

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dhina Kajani and Sabana Ahmed, Development Workers for Young Voices prepared this report. The consultation was devised by Young Voices Staff and facilitated by independent staff from outside agencies that work in partnership with Young Voices. We would like to thank the following people for facilitating the workshops on behalf of Young Voices.

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To all the parents and children for their continuous support and commitment to Young Voices throughout the year

Consultation Rationale

Young Voices has now been running for almost two years, services have been developed, delivered, monitored. Staff and advisory group members felt it was necessary to consult with local parents, children and young people and find out how this work needs to be further developed.

Consultation Strategy

It was identified through the work of Young Voices that local families should have an input into the present and the future work of Young Voices, so it was necessary to find out how people felt about:

- The services that were provided
- How the community can have a greater involvement
- What issues around education were important to service users

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The main focus of Young Voices work has been with Bangladeshi children who attend Canning Street Primary and Wingrove Primary School and their parents. The majority of these parents first language is Sylheti; therefore staff identified the need for workshops with parents to be delivered in their spoken language.

Methodology

A list of all the Bangladeshi children who attend the two primary schools was obtained. Letters and invitations both produced in English and Bengali were sent out to family's home address. The same invitations were given to Young Voices groups, as well as local venues to promote the event.

The majority of the facilitators we used for our workshops were staff from local organisations such as Families First, Roshni who were both fluent in English and Sylheti.

Questions were devised with a clear focus around our aims and objectives. Question 2,3 and 4 were used with both parents and children.

- 1. How to create better Partnership working between schools and parents?**
- 2. What is the future for Bangla class and how can children influence decision-making through Bangla class?**
- 3. How can children influence decision-making through Bangla class and what is the future of Bangla class?**
- 4. What services would you like to see developed in relation to education?**

Background Information

Through work with BME communities Riverside Community Health Project has built up a sound knowledge of the disadvantages faced by BME communities living in the West End of Newcastle. One of the more concentrated areas of work has been with the Bangladeshi community, providing family support for over seven years.

Through this work it has been identified, Bangladeshi families in this area are characterised by poverty, large families with an average of four children aged between the ages of 0-16 years, overstretched and stressed mothers, absent fathers (who typically do evening work of between 60-70 hours weekly) and being the subject of racism and racial harassment. Such circumstances were having an effect on children and their performance at school.

Generally throughout the country Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils perform less well than other ethnic groups throughout compulsory education (Appendix 2). Pupils from these communities (or the Bangladeshi Community) also have a higher proportion of children with special needs than those from white, Chinese and Indian communities (Appendix 5).

Figures in 2003 revealed that some of these children are significantly disadvantaged: Over 30 percent of Pakistani pupils and of Black pupils, and over 50 percent of Bangladeshi, Gypsy/Roma pupils are eligible for free school meals (FSM). This compares to only 14 percent of White pupils. Pupils eligible for free school meals are likely to do less well at GCSE than those not eligible, a pattern that applies to all BME groups (Appendix 3) (DFES, 2003)

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Recognition was given to these issues and as a result Riverside secured funding from the Children's Fund. The overall aim of the project is to work specifically with children aged 5-13 years and their families and minority ethnic communities. The work currently focuses on specific needs of Bangladeshi families. The three main objectives identified are:

1. Improvement in their relationship and levels of contact between Families and schools.
2. Reductions in child poverty through strategies to increase benefit maximisation.
3. Increased involvement by children and young people in service development and delivery.

Developments of the project since it started

- Advisory group formed
- Three local schools identified, Canning Street Primary, Wingrove Primary School and Westgate Community College, all three schools have a high percentage of BME children.
- Staff appointed
- Consultation Events
- Working with voices projects, i.e. taking groups of children participation events
- Bengali classes developed and delivered
- Boys Club
- Ramadan Club
- Eid Party
- Summer activities and trips
- Logo produced
- Drop-ins
- Bengali After School club
- Leaflet produced

Workshop 1

How to create better Partnership working between schools and parents

Number of Adults- 12 adults

Parents and families are huge influences upon a child's achievements, therefore the more supportive and the more interested parents are; the more successful a child will be at school. This belief is widely accepted throughout different communities, this was the reason for this workshops being held.

