Communities Empowerment Network

Evaluation Report
September 2015

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1.0. Executive Summary

The Communities Empowerment Network (CEN) was set up in 1999 to address education issues commonly found in minority communities in South London. Parents will often come to CEN if their child has been excluded from school and is going through the complex legal exclusion process, or if their child is at risk of exclusion. These are often confusing and daunting times for parents. CEN offers advice, support and legal representation to parents, working with around 1000 people a year to retain young people in mainstream education. Additionally, CEN offers advocacy training to parents and volunteers, and runs workshops for at-risk youths in local housing estates. In the past three years CEN has offered education advocacy training to parents, local community organisations and a corporate social responsibility department. CEN has conducted an in-house report that has gained national media attention, and had a real impact on government policy. The present evaluation report is the culmination of the past three years of the Big Lottery funded project, the Parent Empowerment Network. Here, we will discuss what CEN has delivered in the past three years, what has been learnt from delivering this project, and what the future for CEN may look like.

"The worst thing in the world is a young person who has nothing to lose. I have worked with them, I have seen them. The boys who have nothing to lose are not in school - they will carry a gun, and they will fire the gun - because they now have to make up their own road"

Ralph - Parent of an excluded child

1.1. Likelihoods

The rate of fixed period exclusions is 350 per 10,000 pupils; six in every 10,000 pupils are permanently excluded from school. These numbers have increased since 2013, and fixed period exclusions, particularly in primary schools, are at their highest rate since 2007 (ONS, 2015). The long term outcomes for excluded children is poor: they are 13 times more likely to engage in antisocial and criminal behaviour later on in life; twice as likely to be long term unemployed, and nineteen times more likely to underachieve academically (SCIE, 2005).

1.2. Vulnerable Groups

Some pupils are excluded by their life circumstances. Children with special educational needs (SEN), those in receipt of free school meals (FSM), boys, and black Caribbean children continue to be disproportionally represented in exclusion statistics. Students with SEN are between six and ten times more likely to be permanently excluded from school. Children in receipt of free school meals are four times more likely to be excluded, and black Caribbean or white and black Caribbean students are three times more likely to be excluded than the school population as a whole. A boy of black Caribbean heritage, in receipt of free school meals, with a statement of SEN is 168 times more likely at the age of sixteen to be excluded from school than a girl of white middle class background with no SEN (Joseph Rowntree, 2005 & 2010; OCC, 2015). Coupled with this is the fact that 37% of children in London live in poverty and under current austerity policies, child poverty across England is expected to rise from 3.5 million to 4.7 million by 2020 (CPAG, 2015).

1.3. Poor School Practice

Statutory guidance on exclusions as set out by the Department for Education in 2012 states that headteachers may exclude a pupil permanently, or on a fixed term basis, for up to 45 days per school year on disciplinary grounds. Such decisions to exclude must be 'lawful, reasonable and fair' and schools have a statutory duty to 'give particular consideration to the fair treatment of groups that are vulnerable to exclusion'. Within fifteen days of the exclusion notice, a Governor's Disciplinary Committee (GDC) must consider whether or not to reinstate the pupil or not, and if not, the parents of the child may have this decision scrutinised by an Independent Review Panel (IRP), or a First Tier Tribunal (FTT) if parents feel their child is discriminated against on grounds of disability.

The process of exclusion is often a lengthy one, with detrimental effects on the child and parent, both academically and emotionally. Parents need support

during the GDC and IRP process, and can easily be overwhelmed and find it difficult to argue their case (CEN, 2015). Legal representation in these cases often enable parents to engage with schools and feel more comfortable about approaching a potentially intimidating situation.

Qualitative research has further indicated that institutional practices often go against the 2012 Department for Education guidance. Two studies, one conducted by Barnados, and one here at CEN found that schools that employ poor practices during the exclusion process sometimes directly contravene statutory guidance and employ managed moves which constitute as illegal exclusions. Parents that have migrated to the UK or those whose primary language is not English were found to be more vulnerable to these practices. Additionally, several grey areas exist as to whether, as stated in the statutory guidance, exclusions were being used as a 'last resort'. This raises questions as to the amount of discretion that is given to head teachers, and consequently the disparity in exclusion criteria from school to school. This is connected to the wider issue of schools, particularly academised ones, being autonomous and not being held to account on their decision making processes (CEN, 2015; Barnados, 2010).

A 2013 report by the University of Sussex found that many alternatives to exclusion are being practiced by schools, in particular academies. These include concealed exclusions, managed moves to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and illegal exclusions (UOS, 2013).

The Department for Education's 2012 guidance requires that exclusions must be made in accordance to the European Convention of Human Rights, and the 2010 Equality Act. However, an enquiry made in 2012 by the Office of the Children's Commissioner identified several breaches of United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNHCR) within current exclusion practices. Firstly, the statutory guidance does not indicate that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration, contravening Articles 3 and 12 of the UNHCR. A mechanism does not exist within current exclusion practice that allows for the involvement of children's views, and they cannot appeal in their own right agains the decision of the exclusion (OCC, 2012).

1.4. IAP to IRP

The 2011 Education Act bought about changes to the way parents are able to challenge their child's permanent exclusion from school. The Independent Appeals Panel (IAP) was replaced by the IRP and FTT. The IRP does not have the authority to reinstate a child in the way that the IAP could, and the decision to do so now rests solely in the hands of the governing body and head teacher, who

2.0. Evaluation Questions

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the delivery of CENs Parent Empowerment Project since 2012. The questions that need to be addressed are:

- What are the outcomes, timescales and outputs of the project?
- What are the key learnings from the project?
- What worked, and what didn't?
- What are the key strategic and deliverable components for the coming years?

