



In Work Support 2.0: Findings on supporting young BAME women into employment



## Talent Match In-Work Support 2.0: Developing Deep Value Relationships to Support Young BAME Women into Sustainable Employment

We are often told that a strong CV, good qualifications and the right experience can be the passport to a great job. But what about the soft skills, support and training opportunities that can help young people develop that job into a sustainable career? What additional barriers to achieving long-term, sustainable employment might be faced by traditionally marginalised groups? Recent research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has found that, whilst levels of technical qualification are improving for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in the UK, many still face social and economic disengagement.<sup>1</sup> This is despite many organisations across sectors increasingly talking about the benefits of having a diverse workforce. With this in mind, Community Links has developed a pilot (in partnership with London Youth) to explore how young Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women can be supported to achieve sustainable employment.

Community Links has previously worked with London Youth as a delivery partner on the Talent Match London programme. Between 2014 and 2018, we supported over 400 young people in East London to help them find employment, education and training opportunities. Building on our experiences from Talent Match London, Community Links ran an In-Work Support (IWS) pilot between January and July 2018, and again between January and March 2019 to test how these pathways could be made more sustainable for young people. We went beyond traditional employability programmes by providing additional support to young people who found employment in the form of 1-1 guidance and support to take up training opportunities. As our IWS project was ending, we felt the need to dig deeper into some of the issues affecting young BAME women. Hence, we embarked on this short qualitative research project to answer the question “how do we support young BAME women into sustainable employment?”.

Our pilot was focused around the principle of ‘Deep Value’, the idea that trusting relationships between service providers and service users can provide better results and, in the context of employability programmes, longer and more sustainable outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Throughout our IWS pilot and IWS 2.0 research project, we found that these relationships made young people feel more empowered and confident in their roles and enabled some to approach their employers about their training and development needs. Our research also explored the employers’ perspective on how the IWS pilot benefitted their organisation and how they could increase their knowledge about the motivational factors for young people to stay in their role for longer.

### **1. Key findings and recommendations**

Our key finding is that providing support in the form of advice and training beyond the initial six months does produce more sustainable employment outcomes for young BAME women. Our participants received additional training and were satisfied to obtain these qualifications through the programme, benefitting from motivational support to consider career progression from their advisors (this was not always forthcoming from their employers). We also gathered numerous insights from our participants, which we have summarised below. These considerations may be particularly useful for organisations looking to improve their employability programmes, employers hoping to sustain a more diverse workforce and young BAME women looking for a greater degree of career sustainability.

#### **a) Findings for public / social sector employability programmes**

The collective knowledge and expertise gained through the IWS 2.0 pilot and our other employability programmes at Community Links demonstrates that a strong, trusting relationship between jobseekers and their advisors is key. This is doubly important in our work with young BAME women where we have found that the advisor’s knowledge of the participant can help to navigate a wide range of complex technical, social and cultural barriers to sustainable employment. The process of identifying these barriers and supporting the development of soft skills (including confidence, trust and self-awareness) is crucial to helping young people become job ready.

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), [Reaching out: Tackling disengagement among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Britain](#) (IPPR: London, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Community Links, [Deep Value Assessment: How ongoing, participatory employability assessments could improve outcomes for jobseekers](#) (Community Links: London, 2014); David Robinson, ‘The You & Me Principle’, London School of Economics, 12 March 2018.

- *“Before Talent Match, I was unemployed and I didn’t know what to do. After being on the programme and with the support of my advisor, I am not only employed right now, but also have my own business as well.”*
- *“My advisor has been amazing and reassuring with an incredible amount of knowledge to guide me. He had the perfect balance in reaching out and always empowering to go the extra mile. An opportunity that has truly made a difference to my life”.*

We also found that good relationships between programme participants can improve their experiences. Whereas some advisors on the IWS pilot focused on their 1-1 relationships with participants, one advisor created a WhatsApp group to enable participants to speak with each other. This provided an additional layer of support from young people who were experiencing a similar journey and could provide useful tips and advice. This can prove to be particularly useful for young BAME women who may be from a different social background to their advisor and, as IPPR has suggested, may gain important trust and insights from developing their skills in informal settings within existing social networks.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout our research, we found that it was difficult to re-engage young people whom we had not been in contact with for several months. With time and extra work to explain the benefits of IWS, we managed to re-engage some of our cohort. However, this could have been avoided had we kept these young people engaged throughout, and we learned that it is important to maintain relationships even while they may be dormant, to ensure future engagement.