12 Bangladeshi parents attended the workshop. The workshop was delivered in Sylheti; the ideas from parents on how to create better partnerships are listed below:

- Feel easier to approach teachers / office staff
- Communication gap between schools and parents
- Parents evenings between teachers / head teachers
- For mums – coffee mornings with teachers (could be evenings)
- More consultation with parents
- Letters / information from schools should be in dual languages
- Questionnaires to get information off parents who would not attend parents meeting re school issues / changes in policies, etc.
- V

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- Training for parents to help
- Training for parents to help them understand school systems
- Training on how to help with homework
- More understanding of cultural issues by teachers / head teachers
- Need interpreters for parents with language barriers to understand school reports, parent evening (not everyone has family members who can come with them)
- Annual consultation event for parents (during weekend or holidays)
- Bilingual classroom assistants

In the workshop participants also identified how to overcome barriers that hinder better partnerships. For example, language barriers, many of the parents may have difficulty with English, which is the spoken language in schools. Parents have suggested the need for interpreters to be available at meetings and newsletters to be translated. Also, bilingual classroom assistants are necessary; that they should be based at the school, which in turn will allow parents to feel more comfortable.

Despite giving examples of ways to overcome language barriers, there were other reasons as to why parents are still hesitant to approach schools, especially Bangladeshi parents whose culture as well as language, is somewhat different to the majority group.

“We never went to school in this country and, so I did not realise the importance of parents evenings”

“I did not know parents could have a say in what happens at schools”

“My parents never went to my parents evenings, but I try to be more involved with my child’s educations, but its difficult with all the changes over the years”

Difference in cultural beliefs and values means Bangladeshi parents have different perceptions of schooling. A lot of these parents have never attended British schools themselves, and for this reason have very little understanding of how British schooling works. Even though these parents may have wanted to get involved with their children schooling, this may not have been possible for numerous reasons. Second generation parents who did attend British schools tend to take more of an active role in their children’s education, because they have attended British schools, and have more of an understanding of their workings even though teaching structures may have changed rapidly over the years. With this in mind our second workshop looked at *What services they would like to see developed in relation to education?* These services would help bridge the gap between home and school.

Workshop 2

What services would you like to see developed in relation to education?

The participants in this workshop decided that the workshop should be delivered in English as all participants spoke and understood English, or Sylheti was not their first language.

Number of parents: 15 adults

- Crèche
- Play groups
- English classes
- Activities

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- Awareness of activities and sessions for children
- Extra classes after school
- Learning groups – divided in half 1 hour work and 1 hour fun
- English classes for parents on school premises (any time)
- Student wives (3 year rule of staying in England before accessing training should be abolished)
- No place to get support around racism and bullying
- Schools to identify language parents speak
- Who would support parents in schools? There should be a named person.
- Have staff who speak community languages
- Activities for parents and schools
- Leaflets in community languages (letters, learning journeys, etc)
- More home work
- Home work clubs
- Existing services need to do more for BME children

English as an additional language.

Approximately nine percent (over 600,000) of pupils in schools in England are recorded as having English as an additional language (data from PLASC 2003, DFEE). Bangladeshi children often have to acquire English as an additional language. This can be a major issue in relation to overall attainment levels at school illustrated on the graphs in appendix 4. Bengali children who enter school with EAL underachieve because of lack of exposure to English prior to school, which is clearly the dominant language in British schools. Therefore it is not possible for them to confidently use it in relation to the curriculum.

There are continuous debates in relation to whether bilingual children will benefit from bilingual educational programmes, and whether the main reason for underachievement is due to language barriers and not academic performances. With little significance placed upon home languages such systems in our schools require quick adaptations to the majority language. Parents often feel children are forced into rejecting their skills in their home language, which form the basis of their character and identity.

During the initial stages of this project Bangladeshi parents identified the need for their children to be given the opportunity to learn their mother tongue in a formal setting. Research has shown there are huge educational advantages in being well educated in your first language and given the interest shown by parents this work was developed. Young Voices staff and advisory group members recognised the provision of mother tongue classes was also an opportunity to draw children in and support their schoolwork alongside their first language.

