

*THE VISIBLE AND HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF LONDON'S HOMELESSNESS
A BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC ACCOUNT*

Addressing the Gaps in Service Provision, Policy and Practice



Race On The Agenda, 2007

AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to all the paid and volunteer staff at ROTA for their contribution to this publication and the two year research project that led to its development.

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The authors would also like to thank Off the Streets And Into Work (OSW), in particular Linda Butcher, for having the idea of setting up the Tackling Multiple Disadvantage (TMD) London Project and prioritising race as an issue from the start, and Carole Coulon. Many thanks also go to the other partnership organisations on TMD; the organisations from the homeless and BAME sectors who gave us invaluable information; Maddy Hill from the Greater London Authority; EQUAL for the funding; and Simon Kane for the cover photograph and help with design.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the homeless individuals who participated in the research from the beginning. Sharing your time, knowledge and experience with us made this report possible - Thank you.

November 2007

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR OF LONDON

“London is one of the most vibrant, dynamic and multicultural cities in the world, and this diversity is essential to its prosperity. However, the city is also divided between extremes of wealth and poverty, and poor housing and homelessness hits London's Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities disproportionately hard.

I am pleased to support ROTA's conference and the launch of its report which has sought to build on the knowledge we have of homelessness amongst London's BAME communities, in particular the issues and barriers they may face in accessing the capital's homelessness and other support services.

Through my Housing Strategy I want to tackle homelessness and overcrowding in the capital and see more appropriate housing-related support services being developed and maintained. I'm sure that ROTA's report will help contribute to the development of responsive and sensitive services that will meet the challenges of homelessness as experienced by London's BAME communities”.

Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London

November 2007



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FOREWORD

Homelessness is a reality not just for individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, but indeed for everyone. This is reflected in the increasing numbers of homeless people. In England, an estimated 1,180 sleep rough every day, out of which an estimated 600 are in London, one of the three most important city-players on the global economic stage.

Like all social failures, homelessness tends to hit those who are already disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable. In London, over fifty per cent of homeless people come from BAME groups, while more than half experience multiple disadvantages such as being disabled, having a mental health problem, or being drug or alcohol users.

ROTA's project aims to tackle the persistent inequalities and failures in the provision of services to homeless BAME individuals as well as shed light on the subtle, but yet important, dimensions of homelessness. Through evidence-based recommendations, best practice examples, the production of a film, a toolkit and a directory, ROTA hopes that this project proves useful to local, regional, national and international stakeholders.

Managing this project has been an eye opening experience. It illustrated the significance of partnership working, the consistent failures to protect those who are most vulnerable in our society, but more importantly it brought evidence of the difference we can make by ensuring that homeless peoples' voices are heard. By involving, respecting and including homeless people in decision-making, policies and practices become more evidence-based and real.

Dr. Theo Gavrielides, Head of Policy, ROTA

November 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ROTA is a social policy think-tank that has been active since 1986. ROTA works with London's BAME communities towards achieving social justice by the elimination of discrimination and promotion of human rights, diversity and equality of opportunity. ROTA achieves these aims by informing London's strategic decision-makers about the issues affecting the BAME voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the communities it serves and by making government policy more accessible to London's BAME¹ organisations.

This report presents the findings of a two year project that aimed to collect new evidence on the service provision to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) homeless individuals in London. Through original fieldwork, desk research, events and meetings with stakeholders, the project looked at existing gaps and put forward recommendations on how to address them. The project was funded by Equal and was carried out by ROTA as part of the London Tackling Multiple Disadvantage (TMD) Partnership.

Linking BAME and Mainstream homeless organisations: The project illustrates that there is considerable scope for further development of partnerships between BAME groups and the homeless sector; support exists for this from within the sectors themselves. Responses from surveyed organisations reveal that they wish to link up on the areas of awareness raising, information, referrals and service provision. BAME organisations that worked with mainly non-homeless individuals stated that they would like to be able to access more information on the needs of homeless individuals and services available in the mainstream. Mainstream organisations were keen to find out what services the BAME sector offered and whether referrals were possible for BAME clients with particular vulnerabilities such as alcohol use. It was noted however, that where mainstream homelessness agencies were taking most of their referrals from Local Authorities through Supporting People arrangements, they were restricted in setting up referral links with BAME organisations.

Diversity: The BAME homeless are not homogenous and this research shows that issues for differing nationalities and also BAME people who are also refugees, from Traveller and Gypsy communities, and/ or women, for example need to be recognised. BAME women face discrimination on grounds of race but also their gender, including from men within their own communities. The situation for refugee women fleeing domestic violence is particularly difficult where they have no recourse to public funds. An understanding of this diversity and a nuanced approach is therefore appropriate in order to provide suitable services. As an example, based on current evidence, a high proportion of older ex-homeless people of Irish origin have become institutionalised in hostels and need support.

