

Racial Equity Learning Network Event Insights



We want to do better in how we work alongside people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. We want to listen, learn and help amplify people's voices so Corra, and wider society, can be part of the solution to racial injustice. This report shares insights captured at a Learning Network event exploring racial equity within substance use, addiction, and recovery services. These insights suggest that more needs to be done to take an anti-racist approach within the sector ensuring that people are supported in ways that work for them. In particular:

- A holistic, non-judgemental and whole-family approach is needed. This may involve delivering support through groups with a more generic 'wellbeing' branding rather than 'drug/alcohol/addiction' specifically.
- Developing an inclusive and diverse workforce including people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in drug and alcohol services would strengthen engagement, understanding and provision of support.
- Ensuring materials are available in additional languages or offering translation services.
- Targeted outreach to build connections with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Support services should be encouraged to attend events in these communities to build relationships.
- Addressing structural issues by dedicating funding to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups working within the drugs and alcohol sector to make strategic change in policy and service delivery
- Further research on the experiences of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people providing and accessing drugs and alcohol services within Scotland is needed.

About the Learning Network Event on Racial Equity

On 13 June 2024, Corra hosted a Learning Network event focused on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities within the context of substance use, addiction and recovery. We wanted to create a safe space for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic-led organisation to share their insights, experience, and examples of good practice with other organisations funded through the National Drugs Mission Funds.

The event was chaired by Corra trustee, Mildred Zimunya, and featured five panellists from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic-led organisations funded through the National Drugs Mission Funds, plus representatives from the Scottish Drugs Forum. 47 people from 32 organisations attended.

The event began with introductions and presentations from the panellists followed by an opportunity for questions and wider discussion.

It should be noted that these are insights primarily from six organisations, and therefore may not be reflective of the whole sector.

The challenges

Structural racism

Structural racism describes a system of organisational and institutional systems and processes created over time that create unfair or harmful treatment of people based on their ethnicity. The panelists highlighted that structural racism affects both organisations and people accessing support.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic-led organisations can find it challenging to access funding to support their work. Application forms and terminology used by funders can be difficult to understand. Often, organisations feel that they are only taken seriously by funders when they come under the 'Diversity, Equality and Inclusion' umbrella. Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic-led organisations are often operating at their maximum capacity and with limited resources. Panelists shared that being a small Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisation within the addiction sector and the wider third sector can be very isolating.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations expressed a willingness to collaborate with drug services and the Alcohol Drug Partnerships, but often experienced

difficulties in engaging with them. Recognising the value of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations within the sector can help increase engagement, while developing effective channels for information and knowledge sharing can foster better access to treatment and support for people from those communities.

For people accessing services, a lack of translation services makes the voices of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities less well heard, and issues not being addressed. Similarly, the terminology and jargon used by mainstream services is not accessible and can be misunderstood.

People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities feel they are invisible to the services. Community members feel there is heightened visibility of when they do 'something wrong', but invisibility when they are in need.

Lack of knowledge within workforce and different understanding within communities

Underrepresentation of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in the workforce across the sector creates barriers to engagement and understanding.

There is limited research and a data gap to understand Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, communities and drug use in Scotland. This includes a lack of statistics on ethnicity and drug-related deaths, as well as data on access to drug and alcohol support services.

Within Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities, there are different understandings of addiction and mental health particularly around self-harm and depression. This means generic drug, alcohol or mental health services are sometimes not able to effectively support people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

Stigma

Social and cultural stigma within some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities may make it difficult to discuss drug issues and/or access mainstream services. This leads to a fear of disclosure with people seeking help once at the point of crisis. For some communities, there may not be safe spaces within families to talk about problems or concerns. Compounding issues and feelings of isolation may lead to seeking solace in substance use. There are fears that disclosing drug use will lead to deportation, losing children or a partner, and being ostracized by their community. People without settled immigration status can feel particularly vulnerable and be unable to access support.

Intersectionality

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are impacted by drug use and drug trade. This is further compounded by issues around race, class, discrimination, gender, poverty, domestic abuse, mental health, and trauma.

There are unique challenges faced by people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities around race, discrimination, inequality, mental health and trauma.

What needs to change?

An anti-racist approach needs to be taken in the design and provision of support services and funding for organisations working within the drugs and alcohol sector. Panel members highlighted the following actions as being vital next steps to progress racial equity within the sector and ensure that everyone receives the support they need.

- A holistic, non-judgemental and whole-family approach is needed. This may involve delivering support through groups with a more generic 'wellbeing' branding rather than 'drug/alcohol/addiction' specifically.
- Developing an inclusive and diverse workforce including people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds would strengthen engagement and provision of support.
- Ensuring materials are available in additional languages or offering translation services.
- Services should seek to limit paperwork and formality of processes to enable better access to the services they provide. Informal routes are helpful, and delivering support where people are e.g. in homes, via video calls, or through more general well-being groups helps.
- Services should develop more effective channels for referrals, information sharing and collaboration.
- Targeted outreach to build connections with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Support services should be encouraged to attend events in these communities to build relationships and trust. Gatherings around food foster collaboration and increase engagement.

- Addressing structural issues by dedicating funding to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups working within the drugs and alcohol sector could help reduce barriers. This could include also funding opportunities to attend events and visit other organisations for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic led groups.
- Further research on the experiences of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people providing and accessing drugs and alcohol services within Scotland is needed.

About Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

Our ways of working

At Corra we have a set of principles that we strive to put into practice across our roles as an employer, independent funder, charity and partner, as well as in our influencing activity.

We will:

- Listen and respond to people, communities and organisations and amplify voices that are less well heard – their wisdom is at the heart of Corra's approach.
- Build relationships, always working alongside others on the basis of shared power, mutual trust and shared learning.
- Pursue diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), trying to challenge structural discrimination and contribute to radical shifts in the funding sector.
- Be an open, trusting and flexible grant maker.
- Ensure we contribute to tackling climate change, through our investments, operations and grant making and encouraging others to take action alongside us.
- Be bold, taking considered risks and supporting others to do the same.

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