



Launch event for the GM BAME Social Enterprise Network, February 2020

Introduction

The Connecting GM BAME* Entrepreneurs to Social Investment project (January 2020 – June 2021) sought to strengthen the inclusion of BAME social entrepreneurs in the Greater Manchester (GM) social enterprise ecosystem. This evaluation covers four strands of activity across the project, including:

- **Capacity Building** – a series of online sessions run by the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE), with a broad range of enterprise based topics, which people were able to access.
- **Mentoring** – the aim was to develop a programme to support individuals who wanted to become mentors.
- **Regional hubs** – set up in Manchester, Rochdale and Trafford. Their aim is to support the Connecting BAME Social Enterprise project and the GM BAME SE network to reach to BAME social entrepreneurs, BAME VCSE organisations and BAME individuals interested in or setting up enterprise.
- **The Greater Manchester BAME Social Enterprise Network** – this was established to give BAME social entrepreneurs the opportunity to network and learn from their peers, to learn from specialists, and to develop their skills in key aspects of running a business.



*GMCVO uses the BAME abbreviation as we believe it is widely understood, but we acknowledge many feel this term is inadequate and limiting. We are therefore currently reviewing our use of the term. Our principle is to refer to individuals, organisations or networks by the terminology they themselves prefer.

Background

The development of the Network was funded by the Postcode Innovation Trust's Social Enterprise programme and the Connect Fund. The need for the project was demonstrated through research conducted in 2019 by GM BAME Network, Flourish CIC and GMCVO, the aim of which was to better understand the barriers facing GM Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities to access social investment and what support would be needed to make social enterprise infrastructure more inclusive to BAME-led social enterprises.

The research found that BAME communities have an appetite to develop products and services to address need. However, people are doing this in isolation; work is fragmented and infrastructure is poorly resourced and reliant on short-term interventions. These communities are often disconnected from enterprise support and relevant networks, which restricts access to information and opportunities.

This project sought to action recommendations from this research, such as the need for peer support, mentoring, and training opportunities.

The Mentoring Programme

The initial scoping research and much of the literature regarding how to create a network of thriving social enterprises, points to the importance of mentors and role models. Greater Manchester has a number of experienced BAME social entrepreneurs who are already (often informally, through mutual contacts) working with others to help support them.

The content was delivered over several weeks, and was designed to highlight different methods and techniques to work with mentees, build a consistent approach to delivery, look at some barriers mentees can have in terms of engagement, learn from sharing experiences, and to recognise the importance of hard and soft skill development.

The mentors that accessed the training all learned something from taking part, and will be more effective in any future mentoring they deliver. Adding to the pool of BAME social entrepreneurs who have the skills and confidence to provide advice, support and guidance to others is an achievement.

Recommendation:

It would be valuable to provide training to potential mentors in future, regardless of whether a formal network of mentors and mentees is then established. There was evidence of informal mentoring taking place across Greater Manchester, and it must be carefully considered whether to attempt to coordinate this would add significant value.

Recommendation:

Provide an 'introduction to mentoring' session for those with no, or limited experience to cover the basics of being a mentor and give people the opportunity to ask questions. If there is to an attempt to train more mentors in future, then these introductory sessions may give people the confidence to sign up to take part.

Recommendation:

Check in regularly with mentors and mentees. If the mentoring programme is to continue in a formal manner, it is important to continually review the quality of the input from mentors and to check that both parties are making the most of the opportunity provided.

The Capacity Building Programme

Online training modules offered by the School of Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) were utilised to capacity-build participants due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for training to take place online. The online sessions provided high quality input on a range of topics and were well received by attendees. However, take-up was limited due to the pandemic and the delay in establishing the regional hubs.

Recommendation:

Going forward, it would be beneficial to work with a range of local providers and to hold courses primarily face-to-face, with an online offer. This should also seek to make use of the talent and experience in the Network.