2.1. Methodology

This evaluation report was conducted through the analysis of a series of focus groups and case studies, and archival research into CENs outputs, outcomes and database data. The quantitative and qualitative information presented here is the result of this data gathering. Where there have been developments in the last three years, these have been highlighted, and what CEN has learnt and found are highlighted in green. Five focus groups were conducted: with partners; volunteers; parents; CEN staff; non- CEN parents in a Hackney parents project. Additionally, CEN has been contacted by a community centre in Birmingham and an ad-hoc advocate in Manchester. Information from these contacts has also been used to inform the demand for scale.

have the power to exclude a child with no consequence or opportunity for the decision to be overturned. This raises questions as to the level of autonomy schools have and should have, and to the fact that no accountability framework exists on decisions affecting children's lives. Subsequent quantitative research conducted at the University of Sheffield and here at CEN has since suggested that the replacement of IAPs with IRPs dramatically compromises both the social justice and right of the child, since students are not given the option of reinstatement even if they are unfairly excluded. This only exacerbates an endemic problem, within which marginalised sections of the community are disproportionately represented (UOS, 2013; CEN, 2015).

1.5. Summary

There is an argument that on occasion, exclusion is a necessary disciplinary measure which, if used sparingly, allows the child to behave better and the teacher to resolve problems in the classroom. As several have pointed out, however, there are a number of negative effects of exclusion. In particular, for children who's family lives are chaotic, taking the child out of a stable institution disrupts an already disrupted routine (Daniels et al. 2003; McAra & McVie, 2010; Parsons, 2009). Exclusion rates in the UK are the highest in Europe, indicating that children are often needlessly excluded from mainstream education. The message given by exclusion often appears to be that it is fine to give up on or walk away from tough situations, which is not a helpful message to young people already disaffected by poverty, by racism or by struggling to meet academic work. There is a distinct need for the school, parent, and relevant workers to intervene on disruptive behaviour and act sooner, and for parents to receive the right support in the process. There is a need for parents to build positive, effective and lasting relationships with their child's school, and a need for schools to acknowledge that their decision making processes are scrutinised by independent advocates.

It is with this critical need in mind that the Communities Empowerment Network operates.

3.0. About CEN

CEN was founded in 1999 in the knowledge that poor school attainment, school exclusions and academic underachievement was consistently and disproportionately higher in black Caribbean communities. Sixteen years on, this level of marginalisation continues to be a concern within the education system, and a major focus of CEN.

CEN provides support through advice, information and advocacy for parents whose children are currently going through the exclusion process. As mentioned in section 1, this is a long and complex process, complicated further by the endemic life circumstances of children and the bureaucratic difficulties of school policies. Services at CEN are carried out by legal (pro bono) and non legal (advocacy trained) volunteers as well as CEN staff. In the past three years, the work has included:

- Drop in advice, support and representation for parents and children
- A legally trained or CEN trained advocate to accompany parents and children to school exclusion meetings
- An out of hours hotline
- An advocacy service that helps prepare cases for appeals, IRPs, reintegration meetings and other such instances where parents feel they need support
- Volunteering opportunities for education advocates
- Placements for law students through CENs Legal Advocacy volunteer Scheme
- Pupil reintegration services, and school based mediation and mentoring
- Out of school, developmental activities for young people at risk of exclusion
- Education advocacy training supporting local families
- Parent support through regular parent forum groups
- Research into the impact of school exclusion and analysis of the context to inform government, local authorities, schools and community organisations
- Real impact on government policy, recognition in national media

4.0. Outcomes, Indicators, Outputs.

In year one, CENs outcomes were based on training and development, stronger relationships between schools and parents, and the development of a parent community. In this section, these and subsequent outcomes will be evaluated.

In year one CEN's outcomes were:

1. Parents will be empowered through access to training and development courses to effectively support their children when faced with challenges in school.

    1.1   Indicator: 60 parents involved in training taking on responsibilities to support the development of further courses
        Timescale: End of year one
        Output: 70 parents attended the education advocacy training course

    1.2   Indicator: 15 parents demonstrating their skills and knowledge by co-facilitating training courses
        Timescale: End of year two
        Output: 17 parents co-facilitating training courses

    1.3   Indicator: 120 parents recruited to act on behalf of other parents and children when they face challenges in school
        Timescale: End of Project
        Output: 243 parents recruited

2. Parents will have stronger relationships with their children's schools which in turn will improve their children's educational opportunities

    2.1   Indicator: 400 parents contacting the project for advice, support, representation and advocacy services
        Timescale: End of year one
        Output: 365 parents contacted the project in year one

    2.2   Indicator: 700 parents reporting a reduction in school exclusions of their children
        Timescale: End of year two
        Output: 648 Parents reporting a reduction in further fixed term exclusions of their children

