

# Improving Rural Reach

A partnership project between  
Oxfordshire Rural Community Council  
and Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council

April 2007 to March 2008

## Report



ChangeUp



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## **Report of the “Improving Rural Reach” project**

A partnership project between Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council April 2007 to March 2008

### **Introduction**

1. The Improving Rural Reach project has run for one year from April 2007 to the end of March 2008 as a partnership project between the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) and the Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council (OREC). It has been funded by Capacitybuilders as part of the national ChangeUp programme of strategic investment in voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure. “Infrastructure” is defined as the physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that help “front-line” VCS organisations to achieve their aims.

### **The ChangeUp programme**

2. The ChangeUp programme was launched in 2004 by the Home Office who, with the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), funded the initial two years of the programme. During the period 2004 to March 2006 locally-based consortia of interested statutory and voluntary sector organisations were supported with funding to engage in a strategic planning exercise to shape the structure and content of VCS infrastructure support services that best suited the needs of the front-line organisations in their areas and how those services should be funded. Consortia were tasked to produce a Local Infrastructure Development Plan (LIDP) by March 2006.
3. In our county the Oxfordshire VCS Infrastructure Development (OVID) Consortium was formed, bringing together VCS infrastructure providers, the six principal local authorities and some representatives of front-line organisations. The Oxfordshire LIDP was produced to time and copies are available from ORCC or Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA).
4. In the South East some ChangeUp funding was channelled through an Additional Support Programme (ASP) in order that consortia could pay particular attention to the capacity building and infrastructure needs of Black and Minority Ethnic communities, Minority Faiths, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and Gypsies and Travellers. In Oxfordshire OREC acted as Lead Body and the ASP experience and findings were fed into the LIDP.
5. The LIDP proposes a mix of improvements in the way that support services are delivered at present, with some new or different services. The proposals are grouped into seven broad themes:
  - Developing support for volunteering;
  - Improving information resources;
  - Supporting organisational development;
  - Supporting community capacity building;
  - Promoting diversity and equality;
  - Using the expertise and resources of the larger Faith Communities for the benefit of the wider VCS;
  - Enhancing networks and partnerships, and promoting the sector to partners and the wider community.

6. In 2006 Capacitybuilders was created to take responsibility for managing the Government's continuing investment in the ChangeUp programme. OVID became the Oxfordshire Voluntary Sector Development Partnership (OVSDP) and has been working to implement the findings of the LIDP as far as the available central and local resources will allow. (The membership of OVSDP is shown in Appendix 2 to this report). Further information about Capacity Builders is available on their website: [www.capacitybuilders.org.uk](http://www.capacitybuilders.org.uk).
7. During 2007/08 local ChangeUp consortia have been tasked with producing a Business Plan for 2008-11 and a Development Strategy for 2008-14. The OVSDP documents can be viewed in the ChangeUp section of the VCS web portal, [www.oxnet.org.uk](http://www.oxnet.org.uk), and show how the OVSDP would like to build on and take forward the improvements in infrastructure support that were proposed in the LIDP.

### **The Improving Reach programme**

8. The national Improving Reach one-year pilot funding programme was launched by Capacitybuilders during 2006 with the aim of improving the reach of infrastructure for a range of marginalised groups and the following groups in particular:
  - Black and minority ethnic
  - Refugee and migrant
  - Faith
  - Isolated rural
9. The programme was framed in the light of a strategy paper on Mainstreaming Diversity within the ChangeUp Programme which was commissioned by the Home Office Active Community Directorate and published in January 2006. The report can be viewed on the national ChangeUp web portal : [www.changeup.org.uk](http://www.changeup.org.uk) (see National Projects – Equality and Diversity).
10. The programme was open to individual organisations and not restricted to existing ChangeUp consortia. The programme criteria were considered by OVSDP in the light of the LIDP project proposals focussing on rural community capacity building and promoting diversity and equality. The Partnership agreed that ORCC and OREC were the relevant OVSDP members to act as lead bodies under such a programme but concluded that the limitations brought by the short-term nature of the funding would not make it an appropriate means of taking these LIDP projects forward. OVSDP endorsed ORCC and OREC's proposals for the project which was eventually submitted to Capacitybuilders and will be considering how the learning from the project feeds into the Partnership's work to take forward its Development Strategy.

### **The Oxfordshire Improving Rural Reach Project**

11. The overall aim of the project was to identify where VCS groups serving marginalised and isolated individuals and groups exist in the county's rural areas and whether they have unmet capacity building and/or other infrastructure support needs.
12. By agreement with OREC the ORCC took the role of lead body for the project application. The project was devised as an opportunity for partnership working between the two organisations. Brief details of the aims and work of the two organisations are given in Appendix 1 and an outline of the project in Appendix 3.
13. The two partners agreed that the work would be done through financial provision for the employment of an ORCC project worker with additional worker support, deployed and managed through OREC, to build the capacity of BME/faith groups to engage with the project.

14. For ORCC the project was also an opportunity to build on the work of our Community Development Worker focussing on rural social inclusion. The ORCC sees its role as taking a holistic “whole community” view of how social exclusion can occur – and who is likely to be at risk – in rural communities. We work to encourage and assist rural communities themselves to be inclusive and to do what they can to address social exclusion where it occurs. We seek to promote examples of inclusive good practice available to service providers and other agencies and to local community leaders and community groups

We aim to be at the centre of a network of agencies with an interest in social exclusion/inclusion or working to address the needs of socially excluded people/groups - to learn from them and to provide them with a means of accessing our expertise on rural community organisation and development, parish planning, rural-proofing and our links with community leaders and groups.

This work includes supporting the Rural Inclusion Group which brings together representatives of a range of statutory and voluntary agencies concerned with rural health, well-being and inclusion issues and ways of addressing local needs.

15. ORCC wanted to identify whether and where VCS groups serving marginalised/isolated individuals/groups exist in the county’s rural areas and whether they have unmet capacity building and/or other infrastructure support needs. In particular, our organisation was conscious of the interest of a range of statutory and voluntary agencies within the county in the implications of the arrival in the county of migrant workers from Eastern European and other countries and of a lack of knowledge as to whether and where economic migrants were settling outside the main urban centres.
16. ORCC also saw the project as an opportunity to investigate further the idea of creating a network of Local Representatives who would be people, preferably part of a local “good neighbour” group, who could act as a two-way information channel from and to centrally-based statutory and voluntary organisations, including ORCC, and alerts back to ORCC (and others) on identified local service/support needs. The need for a better two-way flow of information had been voiced at a number of networking events focussing on social inclusion and health and well-being issues, including an “Invisible Health” event organised by ORCC for the Rural Inclusion Group in November 2006.
17. The Improving Reach funding application was submitted in October 2006 and the two partners were delighted to be informed in December that Capacitybuilders wished to support it by providing the requested funding during 2007/08. We are grateful to the agency for its interest in the project and for supportive joint working on project monitoring and financial management during the year.
18. In the last quarter of 2006/07 two project workers were recruited and Julie Smith and Lebo Molete were appointed from 1 April 2007 as Community Development Worker (Improving Rural Reach) and Community Development Worker (BME Support) respectively.
19. A Partnership Agreement between ORCC and OREC was signed providing for ORCC to act as employer for both workers, with Lebo Molete being seconded to OREC, who would provide accommodation and management in close liaison with ORCC. This kind of partnership was a new venture for both organisations and has proved an interesting, productive and mutually beneficial experience, on which we wish to build in the future.
20. A project Reference Group was established consisting of interested individuals with knowledge, experience and contacts which would be beneficial to the workers and to ORCC and OREC as project managers. Details of the membership of the Group are set out in Appendix 4.

21. ORCC and OREC soon became aware of a one-year Community Engagement Project, which had just started in Oxford City and which was a joint City Council and County Council initiative, with the City Council as Lead.

The project had 2 work strands: Area Planning in two pilot areas (Central/West Oxford and Cowley) and BME engagement City-wide. The focus of the project was to build the capacity of people in isolated groups who wanted to be more involved in policy-making in their area. This would include newly-arrived people from Eastern European countries, existing ethnic minority community groups, refugees, gypsies and travellers, faith communities and students or other transient populations.

The work would include the recruitment of community champions and to provide training for them on how local authority decision making works and how community groups can feed views into policy making.

As the communities and groups which were being targeted through this project were the same as those being targeted by the Improving Reach project and a number of the same people would be likely to be recruited for both groups, if two separate reference groups were to be established, it was agreed with the City Council that the Improving Reach Reference Group should have an interest in both projects.

Although the purposes, contexts and geographical coverage of the two projects differed, the coincidences of target groups and a shared intention to widen participation and inclusion and improve access to support services and opportunities, suggested that it would be useful to share information, contacts, experience and learning.

