

# Supporting our diverse society



CORE (Community Organisation for Race Equality) hosted a very successful city wide Conference, in collaboration with four other Edinburgh based minority ethnic organisations; Skillnet Edinburgh, NKS, Sabeliya and Men in Mind. The event took place on 12 November at the North Edinburgh Arts Centre and was attended by more than 60 diverse people from all over the city. Politicians; Joanna Lamont MSP, Malcolm Chisholm, MSP, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP, Mark

Lazarowicz MP and Cllr Cammy Day all attended the conference.

CORE's chair, Mr Fernando Diniz (pictured) opened the conference saying: "Our task is to put our minds together to address a serious state of affairs in which grassroots Black Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations find themselves as they journey in uncertain political and economic times. This issue is not unique to Edinburgh, but our focus today is on the

experience of five leading organisations in our city; Skillnet, NKS, Sabeliya, Men in Mind and CORE.

"Like many of you, I have been impressed by their long and distinguished records of service to BME communities. So I am confident that you will join me in paying tribute to all five. They are committed to and driven by a clear value base; that of social justice and anti-racism. They understand the barriers faced by their clients and have developed ways to promote civil liberties and social mobility.

"This success is respected and recognised but they face pressure, in terms of resource allocation, to fight for communities who have little voice. This 'culture of survival' has been at the root of BME organisations, even in times of plenty. We are not in times of plenty which is why these five organisations have felt it necessary to come together to make their voices heard."

The guest speaker of the day, Ms Joanna Lamont MSP Scottish Labour's Deputy Leader, expressed her delight to be asked to speak at the conference and acknowledged the huge and positive contribution ME organisations in Edinburgh and Scotland have made. Ms Lamont called on all political parties to work together and do more to reach minority ethnic communities.

CORE's Director Tesfu Gessesse joked that as part of his austerity measures, the chair has asked him to speak for only 15 minutes! Tesfu said: "For those who know me this will be a real challenge because, whilst I can manage my life and CORE's expenditure under austerity, trying to convey my message in 15 minutes will not be easy - but let me try." He then explained the conference's three main objectives: To mark the organisation's name change from BCOP to CORE. To highlight key messages about the impact of impending cuts on the service users of Edinburgh's ME organisations. And, importantly to offer conference participants an opportunity to come up with suggestions for securing the future of BME voluntary organisations.

Tesfu continued: "CORE, formerly known as Black Community Development Project, has existed for 17 years. Our organisation has grown and strengthened because of the commitment and clear strategic direction of our Board members and the support we received from local people and local politicians, in particular, Malcolm Chisholm MSP and Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP. We at CORE have worked very hard to survive and build our capacity and reputation. However, our future is less certain and that is what we are here to look at today. *continued on page 3*

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"The composition of Scotland's minority ethnic community has changed dramatically in the past decade. Many of our current service users are recent arrivals from a range of countries. Some have experienced torture and come to Scotland with a scar in their minds. Others come to study or work and whilst they are here the situation in their country of origin can change and they cannot return. Some experience domestic violence. Most do not have a relative to turn to - they live in isolation, suffer depression, lose confidence and feel worthless. On top of this they experience multiple discrimination, such as verbal or physical abuse. It is these people who will be further discriminated and marginalised if BME organisation funding is cut. We need to ask appropriate bodies, how they intend to address the needs of these people in this time of 'Cuts and Fairness?'"

"The direct and indirect discrimination experienced by ME organisations is exactly the same as that experienced by ME individuals. I believe that our history of inequitable funding is because, unlike many parts of England, there is very little recognition and support for BME people and organisations in Scotland. After all, it is still the case that we are seriously under-represented in Scottish public and private sectors. Perhaps even mainstream white voluntary organisations have failed to recognise and address the needs of minority ethnic communities? Given that the flow of resources and support is exactly the same: From the UK Government to Scottish Government Local Authorities to Voluntary Sector? Research and our experiences show most of the support and funding go to the mainstream white voluntary sector.

"I believe in the coming years, it is the poor who will suffer more and both BME and mainstream voluntary organisations need to work together to protect the vulnerable in our society. I am confident that everyone present today will want to have your say and suggest how we tackle the serious problems faced by BME voluntary sector."

Tesfu concluded his speech by asking the conference to think about the following: Local and national government must recognise that the experience of BME organisations has been

unsatisfactory, irrespective of which political party has been in power. It is time that political leaders genuinely work together to rectify the situation.

- BME organisations would like the white voluntary sector to demonstrate their recognition of the important work carried out by BME organisations and for joint working to meet the needs of minority ethnic communities.

- For BME organisations to reflect on their achievements so far, to challenge thinking and work together effectively - in partnership - in order to secure our existence.

The third speaker Skillnet Edinburgh's Chair; Ms Marion Fletcher talked about the importance of working in partnership. She continued: "The current scarcity of funding means that we need to look at our work, how it is delivered effectively and this means looking at partnerships and finding economies of scale. Meaningful partnerships must be built on trust and shared ideals, not simply on the search for funding or resources. It must be based on the needs of the individuals, and not the needs of the organisation.

"The push towards social enterprise does not suit all organisations; we need a range of approaches and structures to address needs. There is a difference between employability and employment. Employability is about giving people the tools to last them a lifetime.

"Our CORE and Skillnet joint project will have worked with over 500 people over the past four years - 75% have either gone onto employment, further training or education. Our partnership enables two small organisations to work together and make a greater impact than either could make alone. We were runners-up in the Scottish Government Best Practice Awards for Partnership Working are determined to build on this success and recognition."

The conclusion reached by delegates and those projects hosting the event was that the way forward is to work together to build strong partnerships and develop joint projects. It was agreed that one strong and united voice will achieve more for the communities and individuals they work hard to represent.

CORE