### Recommendations

- Recognise and acknowledge that every participant has different barriers and needs to reduce those barriers. Therefore they can’t be ‘categorised’.
- Use initial group meetings and team-building activities to set expectations beforehand, and make the participants feel that you are there for them.
- Employability advisors should develop strong, trusting professional relationships with their programme participants. This is possible through regular 1-1 meetings, telephone contacts and ad hoc support via text messages. It can also be difficult to re-engage young people after a period of no engagement, so make sure to check in regularly!
- Work with participants to identify training needs. This may require some technical qualifications, digital skills work or ESOL classes (paying attention to the financial barriers which participants might have to accessing these courses). However, advisors should particularly focus on developing soft skills and building confidence.
- Enable the development of support networks between participants by creating a WhatsApp group and/or team-building activities.
- Identify role models to work with and provide inspiration to young BAME women. This can help to build confidence and motivate programme participants.
- Going the extra mile and providing support at crucial times can develop important trust with participants.
- Programme plans, budgets and evaluations should be designed to reflect the additional time necessary to develop strong relationships. However, it can sometimes be difficult to ascribe a time or financial cost to the most valuable interventions.

### **b) Findings for employers and recruiters**

Throughout our pilot we have worked closely with employers and have found that, whilst many recognise and talk about the benefits of having a diverse and inclusive workplace, some employers appear unsure about how to proactively encourage recruitment from diverse backgrounds. The employers we spoke with were keen to state that they recruited in a non-discriminatory way, assessing a candidate’s skills and how they fit in a job, regardless of their gender, age or ethnicity. However, there was little evidence of any proactive recruitment policies or monitoring to support diversity. Furthermore, when asked about their impressions about BAME women, it appeared that

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<sup>3</sup> IPPR, *Reaching Out*, p.12

many pervasive stereotypes about BAME women in the workplace remained. Both recruiters and employers felt that BAME women are more likely to:

- face cultural and domestic barriers to work
- be family-oriented
- question ability to go for the next step
- suffer from discrimination in and out the workplace
- stick together/cluster within their community

And some of the recruiters we spoke to feel BAME women are less likely to:

- be privately educated
- have peer/support role models
- have been through higher education/former qualification
- be supported towards working
- feel empowered and/or confident

Whilst some of these perceptions may be partially supported by existing available data, others may be problematic and reveal unconscious biases against employing BAME women. Our conversations on perceptions and stereotypes also revealed a discomfort in talking about ethnicity and diversity: while some employers mentioned they were comfortable, others mentioned feeling a bit awkward, surprised, confused, and worried to say something wrong which might possibly offend someone.

#### Recommendations

- It is crucial that employers and recruiters feel comfortable talking about diversity and inclusion and have the knowledge to be more proactive in developing a diverse workforce. To achieve this, further diversity awareness training is necessary.
- Employers and recruiters must also work hard to identify and tackle their own, often-unconscious biases. This includes developing opportunities to dismantle stereotypes about BAME women in employment.
- Young BAME women may well have less formal experience than other candidates for a role, but can also bring a wealth of knowledge and perspectives from other experiences. To harness this and support an inclusive workplace, employers should think about how young BAME women can be better supported through recruitment processes and how their different experiences can be valued. Sometimes it is important to “take a risk” on the right candidate.
- Ensure that flexible work options are available for jobs at all levels.
- Recruiters should develop employability fairs where BAME women and employers can meet in order to find new opportunities and dispel stereotypes.
- All employers and recruiters who take diversity and inclusion seriously should collect data, set gender and ethnicity diversity targets and monitor their policies to understand how diverse their workforce really is and whether their recruitment is prone to any hidden, unconscious biases.

#### **c) Findings for young people and BAME women**

Throughout our IWS 2.0 project and when evaluating our other employability programmes at Community Links, we have developed our knowledge of the social and cultural barriers to work faced by young BAME women, particularly those from a Pakistani and Bangladeshi background. We have held several focus group sessions to gather the opinions of those with lived experience of these issues, exploring how young BAME women see their careers developing and identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, progression.

In these sessions, our IWS participants highlighted:

- A need to develop a professional level of English language skills, particularly among those for whom English is a second language.

