

**On the Margin:  
Research report on the needs and experiences of  
Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) young people in  
Bexley**



# **ACTIVE HORIZONS**

youth participation for change

APRIL 2011

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# Preface



I believe it was important for Active Horizons to lead in undertaking this research to highlight the problems facing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) young people in Bexley and also encourage them to make positive contributions to the community. This research is to ensure that BME young people experiencing difficulties will be supported through planning and provision of appropriate services, as well as engage them in productive ways.

I have always believed that the key to un-locking the potential of BME young people lies in our collective ability to work together as a community. This also requires the active involvement of the young people themselves in order to help them achieve their goals in a sustained and progressive way. This report is looking at various issues relating to BME young people detailing equality and diversity strategies to enable young people, workers and practitioners to recognise the challenges faced by BME young people and how to address those challenges.

It will also advocate for the development of effective BME networks among policy makers and providers to enable them gain insight and useful tools for a range of operations: To promote diversity interventions within all sectors of socio economic development including education, recreation, security and mental health promotion. These networks can also translate policies into practical actions and vice versa. It can add value to the lives of young people by helping to develop their talents and potential.

We at Active Horizons will not only continue to demonstrate our commitment and belief in promoting the diversity agenda for young people, but we will continue to implement best practices and to advocate on behalf of young people towards this aim. It is also my hope that this research in addition to other initiatives aimed at improving the well being of BME young people will make Active Horizons a pathway for achieving excellence. This will also enable us to continue to promote social justice and offer sustainable, committed, imaginative, transforming and well grounded solutions to some of the deepest needs of young people from BME communities.

**Yeukai J Taruvinga**  
**Director**

# Young Researchers

“I was amazed at how young people share the same experiences in life. I am glad that being part of this research will voice those concerns”

Cherub Chidowe  
(Aged 15)



“I think it is important that we young people should take an active role in our communities and to make a difference”

Rufaro Bere (Aged 17)



“This research has been an eye opener for me because it has enabled me to learn more about young people”

Gabriel O Adams (Aged 24)



“I have gained a lot of skills being part of this research and as a young person, this opportunity is really important”

Katia Duru (Aged 16)-



“I feel empowered by the opportunity to play a role in this great assignment”

Tony Augustine  
(Aged 19)



# THANK YOU

On behalf of Active Horizons, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to all the young people who participated in the design and implementation of this research namely:- Cherub Chidowe, Gabriel Adams, Leah, Junior, Rufaro Bere, Tope, Tony Augustine, Thu Vu, Patience Owusu and Abisola Arobieke for contributing immensely in conducting the interviews and focus group activities. Also special thanks to Marie-Lyse Numuhoza and Carina Crawford for providing research training to the young people. We also thank all the young people (respondents) that gave their time to be interviewed and took part in the focus groups meetings.

Special thanks also goes to Tom Strannix from the Bexley Voluntary Service Council for his advice and support, as well as representatives of faith and voluntary organisations such as African Association, Bangladeshi Association, Bexley Afro-Caribbean Association, Insight Bexley, Bexley Council for Equality and Diversity, Crayford Mosque, Peace International Prayer Centre and Praxis whose diverse contributions made this research possible.

We also wish to register our appreciation with John Mensah Director of Outreach Management Services for his immense support and advice towards the research and his willingness to compile and edit the report.

We wish to say a big thank you to the long list of individuals and organisations whose names could not be mentioned in this report due to space for their invaluable support towards the accomplishment of this task.

**Finally our sincerest appreciation also goes to Praxis for funding this research project**



# Executive Summary

Over the past ten years there has been an astonishing increase of young people from the ethnic minority communities in the London borough of Bexley. Whilst it seems as if it is a new experience for Bexley, there has been a long history of immigrants coming to live in Bexley. However what is unique now is the scale of diversity the migrant community, which has become part of Bexley.

In planning for this research, it became clear that the ethnic demography has been dramatically changing, particularly in schools, even though statistics are unavailable. This research mainly engaged young people from migrant backgrounds who have either directly and indirectly experience trauma and challenges like war, torture, rape and violence in their countries of origin.

The young people fall broadly in three large categories of: - those who arrive alone (often referred to as unaccompanied or separated), those who arrive with families, and those born to migrant families after arrival in the UK.

