

Chapter 1

BLACK & MINORITY ETHNIC LIVES IN RURAL DEVON: The Handbook's construction around the key research outcomes

Themes in this chapter

- Really rural voices
- Interest in safe means of having a voice
- Issues of Concern
- Recommendations
- Issues apart from race and equality?
- Transport
- Countryside
- Community Safety

Whose voices?

Between 2000 and 2003, the Devon & Exeter Racial Equality Council has been reaching out into the rural Districts of Devon, to listen to the experience of Black and Minority Ethnic rural people.

Most of the work of the Racial Equality Council and other agencies' action on race equality in Devon has centred on Exeter. This raised real questions and concern about the un-appraised and un-addressed situation of Black and Minority Ethnic people in rural areas. For this reason, the brief for the Rural Outreach Project was given specific rural parameters and focussed on work in the 7 Districts of East, Mid and North Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Torridge and West Devon. The urban areas of Exeter and Torbay were not included within the brief.

In the process of this work, issues arising from the experience of 170 Black and Minority Ethnic individuals and family members have been collated, and are presented in this report.

The aim has been to provide a platform for the voice of Black and Minority Ethnic people whose perspective is both distinctive and mostly unheard, because of their rural situation. In listening to these voices, we hope that the outcome will be that rural service providers will be better informed, and better equipped to address race equality in the rural context.

In order to help prepare service providers to engage with Black and Minority Ethnic peoples' experience, the research has also listened to over

180 service providing staff, from a wide range of service-providing sectors and organisations. We have heard from staff regarding the concerns they have about the situation of excluded Black and Minority Ethnic people whom they have served. We have also heard about the difficulty experienced by many organisations in knowing how to address race equality, in the rural setting.

The information provided by service providers has supported what we have heard from the Black and Minority Ethnic participants, and has helped to set the context for the report's discussion about the way that its recommendations should be addressed.

We have also made use of background information from some other relevant reports and resources. These are listed within the resources list at the back of the Handbook. (It is also hoped that the full desk study mapping race equality research and action in rural areas, which was conducted by Philomena de Lima, will be published soon by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE).)

What was said & heard

This Handbook has been constructed around the key issues emerging from the work with Black and Minority Ethnic participants. The research was designed to be as responsive as possible to the direction in which the participants' experience would lead it. We made sure that the debate was open to the participants' concerns that had nothing to do with race and equality, as well as to the issues that were directly related to identity. In this way, the research was intended to provide a Black and Minority Ethnic input to service providers' general planning, as well as planning related to promotion of diversity and anti-racism.

The ***overall key finding*** of the research was that, whilst there were some clear and widely held views about what generally makes life in Devon good or bad (respectively the countryside and transport), most of the discussion did focus on issues related to ethnic identity and experience of prejudice. Given the low rates of involvement in any kind of consultation, and the fact that nearly two thirds of the participants described experiences of discrimination and prejudice, this was perhaps unsurprising. Only 20% of the participants ('n' = 135) reported having ever been involved in any kind of survey – whether related to race equality or not. By contrast, 61% expressed an interest in having future involvement and voice on race equality issues through Racial Equality Council initiatives.

The key areas of interest and concern were as follows:

Box 1.1 Issues raised for discussion by participants	No. of people raising points on these subjects
1. Experience of prejudice & discrimination	111
2. Transport	62
3. Health & Social welfare	54
4. Faith & Religion	47
5. Countryside	44
6. Shopping – general Shopping – ethnicity related	15 21
7. Education	24
8. Community safety – general	6
TOTAL	384

Participants completed their input to the research by contemplating on the issues they had raised and then putting forward their suggestions for ways to promote cultural diversity and improve race relations.

These suggestions coalesced to form the following recommendations:

Box 1.2 Participant's key recommendations	No. of people contributing to this proposal
1. Awareness raising & training (including in schools)	62
2. Networks and peer support	31
3. Bridge building across cultures – celebrations of culture & diversity	31
4. Improving access to information & services	19
5. Race equality support services	17
6. Equality in employment	14
7. Political action & leadership	14
8. Media	11
9. Initiative on the part of Black and Minority Ethnic individuals	8
10. Consultation & influence	6
11. Demographic change – its effects and its value.	5
12. Inter-religious understanding	4
13. Cultural centres	4
14. Adoption – placement matching issues	2
TOTAL	228

These recommendations are described and discussed in detail in chapter 12.

