

**Forum Discussion - Minutes**

**Living in Harmony forum, 18th August 10-12 at Pilton Community Health Project**

**Attending**

Mitra Rostami (Edinburgh Lothian Regional Equalities Council), Mizan Rahman (local resident), Sumi Rahman (local resident), Helen Bourquin (Community Learning and Development), Saliha Abibe (local resident), Jon Mennie (Community Renewal), Kenny Cameron (Spartans Community Football Academy), Declan McCann (Muirhouse Library), Peter Sparrow (Drylaw Police), Anita Aggarwal (Pilton Community Health Project), George Melville (Bethany Christian Trust), Julie Smith (North Edinburgh Timebank), Hannah Kitchen (Development Worker, Living in Harmony).

**Apologies**

Lesley Hinds, Lyn West (Granton Housing Co-op), Cllr. Vicki Redpath, Wilson Masih, Fiona Manson (Community Learning and Development), Kathy Softley (Library Development Officer North and West), Zuleika Osman.

**Updates on events and projects related to LiH**

Julie Smith: Chat café is starting again next Monday (22nd August), 12-2 at a new venue of Royston Wardieburn Community Centre. Crèche is available but must be booked in advance on 07965941177.

Helen Bourquin: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes will be starting at West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre and Royston Wardieburn Community Centre on Saturdays. There are additional classes on a Thursday 10-12 at RWCC, with a focus on preparing for Life in the UK Test, and beginners’ classes for people who may have not have literacy skills in their own language. Both classes have crèche available during the class. These classes start on 27th September.

Hannah Kitchen: ELREC are organising a workshop for those interested in running to become community councillors on 7thSeptember, 6-8pm at ELREC conference room, 14 Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LH.

**Employment Discussion**

Hannah highlighted the main points from the last forum meeting, when Eleanor McKnight from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights gave a talk about their recent research into race equality in employment in Scotland’s public sector.

Key points were:

**Unemployment rates are higher for all visible Black and Minority Ethnic groups than for white people in Scotland.**

**In the public sector white applicants are *twice* as likely to be appointed to jobs than their BME counterparts**

**In local authorities white applicants are *three times* as likely to be successful**

**Community Renewal regularly find that BME people end up applying for jobs they are overqualified for, and that converting overseas qualifications or having them recognised is a huge difficulty for people moving here from abroad and looking for work.**

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We started the discussion by asking if anyone present had other experiences to add to the above.

**Mitra Rostami** shared her experience of moving to Scotland and having great difficulty looking for work. Although she had a Masters in Business she was repeatedly unsuccessful in job applications she was qualified for. She then was continually rejected even for jobs that she was overqualified for.

She became hopeless about getting work and started to realise that most employers want to stay in their comfort zone. References from overseas can be something that puts employers off.

She then started to volunteer, but wasn’t aware of the opportunities to volunteer in roles that are relevant to your chosen field.

She eventually volunteered with ELREC which was a very helpful thing to do.

She emphasised the need for appropriate outreach to people who need job support, and how helpful it is to have a reference from a UK employer.

**George Melville.** At Bethany job club they help people known to them with references and also have partnerships with some businesses in Edinburgh.

**Anita Aggarwal** acknowledged the difficulty in accessing employment when you have arrived from another country, but also pointed out that studies show people born in Britain from BME groups are also underrepresented in the workforce and face real barriers. That we as employers need to look at our own recruitment practices and how we can make these fairer. We all tend to employ people who seem ‘easiest’ to work with and can make decisions based on a feeling about someone. It would be good to have training and to look at how we can improve our recruitment practices.

**Mizan Rahman** said that he has lived in Scotland for 10 years and has faced institutional racism when trying to get a job. The way a lot of BME people react to repeated frustration in trying to get a job is to go into self-employment or set up their own business. However job support targeted at BME groups is still about filling in applications and not enough about setting up your own business.

**Anita Aggarwal** said that this can be an issue, as if people feel like they have no other option than to be self-employed, this can result in people going into less stable, less well paid work because of the barriers they face to more stable employment that may suit their skills better.

**Mitra Rostami** said that many migrants don’t know about the support available to them – it’s very important to reach out to people in a relevant way.

**Helen Bourquin** asked why it is so difficult to find out the steps people need to take to get work in an appropriate field.

**Jon Mennie** shared that from his experience at Community Renewal, the system is very inflexible. He gave an example of a woman they supported who was a qualified teacher in her own country. However in order to work here she would need to take 18 months to retrain. As a parent she was not able to take time out without an income in order to do this. She now has her own business teaching Arabic. 5 year background checks and references are also real issues for employers. It can cost a lot to have your qualifications certified in this country also.

