

## Practitioner Briefing 3: Prioritising Education

This briefing provides tips to practitioners in West London and UK to highlight best practices in social inclusion through employment. It is drawn from a wider research on *Good Practices in Social Inclusion through Employment*, using examples of Roma integration. The study is published as a separate paper for policy makers together with map of relevant organisations and further reading. The study is a part of the ESF funded project *New Pathways to Work in West London*, led by Ealing Council (2009-2013).

**Summary:** Young People dropping out of education or leaving school with limited qualifications is a persistent issue in West London. Young people from certain geographic areas or from particular ethnic groups are more likely to be affected. They face barriers of accessing employment as a result of underachievement. Prioritising support with education, for all age groups of children and young people, is essential in improving the social inclusion and employability of vulnerable groups.

### **Context**

A significant proportion of West London residents have relatively low-level skills, with around 13% having no formal qualifications and one in five lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills. There are concentrations of unqualified residents in certain geographic areas (e.g. parts of Brent, Hounslow and Hillingdon) and across ethnic groups (such as Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Irish residents). This relates to patterns of social exclusion and deprivation. High numbers of young people not in education, training or employment (NEET) is a particular concern in Hammersmith & Fulham and Harrow, and young people (16-25) leaving school with limited qualifications is a concern across West London<sup>1</sup>.

### **About the Practice**

In order to effectively improve the employability of vulnerable groups, it is essential to prioritise supporting the education of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes working with parents, helping children and young people stay and progress in education, and complete school or training. This needs to happen for all age-groups, starting from very young children in early years' education, primary school, at secondary school to prevent low-qualifications and school drop-outs, and improving opportunities for disadvantaged young people to access to further education and training.

<sup>1</sup> WLA 2011 West London Economic Assessment, available online here: <http://app.thco.co.uk/wla/wla.nsf/News/WLAN-250> (l.a. February 2013)

## ***How can this be done?***

The steps taken by practitioners on the ground can include:

### **Early Years**

- Undertaking outreach and community engagement with parents, including visiting parents in homes and areas they are located.
- Employing home visiting programmes for vulnerable groups during pregnancy and up to 2 years after birth to give hands-on support with parenting and access to early years' education.
- Delivering pre-school or school-readiness classes aimed at children from disadvantaged groups (language support, healthcare checks, and school expenses support for food and uniforms).

**Bringing Communities to Early Years Centres: Gypsy, Roma and Traveler Achievement Service.** The GRTAS works closely with local Early Years Centres in order to promote the inclusion of Gypsy Roma and Traveler (GRT) children and families. Community members are also employed at the centres to build trust and support within local communities. Children who attend Early Years find the transition to formal teaching in primary schools easier to manage, so improving access to early years provision is key in raising the attainment of vulnerable groups, at risk of falling behind in education.

### **Primary School**

- Supplementary schools, free extra-tuition and after-school classes can give additional support to children from vulnerable groups.
- Supporting parents with their language learning so they can better support their children at school e.g. giving information and help in accessing local ESOL classes.
- Facilitating access to interpreting and translation services to help communication with parents; e.g. linking with local NGOs and community groups, or recruiting community members or parents as volunteers.
- Improving information for parents (e.g. Roma parents) about how they can get involved in their local school, and in parents/ governing bodies.
- Running cohesion activities to promote good relations and contact between pupils and parents from different backgrounds; e.g. exhibitions, inter-cultural visits and trips, local celebrations, arts performances, talent shows and concerts.

**Roma Support Group: Cultural Awareness Training in Schools and with Statutory Staff.** A key aim of the RSG is to provide cultural awareness training for statutory organisations and staff, including work in schools. This includes running workshops and training for practitioners on cultural and ethnic diversity within Roma communities, ethnic and family structures, understanding of social inclusion barriers, best practice in improving Roma inclusion and engaging with Roma children and families. They have also developed a range of school education materials on Roma culture and communities. Contact information for RSG and similar organisations is available as an annex to the Research paper from [www.tavinstitute.org](http://www.tavinstitute.org).

## Secondary school and preventing school drop-outs

- Implementing cultural education activities and curriculum materials on the contribution of different ethnic groups, including language, history, culture, music, religion and arts.
- Having strong elements within formal and informal education to promote anti-racism and bullying, and a welcoming school atmosphere for all groups.
- Using informal, interactive, and creative methods, with a focus on more practical/vocational subjects can help engage pupils and make learning feel less intimidating and more relevant and enjoyable.
- Carrying out after-school activities e.g. sports and the arts to help build engagement and interest of disadvantaged pupils.

**The Urban Youth Network: Using the universal language of sports.** The organisation works with young people through sports events, mostly football sessions. It particularly supports Somali boys, but also invites people of all ages, races and genders to promote intercultural dialogue. The events allow the team to talk with young people, especially those who lack a parental figure, to provide role models from their communities and to deliver tailored mentoring. The team also signposts young people to other services that can help with skills and works with parents to support their engagement in the education and schooling of their children.

- More flexible recognition of a young person's skills, strengths and interests outside the classroom can build self-esteem and aspirations; e.g. hobbies, responsibilities with home and families, volunteering.
- Employing or linking with mentors and youth workers from communities to support pupils from vulnerable groups.
- Setting up peer mentoring schemes, or volunteers from older young people/ pupils, to provide support and act as role models.
- School and education support workers for vulnerable pupils at risk of early school leaving, combining education and social work activities, building trust and engagement, and liaising with other professionals (e.g. health, social services, youth offending as in the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS)).
- Working through trusted community NGOs and leaders, to visit families and undertake community outreach to promote the importance of continuing schooling, whilst being respectful of culture and tradition.
- Support to the wider family as problems experienced by young people are often intrinsically linked to difficulties faced by their families, for example health needs.
- Removing financial barriers for families in their children attending school, e.g. free transport, uniforms, text books, and school meals.

