

Routes to Solidarity

Supporting ethnic minority women in their struggles and aspirations.



winter 2009/2010

Welcome...

...to the second issue of Routes to Solidarity newsletter.

This newsletter is for everyone involved in fighting the poverty and discrimination experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women and their organisations, particularly in the North of England.

It will bring you the latest project news, updates on coming events, and useful resources. We want you to get involved too – do contact us to tell us what you think and share your experiences through the Routes to Solidarity Project Newsletter.

What is Routes to Solidarity?

The overall project goal is to create a stronger BME women's sector, with increased strategic and influencing power, particularly in the North of England. The project, funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government, offers a unique opportunity for ethnic minority women and their organisations to collectively share their experiences, and to act on the needs and issues they experience.

The project is also working to support a community cohesion strategy that is both pro-poor and anti racist, and which will improve and sustain ethnic minority services and communities.

The programme activities include: training programmes, mentoring, developing/supporting networks and forums, developing partnership projects, organising events and policy seminars.



Tendayi Madzunu. Credit: Fiona Davison/Oxfam

Tendayi: "This is just the beginning..."

Tendayi Madzunu, talks about her experience of the Voice of Solidarity training which took place throughout November in Manchester.

Being originally from Zimbabwe, Tendayi found herself caught up in the political uprisings that occurred in Zimbabwe during 2003 and as a result, found herself seeking asylum in the UK, having lost everything she had worked for in Zimbabwe, her job, her house, land and her pension.

In 2004, Tendayi was granted asylum and then "the really hard work started".

Tendayi describes this experience as a "silent killer, every time having to repeat yourself over and over again... I am a refugee, I am a refugee".

A chance meeting with one of the founders of the Zimbabwe Women's Organisation (ZIWO), Elinah Mugwagwa, in Manchester, proved life changing.

It was through getting to know Elinah that Tendayi found a shared drive and passion

to support other women who had come from Zimbabwe, to help them orientate themselves, understand the systems and get a helping hand from someone who understood their shared cultural background. Started by Elinah in the front room of her house in 2006, ZIWO now has some 15 women who are active members and is run by a management committee. As Tendayi explains it is a strongly shared view that mothers are expected to know the answers to everything! This small grass roots organisation, based in Manchester - provides a vital lifeline for many women.

Tendayi and Elinah both attended the Voice of Solidarity training.

Tendayi describes, "I didn't know what to expect but, I thought, even if I don't like the training, I can still see what methods they are using, what ideas I can borrow!"

However, Tendayi soon found that the training was more than just a set of methods and skills, "it was like a magnet, there was a magnetic connection from the very

first day... the spirit that was there, the oneness, the commonness of what women were doing; it gave me some life back...it was like an awakening. I realised that yes, I am a true activist, but I hadn't realised this until the training".

"The training has given me a platform because all that I have been struggling with, the racism, the sexism, is shared with other women".

Tendayi and ZIWO want to continue their work with Oxfam "This is just the beginning", she says. "Oxfam will work with us to help restore the confidence back in black women...I want Oxfam to be this restoration in us".

Describing her feelings about the newly formed network, Tendayi explains that the group forming in these sessions feels special because they spoke about their issues, for themselves and for those women who were

absent. "We now have self-determination, yes...we are committed to the well-being of fellow women. I feel like instead of the victim, I am the victor"

Oxfam will be working alongside ZIWO to support them in their endeavours, and guiding the formation of a women's network throughout the project. The Zimbabwean Women's Organisation can be contacted on **07508 263424**.

"I am not hard to reach, I am here 24 hours a day!"



Voice of Solidarity training group, Manchester. Credit: Fiona Davison / Oxfam

The first training sessions of the Routes to Solidarity's empowerment programme have been held in Manchester during November, consisting of 5 sessions over 4 days. Women attended from a range of different backgrounds and organisations, as well as individual women activists. The training, entitled "Voice of Solidarity", aims to strengthen the BME women's voice in the North through a set of sessions designed to help women from BME women's organisations to enhance their skills, experience and knowledge enabling them to become more effective in their roles, engage with decision makers and develop a strengthened policy voice.

The first training session was based on developing a sense of togetherness, as well as being honest and thinking through the politics of fragmentation in the BME and women's sector. The group formed a strong bond based on shared experiences and challenges, and developed a common basis for working together for change.

This was an incredibly powerful session exploring feelings of discrimination,

particularly the intersection between race and gender. The group shared experiences of isolation at household, community and society level.

Some of the feedback included comments such as

"Haven't been so excited about a project in 32 years!"