    2.3   Indicator: 1140 parents to report improved relationships with the school
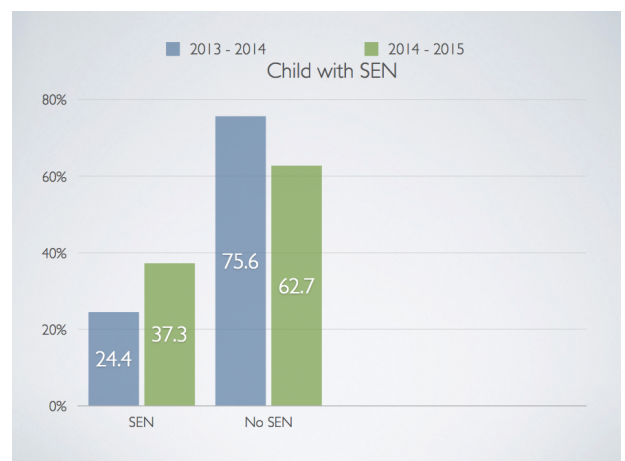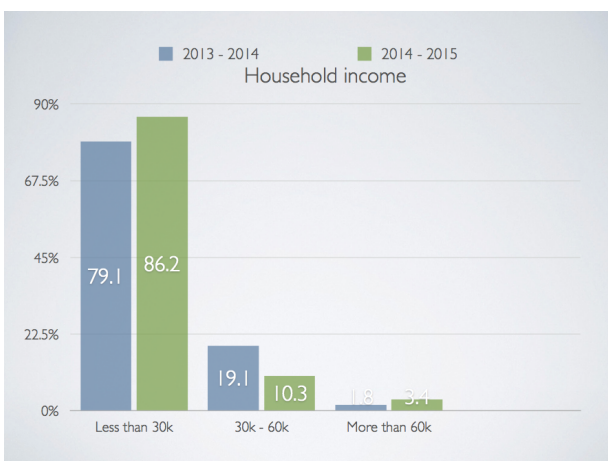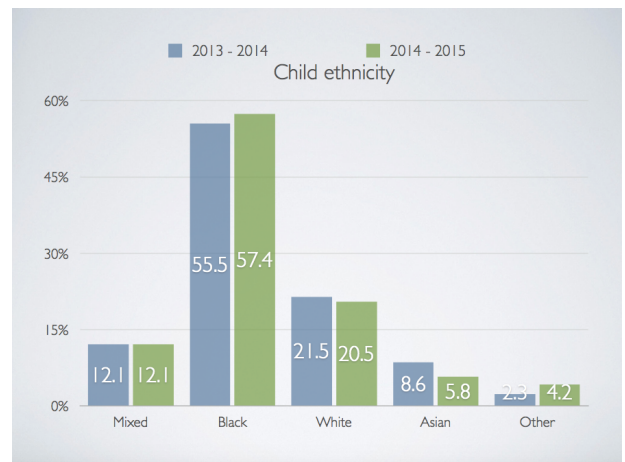   Timescale: End of the project
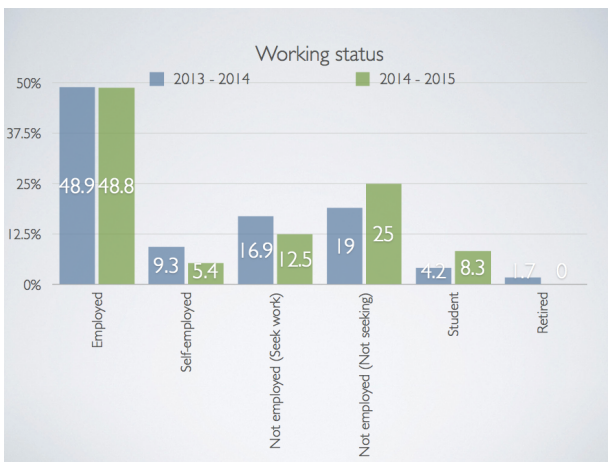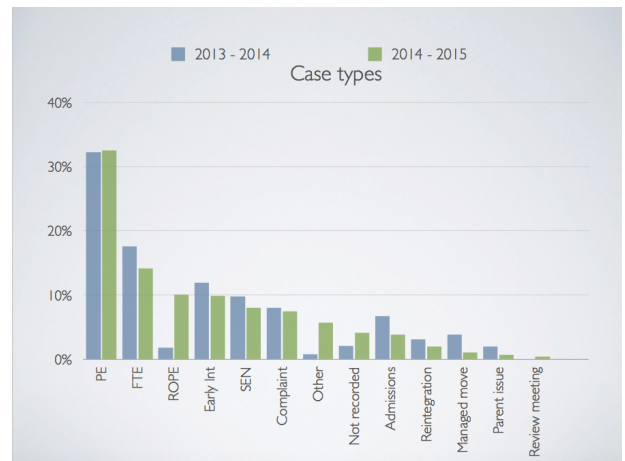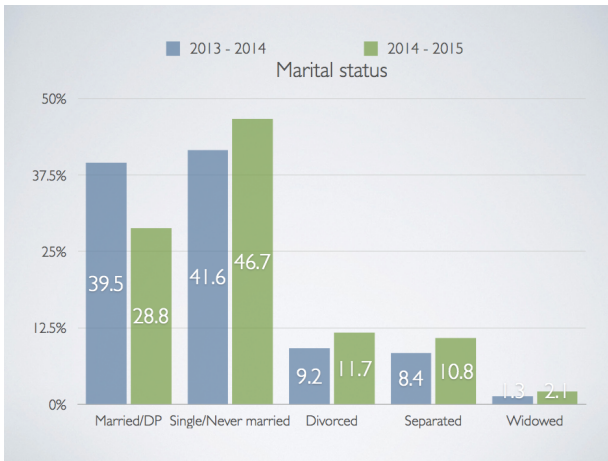   Output: 926 parents

