MOVING FORWARD: TOGETHER WE CAN

Introduction

Leicestershire Cares is an award-winning charity which aims to make a positive and sustainable impact on the quality of life for people who experience barriers to social inclusion in all its forms.

This report is the first stage of our Time to Shine project, funded by the Rank Foundation. It explores the strengths, issues, challenges, and opportunities experienced by African, Afro Caribbean, Asian and East European communities in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland. It makes recommendations for Leicestershire Cares to further develop its work in supporting these communities, so no one is left behind.

Findings

We conducted formal interviews with 17 diverse community groups from the city and one from the county, as well as informal visits and discussions with 19 other groups across the city and county.

Strengths

Trusted voice: Community groups are a trusted voice that people turn to for support.

Connection to local people: Local community groups are the first point of call for many isolated, vulnerable, and marginalised people.

Local, national, and international networks: Groups had strong and diverse networks of partners, ranging from local, national, and international policy makers to other local community groups.

"Staff from diverse backgrounds with lived experienced similar to the community they serve, bring excellent knowledge of local issues, and real understanding of needs of people we work with."

Local knowledge and language: Groups' local knowledge, lived experiences and ability to speak similar languages as their service users enables them to develop bespoke workshops and tailored sessions for their local communities.

Skills: Community groups know their communities' needs better than any "outsider" and they have the skills to engage and consult with members of their community.

Issues

Language: Can create huge barriers to understanding and receiving support and information.

Tensions between communities: Due to lack of understanding and segregation between communities. This can be exacerbated by voluntary organisations and community development resources only targeting a single community, rather than all local groups.

Local press and media: A lack of support for community-based media and communications can lead to low levels of trust and engagement.

Employment and unemployment: Minority ethnic groups are over-represented in low skilled jobs, zero-hour contracts and are at risk of being exploited by employment agencies.

British norms: Language barriers and lack of understanding about how British society works creates further marginalisation and can result in a lack of communication between parents and their children.

Health and housing: Multi-generational families living together puts these families at greater risk of Covid19 transmission. High proportions of minority ethnic families are also unsuitably housed.

"Every community has a culture and identity and ways of doing things, which is something that should be considered when dealing with the diverse communities."

"Many mothers who live in the UK do not speak the language, as [there used to be] a stigma to say women may lose their values and culture if they integrate into British society."

Young people: Young people are navigating multifaceted and complex issues about identify, belonging and racism, as well as how they can access education and training, progress towards meaningful work, and with their mental health.

Challenges

Funding: Many groups rely heavily on funding to continue providing their services. Some want to move away from this by diversifying their income but need support with bid writing.

Using social media: Lack of skills in using social media means groups are missing opportunities to share their work, recruit volunteers and secure financial support.

Lack of spaces: Many community groups do not have a base where they can operate from which means they struggle to hold vital workshops and sessions for their community.

Covid19: The pandemic has increased the need for support and services. Most groups have continued supporting people and are adapting to the "new normal", but some have been unable to fundraise and have lost volunteers.

Digital poverty: Lack of access to technology and/or poor digital skills has created issues for families in accessing important information and services, staying in touch with families and friends, and for children in attending virtual classes.

The elderly in the community: Covid19 has exacerbated the isolation and loneliness experienced by elderly people in African and Asian communities already created by a lack of spaces that are culturally appropriate for them to meet.

"More integrated approaches for neighbours to get to know each other on every street is needed to create community cohesion."

Children with special needs: The pandemic meant that parents who have children with complex needs were unable to get the support and guidance they need from services.

Opportunities

An insight into local communities, particularly those from hard-to-reach backgrounds: There is wealth of knowledge and skills within these communities and policy makers, charities and grant givers need to consult with the trusted voices in communities.

Rooted links: Using and identifying people with the right skills and passion to make a difference in their local communities and pair it with a local charity that is lacking that skill.

Rapport with local community and faith groups: Faith groups and local communities have mobilised and coordinated swift responses to the pandemic, which leading charities and the local government need to learn from and build on.

Lived experience and cultural knowledge of the diverse communities that reside in LLR. People with lived experience need to be seen as change-makers and leaders of change, as they are the experts of their own lives and their need.

Build Back Better: Government talks about levelling up and delivering more power to communities provides an opportunity to bring communities together to build back better.

"Investment in the right area, empower the communities that are most marginalised."

Black Lives Matter: The rise of the BLM movement in the last couple of years has highlighted centuries of historical prejudices and injustice towards Black and Brown people.

"Our strongest asset is our people"

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, it is the recommendation of this report that the following action is taken by Leicestershire Cares to support local African, Afro Caribbean, Asian and Eastern European communities in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland:

- **Funding:** We need to train and upskill groups on identifying funding streams and bid writing in partnership with business members.
- **New technology and social media:** We need to support community groups to effectively of technology and social media. An intergenerational approach would provide work experience and progression for the young people.
- **Office/meeting room space:** We need to link up businesses with community groups to offer free spaces for meetings and workshops in their buildings.
- **Covid19 transition:** As restrictions ease, we need to support groups with Covid safety checks of their premises and activities with support from business members.
- **English language:** We need to work in partnership with other agencies to provide ESOL classes as well as ICT classes to combat low literacy and digital skills.
- **Encourage volunteering within communities:** We need to match individuals willing to volunteer with local community groups that would benefit from their skillset and talents.
- **Loneliness and isolation:** We need to work with business volunteers and other charities to set up social activities to address high levels of isolation amongst the elderly.
- **Legal rights and the law:** We need to hold workshops to teach the community about their employment rights.

Team development

Leicestershire Cares will take the following steps to develop our team's awareness of the needs of diverse communities:

1. Organise training sessions for the team on the history, issues and challenges faced by key community groups across LLR delivered by local community organisations.
2. Identify practical ways team members can engage with and learn from local communities, e.g. outreach sessions in St Matthews delivered via partners.
3. Organise staff training around values and attitudes, diversity, and inclusion.
4. All team members/projects will track and disaggregate data on who benefits from their services/support and set targets and plans to ensure their work is inclusive.

Business members

Leicestershire Cares will take the following steps to develop our business members' awareness of the needs of diverse communities:

1. Offer business members training on local diversity and inclusion issues. This might include developing online training/videos.
2. Identify members and business volunteers who want to share skills through training sessions and/or coaching and mentoring and match them with community groups.
3. Establish a business member steering group to inform the design and delivery of services we offer our members to ensure they are inclusive and reflect the needs of local communities.
4. Emphasise that Leicestershire Cares' approach is one of partnership and two-way learning and promote a way where business and community share and learn from each other.

Acknowledgements and thanks

Leicestershire Cares would like to thank the following organisations for contributing their time to this research.

Adhar Project
British and Muslim
Equality Action Loughborough
Women 4 change
Fair pay citizens advice Leicestershire
Outspoken
Afro innovation
SOCOPO
Decentred Media
AAA Foundation
New Horizons
Real Projects
Freedom Club Young People (Centre Project)
Dr Samira Hassan
Project Polska
Highfield Centre
Marzena Ellis
Belgrave Playhouse
Shree Sanatan Mandir & comm centre
Braunstone Civic Centre
Braunstone Adventure Playground
Goldhill Adventure Playground
Highfields Adventure Playground
St Andrews Play Association
New Parks Adventure Playground
New Parks Team Hub
Woodgate Adventure Playground
The What Cabin- St Matthews
Christ The King Church
Leicester Royal Infirmary Children's Hospital
Sharma Centre
Zinthiya Trust
Wesley Hall
The Race Equality Centre
Red Cross
BACA in Loughborough