

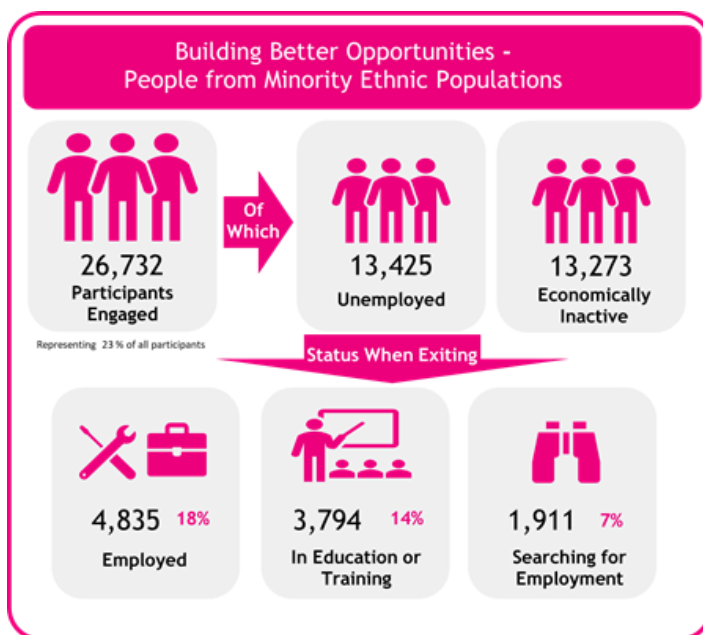
Building Better Opportunities - Quarterly Update - July 2020

As many of you will know, the current COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the many diverse communities that our projects support. The pandemic and resulting lockdown has presented BBO projects with a range of challenges. The unprecedented experiences of 2020 have highlighted the disproportionate health and economic impact that the crises has placed on the black and Asian diaspora and minority ethnic populations. With this in mind, we have taken this opportunity to focus this update on sharing the experiences and challenges of some of those projects who are supporting minority communities and how they have continued to support their participants during extraordinary times.

BBO and Minority Ethnic Communities

By the end of March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic had sparked the UK's lockdown, 115,953 participants had progressed through BBO with over 36% of those people achieving one of the designated programme results (employment, training or education, or job search) depending on individual needs and personal goals.

Progress on employability and employment is looking strong for BBO. Yet how is the programme doing on its important, underlying thematic drivers: 'social inclusion' and 'combating discrimination of any kind'?



A consideration of the acronym 'B.A.M.E.' (Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic) is useful insofar as all BBO projects have targets to engage and support people from BAME communities towards or into employment. These targets are being closely reviewed within quarterly reporting, and continuous improvement is the general trend across the land. Indeed, at the close of March 2020 a sub-total of 26,732 people had been recorded within the BAME demographic when

signed up for various BBO projects around England. That BAME proportion is 23% of the participant total, which is a higher percentage than the proportion of minority ethnic populations in data recorded for the nation, such as the Census.

Looking across the programme, there are more than 40 projects explicitly stating that they will focus on supporting people from BAME communities. Grant holders state that many different, diverse ethnic communities are commonly experiencing *extra* barriers to employment. Some of these barriers - without attempting a comprehensive list - include: unrecognised qualifications that were gained overseas, or language needs/ESOL; cultural norms; and discrimination along ethnic/racial lines.

As stated above, the unprecedented experiences of 2020 have highlighted further challenges, with the black and Asian diaspora and minority ethnic populations facing disproportionate impacts from health and economic crises.

Below, is a small selection of relevant insights and experiences from some of our grant holders.

Changing Experiences During the Pandemic

Prior to lockdown the **GREAT Project** Leicester provided key aspects of support to all participants by addressing the barriers they may face, including:

- Lack of confidence or motivation
- Lack of skills, experience, or qualifications
- Disabilities and Health conditions
- Mental health or anxiety
- Language barriers
- Lack of access to childcare
- Lack of opportunities
- family members
- Transport or cost of transport

Although these barriers to employment are relevant to members of all communities, BBO projects have found that they have a disproportionate impact on individuals within minority ethnic groups.

In the weeks prior to lockdown, projects that support participants from minority ethnic groups noted that behaviours amongst participants started to change. The **BRIDGES project**, reported that that people were generally confused with a lack clarity regarding what was happening in response to the pandemic. The lack of English language skills meant many of their participants were generally not aware of what was occurring; key messages of washing your hands, for example, were being missed or just not understood.

To combat this, their ESOL sessions became more and more focused on ensuring health messages coming out locally and nationally were being understood. During 1-1 interventions staff were often being asked what was happening and what individuals could do to remain safe. These ESOL sessions and support groups are perhaps a key component of many of our BBO projects.