A lot of work was put into appointing two Bengali mother tongue tutors to work at weekends with children from Canning Street and Wingrove Primary School. This has been an innovative piece of work in terms of drawing up job descriptions and person specifications to appoint Bengali Sessional Tutors in Newcastle. As well as teaching Bengali the sessions also provide opportunities for children to get support with homework they are given from school. Unfortunately, the Development Worker who initiated this project has since left. Riverside nonetheless continued to progress the work with Bengali classes starting in May 2003. Registers have been kept on the number of children who attend the Bangla class, the graph on page 17 (Appendix 1) show the popularity of the classes since it started.

With an average of twenty-five children attending each week since the sessions started, this clearly indicates the popularity of the classes. With it coming to almost a year since it started we decided to ask both parents and children about the future of the Bangla Class. Bearing in

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mind parents initiated the idea of Bangla classes, and objective number three “*Increased involvement by children and young people in service development and delivery*”, we asked parents the question about children influencing decisions making such as the future of the classes.

Workshop 3

What is the future for Bangla class and how can children influence decision-making through Bangla class?

Number of Adults 8

- It is fine just started, will improve slowly.
- Training is good
- May be the older one’s can cope with getting more homework (Bangla home work)
- Possibly extend the age limit
- Home work diary
- Have holidays during normal school holidays
- May be do other activities during holidays e.g. trips
- Happy with homework how it is at the moment
- Some activities during term time will encourage children to attend make it more fun and enjoyable for them, break session up into part e.g. have craft session
- Homework should be regular and parents should not need to ask for it.
- Homework diary so parent have a record of when children are getting homework and if it is being completed.
- Teachers need to mark homework.
- All parents want home work club
-

Decision Making

- Ask children opinions of what they would like
- Homework clubs are needed especially for parents who can’t help their children with homework due to language difficulties
- Parents and teachers should value children’s opinions
- Listen to them
- Asking children in a group may help in asking what they want
- Have more of an impact on influencing decision-making. Parent should support children in making decisions
- Bullying is an issue in Bangla School and needs to be addressed. Teachers. Workers need to keep an eye on children even during break time.
- Bangla class help my children build their confidence and I will be devastated if they stop.
- Encourage children to speak Bengali in Bangla class, also the teachers should communicate with the children in Bengali. Children need to become more confident in using two languages.

Parents were then asked to prioritise three areas that staff at Young Voices need to work on. They voted on the following.

1. More consultation with parents
2. Training for parents to help them understand school systems
3. More understanding of cultural issues by teachers / head teachers

Engaging Children

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Engaging children and young people is recognised as crucial by staff and advisory group members in both service development and delivery, and with the support of Sara Bryson we have tried to implement this belief. Our first workshop with children and young people looked at the Bangla Class.

Workshop A

How can children influence decision-making through Bangla class and what is the future of Bangla class?



16 children and young people attended the workshop, 9 boys and 7 girls.

The group started looking at what they like about the Bangla class. The group wrote and drew pictures of all their favourite things.

What do you like about the Bangla class?

Trips

Teachers

Art

Messing around

Friends

Drawing

Food

Work

Pen/pencil

Having fun

Eating

We then turned the paper over and looked at the things they don't like about the class.

What do you not like about the Bangla class?

Don't like getting up in the morning

Don't like working

Don't like the juice

Learning

I Like everything

Girls

The teachers

Everything

Don't like X teaching us

Hate dictation

Copy cats

Boys

Being upset

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Bullies

Work

Test

The group was then asked given the number of things they don't like, do they think the Bangla class should continue?

10 said yes

3 said no

If it does continue would you change anything about it?

More trips

More teachers

Less learning

Boys group

More games

The girls

The boys

1 hour teaching, 1 hour games with Voices Worker

Playing outside

Male teacher not just women

'Some children expressed their personal preference or dislike regarding individual members of staff'

Once we established that the group did want the Bangla class to continue with some changes, we moved onto explore decision-making.

What is a decision?

Come to an agreement

Agree on things

Who makes decisions at Bangla class?

Teachers

'The children named one of the Young Voices Development Workers'

Us

What decisions would you like to be more involved in?