### **The scope and implementation of the project**

22. In drafting the project proposal ORCC was conscious of the broad scope of the potential target groups, target areas of activity and issues to be investigated. It was recognised that once the project was in place, after initial scoping there would be a need to prioritise from among the different strands included in project outline.
23. It was agreed that Julie would look at the needs of groups serving migrant workers, young people, older people, people with mental health issues, people with disabilities, carers and the gay/lesbian/transgender community and that Lebo would focus on groups serving black and minority ethnic people (BME).
24. The term BME means many things to different people but for the purpose of this report, it refers to all ethnic groups who do not fall within the White British category, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It was recognised that migrant workers from Eastern Europe might be considered to come within the BME grouping and therefore they might come within the remit of either Julie or Lebo. (In the event it was interesting to note that the Polish community in Banbury classify themselves as ethnic minorities but that is not the case in Oxford.) It was also recognised that travellers were included within the BME grouping.
25. It was not being suggested that all individuals in these groups would be marginalized but that these groups were likely be more at risk of marginalisation – particularly in rural areas where numbers are low and scattered across a large number of relatively small settlements.
26. The Oxfordshire BME sector is diverse and multifaceted with complex needs which cannot be solved with a uniform intervention. Therefore it would be a huge mistake to lump together all BME organisations in Oxfordshire and try to devise one standard programme to build their capacity. It became apparent to us, early on in the project, that some BME frontline organisations needed more attention than others.

27. Additionally, specific groups like Oxfordshire Travellers and Gypsies had already been identified and targeted by local, regional and national infrastructure organisations for support. For instance, the Redbridge Traveller Women's Support Group had already launched a training and support project on behalf of Travellers in the county. The national Travellers and Gypsies organisation 'Travellers Friends and Families' had plans in the pipeline to run several workshops in the South East, including Oxfordshire, on traveller awareness and intervention strategies aimed at generic organisations in the voluntary/community, statutory and private sectors.
28. Also, early on in the project Julie met with staff from the Advisory Service for the Education of Travellers (ASET), which has for a number of years been providing educational activities for the Traveller community on site, which is much appreciated. This service visits all the travellers sites within the county and has built up, over a number of years, very good relationships with the communities. We wanted advice on how best to engage with the traveller community, so their views and needs could be included in this project report. The advice we were given was that there had been many attempts at consultation with this community in the past, but nothing had changed for them. It was therefore felt that they would be reluctant to engage with yet another consultation exercise.
29. This project did not want to raise expectations with any community that their voiced needs would be met through the project, neither did we want to contribute to 'consultation fatigue'. We therefore took the view that instead we would ask for the views of the workers who knew this community well and have built up trust: these being ASET and staff on the Banbury Community Bus and the Oxfordshire Playbus, who visit the sites to provide leisure and play facilities.
30. Lebo therefore decided to focus on the needs of African Caribbean and Asian groups in the Oxon BME sector and of some East European groups which regard themselves as BME groups. Apart from Gypsies and Travellers and some East European groups, the BME sector in Oxford is constituted by at least 13 different sub-groups, according to anecdotal evidence. Therefore the focus was still broad and represented a huge task for one Community Development Worker (CDW) in a short period of time.
31. During the project it became clear that time would not allow sufficient attention to be given to work to support BME and minority faith individuals and groups to play an integrated part in the life of their rural communities and to access support services or to look at ways of supporting communities without existing community champions/leaders coming forward to stimulate self-help initiatives including community action planning projects. These aspects of the project proposal were therefore not covered in detail.

### **Research methods adopted**

32. The project was not intended to be an exercise in the field of academic research or to include the collection and analysis of detailed data. The workers explored the existence and location of their target groups and their needs and possible solutions through reading, talking and listening, visiting and networking with other agencies.
33. A list of all the organisations consulted and events attended is attached as Appendix 6. A list of useful publications is given in Appendix 14.
34. Lebo carried out a small baseline study to establish where there was existing mapping of rurally-focused BME VCS organisations. He reviewed literature i.e. reports, minutes, publications, and visited the oxnet website and the websites of OREC, ORCC and other organisations. The ASP programme provided a picture of an attempt to map BME frontline organisations and their issues in 2006, which had produced a small database, which was Oxford-centric, limited in scope and in need of up-dating.

35. Consultations with OREC/ORCC partnership staff and members of the Reference Group were part of the baseline study. The overall finding indicated that no major work had been undertaken to specifically identify BME and isolated frontline organisations in rural areas and to assess their capacity needs. Lebo therefore carried out further mapping, as far as possible.
36. Both workers identified the need to consult widely and extensively and to investigate any preceding work as a standard feature of the project. The workers embarked on methods of consultation which include meetings with individuals, attending forums, AGMs, conferences, training workshops and a survey, to gather evidence and solicit views from a wide range of stakeholders.
37. They also organised an event towards the end of the project in conjunction with Aimee Evans, the ORCC's Community Development Worker (Social Inclusion), to inform stakeholders in the VCS as well as the private and statutory sectors of our findings and to check our experiences against the reality they encountered in their daily service provision. The event was titled "The Challenge of Community Change" and points made in discussion at the event are set out in Appendix 11.

### **This report**

38. This report is a collective effort which combines the reports, findings and recommendations of Julie and Lebo, as the project workers, with the views and suggestions of the people attending the "The Challenge of Community Change" event and the comments and experience of members of the project Reference Group, of OVSDP partners and of ORCC staff.
39. A glossary of initials used is given in Appendix 5.



## **Community Development Worker (Improving Rural Reach) findings and recommendations.**

### **Groups serving individuals and groups at risk of marginalisation are generally not based in rural areas**

40. Over the course of the project it has become clear that generally there are no local VCS groups based in rural areas who are serving the specific needs of most of the marginalized groups identified for study. The notable exception are community groups working with young people and older people. There were a number of local groups set up to serve their needs.

### **Groups working with older people and younger people**

41. These groups are often aware that they could be doing more if they had more volunteers, more support, more seedcorn funding. Several groups working with young people reported that they were having difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Often potential volunteers were put off by perceived red tape (CRB checks being cited as a particular example) and the fear of not being able to cope with challenging behaviour and/or the particular needs of young people.

42. Groups working with older people expressed the desire to do more, to have the resources to visit housebound older people, to encourage people who are reluctant to attend social events to do so, and to help people with caring responsibilities. As well as the lack of resources the fear of getting in too deep was cited as a reason for not engaging with those individuals who were marginalized – the fear of offering help but then not having the time, resources or knowledge to actually help.

43. The social needs of the older age group were considered. In several discussions it was noted that not everyone wanted their social needs met by a chat and a cup of tea. The invaluable part that hobbies and pastimes play in the health and well being of the older person was mentioned.

### **Migrant workers**

44. A great deal of time and energy was expended in trying to find migrant workers living in rural areas. There is statistical and anecdotal evidence of migrant workers living and working in Oxford and Banbury but the position in the rural areas is less clear. Contact was made with a range of agencies who were trying to compile relevant data and/or to otherwise identify where migrant workers had settled within the county. They all reported the difficulties experienced and were eager to learn from whatever the Improving Reach project might reveal.

45. During the summer of 2007 a letter was written to every parish council and parish meeting in the County asking if they knew of any migrant workers living or working in the parish. (A copy of the letter is given in Appendix 7).

46. Only 5 parishes replied to report that there were migrant workers in their community. All these replies reported that their presence was having no particular impact on the life of the parish. It was reported that the work they were doing was in the hospitality industry, on pick your own farms or in care homes.

47. In the absence of any detailed information within the county about the location of migrant workers outside the main urban centres, it was difficult to decide on whether and how to follow up on this very limited response. We noted that the issue of migrant workers as new residents in a parish had not been featured in any of the Parish Plans that had been produced recently or were in the process of production around the county. We felt that, if this issue was beginning

to be significant in rural communities, it would be being voiced locally and picked up by ORCC and other agencies working with those communities. We had written to parish councils as organisations who know and respond to the issues and needs of their communities. We judged that the lack of response to our letter did reflect the fact that a majority of migrant workers who are employed in the county are finding accommodation in the main urban centres.

48. The difficulty of finding lower-cost accommodation in rural areas, a on-going problem being experienced by a wide range of individuals and households, also suggests that this has been the only practical way forward for migrant workers moving into the county.
49. The exception to this conclusion would be migrant workers provided with accommodation by their employers in the hospitality industry, pick-your-own farms and care homes. In the light of the comments from parish councils, a letter was sent to all the pick your own farms and to the larger hotels in the county (see Appendix 7) asking if there were migrant workers employed there. No replies were received to these letters, which is probably understandable when people are busy, unaware of the ORCC and possibly wary of revealing information which might have adverse consequences for them. Nevertheless, we felt that it was worth trying this means of eliciting information.
50. Our conclusion is that, in order to try to assess what is the situation regarding any minority group's existence in particular parishes, there is a need to have the time and resources to travel out to each parish – to look and to talk to a range of key local individuals and organisations. There are 317 parishes in the county and this was way beyond the scope of one or two workers engaged on a one-year project focussing on a range of needs.
51. Although we were unable to meet with anyone from the migrant worker community living or working in rural areas we were able to meet some living in Banbury, Oxford and Abingdon. All the conversations took place in English and this limited the extent to which we could engage with the community. However, one of the people we spoke to was a volunteer with the Polish Association in Banbury and was in touch with a range of people, both those who could converse in English and also those who could not. He shared some of the experiences of the second group with us.
52. The consensus view from the individuals we spoke to, both about their own experiences and the experiences of others in their community they were in contact with, was that support was needed to allow the migrant community to integrate. These support needs included:-
  - English language teaching
  - Information on services eg GPs, housing, education (including school admissions for their children). Often it is information on community safety issues which is needed, for example drink driving and seat belt laws, how recycling and rubbish collection works, alcohol free zones. Due to lack of information on these issues the migrant community can often look as though they do not care about respecting English laws; they can cause trouble (without meaning to) and get a bad reputation which can lead to problems with acceptance by the host community.
  - Signs in the community languages, which mean that the community feels welcoming and that the service is for them.
  - Although some members of the community are able to access information via websites and leaflets (either in English or in community languages), others need one to one support to help them access the information, preferably from someone within their own community who can empathise with how they feel and support them with their language needs and explain the cultural differences.