With an approximate population of 56,900 children or young people aged 0-19 years living in Bexley. Around 25 percent of Bexley's school pupils are from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Of the disabled population of young people in Bexley around 20 percent are from BME backgrounds. However there is a shortage of information on the issues they face as migrants and in some cases a lack of representation or voice in civic life.

Studies have shown that ethnic communities are disadvantaged in socio-economic, legal and political spheres. Particularly young refugees they often experience unequal access to economic and social opportunities that their non migrant counterparts access. In addition, they also experience racism and bullying mainly because they are not able to speak English very well and in the end they withdraw and stay away from people.

This report therefore, concentrates on the individual needs to aid policy makers and service providers to better plan, expand and improve their services in to cover all categories of young people across the borough. They also have to acknowledge the contributions of BME young people in Bexley despite the barriers and problems they face. The research is also aimed at halting or reversing negative cultures and patterns among young people themselves.

## Overview of young people in Bexley

There are approximately 53,940 BME children and young people aged 0-19 years living in Bexley (GLA 2010 - Ethnic Group Population Projections). 51% of children and young people in Bexley are male and 49% are female. The percentage of children by age who are resident in the borough as of 2010 is follows:

<b>Age</b>	0-4	27%
	5-9	24%
	10-14	24%
	15-19	26%

Fig.1

The percentage of children by age who are resident in the borough as of 2015 is follows: (GLA 2010 – Age Group Population Projections).

<b>Age</b>	0-4	26%
	5-9	26%
	10-14	23%
	15-19	23%

Fig.2

81% of children & young people in Bexley are White, 14% are Black, 5% are Asian, 0.4% are Chinese and 2% are others. Minority ethnic communities living in Britain. BME groups are considerably younger than the population at large. BME communities including asylum seekers and refugees are often socio-economically disadvantaged and subjected to racism on both personal and institutional levels. Recent government reports have urged councils to develop policies on community cohesion, to help promote diversity and combat racism. Young asylum seekers and refugees have been given scant mention in these reports. However, the development of young people strategies must include the needs of these most vulnerable of groups. Involving children and young people in the planning, delivering and evaluation of government services brings significant benefits. If young people's views are taken into account, services can be tailored to meet real, rather than presumed need.

The profiles of ethnic communities in Bexley gives crucial insight of their activities and experiences but also presents a reminder of the many other communities that the sector knows little about. This mapping research report is a qualitative research but does not seek to be comprehensive or exhaustive, yet the intent is to gain a clearer picture of life for young migrant communities. It is important to make sure those findings from this report and the proposed recommendations are discussed and acted on by relevant agencies.

## Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore and investigate issues around young people and how these issues impact on them. It will also make appropriate recommendations for improved services and facilities for young people, increase awareness on young people's matters and educational opportunities for BME young people in Bexley. The research will serve as a channel for young people to express their concerns and difficulties. It will advocate for the provision of a platform for them to have a say on issues affecting them, as well as promote leadership, representation and an opportunities. It will aim to respond to their personal and

social needs by listening, advising and referring them to service providers, where appropriate and opportunities for learning in a fun and safe space.

The research will also aim at bridging the gap between young people and the community and also as a catalyst for promoting young people empowerment through participation in decision making and encourage dialogue between them policymakers. The primary geographical framework for this research is London Borough of Bexley and the aim of this exercise is to find out the needs and experiences of young people from the ethnic minority community, their engagement with the wider community.

For the purpose of this exercise young people from ethnic minority communities are classified as African, Asian and Caribbean backgrounds. The research was qualitative and young people led with basic technique used to capture how they feel about living in Bexley and their experiences of accessing services and whether some of their expectations of their quality of life in the borough are met.

## **Objectives**

1. To promote leadership skills among young people through and research and dissemination of information affecting them.
2. To provide a platform for young people to voice their opinions and concerns.
3. To facilitate dialogue between BME young people and policy and decision makers, with the view to influence services for young people.
4. To encourage training and development opportunities for BME young people to engage and participate in mainstream community.
5. To promote appropriate programmes that reflects the needs of BME young people.
6. To advocate for better and meaningful communication and dialogue.
7. To promote mutual respect for different cultures and communities in Bexley

## **Consultation with Young People**

Active Horizons recruited seven young volunteers between the ages of 13 and 25 young people to be researchers for this research. All the volunteers are from migrant and refugee background. The purpose of engaging them was to ensure that young people themselves would research their needs. They were given series of briefings and training in research methods, including Participatory Appraisal techniques (visual, community-based research tools), on one- to-one interviews and focused group sessions. The young researchers were supported and facilitated by experienced and qualified adult volunteers with advice from relevant community workers in order to ensure that they understand the task involved.