BRIDGES also offered 1-2-1 telephone support explaining the Government's guidelines and why it was important to follow the guidance as many didn't understand or were unable to read the statements the government had released. They sourced translations of guidance from health agencies and sent these to participants for them to read in their own language. As lockdown took hold, BBO projects were determined to continue with delivery, though understood that they would have to adapt their delivery models. Projects across the board have met this challenge head on and continued to meet the needs of their communities.

Digital Exclusion

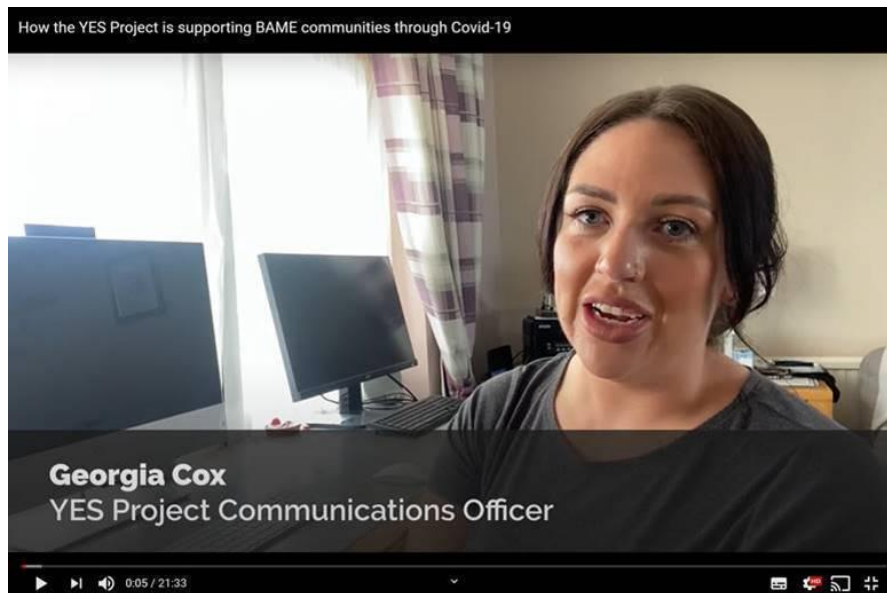
With the change in delivery, and the move towards online support, several projects reported that many participants initially struggled to adjust. This struggle was two-fold: a lack of access to equipment, and a lack of knowledge or experience in using video calling or Zoom via their laptop or smartphone and the fear of interacting and engaging with the project and new faces virtually.

In an effort to overcome this, the **Great project** in Leicester created a 'how to' guide, in written and video form, to enable them to support participants to access Zoom. Participants became more comfortable interacting online, and this helped them to overcome the digital barriers they may face when adjusting to virtual support available via online sessions and workshops.

Limited access to IT equipment and internet access has also proven a major challenge. Many of our participants would previously use public libraries to access IT equipment and the internet. At the outset of lockdown, a number of BBO projects surveyed their participants to gain a better understanding of their needs. The results of these again highlighted the disproportionate effect that COVID-19 was having on minority communities. For example, one BBO project reported that less than 10% of respondents from an ethnic minority background had regular access to the internet.

With the above in mind, projects have ensured that they connect with participants in the most appropriate way, including via telephone or text message. Projects have looked at other ways in which they can overcome these obstacles, for example:

- After speaking to their BAME partner organisations such as the Refugee Council, and also linking up with schemes that provide free IT devices, **Good Work project** in Sheffield ensured that their Digital Inclusion partners provided digital support. This meant that participants were digitally able to search and apply for jobs, take part in interviews, and even carry out their role using digital technology. This digital upskilling allows those with no previous digital experience to not only continue with their BBO journey, whilst also giving them experience that they will be able to take into any future job role.
- Through their delivery partner, the **Bangladeshi Youth and Cultural Service**, the **YES project** has begun to arrange conversations with parents and other family members to improve access to IT equipment and suitable study space in the house and to emphasise the importance of young people continuing to study. The below video includes Project Worker, **Ebrahim Ali**, and YES participant, **Mahek Sheik**, talking about how the project is supporting minority communities in Leicester.



- Participants on the **GREAT project** have sought support from each other during lockdown. These participants were not known to each other prior to meeting on the project but have formed connections on the project that have come to be a lifeline for individuals. They are now able to connect with others who are facing similar barriers or have similar life and cultural experiences. In order to continue this support outside of the project the participants have shared their contact details and formed their own support groups.

