

Gathered Together (Cruinn Còmhla)

The Scottish Government has “a continuing commitment to achieving a fairer Scotland in which there are opportunities for all to flourish... We have an ambition for an equal and just Scotland... This is why we maintain our strong commitment to equality across all that we do.”

John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth.
(Scottish Government Draft Budget 2014-15)¹

Mission Statement

Gathered Together (Cruinn Còmhla) is a partnership project between **BEMIS Scotland** and **SPTC** funded till March 2015 by the Scottish Government’s Third Sector Early Intervention Fund and managed by the Big Fund.

Our mission is to promote inclusion and active citizenship for Ethnic Minority parents and carers, stimulating pro-active engagement in their children’s education and advancing pathways to establishing closer relationships between home and the school community. The focus on initiating and sustaining such cooperation between parents, carers and parent councils is crucial to success in driving the desired enhancement of children’s achievement and attainment.

Scotland’s population has, in recent years, increased its diversity dramatically at several levels; however, this has not been reflected in various settings such as in the profile of parents involved within the school community or membership of Parent Councils. Increasing representation of the diverse ethnic minority communities in parent councils and within parent groups across Scotland remains an important process not only in relation to enhancing their children’s opportunities and achievements but also to empowering their sense of citizenship at several levels. Similarly, it is vital for parent councils and parent groups to be supported in enhancing and advancing their engagement with inclusion and equality agendas through instigating and sustaining structures and frameworks that can ensure equality and diversity are core values in their work and remit.

Parental involvement is a key driver to improving outcomes for Scotland’s children, and equality, in this context, is instrumental for the parents, their children, Scottish schools and civil society as a whole. The Scottish Government’s National Parenting Strategy² recognises that Scotland’s family portrait is growing more culturally diverse. It is important that every child in Scotland reaches their full potential and that their parents are informed and involved in that process. Within this framework, it is widely acknowledged that parents, carers and the schools community are all key partners in ensuring that the Scottish Government’s strategy Getting It Right for Every Child

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/09/8093>

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/10/4789>

(GIRFEC)³ is delivering its objectives. However, the partners understand the significant institutional barriers which limit ethnic minority parents' participation and impacting on their children's opportunities, particularly when they are marginalised and invisible in terms of culture, faith and customs within the school community (Arshad et al, 2005). This understanding has been complemented through the mapping research which BEMIS and SPTC undertook as a pre-cursor to the development of this project: the mapping exercise conducted with parent councils around Scotland confirmed the depth of the challenge, while also highlighting the opportunity to capture and build on the sound practice which exists among some parent groups.

Taking such background information and evidence into consideration, the partners initiated this unique project where six pilot areas are identified as potential delivery regions with high population of ethnic minorities and active parents groups: **Glasgow, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Stirling and Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Fife**. It is agreed that the project, in its objective to promote ethnic minority parents' representation, parent councils, and local authorities, will deploy relevant strategies and policies as backdrops to its strategic and operational framework. This includes:

- GIRFEC (Get it Right For Every Child)
- Parental Involvement Act 2006
- UNCRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)
- Early Years Framework
- Equal Opportunities – building on the Equality Act 2010
- ✓ The Guidance on Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 requires education authorities to promote the involvement of parents in their children's education.
- ✓ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that all children have the right to safe, stable, stimulating and nurturing relationships with parents that develop resilience and a sense of security and trust in the relationship.
- ✓ In Scotland, the UNCRC underpins all aspects of service delivery with regards to children, young people and their families.

Similarly, the Scottish Government's Early Years Framework identifies that, in order to enact transformation change, parents must be:

- ✓ Involved in their children's learning and given opportunities that will help them support their child's learning and development.
- ✓ Provided with integrated support from services to meet a range of needs they and their children may have.
- ✓ Supported to develop positive relationships with their children and their education

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/gettingitright>

Key Strategic Aims and Objectives

Gathered Together (Cruinn Còmhla) will be working closely with ethnic minority parents, carers, parent councils and local authorities, both at strategic and operational levels, to promote and empower ethnic minority parents' representation at parent councils through initiating and advancing wider parental participation, providing direct support and capacity building initiatives for parent councils, ensuring their expectations and needs are addressed through advancing their inclusion and diversity strategies and policies, and through building a bank of good practice examples, while influencing positive change.