3. Groups and networks of parents will share and develop knowledge, insights and expertise through parent forums

    3.1   Indicator: 6 Parent forums convened
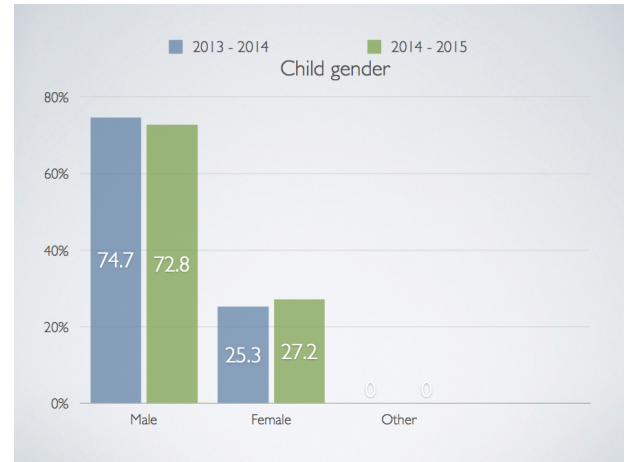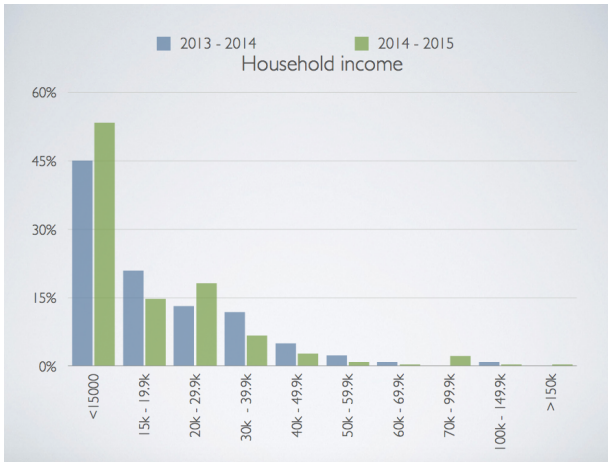   Timescale: End of year one
                 Output: 7 Parent forums convened

    3.2   Indicator: 120 parents attending parent forums

Timescale: End of year

two
Output: 161 parents attending parent forums

3.3   175 parents demonstrating their knowledge, insights and
expertise by sharing their stories of improved relationships
with their children's schools
Timescale: End of project
Output: 168 parents

From year 2 onwards the wording of the original outcomes was refined to the following, but indicators remained the same:

1. Parents will be empowered through access to advice, support, representation and training to retain their children in full time, mainstream education.
2. Parents will be actively engaged with their children's schools - improving the educational progress of their children
3. Empowered networks of parents will share knowledge, insights and expertise to create a sustainable and preventative community

5.0. Demographics and Impact

5.1. Demographics

The following tables outline the demographic data of all of CENs parents between 2013 - 2015 .

5.2. Impact

80% of the parents CEN worked with felt that CEN had provided them with an effective service, and additionally felt an increase in at least two of the following areas: knowledge of their rights/ education law, school processes and policies; communication with the school; decision making regarding their child's school and education. They also felt much more confident in supporting their children and engaging in school activities. Some have gone on to support other parents informally in 'peer advocacy' activities.

90% Parents felt that their voices had been heard and that CEN gave them the opportunity and confidence to put their child's case forward.

82% of parents felt that the rate of their children's ongoing and fixed term exclusions had decreased. 60% of parents go on to tell on average 13 people about CEN.

One important finding is that the holistic support of parents is key to the effective delivery of this project. CEN gives the parents a voice, trains parents in how to approach schools and build meaningful relationships with their children's teachers, and works with teachers and parents to uphold individualised behaviour plans for children at risk of exclusion. It was felt that it was important to work with the parent, rather than teach or train them.

Confidence about child's future education
Baseline average parent score (rated 1-5) = 2.15
Average parent score after 3 months = 3.64
29.8% increase

Confident about making decisions (A good indicator of empowerment)
Baseline average parent score (rated 1-5) = 3.35
Average parent score after 3 months = 4.27
18.4% increase

Understanding of school process
Baseline average parent score (rated 1-5) = 2.49
Average parent score after 3 months = 3.63
22.8% increase

Taking an active role at school
Baseline average parent score (rated 1-5) = 1.45
Average parent score after 3 months = 1.56

16

2.2% increase

32.5% Permanent exclusions
14.2% Fixed term exclusions
10.1% Risk of Exclusion

There were 5 times as many cases of Risk of Exclusion compared to the previous year (57 - 11)

Ethnicity
A rise in 1.9% of black children. However, black Caribbean numbers actually fell by 2.7%. The overall increase was due to larger numbers of black African (+2.5%) and black Other (+2.1%)

Household income
Percentage of households earning less than £30000 per year has risen from 79/1% in 2013 to 86.2% in 2015

6.0. Learnings

6.1. Evaluation of education-advocacy courses

When CEN set out evaluating the course it was through paper questionnaires. It was suggested by a few parents that this process should be online as it would be easier and more efficient. Since the beginning of year 1 therefore, an online evaluation questionnaire has been implemented. This evaluation feeds into the Salesforce CRM, whilst also keeping the paper questionnaires as some parents found these more convenient. Secondly, parents suggested that the timings of the workshops would be more convenient if they were in the evenings. Consequently a number of workshops were held that fitted around parent's busy schedules, based around the smaller components of the full course. These have been around SEN and advocacy, advocacy and representation, and managing the logistics of a case from start to finish.

