnic groups. For example, Wiltshire had produced a report 'Removing the Barriers – What looked after young people tell us' that had helped shape an action plan for children and families services. South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset had sought the views of parents of looked after children from Black and minority ethnic groups and this had influenced the production of their very comprehensive guide for staff and carers. Bristol had undertaken extensive consultation as part of its SSI Demonstration Project on children of dual heritage (see section 5).

In some instances Black and minority ethnic young people had been consulted as part of wider consultation exercises aimed at children looked after. Many authorities had undertaken consultation at a corporate level. Concern was expressed that because of the small numbers in Black and minority ethnic communities there might be a danger of over consultation.

Methods of Consultation

Across the region authorities have used individual meetings, questionnaires, consultation events and group meetings. Because of the relatively low numbers of Black and minority ethnic children looked after, the most frequently used method of consultation was individual face to face interviews. In some cases structured questionnaires were used, but more often discussions seem to have been open ended. This raised issues about the collation and consistency of information gathering.

Effectiveness of consultation

The general view was that any consultation raised the level of understanding of minority perspectives and views. Several authorities felt uncertain about the effectiveness of their consultation processes, and some felt that it had not enabled them to be more confident about the way in which services should be developed. Direct feedback on an individual basis from Black and minority ethnic children seemed to be very valuable.

Lessons for Future Consultation Exercises

Uncertainties about the effectiveness of consultation meant that authorities were often unsure about whether it was possible to draw out lessons for the future, but some of the key messages were:

- **One to One Interviews.** Most felt that one to one interviews worked best and would like to develop this approach in the future. For example, Wiltshire had found that enabling individual young people to tell their “stories” uncovered a wealth of powerful information. Young people had also commented on the “therapeutic value” of the interviews.
- **Group Events.** Some authorities felt that it is very beneficial to get young people together in groups. South Gloucestershire felt that group activities, such as their ‘One Big Fun Day’ were worth developing further.
- **Postal Questionnaires.** Doubts were expressed about the benefit of postal questionnaires unless there was the opportunity to follow these up with direct contacts.
- **Feedback to young people** It is really important to close the feedback loop around consultation so that those consulted are informed about how the views that they have expressed have led to changes (and if not why not).

Making it Easier for Black and Minority Ethnic Young People to Comment on their Experiences

Councils proposed a variety of different approaches to facilitate consultation with Black and minority ethnic young people:

- Bristol are producing a consultation brief to ensure that standards are maintained.
- Devon are surveying ethnic minority care leavers.
- Cornwall had appointed a voice influence and participation worker to enable all looked after young people to comment on their experiences.
- Torbay are setting up a consultation group as part of their Total Respect training.

Understanding the Needs and Wishes of Black and Minority Ethnic Children Looked After and Their Parents

Authorities were asked to comment on the confidence that they felt in their understanding of the needs and wishes of Black and minority ethnic children looked after and their parents. Councils were generally not very confident

about their overall understanding, although several felt that they had made a start and expected things to improve.

South Gloucestershire had undertaken a detailed survey in 2001 on the needs of Black and minority ethnic children looked after. This involved interviews with a range of stakeholders, including children, their parents, social workers, foster carers, Black social services staff, the Black parents of dual heritage children, and placement services.

Key Messages from Consultation Exercises

Seven of the fifteen councils completing the survey were able to extract key messages on consultation.

Work with individuals:

- Listen closely to the individual child and endeavour to understand their position
- Young people are very keen to have opportunities to talk about their experiences and explore identity issues but do not always feel confident about doing this.
- Professionals are often afraid to broach the subject of identity
- Black children face real isolation; for example, they can often be the only black child in a school or a village.
- Black and minority ethnic children systematically face bullying and racial harassment, but particularly at school
- Children often feel that they are not listened to, and that their concerns about harassment are not always taken seriously or dealt with.

Service Quality

- Black and minority ethnic service users were marginally less satisfied than service users generally.
- The perception by Black and minority ethnic service users of the quality of services offered sometimes differed significantly from staff perception of these services.
- Black care leavers often face racism in their work place, which they may not have faced before. After care services can provide help from Black adults who have learnt how to cope with such experiences, for example through 1:1 support, mentoring or group-work.

Placements

- Carers can often feel unconfident about supporting Black and minority ethnic young people, for example, in addressing identity issues.
- Recruitment and training of foster carers is a priority.
- One solution for infrequent demands for Black carers is for neighbouring authorities to link up.
- Social workers for Black foster carers need to receive specific training.
- White social workers allocated to Black looked after children, and white foster carers for such children, need written guidance and training on issues faced by Black looked after children, and to have access to local/national resources.
- It can be very difficult for small authorities to have a 'bank' of foster carers from Black and other minority ethnic communities. South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset are therefore now collaborating in working together to develop these placement resources.
- Some dual heritage looked after children who are placed with white carers need help to develop a Black identity and links with a network of Black peers. White foster carers who are caring for Black children, and who have no links to Black Communities may need specialist help and advice. In 2002, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset published a very comprehensive guide for staff and carers to help them address these and related issues.