### **Groups working with other individuals and groups at risk of marginalisation**

53. As mentioned above no groups were located in the rural areas specifically serving the needs of people with mental health issues, people with disabilities, carers or gay/lesbian/transgender people. But there are local community groups who are keen to include all members of the

community, and district or county wide organisations that exist to support people with specific needs and issues. In the case of transgender individuals Julie was able to locate only one organisation set up to serve their needs, this being a national organisation based in London.

54. Julie found that there are many local groups want to include and support all the people in their community but feel that there are barriers to overcome. Some of the barriers she heard about are lack of knowledge and therefore confidence in dealing with 'tricky issues', fear of getting in too deep and lack of specialist support for the volunteers.
55. She also found specialist organisations who have the expertise to support people with specific needs and local community groups who wish to include them. But the specialist organisations do not have the resources to reach out and to work one to one with everyone who needs their service. This is particularly true in the rural areas given the relatively low numbers and the time taken to travel.

### **Travellers**

56. The main message from agencies in touch with the Traveller community is that they want services which are culturally aware and come to where they are based rather than asking them to travel to access services elsewhere.

### **Recommendations and suggested ways forward**

57. We need to explore how local community groups wishing to be inclusive in providing facilities and services can be supported by the specialist groups. If this can be tackled, it would mean that more people could get the support they need in their own community. If the volunteers in local community groups can be supported, some of the barriers could be overcome. In return the specialist organisations would be able to call on local volunteers to help them reach out to the people they know need a service that they are not presently able to provide.
58. This fits in with a recurring message which is coming from talks with a range of individuals and agencies: people at risk of exclusion/isolation or with special needs want to be able to access support and services provided generically within their home community and not have to travel to "specialist" "badged" services elsewhere, particularly if there could be an element of stigma attached to a specialist service.
59. The following ways forward should be explored:
  - a) Training by specialist organisations for local people running community groups.  
This would be aimed at passing on their expertise in order to give people locally the confidence and awareness needed to reach out to individuals with particular issues or needs or otherwise at risk of marginalisation. The members of OVSDP need to consider how far this could be pursued through the training programmes and other support for community organisations already provided by OVSDP partners and how far there is merit in specialist organisations complementing existing programmes by providing training for members of the local organisations they will be working with, so that relationships and trust can be built up.
  - b) On going specialist support for members of local groups, so they have someone with knowledge and experience with whom to discuss 'tricky situations'. Again this would be provided by the specialist organisation with the relevant knowledge and expertise.
  - c) Facilitating the two way flow of information.  
So local groups would know of agencies providing services who would benefit from their input and so that agencies were informed of local situations where their specialised support was needed. The idea of a network of Local Representatives as a channel for information to and from rural communities is dealt with in paras. 69-72 below.

- d) Facilitating networking between community groups engaged in similar activities, so that ideas and best practice as well as experience of similar issues and problems in other communities can be shared. This could be done through meetings or events or electronically through ICT-based mechanisms.

The OVSDP voluntary sector forums which are held in each District are valued as a means of networking with a range of VCS organisations and groups and of gaining information on a range of issues and topics of general interest to the voluntary sector. But there is also a place for specialist forums and networking events, where topics and issues specific to the groups in question can be discussed. Examples are the networking opportunities for village hall committees, community shop committees and community transport schemes which are facilitated by ORCC and those for Volunteer Co-ordinators by OCVA.

- e) Small scale financial support. Many voluntary groups exist on a very low level of funding and often a small amount of additional funding can improve their service exponentially. In discussion the funding advice available through OCVA was recognised and appreciated by several groups. The new OVSDP local information points supported by OCVA were also welcomed as a means of improving local VCS support services. However, there was felt to be a need for groups to be supported to access small scale funding available from within their community. It was also suggested that start-up funding could be provided by a specialist organisation seeking to work with local community groups (at least in the short term to get a group up and running)
- f) Sharing of policies and procedures. Specialist organisations already have policies and procedures which local groups can use and follow, rather than have to write them from scratch. OVSDP partners already usefully provide a range of specimen policies and procedures which are likely to be needed by VCS organisations. Sometimes it is also helpful to have the advice of specialist organisations on how to adapt these to meet specific service needs and circumstances.

### **The role of community capacity building as the first rung in the ladder of VCS infrastructure support**

60. These suggestions are made and should be considered in the context of the classification system adopted by the OVSDP as a basis for thinking about the VCS infrastructure support services that are needed, and how they should be delivered, which is set out in the LIDP.

61. The system recognises:

- a) community capacity building that:
- stimulates thinking among individuals that have identified unmet needs and might be thinking about starting a new group
  - helps get communities to start the first stages of organising themselves
  - supports inter-community networking on common issues of concern, and
  - facilitates partnership with the wider network of voluntary sector and statutory bodies;
- b) the needs of individuals who are setting up a new group including those with an awareness of the needs of the ASP communities;
- c) the needs of organisations that are happy with what they are doing, have no ambitions to grow or develop new services, but who nevertheless need advice or support ('steady-state groups') including several self-contained BME faith groups;
- d) the needs of more ambitious organisations who are thinking of developing new activities, or who wish to expand their operations;

- e) the needs of organisations that are tendering for contracts, developing a range of services for the public and perhaps thinking of becoming social enterprises;
  - f) the needs of organisations with in-house capabilities or the resources to buy in the help they need.
62. The OVSDP Business Plan 2008-11 builds on this by including an intention to ensure that a clearly structured cross-sectoral ladder of support is in place that leads from community capacity building and community planning through to support for frontline organisations and their projects.
63. The suggestions in paras. 57-59 above are seen by ORCC as part of community capacity building. There is a need to provide support and advice to local communities and informal community groups to enable them to identify a solution to a need they have identified and to signpost them to sources of specialist help, where necessary. When groups come to a stage where they need organisational development support, they can be referred to the services available through the members of the OVSDP.
64. On the question of facilitating volunteering within communities “volunteering” is often as much an individual’s natural response to the need to address a particular local community issue or drive forward an area of personal or family interest as a conscious decision to undertake voluntary work somewhere (not necessarily within their home community) for personal or altruistic reasons (or often both). Individuals coming forward to participate in community activity in this way would not necessarily consider themselves to be “volunteers”; they are just responding to friends and neighbours and the local community environment in a way which they see as a normal part and parcel of life.

### **Case Study – Archway Foundation.**

The Archway Foundation is a voluntary organisation which was founded and based in Oxford. Its objective is to help relieve some of the distress caused by loneliness. They provide opportunities in Oxford to meet up with others and offer a varied programme of social activities. Where available, befrienders visit those who cannot get out to the social events. Many service users get in touch with Archway themselves while others are referred by family, friends and other groups or agencies.

Archway recognises that loneliness is not just an issue in Oxford and they get requests for help from all over the county. If people can get to Oxford they are welcome to attend Archway events. But often this is not possible: there are transport difficulties or people may feel anxious about leaving their community where they feel safe. Archway recognises a need for their service in the rest of the county but have limited resources to start anything new. They also recognise that there are social events and “drop- ins” being organised in communities. They want to explore whether there is a way to support the volunteers who organise these events so they could include community members needing extra support.

Julie met the Director of Archway, Sheila Furlong, and the Volunteer Manager at OCVA, Frances Duggan, to discuss how best Archway could proceed. Sheila brought her in depth knowledge of the issues surrounding loneliness, Frances brought her experience of recruiting, training and retaining volunteers and Julie brought experience of reaching out to rural areas and working with rural communities. It was decided that Archway would investigate instigating a service based in Abingdon which would serve the needs of neighbouring communities in the Vale of White Horse District. Sheila found a local partner organisation through which to deliver the service and Frances and Julie provided relevant information in their areas of expertise in order to help get the service up and running.

65. It is hoped that this model of facilitating a centrally-based VCS service-provider to reach out and work with local community groups in villages and market towns in order that they can provide a complementary service or help to extend an existing service will be useful in stimulating similar initiatives elsewhere.