"Rekindled my passion for activism"

"very informative and inspiring, motivated all of us"

3 intensive sessions looked at the state of the sector, the nature of power, key policy areas, decision making structures, and challenges and opportunities. The final piece of work revolved around action planning. As a result of the training, the group participants decided to join as a network. The group worked on development of a strategic action plan including how to best to develop their shared voice.

We look forward to supporting their first meeting in January. Watch this space.....

We will be running more Voice of Solidarity training programmes during 2010;

Manchester, February 2010
Newcastle, March 2010
Accrington, May 2010
Leeds, September 2010

The programmes are to encourage and support BME women's organisations but there will also be opportunities for women from other mainstream organisations and individuals who work with BME women to get involved.

We are also aiming to host a 1 day conference to share dialogue, ways to influence policy and shared action with BME womens groups – in early 2010.

Equal Opportunities Commission, "Moving on up?" 2007 Report

Main conclusions:

- Black Caribbean women are twice as likely to be unemployed than white British women;
- Pakistani women born in Britain are three times more unlikely to be self-employed than those born abroad;
- Over 1 in 5 BME young women take jobs below their level of qualification compared to 1 in 20 white British women;
- BME women are focused in the health, social care and retail sectors despite high educational qualifications and positive aspirations;
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have their first child earlier and more children compared to other groups, therefore childcare/flexible work conditions are more significant in economic engagement.

BME Women and the Recession

DOSTI "Not just about surviving"

DOSTI Asian Women's Support Service is based in Leeds and offers a supportive environment for Asian women with mental health issues. Dosti means 'friendship' in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Gujarati. Dosti was established in 1995 when the need for an Asian women's mental health provision was identified. Dosti gained charitable status in December 2000 and has developed as a unique Asian Women's Support Service in citywide Leeds with a vision to deliver high quality service empowering women to enhance their mental health.

The demand from women who experience mental and sexual abuse, and from young women being forced into marriages has got worse during the recession. Referrals at Dosti have increased by 80% over the past two years, with over 60% flagging up a history of mental and sexual abuse at referral stage.

The recent outcomes for clients of the project are impressive – lowered levels of self-harm and suicidal risk, and reduced levels of depression and anxiety.

Dosti were struggling to meet the increased demand, due to lack of resources and

funding available. They have adopted a forward thinking approach, and have successfully negotiated a variety of partnerships in order to survive. It is this joint partnership working that has successfully enabled major changes to the services offered. Currently they are funded by Leeds Adult Social Care and have managed to acquire funds from other organisations such as Lloyds TSB Foundation, and some other small grants. Dosti have now adopted a "beyond survival" strategy. This model includes encouraging user led initiatives, and working cross culturally. The need to be socially inclusive is crucial to reduce stigma and discrimination within the local community and to support the integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable women.

Dosti has also worked hard to achieve and build on the high profile that it possesses, not just in Leeds but also nationally, including the launch of a website this year. Dosti has previously been quoted as a positive practice example in Women's Mental Health Service into the Mainstream by the Department of Health.

Ravinder Samra, Manager of Dosti, strongly recommends such a collaborative



Melting Pot social enterprise project. Credit:Dosti

approach, within a strategy that positively encourages and empowers users of the service to influence future service developments. "Women using Dosti's services say they feel listened to and their voices are being heard; consequently they feel less isolated, and less marginalized. We are delighted our members feel able to express themselves,they have identified gaps and consequently steer the shaping of our services".

For more information, please visit www.dostileeds.org.uk or ring 0113 203 8893

Recession in the North West

There is a pressing need to focus on how the recession has impacted on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, including BME women's groups. One North West - the regional BME Network which aims to promote the voice of the BME third sector, and to provide opportunities for organisations to work together, recently undertook a regional survey on the impact of the recession. The 3 key impacts identified were:

- Government help is not reaching the most marginalised
- Funding cuts are affecting the BME Third Sector
- Resources are stretched from having to deliver more services

The survey comments have shown strong feelings that the unique contribution of the BME third sector organisations should be recognised. They reach communities and provide essential services that respond to significant needs. The specialist role of the BME women's sector within this needs to be protected.

As Daniel Silver, the BME Policy Forum Co-ordinator for One North West says, "There are real fears about the long-term sustainability of the BME third sector and widespread concern that ultimately the most excluded members of society will suffer disproportionately as a result of the recession. There are also hidden effects on women, which Government should be aware of, for instance: increased cases of domestic abuse, economic hardship and also financial abuse".

His view is echoed by Tania Pouwhare, Head of Policy at the Women's Resource Centre, "BME women's organisations are often working with the most marginalised women in our communities, and they are fundamental to promoting equality. Changes to the funding and political environment are making it increasingly difficult for these specialist services to survive and we are deeply concerned that we will lose an important part of the women's sector."