5. Putting it all into practice

This section focuses on some key practice themes that are important in improving the life chances of children and young people from Black and other minority ethnic communities. Many of these were considered at the Regional conference in June 2003.

Racism:

All children have the right to grow up in an environment that is free from racism, prejudice and harassment. Children who grow up feeling that they are inferior because of their skin colour, disability or family background may find it difficult to reach their full potential. It is essential that Black children and those working and caring for them have an understanding of race and racism. Black children need to know the nature and meaning of what it is to be Black in society, and be provided with the necessary coping mechanisms and survival skills to deal with institutional and personal racism.

Professionals may:

- fail to recognise racist incidents;
- fail to attribute due importance to racist incidents;
- lack confidence on how to handle incidents, for example, what to say or do;
- hold discriminatory and racist views themselves;
- not want to "make an issue" about the incident.

When children experience racism it needs to be seen as a collective rather than an individual problem, and openly acknowledged and responded to. Carers and social workers can take the following steps whenever there is a racist incident:

- Listen attentively to what the child or young person is saying, and acknowledge their feelings,
- Create an environment in which the child or young person feels comfortable to be able to talk openly. Carers and social workers need to ensure that they do not accept or collude with racist comments, do not deflect their concerns; and give truthful and honest explanations,
- Making sure that the child or young person feel valued, and reassure him or her that the racist incident will be taken seriously,
- Help the child or young person feel positive about their skin colour, physical features, language and culture, by using positive words to make them feel good about themselves,
- Point out that people are visibly different in many ways, and that all people should be treated equally,

- If possible speak to the perpetrator of racist remarks and behaviour, and find out why they said what they said. Make him or her aware that such comments are hurtful and are not acceptable in a firm but not aggressive way.
- Ensure that the incident is followed up appropriately by relevant agencies and managers, for example, a school or youth club, or placement provider.

Assessment:

Assessments for Black children need to address clearly and explicitly how racism may have affected an individual child and her/his family. It is crucial that the assessment process does not itself reinforce racism through racial or cultural stereotyping. The following practice checklist has been developed by Bath and North East Somerset Social Services to assist the assessment process:

- Identify and record ethnicity, religion, culture and language for all children and families. Ethnic group self-classification should be recorded as a general rule; establishing true ethnic origin with certainty is important for looked after children.
- Assess needs. Always take account of ethnicity, religion, culture and language, be aware of the impact of racial harassment and other forms of prejudice and discrimination.
- Plan. The plan should address all the assessed needs including those specifically related to race and ethnicity (religion, culture, language), including experiences and risks of racial harassment. Address matching issues in making placements for looked after children. Placement plans need to mitigate any identified limitations in matching.
- Review. Reviews should always consider whether all assessed needs have been met including those specifically related to ethnicity (religion, culture, language), for example experiences of racial harassment.
- Access. Identify language or cultural barriers to accessing services or deficits in service provision that may act as barriers to meeting needs fully. Ensure access for all groups on the basis of need and not other criteria. Make plans to address barriers and deficits; for example via translation, appropriately qualified adult interpreters, support packages for 'imperfectly matched' placements etc.
- Participation. Involve children and families fully in assessment, planning and review, do not be afraid to ask questions or raise issues.
- Work on the basis of evidence; do not make assumptions. Use the information and guidance available, the family, community organisations, other source of information.

Ethnic monitoring

It is very important that the ethnic origin of looked after children is identified and recorded accurately so that placement decisions can be based on accurate identification of the child's needs in terms of culture and identity.

A fundamental principle of ethnic category data collection is that the person to be classified is responsible for defining classifying themselves, and that their reply is their own perception of their ethnic category. However in a small number of cases the child or their parent(s) may assign an ethnic group that is different from the child's 'true' ethnic origin. For example, in some cases children of dual heritage child may be identified as 'white-UK'. It is important in such cases that the 'true' ethnic origin is recorded and that this decision and the reasons /evidence on which it is based are clearly recorded.

Promoting positive identity

All children need to develop and hold on to a strong and clear sense of their identity; indeed having a positive identity is fundamental to their emotional and physical well-being. There is an added dimension for Black children and young people in that racism – in all its many guises – has a very direct influence on individual and group identities. Whilst there is no biological or genetic basis for the concept of a racial group, 'race' has a social significance in that it affects the way in which a child sees him or herself and is perceived by others. A Black child growing up within a predominantly white society may receive negative messages about being Black, and needs to develop a positive internal model of Black identity to counteract the negative stereotypes of the external world.