### **Information**

66. Another strand of the work of the project was to look at the flow of information to and from rural areas, how information is circulated and how it is used. Throughout the project it has become clear that there is a need to improve a two-way flow of information, so that local communities and the individuals within them are more aware of what services are available and specialist organisations are more aware of where there are individuals that need their service or support .
67. As part of the project the question was asked, does information reach the right people at the right time and what impact does ICT have on the provision and use of information?

It is recognised that information is meaningless until the individual receiving it has a current and active need for it. By the time an active need arises, the poster may have been removed, the publicity leaflet destroyed, the newspaper or magazine used to light the fire or the existence and address of the useful website forgotten. It is therefore important that information is able to reach people at a time, when they need it and are able to take action on it.

68. Even where printed information or information contained on websites is available, it is still not necessarily accessible. When people are upset or anxious they may also need someone empathetic and willing to give them one to one support by talking them through the process of accessing the information in front of them.

### **A network of Local Representatives as an information channel**

69. In response to some of the needs identified above the ORCC wants to explore whether a network of Local Representatives (volunteers) in the rural areas could act as a two way channel for information. This idea reflects the successful Parish Links scheme run by Age Concern but this would be a generic service, not just a means of providing information for older people. The ORCC Representatives would need to be seen as part of a network of such other local representatives, organisations and support services (either formal or informal), including the parish council and the church, with whom they would need to work closely. Any new network should be complementary.
70. Parish Councils would be key to the development of this service as they are often the first point of contact for outside agencies trying to get their message into local communities and likewise see themselves and are seen as a source of information for local residents. Any initial approach to local communities in order to recruit potential Representatives should be through Parish and Town Councils.
71. Once established the Local Representatives would receive leaflets, website information and publicity for events which they would make available and accessible to members of their community using a variety of methods and channels in order to try to reach everyone. They would also feedback specific concerns from their community. The service would need to be co-ordinated by ORCC who would circulate the information, support the volunteers and receive feedback on local issues and concerns. A project outline is set out in Appendix 8.
72. Julie's contacts during the project, including consultation with staff of Age Concern, confirm that it would be useful to pursue such a project. ORCC will be considering how to pilot these ideas with the co-operation of a few selected and willing volunteers. The intention would be that, if this suggested the value of further development, we would explore suitable sources of funding.

## **Community Development Worker (BME support) findings and recommendations**

### **The BME population in Oxfordshire**

73. The BME population in Oxfordshire constitutes 12.9% of the total county population, according to Data Observatory 2006/2007 statistics. The majority of BME communities live in Oxford and market towns like Banbury while a small percentage of this population lives in rural Oxfordshire. Rural BME communities are small and scattered, constituting 2% of the general white population. For that reason, a large number of BME organisations are based in Oxford where it is convenient for them to provide services centrally for a significant segment of the BME population. The records built up by Lebo indicate that there are at least 52 specialist BME organisations in Oxfordshire and 43 of them are based in Oxford city (Appendix 9). Less than a quarter of all Oxfordshire BME organisations provide services to rural BME communities.
74. This picture will certainly change because the Oxfordshire BME population is predicted to grow at the rate of 4,5% in the next 20 years .
75. As is mentioned in paras. 34-5 above Lebo conducted a baseline study to map the location of rural Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations which provide services to marginalised groups and BME communities. Initial results indicated that there are no specialist BME organisations based in rural Oxfordshire. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be a few informal networks e.g. 4 African women who meet once a month for Bible discussions and prayer in Witney. Data Observatory settlement figures in 2006/2007 indicate that actual numbers of BME individuals living in rural Oxfordshire rural areas range from 3 in a village to 809 (Kidlington).
76. It is most stakeholders' opinion that wherever there are BME individuals or groups, there will be specialised BME needs, e.g. religious services, specialised food, international call cards, culturally appropriate counselling services etc.

### **Survey of identified BME organisations to explore their rural reach**

77. Due to the non-existence of rural BME organisations in Oxfordshire, Lebo had to change the project's approach and concentrate on City- as well as market town- based BME organisations, which offer (or would like to provide) services to BME clients in rural Oxfordshire. He conducted a brief survey in Oxford on BME organisations to identify their capacity needs and their ability to reach out to rural areas. 52 questionnaires were sent by post and electronically to all BME organisations which varied from African to Malayalee ethnic groups. A copy of the questionnaire is given in Appendix 10.
78. Of the fifty-two questionnaires distributed by email and post, fourteen were returned completed. The poor response rate could be attributed to the time of the year in which the survey was conducted i.e. Dec 07 – Jan 08. Apart from the timing, other factors are likely to include the fact that many BME organisations do not use email and also the reality of a history and culture of non-participation or non-involvement by BME groups in community issues.
79. The survey responses showed the following:
- Exactly half of the respondents (7) indicated that they were not aware of any gaps in the services provided to rural BME client groups
  - The remaining half of respondents indicated that service gaps include lack of transport for rural BME communities to access specialised services in Oxford city.

- 6 of the respondents cited difficulty in locating and contacting rural BME client groups
- 10 respondents indicated they did not specifically target rural BME communities
- 9 respondents stated they would like to provide services to rural BME clients they have insufficient resources to do so
- 4 organisations indicated that they do have adequate space and appropriate premises to provide services
- 5 organisations mentioned marketing and publicity of their services, as a capacity need
- 2 organisations indicated that they provide services to a specific ethnic group, e.g. Kurdish Women's Group and the Oxfordshire Chinese Community Centre, therefore they are not looking to extend services to all rural BME communities
- All respondents have listed funding as an ever present challenge to providing services to their clients
- 1 organisation stated that their clients prefer personal contact rather than email or telephone correspondence due to a lack of confidence

80. Of the 14, only 3 are unregistered with the Charity Commission and the rest are charities or companies limited by guarantee. The youngest of the 14 organisations was established in 2006 and 5 were set up in the new millennium and the rest of them in the 90's and 80's.

### **Learning points about the BME Sector in Oxfordshire**

81. From experienced gained during the project it is clear that BME VCS frontline organisations in Oxfordshire share a few similar characteristics:

- A majority of these organisations are small due to very limited funding
- Most leaders and service providers in BME frontline organisations are volunteers who have other jobs in the private economic sector and this restricts the amount of time they have to give to their organisations and to outside contact.
- Lack of expertise
- There are generally no BME specialist infrastructure organisations within the county. OREC is the only specialist organisation in Oxon which could support BME frontline organisations but it will require more resources to make a visible impact. The first South East BME infrastructure organisation, UNI, was launched in 2007 and was established as a result of the 2006 ASP programme, to advocate on behalf of all BME organisations in the region.
- Many organisations are not connected to or accessing generic infrastructure structures and do not participate in decision making and policy processes in the county. There seems to be some lack of motivation to connect; some lack of conviction that engagement with these structures and resources will bring tangible benefits.

82. The Oxon BME sector is complex and characterised by several challenges which need all sectors and resources; time, human (expertise) and funding to resolve. BME groups are quite diverse and have very little in common, apart from a common characteristic of being isolated from the mainstream majority. There is no evidence of a concerted effort to unify the sector from within or externally.



83. Although it is not entirely up to the generic VCS, private and statutory sectors to involve the BME sector in their processes, much more needs to be done to engage the BME sector at all levels, rather than refer to them as being 'hard to reach'.
84. Several barriers are rooted in the BME sector itself and it is essential for infrastructure organisations to identify them. Some groups within the BME sector have 'built in' gatekeepers who make it very difficult for service providers to reach potential clients without their official sanction. Similarly, their members unable to access services without permission from 'above'. This applies mostly to Faith groups and specialist cultural organisations. Sometimes BME people's faith or culture will bring disapproval of certain organisations working on what they consider to be controversial issues such as AIDS. This brings a reluctance to participate in events and activities designed for the voluntary sector generally, in case this involves contact with such organisations.
85. Most BME individuals have a general lack of trust in mental health services either because of a negative perception of mental illness in BME communities or issues associated with individuals' own past negative experiences in the service. Therefore, there maybe a general awareness of particular services but a deliberate lack of responsiveness
86. Similarly, some sections of the BME communities do not take up services because their customs maybe at odds with laws and regulations. For instance, many Asians tend to live in extended families and this might have implications for council tax payments. In the same way, conservative Christians or orthodox Muslims do not use generic counselling services intentionally because such services are based on a secular tradition which are in contradiction to Biblical or Quran principles.
87. Therefore BME and generic VCS organisations as well as infrastructure service providers need to be aware of these factors and innovate around them.
88. Lebo concludes that traditional consultation and engagement methods in the BME sector are not sufficient and need to be supplemented by one-to-one visits to all BME organisations. The survey mentioned above was a case in point. 14 out of 52 organisations returned their questionnaires only after further reminders and a few personal visits.
89. Reliance on e-correspondence proved very difficult as many BME organisations do not use email and do not have websites., This can be attributed to a lack of resources and technical support available to the organisations but also to a lack of motivation to become part of a wider community e-network. A number of leaders and contact persons rely on their personal contact numbers and personal web based email addresses. These facilities are regarded as there for specific personal purposes – for job seeking or contacting friends and family back home – and are often only accessed once a week. .
90. It was interesting to note at the "Challenge of community change" event, that a good number of organisations would like to reach the BME sector but do not have the capacity and knowledge to do so. Equally, both mainstream and BME organisations experience more or less common challenges with a few extra, sector specific needs on the part of BME organisations. This provides an opportunity for both sectors to establish partnerships and pool resources to address existing gaps.
91. One other important feature of the BME sector in Oxfordshire is that, it is preoccupied with survival rather than development. This probably explains why there is an under-representation of BME organisations in countywide partnerships or forums like the OVSDP. Funding is flagged by most BME frontline organisations as the primary challenge in the sector and all other issues like premises, skills and volunteers, are regarded as secondary and are dependent on funding. This perception that funding is the solution to all problems may to some extent distract organisations from seeking other more relevant solutions with capacity-building support.

