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## RACE EQUALITY NETWORK EMPOWERMENT EVENT

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## INFLUENCE AND CHANGE “TAKING FORWARD YOUR CITY, YOUR VOICE” WEDNESDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2019

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Delivered by Empowering Minds

Produced and delivered by:  
Sofia Mahmood  
Empowering Minds Consultancy LTD

**Table of Contents:**

1. Acknowledgement	3
2. Report Author	4
3. Forward Empowering Minds Consultancy	5
4. Introduction	6
5. Recruitment Process	6
6. Conference	7
7. Observations	7
8. Discussion	8-12
9. Exit Strategy	13
10. Feedback	14-15
11. Appendices	16

**Acknowledgements:**

Empowering Minds would like to thank Race Equality Network for funding this project.

Bradford CNET, for the partnership in hosting our conferences at their venue, and Bradford partners, voluntary and statutory sector partners who supported the project.

Above all, a big thank you to all of the participants who gave up their valuable time, and gave us an insight to the issues faced by the BAME community across different sectors.

And finally, thank you to Rahib and Mubashir for their constant support throughout the project.

**Report Author:**

Sofia was born in Lancashire but raised and educated in Bradford specializing in (BA Hons) Applied Criminal Justice Studies and has over 18 years' experience working across the public, private, faith, voluntary, education and health sectors. Sofia has been a catalyst in raising awareness, campaigning and developing innovative approaches and strategies around the themes of Education, Social cohesion, integration, safeguarding, young people, women and the Prevent Strategy locally and nationally.

Over the years Sofia has been called upon to speak at public conferences local and national institutes. She has been a voice for communities across the country- addressing and challenges around Racism, Identify and Cohesion, Gender violence and the ideologies and misconceptions attached to these. Her drive and passion shines bright as she works intensively to make a difference locally and nationally. She has been at the forefront of devising models of engagement for faith base institutes, schools, community groups, statutory sector and private sector.

She has also held the role of Secretary for the Shanaz Network, a national Prevent engagement initiative aimed at women and has designed engagement program for a broad range of audiences. Sofia is an experienced professional and specializes in Community engagement, safer communities, citizenship and identity, child sexual exploitation, engagement with young men/women, Prevent, communities, families, practitioners. She has delivered tailor made training courses for Prevent Engagement Officers for various Police Forces on how to engage with women and Muslim communities, Anti-racism strategy's and policy development. Sofia has worked closely with a number of services such as National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA), where she has developed resource tools for practitioners around preventing violent extremism, community engagement and tackling radicalizations.

Recently, Sofia has engaged in several media interviews across the UK to highlight key messages on Gender Violence, Safeguarding, Hate Crime, islamophobia, women engagement in tackling Prevent through grass root level engagement.

Interviews have included the Security Minister, MP's, senior Police Officers, representatives from BBC departments, Radio 5, BBC Asian Network as well as Directors from a range of services. Sofia has been a key speaker at local and national events empowering men and women to challenge and eradicate key issues from communities e.g. CSE, all forms of extremism and racism.

Sofia is passionate about Safeguarding and Education, creating opportunities and making a difference. providing a platform for young women to enhance and develop their education further a specialist career. Engage, Educate and Inspire young females to know their worth and value. She is enthusiastic about alternative education as well as main stream education young females require to be mentored by women who will support them through their journey of life and education.

***Sofia Mahmood Director***

**Forward Empowering Minds Consultancy:**

“A closed mind has no space for Knowledge. The mind is a powerful tool and can never be unlocked without the right education, where that knowledge comes from is down to what individuals are exposed to. it can enslave us or empower us. Ideologies and misconceptions can create an animosity which can only be cleared with education and sharing practise. You cannot unlock the mind without the right knowledge hence knowledge is the key, mind is the lock. Knowledge empowers you as knowledge is the life of the mind”-

**Sofia Mahmood Director**



Empowering Minds @sof... · 09/09/2019 ✓

“Influence and Change “Taking forward Your City, Your Voice”

Conference will bring together young adults aged 19-25 from the [#BAME](#) community. Workshops to [#empower](#) young adults to create opportunities to initiate, influence and/or drive positive change for [#Bradford](#)



Youth Work Unit Y&H and 9 others

1 9 13

## 1. Introduction

This evaluation summarises the finding of “Your City, Your Voice” BAME young adults event.

The focus group consisted of young people from a BAME background.

### **Future Leaders programme will undertake:**

Workshops will empower women to take initiative and create change for the District of Bradford. Women and young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities will develop the skills and aptitude to influence key decisions made in Bradford’s public, private and voluntary sectors including; better health, housing, employment, education and other services in the city.