It is really important that children of dual heritage, (and perhaps particularly those who live or have primarily lived with their white parent and have little or no contact with their Black parent or the Black parent's family) are supported to develop a positive Black self-definition. This may sometimes be a complex journey. For example, a child might have anxieties about being seen to be hurting their white parent because they seemed to have 'rejected' that parent's white identity or that of other key caregivers. There is further discussion below about the issues that were highlighted by a Bristol project on work with children of dual heritage.

Carers of looked after children need support, advice and guidance in choosing activities and resources that reinforce positive messages about social and cultural diversity, and about children's identities, heritage and languages.

It is very important therefore that children and young people have access to a range of books and newspapers that accurately reflect the multi racial society we live in, that avoid stereotypes and show people from different groups in positive roles in every day situations.

Role Models and Mentors

Having a role model or mentor from the same ethnic, racial and cultural background can be really important in helping to reduce the isolation that

children from Black and minority ethnic communities can experience, particularly in rural environments. Practitioners and carers can help by:

- Linking children with mentors and independent visitors from their own ethnic and cultural background;
- Providing information and access (e.g. books, films) about Black people who have achieved and been prominent in a range of different roles and occupations, to music and art by Black artists, and through posters and videos which show positive images;
- Establishing links with community based groups who can provide opportunities for children to expand their knowledge of their history outside of school;
- Sharing information on positive roles of Black people with carers and all children and young people in the placement to reduce negative stereotypes and myths of Black and minority ethnic people and communities.

Placements

When seeking a placement staff should be guided by the child and his/her family as to those aspects of culture and tradition that are important to them. Where birth parents have different cultures, the placement should seek to:

- Reflect both parents' wishes.
- Provide continuity with the child's current cultural, religious and linguistic patterns.
- Address the child's need to maintain, or gain, contact with the culture of both their birth parents and especially the parent who has been most marginalized.

When seeking a placement that matches a child's religion, social services staff should look for a placement that:

- Reflects their family's particular observance, for example, Orthodox Jew - or Reform Jew, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and encourage their religious observance at a pace and level that meets the child's needs.
- Where parents are of different faiths the placement needs to reflect both parents' wishes.
- Language can be an essential element in a child's cultural identity. It is essential that children are placed where they can continue to communicate in their first language, including its patterns of speech and vocabulary that can contribute to their sense of ethnic belonging. Where it is not possible to provide this in the child's home, it can be promoted by contact with the birth or extended family, or an independent visitor from an

appropriate community, or contact with friendship networks that provide continuity. However, such measures can only contribute to filling a gap, and cannot be seen as a substitute for an appropriate placement.

Children sometimes become looked after without having had access to the culture, religion or language that is linked to one of their parent's heritage. In such situations, the placement needs to provide an opportunity for the child to experience the culture of both their parents. For example, a dual heritage child brought up by a white parent having no contact with their Black parent's culture, may need to be placed with carers who are able to give the child contact with this culture.

A range of initiatives have been taken across the region to recruit Black carers, and to support all those working with children from Black and other minority ethnic communities. For example, some authorities run pre-assessment training courses for Black carers that are run by Black staff and for Black carers. Some authorities also have support groups specifically for Black carers.

One of the workshops at the conference focussed on these issues and emphasised the importance of local authorities working together to address the placement needs of children from Black and other minority ethnic communities. It is challenging for authorities with relatively small minority ethnic group populations to develop a diverse range of specialist services because they are needed so infrequently. There is a real logic therefore in authorities working pooling resources and working together. This might focus around recruitment and support of Black carers and also on building the skills of all carers to support children from Black and other minority ethnic groups. As the young person who had spoken at the conference (see section on 'young people's voices') emphasised, white carers can provide excellent placements for Black children but they considerable support in doing so.

Life Story Work

Helping a child to understand their life story and family background can help to promote a positive self image, however some Black children have misconceptions about themselves which will need to be handled with great sensitivity and honesty. This can be particularly the case when the worker or carer is white and the child is Black or dual heritage. Staff and carers who work with Black children may need support from members of the child's culture and with whom the child can identify. This can enable children's questions to be answered from first hand experience and in a way that will be meaningful for the child.

The person doing life story work needs to have a good grasp of the child's inner and outer world. This means that they need to familiar with the child's Black family life, traditions, customs and religion and in the context of this society. Life story work may include:

- Showing the child photographs from their past, or if these are not available, pictures from the child's Black culture, and inviting the child to discuss them.
- Talking about Black and white people, and asking the child to draw a picture of how they would like to look, and discussing any differences between what the child draws and what they currently look like.
- Showing the child pictures of the child's family's country of origin, describe the food eaten there, dress and cultural traditions, religions. They need to help the child to find out more about these, by attending local festivals or talking to people from their culture.