Individualised Homeless Services that are compatible with human rights standards: Research with people using services and with providers from both the mainstream and BAME sectors suggests that there is a need for both provision based on peoples' homelessness status and their race. African, Caribbean, Gypsy and

¹ ROTA uses the term BAME to refer to all groups who are discriminated against on the grounds of their race, culture, colour, nationality or religious practice. This definition includes but is not exclusive to those people of African, Asian, Caribbean, Irish, Jewish, Roma and South East Asian decent.

Traveller cultures are areas of particular concern noted in this report. Human rights principles such as dignity, respect and equality were considered to be key standards for service provision which would impact on delivery to everyone, including all these communities and new arrivals.

Hidden Homeless: Homeless people are not only those who sleep rough, but also those who have spent time staying in overcrowded conditions with friends or relatives. Overcrowding can also have severe consequences in terms of mental and physical health outcomes that make it harder for those in the situation to gain appropriate accommodation and employment. Although our fieldwork found that the group of homeless individuals interviewed for ROTA's work were not hidden homeless, (partly due to the way we advertised for interviewees), our desk research indicated that BAME homeless individuals are more likely to be living in overcrowded accommodation and may be missed in statistics, as well as the design and delivery of services.

Gaps in Mainstream Homeless Services: The research participants described their experiences of mainstream provision as both good and bad. Many of the African and African-Caribbean male research participants described a poor relationship between themselves and the frontline staff in homelessness organisations, reporting that staff stereotyped them as aggressive. It was noted that as in other areas of employment, few senior members of staff were from BAME backgrounds.

Gaps in BAME Services: In terms of specialist BAME agencies, only three of the sixteen homeless research participants had accessed BAME VCS organisations working with the homeless. The majority had not known that these services existed, but felt that such organisations would make a difference to their situation. One of the points raised by BAME organisations is that of the historic and continued under resourcing of the BAME VCS which prevents it delivering in the way it would wish to.

Service user involvement: The need to involve homeless individuals was a key tenet of the broader Equal TMD project that this research is linked to. The good practice examples described in this document show how this has both helped improve key services for the homeless, and has empowered many to take more initiative to improve their own circumstances. ROTA's project illustrates that service users can also influence policy relating to service delivery in order to make it more appropriate.

Influencing policy: London's governance is complicated. There are European, national, regional and local bodies that produce policies, initiatives and services that impact on London's BAME homeless individuals. Future research and work to engage with policy makers will need to take into account the findings of this report. Everyone will need to work to ensure that initiatives such as the Mayor's Housing Strategy and Supporting People are aware of and supportive of the needs of all.

Key Recommendations

1. Developing Partnerships:

- i) The need and desire for BAME and mainstream organisations working with BAME homeless individuals to work in closer partnership can be partly supported by this projects work. ROTA's toolkit (Annex II), best practice examples (Annex I), film and directory of organisations (Annex V) can help with the initial development of such partnerships.

- ii) There also needs to be support to allow equitable partnerships to develop allowing full engagement of the usually much smaller BAME organisations.
- iii) What could complement ROTA's work is a pan-London network that could act as a broker between BAME and mainstream homeless organisations. The network should help ensure that the directory is accessible and kept up to date; encourage the partnership working and increase awareness of services among clients. It could also continue development work with the Federation of Black Housing Associations to raise awareness of BAME homeless agencies and related groups.

2. Diversity and mobility of BAME homelessness:

- i) The BAME homeless constitute a very mobile group. A particular community (e.g. people from Eritrea or Sri Lanka) may be highly represented in the homelessness population within a particular area, but this may not be the case in a neighbouring borough. Moreover, as newer communities arrive, BAME individuals who may be considered as highly represented in homelessness numbers may cease to be so within short periods of time. Therefore, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the significance of locality and the provision of support to organisations working at the neighbourhood level.

Further examples of groups with specific needs within the broader BAME category include:

- ii) **Refugee and Asylum Seekers (RAS) and Migrants:** While this report did not have a remit to cover specific issues relating to RAS communities, London's RAS and Migrant communities are a key component of the broader make-up of London's BAME community. It is important that mainstream and specialist initiatives take into account their needs and link them to the Mayor's Strategy on Refugee Integration currently being developed, specifically its proposals on housing.
- iii) **Gypsies and Travellers:** Gypsies and Travellers face particular discrimination in terms of housing provision and have specific needs. Specialist Gypsy and Traveller organisations should be supported to carry out work with the statutory sector in regard to issues such as the provision of better facilities; more affordable electricity and heating, and assistance in the repair of caravans.
- iv) **Irish Homeless:** As noted, a high proportion of older hostel residents of Irish origin have become institutionalised. Permanent housing schemes are therefore needed which provide continuing support. There is also a role for specialist provision, for those living in poor conditions in the private rented sector. This might include befriending schemes drawing on Irish volunteers.
- v) The research also suggests a lack of London-wide or borough data on Irish Travellers and ex-offenders. Data collection and further research on the special needs of these groups is recommended.
- vi) **Women:** Service provision for BAME homeless women must be highly specialised and well-orchestrated to prevent them falling between the gaps. Outreach, advice and support should be provided, particularly in terms of domestic violence and refugee women. This should recognise that female

counsellors from their own community may be best placed to meet the need and that refuge places are essential.