- Many participants were not comfortable or confident enough to make their employer aware of specific training needs. And for those who did, there was often little support from their employer, or time and financial constraints which meant that participants felt unable to take up these opportunities.
- Some women have the necessary qualifications for their roles but wanted to develop leadership and management skills as they ultimately want to move into managerial roles. However, they were hesitant to explore this issue with their employers.
- Some of our participants also demonstrated an entrepreneurial attitude and were keen to be self-employed, but lacked the knowledge to formalise their business.
- Some participants feared failing at work, not being able to 'fit in' the work environment and/or being stereotyped by their employers (or even by their colleagues).
- Some of the young BAME women think there is a lack of understanding from employers towards their caring or other family obligations. Many expressed a belief that employers were unwilling to be flexible on working hours, but also felt unable to discuss this with their managers.

### Recommendations

- For young BAME women who are facing multiple barriers to employment and/or progression, we recommend confidence-building and assertiveness training to enable them to raise important workplace issues with their employers.
- It is also important to consider a wide range of careers, even if it means breaking stereotypes of where young BAME women are expected to work. Researching different careers, learning opportunities and training online, with local employability services, at employability fairs and through public noticeboards / libraries is highly recommended.
- Young people should upskill themselves and seek opportunities to learn about being self-employed. Training and information should also be provided by employability services covering information such as how to register a company and get a VAT number.
- Young BAME women seeking to improve their English are likely to benefit from learning in more informal settings, as suggested by IPPR, and should consider working with their social networks to organising such sessions themselves. Young BAME women should feel empowered to learn from women of their own background, but also to expand their social networks and meet new people in conversation clubs and ESOL classes.

## **2. Case studies**

- a) The first participant we interviewed is a young, BAME, Muslim woman who is a football coach at the West Ham Foundation and is studying for a degree in sport science. She also wants to motivate other young BAME women to join her profession, as it is not a very diverse field. Having previously been on the Talent Match London programme, she told us that she has really benefitted from the support and is really enjoying her new role as she always wanted to be a sports coach. Although known to the advisors as being a bit shy and quiet, she has a passion to innovate the football industry and make it more inclusive. We also spoke to her employer who supports her development by giving her the opportunity to upskill and who recognises the benefits of having a diverse workforce.
- b) The second participant we have spoken to is a young, BAME, female who works as a science teacher at a girl's school in Newham. She mentioned that she really enjoys her job and said: "I like the fact that I get to work with young women every day, get to inspire them, motivate them, teach them and see that lightbulb moment". When we asked her how IWS helped her, she said: "The IWS was enough to push me in the right direction. The relationship with my advisor was simple and there wasn't much that I needed as the phone conversation and sit down was enough to motivate and challenge me". The Talent Match London advisors felt that, unlike some young people, she knew what she wanted to do but needed that re-assurance from her advisor while applying for the. Her employer told us that, "Diversity is really important, especially for us being a school in Newham which already has a large representation of different backgrounds".

- c) A third IWS participant was a young BAME female from a British Bengali background, aged 23, who works as a scheduler at NHS. She talks about the job being challenging as it's a variety of different things and problem-solving. "The IWS allowed me to explore training options, because at my current workplace there wasn't much funding available for certain types of training, so further exploration through IWS was really good for my career progression. The relationship with the advisor has been good...they have been really accommodating and understanding and made phone calls to catch up when I was available". When she came on the Talent Match London programme, she had dropped out of university and didn't want to pursue her studies, although she had high grades. She was under a lot of pressure from her parents as she comes from a highly-educated family. She did some research on her own and approached her advisor that she wanted to be on the NHS pool programme through Poplar Harca. She got that placement for a month after which she applied for a job with the NHS and was employed as a receptionist, and then moved into her current role soon after (about six months after being on the Talent Match London programme). Her employer described the range of training available in their organisation, such as MS training, project management, Prince 2, presentation and interview skills. The employer also talked about the importance of diversity: "It brings equal opportunities and a good mix of skills".
- d) Another Talent Match London participant was studying for nursing qualifications Levels 1-3 whilst working at a nursery. She wanted to upskill herself and achieve her Level 4 qualification but was unsure if her employer would be able to support her. The reason for this was, she believed, because she would be equally qualified to her manager and potentially overskilled for her role. Through the IWS pilot, however, the participant was encouraged and supported to do her Level 4 qualification. She told us: "This will be a game changer for me. In these two years, Talent Match has changed my life and my mentality. Through Talent Match/IWS, I could be a manager by the end of the year".