## 92. Recommendations

- a) Oxford based BME organisations need to develop a rural outreach strategy in their services in order to reach rural BME clients
- b) It would be beneficial for these BME organisations to establish partnerships with existing generic organisations working in rural Oxfordshire, e.g. CAB, Age Concern etc, in order to pool their resources and expertise for the benefit of rural BME clients. The proposals in the OVSDP Business Plan to promote diversity awareness and good practice within VCS organisations, starting with the members of the OVSDP Voluntary Sector Support Services Group, and to develop a Diversity Training Programme are welcome (see Appendix 12).
- c) There is a need for city organisations to share premises or upgrade them to an acceptable standard for their clients.
- d) Establish an organisational development programme for BME organisations to address short and long term capacity needs in partnership with infrastructure organisations in the county and other organisations at regional and national level such as the Media Trust, who have recently offered media training targeted at BME groups. This is one of the Oxfordshire Voluntary Sector Development Programme (OVSDP)'s strategic priorities in their Business Plan and Development Strategy.
- e) Longer term funding for BME groups as well as joint partnerships in bidding for same funding pots. Simplification of funding application procedures could prove useful to the BME sector.
- f) Development of the Oxfordshire BME Forum is crucial for sharing good practice and to support the sector. OREC is currently working to establish such a Forum
- g) Help BME organisations improve their profile in rural Oxfordshire
- h) Develop the e-culture for BME organisations through awareness raising and provision of accessible training and support.
- i) Where appropriate, work through faith groups but be aware of the constraints that may need to be overcome.

### **Case Study - Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)**

The RCCG is a BME Faith organisation in Oxford, which provides support for the spiritual, emotional and social needs of mainly BME individuals and families in the county. The varied and complex needs of the congregation often require a multi-sectoral response and intervention. For that reason, Pastor Patrick Tolani and his leadership team have resolved to establish cross-sector partnerships with specialised VCS organisations in the county, to provide information and services within the Church and to refer congregants to those organisations, whenever a need arises.

Recently, the RCCG invited three VCS organisations to offer information sessions about the services they provide:

- \* a Caseworker from OREC introduced the organisation and outlined legal support services that are provided to racial harassment clients
- \* Terence Higgins Trust (THT) was invited to introduce the types of support they offer to individuals, partners and families of people who are affected by HIV/AIDS.
- \* the local 'Social Services' branch made group presentation about Tax Credits and related processes. They also offered one-to-one sessions for congregants on benefit related matters.

Since then, there has been a noticeable interest and enquiries from RCCG members on services provided by the three organisations. The RCCG leadership is in a process of identifying more VCS organisations with whom to establish partnerships for the benefit of its membership.

## General findings

93. In order to try to assess what is the situation regarding any minority group's existence and needs in rural areas, there is a need to have the time and resources to travel out to each parish – to look and to talk to a range of key local individuals and organisations.

The same principle of personal contact and face-to-face meetings applies to dealing with the views and needs of different groups within the BME sector, as suggested in para. 88 above.

94. Many of the needs of individuals and groups at risk of isolation and marginalisation are best met within their home communities. It is therefore important to build the capacity and raise the awareness of community organisations, including parish and town councils, where necessary, and to support them to extend the services, activities and facilities that they are providing locally to be inclusive of everyone in the community who could benefit from them. Julie's research has shown that there is already evidence of local commitment to equality and inclusion, which can be built on.
95. It is more productive to take consultation and services to where people already are and to "piggy back" on existing activities or events that people are already motivated to attend. The Redeemed Christian Church of God case study is a good example.

The ORCC's "Good Practice Guidelines – Getting more people involved in rural communities" contains practical ideas of how to make consultation exercises, services and activities more inclusive and engaging. The Guidelines are on our website: see What We Do/Social Exclusion and there is more information and guidance on inclusive consultation methods in the What We Do/Parish Plans section

96. As shown by the Challenge of Community Change event, the same issues and needs may keep coming up without as readily-identified solutions to them, because common issues and needs are issues and needs being experienced by individuals or by individual groups or communities. Individual needs have to be addressed individually in a way that is appropriate and specific to each particular situation, circumstance or community.

This chimes with the views of the University of Gloucestershire's Countryside and Community Research Unit on rural sustainability and with the contents of a Guide for Improving Access to Services for Rural Communities, "Getting the Solution Right" published by the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly . Further details are given in Appendix 13.

97. It would be useful to investigate further the value and potential but also the disadvantages and risk of exclusion (and for whom) that an increasing use of e-communication brings to a rural county. What is the nature and extent of the "digital divide" in Oxfordshire today and how should the limitations it could bring to those on the "wrong" side of the divide be addressed?

Participants at the Challenge of Community Change event were concerned to send the message that too much reliance should not be put on the use of e-mail and websites as a form of communication to the exclusion of other methods: printed material, letters, phone calls (including texting), face-to-face contact etc. We need to know more about how everyone we want to contact likes to be contacted and communicated with and use a variety of different methods. For some people a decision not to use e-mail is a lifestyle or cultural choice not something forced on them by lack of resources or understanding.

## Thanks

98. ORCC and OREC would like to thank everyone who has contributed either directly or indirectly to the contents of this report. This includes:

- Everyone whom Julie and Lebo have met during the year and who have contributed valuable views and experience
- Members of the Reference Group
- OCVA as OVSDP lead and other OVSDP partners
- Everyone attending the Challenge of Community Change event
- Members of ORCC and OREC staff
- Members of the Rural Inclusion Group

In particular, of course, thanks and congratulations are due to Julie and Lebo for a productive and insightful year's work.

99. We are grateful to Capacitybuilders for their funding support and hope that they will find this report of interest.

## THE IMPROVING REACH PROJECT PARTNERS

### Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (registered charity)

ORCC aims to improve the quality of life for those who live or work in a sustainable rural Oxfordshire

We want to achieve stronger and more sustainable, vibrant and active rural communities across the county. In particular we want to:

- Encourage the people within them to identify the issues that affect their lives and to find solutions
- Facilitate effective rural community action
- Increase equality and inclusion for everyone
- Enable people to participate in community activities and local democratic processes
- Increase opportunities for people to live in their home community
- Support improved provision of local services and facilities
- Promote improved means of accessing services which cannot be provided locally
- Raise local awareness of opportunities to promote sustainable living
- Influence policies and programmes at national, regional and local level to take more account of the needs and views of people living or working in rural communities

This involves us in working throughout the county to:

- Promote local involvement in community action planning and community project development
- Provide awareness raising information, advice and examples of good practice on how to:
  - promote social inclusion in rural communities
  - promote sustainable living in rural communities
  - provide and improve local services and facilities
- Provide a support service for key local action groups, service and facility providers such as:
  - Parish Plan groups
  - Community hall committees
  - Village shopkeepers and community shop committees
  - Parish councils interested in promoting affordable housing
  - Community transport schemes
  - Community newsletter editors
- Contribute to the achievement of more units of affordable housing
- Facilitate opportunities for networking and information-sharing
- Play an active role in key partnerships and networks including Local Strategic Partnerships and the OVSDP
- Act as lead body for
  - the Oxfordshire Rural Forum
  - the Oxfordshire Rural Transport Partnership
  - the Oxfordshire Market Towns Network
  - the Rural Inclusion Group
- Comment on and rural-proof relevant policies, proposals and processes and alert community organisations to opportunities to contribute their own views to policy makers

### Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council

OREC is an independent voluntary organisation working to promote racial equality in Oxfordshire. OREC tackles racial harassment and discrimination – through casework and by providing information, free confidential advice and assistance about the rights each resident has, to live their lives free from the harm of racial prejudice.

**Membership of the Oxfordshire Voluntary Sector Development Partnership (OVSDP)**

(as at March 2008)

Oxford Anglican Diocese (Bishop Colin Fletcher, Independent Chair)  
Co-operative Futures  
Cherwell Community and Voluntary Service  
Churches Together in Oxfordshire  
Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (currently acting as Lead Body)  
Oxfordshire Children's and Voluntary Youth Services  
Oxfordshire Rural Community Council  
Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council  
West Oxfordshire Volunteer Link-Up  
Cherwell District Council  
Oxfordshire County Council  
Oxfordshire County Council (Children & Young People)  
Oxford City Council  
South Oxfordshire District Council  
West Oxfordshire District Council  
Vale of White Horse District Council  
Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust

**Brief summary of proposed project work**

1. To identify where VCS groups serving marginalised/isolated individuals/groups exist in the county's rural areas and their unmet capacity building and/or other infrastructure support needs.
2. Although the needs of a range of groups will be considered, the following groups will be focussed on in particular:
  - Ethnic minority
  - Faith
  - Migrant workers
  - Communities without existing community champions/leaders coming forward to stimulate self-help initiatives including community action planning projects.