Education

'I'll have to be a legal secretary because Black people can't be lawyers'

The workshop at the regional conference on education started with this powerful quotation from a young person who was looked after in a local authority in the region following a visit to a sixth form college. It reveals both the prejudice and disadvantages faced by many children and young people looked after from Black and other minority ethnic communities. The evidence about underachievement of many Black young people is compelling; equally strong is that of the underachievement of young people looked after. Not surprisingly therefore Black young people who are looked after have to work especially hard to achieve well at school, college and in the world of work. Many young people achieve a great deal educationally but others do not achieve what they could.

The conference workshop considered some of the raw statistics about ethnicity, being looked after and educational achievement and experience, for example:

- 8% of young people looked after achieve 5 or more GCSE grades A-C
- 77% of Chinese young people achieve such grades
- 51% of white young people achieve such grades
- 30% Black Caribbean achieve such grades
- 45% Bangladeshi such grades.

We also know that Black Caribbean pupils are over three times more likely than white pupils to be permanently excluded from school (and in secondary school this rises to four times). Children and young people looked after are ten times more likely than their peers to be permanently excluded. The Social Exclusion Unit's report 'A better education for children in care' was published a few months after the South West Regional conference and provides excellent source material about these issues. The report highlights five key reasons why children in care underachieve in education:

- their lives are often characterised by instability
- they spend too much time out of school or other learning environments
- they do not have sufficient help with their education if they get behind
- their primary carers are not always expected, or equipped, to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development
- many children and young people have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs.

Arguably Black young people looked after face similar issues to the wider population of children and young people looked after, but they also have to face and experience institutionalised racism in so many areas of their lives, including at school, from other professionals and carers and in the wider community.

Critical issues include:

- The impact of racial harassment on Black young people's experience of and attainment within the education system. Evidence from young people in the region indicates that Black young people can be targets for bullying at school on account of both their ethnicity and care 'status'. This is a particularly important issue given that often in the South West Black young people are the only Black child in their class or even school. Carers, social workers and schools therefore must be proactive in tackling bullying and harassment?
- Systems of support need to be robust and effective; these include pastoral care within the school and from social services. Carers, families and professionals all need to set high expectations but not at the expense of the young person feeling that they have 'failed' when they do not reach the grade they had hoped and been expected to get. They also need to be challenging advocates for young people. Personal educational plans (PEPs) can be crucial in ensuring that everyone – including the young person – is working together and to the same ends.
- School attendance is critical to educational attainment, however, young people looked after can be very vulnerable to irregular school attendance, especially following placement moves.
- Knowing what works in raising educational achievement is important. Evidence suggests that key factors in enabling children and young people from Black and other minority ethnic groups to achieve well include effective use of good quality management information, good quality teaching and learning opportunities, setting clear targets and objectives, high quality training and support to staff, and engaging with Black communities about possible barriers to educational achievement.

The South West regional conference workshop considered a range of issues and emphasised the importance of carers and social workers challenging schools when young people were not getting a fair deal and/or when they were not achieving all that they should. Supporting and encouraging motivation and high aspirations and expectations is equally important.

Useful websites include:

- www.dfes.gov.uk/education_protects
- www.runnymedetrust.org (includes a lot of information and resources on issues about ethnicity, racism and education).

Working with children of dual heritage – Lessons from Bristol

At the end of 1999 the Department of Health established a Black and Other Minority Ethnic Children and Families Project as part of the Quality Protects national work programme, with the aim of promoting access to services and equality of outcomes for all children and families.

The project's method for improving service delivery was to establish four demonstration projects, based in different regions as a way of developing and disseminating 'best practice'. Bristol City Council was asked to look at Children of Dual Heritage and Placement Choice and Permanency Planning. The project provided an opportunity to focus on this group and to learn more about services and outcomes for all Black and minority ethnic children and indeed for all children looked after. A full report on the project was presented to the Department of Health.

One key finding was that authorities are often not able to match children with placements that best meet their needs in terms of their ethnicity, or the location. Out of authority placements are less likely to be racially matched, and these issues need to be taken into account in using these placements for minority ethnic children, and balanced against the benefits in meeting their other needs. Compensatory strategies need to be built into these placements to address identity issues.

There is recognition of the very real difficulties in increasing the availability of placements. The recruitment of foster carers and adopters needs to be pursued in an active and ongoing way, with imaginative approaches to attracting carers from minority ethnic communities, and with a clear recognition of the need to make good matches for all aspects of children's needs when placement decisions are made.