The researchers were encouraged to make the process friendly and welcoming for the respondents in order to encourage them to express their concerns whether their aspirations. There was a huge response to the research more than anticipated. Possible research methods were discussed and the research team agreed to conducting interviews and focus groups.



## Methodology

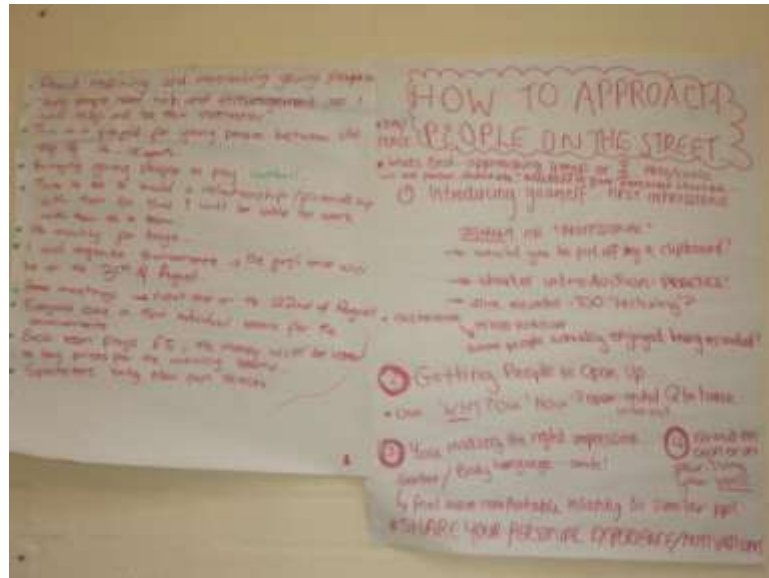


Fig 3

During the course of the research, the seven young volunteer researchers talked to young people across the borough. They administered questionnaires in street settings, in projects, schools, churches, leisure facilities and group sessions using Participatory Appraisal Techniques. The researchers worked in groups of four and spent between one to two hours working with small groups. They asked the respondents about the projects, places, schools, services and activities they visited or engaged in during their spare time. They also asked about the areas where they lived, the projects they used, and what changes they would like to make in various aspects of their lives. 177 BME young people took part in the interviews and the respondents were as follows: -