### **Workshop outline:**

The goal is to empower, motivate, inspire and build confidence within the BAME community.

## 2. Recruitment Process

Young people were recruited from across the Bradford district. A poster was designed which was:

- Emailed to partner organisations within the community voluntary and statutory sector.
- Posted on twitter and Linkden
- Shared via what’s app
- Messaged to young people
- University

Young people and partner organisations supported with this recruitment by circulating the email to their contacts and endorsing the event. Young adults who previously participated in this conference told other young adults to participate in the current one. They felt previous conferences were insightful and invaluable.



Sofia Mahmood on LinkedIn:  
"#YourCityYourVoice #BAME confere...  
linkedin.com



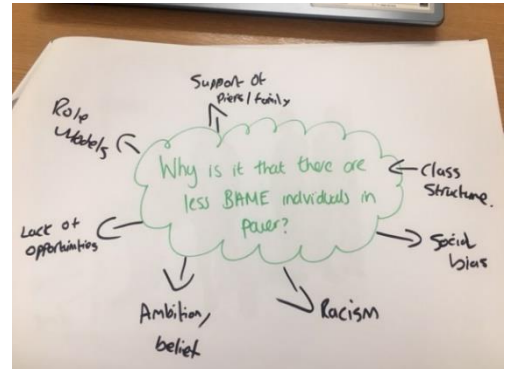
### 3. Conference

The conference was held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019 from ten in the morning to three in the afternoon at CNet Bradford. Thirteen young adults between the ages of nineteen to twenty-five were recruited from across Bradford and Leeds.

Young adults represented different ethnicities and backgrounds with some representing media, fashion, entrepreneurs, police, education and community with some master students.

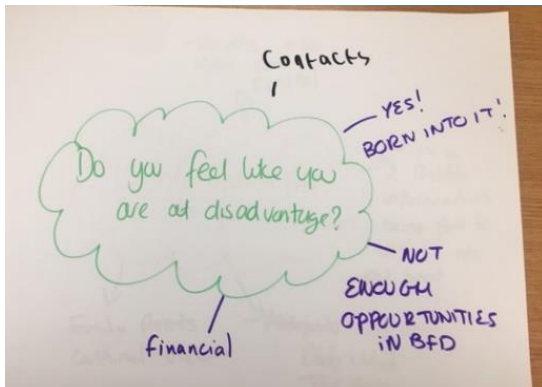
Throughout the day, a range of workshops were delivered exploring:

- Bradford BAME breakdown, identity
- Political agenda, looking at local and national issues
- Government and Parliament
- Your visions for the district
- Barriers, institutional racism and racial discrimination
- Leader and activist
- Cycle of change
- Motivation and empowerment



Two young adult visitors from London and Bradford shared their vision and story of how they became successful despite the challenge of being a person of colour.

### 4. Observations



Discussions raised serious concerns, with some feeling that institutional racism is still widespread. One young adult Asian male highlighted that he worked in a recruitment company that was predominantly white. He was counselled that if he did not get a lead from clients, it would be due to his name. They recommended to him to change his name from Mohammed, change his email address and use a white British name. According to the recruitment company, this would widen his leads prospects and help him get more clients.

A Black young woman mentioned that when she was in school which was a predominantly white British school, her picture would always be used for Equality and Diversity, yet she was the only black woman in her school. In the fashion industry, she stated that designers would only work with light shades and when calling people on to the run way the models would walk out in shade order, light at the front and dark at the back.

Young people blamed the media for the messages they send out, people use media to access information. Black and Asian youth are constantly placed in a negative spotlight and their positive achievements are not highlighted in mainstream media outlets.

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## DISCUSSION: WHEN ASKED A SERIES OF QUESTIONS THESE WERE THE RESPONSES

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### QUESTION 1: WOULD YOU BE IN ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS: POLICE, COUNCIL, SENIOR MANAGEMENT?

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**Answer:** Yes, I would, but I know there are challenges. You have to be the change and not just sit there and expect everything to come to you. Use the power for betterment, supporting each other without seeing it as a competition. Have a direct impact and influence the youth, since we are the largest city of youth in the EU we need to invest in the upcoming generation. The youth are a new movement and can challenge and influence each other. It would be the biggest works force who are just waiting for an opportunity.

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### QUESTION 2: DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU ARE AT A DISADVANTAGE?

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**Answer:** Contacts and networks, and not having access to key BAME influencers. Yes, we are at a disadvantage as there is a lack of opportunities and institutional racism is still at a high. We are judged and profiled as soon as people see a BAME person. We are born into institutional racism, and at times we can be identified as “the poor black girl”, meaning that black people come from poverty and people don’t see beyond colour and slavery. There are not enough opportunities in Bradford for the upcoming generation, most senior positions are held by White middle-class people, pronominally male. Financial disparity, certain roles come with higher wages, however if you can not access those roles then how would you earn that income.