There are other groups whose needs will also be considered in consultation with other agencies, including: Travellers, Refugees and asylum seekers, Gay/lesbian/transgender, Young People, Older People, People with mental health issues, People with learning difficulties, People who lack basic skills, People with physical disabilities, Others lacking access to services.

3. To explore means of meeting needs from within and outside their communities, in the light of existing and developing capacity/infrastructure support services being provided and planned within the county and also the example set by Age Concern's Parish Link project and a previous Local Representative scheme pioneered in Shropshire.

This will include work with OREC to support BME and minority faith individuals and groups to play an integrated part in the life of their rural communities and to access support services.

4. To make recommendations for future action.

**Membership of Improving Reach Reference Group**

Barbara Shaw, West Oxfordshire CAB  
Bede Gerrard, Oxfordshire Churches Together  
Malcolm Leeding, Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils and Rural Inclusion Group  
Ben Lloyd-Shogbesan, OREC Chair  
Chinta Kallie, OREC Trustee  
Glyn Evans, Oxford Diocese, Farm Crisis Network and ORCC Patron  
Alison Baxter and Kate Hill, OCVA and OVSDP  
Sister Nyarai Humba, Oxfordshire Befriending Network  
Michael Gogut, Banbury Polish Association  
Nisha Prakash, Oxford City Council  
Rebecca Harty, Oxford City Council  
Patrick Tolani, OREC Director  
Aimee Evans, ORCC Community Development Worker  
Meryl Smith, ORCC Deputy Chief Executive

**Glossary**

ASET	Advisory Service for the Education of Travellers
ASP	Additional Support Programme (part of ChangeUp programme 2005/06)
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CDW	Community Development Worker
LIDP	Local Infrastructure Development Plan (part of ChangeUp programme 2004/06)
OCVA	Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action
ORCC	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
OREC	Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council
OVID	Oxfordshire VCS Infrastructure Development Partnership (2004-2006)
OVSDP	Oxfordshire Voluntary Sector Development Partnership (successor to OVID)
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector



### Organisations and Individuals Consulted

Nigel Carter – Oxfordshire PCT health advocate for BME communities	LM
Ritu Kapoor – OREC Acting Director and member of the Hindu community	LM
Bede Gerrard – Oxfordshire Churches Together	LM, JS
Alison Baxter –Chief Executive, OCVA	LM,JS
Sheila Furlong – Director, Archway Foundation	JS
Alfred Fullah – West Oxon CAB Advice Worker (BME Sector)	LM
Firoze Manji – Director of Fahamu	LM
Katherine Doherty – Vale of White Horse District Council	LM, JS
Uzma Bhatti – BME Community Development Worker, Mental Health Early Intervention Service	LM
Nana Apiah – Terence Higgins Trust	LM
Sista Nyarai – Oxfordshire Befriending Network	LM
Mebesa Makaka – BME Co-ordinator, Mental Health Matters	LM
Barbara Shaw – Manager, West Oxon CAB	LM, JS
Frances Duggan – Volunteer Centre Manager, OCVA	LM, JS
Nisha Prakash – Diversity Officer, Oxford City Council	LM, JS
Chinta Kallie –OREC Trustee	LM
Zahid Bhatti – Banbury BME Network	LM
Pastor Memory Tapfumaneyi – BME Faith Leader	LM
Pastor Dupe Adefala – BME Faith Leader	LM
Clare Dodwell – Rural Children’s Centre	JS
Jo Cannon – Oxfordshire Playbus	JS
Eddie Lofthouse – ActiveTen20	JS
Sue Butterworth – Dialability	JS
Julia Hill and David Bingham – Restore	JS
Lucy Beckett – Advisory Service for the Education of Travellers	JS
Susan Weaver – Mental Health Matters	JS
Valerie Thwaites – Oxfordshire Carers Forum	JS
Richard Brooks – Equality Policy Advisor, Oxfordshire County Council	JS
Debra Rouget – Oxfordshire Children’s Information Service	JS
Helen Grimwade – Age Concern	JS
Kate Clemmow- Cottsway Housing Association	JS
Michael Gogut – Banbury Polish Association	JS
Muqudus UIHassan – Early Intervention Service, Oxon and Bucks Mental Health Trust	JS

### Forums Attended

West Oxfordshire Voluntary Sector Forum	JS
Vale of White Horse Voluntary Sector Forum (contributed to a workshop on diversity and equal opportunities)	LM, JS
South Oxfordshire Voluntary Sector Forum	JS
County Voluntary Sector Forum	LM, JS
Supporting People Inclusion Forum	JS
Data Users Forum – Understanding Migration in Oxfordshire	JS
Rural Inclusion Group (facilitated by ORCC)	JS
Launch of Cherwell Recreation Strategy	JS

BME Faith and Mental Health	LM
EMBRACE Quarterly meetings	LM
Ethnic Minorities Business Service AGM	LM
Love Oxford Christian event	LM
UNI BME South East Regional Forum	LM
Oxford MELA event	LM
OREC's Slavery Symposium	LM
Race Equality in Oxfordshire market place event in Banbury organised by Oxfordshire NHS and Oxfordshire County Council	JS
Age Concern Older People's Information Fair, Witney	JS
Launch of Rural Children's Centre	JS
South and Vale Carer's Centre Professionals meeting	JS
West Oxford and Cherwell Rural Strategy Workshop	JS
Pride Oxford event	JS
Rural Children's Centre Steering Group meeting	JS
Mental Health Matters AGM	JS
Cherwell District Council Seniors Forum	JS
Information Point Launch, Chipping Norton	JS
Mayor's Reception for Polish People, Oxford	LM,JS

#### Training Attended

Exploring Prejudice and Discrimination	JS
Training on 'Black Perspectives in Community Development'	LM
Commissioning Workshop for BME frontline organisations	LM

**Letter sent to parish councils**

6<sup>th</sup> July 2007

Dear Parish Clerk

Migrant workers in rural communities in Oxfordshire – the role of parish councils

I am the newly appointed Community Development Worker for the Improving Rural Reach project at ORCC. Improving Rural Reach is a one year project, funded by Capacity Builders, and is part of ORCC's commitment to promoting inclusion of all in village life.

The aim of the project is to identify where voluntary and community groups, including parish councils and local village groups, are serving marginalised or isolated individuals and groups in the county's rural areas and if they have unmet support needs. If there are marginalised individuals or groups without representative local organisations to support them we would regard this as a need to be considered.

Among the groups that the Improving Reach project has been asked to consider are migrant workers and people from different ethnic or faith groups. Although the numbers and location of migrant workers are difficult to quantify we know that there are significant numbers in the urban areas of Oxfordshire. At the ORCC we are interested in knowing whether there are migrant workers living and working (or both) in the rural areas, and if so whether they are having an impact on local services or other aspects of community life.

Could you help us by letting me know whether you have any migrant workers or people from different ethnic or faith groups living in or near your community who may be finding it difficult to access support services that they need? If you as a parish council or as a village are providing support to local people from these groups or if you know of any local organisation or local person to whom it would be useful for us to talk in order to help us with our project described above can you please let us know. We are keen to hear 'eyewitness' accounts of what it is like on the ground and what would help.

Once the support needs are established then work will be undertaken to explore means of meeting them, with recommendations being made for future action.

If you have any comments you would like to make or want more information on the project please do not hesitate to contact me on 01865 883488 or via email to [julie.smith@oxonrcc.org.uk](mailto:julie.smith@oxonrcc.org.uk).

With thanks for your time and attention.

Yours Faithfully

Julie Smith  
Community Development Worker, Improving Rural Reach

## Letter to major hotels and pick-your-own farms

27<sup>th</sup> September 2007

Dear Sir/Madam,

Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) is a registered charity which was founded in 1920. One of its aims is to help rural communities in Oxfordshire to identify and tackle local needs and problems, by encouraging and supporting local initiatives and volunteering activities.

As part of its commitment to promoting inclusion for all in rural life ORCC has a one year project, Improving Rural Reach. The aim of this project is to identify where voluntary and community groups are serving marginalised or isolated individuals or groups in the county's rural areas, and if they have unmet support needs. If there are marginalised individuals or groups without representative local organisations to support them we would regard this as a need to be considered.

Among the groups that the Improving Reach project has been asked to consider are migrant workers. The number and location of migrant workers, who may be scattered across a large number of rural communities and therefore less visible, have been difficult for us to track down. We have contacted parish councils as they know what is going on in their local area. Several parish councils have reported that migrant workers may be working at local hotels and inns – hence my letter to you.

