

**making
equality
reality**

our theory
of change

brap was created in 1998 to respond to the challenges posed by increasing diversity: poor community engagement; superficial understanding of community demands and needs; entrenched inequalities; and professional paralysis on equality issues.

From the onset, our message was hard and unorthodox. We highlighted the dangers of funding community representative activities and services and argued for a focus on the equality skills of public officials and communities.

We knew, however, that talking the talk was not enough. Our activities quickly developed to include training for partners who wanted to put these new ideas into practice. Through trialling new methods of service delivery and through supporting and consulting with excluded groups we helped public service providers design services that stood a better chance of addressing systemic inequalities. Our research activities helped to identify 'what works' in progressing equality and effective engagement with excluded groups.

Our national work has focused on generating a credible evidence base to influence progressive equality and human rights practice. In particular, we have continued to champion an approach to equality that moves 'beyond identity'.

We were among the first to argue that many aspects of people's identity – such as race and gender – are social constructs and as such, equalities thinking needs to balance a response to specific needs with a retreat from traditional, siloed approaches that reinforce artificial divisions.

We were also one of the first organisations in the country to show the potential for human rights to improve services and ensure people of all backgrounds receive their entitlements.

The following pages outline why we do what we do. If you want to see more go to our website:

www.brap.org.uk

**WHO
WE ARE**

The problems we're solving

SINCE 1998 OUR WORK HAS TACKLED THE PROBLEM OF INEQUALITY AND INHUMANITY IN OUR SOCIETY. IN RECENT YEARS BRAP HAS FOCUSED ON THE FOLLOWING SPECIFIC CHALLENGES RELATED TO EQUALITIES THINKING AND PRACTICE...

1960s PRACTICE FOR A 21ST CENTURY SOCIETY

If you ever get the chance, have a look at an equalities policy from the 1980s. You might be surprised at how similar it is to the policies we produce today. A handful of actions that haven't changed very much have dominated equalities practice for decades.

Unfortunately, these actions have delivered only limited progress. And the rate of progress is frustratingly slow. But all too often, we ignore the evidence base regarding the impact of our interventions. So it's not just that we don't innovate – it's that we don't see the need to.

Some people say the problem is that we have never implemented our existing approaches properly. We say these approaches can never work. The problem is, they rest on a couple of assumptions that are just plain wrong. We continue to think, for example, that disadvantaged groups are somehow different and that they therefore need separate, different services. We also tend to think that equalities plans, policies, and assessments will, by themselves, improve outcomes.

Beyond some early successes, neither of these ideas have borne fruit. The time has come for a new way of thinking with new, evidenced-based approaches.



EQUALITY IS A SPECTATOR SPORT

Ok, hands up if you're reading this and believe that equality is everyone's business.

If you've got your hand up, we've got some bad news – (a) you look a bit silly (put your hand down) and (b) you're in a minority.

Because people still think equality is about uncovering the thing that makes disadvantaged groups 'different' it's not uncommon for people from minority backgrounds to be given responsibility for this area. They're asked to sit on interview panels, for example, or chair support groups, regardless of whether they've got the skills for the task. This reinforces the idea that promoting good equalities practice is a skill you're born with.

There is another issue here as well. The term 'equality' has a bad reputation, especially in the public sector. Equalities implementation has tended to be punitive: rather than telling people what they should do, it has told them what they can't do. Staff don't feel as though they can discuss, question, or criticise what is done in the name of equality for fear they will 'get something wrong'.

The challenge is to convince people – to show people – that 'equality' is a skill that can be learnt, that we all share responsibility for furthering this agenda and taking a stake in the society we live in.



HOW WE LIVE TOGETHER

Society is increasingly diverse – in every sense of the word. It's not just that one in eight of us was born in a country outside the UK. It's not just that 'multiple heritage' is the fastest growing ethnic group. It's that we are increasingly diverse in the values and beliefs we hold. Our attitudes to immigration, for example, are polarizing. Our notions of what it means to be British are split along clear generational and socioeconomic lines.

In the absence of a clear, shared framework of values we are finding it increasingly difficult to make tough policy and funding decisions. Decision makers often respond to whichever representative or lobby group has the loudest voice or the most clout. While this is an understandable response, it does not guarantee fair results. It does help to generate resentment though.

And more than that, it alienates people. In fact, our whole approach to politics, decision making, and community relations alienates people. A few years ago we surveyed 500 young people. The sense of alienation and frustration was palpable – very few felt connected with the society, with the communities, they lived in. And it's not just young people. Look at how low political participation rates are for older age groups. (And if you've ever tried to organise a consultation event...well, let's just say you have our sympathy.) Fundamentally, people don't feel they have a stake in society – and that's something we need to change with a shared vision that they can buy in to, based on shared values they can believe in.



NOT CONVINCED?