Some general findings or pieces of learning have emerged during the life of this project that may help us work better with this group of children; these include:

- None of the children, or service users felt that the term 'dual heritage' was useful to them. Staff of that ethnic origin were also often not comfortable with the term. One problem is that many people we refer to as of 'dual heritage', in fact, have multi ethnic origins, and prefer the term 'mixed race' or other terms.
- Children and adults told us that being of dual heritage is not the same as being black, even though there are shared experiences of racism.
- The development of identity for a dual heritage child requires them to have an opportunity and support to identify positively all aspects of their heritage. Young people may go through phases of identifying with specific parts of their heritage to the exclusion of others as they assimilate different parts of their heritage. Workers around them need to show sensitive acknowledgement of this. One young person felt very undermined by a

teacher who had ridiculed her developing identification with black culture, commenting that she looked white, and seemingly seeing the changes in her as an “affectation”.

- Contact with parents, siblings and extended family is crucial to the development of identity for all children. For children of dual heritage contact with all parts of their heritage and therefore ideally with all parts of their family is crucial. More weight needs to be given to mapping and recording details about extended family members, including about their ethnicity. This needs to take place very early when children are looked after. Workers need to develop confidence to contact extended family members who may be out of touch and who, even if they cannot offer care for children, can sometimes offer very rewarding contact.
- Parental attitudes to ‘race’ are key factors. One young person felt her parents’ battles were fought through her, in part by attacking signs of her identification with the other parent’s ethnicity, which had the effect of making her feel that all aspects of her identity were unacceptable. Staff need skills to recognise this when it occurs and to challenge parents. Foster carers can find themselves under conflicting pressure from social workers and parents in the way they care for children and they need support with this.
- Most carers were familiar with the basics of skin and hair care for black and minority ethnic children. Children are telling us that this is important and validating to them.

Working with unaccompanied asylum seekers

Many unaccompanied minors have grown up in stable, loving families who have made great sacrifices to arrange for their child to go and live in another country. It is very important that each child or young person’s needs and strengths are carefully assessed in the knowledge that apparent confidence and maturity may mask fear and difficulties in coping with the stress and tensions that there may be in their lives in Britain and their country of origin.

Some unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people have expectations about life in Britain which may not be realistic. For example those who have been wage earners in their home country may sometimes feel resentful about the British legal requirement for full time education until the age of 16. Others may seek educational opportunities, which in turn can reflect parental hopes of succeeding in a new life in Britain.

Children and young people may, usually for very understandable reasons, not disclose accurate information about their family or personal history because of well founded fears of repercussions for themselves or their families. The development of trust and confidence in social services and other agencies may, therefore, often be both lengthy and challenging.

Key issues identified by the workshop on these themes at the South West Regional conference were:

- The legal framework surrounding work with young unaccompanied asylum seekers is very complex. It is essential that social workers and other professionals understand how this affects their work and seek expert assistance when indicated.
- Providing emotional and social support to young separated refugees demands skills, knowledge and resources. Workers need to be aware of the feelings of vulnerability that young people may have, particularly as many will have experienced major traumas and stresses both in the country of origin and in the process of travelling to and arriving in Britain. Young people may experience a range of other feelings and responses to their situation including that of loss (family, country, culture and home), of isolation and loneliness, and of fear and anxiety as they await a decision on their asylum claim.
- Young asylum seekers may have had very different experiences to other children and young people who are looked after.
- How can the ambivalence and hostility that often surrounds work with asylum seekers be challenged and combated at the same time as keeping a focus on their needs as individuals?

The Save the Children Fund has a number of invaluable publications on these themes including '*young refugees: providing emotional support to young separated refugees in the UK*', and '*young refugees: a guide to the rights and entitlement of separated refugee children*'.

Working with disabled Black children

In 2001, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation carried out a survey of the views of Black disabled people of the services that they received (Evans and Banton *Learning from Experience: Involving Black disabled people in shaping services*, 2001). This found that Black disabled people have frequently found themselves falling between services for black people and services for disabled people.

Users and professionals felt strongly that there was a lack of dedicated funding for work with Black people generally and particularly for work with Black disabled people. A range of factors may account for this pattern, including:

- Many organisations do not recognise a need for specific work with Black disabled people, or that additional resources are required for this.

- Restrictions on funding mean that some organisations are forced to focus on their core remit of either race or disability.
- Funding is rarely available for long term projects such as outreach work to identify and support Black disabled people, or time to build trust and relationships with individual Black disabled people and their families.

The Regional Working Group recognised that these issues needed greater and more sustained attention, by Social Services but also by Education and Health Services.