The group wrote their ideas on post it notes and stuck them to the flipchart.

More trips

What trips

More activities

Have more fun

Have 1 hour play and 1 hour learning

More games, more of the Voices Worker and 1 hour of games, 1 hour learning

Playing out, learning less

PC

Drawing

Playing

Our games

Watch TV

Play the PC

Playtime

Longer break

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No bullies
Writing
No boys allowed
Less girls
No boys
Boys group
No girls
One group of girls and boys, boys separated from girls

Our time of work
More work
How long
What time

Choose teachers
Which teachers

Choose what to eat
Our break

Do anything
Let the genius team decide (girls)

The main decisions that the group wants to be involved in are in making the classes more fun and having games and activities. They are also keen on separate work with girls and boys, having more control over the work, choosing their teachers and food. All of these are areas that the children and young people could become more involved.

How can we make decisions?

We then talked about how those decisions could be made?
Talk about it in a group
Have a meeting (boys only)
Vote
Tally chart

Everyone was given a dot to vote on their favourite suggestion.
Group – 11 votes
Meeting – 2 votes
Vote – 4 votes

Again the group are saying they would prefer to talk as a group. The proposal to have a circle time at each weekend class is still relevant despite the composition of the group changing.

Evaluation

A yes sign was placed at one end of the room and a no at the other. The group started in the middle and was asked questions, they responded by standing next to the appropriate sign.

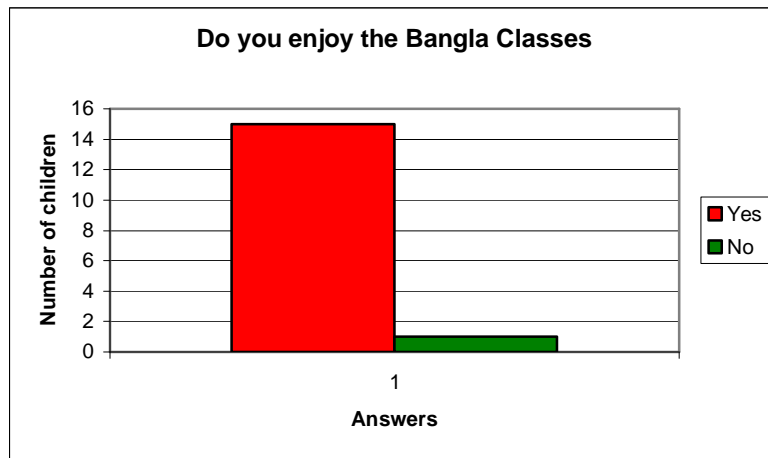
Do you enjoy the Bangla class?

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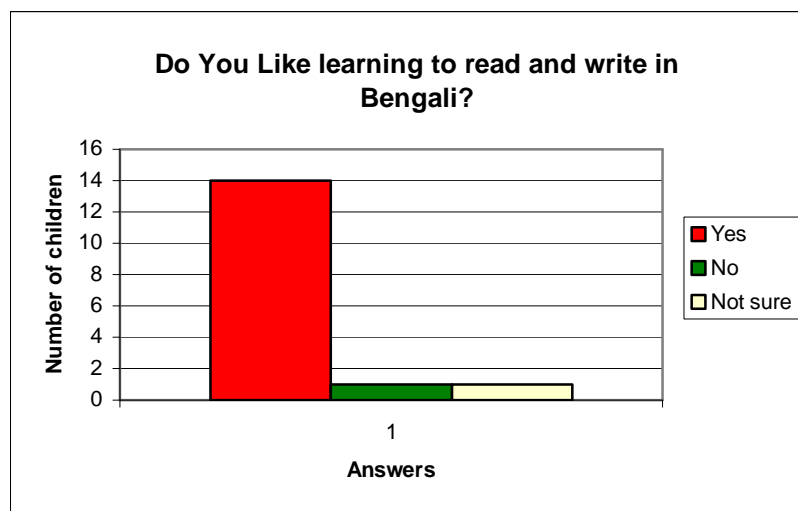
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Children were also asked if they enjoyed learning to read and write in Bengali, the answers are illustrated on the graph below.