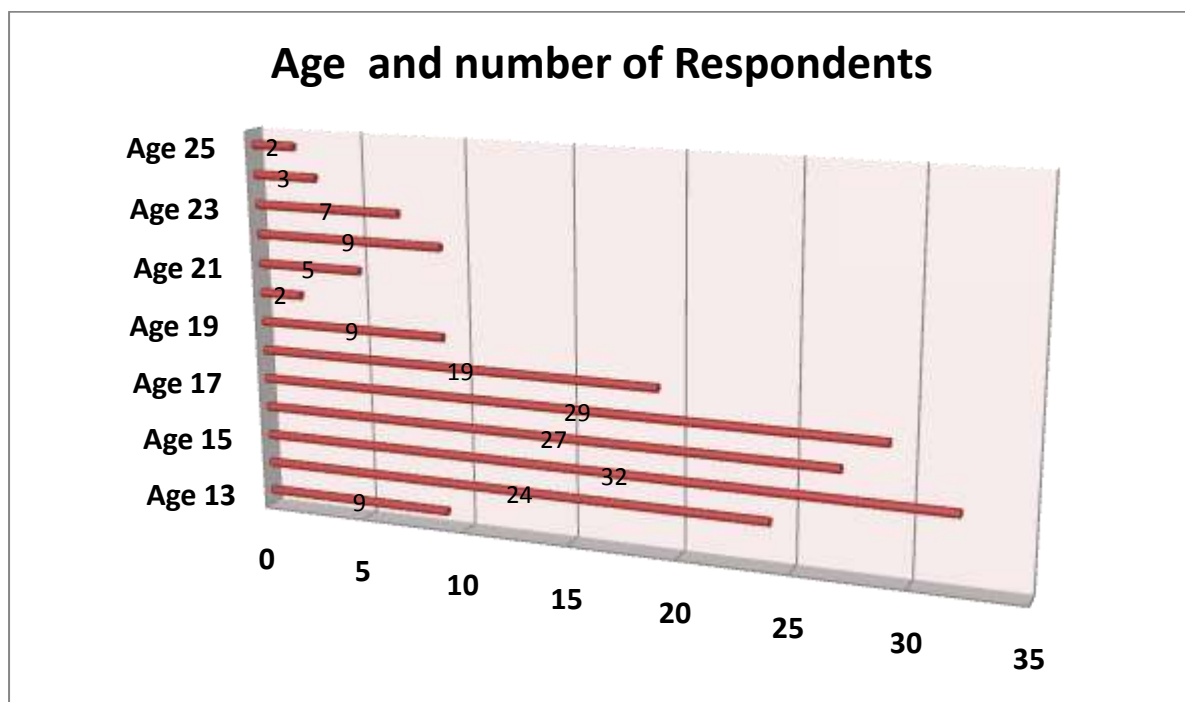


Fig 4

## Questions

The questions administered by the young researchers include:-

- What worries you most?
- What challenges do you face as a young person?
- What do you want support in ?
- How safe do you feel when walking in the streets?
- Are you aware of any community facilities available to you?
- What sort of young people facilities would you like?
- Are you in school or employment?
- Do you have educational needs and challenges?
- What is your family arrangement like?
- Any financial challenges?
- Have experienced any form of before?

## Location of young people interviewed

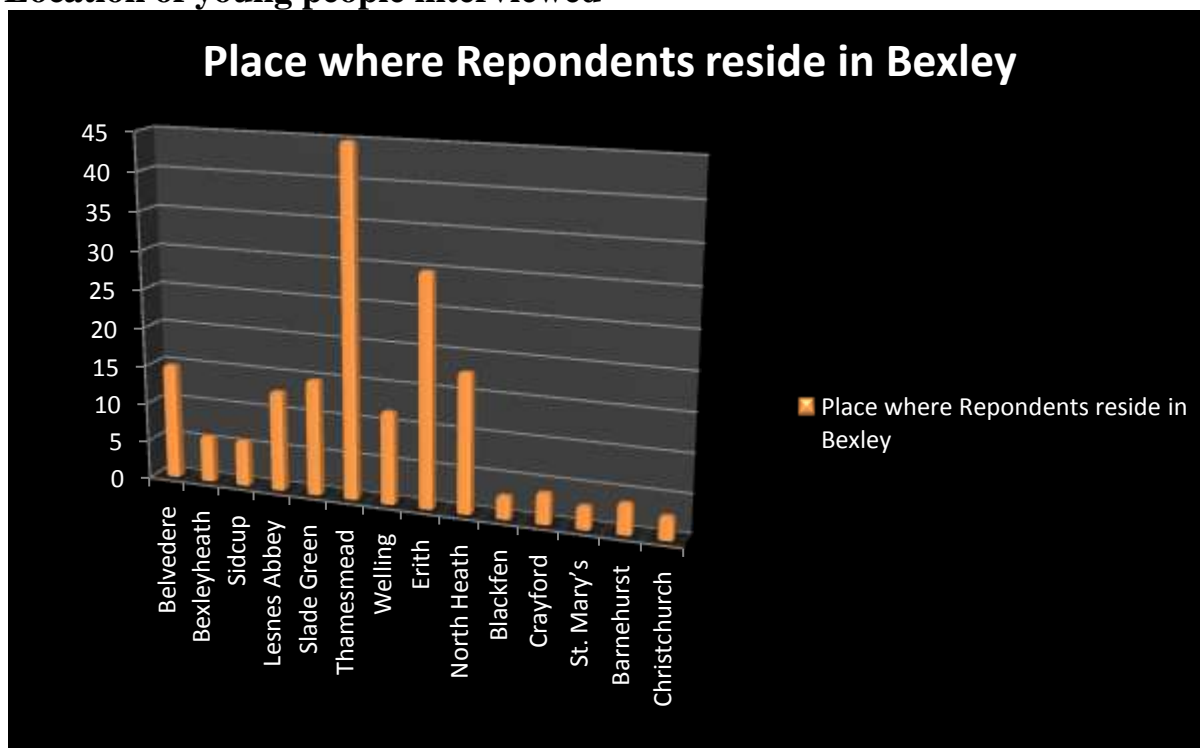


Fig 5

Most of the the young respondents who took part part in this research live in the north part of the borough in East Thamesmead, Erith and Belvedere. This however reflects the existing studies which points out the concentration of BME community in these wards. These areas features within the 20% of wards nationally in terms of multiple deprivation indices of economic, housing and environmental indicators. The area has a high rate of child poverty characterized by unemployment, above average of ethnic minority population.