3. **Ethnic monitoring and evaluation:**

- i) Mainstream VCS and statutory organisations need to monitor the outcomes of their services in terms of race and nationality. Monitoring followed by evaluation allows the development of services to meet identified needs and gaps in provision. Where a public authority is involved, this recommendation should be linked with their statutory obligation under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act.
- ii) Organisations should consider using as broad a range of categories as possible so as to understand the true diversity of the BAME groups in London they are serving and how their services impact on users. Irish people, for example are often categorised under the 'White' and their specific issues can go unnoticed.
- iii) Internal processes should also be monitored to ensure staff throughout an organisations structure, reflect London's population and the clients it serves.

4. **Accessible advice:** Information on housing, education, health and employment needs to be made available in accessible formats in non-discriminatory ways. This will include using trained staff and specialist BAME organisations that understand the issues; email briefings and bulletins; BAME media and networking. Information may need to be available in a variety of community languages, or translation and interpretation services made available for those both literate and unable to read. A recent response by ROTA to the consultation on the Mayor's Health Inequality Strategy stated that advocacy (even more so that translation or interpretation services) allowed people to help shape as well as obtain public services².

5. **Cultural sensitivity and human rights training:** To ensure the needs of all BAME homeless individuals are met, cultural and human rights training for staff in both mainstream and statutory services is needed. The new Equality and Human Rights Commission should work with public service providers that have a role in addressing homelessness and unemployment to encourage such training. This recommendation should be linked with the annual audits carried out by the existing regulators and commissioners such as the Audit Commission, the Healthcare Commission and the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

6. **Hidden homelessness:** All those working to develop and provide services need to take into account that BAME homeless individuals are more likely to be 'hidden homeless' rather than 'street homeless' and ensure their needs are reflected in the work.

7. **Outreach work:** BAME organisations need to engage in more outreach to ensure that BAME homeless individuals are aware of the support they can provide. This will need to be properly resourced to be effective.

² Gavrielides, T., Developing the Mayor's Health Inequality Strategy for London, (ROTA, November 2007).

8. **Homelessness Training:** Targeted information and training for BAME organisations on the needs of homeless individuals and services available in the mainstream homelessness and statutory sectors is critical to developing effective referral networks.
9. **Funding:** BAME organisations need information on and access to funding in the homelessness sector in order to engage more fully in providing services directly and for partnership working.
10. **Combining housing, training and employment initiatives:** A holistic approach to training, employment and housing would enable more homeless BAME individuals to tackle the discrimination they face in all these areas and succeed in maintaining a home and job in the longer term. For instance, as money is being spent on housing estates and neighbourhoods to meet the Decent Homes Standard, it is hoped that this spending will be broadened to support the creation of local jobs, community-owned businesses, and increase the skills base of local people³. Access to new jobs and capacity building for local tenant groups are a part of one such initiative called 'added value' and 'housing plus.'⁴ It is essential that BAME homeless individuals are empowered to get involved in such initiatives.
11. **Volunteering:** The critical role volunteering can play not just as a route to employment opportunities, but in building self-esteem for individuals, should be raised and more widely promoted as an option for homeless people. Linking homelessness agencies with volunteering brokerage agencies would ensure greater access to voluntary work for BAME homeless people⁵, who may wish to volunteer within the BAME communities.
12. **Improving health:**
 - i) The particular mental and physical health needs of BAME homeless individuals need to be addressed in service provision. The effective promotion of equality policies within the health services sector is critical to combating discriminatory procedures and assessments, particularly with regard to the treatment of homeless BAME individuals.
 - ii) As ROTA noted in its recent response⁶ to the consultation, the Mayor's Health Inequality Strategy, currently in development, provides a unique opportunity to tackle this persistent inequality affecting one of the most vulnerable groups in London.
13. **Service user involvement:** It is imperative that all homelessness work - frontline delivery, service planning and policy design has the involvement of homeless and ex-homeless BAME individuals to ensure their needs and aspirations are being met.

³ Simmonds, D., Getting Jobs: Harder for Some: Working Brief 151, (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, February 2003), p.10 -13.

⁴ Simmonds, D., 'Getting Jobs', p. 87-88.

⁵ Simmonds, D., 'Getting Jobs', p. 87-88.

⁶ Gavrielides, T., 'Developing the Mayor's Health Inequality Strategy'.