

# **Letter to the Editor – from ELREC Chair**

## **Letter from Foysoł Choudhury MBE, Chair of Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council and Scottish Labour candidate for Lothian in the May election.**

Dear Madam,

As the Chair of an equality organisation, I have personally witnessed the struggles, concerns and issues within my local communities. We all know that 2020 was difficult and challenging for many due to Covid and the lockdown. It has been truly remarkable how people have come together during this time and I do not see these as problems but more so as opportunities for us to help one another.

During Covid lockdown it became very apparent that there are many levels of poverty within our BAME communities and this was the reason why the food parcel project was started by Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council (ELREC).

Since June 2020 ELREC has supported 35 families each week with a substantial food box catering for bigger families. Many lost their jobs due to the pandemic; others could not live on benefits alone and with children at home full time, more support was needed. Since this work started, we have found out that many BAME communities miss out on many services and support due to language, cultural and literacy barriers. Many of the families supported would never access standard food banks as they do not cater for their needs.

The pandemic also highlighted the disproportionate effect it had on various ethnicities due to many being front line workers, hospital staff, taxi drivers, supermarket staff etc as well as poorer living conditions at home and or crowdedness. Also, BAME communities have different health issues and illnesses which may also have impacted on their resistance to Covid.

ELREC also did some work funded by Foundation Scotland on a small project aimed at providing translated information about Covid and the lockdown in various languages. This was done by phone, online groups, and posters. Aim of this work was to ensure the disadvantaged groups got this vital information so they can protect themselves and their families as well as follow the rules effectively and not rely on misinformation circulated online and via speakers etc.

This work shows us we still have a lot to do for many communities to ensure they have fair access to services and information like everyone else.

Other issues come to light have been housing, and the increase in hate incidents and crimes since Covid and the lockdown started. Many BAME families and disadvantaged groups live in poor standards of housing, have bigger families, less space and health concerns as well as poor literacy. We need to ensure all our citizens have the same access to housing and other services. The lockdown also highlighted the digital poverty amongst BAME communities, not only with lack of devices but the need for training and support getting online.

I have also come to know that hate incidents have increased within local communities, specifically against our Chinese communities. There has also been a rise in racism complaints coming forward from both parents and students in schools. Other issues I have been told of by communities include a rise in anti-social behaviour in many areas of Edinburgh, an increase in poor mental health amongst BAME people and poor

physical health due to the lockdown and isolation.

Different communities face different challenges and pressures and Covid has only highlighted what we already knew but maybe didn't do enough to investigate further. However we must strive to ensure all our citizens receive the best care, access to services and fair and equal treatment in all aspects of life.

Yours sincerely,

Foysoł Choudhury