THIS IS JUST A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEMS BRAP IS WORKING ON. IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR RATIONALE WE DISCUSS THEM IN MORE DETAIL IN OUR *CASE FOR CHANGE*. DOWNLOAD IT FROM OUR WEBSITE.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Here's our three step process to creating sustainable, lasting change:

- **EAR ON THE GROUND:** we develop relationships with partner organisations – NHS trusts, care homes, universities, housing associations – and engage with traditionally excluded groups (via projects like Lifeline (business support to young people), Heart 2 Heart (health awareness amongst BME women), and Armchair Advocates (helping older people lobby for better services)) – to understand how inequality operates on the ground. These projects might be in Manchester, Birmingham, London, or somewhere in between: the key thing is that we learn the issues and barriers people and organisations are facing on the frontline. We're particularly interested in the skills people need to deliver equality, what human rights infringements 'look like', and the impact of globalisation
- **BEING PART OF THE SOLUTION:** we use this knowledge to refresh equalities thinking and practice – either in organisations or in the types of project we deliver. We deliver training, support on organisational development, advice, and clarity around service design. In particular, we show organisations how they can change their organisation's culture, embed human rights practice, and resolve conflict fairly. Finally, we monitor the impact of this support to better understand how and why what works
- **SPREADING THE KNOWLEDGE:** another thing that makes us different – we campaign and lobby national (and, increasingly, international) decision makers to get them to adopt the best practice we've identified. We attend meetings, write consultation responses, produce papers, give lectures, deliver seminars, and much more. In this way, progressive, innovative equality approaches become mainstreamed, leading to better, fairer services



WHAT KIND OF CHANGE DOES BRAP WANT TO PROMOTE?

Society has not yet developed a convincing approach for responding to diversity. Multiculturalism is insufficient and unrealistic given the problems we've just outlined. A new approach needs to recognise that our society is complex, that people are diverse in a multitude of ways, and that we need to revise our approach for living together, looking after one another, and sharing in society's rewards.

We recognise that the impact of public services in relation to disadvantaged groups is linked closely to systemic patterns of inequality that often remain beyond the remit of public services alone (such as inequalities in the labour market, differential access to good quality and cheap child care, unequal wealth distribution, and discriminatory public attitudes). It is against this backdrop that changes in the practice of service delivery need to be engendered. It is a difficult hurdle to overcome because there is little appetite to move away from current belief systems (cultural deficit, representation, and voice) towards an entitlement/rights-based model. In 2007, the government-commissioned Equalities Review highlighted the need for the UK to have a different approach to addressing inequality, recognising that, despite 40 years of legislation, parity between different equality groups may never be achieved. Our theory of change demands new thinking and new approaches to addressing these old – but also worryingly new – concerns.

CURRENT THINKING

THE OUTCOME

NEW THINKING

IDENTITY-BASED REPRESENTATION

- | | | | |
|----------|--|--|--|
| 1 | Community engagement is conducted on the basis of speaking to community representatives. The success of a consultation event is measured by how many 'different' communities attend. | Public sector staff tie themselves in knots trying to consult with ever-more specific groups. The idea that specific communities are different is reinforced: the diversity within communities is missed. Genuine innovation in engagement methods can take a back seat to safer, box-ticking exercises. | Much more effort should be placed on ensuring the processes underpinning engagement are fair and just. Individuals should be consulted as individuals. |
|----------|--|--|--|
-

EQUALITY IS BORING

- | | | | |
|----------|--|--|---|
| 2 | Communities are asked to share their views on what they need but feel little 'ownership' of the outcome of consultation. Approaches to equality in the public sector are 'top down'. | People are convinced equality is about some other group, not about them. Staff do not feel empowered to change or influence what is done in the name of equality. There is little enthusiasm for the whole agenda: momentum and energy dissipates. | People should be involved in a conversation about their rights (and responsibilities). Communities and organisations should translate these into a series of entitlements so people know what they can expect from their services on a day-to-day basis and public sector staff have something positive to aim for. |
|----------|--|--|---|
-

LET'S BEHAVE

- | | | | |
|----------|---|---|--|
| 3 | Continued focus on 'process' and 'box-ticking' as a way to improve equality and promote human rights. | A lot of paper is generated that has little impact on things like organisational culture and staff behaviour. Staff are still confused about what to, on a day-to-day basis, to promote equality. | More focus needs to be placed on the behavioural and attitudinal change required to improve practice. A move away from a 'punitive' approach to equality enforcement will help public sector officials to question, discuss, and challenge what is done in the name of equality. |
|----------|---|---|--|
-

CURRENT THINKING

THE OUTCOME

NEW THINKING

ONE FOR ALL...

4

Specialist/separate provision will help to address systemic issues of system deficit.

We get short-term, piecemeal services which don't tackle the root causes of the problem.

Opportunities should be created to redesign systems based on the protection of rights. While it is important to address specific needs, more focus needs to be placed upon responding to common forms of exclusion and identifying mainstream changes that will promote the rights of a range of excluded groups.

BALANCING ACTS

5

The framework for assessing the relative value of competing demands from minority and excluded groups in society is generally whichever group shouts loudest wins.

As a society, we don't know how to handle tricky situations where the rights of different communities conflict. Decision makers are often not sure what weight to place on cultural wants and how to tackle some practices (such as forced marriage). Communities compete with each other for resources and attention.

Human rights should be used to promote a practical understanding of how to create universal entitlements in a demographically diverse and complex society. In this way, people can be supported to understand when it's appropriate to deny somebody's demands in favour of promoting the rights and needs of others. In this way, decisions to protect and promote rights are balanced and proportionate.

brap is a charity transforming the way we think and do equality. We support organisations, communities, and cities with meaningful approaches to learning, change, research, and engagement. We are a partner and friend to anyone who believes in the rights and potential of all human beings. Registered charity number 1115990

The logo for brap, featuring the word 'brap' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are a vibrant magenta color. The 'b' is slightly larger and more prominent than the other letters.

making equality work for **everyone**

brap | 2nd Floor, Lockside | 5 Scotland Street | Birmingham | B1 2RR
Email: brap@brap.org.uk | Telephone: 0121 237 3600 | Fax: 0121 236 7356