We would like to know whether you do employ migrant workers at your establishment. The reason for asking is so that we can assess any difficulty they, or you, may find in accessing local support services. We are in no way checking up on them, or on you as their employer. We are very keen to hear 'eyewitness' accounts, what it is actually like to be a migrant worker, or their employer.

Could you help me by letting me know:  
whether you are, or were, employing migrant workers at your establishment and, if so

whether you could spare some time to talk to me about any issues you, and they, have faced in helping them become a member of a rural community.

I can be contacted on 018565 883488 or via email to [julie.smith@oxonrcc.org.uk](mailto:julie.smith@oxonrcc.org.uk)

If you would like to have more information about the Improving Rural Reach project before responding, please let me know.

With thanks for your time.

Yours sincerely

Julie Smith  
Community Development Worker, Improving Rural Reach.

### The idea of a network of ORCC local representatives

1. Local representatives would be people, preferably part of a local “good neighbour” group, who could act as:
  - a 2-way channel from and to centrally-based statutory and voluntary organisations including ORCC for:
    - carefully selected (by ORCC) “public service information” at the request of other organisations
    - alerts back to ORCC (and others) on identified local service/support needs and emerging rural issues; and
  - ORCC’s eyes and ears “on the ground” in rural communities.
  
2. This would involve the following:
  - Receiving information material supplied through ORCC
  - Publicising its availability on request from the local rep. and other members of the good neighbour group
  - Making efforts to distribute it (or details of how to obtain it from the source organisation) through a range of user-friendly accessible outlets including:
    - Local newsletter
    - Local website
    - Parish noticeboard
    - Parish clerk
    - In the shop/PO
    - In the pub
    - On the village hall notice board
    - In the church
    - Clergy serving the parish
    - At the local drop-in coffee morning/lunch in the village hall
    - Drawn to the attention of organisers of special interest groups/clubs/activities e.g. youth club, parent and toddler group, playgroup, older people’s club, social housing warden or tenants rep.
  - With other members of the good neighbour group, being aware of potential local service/support/information needs, especially with individuals and groups in mind who might be at risk of social exclusion and face barriers in accessing existing information/services
  - Using that awareness to facilitate access to information locally, as described above, and to feed back to ORCC information on local needs and issues
  
3. Local representatives, and their associated good neighbour groups, would not be asked or expected to do the following:
  - Host a publicly-accessible information “library” in their home
  - On the basis of literature supplied for distribution (or otherwise) provide specifically-tailored information and advice to local individuals
  
4. Local reps. would be asked to provide this service on a voluntary basis but any out of pocket expenses would be reimbursed.
  
5. Local representatives would need to have the backing of a support service provided by ORCC which would involve the following:
  - Keeping a database of local rep. contact details
  - Providing reps. with terms of reference and guidance on how to operate
  - Providing reps. with mailings of information
  - Receiving and vetting information provided by external organisations who wished it to be sent to local reps. for local distribution

- Selecting suitable information from within ORCC
  - Keeping a record of what and when information has been distributed
  - Keeping a contact list of organisations on whose behalf information had been sent to local reps.
  - Using these records to:
    - Be aware of when information is 6 months old and to check with the supplier organisation that it is still valid
    - Remind supplier organisations to keep providing local reps. with information updates, as required
    - Know when to alert local reps. to the need to destroy out of date information
  - Requesting and receiving feedback from reps. on a regular basis on local issues/needs emerging and passing information on to other ORCC staff and external organisations, as appropriate
  - Keeping in regular touch with reps. and dealing with any operational queries, problems etc.
  - Organising occasional networking meetings for reps.
  - Liaising with other ORCC staff and ensuring that information received from local reps. is fed into ORCC discussions on work programme, service provision etc.
6. The ORCC reps would need to be seen as part of a network of other local reps. (either formal or informal). The existence and location of other networks of representatives would be identified – Age Concern, Church, Neighbourhood Watch, other? - in order to explore how everyone's work could mesh in with others
  7. The role and work of ORCC reps. would not be usurping or duplicating the valuable existing roles of key people such as the parish clerk and councillors, County and District Councillors, members of good neighbour schemes etc. The intention would be to be complementary. Any initial approach to local communities in order to recruit potential Representatives would be through Parish and Town Councils.
  8. Local representatives could either singly or between them be recruited to serve a "cluster" of villages. The aim would be to trial the idea in a cross-section of types/sizes of community. These aims would probably be best dealt with as part of the recruitment campaign flowing naturally from discussions with prospective reps. rather than be set as a generally applicable template from the start.
  9. ORCC will be considering how to pilot these ideas with the co-operation of a few selected and willing volunteers. The intention would be that, if as a result we think that this idea is worth developing, we would need to explore suitable sources of funding and work up bids accordingly.

## Oxfordshire BME Organisations identified through the Improving Reach project

We have not sought permission from persons and organisations on this list to publish their contact details in this report. Some of these organisations are listed on the voluntary sector web portal, [www.oxnet.org.uk](http://www.oxnet.org.uk), (marked \*) and for those that are not, please contact Patrick Tolani at Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council (OREC).

African Caribbean Youth Project *	Women of the World Well Being Group
Asian Youth Project *	Oxford Malayalee Club *
African-Caribbean Community Action Network *	Multicultural Play Project
AFRICOL UK *	Oxfordshire Kurdish Women's Group
African and Caribbean Women's Art Collective *	Word Fountain Ministries
Afghan Community Association	The Redeemed Christian Church of God
ARISE Enterprises *	Oxon Chinese Community & Advice Centre *
Ark-T Trading Company	Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council *
Asian Cultural Centre *	Multicultural Play Project, Banbury *
Asylum Welcome/Refugee Resource *	Zimbabwe Action Group
Attaining the Peak, Oxford *	Oxford Living Word Fellowship
Funsani Kids 4 Kids	Equality in Diversity Organisation *
Anjuman-e-Adab	Ethnic Minority Business Service *
Anjuman Khawatee-e-Pakistan *	Oxford Welfare Rights
Banbury District Racial Equality Council *	Children & Young People
Bangladeshi Mosque *	Oxfordshire Bangladeshi Association *
Bangladeshi Welfare Association *	Redbridge Traveller Women' Support Group *
Barton Community Activities Group	Sahara Asian Women's Support Group *
Blackbird Leys Community Association *	Refugee Youth Project
Blackbird Leys Credit Union Ltd.	West Indian Day Centre
Blackbird Leys Youth Centre *	Oxford Caribbean Cricket Club *
Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground	Umojo Oxfordshire Community Associations
Blackbird Leys Art Group	Divine Project
East Oxford Interfaith Project	Sant Nirankari Mandal *
Back to God Single Women Group	Christian Life Centre
Oxfordshire Multi-agency Refugee Forum	African & African-Caribbean Kultural Heritage Initiative *



**IMPROVING RURAL REACH 2007/2008**

**Infrastructure and capacity questionnaire for specialist Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations**

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. Please return a completed questionnaire by 11th January 2008 to Lebo Molete (Community Development Officer) in a self addressed envelope (enclosed) or fax it to 01865 883191.

**Section 1: Details of your organisation**

1. Name of organisation: .....

2. Your organisation's contact details:

Address: .....

Telephone number:.....

Fax number: .....

Email address:.....

Website:.....

3. Name and role of person completing the questionnaire  
.....

4. Your contact details if different from 1. above.  
Address: .....

Telephone number:.....

Fax number: .....

Email address:.....

5. Is your organisation registered as a ...?
- Charity
  - Company limited by guarantee
  - Not registered
  - Other (Please specify).....

6. When was your organisation established? .....

**Section 2: Information about your services**

7. What type of services does your organisation provide? [*You can tick more than one if appropriate*]

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advice and information      | <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy and justice   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health and social care      | <input type="checkbox"/> Counselling and advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith services              | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing & hostels      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education & training        | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth work/services    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify)..... |   |



8. What geographical areas does your service cover? [*You can tick more than one if appropriate*]
- West Oxfordshire
  - South Oxfordshire
  - Oxford City
  - Other (please specify) .....
  - Vale of White Horse
  - Cherwell

9. Please tell us how many of your clients/members live in the following areas (*a rough figure is fine*):

South Oxfordshire = ..... Cherwell District = .....

Vale of White Horse = ..... West Oxfordshire District = .....

10 Do you think there are any gaps in the services you provide to rural BME client groups? Please provide details. ....

.....

.....

.....

**Section 3: Information about Client groups**

11. Which client groups do you provide services to?.....

.....

12. Do you specifically target rural BME clients in any way?.....

- (a) If no, would you like to?
  - (b) What type of support would you need?
- .....
- .....

13. Are you aware of BME communities living in the following rural areas?

- West Oxfordshire
- South Oxfordshire
- Vale of White Horse
- Cherwell

14. Are you aware of any particular needs that rural BME communities have? (Please provide details).....

.....

.....

.....

15. Do you think people from ethnic minorities face any particular problems when they are trying to access rural local services? If so, please outline the barriers you are aware of.....

.....

.....