## Countries of Origin

The respondents represented twenty countries across Africa, Asian and the Caribbean. This shows how diverse Bexley is and so many languages and different cultures that the young people share.

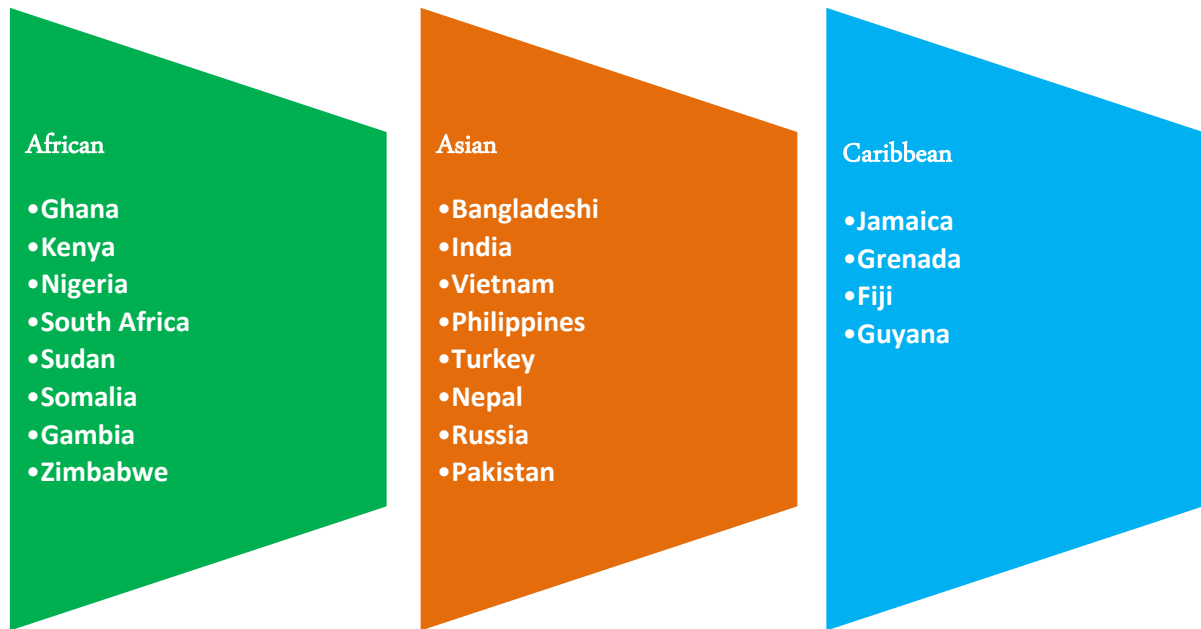
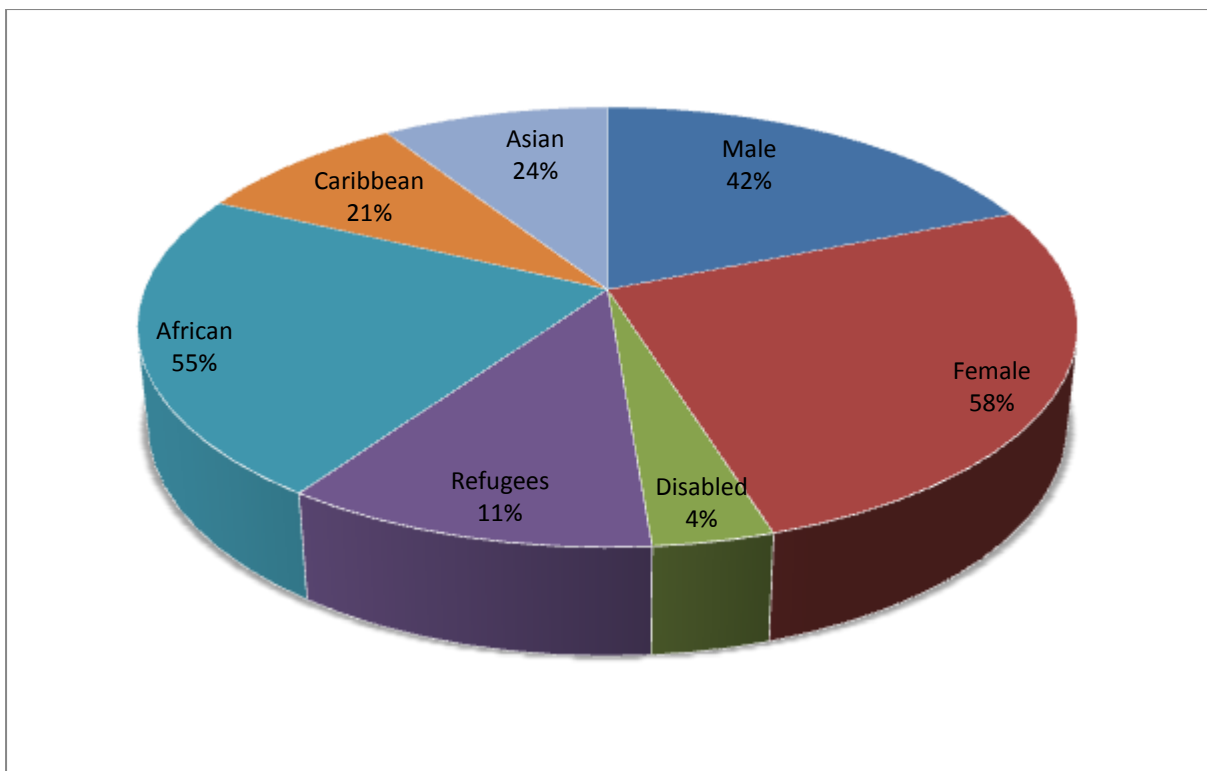