Key Questions

1. Have staff and carers been trained in responding to racial incidents?
2. Are carers confident in working with children from different racial backgrounds, including with children of 'dual heritage'?
3. Do assessments record and take account of ethnicity, religion, culture and language for all children and families?
4. Do care plans address all the assessed needs including those specifically related to ethnicity (religion, culture, language, harassment)?
5. Are there any barriers to accessing services for people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds?
6. What arrangements are in place for positively promoting a child's racial, cultural or religious identity?
7. What arrangements are there to help children maintain and develop language skills appropriate to their ethnic origin?
8. Can carers access a good and diverse range of books, newspapers and videos?
9. Are children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds provided with access to mentors or independent visitors from similar backgrounds?
10. In providing placements are the wishes of the child and both parents taken into account in seeking a culturally appropriate placement?
11. Have all staff and carers who undertake life story work received training to work with children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds?
12. Have staff and carers received training to meet the specific needs of asylum seekers?
13. Has the agency made plans to meet the specific needs of disabled Black children?

6. Breaking the ice – building inclusive organisations

The race equality and diversity agenda poses enormous challenges to organisations and how they operate. Report after report has emphasised that changing the organisational context of service delivery is a key pre-requisite to improving the life chances of children and young people who are looked after. Many agencies have allocated significant resources to equalities training and development yet still many go on struggling to be effective in implementing strategies that put 'race', racism and diversity at the heart of their work.

A range of approaches and strategies have been used in the South West region for building organisations that actively promote and celebrate diversity, that challenge race inequality and that will improve outcomes for Black children and young people.

Key issues – making race equality 'talk aboutable'

There is a lot of evidence from the South West region and elsewhere that staff often feel 'frozen' and unconfident when engaging with issues about 'race', racism and ethnicity. Lord Laming's report on the Victoria Climbié Inquiry brought into sharp relief once again how racism can shape and affect work with children at risk of suffering significant harm. Quoting from the opening statement by the Counsel to the Inquiry, Lord Laming states:

Race can affect the way people conduct themselves in other ways. Fear of being accused of racism can stop people acting when otherwise they would.

Lord Laming continued:

Those involved in the protection of children perform vital and difficult work. They should never feel inhibited from acting in a child's interests on the grounds that they are felt by others to have an insufficient grasp of the child's particular circumstances. Safeguards must be put in place that ensure that skin colour does not influence either the assessment of need or the quality of services delivered. That is the challenge to us all (Laming, 2003, pp 346- 7)

A great deal of the Victoria Climbié report is focussed on the role and responsibilities of elected members and senior managers to establish and maintain organisational cultures that promote and safeguard children's welfare.

It can be misleading to suggest that the rural context is qualitatively different in terms of how racism is manifested and needs to be tackled but there are nonetheless some specific challenges. For example, it may be more difficult to secure widespread support and commitment to race equality issues in rural and semi rural areas; it may therefore be that much more difficult to make such issues 'talk aboutable'.

Developing inclusive organisations has to be seen as a 'whole system' activity that is driven and led by elected members and senior managers. The Audit Commission in its report *Directions in Diversity* (2002) argues that:

determined and passionate leadership is needed to ensure that good intentions are translated into everyday action to improve public services for our richly diverse population (Audit Commission, 2002).

The regional working group identified four key issues with which organisations need to engage in building inclusive organisations:

- Organisations cannot afford to be shy, embarrassed or passive in tackling issues about race, racism and diversity.
- Elected members and senior managers must give, and be seen actively to give sustained commitment and attention to race equality and diversity.
- There must be a 'joined up approach' – social services are not delivered in isolation and the partnership agenda must actively embrace race equality.
- Race equality and diversity issues must be actively and effectively managed. Objectives must set out clear and realistic priorities and ensure that there is effective scrutiny and evaluation of the impact of policy and practice.

Organisations and individuals working within them will often have to take risks, and be brave and single minded when tackling institutional racism. Equality and diversity issues must be fully integrated into strategic and operational objectives throughout the organisation. Only then is active ownership and engagement by everyone really possible. There are no simple solutions, and it is important to recognise that addressing diversity and equalities issues can often be messy, painful and difficult.

There was much experience in the South West of the way in which the locations of 'support' and resistance vary. Assumptions cannot be made about who will engage with commitment to the change agenda. Securing and supporting a climate of 'safe challenging' is important. If individuals feel that the organisational atmosphere is punitive and blaming then they will be less inclined to learn and change.

The active commitment of elected members and senior managers is crucial. In so doing it is important to build on the success of many local authorities in the region in developing active corporate parenting roles and strategies. The very fact that work undertaken by children and families social care services is inextricably connected to that of other key agencies such as health, education and schools means that there must be a 'joined up approach to equality and diversity issues. There is no monopoly of wisdom on these issues: everyone can learn from one another.

