

## School engagement to understand early intervention and prevention initiatives to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of Black and mixed heritage children

### VCSE Partner Specification

#### Background

South East London Integrated Care Board (ICB) commissions health services for the boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. Addressing inequalities in mental healthcare for children and young people across South East London is a priority area of focus for the ICB – to this end, the ICB is partnering with Black Thrive to address mental health inequalities for Black and mixed heritage school aged children, and looking for additional local voluntary sector organisations to engage in community engagement.

Based on review of stakeholder feedback and data, the ICB recommended that there is a need to develop and enhance access to trauma-informed, early intervention and prevention wellbeing and mental health support for Black and mixed heritage children. This is in recognition that Black and mixed heritage children have lower rates of referrals to child and adolescent mental health services but higher rates of school suspension/exclusion and detention under the mental health act.

Studies demonstrate that children exhibiting behaviour that is perceived as challenging, and subsequent exclusions, have often experienced adversity or trauma (experiences of trauma may be systemic, such as racialised bullying or discrimination, which may occur in the school setting), and that school suspensions and exclusions further exacerbate likelihood of poorer outcomes for children and young people throughout the lifecourse.

It is recognised that more could be done to offer interventions and solutions that are relevant and meaningful to local communities and that, due to historic experiences of racism and discrimination in health services, Black communities may have reservations about engaging with mainstream mental health provision.

**This project aims to engage with communities to develop collective solutions by coproducing anti-racist and trauma-informed initiatives.**

#### Activity

Black Thrive and South East London ICB are looking to identify voluntary sector organisations to engage in this large-scale school engagement initiative.

#### Geography:

We are aiming to identify one voluntary sector per South East London Borough: Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark. A VCSE organisation can apply to work across a maximum of two boroughs but would need to demonstrate a clear rationale for being able to deliver the activity across this footprint. To apply for funding in a borough, an organisation must be able to demonstrate that you are already working in that borough and have experience engaging Black and mixed heritage communities.

### VCSE organisation experience:

We are seeking to partner with local grassroots voluntary and community sector organisations that represent Black and mixed heritage communities. Ideal voluntary sector partners would have experience include engaging with Black and mixed heritage children, young people, and their families.

This may include those who have experience of trauma, racism, discrimination, marginalisation, and which may include addressing mental health and wellbeing needs and/or support avoidance of harm.

As a minimum, we would expect that organisations should be able to demonstrate:

- That they can advocate for the needs of Black and mixed heritage communities
- Have experience of engaging Black and mixed heritage communities
- Have experience engaging with schools or services such as youth clubs where children and young people may engage.

### Expected activities for VCSE organisations:

- Identify from within existing capacity or recruit an individual to lead on school engagement. An example role descriptor is included in the appendix. It is anticipated this would be a part-time role (i.e. 3 days/week, predominantly linked to school term times as it involves liaison with schools for up to 18 months). The identified individual would need to be an experienced facilitator, responsible for undertaking in-person engagement sessions between parents/carers of Black and mixed heritage primary school aged children and school staff to come to collective agreement around priority areas for change. Appointed roles would ideally represent Black and mixed heritage communities.
- From March 2025 onwards, build positive and productive relationships with 6 primary schools (which will be selected/identified in advance by the commissioning organisation) within the borough to enable (1) mapping of existing offers / baseline understanding of need/challenges (2) collectively agreed solutions. Specifically, this will include:
  - Conducting engagement with school senior leadership and mental health leads to plan the programme of work, map existing offers, and undertake any baseline evaluation requirements.
  - Raise awareness of the engagement initiative with school staff and parents/carers to enable sufficient uptake of the engagement sessions, offering flexibility in the times of sessions to ensure these work best for maximising engagement.
  - Conduct two in-depth consultation sessions with parents and staff, over the Summer term, using the Appreciative Inquiry approach to explore strengths, needs, and potential interventions. Ensure a safe, inclusive environment for meaningful participation and manage group dynamics to foster productive discussions.
  - Conducting feedback sessions with schools and parents/carers on the proposed initiatives for delivery in the Autumn term '25, outlining how initiatives can be accessed and when.
- Collect accurate records of engagement plans, activities and outcomes and report these back to Black Thrive. Specifically:
  1. Provide monthly summary of plans and activities and a summary of priorities and thematic learning to enable scoping of new solutions. This may include, but is not limited to:
    1. Name and number of schools engaged
    2. Summary of mapping of current offers available in schools and gaps
    3. School engagement tracker for each school

