

BME Campaign Training

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Background

This was a training undertaken by BME identifying Therapists in the UCS to support the BME Campaign officers in 2020 in managing increasing requests for support regarding the emotional and psychological impact of racial discrimination mainly within (but also outside) Cambridge.

The BME Campaign was conceived and is coordinated by BME identifying students at Cambridge with the aim of strengthening BME representation and campaigning on issues that matter to BME students across the Collegiate University.

Such issues include: closing the black awarding gap and targeted mental health support for BME students

Rationale

- Officers who are undergraduate students found themselves in the position of providing in depth emotional support to their peers with no training and little infrastructural support behind them.
- They therefore took the initiative to contact the UCS to arrange some training for themselves.
- During the initial meeting it became apparent that although each College had welfare officers, students experiencing emotional distress as a result of racial discrimination felt more comfortable speaking to their BME Officer about the issues and so BME Officers would often find themselves supporting students experiencing high levels of emotional difficulty with no training or support for themselves.

Rationale (continued)

- The officers also expressed feelings of sadness and frustration at finding themselves having to work for a more hospitable environment for themselves and their peers
- Having little infrastructure with which to do so

Process: Stage 1

- After the initial contact was made to the Head of UCS, arrangements were made in May of last year to meet with the students to establish what they felt were requirements for their training.
- Some of the issues for further training/support identified by BME Officers in the initial meetings included:
 - Confidentiality and the boundaries of it
 - Self-care for officers
 - Signposting to appropriate internal and external support services
 - Understanding and managing the emotional and psychological impact of racial discrimination for themselves and how to support others

Stage 1 (continued)

- Dealing with the impact of vicarious trauma
- The challenges of offering support online

Stage 2

- After this meeting, another further meeting took place with the BME Officers to identify/manage practicalities e.g.:
- Signposting the Officers to other training pertaining to fundamentals of offering emotional support so that the UCS training could focus on supporting with managing the impact of racial discrimination.
- Deciding on the format of the training
- Deciding who would receive training (issues around boundaries and confidentiality needed to be considered due to the officers possible accessing the service as clients in the future)

Stage 3

After this second meeting, the Therapists involved (Angela Ike and Diana Ong) met with Head of Service to discuss taking the process forward. It was agreed that the training would be given to three key officers who would then cascade it to their colleagues so that:

- BME officers could still access the service and see a BME therapist if they preferred which would be more difficult if they had previously had a trainer/trainee relationship
- To manage time/diary challenges for UCS Therapists and BME officers
- It was also agreed that the Therapists would be available for consultation and possibly to refresh the training for each new (yearly) intake of Officers

The Training

- The training occurred in October 2020 over two 1.5 hour Zoom workshops and covered issues such as:
- Racism as a lived experience
- Being BME at Cambridge
- The Emotional and Psychological Impact of Racism
- Managing the Emotional and Psychological Impact of Racism
- Microaggressions; Identifying and managing them
- Self-care for those offering support (including issues around boundaries and appropriate seeking of supervision for support work)

The Training

- Further resources for learning/signposting
- Ways to cascade training

Feedback/Update

- The Officers reported appreciating the space to feel heard and supported in exploring the issues/difficulties they had been experiencing not just as BME students themselves in Cambridge but in supporting fellow BME students.
- As of January 2021 reported changes (according to the Chair of the BME Campaign) that had resulted from the training include:
- Supervision once a month for care/welfare work from SU. This is reportedly happening for all the SU Campaigns.
- Extra training from SUAS on signposting within the University

Feedback/Update

- BME Officers had created a delivery pack based on SUAS training and UCS training to deliver to their peers
- A trial delivery on a small sample of BME Officers had taken place
- The outgoing BME Campaign officers were “refining” the training to deliver to new intake of Officers in Easter Term