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### QUESTION 3: IS INFORMATION FED TO YOU?

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**Answer:** Trending information which trends on social media you can’t control. For example, on twitter people or organisations are verified and given the blue tick so that means they are validated. Now whatever they tweet is approved and endorsed as they have the blue tick. So, when something is shared and liked some many times, talked about by many people it becomes trending. When it is trending it starts to influence, that’s when information is fed to you. Every picture and article has a hidden message, there is always some kind of aim and objective behind it. Social media has taken over and now you must really search for information as your feeds are structured to what the social media teams want you to see or what you may have liked. Family members, friends and peers can also have a heavy influence, which can then feed into cultural views, causing confusion between religion and culture.



Propaganda news is fed through newspapers such as Daily Mail, The Sun who are seen to have an agenda to divide communities especially those of BAME. They don't promote anything positive about us and always have negative stuff to say, which causes tensions in communities. Their headlines are large and bold with negative and prejudice messages. Then the fear of the other is created.

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#### **QUESTION 4: CAN YOU TALK OPENLY ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT?**

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**Answer:** There aren't many opportunities in Bradford, where do we go? And who do we talk to? We have our politically correct, who don't want to look at the real stuff going on, it just gets brushed under the carpet. If we speak out and take a stance, we are then seen as trouble makers or seen to be siding with one community. You must be so careful in the words you use, and how they are structured, because people read so much into what you write. BUT then there are people who spit hate and don't care about what they say or write. These people get away with it, as they have fake accounts and just say what they want. The only way you can speak openly about issues if you're participating in project. There are a very limited amount of known safe spaces where you can have those conversations, otherwise you're just expected to keep everything inside.

Sometimes it's like if I speak or say something out loud or tell somebody I feel I will be held accountable. A long time ago I thought the whole world was against me and if I dreamt big, then I would make it. But as I grew older, I realised it was all in my head. Because when you try and do something and you keep trying and keep trying there are so many obstacles and like coming from Bradford there are no many opportunities. It wasn't until I decided to go out of Bradford that I started meeting people from different backgrounds that's when I realised there's a big wide world out there. I realised that not many people reach out, you stay in Bradford, you work in Bradford and everyone stays in this bubble. People don't go out and I was scared that I would also fall into this trap.

Do you ever get that feeling where you want to say something, but you think if I say this it might upset someone, or I don't know how they will react? - I wouldn't say it if it was going to upset somebody but sometimes you have to. I think it depends on the settings you are in and what you are going to say if it's hurtful, I would think of a different way to say it or just avoid it.

What if you don't agree with something somebody is saying but you don't want to upset them either? - If I don't agree I will always say something, but I will only say it if I could justify it and back my point up.

We can't talk about racism, hate crime and inequality openly, because people will say "here we go again, you're always thinking about how oppressed you are". We know it exists especially when you have senior people in power openly making these comments. We live in times now where people just think it's OK to make racist remarks and not be challenged. Schools don't teach you about these subjects, you just have to learn by yourself. Racism in Bradford and across the country is hidden in passive joking, so difficult to stand up for yourself when people make it out to be a joke. Sometimes you really must go into facts and figures for individuals to understand that there is a racism and it needs to be dealt with.

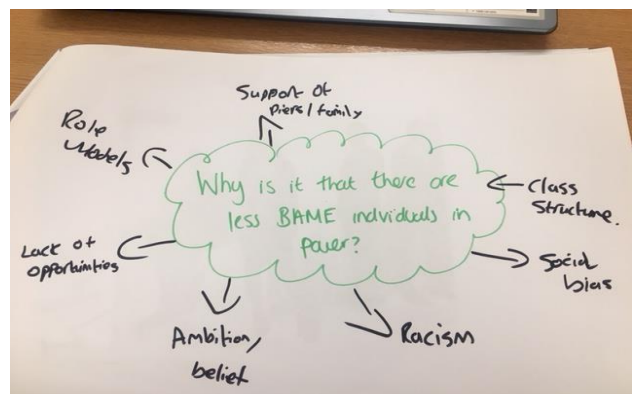
I wish I could address these conversations openly and not be afraid to challenge people, but sometimes you've been put down so much you just think you're better off staying quiet. It's like people think we are always fighting for colour and acceptance, being a black afro Caribbean woman, I was told that my own hair was not suited for society and I should wear a weave, as this would look more acceptable in society. Due to these comments I am self-conscious and feel that I should not be judged on the basis of my hair and feel people look down on me. Which then leads onto questioning yourself, wondering if you belong, which then makes you feel you're an outcast. This can be damaging to your identity and who you later become, I found that I started confirming and losing my identity just because people told me how I should look and be. I just wish people would have open respectful conversations, I understand people are curious, but we have moved forward in times. Honesty is important but don't make people feel uncomfortable. Sly comments get made so much, that's when you think, did I just hear right? However, in Bradford you won't it as much, as we do a lot to address issues around racism and inequality. You do get the odd few who use the term "freedom of speech" when they are spitting hate.