1. Number of sessions undertaken, dates
  2. Number of school staff who engaged in the session and profession breakdown (e.g. to be obtained through online registration)
  3. Number of parents/carers who attended – focus to be on parents of Black and mixed heritage children and young people in the school
  4. Qualitative report from each school engagement session that describes what the priority areas of development are for each school
  5. Feedback from staff who engaged with the VCSE partners – experience of approach/engagement
  6. Feedback from parents/carers with the VCSE partners – experience of approach/engagement
2. Continuously monitor the effectiveness of the engagement process using the programme's monitoring and evaluation framework. Provide feedback to improve the framework and approach.
  3. Work with the Programme Manager and VCSE partners to ensure that interventions are implemented effectively and that learnings from each school engagement are integrated into future work.
  4. Participate in an evaluation of the programme.
- Partnership working with Black Thrive, the ICB and wider stakeholders.
    1. Black Thrive will provide support and networking to the VCSE organisation. There would be an expectation that any organisation collaborate with Black Thrive. This would include:
      1. Ensuring staff taking on this programme of work are inducted and trained in accordance with a predefined training curriculum developed by Black Thrive
      2. Engaging in monitoring calls with Black Thrive regarding school engagement
      3. Engaging in networking calls with other VCSE organisations across South East London also participating in this initiative to share learning and best practice
      4. Present at relevant stakeholder meetings where required
      5. Engage with Mental Health Support Teams where they are based in the selected schools to share learning and experience
    2. In Lewisham the Local Authority want for the VCSE organisation to foster strong working relationships with the Lewisham Family Hub/s Children Centres Network plus emerging Youth Provision Network, Schools, CAMHS and other local voluntary and community organisations working with Black communities.

### Proposed activity schedule

This project will be delivered in two phases.

1. Phase 1 of this programme will be focused on engaging with schools and parents/carers to co-create solutions to test and develop in Phase 2. Milestones and activities for the first 8 months of this programme (phase 1) are clearly defined.
2. Phase 2 will begin from the Autumn school term of 2025 and the activities for delivery will be shaped and developed with VCSE partners based on the feedback and needs identified through the first period of this programme of work. It is possible that the school engagement lead role may adapt to include working with schools on an ongoing basis to develop their school policies and procedures to ensure that these are tailored and adapted to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing needs of Black and mixed heritage children and young people. For example, this may include, further to collaboration with Black Thrive, supporting the role out of coproduced anti-racist policies (e.g. how to address and respond to racialised bullying at school).

Month	Activity
<b>January</b>	Awarded contract
<b>February</b>	Staff recruited or identified from existing resource
<b>March</b>	Calls with VCSE partners and pre-identified participating schools to agree work plan/timings.
<b>April</b>	VCSE partners to undertake mapping of existing offers and raise awareness of engagement sessions in schools
<b>May</b>	After Easter holidays, school engagement sessions to begin in selected 6 schools
<b>June</b>	Engagement sessions ongoing Feedback/sharing with Black Thrive/ICB
<b>July</b>	Engagement sessions ongoing Feedback/sharing with Black Thrive/ICB
<b>August</b>	Engage in South East London stakeholder workshops with Black Thrive, partner VCSE organisations across 6 boroughs, MHSTs, and local authority leads to discuss thematic learning, and contribute to the development and shaping of potential initiatives to deliver at scale across South East London
<b>September/ October</b>	Feedback calls/meetings with schools
<b>November onwards</b>	Activities to be further defined and scoped but likely to include ongoing relationship with school to support (1) evaluation (2) awareness raising of interventions (2) uptake and engagement of interventions

## Funding

**The funding available for this 18-month programme is £37,000 per lot / per borough.**

Programme mobilisation is expected to begin in March 2025. The costs are expected to cover salary costs for workforce to deliver this programme; this may be a newly recruited member of staff or a pre-existing member of staff who takes on additional responsibility from March 2025 (i.e. identified in February).

A detailed role description has been provided in the appendix to support understanding of the responsibilities for this role.

## Appendix

### **EXAMPLE ROLE DESCRIPTION: School Engagement Lead**

**To support VCSE organisations with clarity on expectations of the role, an example role description has been created below. This outlines what an individual would be expected to do to engage in this programme of work. This individual may be identified within your existing workforce or you may recruit to the post using the role description below.**

**Job Type:** Part-time [3 days a week, Fixed Term Contract 18 Months]

### **Role Overview**

This is an exciting opportunity to be involved in the delivery of a large-scale school engagement programme in collaboration with Black Thrive. The School Engagement Lead will play a critical role in engaging schools in a co-production process designed to address mental health inequalities for Black and Mixed-Heritage children.