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**Possible solutions locally:**

**In pairs we discussed things we could do as Living in Harmony to make a difference to inequality in employment locally, then fed back ideas**

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| **Work with organisations** |
| Make North Edinburgh an ‘area of excellence’ in terms of diversity of workforce* Offer training on recruitment practices – how to make these fairer
* Raising awareness of our own biases
* Would be really helpful to hear from an organisation who has looked at their recruitment practices who could share what they did to improve
* ELREC have a big stress on diversity in the workplace and how positive this is – they would be willing to share practices
* Collect equalities monitoring forms centrally to help organisations have accurate picture and up to date information

Working with employers* Could we contact large construction companies working in the area and encourage them to employ local people, inc. BME people?
* North Edinburgh jobs fair where employers explain what they are looking for and how to work towards a career with them

Council elections* We should be raising this issue with potential councillors now, especially as the council is such a major employer in the city and should be representative of the people who live here
* Continue to work to dispel myths around housing etc.
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| **Outreach and support** |
| Appropriate advice and outreach* Volunteering can be a new concept to some new migrants and it would be helpful to have information about volunteering opportunities relevant to your chosen field
* References can be a problem so help with getting a reference would be very helpful
* Information about support services advertised in lots of places so people who need it can find out about it

People who have experienced unemployment share experiences* A ‘residents’ advisory group’ where people such as Mitra can share what it is like to be new to the country and trying to find work. Could share experiences with support agencies and employers

Advertising local jobs* Could have a board in the library with current vacancies – other places as well as specific employment agencies. Declan McCann said this would be possible at Muirhouse Library and Jon Mennie said that Community Renewal can share jobs they have information on for the library.

Job centre* This is a big source of stress for many people who have found their interactions there particularly unhelpful.
* There is currently a Scottish Government consultation about social security where people should share their experiences of the job centre <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/social-security/social-security-in-scotland>
* Community Renewal also has contact with the job centre and feeds back people’s experiences directly to the local manager. They are also hosting a workshop as part of the Scottish Government’s consultation at their hub in Muirhouse.
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**Issues affecting residents at the moment**

**Mizan Rahman** said that residents he is in contact with from the Bengali, Nepali and Pakistani communities would like the opportunity to take part in more social activities, and would like to organise an event for Eid. Hannah agreed to contact the residents through Mizan and inform them about the community events team, and also see if Living in Harmony can help with an event they would like to organise.

He would also like to encourage more BME people onto organisations’ boards locally as this is an important way that people can influence what happens in the area.

**Anita Aggarwal** asked if any residents had noticed an increase in hate crimes or incidents since the Brexit vote.

**Julie Smith** had noticed mutterings on the bus when out with chat café people over the summer. She will ask people at Chat Café when it starts back.

**Saliha Abib** said that, for her, North Edinburgh is the best and most welcoming area in Edinburgh, having lived in various parts of town over the last ten years. She said that it is more mixed, people meet together more and she’s more aware of what’s going on. She feels good here and finds doctors, dentists etc to be very welcoming which contributes to how she generally feels about where she lives.

**Training needs for organisations**

Bright Choices: Mitra Rostami from Edinburgh Lothian Regional Equalities Council (ELREC) explained that this project looks at a wide range of violence issues, including honour based violence, which is likely to affect BME groups in the city. They can offer awareness raising sessions for professionals for 2 hours, the ideal number of people being between 20-30. Those present were interested in the training and it was agreed that Hannah would work with Mitra to organise a session for professionals in North Edinburgh.

Hate Crime: The police have offered to put on training about hate crime, and how to become a third party reporting centre (somewhere you can report a hate crime without having to go directly to the police). We discussed the fact that on top of the basic training, it would be good to have more awareness among professionals and residents about what hate crime is, and why it’s important to report hate crime or hate incidents. We agreed to organise a session like this with the police – Hannah will take forward.

Recruitment: As discussed above, it would be good to organise training on recruitment practices and how to become more aware of our own biases.

**11.30: Any other business**

Hannah will be going on maternity leave at the beginning of November and we are now recruiting to cover her role while she is away. Please share this opportunity as widely as possible: <http://www.pchp.org.uk/news/2016/living-harmony-maternity-cover-post> The closing date is 12th September

**The next forum will be on Thursday 12th October, 10-12. Venue and theme to be confirmed. Meanwhile we will send around the details of training opportunities discussed once arranged.**