## QUESTION 5:

### WHY IS IT THAT THERE ARE LESS BAME INDIVIDUALS IN POWER?

Support of peers and family, role models, class structure, social bias, racism, ambition/belief, lack of opportunity

There is a lack of BAME role models from Bradford and within our communities. There seems to be a class structure in the sense that you are limited as a individual from the BAME community as to progression into senior roles



and these opportunities are felt less accessible to the BAME individual. As well as this many young people face a social bias from friends and family such as young females who are wanting careers within certain industries but face a backlash from their community as that particular career, is in their eyes more male suited. Unfortunately, institutional racism within many professional institutes is still prevalent which acts as a barrier for individuals from progressing as they feel uncomfortable and therefore not progressing within the institute. Many young people do have ambitions, but they seem to be lacking belief and this is somewhat linked to not having role models around and also the fact that there isn't many opportunities available to young BAME individuals for them to even progressing.

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## GROUP DISCUSSION:

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**Fashion;** Durag, cornrows, Braids

**Friends:** Class, similarities

**Celebrity (Rihanna):** Drake

**Advertisements:** Manipulates your mind, although it hasn't directly influenced, depends on the type of advertisement.

**Television:** procrastinations, for entertainment/ leisure purpose mainly, we don't really watch it to influence us, I use my tv as a lamp, fake news, I work with TV and I see it for its true value.

**Family/Peers:** Sister passed away and it encouraged me to never waste a day because no one is promised tomorrow, inspires to keep moving forward, influence me to be more successful.

**Religion:** Gives you purpose to fall back on, morals- principles routine, refraining from certain things

**Social Media:** YouTube- follow people who keep busy, motivate me to do the same, Instagram- Comparing yourself- insecurities come out, start comparing.

**Parents:** Hardworking, values-morals religion, social pressure, expectations from parents, comparisons, changing yourself.

### How do media and public identify you?

"If somebody was describing me who I had not met would say, 'that young girl over there, they have already identified my gender' and have said young and then they would go on to give a detailed description such as she was wearing a headscarf or I have had incidents where they identify me by my headscarf first, it depends on the situation you are in."

Whenever I have somebody describe me, it's always that tall black girl, but I find when I find somebody approaches me, they see me as a young person, so they talk to me different cause I look young. I have never been identified as being British first, that would always be the last thing.

Due to the industry I am in which is fashion, I am the tall black girl. If there's a show, they must have one black person in the show for it to look diverse and I am that one black girl.

I also get that often as that young Asian girl or that Asian girl with a headscarf.



Empowering Minds @sof... · 18/09/2019 ▾

Quote of the day of our

[#YourCityYourVoice](#) [#BAME](#) [#Conference](#)

"interesting how we are automatically are stamped when we are born". Lead to great discussions and dialogue "labelled and boxed". [#Empoweringminds](#)



Sofia Mahmood on LinkedIn: "Quote of the day of our [#YourCityYourVoice](#) [#B...](#)  
[linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com)



**How does that make you feel?**

Do you not see nothing else other than my colour?

It depends on the situation. For instance, if somebody was describing me to someone who was going to meet me, then they would need to use identity markers to help differentiate me from the crowd. However, if it was in another context, then I would not like it.

**Do you feel it is a tick box service like you mentioned earlier?**

In most industries yes. Like in my college I was partly taken on as I was the only black girl in the year, I was on all the college publicity posters to show that the college is diverse, however, I was the only black girl in the college.

On some forms where it says tick Black British it feels weird, I am British I should not have to say Black British.

**Social media influence.**

Everyone you follow influences you in what you do. Sometimes when you start comparing yourself, certain insecurities come out and you start asking yourself who am I, where do I belong, will I be accepted, should I do what others are doing and then you start copying and conforming.

**Are social media platforms a good influence?**

Sometimes and certain things. They can be negative as sometimes you see things that don't show positive messages about BAME people, so when people see this it does send a negative message. That's when I think they are influencing, and it brings you down because not all BAME people are the same.