The role will focus on developing positive, collaborative relationships with parents and primary school staff to explore the mental health needs of Black and Mixed-Black heritage children and suggest targeted interventions to meet these needs. Black Thrive will work with the VCSE organisation partner to offer a comprehensive training programme to support delivery of the co-creation sessions in

schools. This will include training on how to use the appreciative inquiry methodology with stakeholders to come to collective agreement on solutions to deliver in schools.

The individual engaged in this project would need strong facilitation skills, relationship-building with schools, knowledge of mental health frameworks, and experience managing community partnerships. Managing group dynamics during engagement sessions to ensure meaningful participation will be crucial for co-creating solutions.

## **Key Responsibilities**

### **1. School Relationship Building and Engagement:**

- Lead communication with the participating schools throughout the duration of the programme. This includes:
  - Conducting an **introductory call** with the school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Black Thrive's Programme Coordinator, to introduce the project's aims, objectives, and timelines.
  - Conducting an **exit call** at the end of the programme with the relevant stakeholders, gathering essential feedback and insights on the process from schools.
- Tailor **communication materials for each school**, working closely with the school staff to ensure timely advertising of the engagement sessions.
- Conduct **pre-planning meetings** with the school's Mental Health Lead or other designated representatives to align engagement strategies.
- Work with the **senior mental health lead** to record existing mental health initiatives in the school, using a pre-defined framework to identify gaps and opportunities for intervention.

### **2. Facilitating Co-production and Engagement Sessions:**

- Lead two in-depth consultation sessions with parents and staff, using the **Appreciative Inquiry** approach to explore strengths, needs, and potential interventions:
  - **Session 1:** Initial consultation (1.5 hours) with parents and staff to introduce the framework and gather input. This includes travel and set-up time (a total of 3 hours).
  - **Session 2:** Follow-up session (1.5 hours) to facilitate collaborative decision-making on which interventions to offer, ensuring alignment with the agreed-upon framework. Includes travel and set-up time (total 3 hours).
- Ensure a safe, inclusive environment for meaningful participation and manage group dynamics to foster productive discussions.

### **4. Reporting and Feedback:**

- Document key insights and **feedback** from the engagement sessions, ensuring an accurate representation of discussions and decisions.
- Provide detailed reports to Black Thrive and the school's leadership on the outcomes of the engagement sessions and suggested interventions.

### **5. Networking and Best Practice Sharing:**

- Engage actively with a **broader school engagement network**, participating in knowledge-sharing forums and contributing to the exchange of best practices.
- Collaborate with local boroughs, Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), and other stakeholders to ensure alignment with broader mental health initiatives and strategies.
- Stay up-to-date with the latest community engagement and school-based mental health support developments, and bring new insights and approaches to the team.

### **6. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement:**

- Continuously monitor the effectiveness of the engagement process using the programme's monitoring and evaluation framework. Provide feedback to improve the framework and approach.
- Work with the Programme Manager and VCSE partners to ensure that interventions are implemented effectively and that learnings from each school engagement are integrated into future work.

### **Person Specification**

#### **Experience:**

- Demonstrable experience in community engagement, ideally within the education or mental health sector.
- A proven track record of building relationships with various stakeholders, including schools, parents, community groups, and VCSE organisations.
- Experience managing group dynamics in workshops, consultation sessions, or focus groups.
- Familiarity with the mental health challenges faced by Black and mixed heritage children and their families.

#### **Skills and Competencies:**

- Strong facilitation skills, with the ability to lead collaborative discussions and ensure meaningful participation.
- Excellent communication skills, both written and verbal, and the ability to tailor messaging to diverse audiences.
- Ability to manage and diffuse tension or conflict in group settings, ensuring a productive and respectful environment.
- Strong organisational skills, with the ability to manage multiple tasks, timelines, and stakeholders.
- A commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, particularly in addressing racial inequalities in education and mental health.

#### **Desirable:**

- Experience working within or alongside schools, particularly in a mental health or wellbeing capacity.
- Experience using the **Appreciative Inquiry** approach or similar participatory, strengths-based engagement methods (training will be offered on the Appreciative Inquiry approach as part of the role).

#### **Why Join Us?**

- This role is an opportunity to make a meaningful impact by improving mental health outcomes for Black and mixed heritage children and young people.
  - You will collaborate with a passionate, dedicated team focused on racial equity and systemic change.
  - We also offer a competitive salary and benefits, with flexibility to accommodate work-life balance.
  - Engage in innovative approaches to community and school-based interventions.
-