Chapters 6,7,8,9,and 10 look in depth at the experiences that underpin the recommendations made directly by the participants. These chapters examine in particular the participant's experiences of prejudice and discrimination and issues raised by participants relating to health & social welfare, education, and religion. These were major areas of concern with a direct bearing on Black and Minority Ethnic experience of life in Devon and form the main substance of this Handbook.

It's also important to pause to describe here the three other general themes that were raised by participants as issues of concern - but described by them as being un-related to race or equality.

- **Transport**
- **Countryside**
- **Community Safety**

The fact that these are issues of heated interest to most of the general public living in Devon does not discount the value of adding the voice of Black & Minority Ethnic people to that of the wider population. It's also important to recognise that whilst the participants were provided with the opportunity to cover all aspects of everyday life in Devon, these aspects attracted the focus of their attention. We also noted that whilst at first sight these issues seem un-related to race and equality, in the context of issues raised by the research as a whole we found that they do have a bearing on Minority Ethnic isolation and demography, for reasons which we'll explain.

We'll look at these issues here, rather than in a separate chapter, since whilst they represent a significant proportion of concern, the concern was expressed briefly, in simple and similar terms by most people.

1). Travel and transport around Devon was considered a major problem by many of the participants.

Most of the concern centred on public transport, which was perceived as inaccessible and expensive. Several of our participants were not car owners or were disabled, and public transport was a key issue for them. 31% of our participants were unemployed, retired or occupied in unskilled work and 31% also lived in villages or 'out in the sticks'. We noted that therefore inaccessibility of public transport together with rural isolation and low income, would be socially excluding factors that could combine to

reinforce each other and exacerbate other aspects of Black and Minority Ethnic isolation (see chapter 5).

For both the public transport- and car-dependent participants, the size of Devon also presents a problem, in terms of accessing centrally provided services and cultural outlets and in terms of finding support and networking with Black and Minority Ethnic peers. We look at the issues of isolation and networking in more detail in chapters 5 and 12.

Several participants felt that travel in and out of a county the size of Devon was also inhibited by poor road networks and connections to the outside world. For some this impacted on the feasibility of keeping regular contact with family.

Others described the difficulties in acquiring or getting driving skills recognised. As one driving instructor told us:

☞ *The Driving Standards Agency need cultural education. They also need awareness about English as an Additional Language. Examiners don't give instructions slowly and well in advance. It's no good to have an interpreter because it's too confusing. Examiners are harder on foreign pupils.*

Car dependency is a feature of life in rural Devon and, therefore, barriers to the ability to drive are a matter of real concern. In addition to the discrimination described by the instructor above, participants also described the heavy emphasis put upon written and spoken English fluency in the Driving Test. Driving is essentially a physical and visual skill, and high levels of reading, writing and spoken English skills do not play a part in driving itself. If it did, most Britons would be ill prepared to drive abroad. In this sense, the Test format culturally discriminates against people who speak English as an Additional Language.

Other travel issues were also raised concerning volumes of traffic, traffic noise and dangerous driving.

The following table gives a flavour of the participants' experiences of travel and transport in Devon:

- | |
|---|
| <p>☞ <i>Improved transport in Devon could make life here better - I don't drive and the county is so big.</i></p> <p>☞ <i>I felt very isolated because we were very far from Exeter and the house was far outside the village and I had no transport and the bus service was very expensive and it's a bad service to Exeter.</i></p> |
|---|