Recommendation:

Cascade learning from training courses. It ensures that resource is invested efficiently, and it would also be useful to get attendees to produce summaries of key point briefings that could then be shared across all network participants.

Regional hubs

These were established in Manchester (hosted by Manchester BME Network CIC, led by Jonah Ogbunike), Trafford (hosted by Tuf- C, led by Mark Nesbit) and Rochdale (hosted by Kashmir Youth Project, led by Nadeem Raja).

The aim of the hubs was to support the Connecting BAME Social Enterprise project and the GM BAME Social Enterprise Network to reach to BAME social entrepreneurs, BAME voluntary and community organisations, and BAME individuals interested in or setting up enterprise. This included:

- Providing information, advice and guidance in their local area, including sharing communications and updates from the wider Network to local networks.
- Hosting sessions targeted locally, but open to all the other hubs and the wider Network.
- Mapping local BAME social enterprises.
- Encourage take up of the capacity building programme.
- Identify suitable people to receive support as a mentee.

The hub leads have an array of experience and contacts which were put to good use in supporting entrepreneurs to access funding, develop their website, access mentoring, build self-confidence, connect to people in the same sector and more. The hubs also played a key role in signposting people to the Network and its associated resources. There was very positive feedback from hub members about the support they received. Hub members were particularly positive about having a local point of contact for queries and signposting.

The regional hubs have proved that there is demand for a local support offer for BAME social entrepreneurs across Greater Manchester.

Recommendation:

Aim to roll this approach out across Greater Manchester. It should be considered how best to ensure the support is available, but that the support can be knitted into the activities of the central network, rather than potentially creating 10 smaller, isolated networks. This new offer would see regional representatives of the Network working in each borough. Their remit would remain similar (although additional funding would be required). This would reinforce the importance of the central network, and the huge pool of knowledge and expertise this comprises.

The Greater Manchester BAME Social Enterprise Network

The Greater Manchester BAME Social Enterprise Network was established to give BAME social entrepreneurs the opportunity to network and learn from their peers, to learn from specialists, and to develop their skills in key aspects of running a business.

The Network meets monthly and provides a programme of speakers and opportunities to network at each. A monthly bulletin with updates and opportunities is shared monthly among members.

The Network has been a useful convening point for entrepreneurs during a difficult period. The membership has begun to grow and there is a platform here for something to be developed for the long-term and to have a significant impact.

Recommendation: The Network needs a dedicated support worker to ensure that there is oversight and development of

activities and to help grow membership and the offer to members.

Recommendation: Create a stronger online community. Although we are moving to a time whereby the meetings of the Network may become face-to-face, there is a need for a space for members to connect and keep conversation going outside of the meetings.

Recommendation: Ensure there is a mechanism for members to shape the direction of the Network. It is vital that the network continues to operate and provide content to suit the changing needs of its members. This should be a key focus of the support worker and a feature of the online community.

Recommendation: Develop a pool of trustees. Finding suitable trustees has been reported as an issue for start-up organisations and if the Network could act as a broker, then this would add value.

Conclusion

The Connecting GM BAME Entrepreneurs to Social Investment project has achieved a great deal in its initial delivery phase, despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Take-up of activities was impacted because entrepreneurs were forced to grapple with growing need in communities and their organisations survival, the Network were unable to physically meet, and the support worker was unable to engage in person.

Overall, the project has equipped individuals with new skills, as well as the skills to mentor others and pass on their specialist knowledge. It has created a network of engaged entrepreneurs and curated a supportive environment for them to network, and it has established that there is demand for regional hubs to provide information, advice and guidance.

It is now important to consider how these activities could be delivered going forward. Continuity will be a key factor in the success of the project in future, and this should be central in the minds of shaping the programme over the next 3-5 years.

GMCVO

St Thomas Centre
Ardwick Green North
Manchester
M12 6FZ

 0161 277 1000
 www.gmcvo.org.uk
 gmcvo@gmcvo.org.uk
 @gmcvo

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