The Audit Commission suggests that the following are some of the key elements of effective strategies for building effective diversity strategies:

- *Introducing best management practice generally, and active top level support specifically, backed up by the achievement of a diverse profile at the top of organisations;*
- *Mainstreaming diversity into all activities;*
- *Introducing strategies such as staff networks or flexible working, to help recognise and value difference in staff;*
- *Introducing strategies to recognise, respect and meet the needs of diverse service users, including improving access to services and monitoring service use;*
- *Introducing training and professional development packages in order to improve knowledge, understanding and behaviour;*
- *Being specific, focussing on particular needs, groups, interventions and measurement; and*
- *Monitoring the implementation of diversity strategies and measuring their outcomes to raise awareness, evaluate change and check out areas for improvement – in both employment and service delivery.*

Creating and supporting change

The Audit Commission report '*Directions in Diversity*' indicates that there are three broad arenas for action - defining diversity, developing and implementing standards and mainstreaming equalities and diversity.

An important starting point for any organisational strategy has to be clarifying what is meant by diversity and racial equality. The very process of debating and defining this can itself be helpful in developing the necessary passion and commitment that will be needed to deliver concrete service changes. For example in Wiltshire work on producing a race equality statement was useful in generating debate about overall service aims.

Developing and implementing standards can be a complex and challenging process and the Social Services Inspectorate report *Excellence not excuses* (2000) includes many relevant standards. Measuring and evaluating service quality is notoriously difficult and it is probably even harder to evaluate the extent to which an organisation is inclusive.

The requirement that local authorities produce a Racial Equality Scheme should support the process of looking at race equality issues in a systematic way though it is as yet too early to say whether the Schemes will result in tangible improvements for children and families.

Key questions

- Does the organisation have a clear and explicit vision of what it wants to achieve in terms of race equality? Is there 'hearts and minds' commitment across the organisation? How do you measure this?
- How and who champions race equality issues?
- What kind of messages about equality and diversity are explicitly and implicitly conveyed through the way that the organisation operates both internally and externally?
- How active or passive is the organisation and the individuals within it about challenging discrimination and inequality?
- How does the organisation recruit Black staff; how well does it support and develop their skills? There is generally a relationship between these issues and the effectiveness and sensitivity of services Black users and carers.
- How does the organisation engage and communicate with Black and other minority ethnic communities?

A range of activities and practices can assist and these include:

- All teams/units being expected to produce a racial equality plan (e.g. as part of routine business planning processes).
- A department's requirements that all services and teams develop clear targets in relation.
- Setting clear processes for auditing outcomes of plans at all levels within the organisation.
- Making sure that race equality issues permeate the performance management process rather than being some kind of 'add on'. Within this supervision and appraisal is crucial and policies need to reflect a clear requirement that equalities and diversity issues are addressed routinely and regularly.

Developing Inclusive Organisations and Services – A framework for action planning

The Regional Working Group developed a framework for evaluating and planning action in relation to race equalities issues.

1. Recognition

- Is there sufficient information about the size, composition, location and needs of the ethnic minority population?
- Is there information about service delivery to ethnic minorities?
- Is the information readily available?
- Has the information been presented to elected members, managers and staff?
- What opportunities are available for individuals or groups from ethnic minorities to make their views known?
- Is there an individual or a team within the organisation with specific responsibility to promote, monitor and review race equality issues?

2. Identification of key issues and priorities

- What processes are in place for analysing and evaluating information on race equality issues?
- How is information on service delivery and outcomes used to plan and develop services responsive to the needs of ethnic minorities?
- Where the development of services responsive to ethnic minorities have resource implications, what priority will be given to these developments?
- What processes are in place for identifying race equality in the workplace?

3. Action Planning

- How is racial equality built into the service commissioning process?
- Are the needs of black and minority ethnic service users built into training programmes for staff and carers?
- Is race equality embedded in staff recruitment, development and career progression? Have targets been set for recruitment processes?
- Is race equality addressed through the supervision process?

- Are Black workers' groups actively supported?

4. Implementation

- Are the responsibilities of managers for developing and delivering racially sensitive services made explicit?
- Are all teams and units required to produce a racial equality plan?
- Are there guidelines in place for identifying and responding to racial discrimination or harassment both in the workplace and in the community?
- Have all staff been made aware of the organisation's race equality policies and procedures?
- Is race equality a regular agenda item on team meetings?
- Is information for service users made available in appropriate languages and formats, and is it distributed appropriately?
- Are targets in place relating to black and minority ethnic actual or potential service users? Are these targets owned at team or unit level?

5. Review

- Do case reviews specifically identify race equality issues?
- Do all service reviews consider issues of equality of access and appropriateness of the service for meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic service users?
- Does monitoring of external contracts measure performance in relation to racial equality?
- Is progress against targets measured and reported to senior managers and elected members?
- Is feedback provided to black and minority ethnic groups following consultation and review exercises?

7. Conclusion

This report has spotlighted some key questions that practitioners, managers and members need to be asking about services to children looked after from Black and other minority ethnic communities. It is clear from the evidence available that there is much needs to be done in the South West to improve the life chances of this group of children and young people, but it is equally clear that there is much sensitive and effective policy and practice within the region.

