ANTI-RACISM ACTION PLAN RESPONSE

ABOUT PLATFFORM AND POWER UP

1   Platfform was born in 2019 from Gofal, a mental health charity established in Wales in the late 1980s. Through decades of working across housing and mental health, we gained real insight into the reality of mental health in society, the impact of trauma, and the causes of distress. That work led us to change our focus and become Platfform, the charity for mental health and social change.

2   Today we work with over 9,000 people a year. We support people of all ages, across urban and rural communities, in people's homes and alongside other services. Our work spans inpatient settings, crisis services, community wellbeing, supported housing and homelessness, businesses, employment, counselling, schools and youth centres.

3   One of the projects we have is called Power Up, which is young people's wellbeing and social action project for young people aged 10-25 living in Cardiff and The Vale of Glamorgan. The project provides frontline wellbeing support to young people as well as supporting them to create social change within their communities and within Wales.

4   Our response is from the Power Up project within the organisation, with specific additions from Platfform as a whole. The Power Up project recognises that we cannot speak for every young person from minoritised ethnic communities, but it is important that we share the voices of those that we can.

RESPONSE

5   At Platfform, we have committed to working in an actively anti-racist way – although we are open about the fact that we are by no means complete experts and pioneers of equality, diversity and inclusion. There are many areas where we could be continuing to develop, or work differently in making our organisation a more inclusive and accepting place for all. We felt this was important to state from the outset: we write this response from a perspective of not being perfect, of still trying to get it right, and learning from our mistakes, and we believe this approach should also be the default setting for any Anti-racist Action Plan.

6   A note on language: we will be referring to people from African, Asian, Arab and other ethnic communities that experience racism and discrimination as "minoritised ethnic communities". This is to call attention to the idea that these communities are in fact global majorities in other parts of the world and that due to many factors, are discriminated against because of their belonging to a certain group of people. We recognise that this may not be the preferred term of all people and that the experiences people have because of their skin colour, are not the same for everyone.

7   The Power Up team know from engaging with 490 children and young people about their opinions and experiences that racism and discrimination is detrimental to overall mental health and wellbeing. Racism and discrimination are a social determinant of mental health and those who experience racism are at an increased risk of adverse mental health outcomes (Compton & Shim, 2015). This could be individually, where individuals are subject to physical and psychological stress due to poor treatment or this could be organisationally or systemically, where generations of unfair policies and practices create inequalities for certain groups of people and lead to the same people to make reduced choices (Shim & Compton, 2020). This was reaffirmed by young people we work with, who said that they wanted to make the world better, but were held back because our system needs to be "more inclusive and accessible". They held a commitment to "end racism".

8   We welcome Welsh Government's initiative in creating the anti-racism action plan, and importantly, checking progress of the plan. We consulted a group of young people to help support this response and have included Platfform's overall perspective as well where relevant.

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9 Young people thought that the government was not currently doing enough to deliver the aims of their plan or 'lead by example'. They expressed concern over their own lack of knowledge regarding the proposed actions for the plan, with one young person stating that it was "difficult to comment as I don't know so hard to know [how well the plan is being delivered]". They felt that there was not sufficient advertising of the action plan ("not on signs and posters") nor was there sufficient attention paid to training given to the general public.

10 In terms of the government leading by example, young people thought the government were not achieving this to a high standard. They were worried about the incongruity between the Welsh Government wanting to promote diversity and inclusion, and the lack of ethnic representation in positions of power. Platfform is clear that more can be done here and would encourage wider gathering and publication of diversity data, particularly for the Welsh Government workforce.

11 One young person remarked that they thought the anti-racist action plan "has not been spoken of widely enough in the mainstream", which does not inspire confidence in the success of the anti-racist action plan and that the government is leading the public by example. Platfform welcomes this point, although also noting that across the public and third sectors, the awareness is greater, which perhaps represents where the Welsh Government levers are limited.

12 However, the young people we spoke to recognised that there had been some positive progress in the government delivering their anti-racist action plan. They applauded the effort the government has made in both establishing relationships with organisations in the race equality sector; attending events held by minoritised ethnic communities and campaigning for decreased tolerance of discriminatory and racist language.

13 With all this considered, it is important to note that real change will take time, which one young person highlighted that real change "speaks more volumes than short term turnarounds which can come across as performative".

14 It is vitally important that Welsh Government puts regular measures in place to ensure targets are being met.

15 There was a strong feeling among the young people that it should be people from minoritised communities that measure the progress of the plan, and this should be done through a range of methods including questionnaires and face to face engagement. Too often, minoritised communities are labelled 'hard to reach' – Platfform ardently opposes this perspective, but also recognised that Welsh Government has noted the limitations of prior engagement strategies in the action plan.