Fig 5

## Representation

The Pie Charts below reflect the statistical analysis of the sample containing respondents age and gender background



## Research Findings in Sub themes

The experiences of BME children and young people differ considerably by age group. More so those who are refugees experience worst problems because of the stigma associated with being a refugee. They also live in deprived areas, as well as face many challenges thus adding extra burden on them. The concerns of these young people have been summarised in the table below:

### Summary of Concerns

Themes	Concerns
<b>Education</b>	<p>Majority of the young people expressed disappointment in the lack of motivational schemes in schools for BME young people. They feel alienated because the of way school curricullum. It is not cultural friendly. Subjects do not reflect diversity, which is a contributory factor to educational underachievement of BME young people. Among other issues they also expressed worry about:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability of BME young people to enter university or higher education due to high numbers of dropouts.</li> <li>• Significant lack of vocational skills to raise their confidence and broaden future access to job opportunities.</li> <li>• 62% said the scrapping of EMA is detrimental to majority of BME young people because they do not get pocket money from their parents. This means they will stay away from school.</li> <li>• 23% Percent reported that they find it difficult to concentrate on their school and homework at home because they do not have internet access at home. Whist others do not have their own bedroom to concentrate as they share with their siblings, thus making it difficult to catch up with their subjects.</li> <li>• Almost 96% of the respondents complained of too much bullying in schools thereby discouraging most of them from going to school.</li> </ul>
<b>Crime and Safet/ Legal and Justice System</b>	<p>All the respondents highlighted the increasing levels of anti-social behaviours, drugs use, gun and knife crimes, leading to the deaths of many young people, whilst some go prison. Increased violence and gang activities in certain neighbourhoods such as Thamesmead and also neighbouring borough have engulfed many of the young people.</p> <p>During the research, we interviewed young people who always hang out at Bexleyheath and Erith shopping centres after school. This was a good catchment area that we had an opportunity to hear why they always hang at bus stops and shopping areas. Their response was that they have nothing to do neither have any where</p>