The South West regional conference in June 2003 brought together practitioners and managers to consider how these services might be improved. The conference highlighted the importance of ensuring that robust and rigorous debate about race equality and children's services is progressed. Lord Laming's report on the Victoria Climbié inquiry reinforced the imperative of training and support to staff and of maintaining race equality as a key priority for all those working with children. These debates and challenges will continue as new service frameworks are established following the publication in September 2003 of the Green Paper *Every child matters*.

Three key messages have emerged from this regional work:

- Public sector organisations must listen actively to what children and families from Black and other minority ethnic communities are saying about their experiences of public services, and about their daily experience of racism and discrimination. We must not underestimate the pervasiveness of racism.
- There is much high quality practice in the South West, but agencies need to invest more in making sure that Black and minority ethnic group children and young people consistently access and receive high quality services. Staff and managers have varying levels of understanding and skills for responding to the needs of children and families from minority ethnic communities.
- We all need to support organisational cultures that positive emphasise diversity and difference, and that encourage staff to learn and challenge. Racial equality issues need to be championed and 'mainstreamed'. They should be seen as any kind of 'add on' and everyone must take responsibility for tackling racism and promoting high quality services.

These are important and difficult challenges with which all members, managers, staff and carers must engage if the commitment to serve all children well is to be realised.

September 2003

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Appendix 1 Regional Survey Results

	B&NES	Bournemouth	Bristol	Cornwall	Devon	Dorset	Gloucestershire	N.Somerset	Plymouth	Poole	Somerset	South Glos.	Swindon	Torbay	Wiltshire
Total Number of CLA	147	211	560	561	691	275	518	153	479	154	333	138	204	219	278
No. of CLA from B&ME Groups	26	19	115	19	17	16	70	9	16	15	5	11	25	8	7
No. of CLA from B&ME groups who are dual heritage	13	3	58	7	14	9	35	9	11	7	5	7	9	8	
% of CLA from B&ME groups who are: (a) in foster care	96	86	84	67		69	77	11	73	100	100	55	72	88	71
(b) in residential care	4	10	6	22		0	9		18	0	0	0	4	12	0
(c) in other placements	0	4	10	11		31	14		9	0	0	45	24	0	29
% of foster carers from B&ME groups		1	11	1				1	0		1	5	9	0	1
% of B&ME children who are fostered and placed with foster carers from the same ethnic group								11	0	7	0	45	16	0	0
% of children waiting for adoption who are from a B&ME background	0	0	24	5	1	0	0	10	0	50	0	0	19	4	0
% of prospective adopters from a B&ME background	6	29	11	5	10	17	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0

Appendix 2 South West Region Heads of Children's Services Group

Terms of reference for working group on improving life chances of children and young people looked after from Black and other minority ethnic group communities

Scope of working group

The working group was established by the South West Region Heads of Children's Services Group, following a report from South Gloucestershire Social Services on the health needs of Black and other minority ethnic children who are looked after, and other initiatives taking place both within the Region and nationally (for example the SSI demonstration project).

Objectives and tasks for the working group

1. To evaluate available evidence about the life chances of Black and other minority ethnic children and young people looked after living in the South West region. .
2. To evaluate patterns of services which are available to these children and young people, and to identify and share best policy and practice;
3. To consider a range of key underpinning and cross cutting themes.
4. To ensure that the group's work is shaped by the perspectives and views of members of Black and minority ethnic group communities within the region, including those of children and young people who are, or have been looked after, and their families.
5. To evaluate and analyse relevant resource and organisational issues, including human resources and organisational development issues.

Membership

There were representatives from each Social Services authority in the South West region, as follows:

Annie Hudson	Wiltshire (Chair) (now Bristol)
Jean Pollard	Bristol (now Swindon)
Nigel Shipley	South Gloucestershire
Charlie Moat	Bath and North East Somerset
Sheila French	North Somerset
Brenda Laker	Devon
Paul Grimsey	Somerset
Karen Morris	Plymouth

Kim Merriott	Torbay
Nicola Bunney	Cornwall
Sheena Parkin	Bournemouth
Jan Sayers	Poole
Peter Todd	Dorset
Sue Butcher	Gloucestershire
Terry Scragg	Swindon
Mike Craddock	Department of Health SSI

Outcomes

Some of the proposed outcomes for the working group included:

- A report for discussion within all constituent agencies, and the SSI
- Agreed core practice, policy and organisational standards.
- Good practice and training materials that could be disseminated and used within the Region.
- Ideas and proposals on methods and approaches to service delivery and development that will improve the life chances of children and young people from Black and other ethnic minority communities who are looked after.
- A Regional conference/workshop event.