6.2. Outputs that differ from projections

400 parents contacting CEN: One major learning at the beginning of the project was that much more publicity and advertising needed to be implemented in order to achieve CEN's target numbers. Whilst it was anticipated in year one that 400 parents would contact CEN, 365 did. This was due in part to the delay in setting up and the unanticipated time it took to advertise, appoint and induct

project workers. Additionally, it took more time than anticipated to design and distribute materials. It was known that the numbers of people looking for a free advocacy service are incredibly high - it was a matter of trial and error both getting the relevant bodies to point them in CEN's direction, and advertising directly into the community. The team contacted a number of local organisations, MPs, Local Education Authorities and the Department for Education. The team has given key note speeches at The London Black Child Conferences, ran awareness campaigns with Race on the Agenda in Lambeth and Southwark, ran a conference with the Alliance for Inclusive Education, distributed leaflets, posters and online information, and contacted every London Local Authority Inclusion Officer and Parent Partnership Advocates to publicise CEN's service. All of this publicity and campaigning gained traction; CEN's services are now mentioned in every letter a parent of an excluded child in Lambeth receives, and 70% of CEN's referrals continue to come from word of mouth. Establishing a telephone hotline that is available during evenings and weekends has dramatically improved the numbers of parents calling in; these parents are not only from London but the team have been receiving calls from around the UK.

700 parents reporting a reduction in exclusions: As mentioned in section 1., the 2012 Department for Education Statutory Guidance made dramatic changes to the way parents are able to challenge a schools decision to exclude a child. Nationally, 20 children in the UK had their exclusion decision overturned by a GDC. What CEN can and does work on reducing however, is the rate of illegal exclusions, fixed exclusions when unnecessary, and mediating the relationship between the parent and the school in the implementation of a behaviour plan to prevent further similar situations arising.

6 Parent forums convened: Many more informal groups than the ones recorded in the first year took place outside of CEN. It soon became apparent that these forums, when put into practice, are less likely to be formal forums through which parents communicate via CEN. Whilst CEN is a resource and a network for parents, much of the sharing and socialising comes from the community. Around 70% of CENs referrals are word of mouth, which indicates that informal groups do exist outside of CEN, but that these are difficult to quantitatively measure.

6.3. Measurement

The existing database that recorded casework was insufficient to meet the demands of the type of data required. Capturing what happens during this project, how much, and to what extent is integral to the future viability and scaling plans of CEN. A Saleforce Contact Relationship Management (CRM)

database was therefore set up in order to accommodate for the increasing caseload CEN currently receives. The CRM captures specific information on each case, including caseload time, SEN and equality data, school meeting outcome data, soft outcome measurement, and correspondence.

6.4. Website

With the help of external contractors, the team rebuilt the website due to the amount of traffic coming in. The website is now not only a place for people seeking CEN's services, but a resource for information and volunteering, and has the capacity to host more visitors. It became apparent however that a number of people were accessing the site and its resources, and the team had no way of measuring this other than the number of clicks on each link. In the near future therefore the team plan to create a log-in section that can track activity.

6.5 Policy Impact

Earlier this year Christie Kulz wrote a report titled "Mapping the Exclusion Process: Inequality, Justice and the Business of Education". It is the first qualitative research study to assess the impact of the 2011 Education Act on the exclusion process, in particular the change in statutory regulations, the increasing autonomy and academisation of schools, and the (in)ability of parents, particularly from 'vulnerable' groups, to be heard in the process. The report gained recognition in national media (Guardian, 2015) and as a result the number of calls that CEN has been receiving, from people all over the UK, have increased by 33%.

On January 5th, 2015, statutory guidance on the criteria for permanent exclusions was altered. In this central paragraph:

"The government supports head teachers in using exclusion as a sanction where it is warranted. However, permanent exclusion should only be used as a last resort, in response to a serious breach, or persistent breaches, of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school"

(DfE, 2012)

The stipulation of 'last resort' was removed, 'seriously harm' was changed to 'detrimental' and the word 'and' was removed from the final sentence and replaced with 'or'; meaning that the head teacher could exclude a child without them violating the school's behaviour policy:

"It is for the head teacher to decide whether a child's behaviour warrants permanent exclusion, though this is a serious decision and should be reserved for a serious breach, or persistent breaches of the schools behaviour policy; or where a pupil's behaviour means allowing the pupil to remain in school would be detrimental to the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school."

(DfE, 2015)

Just for Kids Law and CEN challenged these changes in the statutory guidance by writing letters to education minister Nicky Morgan, calling for a judicial review. This led to the retraction of this guidance on February 2nd by the schools reform minister Nick Gibb. As a result of CEN and Just for Kids Law's actions, the DfE announced that this guidance was being withdrawn in order to be reconsidered, so that all relevant matters could be taken into account.

6.6. Learnings around School-Parent Relationships

Despite the encouraging number of parents who felt their voices were heard, and felt they had more confidence in talking to their child's school, there still remains a low rate of parents being involved in school activities. Although 72% of parents felt they had a better relationship with the school, only 19% of parents retain an ongoing relationship and are actively involved in their child's school life, such as taking part in parent boards, governing bodies and volunteer roles. One of the major reasons that exclusion is endemic in minority communities is because of the lack of active parental involvement in the child's day to day education (Joseph Rowntree, 2012; Also see Section 1.2.). This is an area of future commitment for CEN.

Since the recent policy impact of CEN there is a distinct need and ability for CEN to make a real contribution to the wider debate on exclusion, marginalised communities, and the endemic issues bought up by the changes to the education system. Although this need is not a priority, we have found it has given CEN a much needed voice.

6.7 Learnings around volunteering

243 people have been trained by CEN's One Day Education Advocacy Training Course. From this group, 19 volunteers took on full and part time roles as education advocates, taking on the responsibility of a further 126 cases advising, supporting, and representing parents and children at appeals and hearings. This totals 708 hours of voluntary time put in by parent advocates, or 4.7 months of

full time work. On average, the hotline receives 15-20 calls per week and is staffed by project workers and legal and parent-advocate volunteers.