**Thank very much for completing this questionnaire.**

## Challenge of Community Change event

### Summary of Challenges and Answers coming from the workshops

#### Challenges

Transport - independence not reliance – more - accessible

Exclusion and disenfranchisement:

- E-literacy
- Stigma
- Language barriers
- Isolation in many forms

How to reach excluded individuals, families and groups – capacity

Use of e-communication – quick, cheap and effective method in scattered rural locations but will not reach everyone (unequipped or unreceptive)

Needs of BME communities – inclusion - engagement with services – having a voice – accessing information

Dependence on voluntary organisations and volunteers

Many people now have less spare time

How to build capacity

How to attract new volunteers

Bureaucratisation

Access to services including specialist services e.g. drug addiction services

Loss of services – especially shop and post office

Sustainability and development of local services and facilities

High cost of housing and lack of mix of types, tenure and size

Meeting the needs of young people and older people

Ageing population

Consultation fatigue

Wrong kind of consultation

Wrong kind of language

Lack of asking and listening

Climate change

Land/drainage/water supply management

Fear of crime/lack of policing

Funding

Regulations/professionalisation – psychological barrier to volunteering

Polarisation – communities becoming “wealthy ghettos” – weekenders not involved – impact on balance and service viability

Lack of mobile phone and broadband coverage

## Answers

Community transport to access services

Outreach/locality work

Sharing outreach/transport – e.g. health bus, mobile library

Joint working and service delivery

Mixing transport and service delivery – combined use of vehicles/businesses providing transport for customers

Use of village halls and other local venues as service outlets

Provide opportunities to try IT – acceptance that not everyone will want to take it up – recognition of cost barriers

Use different/appropriate methods of communication – don't just rely on IT

When consulting – listen and respond – don't just tell

Signpost through existing services e.g. GP

Word of mouth is a powerful tool

More housing suitable and attractive for older people so that they can release larger housing for others – supported housing which allows independence

More affordable units

Businesses to encourage employee volunteering

Simplify CRB check system – 1 check per volunteer

Encourage good neighbour schemes

1 to 1 contact with isolated people

Health prevention measures within the community

Encourage a sense of belonging for everyone – parish council – supporting local services – information

Community-led planning is an effective tool

Enable and welcome young people and older people to contribute within the community and to meet together

Work through schools

Talk to them about what they need and would like

Support services provided by OVSDP

BME Forums

Get good mix of people on parish councils

Be receptive to new housing and business development

**Extract from OVSDP Business Plan 2008-11****Project 5 Promotion of diversity and equality**

This project aims to continue the work of the ASP programme and Improving Reach project while taking account of the broader definition of equality and diversity on page 6. It is complemented by the mainstreaming of organisational development support included in project 3 and the commitment in project 7 to Compact work focused on the needs of BME and small community groups. It will:

- Create a Diversity Forum for Oxfordshire;
- Devise and implement a local Compact Code of Practice on working with BME VCOs based on the national code, and promote it to frontline VCOs (see also project 7)
- Promote diversity awareness and good practice within VCOs, starting with members of the VCS Support Services Group
- Establish good working relationships with local authority and NHS Diversity Officers
- Identify existing cultural and diversity events and training; identify gaps and opportunities
- Develop a Diversity Training Programme for the VCS in Oxfordshire to cover basic diversity awareness, followed up by a specific focus on working with particular groups and minorities
- Produce a training programme on race, culture and disability awareness
- Monitor uptake of OVSDP services by groups at risk of exclusion and set targets for improvement
- Promote the representation of BME and other groups at risk of exclusion on strategic bodies including LSPs (see also project 7)

## Common issues and needs should be addressed by individually-determined responses

### Rural sustainability

In a report prepared for 2 of our District Councils in 2007 the University of Gloucestershire's Countryside and Community Research Unit suggest that there is no single definition – or even interpretation - of what constitutes a sustainable rural community. Sustainability is a multi-faceted concept and it is unlikely that all such facets could be encompassed within a single definition. Instead, it might be better for policies and strategies to;

- focus on what policies or processes might better achieve sustainable outcomes; and
- address the more practical question: “How might continuous improvement in the sustainability of existing, specific rural communities be secured?”

They point out that national criteria for sustainability contained in the 45 ‘Quality of Life Indicators’ produced by the Audit Commission (2005), provide a checklist for measuring progress towards sustainability, but they are not particularly relevant to the assessments of sustainability made by individual rural communities themselves in Parish Plans. The criteria are difficult to apply because (a) they impose a ‘one-size-fits-all’ checklist on all localities and (b) they give undue weight to quantifiable indicators and fail to provide a measure of the more qualitative facets of sustainability that are important to rural communities. However, a combination of national criteria and the specificity and sensitivity of Parish Plans promises a more meaningful guide to improving the sustainability of individual rural communities.

What is needed is to facilitate a community-based, bottom-up approach to making existing, individual rural communities more sustainable.

### Access to services

An interesting perspective on improving rural access to services is set out in “*Getting the Solution Right: A Guide for Improving Access to Services for Rural Communities*” published by the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly – see their website: [www.yhassembly.gov.uk](http://www.yhassembly.gov.uk) – Library.

The Guide is based on the principle that “Many considerations need to be taken into account on access issues – the need of an individual or community; the type of service and who delivers it; the type of rural area or community. Solutions to these problems can vary greatly and need to be determined at the local level.”

The Guide suggests: “In order to fix something you have to know what the problem is. Very often problems around access to services are described at a very high level e.g. ‘improving access to health and social care for elderly people in rural areas’ or ‘getting more young people into training’.

“This level of description is too vague to allow a solution to be found: you need to be able to be far more specific about what exactly the problem is. In order to work this out you need to know:

- Who are the people that you want to get to?
- What is the service that you want to improve their access to?
- Why is the failure of these users to access this particular service a ‘bad thing’?
- What are the implications or consequences?

“For a healthcare related scenario, rather than seeking to improve access to health and social care for elderly people, the problem needs to be more specific, e.g. how to reach those patients with diabetes that have stopped attending regular check-ups in order to prevent them becoming high dependence and reliant upon home visits.”


The Guide then takes the reader through seven practical steps from identifying the problem, through “getting to grips” with it in more detail to identifying options and selecting the best solution.

**Useful publications**

Mapping Rural Needs	Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development <a href="http://www.rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk">www.rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk</a>
Breaking Down Barriers	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council <a href="http://www.oxonrcc.org.uk">www.oxonrcc.org.uk</a>
Supporting Migrant Workers in Rural Areas	Citizens Advice Bureau <a href="http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index">www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index</a>
Crossing Borders	Audit Commission <a href="http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk">www.audit-commission.gov.uk</a>
A Guide to Culture and Faiths in Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire County Council <a href="http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk">www.oxfordshire.gov.uk</a>
Calor Oxfordshire Villages Villages of the Year Competition	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council <a href="http://www.oxonrcc.org.uk">www.oxonrcc.org.uk</a>
Migrant Workers in Gloucestershire	Gloucestershire County Council <a href="http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index">www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index</a>
Social Cohesion in Diverse Communities	Joseph Rowntree Foundation <a href="http://www.jrf.org.uk">www.jrf.org.uk</a>
Migrants Lives beyond the Workplace	Joseph Rowntree Foundation <a href="http://www.jrf.org.uk">www.jrf.org.uk</a>
East European Immigration and Community Cohesion	Joseph Rowntree Foundation <a href="http://www.jrf.org.uk">www.jrf.org.uk</a>
The Reception and Integration of New Migrant Communities	Commission for Racial Equality <a href="http://www.equalityhumanrights.com">www.equalityhumanrights.com</a>
The Benefits and Challenges of Migrant Workers in Rural Areas and Recommendations for Action	Commission for Rural Communities <a href="http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk">www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk</a>
BME Communities Inclusion Project	Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council <a href="http://www.nnrec.org.uk">www.nnrec.org.uk</a>
A Charter for Rural Communities	Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development <a href="http://www.rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk">www.rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk</a>
The State of the Countryside 2007	Commission for Rural Communities <a href="http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk">www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk</a>
Every Child's Future Matters	Sustainable Development Commission <a href="http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications">www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications</a>
Civic Participations. Potential differences between ethnic groups	Commission for Racial Equality <a href="http://www.equalityhumanrights.com">www.equalityhumanrights.com</a>
Manifesto for Change	The Commission on the Future of Volunteering <a href="http://www.volcomm.org.uk">www.volcomm.org.uk</a>
Report of the Rural Advocate	Commission for Rural Communities <a href="http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk">www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk</a>

You can get this Report in alternative formats, upon request. These include large print, Braille, audio cassette, computer disk and email.

Please contact Emily Lewis at Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

 01865 883488

 orcc@oxonrcc.org.uk

**THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGES UPON REQUEST:**

هذه الوثيقة متاحة باللغة العربية عند الطلب.

Arabic

এই ডকুমেন্ট অনুরোধে বাংলায় পাওয়া যায়।

Bengali

ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਮੰਗ ਕੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਲਿਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ।

Punjabi

درخواست پر یہ دستاویز اردو میں بھی مل سکتی ہے۔

Urdu

本文件可以應要求，製作成中文 (繁體字) 版本。

Chinese

 01865 883488