This project is a pilot scheme and will be delivered initially across six local authority areas: **Glasgow, Fife, Stirling and Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire**, with a dedicated team of staff working to achieve holistic aims and objectives including:

- Build capacity across parent councils to enable them to better represent the wider parent forum.
- Engage with parent councils and support them to engage with the wider parent community, bridging the gap between home and school.
- Engage directly with ethnic minority parents and carers to identify barriers, increase participation and active citizenship within school education settings.
- Empower ethnic minority parents to increase their participation and engagement with their children's learning and education.
- Engage with local authorities to support equalities focused work in school communities.
- Develop a range of practical support to ensure a sustainable legacy through the work of SPTC and other organisations.
- Take a proactive role in enhancing pathways to influence future government policy in Scotland.
- Utilise the principles of the UNCR⁴ as the hallmark for all work with parents, highlighting parents' key role in furthering the rights of their children and modelling of its principles.

The partners, unified by a shared vision of Equality, Citizenship, and wellbeing of children and education, have respective unique experiences in their specialist strategic remits and areas of expert operation, all of which will be deployed for the advancement and success of this initiative.

Governance

BEMIS is the lead partner in the project; however both partners have proactive roles within the partnership and a cooperative structure of governance has been developed and deployed. This includes:

- Monthly meetings between senior staff from the partner organisations with the project coordinator, providing supervision, reviewing performance of the project's work programme, and working with the project team and partners to consider and plan for the sustainability of the important work of the project.

⁴ <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

- Bi monthly reviews between board members and staff of both partners and project manager, with responsibility for overseeing and providing strategic direction to the project as well as financial management, employment and governance issues.
- Expert Steering Group: Overall strategic direction and advice provided by an expert Steering Group comprising key stakeholders from the policy, voluntary and education sectors. The Steering Group members will play a crucial role in the project by sharing perspectives, expertise and practice in their own field; disseminating information about the work of Gathered Together within their own networks and by advising and monitoring the evaluation process both internally and externally.

Planned Outcomes and the Legacy

Gathered Together will deliver on the project objectives by:

- Utilising established networks of SPTC to establish strong working relationships with parent groups within pilot local authority areas, harvesting examples of sound practice and develop a bank of practical strategies to foster wider engagement while building awareness of equality matters.
- Utilising BEMIS's established networks and membership base advancing strong working relationships with cultural/ethnic minority parents as well as policy stakeholders in each pilot area.
- Working closely with partner local authorities to tap into existing successful practice, influencing development of practice and policy around parental involvement.
- Build strong working relationships with project steering group to influence thinking and practice over the long term.

Planned Outcomes

Year 1:

- Project staff will engage with 40% of parent councils and local minority groups within the pilot areas.
- Increased capacity for parent councils to enable them to attract and retain an increasingly diverse range of parents as members
- Building social capital - helping EM parents to meet and reduce feelings of isolation and lack of confidence to participate in their children's education.
- Use best practice of schools connecting with diverse parents.
- Reduce under-representation of parents from EMC communities within parent councils.

Year 2:

- Project staff will engage with 90% of parent councils and local minority groups within the pilot areas.
- Increased parental involvement within parent groups across Scotland.
- Parents playing a part in shaping their children's education, improving life chances and outcomes for the future.
- Link ethnic organisations to work directly with schools.
- Create a community of engagement around parental involvement and roll out sustainable programme to parent councils across Scotland.

The Legacy

- Ethnic minority parents to gain the confidence to engage, embrace and be part of their child's educational journey
- Parent councils will have an understanding of the significance of the UNCRC and its impact on their functioning, with specific regard to equality and citizenship
- Parent councils will have the skills and tools to continue to engage parents and actively recruit and continue to have membership representation of Scotland's diverse parents
- SPTC will have equalities embedded across its work with parents and parent groups and ethnic minority parents' participation in parent councils will be more visible.
- Project's outcome can be utilised to cascade support to other areas in Scotland.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Our Monitoring and Evaluation will be in accordance with the requirements of our funders and stakeholders throughout the life of the project. We shall monitor the project against its strategic plan, evaluate and make changes and improvements through active and on-going learning. In addition, an external independent evaluator will be deployed for the project.

BEMIS Scotland

BEMIS is the national Ethnic Minority-led umbrella body supporting the development of the Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector and the communities that this sector represents in Scotland.

Our vision is of a Scotland that is equal, inclusive and responsive: a society where people from diverse communities are valued, treated with dignity and respect, have equal active citizenship opportunities and quality of life, and who actively participate in civic society.

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SPTC

SPTC is the national organisation for parents' groups in Scottish schools and offers help and advice to all parents.

SPTC's mission is to support the development and maintenance of high quality parental involvement. We will achieve this by working with parents and carers to build their confidence, knowledge and skills so they feel able to engage in the way they wish, with their child's school and wider education services: by working in partnership with organisations and individuals in the educational and wider Scottish community, to build awareness of and engagement with parental involvement and its benefits for children, families and communities.

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