<p><i>“I always try my best to keep out of trouble, because as a young person I know I am at risk of being involved easily”</i></p>	<p>to go so they end up loitering in these areas and find themselves causing trouble, although its not their intention to be troublesome.</p> <p>They were of the opinion that the Police and legal system have been unfair to BME young people because of the perception that all ethnic people are criminals. They also complained of undue harassment such as constant stop and search by police.</p> <p>The young people also expressed fear for their safety, especially in crime endemic areas. This is because BME young people they are not only perpetrators of crime but also victims of crime, even though most of them admitted that they either knew someone who is a member of a gang or has committed a criminal offence.</p>
<p><b>Racism &amp; Discrimination</b></p> <p><i>“When I was a new student at my school, I constantly got harassed by other students outside school gates, shouting that I don’t belong here”</i></p>	<p>92% of the young people said black and minority ethnic groups experience unabated levels of racism and discrimination from both the community and schools.</p> <p>They also lamented about stereotyping and negative perceptions about BME young people, especially asylum seekers and refugees. This they claimed has been due to negative media coverage.</p> <p>They feel that racism in Bexley is still rife even amongst the white young people. This is mainly perpetuated in school grounds and also outside. 90% of the despondence reported that they have in one way or the other experienced a racial comment or attack in Bexley. Although they feel that they have to report any crime on racism, they do not believe that anything can be done about it.</p> <p>The young people were also worried that most of the initiatives undertaken by Bexley Council in the past is not far reaching enough. The Council should be more practically involved in encouraging schools and other organisations such as the Police and social services to promote race equality in all their actions. They also want the council to effectively monitor race equality with the aim of creating a welcoming community for all races.</p>
<p><b>Disabled young people</b></p> <p><i>“I am always uncomfortable going out because I don’t like the way people look, so I just stay indoors”</i></p>	<p>All the fourteen disabled young people interviewed said they experience multiple prejudices because of their disability. They complained about the lack of comprehensive schemes tailored for disabled young people in the borough. The disabled young people felt that most existing facilities in Bexley do not have disabled access thereby increasing isolation.</p> <p>Eight of them said they are not motivated to participate in community projects because these projects are often targeted at able young people. Six of them also disclosed that their parents and families do not encourage them to participate in public activities because of stigma and discrimination by the society.</p> <p>The disabled young people interviewed include people with physical and learning disabilities</p>



<p><b>Community Facilities</b></p> <p><i>“there is nothing to do and we have nowhere to go, so we just cause trouble here and have fun”</i></p>	<p>71% of the respondents said lack of recreational and sporting facilities in the community to engage young people productively resulting in idle time and not enough things for young people to do, especially during the holidays</p> <p>Almost 92% of the young people responded negatively to the question ‘Do you have adequate recreational facilities in your area? But the young people were emphatic in their answers by saying <b>NO</b>.</p> <p>When asked ‘Where they go when they are out’ 87% said that they hang around on the streets with friends and peers, even though their parents disapproval of it. They further stated that they hang around at the town centre, streets and other open spaces or at friends’ houses and shops.</p> <p>When asked about what they would like to see happening in their areas for young people, they said they would like more recreational and sporting facilities, gyms and entertainment centre’s for young people.</p> <p>Hanging around with friends was the key response throughout the interviews with the young people. Hanging around with friends is the main activity among young teenagers in Bexley. They also added that this type of activity encourages them to drink alcohol, smoke and use drugs to relieve boredom in the absence of effective recreation. Hence forcing them to join gangs where they feel accepted</p> <p>It was also revealed during the research that BME refugees and asylum seekers do not have support any form of network to access support and information in Bexley. There are no specific programmes targeted at them that will enable them to integrate with the rest of the Bexley community.</p> <p>Just 6% the respondents reported that they access local activities and are happy with what is offered to them, others did not even know there are local community projects that young people can be involved. The young people also expressed the need for more opportunities and activities that they can engage after school and on holidays. Girls especially would like to see gender specific projects, a girls time and safe space for themselves.</p> <p>There are also barriers to participation and accessing local services- Lack of projects disabled young people experience dual prejudice and stigma.</p> <p>Young people living in East Thamesmead, Erith and Lower</p>

