

Communications Strategy

Proactive Promotion Of Equal Opportunities
For Black And Minority Ethnic Communities

Second Edition (2006)



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INTRODUCTION

Since establishing a full time Equal Opportunities Manager post in 1999, Trust, Hanover (Scotland) and Bield Housing Associations have made a major commitment to the promotion of Race Equality . The programme has implemented significant initiatives and projects, secured a variety of grant funding and expanded the team to five staff working within our Equal Opportunities Programme.

All elements of the extensive Equal Opportunities Programme have been designed to help the associations communicate more effectively with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and raise awareness of the services they provide, both to older people and in employment opportunities. The key objectives of the programme are to:

- Encourage take up of sheltered housing by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) older people;
- Encourage BME communities to seek employment with the Associations;
- Train staff on equality issues;
- Develop policy and procedures concerning positive action

The Associations not only promoted their own services but also wider equal opportunities as required by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. In recent years, this core objective has been broadened to allow the Equal Opportunities team to share their expertise with other organisations who wish to access "hard to reach" BME older people and provide them with key services and benefits.

PURPOSE AND AIM

The purpose of this paper is to provide a communications strategy which sets out the key areas of activity for the Associations' future Equal Opportunities Programme.

1. UNDERSTANDING NEEDS

Key to understanding the need is a requirement to establish contact at both a local and strategic level. The Associations have placed a high priority on the Equal Opportunities team's work of visiting voluntary and community organisations regularly and building strong relationships and continuing contact. There has been a strong emphasis on the importance of not only making, but maintaining and expanding contact. This networking has proved crucial to the success of initiatives such as the Job Opportunities Support Project, the Happy to Translate Logo initiative and Pension Benefits Outreach Project, where other organisations made valuable contributions in achieving successful outcomes.

- We will continue to expand our contacts and formally consult with the BME communities as far as possible in order to respond to their needs and avoid developing strategy and policies in isolation.
- We will endeavour to make the Equal Opportunities team known to individuals at grass roots level and amongst community groups, local authorities, statutory bodies and other relevant organisations as a source of information and advice.
- We will continue to seek feedback and suggestions for improvement through various channels.
- We will continue to expand our data and expertise in organising consultation on various issues with BME communities in Scotland for external agencies.

2. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Effective communication with individuals, other agencies and voluntary organisations is of fundamental importance to an effective Equal Opportunities Programme as it facilitates the development and exchange of ideas and information and ensures that initiatives across communities are streamlined and relevant to local needs.

- We will continue with our development of other communication practices such as the Happy to Translate Logo initiative, which was formally launched in April 2005. This is a core component of the Associations' objective to improve access to information and services across the BME communities.

Other organisations are currently being encouraged to apply for membership to use the "Happy to Translate" Logo. It is hoped that over time, the logo will be widely used by public and private organisations in Scotland to promote a multi-cultural society. Through this initiative it is hoped that non-English speakers will benefit from improved access to information and services and thus enhanced social inclusion.

- We will continue with our contract with National Interpreting Services to provide instant access to interpretation and translation services for BME people.
- We will continue with the production of our bi annual multilingual newsletter to provide updates on our initiatives, news and strategies in race equality.
- We will continue with the development of our multilingual web site EqualityScotland.com which provides access to information on housing, employment, benefits, community events and resources in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (Cantonese), Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.
- We will continue to inform BME older people of the housing options available to them by arranging visits to different types of housing provided by the associations.
- We will consider and develop new approaches with other agencies to enhance communication across the language barrier.
- We will continue to support and participate in community events and organise seminars and workshops in partnership forums to educate and inform BME communities about the services available to them.
- We will continue and expand our production of multi-lingual information material to raise awareness amongst BME communities.
- We will continue and expand our open surgeries using a rotation of elderly day care centres for maximum contact with the widest range of older people and to maintain contact with the support staff working with BME communities.
- We will continue with our policy of visiting older people where it is most convenient for them and the team will go to individuals' homes or community organisations when asked to deal with housing, benefits and employment enquiries and help complete forms.

3. POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Equal Opportunities Programme will develop policies and strategies in accordance with new legislation and work at all levels with other agencies to influence implementation.

