

Harrow Equalities Centre Intersectional Case Study

Introduction

Harrow Equalities Centre is a four year old charity which was set up in response to the identified local need to address discrimination in one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London. HEC offers information and advice to individuals, businesses, voluntary groups and public bodies. The main activities are hate crime casework, immigration advice, and equalities training.

1. Defined Population and Community

1.1 Minority-ethnic groups

Harrow Equalities Centre serves a population of 239,100. Sixty-two per cent of residents come from minority ethnic groups. The largest minority ethnic groups are Asian or Asian British residents (excluding Chinese) who constitute almost one-third of the population. Under one-third of the population identifies itself as White British with high proportions residing in the north of the borough, while Asian or Asian British residents are well established in the south. Higher proportions of Black or Black British residents live in wards in the centre and the south of Harrow.

1.2 Religious diversity

The borough is also noted for having the highest level of religious diversity of any local authority in England and Wales. This suggests there is a real chance that two people picked at random will have different religions or beliefs. Harrow has the highest density of Gujarat Hindus in the UK, and two of its wards boast the largest membership of any single synagogue in Europe.

1.3 Disability in London

Facts and figures from Inclusion London cite that there are approximately 1.4 million disabled people in London and minority ethnic populations are more likely to be disabled, comprising 19.2 per cent of Asian/Asian British groups and 17.8 per cent of Black/Black British groups.

2. Problems and Barriers Faced

2.1 Hate crime figures and under-reporting

The borough is considered to have relatively low levels of hate crime, but anecdotal reports suggest significant under-reporting. Crime figures from the Metropolitan Police for Harrow in the 12 months to January 2014 show that there were a total of 235 racist, religious, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and Islamophobic hate crime offences. HEC dealt with a proportion of these but senses it is only scratching the surface. There are many reasons for under-reporting, including the victim's reluctance to go to the police, their mistrust of public sector agencies, the threat of reprisals and a real fear that they will not be believed or taken seriously. Police figures do not include the numbers relating to disability hate crime.

2.2 Intersectional discrimination

Victims of hate crime often face intersectional discrimination although local data shows levels of race hate crime are high than other kinds of hate crime, apart from domestic violence. This reflects the national picture. For some residents who experience it, the recording of intersectional discrimination is a cause of frustration when their experiences are not logged in a way that reflects the kinds of discrimination they face. The individual

case study supplied to support this document, relates to the intersection of race and disability.

3. Challenges

3.1 Increase in advice

Considering Harrow's diversity, coupled with 44.8 per cent born abroad, and a growing but unknown number of refugees, there is a huge increase in the number of people seeking advice, advocacy and support. In an environment of limited financial resources, this in turn puts pressure on advice organisations like Harrow Equalities Centre. Therefore, in the face of changes to welfare and benefits policy, all Harrow voluntary organisations are reporting a higher demand for advice and advocacy.

3.2 Fundraising challenges

One of the challenges faced by HEC and many other small charities is the problem of raising funds and developing new income streams. In the context of the government's austerity programme, it has become even more difficult. However, one of the ways the organisation has addressed this is by engaging in collaborative work with organisations such as the Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau. Harrow CAB has a service level agreement with Harrow Council to deliver local face to face advice services with the inclusion of HEC commissioned to deliver hate crime advice.

3.3 Impact of austerity

The impact of government austerity measures and cuts to the legal aid budget is having a huge impact on those seeking legal advice, particularly on vulnerable and less well-off residents. Since April 2013, legal aid has no longer been available unless it involves a client being detained or unless a client suffers domestic violence or is seeking asylum.

4. Positive Outcomes

4.1 Client-centred approach

HECs face to face advice work with victims involves them in finding solutions to what are often, very traumatic situations. Therefore, the HEC hate crime caseworker provides a client-centred approach, applying skills, knowledge and experience which enable clients to make informed decisions. Such decisions can include the desire for a housing transfer or legal action against a perpetrator.

4.2 Casework procedure

The procedure the caseworker applies comprises a first interview (where the issues and options available are discussed), making formal enquiries and collecting evidence. This is supported by efficient administration processes. All hate crime cases are systematically recorded in HECs casework management system. New and on-going cases are discussed at staff supervision meetings and summaries of cases are taken to the HEC trustee board for discussion. In addition, HEC holds quarterly meetings with the Harrow Council service manager for cohesion and engagement, and the Metropolitan Police Harrow Community Safety Unit manager to discuss action on cases. Between these meetings, the caseworker pushes for action on the most serious of cases with the two agencies.

4.3 Experiences of disadvantage

Harrow Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2012) records that one in four adults in the borough will experience disabling mental health problems, and residents from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly new arrival refugees, experience not only higher rates

of mental illness but face barriers to accessing help. If you are a woman, an older person, are from the LGBT community or have a learning disability, you are more likely to suffer disadvantage. In order to minimise client disadvantage and improve outcomes, HEC commissioned an independent survey in September 2013 which revealed that 81 per cent of clients claimed that their personal situation improved as a result of casework advice they received and 8 out of 10 clients reported increased self-esteem, confidence, a reduction in stress levels and anxiety, as well as improved wellbeing.

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Harrow Equalities Centre, Individual Case Study

The facts

Ravi lives with his mother in a ground floor maisonette supplied by Harrow Council. Ravi and his mother are Asian, both disabled and under the care of a mental health team. They have lived in their property for the last 10 years.

Three years ago, a gang of eight young men in their early 20s began loitering around their property, smashing bottles and causing noise nuisance. Ravi, himself was of a similar age and on one occasion politely asked them to cease their activity. From that day on the gang harassed Ravi and his mother because of their race and disabilities. They frequently called them "Paki" and chanted other racist remarks, often on their way out of the mental health clinic. They also attacked their property, threatened and physically abused Ravi and his mother.

In one of the incidents, Ravi was physically attacked, resulting in him being hospitalised for a few weeks. However, the abuse did not end there. On the return from a trip to the local supermarket, two of the perpetrators approached Ravi and his mother with a knife and threatened to kill them if they went to the police. Ravi now fearing for his life and that of his mother called the police. The police responded, but their intervention failed to put an end to the harassment.

Ravi also contacted the council housing department about seeking alternative premises but was told they could not help him. They said he would have to look for property himself. However, when Ravi and his mother visited estate agents, they reacted negatively to the Shah's mental health. The stress of looking for property took its toll on the relationship between Ravi and his mother, culminating in them having an angry exchange in their home. As a result, a neighbour called the police and Ravi was arrested and cautioned. It was at that point that Ravi contacted Harrow Equalities Centre.

Intervention of Harrow Equalities Centre

In his first meeting with the hate crime caseworker Ravi said he was anxious about the perpetrators coming back and intimidating him, and the effect it could have on his mental health. He said that on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most severe, he felt very depressed and suicidal. He also felt that because of his disability, the police were not responding swiftly enough or taking him seriously because of his disability.

The caseworker agreed an action plan with Ravi and discussed the options available to him, including taking action against the perpetrators, and putting appropriate measures in place to secure the safety of Ravi and his mother.

Outcomes

The hate crime caseworker raised the seriousness of the Shah's case at a multi-agency panel where the police and council officers were present. As a result, regular police patrols were made in the neighbourhood, arrests were made, and the Shah's were considered an urgent case for management transfer from their property to another.