It was found that there was a demand for pro bono experience for law students, and subsequently a partnership with BPP Law School has been established. CEN inducts, supervises and trains students in providing representation at hearings and appeals. Because there is sometimes not the capacity to take on all the cases that come in, the team will on occasion refer people to City Matrix School Exclusions Project.

However the retainment figures for people taking the course to giving back to CEN remains at about 9%. It is often the case that the team may benefit from fewer, more experienced, advocates rather than a large number of them. For this reason, CEN is changing its recruitment model to bring in smaller numbers of more experienced people. Deploying volunteers, particularly those who are looking for work experience, carries with it a number of challenges. The main one is that most are seeking work or are working part time. The scheduling and the London- wide location of hearings and appeals means that it is a complex logistical exercise for the volunteer co-ordinator who is funded to work two days a week to manage this. In order to address this concern, one of the elements of the new website and back-end system is that legal and parent-advocate volunteers are now informed instantly through when a new case comes in, making the logistics slightly easier. The recruitment criteria for new volunteers now looks to establish long-lasting relationships. This is one of CENs main concerns- retaining it's staff - and a number of team building, office atmosphere and evaluation exercises are part of CEN's ongoing procedures.

6.8. Challenges

The team frequently comes across obstacles when dealing with school operations and procedures. 90% of parent and advocate volunteers question the overall ability of school's governing bodies to robustly critique the head teacher's decision, despite this critique being a necessary element of the exclusion process. These parents and volunteers felt that rubber-stamping of decisions, as well as poor training of school governors, who are often not equipped to deal with the IRP and exclusion hearings. CEN's representations are sometimes viewed as inconvenience by governing bodies, despite having the legal right and sometimes obligation to be there to represent parents. CEN frequently comes across poor school practice, illegal exclusions, and poor school governance. The majority of CEN's parents (87%) feel that race, gender, SEN and class play a role in how they are treated by the school, a view that is supported by previous reports (CEN, 2015; Barnados, 2010; Children's Commissioner, 2010). These are

and continue to be key areas of concern for us, which the senior team steadily and continuously address through the training of parents strategy.

6.9. Scaling

In the last three years, CEN has grown, and it has been increasingly more apparent there needs to be the appropriate infrastructure in place in order to facilitate this growth. Traffic to the website, attention in the media, word of mouth, the increase in numbers of exclusion, and CEN being mentioned in local authority letters to parents have contributed to this growth and as a result the team is often faced with cases outside of London and therefore outside of CEN's remit. CEN has been approached by community groups in Birmingham, Manchester and Northampton about setting up training courses and CEN branches in these areas, and the team is currently working with the Wellingborough Black Consortium in Northampton in delivering advocacy training and advice. Strategic planning on scaling is an ongoing process with the senior management team at CEN, and an operations consultant with experience at Amnesty International has kindly donated time to help CEN plan its scaling process. This process will likely include a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) online platform through which parents, children and legally trained advocates will be able to communicate with each other, and additionally access CEN's training materials and communications, the management of which will come from the CEN head office in South London. An MVP is used typically for expanding online platforms and scaling businesses, and seems the most appropriate approach for this scaling model. Within an MVP approach, CEN will look at the most important aspects of the its operations: the volunteers, the parents, the staff; and iterate the most efficient, cost effective, impactful way of operating each aspect, for small amounts of people at a time. These aspects are then ready to be scaled.

7.0. Focus Groups

We held independent focus groups for staff, volunteers, partners and parents in order to understand each stakeholders view and evaluation of CEN, and their vision for its future. An additional focus group was conducted by CEN and Parents Influencing Education, an independent organisation consisting of Hackney based black, asian, minority ethnic and refugee parents (BAMER). The senior team has also been contacted by ad-hoc advocates in Birmingham,

Northampton and Manchester who wish to access resources and also set up CEN branches in their areas. For full details on all focus groups please refer to the Appendix.

7.1. Learnings from the focus groups:

- Parents both involved with CEN and not involved with CEN felt that they were devalued as parents in their child's school
- Parents felt that there were issues around SEN, class and race that were unspoken and not addressed
- Parents felt that as well as a CEN legal advocate, there is a need for other professionals to be involved in a child's case, including educational psychologists and other professionals related to SEN cases.
- Volunteers felt there should be a support structure in place for day to day wellbeing of volunteers
- Volunteers felt that there could be improved communication
- CEN staff felt the need to scale, but that the correct support and infrastructure should be in place
- CEN staff felt that external focuses, such as policy and parliamentary lobbying were obtainable and necessary to CENs external presence
- CEN staff felt that an online, social media strategy was necessary in terms of expansion
- CEN staff wondered whether CEN could be expanded beyond exclusions
- CEN staff would like to see improved communication within the company
- Partners felt the need for a robust scaling plan
- Partners felt the need to implement a theory of change
- Partners felt the need to both prioritise the day to day issues of exclusion and parent advocate training, whilst also focussing on the priorities of scaling and policy change

The learning from the focus groups was mainly around scaling, policy and external influences, support for staff, and transparency in communication. Taking these on board, it is apparent that the idea of expanding and having a public presence is attractive to staff and volunteers, whilst for partners there is a careful balance between CENs public presence and its day to day activities, both of which are priorities (See section 6.4 for scaling). It also became apparent that a support structure and communications strategy should be implemented in the coming months. This will partly be resolved with the implementation of CENs online platform which can act as a forum, document sharing area, and sounding board for staff. One idea from a volunteer was to collect information on good practice in schools to use as a 'best practice' document. Similar work can be done ad hoc, including blog and article writing, having a social media presence, and keeping up to date with policy and current affair development, and activities

that have worked in the past such as writing letters to the education minister. This will ensure CENs public presence in an informal way, without spending too many resources on activities outside of the core of CENs remit.