The full report was presented to Government Office for the North West, the North West Development Agency and 4NW

in order to influence Equality and Diversity priorities for the coming year.

One North West is continuing to work with BME third sector organisations across the region to develop a Regional BME Policy Forum in order to provide a platform for BME organisations in the North West to come together, make an impact on key decisions and campaign for change. Part of this future work will be an event planned by One North West and CEMVO (Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary sector Organisations) in March around impacts of the recession on BME communities that will look in more depth at solutions that can support BME communities.

If you are interested in the event or in getting involved in the Forum, please contact Daniel Silver at DanielSilver@nwnetwork.org.uk

Voice4Change England

Voice4Change England is a national policy body dedicated to strengthening the BME Third Sector as a positive force for change. It provides a co-ordinated policy voice for BME groups and organisations and supports them to thrive. They recently hosted a conference in London, "Race and the Recession: Be Part of the Solution". At the conference the body launched its new study on inspirational responses to the recession from the BME third sector. The study presents a range of case studies that tell stories of resilience at a time when demand on services is at its highest, with dwindling access to resources and funding.

Thinking and planning ahead is essential for a strong BME third sector. But leaders in the sector can often find themselves too busy to step back and think about the future. Voice4Change England is working with NCVO Third Sector Foresight to research the key trends affecting the BME third sector. They will hold a free event which offers an opportunity to:

- Learn about the research findings
- Make sure the findings reflect the issues affecting your organisation and help find solutions for the future of the BME third sector.
- Take back information about important trends to use in your organisation's planning process.
- Learn more about planning for and responding to changes in the external environment.

This event, "Helping BME Third Sector leaders plan ahead: Solutions, Strategies and Support" is on 26 January 2010 in Birmingham from 11am till 4.15pm.

For more information, please see www.voice4change-england.co.uk

Spotlight on...



The Angelou Centre, based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, is a well known community training provider where black and minority ethnic women can access facilities to increase their skills, knowledge and expertise. It is one of the few surviving black-led women's projects in the North East, is run by women for women, and is highly regarded in Newcastle and the wider region. The centre is a grassroots organisation with a clear vision around supporting and enabling BME women's economic independence. As well as training, they deliver advice, guidance and enterprise development support, and network with service providers to raise awareness of the barriers black women face.

The Angelou Centre is also involved in regional lobbying and networking to raise the profile of the BME women's sector and in the representation of BME women's issues. As a consequence, they are now the gender lead organisation for the North East VCS Equalities Coalition and a member of strategic networks crucial in influencing policy and provision. The centre also co-ordinates the Regional Black Women's Domestic Violence Network.

The Angelou Centre was set up in 1993 and acquired charitable status in 1995, however, more than a decade later, BME women still face barriers to education, training and employment. The work of the centre is having a significant impact on the lives of the BME women it reaches. Over the last 16 years the Centre has developed an excellent track record in engaging and progressing BME women into further education, training and/or employment;

- An average of 230 BME women each year receive training or support and guidance
- 20% of beneficiaries progress onto mainstream further education; 50% younger women progressed to further/higher education
- 15% of service users obtained employment directly from leaving a course

The centre management team have worked hard to sustain service delivery through building partnerships with mainstream service providers. Through these partnerships, they are able to customise and deliver training/activities that meet the identified needs of beneficiaries and to network with mainstream and other voluntary agencies to raise awareness of the barriers faced by BME women. They have also demonstrated success in accessing funding from a range of statutory and charitable sources.

For more information on the Angelou Centre, please call **0191 226 0394**. The website is currently under construction and will be at www.angeloucentre.org.uk

Policy news

No Recourse - A step in the right direction...?

On 12 November the government announced a pilot scheme for women experiencing domestic violence but who cannot access safe housing and support due to their insecure immigration status.

The scheme will provide funding for a woman with 'no recourse to public funds' in a refuge for up to 40 days pending an application to remain in the UK under the Domestic Violence Rule. The scheme will run for three months, following which there will be a review as to its effectiveness.

Leading violence against women and human rights organisations gave a cautious welcome to this initiative recognising that this is 'a step in the right direction'. However they call on the government to ensure that all abused women have sufficient access to protection and safety when they need it for as long as they need it.

For further information, please see www.wrc.org.uk

Resources & Publications

For useful links, toolkits, reports and other documents about gender, poverty and social inclusion, check out the Resources page on Oxfam's website www.oxfam.org.uk/genderworks. If you would like hard copies of any of the documents listed, please contact us on 0161 860 2811

If you would like to let us know about upcoming events, share your experience of how you have resolved any issues or submit any articles to our newsletter, please ring Fiona on **0161 860 2811** or email routestosolidarity@oxfam.org.uk

We would be delighted to hear from you.

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