- ☞ *Communication is one of the worst things about life here. Travel to London to get abroad is difficult because of the travel connections. A better train service to London would make life better. The link road could be dual carriage. There are too sharp turns on it too.*
- ☞ *There's a high turnover of incomers to East Devon from the South East of England. They're very surprised because they move to the area and find that the transport here is very poor. Lots of people come to the office for information about transport. Often people have retired to rural villages and can't drive because of temporary illness or deteriorating eyesight. Mobility amongst the elderly tends to be dependent on the ability of the husband to drive. Also young people who haven't got cars need transport.*
- ☞ *A bad thing about life in Devon is that I have to fly home from London and there are no connections from Exeter or Bristol. It's difficult for older parents (disabled) to get the train from the airport in London. It would be better if there were flights from Bristol and Exeter so that we could go home.*
- ☞ *We have no bus service here. But we have a bus shelter! £4000 was spent on it but it gives us no proper protection from the rain and the drain floods in it. We sometimes use buses from the neighbouring village to meet friends. My Dad isn't happy about me using buses on my own.*
- ☞ *The transportation system is different from that of my country.*
- ☞ *Reducing traffic speed and noise and improving public transport could make life in Devon better. Public transport is impossible - unreliable and inconvenient*
- ☞ *Other concerns include lack of a late bus to return from Exeter if you want to go to cultural entertainment there.*
- ☞ *Have no car - this limits where I can go and where I can work.*
- ☞ *Disability parking problems for getting to social and religious events. Driving will soon become difficult for us because of eyesight. We're very dependent on the car.*

2). **The Countryside** was the main point of attraction about life in Devon for a third of the participants (‘n’=135) who described what makes life in Devon good. It figured as a factor in several participants’ decisions to move to Devon (both as a point of attraction in itself and for some participants as a contrast to pressures of city life) and contributes to the sense of quality of life for many. However, whilst some participants even valued the extremities to which one can ‘get away from it all’ in rural places, others felt that isolation was a negative consequence of rural life:

- ☞ *Best thing about Devon is the countryside and sea and isolation.*
- ☞ *Devon's beautiful, but there's nothing here- you can't live on a view. It's a total desert.*

In fact, as described in chapter 5 rurality is an influential factor in the distinctive nature of Black and Minority Ethnic demography in Devon, and compounds the isolation that many of our participants experience. For this reason, you’ll see in chapter 5 that rurality has been counted as a score in a Multiple Index of Isolation which we have constructed.

3). **Community Safety**

The Police have been involved in a number of the cases for which the Racial Equality Council has provided complainant aid. Analysis of case notes provided most information about Policing and Community Safety. In some instances the Police involvement was in response to calls directly to them about incidents of violent and aggressive behaviour. In other cases the police were involved through the Racial Equality Council. The support provided for victims of racism and issues to do with the reporting of incidents are covered in chapter 6, which deals with experience of prejudice and discrimination.

A few participants also talked about fear of crime that they did not link to racially motivated experiences. These concerns centred on anti-social behaviour on the part of young people:

- ☞ *Lax discipline especially vandalism is one of the bad things about living here.*
- ☞ *The behaviour of some of the drunken natives is one of the bad things about life at college here.*


- ☞ *Need more facilities for the young to keep them occupied - off the streets.*
- ☞ *I don't like my son [16] to go out at the evenings because the youth in Tiverton are out of control. He goes round to his friend's houses. One of the worst things about life in Devon is people getting drunk.*
- ☞ *The drugs scene is sending the town down hill - there've been deaths. There's nothing of the kids to do – they just hang out in the square or drive or take drugs in the square.*
- ☞ *Youngsters cause trouble all the time. Tiverton seems rough with lots of unemployment. Worry about the windows being smashed at night.*

Given that 65% of the participants described experiences of prejudice and discrimination, and that 89% experience multiple layers of isolation, any sense of fear of crime is bound to be amplified with a consequent increase in the feeling of vulnerability.

The participants themselves identified and discussed the above three themes – transport, countryside and community safety – as issues apart from race equality itself. And they do stand as issues in themselves. However, the learning from this research is that there is important value in appraising ‘single’ issues in the light of a broader perspective. This involves illuminated assessment to flag up possible ramifications of the impact of any one issue on a person, through analysis of how that issue encroaches on other aspects of the quality of a person’s life and by using wider information about Black and Minority Ethnic experience in Devon.

We hope that the information provided in this book provides a resource for service providers in taking a ‘person centred’ approach to engagement with Black and Minority Ethnic people in rural Devon and in assessing the impact of service planning and delivery.

In the next chapter, we begin by setting the backdrop to accounts of personal experience, by looking at Black and Minority Ethnic demography in Devon, and the profile of our participant sample.

This handbook and supporting tools  can be accessed at www.DevonREC.org