“It’s helpful”

“If you go to Bangladesh you could talk”

Do you like your teachers?

9 said no

6 said they weren’t sure, they liked one and not the other

Would you like to interview and choose your teachers?

4 said no

No point, could find better ones

10 said yes

Would ask would you be strict with the boys?

Do you like the activities you do?

All said yes

Do you like the Young Voices Project?

All said yes

There were some children and young people who attended the consultation event who were not part of the Bengali classes. They were registered with workshop B and the question was as follows.

Workshop B What services would you like to see developed in relation to education?

- After School Club:
 - Dancing (Indian, African, hip hop, salsa, tap, belly)
 - Trips
 - Advice (education, problems at home, problems at school)
 - Kill racism?
- Problems with parents
- Do parents understand – lacking in knowledge about child’s work
- Not enough time at work
- More art in schools
- Sports –
 - Asian children are not encouraged
 - They are usually left out
 - Lack of confidence
- Teacher are not comforting
- More supply teachers – classes are to big
- Extra tuition after school– free
- Parent classes – find out about child’s schooling
- Drama
- Painting
- Computers
- Extra English – speaking and reading
- Lunch club
- Break time more fun activities
- Learn an instrument
- More awareness

After sharing ideas the children and young people were told, even though all their ideas were valued they needed to decide and vote on what needs to be prioritised. The children and Young people were given three sticky dots and asked to place a sticky dot on three services they thought were most important to them. If they strongly believed in one, they were given the choice to use all three dots on that one idea. The results are shown in appendix 1, on page 17.

Looking to the future...

Children and Young People

- Using different mediums to inform children of the activities and work that is carried out by Young Voices and how they can have greater input.
- Consultations with children and young people on a regular basis to find out issues that are affecting them.
- Improving and sustaining weekend Bangla classes
- Encourage parent and teachers to value children’s opinions.

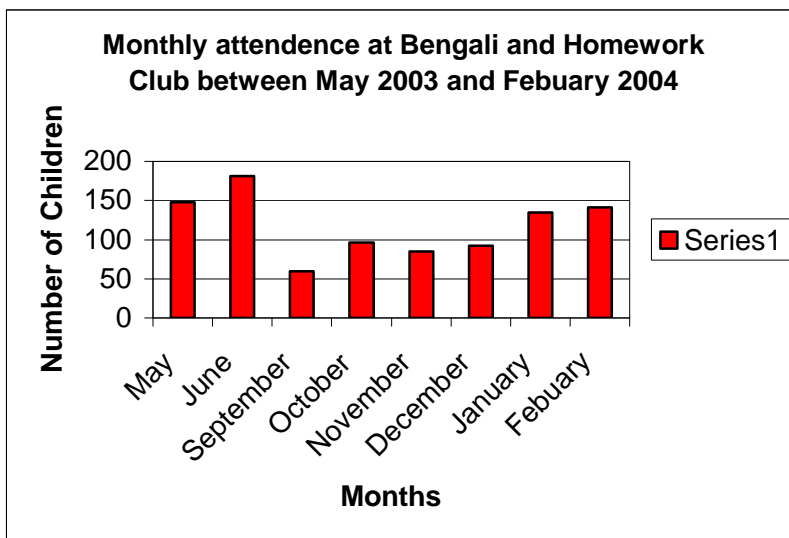
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Parents

- Create opportunities for parents to have information and advice on the British education system
- Develop training for parents on how to support their children with their education
- More opportunities for parents to do activities on school premises, as this will lessen the communication gap between parents and schools
- Consultation to be carried out with parent on a regular basis, this will create more opportunities for parent to influence decision-making.
- Parents to have a greater input in the work of Young Voices, by having a more active role on the advisory group
- Create opportunity for parent to have greater dialogue with education officials.

Education Services

- To promote more partnership working between schools and parents.
- Feed back to schools the issues that are raised through consultation with parent and children, regarding the service that is provided.
- Encourage education providers to support parents and children with issues that are identified as problems
- Support education officials to take action to implement new policies and practices if and when needed. Appendix 1



Workshop B, Services that Children and Young people would you like to see developed in relation to education