8.0. Recommendations

The previous sections outlined what CEN has learnt in the past three years. Here an outline will be given on some of the key recommendations and strategic steps in how to take the learning forward.

In the next three years CEN will focus on building a scalable business model that: allows for the demand of new parents contacting the organisation; enables and encourages volunteers wanting to give time to pro-bono work; enables and encourages parents to build relationships with schools; contributes to the wider debate on school exclusions.

8.1. Operations: Recommendations

From the learning it was clear that both staff and volunteers would benefit from a structured support system and clearer communication within teams. This will likely be taking place through regular staff and volunteer focus groups, and an 'open' policy of communication. The online platform will act as a forum and an additional means by which this can take place.

8.2. Impact Measurement: Recommendations

From the learning it was apparent that a robust and reliable impact measurement framework was needed in order to capture how many people use the service, how many people go on to contribute back to CEN once having received help, and how the service benefits or impacts on behaviours such as parents confidence with talking to childrens teachers and improved relationships with schools. In the past year, CEN developed a CRM (Salesforce) measuring this impact, which the team plan to continue using. The team also plan to analyse the amount of traffic and type of activity on the website, so as to inform us of where in particular the demand lies (for example, resources, information, online help or hotline number)

8.3. Scaling: Recommendations

Given the number of new parents calling in from around the UK, there is a definite need to build a platform through which CEN may expand. At the moment CEN are having to turn away parents because it does not currently have the capacity to deal with calls from outside of London. As mentioned in section

6.9., the team have been talking to community groups in Birmingham, Manchester, and Northampton. The strategic planning for scaling in the future is ongoing, and CEN is currently working with an operations manager from Amnesty International who is advising us on the best possible strategy. In order to scale efficiently, a robust and efficient platform needs to be in place that builds on the current website and CRM. As mentioned, this will likely take place with the use of an MVP.

9.0. Conclusions

CEN continues to deliver a vital service in marginalised communities in London. in the past three years, much of the learning has come from: how CEN can scale to fit the demands of cases coming in from outside CEN's remit; how CEN can retain volunteer staff and keep current staff happy; how the values of the company are portrayed in the public eye; how to gain traction in media and contribute to policy debates; and how CEN can stay true to its original mission to help the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of the community from educational (and therefore social) exclusion. In the coming months, as this report has set out, CEN has set strategic plans for each of these elements and will be taking these plans forward.

Appendix

1. Parents focus group:

This was mainly a conversation about the wider social and political issues around the child's exclusion. Several parents reported feeling upset by the way they were treated by the school, and that further support, other than legal representation, is necessary in some cases. For example one parent, Fiona, the parent of an autistic child, mentions:

"I have sat and thought long and hard over my experiences and what I hear from other parents. Apart from having legal representation - which is hard to get now, as there is no legal aid anymore and nobody (unless rich, famous or have support from the extended family!) can afford it, parents also need - especially if you are going through the tribunal process - professional reports, that being educational psychologist, clinical psychologist, speech and language therapist and occupational therapist. All of whom cost money too. Parents may not have access to all of this and then 'give up' and then its just possible the child will live their life through the criminal justice system."

Another parent, Iram, said:

"I contacted CEN because I was a parent governor, and I started noticing things with my son. I raised certain issues and it resulted in the head teacher and some other teachers bullying my son, who ended up getting suspended on some trumped up charges and had no one to turn to. Gus John - my sister knows of him and she said get in touch with him - So I did and then got onto CEN. In terms of support it was having someone who actually believed in me and believed me about the racism I was experiencing. I knew that they wouldn't treat middle class children like this. But we live in a society that says it is post racist."

2. Volunteers focus group:

This was a group focussed around what the incentives and positive aspects of volunteering with CEN are, and what can be improved.

- There are several attractions to volunteering outside of CENs scope, such as the need to make a difference (whatever the cause) and gaining work experience (transactional)
- CEN could put forward further opportunities such as cases outside of the geographical area
- Further training outside of the existing courses
- Provide a reference
- Would like to see improved communication with all workers
- Mentoring opportunities (both as a mentor and mentee)
- Sharing learning from good schools
- Meet up opportunities for volunteers

3. Staff focus group:

This was a conversation and workshop around changes staff would wish to see in the office, organisation, team, and views of external factors.

Organisation:
- We should be more responsive to external opportunities
- We need to open up, share needs and knowledge and expertise
- Why don't we expand beyond exclusion
- We should engage further with policy and political bodies
- We should have improved communications, including visual, sharing and transparent communications

Office:
- Make the volunteer package more attractive
- Better technology

Team:
- Lets build an online social media and public profile
- Away days, team building and keeping the team happy
- Put in procedures as the team grows

External factors
- Public expenditure cuts are threatening and will mean fewer local authority and school workers to have time for CEN
- It would be great to have increased visibility

3. Partners focus group:

The purpose of this meeting was to look at the strategic vision of the company and evaluate relevant, fit for purpose ideas and objectives. With limited resources, priorities were considered.