**Step by Step Programme Foundation Bulgaria: Educational Inclusion through school improvement.** The project runs training in schools and local conferences, to enrich pre-school and school teachers practice in engaging Roma children. Thus, it provides a more tolerant, open, supportive and stimulating learning environment to enhance their education opportunities. This requires a long-term and systematic approach in schools. One module works with Roma parents to improve engagement with education, and provides support with any socio-economic problems they may be facing. To achieve this teachers are provided with counselling, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. Another module aims at the school management. It covers key values such as equality in a democratic society and school, social justice, and cultural diversity. There is a module for teachers on how to promote understanding and respect for diversity among students: by nurturing positive self-concept and group identities in the classroom, strengthening relationships between schools and communities; and encouraging students to explore and seek solutions on social issues that help foster awareness of social injustice.

### Access to further and higher education

- Supporting students to access grant schemes, scholarships, and means-tested fees to increase access to further education.
- Offering in-employment vocational training and apprenticeships in real work environments, where young people can practical employment skills alongside education.

**Roma Education Fund: Higher Education Scholarships for Roma.** Roma Education Fund has dedicated scholarships for Roma students to bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma in achievement and progression. It is facilitated through an electronic online system, which gives Roma students the opportunity to apply for funding in an effective and interactive way. The system provides to registered users timely online feedback regarding the match of the application with the requirements. The programme is popularised via non-governmental organisations, social media and word of mouth. The programme triggers a chain reaction in communities through the example of successful students: when a few students from the same neighborhood apply, the whole community feels more confident and many other students follow.

### *Making this Work Locally*

The table below offer some tips to practitioners work in this field.

Success factors	Challenges to consider	Tips to overcome challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having trusted NGOs and community groups help engage learners and families, and deliver education e.g. mentors, outreach/ liaison workers teaching assistants, after-school classes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-school education, nurseries and child-care can often be inaccessible to parents on limited incomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise pre-school summer camps specifically designed for each disadvantaged group.</li> <li>• Use interactive learning techniques to help engage children, including sports, arts and crafts.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruiting teachers from relevant migrant and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community backgrounds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can be difficult recruiting teachers due to staff shortages and a lack of trained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link with Teacher Training colleges around recruiting teachers from diverse groups.</li> <li>• Or make sure existing teachers are</li> </ul>

Success factors	Challenges to consider	Tips to overcome challenges
	professionals from specific groups.	trained in working with specific ethnic and vulnerable groups.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ring-fenced funding available to schools with high numbers of pupils from vulnerable groups e.g. Roma pupils.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recession and public sector cuts means that funding for specialist staff and engagement projects are limited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build up links with local voluntary organisations to improve understanding of specific groups.</li> <li>Engage staff in training and further learning on inclusive education.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tailoring support to specific needs of vulnerable children and families e.g. looking at health, housing, social needs alongside education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education professionals and teachers can have very limited capacity and experience multiple pressures on their time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build links with existing professionals in other fields &amp; improve referral arrangements.</li> <li>Engage in community campaigns to highlight gaps in local needs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collection of sophisticated ethnically disaggregated data in schools, colleges and further education e.g. to capture 'hidden' groups such as Roma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Even if ethnic monitoring is improved, due to fears of discrimination (e.g. in GRT communities) young people can be reluctant to self-ascribe their ethnicity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with local voluntary organisations to create an inclusive environment in which people do not feel stigmatised for who they are.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased consultation with parents from vulnerable groups e.g. running school consultation events with Roma parents supported by community groups/ NGOs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given the current labour market, economic climate, disadvantage and discrimination, parents can feel education is not a priority as their children will still be excluded<sup>2</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with parents (via NGOs) to promote education, offer support &amp; build aspiration.</li> <li>Encourage children and parents by celebrating strengths &amp; successes.</li> <li>Organise events, promote an inclusive culture &amp; zero tolerance to discrimination and bullying.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Run training for staff in cultural awareness and skills in working with specific groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School funding for additional activities and training is tight in the current climate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study the local provision as there may be existing services locally.</li> <li>Join forces with local community groups, parents and NGOs to acquire additional funding.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respecting and promoting practices and traditional skills in the curriculum and in extra-curriculum activities to raise awareness and appreciation of certain communities e.g. trade, craft, music and arts skills in Roma communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A constrained, formal and restrictive curriculum can 'turn pupils off' as well as one that does not value or acknowledge the community cultures and values where the young people are from.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the use of interactive techniques.</li> <li>Connect to local voluntary organisations who promote minority cultures &amp; have links with community craftspeople &amp; artists.</li> <li>Involve parents and encourage the sharing of family history &amp; culture.</li> </ul>

*These briefings are prepared by a team at the Tavistock Institute: Laura Stock, Dr Milena Stateva, Dr Kerstin Junge. The briefings are accompany a Research Paper under the title Social Inclusion through Education: Learning from Roma Integration. You are receiving these briefings because we have identified you as a key service provider. To request the paper and the other four briefings or if you do not want to receive further communication from us, please email us at: [hello@tavinststitute.org](mailto:hello@tavinststitute.org)*

<sup>2</sup> See Menzies, L. (2013) Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track, LKMCO and JRF Foundation <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/england-education-aspirations-summary.pdf> (l.a. February 2013)