

## **CASE STUDY:**

### **CoOp Academies - Asset Based Community Engagement**

Pippa Sagrove

*Director of Behaviour and Inclusion*

#### **Working with families and community as a domain of professional practice**

“We realised that we didn’t know enough about our families,” shares CoOp Academies Trust Behaviour and Attendance leader Pippa Sadgrove. “Roma families have faced exclusion throughout history and we knew if we wanted to change outcomes we had to really understand who they were and their experience in Leeds and Bradford where community cohesion is challenging.” What followed was a 3 month listening campaign, which radically challenged the assumptions held about aspiration in the Roma community, and began to change lost learning for young people.

As a leader, Pippa was motivated by a moral drive. “Life expectancy is 20-25 years less than average for those with Roma heritage. This group is three times more likely to be excluded across the country. In our own trust, 15% of our suspensions were from Roma children despite the fact they made up 2.2% of the student population.” Pippa applied to charity Mission44 to fund a strategy across two schools, to reduce lost learning across the continuum.

“We reached out to people across the country, The Difference’s Mohamed Abdallah on the asset-based approach, Centre for Race Education who have an MA in Ethnicity and Education (Roma). We hired liaison officers from the Roma community who were trained by Citizens UK to run door-to-door listening campaigns and support our schools to build community.” What that team heard identified parents’ desire for support with behaviour, better education and working conditions for their children. It raised families’ feelings of not belonging, challenges integrating with the wider community,



experience of prejudice from many services. And it uncovered assets: pride in artistry, music and dancing, the importance of family and religion.

Practical responses to drive up belonging ran through curricular and extra-curricular offers - a boxing club with a roma coach, multiple concerts showcasing roma talent, a local roma cooking group catering some school events, history and english curricula revised for bias and to cover connection to Roma identity - alongside staff training on Roma awareness and inclusion. Listening closer to students, staff uncovered racist comments going under the radar driving low attendance, and were better able to tackle this.

Pippa is clear that this is an ongoing journey. In Year 2 of the project Deputy Heads - not just liaison officers - are trained in a school-adjusted form of community organising, and involved on a more intense listening campaign with other “power holders” - parents, students and teachers with influence. Multi-agency services are being brought into school to provide financial/career support and the early help that families have struggled to access. Impact has begun well: in one school suspensions fell from 632 to 164 term on term / suspensions of Roma pupils are down 3% on the same time last year, and attendance up 1.5%.

As a Co-operative Trust we have welcomed the help and support of external partners to help improve attendance and reduce exclusions and suspensions. We are delighted to work in partnership with The Difference, Impetus and Mission 44 within our West Yorkshire schools.