16 Generally, we feel that the current proposal is sufficient as it covers a variety of sectors and activities and if carried out should make a significant difference. We would also like to see more regular updates from working groups, and for Welsh Government to ensure that meeting minutes are recorded and published for transparency. The goal of the action plan, to "collectively, make a measurable difference to the lives" of minoritised communities, is positive, but the perception amongst young people we spoke to, was that it was to end racism. Ultimately that may be the goal, but this incongruence between perception and the aims of the action plan should be communicated clearly.

17 Platfform would echo the suggestions made by Power Up young people participants, who want Welsh Government to continue to proactively go out to communities that are largely minoritised. Their suggestion is that minoritised communities should be given the resources and power to carry out monitoring and evaluation of the plan to ensure the groups who the plan affects is being appraised by those groups. During this process, individuals should be supported to share their stories in a safe way, and engagement should be meaningful rather than tokenistic.

18 The creation of a Welsh Government Race Evidence Unit is a promising sign, but there is a challenge in finding any resource that provides regular updates or where the public can access information. For example, attempting to find up to date information about public sector workforce is confusing and found across different sources, and there is a lack of detailed drill-down. For example, we can see that the proportion of Welsh Government workforce who are white is broadly representative against a population level (91% white workforce versus 93.8% across Wales as a whole). However, it is difficult to see the details behind that. We would want to see data available around part-time or temporary contracts, or splitting by seniority, which are recognised challenges facing minoritised communities – that representation may be statistically equal, but can perpetuate unstable, short-term, or lower-paid employment amongst minoritised communities.

19 The Power Up project was clear that there needs to be a variety of data collection methods available to ensure that there is engagement from the voices that matter most – those with lived experience of racism. More tailored engagement methods with minoritised communities are needed, and more traditional quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires, while necessary, will need to be supplemented with qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups.

20 We know that those with lived experience often find it challenging to share their stories as their experiences often include large amounts of trauma and distress, and it can be retraumatising to have to tell their story again and again. Every effort should be made to ensure that those with lived experience are supported during this process, and that they are made aware why the research s being carried out and how it will be used. This will help to reassure individuals that the engagement is meaningful, rather than a tokenistic gesture.

21 Platfform would recommend having an accessible website or page for the Race Evidence Unit, with regular publicly available reports, would help the public hold this plan to account, and would demonstrate the transparency and commitment that we know Welsh Government has around becoming an anti-racist organisation. Whilst a page can be found already, it does not store significant information. We also believe that the democratisation of data can only be helpful – the data unit should make data available on the website, much in the way of the Public Sector Equality Data. Giving people the resources and access to aggregated data, so they can undertake their own analysis would encourage wider debate and ownership of the issue across Wales. In addition, this page could offer links to different data streams, acting as a gateway for people to find relevant information, helping to generate more activity across Wales that is informed by evidence and data.

Explore what channels of communication has been established to ensure people with lived experience are informed of the plan's progress and what changes are happening as a result of the plan.

22 Our Power Up participants were more critical of this area. While one young person mentioned seeing "more active diversity recruitment efforts", most comments from young people were that the plan's progress and changes were not being communicated well. They expressed disappointment at "having no clue" about changes and one young person made a point that this information had become something "that I have to purposefully look for, I should be told about it". There was a perception from young people that it was not being promoted vigorously enough, which can lead to a concern that the commitment is less than needed.

23 Young people made several suggestions on how information can be disseminated more effectively than it currently is. Ideas spanned from having more advertisements, whether that was in newsletters, radios, local magazines to even "putting it on the news" and utilising social media more especially as one young person said "we live in a digital world". Moreover, young people thought that ambassadors could go into schools and workplaces and share information and/or deliver training to. They thought people might take it more seriously if training or awareness raising was delivered in person and if the deliverers could possibly be from minoritised ethnic communities and have a professional background related to wherever they were conducting training. The sentiment was to go where people are and meet them at where they are at.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the Plan in its first year, including whether actions have been delivered, what the key outcomes have been so far and to determine why any outstanding actions have not been implemented.

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24 From personal perspectives, young people we spoke to thought that generally the plan had not been effective. Young people provided many examples of areas where the action plan may not be working as planned, for example, they felt that there was still not enough representation of people from minoritised ethnic communities in positions of power.

25 They felt that refugees and asylum seekers were not being adequately supported enough to obtain housing and integrate in society based on their encounters at work. This would have a 'knock-on' effect on how refugees and asylum seekers viewed their future and outcomes in Wales. There were worries about healthcare and perinatal services for people from minoritised ethnic communities, with one young person sharing that women are typically "not listened to when they have concerns" and that this can lead to declining mental health. A survey found that 65% of Black people reported experiencing prejudice in healthcare settings, with this percentage rising for young people aged 18 – 34 (Iacobucci, 2022). A study by MBRRACE-UK found that mothers from minoritised communities are more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than mothers from White communities.