Cultural Challenges

The cultural issues and barriers faced are not necessarily universal to the entire BAME demographic. However, within the context of the current Covid-19 crisis, BBO projects are familiar with the additional challenges they are facing. Understanding and being mindful of cultural differences, as well as having project workers with lived experience, has allowed our projects to continue to deliver for the communities in which they operate.

- **BRIDGES project** staff have supported participants that live in an extended family with their cultural issues and situations that have arisen. They have allocated staff with the same ethnicity who have experience of the cultural demands and additional struggles and stresses that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about whilst families are in isolation. Staff have also volunteered doing shopping for their participants and offering food bank tokens. This has proven to be another challenge as many within ethnically diverse communities are reluctant to access

such services due to the stigma attached. Individuals talk about the embarrassment and humiliation meaning they are less willing to participate.

- **Good Work project** have created their own Good Work ethical jobs platform. They are working with employers to advertise their posts on this platform so that their participants have first access to jobs currently on the market. Employers can only advertise on the platform if their role pays the real living wage and if they are an employer that practices equality and promotes diversity. This platform is allowing minority groups direct access to potential employment opportunities without the fear of discrimination.

Recent studies have identified a range of factors, sometimes inter-related, that contribute to economic inactivity, unemployment, and poverty among different minority ethnic groups, Caring responsibilities - both childcare and responsibilities for caring for older or disabled relatives - are among those factors that prevent adults, usually women, from participating with BBO projects. Some of our projects also report cultural challenges in encouraging women participants to actively seek work, in certain cases sensitivities around the expectations of women being the primary carer within the family.

- The **SWEET project** in London try to overcome these barriers by conducting outreach events with their partners whose project workers understand the cultural sensitivities involved, as their project workers are invariably from within the communities they are trying to reach. In essence, the support workers become role models for the participants.
- The **Great project** offers free childcare alongside in-house workshops and activities to ease the pressure on participants who may struggle to take part due to a lack of childcare and so be unable to fully engage with the project. However, with the onset of COVID-19 and social distancing this has added even more pressure to those wanting to engage with the project. The **GREAT Project** has conducted a group interview over Zoom to capture how project participants are supporting one another during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment Support Officers **Yachna** and **Desrie** also share their thoughts on how project support networks can make a genuine difference.



Mental Wellbeing

Prior to COVID-19, multiple, diverse BAME communities already faced disproportionate prevalence of mental health conditions, which have a detrimental impact on an individual's ability to seek, secure, and stay in employment. In an effort to reduce the impact of the pandemic on individuals within minority ethnic groups, our projects continued to support the mental wellbeing of participants. As projects have moved to a remote delivery model, BBO projects have continued to engage their participants with regular telephone contact to help prevent loneliness and social isolation.

- The **Great project** has introduced two new online workshop sessions covering aspects of personal wellbeing and building self-confidence to help support participants during this time. These sessions have been well attended and work well as they enable the participants to listen, reflect and learn from each other and ultimately understand that they are not alone in this situation.
- **Good Work project's** main referral source is currently through their relationship with NHS Community Mental Health Teams. They refer customers into their services who are accessing secondary mental health services and have a goal to get into employment. They also have measures in place to ensure that they are not overlooking minority groups, by targeting potential referring organisations other than those under secondary mental health services, as they are fully aware of the

stigmas that surround mental health in various BAME communities. These include City of Sanctuary and the Refugee Council.

The BRIDGES Case Study



The BBO Bridges Partnership and Just Straight Talk (JST) are committed to partnership working with community organisations across the Black Country, especially so during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Our principle is not to discriminate; our aim is to reach as many people who need genuine support and either provide this support or link participants to it.

Organisation Lead, Bally, created the S.A.M.H.S.G (Sandwell Asian Mental Health Support Group) to support people within Asian communities in Sandwell with their mental health. Bally experienced bullying and isolation in the workplace, and as part of her recovery it led her to focus on her culture and background. Volunteering to providing regular weekly meetings for all ages and gender, Bally began to see the benefit her groups were having on those who attended. Through the support group S.A.M.H.S.G are able to challenges stigmas and raises awareness for mental health within Asian Communities and beyond.

“When the lockdown began, I felt completely cut off, and, like many, I had to self-isolate, for personal health reasons”, Bally recalls. “It was a very uncertain time, I’m not the best at ‘tech’ and felt I only had my phone to call around my support group and check in on their wellbeing and keep S.A.M.H.S.G. running. I really didn’t think we could keep the group going. Helping others is a key part of who I am”

Bally, connected with Just Straight Talk (JST) via the Sandwell Networkers group and has always kept strong contact, collaborating with various workshops, celebrations, and community events.