- Theory of change
- Policy priorities and how we influence
- Systematic research
- Policies within CEN
- How do we manage both day to day priorities and scaling
- Sustainability beyond three years

4. BAMER Focus Group:

We spoke to over 200 BAMER parents who came from different cultural, social and economical backgrounds. They all shared concerns and gave examples of where there are clear discrepancies between the treatments of BAMER parents compared to their White middle class counterparts. Examples identified in the survey from Parents at 2 or more schools said that even on school trips they weren't allowed to bring younger siblings as schools cited Health and Safety but the White Middle class mothers were allowed to regardless. Many parents felt that they were treated less favourably because they were from BAMER communities or their children were not acknowledged in the same way by staff as the White middle class children. Many parents noted that schools had less BAMER staff and more young white middle class teachers thus having a negative impact on BAMER children whose cultural needs were not being met. The disparity between how parents and children are treated is increasing tensions between races and Class of parents in the Community as a whole.

It is evident from our findings that BAMER Parents said they felt devalued as parents in their children's school. They felt that their voices were not being heard and indeed they had no one to turn to for support or advice that they felt they could trust who would be independent from schools or the Learning Trust. Many parents felt that when they had written complaints to the Governing Body of the school or the Learning Trust their complaints were ignored and in some cases not responded to. This truly is a sad indictment of Hackney schools no parent should be made to feel to excluded or devalued. In the Children's Commissioner's report Always Someone else's Problem on Pg 8 She states Parents and Young people have repeatedly reported to us that they feel let down by the Education System, and have lost faith that it will treat them fairly". She said this was the case throughout the two years inquiry for this report. Unfortunately this is what we have found in our research many parents felt voiceless and often moved their child out of the school because they had lost faith that anything would be done.

The level of fear that we came across when speaking to parents is disturbing Parent's DO NOT feel safe voicing their concerns as there has been little accountability or action by The Learning Trust if things have gone wrong. During our research one parent had been intimidated by the Deputy Head at the school to name the PIE member that had given her the survey or point out the PIE member's children. This kind of behaviour fuels the fear in parents and raises deep concerns and worry about the safety of their children in the school setting. If Senior Management can behave in this way with no accountability than what else is the school capable of when dealing with parents who raise concerns.

We believe that our research is reflective of the experiences of BAMER parents in Hackney. Unfortunately many of the quotes and examples of Racism and Islamaphobia cited are not isolated examples. A report by Childline in February 2014 highlighted the fact that racist bullying in schools had increased. The metropolitan police report for December 2013 noticed an increase in Islamaphobic attacks in Hackney. It would be foolish to think and act as if schools are somehow exempt from the impact of the society around it. It is then interesting to see that an important report such as The London Borough of Hackney: Local Development Framework Authority Report 2011/12 that is 212 pages thick covers everything else in the borough apart from Education. We therefore have to encourage schools to have a more vigilant approach to being inclusive, promoting community cohesion and adhering to the PSED.

5. Birmingham & Manchester

Ashiana Community Centre:

There is no advocacy specifically for pupils and their parent for education matters, particularly for SEN, admissions, school exclusions, general parent/school meetings and yet there is an urgent need for advice, support and representation in Sparkbrook. Parents don't know their rights and therefore what they can be expected to ask for. They therefore often just along with what the school says and feel intimidated by the entire process of which they know little.

Young people are being targeted especially Year 10 and 11 when many are trying to exert their own identity. There are growing numbers of fixed term exclusions (3 days) and therefore the number of hearings too. There are cases where the child has been off rolled and then received no support from the Local Authority.

As no organisation is providing this kind of service there is no documented research about the experiences of pupils and parents.

The community is characterised by crime, substance misuse, unemployment, mental health issues. Lot of youth services have closed down due to cuts exacerbating the problem.

Schools are reluctant to identify pupils as having SEN and to get them dealt with parents have to argue very skilfully. Often parent s don't even know what condition their children may have making it virtually impossible any support will be provided for their child. Exclusions are often the logical conclusion. It can take up to four years for there to be a full assessment of SEN.

CEN's experience of operating in London for the past 15 years, plus the voices of activists involved in CEN for decades, this picture is sadly all too familiar.

There is an agenda being forced on school's governing bodies on how to operate and this has been largely successful particularly with voices from the community being silenced.

An organisation is therefore needed that provides advice, support and representation to parents and to hold schools to account.

There is a clear and urgent need for a service based on CEN's model of service delivery.

Agreed that the service was delivered by CEN and is separate and distinct from Ashiana though housed within and supported by Ashiana and that we begin process of planning and implementation.

Gail Frampton, Manchester:

"I have recently been involved as an advocate for a 14 year old mixed race girl who was being threatened will exclusion to a PRU. Her mum as you can imagine was in bits. Anyway to cut a long story short. I managed to piece together information and challenges to the schools practice including the work I think might have been Gus John's for the Children's Commissioner, and the school backed down. I picked up a lot of information along the way, however, it wasn't until after the meeting with the school that I discovered CEN.

When I was waiting to meet the deputy head teacher in a school that OFSTED claim is a majority white school, the 4 or 5 children sat waiting to hear their fate were all mixed race. As Andrea will tell you, many years ago when my own children were young I established a group, Parents of Black Children, in order to challenge such inequalities and injustices that are often common practice. It was clear that had Amaya's mum not known me her outcome would have been very different. There are children in Manchester who are experiencing this exclusion on a daily basis and I think we can help not only expose this but empower families.

So to cut to the chase, I have found a few likeminded people who are willing to try to set something up and I thought I would ask you if you have an opinion on the best way to move forward. Initially I had thought about CEN possibly branching out and setting up something in Manchester. Or CEN adopting us as a group and somehow supporting our training and development. There seems little point in reinventing the wheel when the standard of excellence is already there.

I would really appreciate you giving my ideas some thought and perhaps offering even better ones."

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