- We will continue to position, the Associations' Equal Opportunities Team as a key player in areas of racial equality and associated housing issues in order to effectively contribute to strategy and policy planning at a national strategic policy level.
- We will expand our involvement at a national level through building contacts and awareness of what the Associations are trying to achieve through meetings, consultation and debate with the Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland.
- We will continue to provide comments and responses to consultation documents, strategic and policy papers and action plans on equality at both national and local levels.

4. BROADENING THE VISION

The Equal Opportunities Team has been expanded to create a new key project - Job Opportunities Support Project. This project is a key step forward in progressing the team's objective of improving access to employment opportunities for BME communities.

- We will seek funding to continue the Pension Benefits Outreach Project working with BME older people to establish if they are eligible for benefits but not claiming it, through a series of recommendations for the Department of Work and Pensions with a view to mainstream this activity.
- We will undertake research and publish results, highlighting areas where communication problems and cultural patterns are resulting in exclusion from benefit entitlement.
- We will make the "Easy Guides to benefits for 60+" in English and six community languages is available to BME communities and also create a web resource for older people, their families and for training purposes in the wider community.

5. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

This is to be achieved by developing a training strategy, based on the needs identified by the staff. The Equal Opportunities Team will provide the necessary training resource.

- We will continue to extend and implement training programmes both internally and for external organisations.
- We will hold workshops and make presentations at conferences and seminars on race and cultural awareness.
- We will advise organisations both internally and externally of new legislation and its implications.

6. EMPLOYMENT

The Equal Opportunities Team will seek to encourage members of BME communities to apply for jobs within housing organisations and other public bodies.

- We will continue to lead and work with partner organisations such as the CIH and SFHA, to run a rolling programme of Job Opportunities Fairs and encourage other interested agencies to come on board.
- We will continue to develop positive actions to improve access to employment opportunities in housing and public sector through Job Opportunities Support Project.
- We will continue to act as a mentor with Linknet, in helping BME people into the job market with one to one support and guidance.
- We will continue to develop links with existing community initiatives to promote access to jobs and training opportunities for BME people.
- We will continue to expand opportunities for work placements, training, retraining and volunteering for BME communities and provide access to information and support.
- We will continue developing a network of employers from the public and housing sector in order to help them identify ways in which they can recruit more effectively from BME communities.
- We will continue to provide individuals help and support in applying for jobs, completing job applications forms and interview techniques.
- We will continue to work in partnership with other agencies with similar remit and particularly with Careers Scotland in supporting individuals.

7. MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

This will continue to be achieved through articles, adverts and press releases on all new initiatives across general and specialist media. It is also important to continue to raise media profile by making submissions for awards.

- We will continue to place adverts in community publications and newsletters.
- We will continue to produce multi-lingual publications, maintain multi-lingual equality website www.EqualityScotland.com, and regular "Housing for Older People" newsletter.
- We will seek to extend our public relations work by networking with journalists and ethnic media.

8. PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

The Equal Opportunities Team believe that partnership with other organisations is key to creating joined-up thinking and practice across the whole area of social inclusion. The Associations welcome opportunities to be involved in partnership projects and are proactive in generating initiatives and inviting others on board.

- We aim to sustain and build on partnership projects undertaken to date.
- We intend to identify new opportunities to develop creative partnerships with other organisations with similar vision for outreach and social inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The role of our Communication Strategy, as implemented by the Equal Opportunities Team is an organic one as has been clearly demonstrated over the last couple of years as the team has expanded and progressed new initiatives for BME people. Successful organic growth must of course come from an understanding of grass roots issues and the Associations must continue to listen to what is being said by people across the BME communities and responding appropriately to provide solutions.

Our Equal Opportunities Programme is now well established, well recognised and well respected. The Housing Equal Opportunities Manager and her team have won awards, launched major initiatives and secured a considerable level of acclaim for their work both on a grass roots and a strategic, national level.

The team has harnessed technology to provide new communications tools through the multilingual website and DVDs but it has not neglected its grass roots contact with individual older people.

The team needs to continue to root itself in the BME communities it serves as well as exploring new, diverse and increasingly challenging ways of breaking down the language barriers and providing older people in our BME communities with access to the services and support they deserve. The “Equal Opportunities Programme” will continue to explore new ideas and keep a focus on innovation.



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