### 3. Our Research

According to the Race at Work Survey, there are around 20.6 million women in the U.K. who are of a working age population, of which around 2.9 million women (14%) are from a BAME background. 19% of working BAME women are Indian, 25% are Black and 19% are Pakistani / Bangladeshi. Whereas Indian, mixed race and Black women have relatively high levels of employment (65.8%, 64.4% and 63.6% respectively) Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have much lower rates at 39.2% and 30%.<sup>4</sup> In 2017 the unemployment rate for BAME women was 9.1% (specifically 21.2% for Bangladeshi and 12.5% for Pakistani women) compared to 3.7% for White women. The government's Race Disparity Audit in 2017 found that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were the least likely group to be employed. However, employment levels in this group have substantially increased since 2004.<sup>5</sup>

	Newham	London
Economically Active	74.5%	78.0%
In Employment	68.4%	73.2%
Unemployed	7.6%	6.1%

Economic Activity in Newham Borough. Source: Newham Council, 'Newham facts and figures'.

In Newham, we can see that the unemployment rate in 2016 was 7.6% (male and female), compared to 6.1% in the rest of London. Data from the London Poverty Profile shows that between 2006 and 2016, worklessness fell for Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black groups in London, but these rates were still far higher for each group (apart from Indian) than the White group.<sup>6</sup>

Research by Sheffield Hallam University has shown that women from BAME communities often face certain difficulties in accessing employment, and it is hard for them to find employment which match their skills, and abilities. The possible reasons for these can be: socioeconomic disadvantage; a lack

<sup>4</sup> Business in the Community, [Race at Work 2015 – 2017 Survey Insights: BAME Women at work](#) (BITC: London, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Office, [Race Disparity Audit: Summary findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures website](#) (HM Government: London, 2018), p.10.

<sup>6</sup> New Policy Institute, [London's Poverty Profile 2017](#) (Trust for London: London, 2017), p.85.

of recognition of the qualifications and skills that they already have; lack of formal and informal support available; and not being fluent in English.<sup>7</sup>

Of the 418 young people who Community Links supported via the Talent Match programme, roughly two thirds were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (including Mixed Ethnicity background. 170 (40.7%) of the young people we supported were young women, and 110 (26.3%) were young BAME women. Of the 110 young BAME women we supported, 62.7% found full time employment.

#### 4. Methodology

##### a) Research methodology

IWS is based on the principle of “Deep Value”. Deep Value refers to the added value and improved outcomes that can be achieved in public services when strong relationships are forged between the service provider and service user. Community Links has previously conducted research on how Deep Value can help to deliver improved employability services and better outcomes for jobseekers.<sup>8</sup> Our founder David Robinson has also written extensively on how relationships, or the “You & Me Principle”, are crucial to supporting communities and tackling poverty.<sup>9</sup>

Based on what we know from this work and from Community Links’ extensive experience in providing employability services in East London, we wanted to demonstrate that more sustained support for jobseekers, based on stronger and longer-lasting relationships with their advisors, would lead to better results. Specifically, we wanted to show that Deep Value support would help jobseekers to find a career that they were passionate about, and support them to stay in their new job for longer.

We have spoken to seven young BAME female IWS participants and three of their employers. We asked the young people what they wanted from the programme and how we could help them shape their career (e.g. through training). We asked the employers what kind of relationship they had with the IWS participant they employed and if there were any career development opportunities available for the IWS participant and what diversity policies they are currently implementing within their work environment to find out their knowledge and importance regarding diversity and inclusion.

##### b) Community Links’ Approach

Community Links has been transforming lives for 40 years. Our Mission is to support people in coming together, overcoming barriers, building purpose and making the most of the place they live in. From our base in east London we apply the learning from our local work to influence and achieve positive national change. The Community Links approach is driven by several key approaches:

- a. *Early Action*: Intervening early to prevent problems before they occur.
- b. *Deep Value*: Building strong, trusting relationships between service users and providers.
- c. *Social infrastructure*: Supporting the development of social spaces where young people and communities can access positive, creative opportunities.
- d. *Encouraging agency*: Encouraging communities and young people to take the lead.

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<sup>7</sup> Sue Yeandle, Bernadette Stiehl and Lisa Buckner, [Ethnic Minority Women and Access to the Labour Market: Synthesis Report](#) (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Community Links, *Deep Value Assessment*.

<sup>9</sup> David Robinson, ‘The You & Me Principle’.