



## **Written evidence submitted by Disability Sheffield to the Race Equality Commission, May 2021**

### **Summary**

Disability Sheffield are submitting evidence to highlight the experiences of disabled people from ethnic minorities. We have gathered this through our work with people and from discussions in an event we ran in December 2020.

### **Identity**

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." – Audre Lorde

Disabled people from ethnic minorities have a layered identity and the oppression and discrimination they face is layered too. Racism and disablism are often intertwined and difficult to separate. An intersectional approach is therefore needed yet rarely used.

Black disabled people can feel that they are not accepted in either the black community or the disability community.

There are many disadvantages to overcome, however there is little recognition or understanding of the barriers such as structural racism. It can be difficult to feel empowered to challenge racism when those in power are not challenging it.

### **Representation**

Disability communities and organisations (including our own) are often overwhelmingly white spaces. This is uninviting and alienating.

#### Example of good practice

National disabled people's organisation ALLFIE have set up a Black Disabled Lives Matter group. The group is campaigning to address inequalities faced by Black disabled people and encouraging other organisations to join them. The group meets fortnightly to provide peer support and have discussions about shared experiences.

Diverse representation must not just be for tick box purposes only. Poor representation can mean disabled people are seen as white by default.

#### Example of good practice

Marsha de Cordova is an MP and black disabled woman. She was appointed as Shadow Minister for Disabled People and was later promoted to Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities. She has campaigned for the Houses of Parliament to become more accessible for disabled people to allow better representation in politics.

It is important to recognise people as individuals. BAME is a broad term for a number of ethnicities: diverse representation should acknowledge these by actively trying to ensure individuals from as many (if not all) of the communities are present. Each community may have very different experiences to the other but are all experiencing some form of racial inequality in the city.

#### Example of good practice

Melissa Simmonds, founder of MisTaught and Adult Autism Project Coordinator at VAS, approach to the BAME label: [https://youtu.be/DSvZ1kj\\_TIA?t=3784](https://youtu.be/DSvZ1kj_TIA?t=3784)

### **Social care**

In cultures where there is an expectation of family members caring for one another, there can be shame associated with accessing external care and support and this acts as a barrier.

Information is often written in white language and this can make services inaccessible.

There can be issues with carers due to lack of understanding of different cultures. For example, carers refusing to take their shoes off inside the home and not understanding why this would be offensive or rude.

#### Example of good practice

Direct payments allow disabled people to receive cash payments from the authority which funds their care instead of services being purchased for them. This gives people much more flexibility and greater control of their support package. Through our work we have identified that direct payments work particularly well for people from ethnic minorities as they can employ PAs who share their background, culture, language, and/or religion. This shows that creating new ways of working, rather than trying to change existing ones, can be the best solution.

"Direct payments give me the freedom to recruit people who have compatible cultures and beliefs. In the past care agencies lost who I am and what I believe. I can be more open with my PAs, with carers I had to be very private. Direct payments mean I will decide what is best for me rather than others. The downside is that I really struggle to afford the financial contribution." - Member of the Kurdish community

There can be reluctance to allow family members or close friends to be employed as PAs through direct payments despite their cultural understandings. More generally Direct Payments could be better promoted within social care.

There needs to be a better understanding of safeguarding in different contexts. Some people worry that if they raise concerns such as domestic violence, this may lead to repercussions within the community for the victim and therefore concerns are not raised.

Care homes can be unable to meet people's cultural needs, for example they will not provide traditional food at meal times despite residents' requests.

## **Education**

Families can find it challenging to access support which their children need. There appears to be very low numbers of children from ethnic minorities who have access to EHC (Education, Health and Care) Plans.

Information about the support available is not reaching everyone, it needs to be in a more accessible medium. There needs to be options for digitally excluded people. Lengthy and wordy letters are particularly difficult for people who do not have English as a first language.

Due to racism in the education system, schools often blame pupils' behaviour on their home life, and do not explore additional needs they may have. There is a lot of racial aggression in school.

Children can become disempowered when they start school as there is no reflection of their own culture in a positive light which negatively affects their emotions. Students can also face double standards and expectations by the school.

Universities need to recognise that people have individual needs. There is a real lack of understanding of the impact of people's backgrounds, for example how their background can impact their mental health.

Reasonable adjustments often do not go far enough, for example needing the use of language to be changed.

There is a correlation between lack of education and being manipulated by others who see this vulnerability. People do not always understand where they can go to access support with this.

Disabled children and black children are more likely to be excluded from school.

Do not see black and Asian people in high positions amongst the staff so there isn't really any representation for those children to look at and feel inspired by.

## **Health**

For those whose first language is not English, it can be difficult to find the words to explain what is happening and get a diagnosis. Accessing interpreters for appointments remains challenging.

“It is difficult if you have a hidden disability and are from BAME background, difficult to find words to explain what is going on and get a diagnosis.”

Diagnostic criteria are often based on white people, it does not take into account other cultures. This can prevent people from being diagnosed or mean people are wrongly diagnosed. For example, a person eating with their hands has been seen as a symptom rather than part of their cultural practice

People are not aware of what support can be accessed, for example mental health support and counselling.

People from ethnic minorities are rarely referred to the Sheffield Adult Autism and Neurodevelopmental Service (SAANS). Much of the understanding of autism has been through white men and based on white middle class boys. Misdiagnosis in childhood or late diagnosis can have real impact on adult life.

Black people are disproportionately sectioned under the mental health act due to racism.

## **Crime and Justice**

Disability can make a person more vulnerable to racially motivated hate crimes. Victims may feel unable to seek support or not understand where to go to seek support. Disabled people are more at a significantly higher risk of violent crime.

There is little study into the overrepresentation of black and disabled people in prison population. This can link back to lack of support in school.

## **Civic Life and Communities**

Within certain communities and extended families, people may not feel able to speak up about their disability or seek support. Some families try to hide the person's disability.

There can be a lack of understanding about people's life experience. Asylum Seekers find it difficult reliving their trauma every time they are asked to detail how they became disabled. There is also little understanding about what Asylum Seekers may have lost.

People have to explain that due to different cultures there are different expectations of behaviour.

Lack of understanding that someone can be black as well as having a disability. No recognition from disabled people about the additional discrimination that black disabled people face. For example, exemption as an autistic person from wearing a face mask but feeling they need to wear one anyway due to additional risk as a black person.

In some communities disabled people are pitied and there is an assumption the person is "damaged goods" and incapable of anything. This stigma has come about because individuals have been made to feel they cannot be supported in living independently by external organisations in the past.

## **Business and Employment**

Access to Work scheme is not widely known about and likely underused by people from ethnic minorities.

In previous years marginalised communities may have faced difficulty getting into work. This may have been made worse if the employer was unwilling to make reasonable adjustments to support disabled people. This attitude may have put marginalised disabled people off seeking support from external organisations, therefore resulting in less disabled Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in employment/being represented in the sector. Thus, further deterring others from similar backgrounds to approach organisations in the sector for employment/volunteering opportunities.