

Charter and Guidelines for Partnership Working between Generic and Black and Minority Ethnic User/Survivor-led Organisations



Background

This charter emerged from the work which was initiated to take forward the recommendations of the report *Dancing to Our Own Tunes: Reassessing Black and Minority Ethnic Mental Health Service User Involvement*. The report was jointly commissioned by the National Survivor User Network (NSUN) and Catch-a-Fiya National Forum for Service User and Survivors from black and minority ethnic communities¹.

A steering group, TOOTS (To Our Own Tunes), was set up to take the recommendations of the report forward. The specific task was to set out ways for NSUN and Catch-a-Fiya to work in partnership, and more generally to suggest ways of partnership working between generic and black and minority ethnic user/survivor-led organisations.

Aims of the Charter and Guidelines

1. The aims of the charter are:

- To assist organisations locally and nationally to work with service users/survivors from black and minority ethnic communities to identify and build upon the strengths and opportunities for developing innovative ways of partnership working
- To combat stigma and discrimination against and fear about mental health service users from black and minority ethnic communities
- To foster a robust, candid environment of trust in partnership working between generic and black and minority ethnic user/survivor-led organisations

2. The purpose of the guidelines is to suggest:

¹ There is often a debate around the terminology used to refer to communities minoritised in relation to the local population on the basis of their “racial” or “ethnic” origin. No single term is fully capable of capturing the vast diversity, difference and similarity within these communities. Currently, “Black and minority ethnic” is the term consistently used in census, survey and routine administrative data. This term refers to a range of communities including established groups (e.g. African, Asian, African-Caribbean), new migrant communities (e.g. people from Eastern European countries), refugee and asylum seeker communities, transient communities (e.g. the traveller community), and groups often referred to as “invisible minorities” (e.g. the Irish community). Hence we have chosen to use this term for the purposes of this paper.

- What the charter means in practice
- Facilitative ways of partnership working

The Charter

Partnership working with black and minority ethnic service user/survivor –led organisations involves the following:

- Showing a positive and enabling attitude to black and minority ethnic service user/survivor organisations
- Acknowledging the discriminatory experiences that people from black and minority ethnic communities face within society, mental health services and within generic user involvement initiatives.
- Recognising the role of these experiences in making individuals experts in their own right and in informing the nature of partnership working and the solutions to apparent challenges
- Empowering them to ascertain that there is confidence in them
- Making a genuine use of their knowledge, experiences and skills, one which stems from a fundamental value for them
- Creating a work environment that ensures mutual listening, hearing and understanding
- Ensuring that the partnership organisations have all the necessary information to work together
- Ensuring that there is openness and honesty within the relationship that will foster a competent and productive partnership
- Treating each other with respect and dignity, with outcomes that benefit all involved
- Supporting each other to achieve goals
- Having faith in each partner's ability to do the job to the standard required
- Providing non-judgemental and proactive support so as to enable each partner to work in their own ways to achieve their aims

The Guidelines

Partnership working with service user/survivor led black and minority ethnic organisations is facilitated by the following:

Values

- A genuine commitment from all partners to supporting race equality and changing organisational practices that may be discriminatory to service users/survivors from black and minority ethnic communities
- Mutual respect between partners and avoidance of competition

- Open mindedness towards ways of doing things that may stem from different and diverse backgrounds and experiences of people and communities. The fact that it is different does not mean it is bad or wrong, or will not work
- Honesty and openness. Each partner needs to feel comfortable about being honest and open and this honesty and openness should be respected by both sides
- Equality and fairness. Partners may come from unequal power structures. Therefore each partner needs to be aware of the power dynamics between them and work towards equality. Patronising and tokenism should be avoided and there should be a true sense of fairness.
- Sensitivity in language and actions. Each partner may have different ways of expressing and doing things. Respecting these will help determine the success of the partnership.

Setting up the partnership

- Establish a shared vision: Each partner needs to agree on a shared vision for the partnership. The shared vision should be ironed out in detail so as to avoid confusion later
- Ensure equality in the partnership: Acknowledge the specific knowledge and expertise both of the black and minority ethnic and of the generic organisations.
- Be democratic in leadership and decision making: Ensure each partner is fully involved. This does not only mean shared tasks or consultation. Let each organisation take the lead in aspects of work for which they have particular skills.
- Agree clear roles: The roles of each partner should be well defined so as to avoid confusion. Each partner should then take full responsibility for their particular role
- Have realistic and clear expectations: Each partner should be agreed on the goals for the partnership and what is to be realistically expected of each partner
- Identify development needs: Ensure each partner has the necessary skills and capacity for the joint initiative. If gaps are identified, provide necessary training and development opportunities

Ongoing management of the partnership

- Share responsibilities: Many tasks within a partnership can be carried out jointly. Know what each partner is capable of and use this to the advantage of the initiative and to furthering the partnership.
- Ensure accountability: There should be clear lines of accountability for the work. Each partner should be able to identify the individual responsible for any aspect of the work.

- Have continual information sharing: Each partner needs to be kept up-to-date about what is happening with the other in order to plan and have things running smoothly. Use appropriate languages and methods of communication to share the information
- Share learning and good practice: Promote opportunities to learn from each partner's work, highlight good practice extensively and use it to aid partnership working
- Acknowledge successes: Celebrate the successes along the way. This does not have to wait till the end of an initiative. All partners need to be acknowledged for their achievements and for successes in the initiative as a whole.
- Identify difficulties: Try to address these as they arise. Do not sit on a difficulty and hope that it will disappear; bring it out into the open and get it cleared up.
- Review the initiative regularly: There should be consistent opportunities to review the partnership and its work to make sure that things are going according to plan, are on target and on schedule. These occasions will also provide opportunities to iron out any difficulties, grievances etc.
- Provide ongoing support for addressing race equality: Partners may need help with changing attitudes and practices or with dealing with personal experiences of discrimination. Be creative about the forms of support which are offered.
- Provide independent support for managers of organisations in the partnership. Staff can come to managers to talk through issues for them , managers also need someone whom they can approach.

Good Practice

- Agree quality assurance standards for the partnership: these should be based on standards that respect and take into account each partner's definitions of quality and methods of measuring quality
- Be creative: There is usually more than one way to work in partnership. Explore imaginative ways of addressing the needs and concerns of users/survivors from black and minority ethnic communities even though these may seem different from generic organisational practices.
- Be flexible: Be prepared for change and difference. If usual ways of doing things are not working for users/survivors from black and minority ethnic communities, try something new. Real partnerships are built on the courage and willingness to change.