Media don't really send positive messages of us, if its crime and rape then they will always put out images of us and make us once again feel bad. They don't show that other people commit the same crime too. Negative stories sell and we must accept it. We need to stand up and see how we can challenge this in a positive way, we need to become those influencers and use the platforms we have.

It will upset somebody but sometimes you must. I think it depends on the settings you are in and what you are going to say if it is hurtful. I would think of a different way to say it or just avoid it. What if you don't agree with something somebody is saying but you don't want to upset them either? If I don't agree I will always say something, but I will only say it if I could justify it and back my point up.

## Exit strategy:

Develop their talent further by establishing a programme of learning through shadowing, mentoring, work placements in line with other successful programmes such as Common Purpose or the Advocacy Academy.



## Since the event:

- Young adults went on to network with each other and build on opportunities
- Supported each other by raising awareness on current opportunities. One participant encouraged fellow participants to answer questions for BBC Look North and help promote Bradford as the city of culture.
- Joined the EMAR - Empowering Mothers Against Radicalisation and Grooming program to work as ambassadors with mothers and senior services to safeguard communities.
- Appointed for a position of working with young adults who have autism.

**Feedback:**

You Retweeted



**ifrah bhatti** @ifyyyy · 18/09/2019

Ended the conference on a positive note, full of motivation and drive! Cant wait to start a positive movement, BAME  
[#yourcityyourvoice](#) @sofiaempowering



You Retweeted



**ifrah bhatti** @ifyyyy · 18/09/2019

BAME [#yourcityyourvoice](#), really powerful conference held by @sofiaempowering 🙌



You Retweeted



**Srosh Khan** @Srosh\_Khan · 18/09/2019

At a BAME Empowerment conference with @sofiaempowering talking about how we can empower young people in Bradford and the wider community.  
[#YourCityYourVoice](#)





Amria Khatun @AmriaKh... · 09/09/2019 ✓  
Another great example of how people come together to make their communities better #CommunitiesWeek2019

 Empowering Minds · 09/09/2019

“Influence and Change “Taking forward Your City, Your Voice”

Conference will bring together young adults aged 19-25 from the #BAME community. Workshops to #empower young adults to create opportunities to initiate, influence and/or drive positive change for #Bradford



## **Appendices 1**

Dear Sofia,

I attended the BAME conference today and would like to provide feedback of my experience.

Firstly, it was a brilliantly executed event - with each activity taking us beyond our depths of imagination and challenging us to think over and beyond. Indeed, I also learnt of the varied experiences of fellow peers and thought of what being "BAME" is to me - something I am identified with, but usually never really ponder or question as to "why". This event taught me to question this label and respectfully stop any negative connotations from accruing.

Furthermore, I also feel like I have learnt a great deal about what challenges being an ethnic minority can impose in terms of one's professional life. Especially the barriers that can be automatically imposed or associated with my skin colour - which can reject a person based upon this "face value" inspection. This was further consolidated when I saw and heard first-hand the experience of the other attendees (for whom, ethnicity has been a label inhibiting progression).

Overall, it was an insightful event that taught me to think and question society each time I feel or see a label being attached to myself. I had a thought-provoking day and would recommend any events such as this to people I know. We should all question the labels - and not feel like we ought to conform, So, many thanks!

- Anonymous



Dear Sofia,

This is some feedback on today's event.

I found the event to be thoroughly informative, interesting and meaningful. Informative because I was able to fully understand the true breakdown of numbers for those coming from BAME backgrounds: this puts into context that those who are with the opinion BAME ethnic groups taking over countries like the UK are in fact such a small minority of the overall population. The majority still being held by white British citizens, which makes you question why those from coloured backgrounds are still being misunderstood to say the least.

Interesting and meaningful because I was able to experience the views of those from BAME backgrounds who have personally gone through events in their life, where they have been subject to being treated less than or faced with racist remarks. This puts into context that behind the numbers are real faces, that cannot be ignored, which also includes my own face. Therefore, something needs to be done or put in place to educate the wider community on tolerance and teach them about integration, to enable such behaviour to be swept under the carpet before it becomes the norm.

The conference allowed me to reflect on how I view myself and how I would like to be perceived. Before I took part in this event, I would have classed myself the same way the system has because I have never thought otherwise. However, after leaving here I was able to unlock the part of me that felt I needed to be the individual I am, followed by every other label society would see fit to brand me with.

Thank You.

- Anonymous

Dear Sofia,

After the Empowering Minds Conference, I realised how much I missed helping the community and applied for a position in working with young adults with autism. Since then, they have offered me a position, its because of the conference I realised how much I want to give back to the community.

Thank You So Much.

- Anonymous