“JST took the time to coach me on how to connect to video calls”, Bally laughs, “Very patient, it took a while, but it really opened up doors... I just can’t believe that in such a

short space of time, I'm now able to coach members of my group to connect to SAMHSG online meetings"

Within a few weeks S.A.M.H.S.G were beginning their digital revolution. Bally enlisted one of her volunteers to support her with the 'tech' and plans were made for a JST remote coaching session ahead of launching their first online support group.

"Being able to run our support groups online is priceless. It would not have been possible without working in partnership with JST & BBO Bridges. I'm so thankful that they have helped us to continue to support our participants. There were some challenges along the way, but with a little help we overcame them!"

The Future

Given what we have seen and heard from projects during lockdown and what research and data is informing us; it is anticipated that there will be an increased demand for BBO services once face-to-face contact returns.

BBO projects are currently planning how they will meet this demand and who is most likely to need support and what that might look like. Projects will be able to utilise their existing skills and experience to address key barriers and create bespoke programmes that meet the needs of their communities.

In this global health and economic crisis, it is anticipated that ethnic minority groups will face greater barriers to engagement, with this in mind our projects stand determined to meet this challenge and continue to be a lifeline to participants within diverse ethnic communities and allow them the opportunity to continue their own journey towards their goals.

I will leave you with some words from **Ebrahim ALI**, Project Worker at YES:

"I hope there is a vision shared by all people who are concerned, not just people but organisations, who are concerned with reducing barriers to improve people's quality of life and those of us who will fight for equality for all. It's very important that we come together and become even stronger."

Next Steps

We will soon be sending out a questionnaire to all BBO grant holders where we hope to draw upon your knowledge, experiences and learning in order to improve our understanding of the challenges you have faced, both pre and post COVID-19 and steps you have taken to address these.

The ERSA Employability Awards 2020



The ERSA Employability Awards 2020 winners have been announced. Well done to all BBO projects who were shortlisted in this year's awards.

Congratulations to **Building Bridges Team** in Swindon and **Include IT Mersey** who were joint winners of the **ERSA Team of the Year Award**, which recognises a team of frontline staff which has demonstrated outstanding commitment in meeting and exceeding the delivery aims of an employment provider.

Gill Tollitt of **Include IT Mersey** also won ERSA's '**Frontline Advisor of the Year 2020**' Award

Other BBO projects who were highly commended at the awards include:

- **Let's Get Working Project** - in the category of **Disability and Health Provider of the Year**
- **Business 2 Business** - in category of **Supply Chain Partner of The Year**
- **Kay Hope** nominated by **Moving on Tyne and Wear** - in category **Frontline Adviser of The Year**

Also a very special mention to **Pat** nominated by **Moving On Tyne & Wear**, who was commended in the category of **Significant Achiever of The Year** which recognises a specific jobseeker who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to overcoming barriers to enter and maintain work.

A full list of this year's winners can be found [here](#). The Awards ceremony can be viewed via ERSA's YouTube Channel via the following links: Part one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lPcDICAzU7s> Part two: <https://youtu.be/nHtQai2jN8U>

National Evaluation Update

Evaluation report

Ecorys' latest national evaluation report, will be available on the [evaluation website](#) in the coming weeks. This report brings together evidence from various evaluation strands to present an overview of the latest developments and achievements of the programme. It specifically reports on the final findings of the participant survey and looks at how projects initially responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the adaptations made to continue to support participants.

Learning papers

Some further learning papers based on the evaluation evidence have been produced - on the theme of [in-work support](#) and [managing complex funding](#). They look at what different BBO projects have done in terms of these themes, what has worked well and some key tips.

Future evaluation activity

The National Lottery Community Fund have asked Ecorys to continue to undertake evaluation activity until the end of the programme in 2022. to ensure the ongoing achievements and learning from the programme are appropriately captured and shared. Evidence gathering will continue with a participant survey seeking to capture evidence of the sustainability of outcomes, further rounds of a grant holder survey and more in-depth research with grant holders and stakeholders.

GDPR

There have been a number of data breaches reported on the BBO programme. These mainly relate to unauthorised access to paper versions of participant records, several involving thefts of records from vehicles. There has also been some confusion around how these data breaches are reported. We advise all grant holders to review the ESF Action Note 020/18 for additional advice relating to the General Data Protection Regulation that is available [here](#).

We also advise all lead and partner organisations to review storage arrangements for both paper and electronic records and carefully consider this in relation to mobile workers, and to ensure staff understand the organisational requirements. Data breaches must be reported to ESFDATA.BREACH@DWP.GOV.UK

Reporting Fraud

To be consistent with organisational policy, we request that grant holders should in the first instance report all potential fraud concerns to The National Lottery Community Fund's central fraud inbox: fraud@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk

Fraud concerns can also be reported through the fraud hotline number which is: 0800 496 9991.