26 Additionally, young people commented on the underfunding of community services that are trying to help members of minoritised ethnic communities.

27 Collectively, these examples show that the lack of support and differential treatment negatively impact minoritised ethnic communities' mental health and ability to make 'good' choices and indicate that perhaps the plan's outcomes are not happening as predicted.

28 Some positive action was mentioned, for example, young people felt encouraged by the mere fact that people are having conversations about turning Wales anti-racist and that there is a growing "wider understanding of diversity". This is obviously not the end of our work to make Wales anti-racist but in fact emphasises its high priority.

29 As an organisation focused on mental health and social change, Platfform has been clear that our mental health system needs to ask itself tough questions as to why minoritised ethnic communities have a more negative experience of the mental health system (for example, black men are 2.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia). The inequality focus in the action plan is more on accessibility, but not on the harm the system does to people when they do access help. Future years of the action plan must explore the clear inequality in the system, the issues raised by young people above, and also consider how we can create a mental health system that is focused on relational health, connection and healing.

Help further understanding of what other interventions are needed to support delivery of the plan and whether there are barriers to implementing the plan.

30 To better support delivery of this plan, more interventions related to the effects of discrimination on mental health and wellbeing are needed which can be mainly achieved through education and appropriate consequences for intolerant behaviour.

31 As we have mentioned before, discrimination is a social determinant of mental health and experiencing discrimination can lead to psychological stress and subsequent poor life outcomes.

32 Whilst racism and discrimination may not be as overt as it has been previously, there are still clear examples through microaggressions and consequences of systemic racism that people from minoritised communities experience.

33 Young people described being called unfavourable names at work (e.g. "a Teletubby for wearing a hijab") to reduced and/or slower career progression ("as you do not have the benefit of contacts to help"). Young people also expressed frustration over people from White communities taking it upon themselves to decide whether something is "racist or not" and disregarding the opinions of people from minoritised ethnic communities, who often find the thing in question racist. This lack of understanding or ignorance leads to detrimental effects on the mental health and wellbeing of people from minoritised ethnic communities. Young people reported feelings of anxiety, withdrawal, and exclusion from society as well as poor self-image and sense of identity and belonging.

34 Young people described the need for training and education, at a wider level, to make a real impact on people's experiences. Helping people recognise and understand their own bias, unconscious or otherwise, would help create conditions to challenge and hold to account racist behaviour. This could take the form of

public information campaigns, or awareness campaigns co-designed by people from minoritised ethnic communities. People will not suddenly and independently begin to challenge their own racism, and there needs to be national conversations and actions about how we can hold ourselves and each other to account.

35   Young people also wanted to see mechanisms for clear accountability, particularly around politics, with real concern expressed that public figures were seemingly encouraged to share racist beliefs with limited consequences. It is important that young people see that there is a sense of justice across Wales, where it comes to racism, wherever it is expressed.

36   At Platfform more widely, we are on a journey towards a relational way of being with the people we support, and with our colleagues, and across society. We recognise that our society is overwhelmed, struggling with broken systems and that inequality is continuing to worsen – our perspective is that we need to rebuild relationships and communities, but we cannot do that without there being accountability – both at government level in setting the direction of travel, at service level in challenging inequality, and at personal level taking responsibility for our lack of knowledge. This need for accountability and justice is echoed powerfully by young people in our Power Up project, and it is a theme we hear time and again across Platfform's wider services.

CONCLUSION

37   Overall, this consultation response attempts to share the very real concerns and worries of young people, as heard by our Power Up project, and their perspectives are of the very real impact of racism on their daily lives. The urgency in their contributions is palpable, and we encourage the Committee to listen to young people who are growing up as part of minoritised ethnic communities, and to be willing to hear impatience, disappointment and even anger. This does not detract from the positive work of Welsh Government, but it is a very firm challenge that we cannot be complacent, and a reminder that in many ways the action plan remains very high level and does not feel real to young people. Racism and negative effects exist and permeate, whether people are actively working to reduce them or not, and for anyone experiencing racism, waiting for change without clear signs of progress will be actively harmful and distressing.

38   In addition, we have added comments as Platfform, particularly around data delivery, re-emphasising the need for transparency, and the importance of addressing the harm that our mental health systems across the UK can do. In particular, the point on data is one that could be a helpful focus – without robust data, progress cannot be effectively reviewed. The risk is that with something as large and worthy as the Anti-Racism Action Plan, things stall and people are let down – accountability and transparent delivery needs to be the priority. There are a range of practical ideas that can be taken, which we would be happy to share further, but this submission has focused rightly on the voices of young people and putting their views front and centre.

SUBMITTED BY:

Rebecca Roots
Young Person's Peer Researcher, Power Up

Oliver Townsend
Head of Connections and Research, Platfform

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