	<p>Belvedere felt they are always neglected as there are not adequate youth facilities, youth centres or recreational activities compared to areas of Welling Bexleyheath and Crayford.</p> <p>Most young people only usually participate in their religious activities such as going to church, temple and mosque .They are not aware of where they can access information. They think services and youth clubs should be available to young people.</p>
<p><b>Employment</b></p> <p><i>“I don’t know what my future holds, I can’t get a job and have been unemployed for 2 years and no qualifications”</i></p>	<p>42% of the young people between the ages of 16 and 25, interviewed are not in education, training or working. The respondents stated during the interviews that they are not in employment because they don’t have the requisite qualifications or they are no enough jobs to accommodate them.</p> <p>22% said they have tried looking for jobs but have not been successful. They claimed that this has impacted on them negatively because they are often short of money to cater for the basic needs, which cannot be provided by their parents, as well as the fact that Job seekers allowance are inadequate.</p> <p>They blamed this on lack skills and vocational training for young people out of school. They reported that there are no enough youth employment centres to provide them with information and guidance about jobs.</p> <p>They were of the view that entrepreneurial schemes should be introduced to empower young people to set up their own trade or small businesses.</p>
<p><b>Family &amp; Inter-generational Activities</b></p>	<p>Nearly 70% of the young people said the lack of parental and family role models and mentors. Most of them have loose bond with their parents because the parents not involved in what young people do outside of school.</p> <p>They also expressed concerns about the cultural clashes between parents and young people. They were worried about the disciplinary measures often taken by parents.</p> <p>All the respondents felt that there is the need to maintain their our culture and also learn more about their heritage.</p>
<p><b>Other issues</b></p>	<p>Young people from BME background do not have any voice or involved in the development of community services.</p> <p>There are cultural barriers around the discussion of sensitive issues such as drugs, sex education, sexual health and sexuality orientation.</p> <p>Lack of dialogue with BME parents and community leaders and culturally-mixed provisions.</p>

## Recommendations

1. To improve existing programmes to be used as platform for developing integrated mainstream services. The programmes should involve anti-racist training, bullying and other appropriate initiatives for young people.
2. To strengthen existing community based projects and programmes targeted at helping young people to develop their potential and to increase the provision of services for BME young people
3. Bexley Council should train more lead officers to oversee the development and implementation of BME young people related strategies.
4. The establishment of multi-diversity centres should be explored to create social cohesion in Bexley.
5. Bexley Council should carry out an audit of current young people projects in the borough to ensure that these projects are made appropriate for the needs of the BME young people. This should also include the intensification of monitoring and evaluating progress of equality and diversity strategy across board.
6. Annual ethnic events and festivals should be instituted in the borough to promote social cohesion and encourage the mixing of ethnic groups as apart of the strategy to break the barriers.
7. Racism and discrimination should appropriately tackle through appropriate programmes in schools, institutions and within the community.
8. More and affordable After School clubs should be set up, while existing ones should also be encouraged and provided with logistics to enable them to reach out to all young people including those from the ethnic minority communities. There should also be comprehensive programmes to promote Saturday schools in order to help develop competence/excellence in core subjects of the National Curriculum, especially English, Maths and Science for all young people in Bexley. This will help and support to young people in terms of study skills, revision techniques, help with mainstream school topics and projects.
9. Educational authorities should work with the community towards eliminating underachievement of BME young people thus enabling them to achieve their full potential.
10. There should be more sustainable partnership working of agencies between policy makers, community groups and service providers to development of effective BME programmes for BME young people. This partnership will aid partners to gain insight and useful tools for a range of operations it will also promote and enhance diversity interventions within all sectors of development including education, recreation, security and mental health promotion.
11. The number of young BME offenders entering the Criminal Justice System should decrease through continuous education and effective programmes to positively engage the young people. By ensuring that young people are taking a lead in tackling this issue.

- 12.** Youth facilities and services should be evenly distributed across the borough so that all young people will have equal opportunities and access to these service, thereby avoiding loitering or travelling long distances to access them.
- 13.** All services in the borough should be reviewed with the aim of incorporating new schemes and access facilities for disabled BME young people.
- 14.** Active Horizons should be supported as a lead organisation in the borough with responsibilities to support BME young people with varied programmes aimed at helping to make informed decisions.

## Experiences of young researchers

- Were able to inform their interviewees about some of the projects in their area
- They gained confidence and self-esteem through the exercise
- Gained awareness of issues affecting young people and other BME communities
- Gained information on available services in Bexley
- To formed a focus groups and interacted with each other
- Demonstrated high sense of ability and commitment
- They found that certain groups of marginalized young people including young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seekers require more support



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# ACTIVE HORIZONS

youth participation for change

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