KUSOMA

Report 2024

MEAM Learning and Reflections Paper

REFLECTIONS ON EMBEDDING ANTI-RACISM IN MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGE INITIATIVES

KUSOMA

MEAM
Making Every Adult Matter

CLiNKS

Homeless Link

mind

About Us

ABOUT KUSOMA

Kusoma is a leading equity and inclusion consultancy that specialises in providing transformative learning experiences for organisations across various sectors. With a focus on anti-oppression and systems thinking, Kusoma helps organisations identify and address systemic issues of inequity and disadvantage. Through innovative training programmes, workshops, and consultancy services, Kusoma empowers leaders and teams to develop strategic interventions that lead to sustainable, long-term change.

ABOUT MEAM

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of national charities working together to improve the lives of individuals facing multiple disadvantage, such as homelessness, substance misuse, mental health ill health, contact with the criminal justice system and experiences of interpersonal violence and abuse. MEAM takes a collaborative and holistic approach to create lasting change in the way services and systems support people. By partnering with local areas and stakeholders, MEAM advocates for systemic reform, shares best practice, and supports the development of integrated, person-centred solutions. Through their work, MEAM aims to build a more equitable and compassionate system where every adult has their needs met.

The partnership between Kusoma and MEAM aims to explore what it takes to use an anti-racist approach to ensure that those who are racially marginalised are also benefiting from work to address multiple disadvantage.

Executive Summary

In early 2023, following internal efforts to confront and comprehend the dynamics of systemic racism and multiple disadvantage, MEAM issued an invitation to tender for a six month action oriented piece of work. Within this call, MEAM openly acknowledged:

> *"We acknowledge that in how we act and frame our work we are likely to be, knowingly or otherwise, complicit in perpetuating everyday systems and practices that cause or fail to address racism and inequity."*

They expressed a desire to engage a learning partner to collaborate with them and a small number of local MEAM Approach areas to explore this further, with the aim of generating insights and resources beneficial to the network and beyond. This initiative was envisioned as a proactive endeavour, focusing on solutions, and empowering local areas to explore these issues and devise practical, community-driven actions for positive change. Subsequently, Kusoma was commissioned to fulfil this role as the learning partner.

This report shares the journeys of the two MEAM Approach areas that took part in this project, Oxfordshire and Birmingham, as they work to incorporate an anti-racist approach into their partnership work on multiple disadvantage. Over a period of six months, these areas have begun to consider systemic racism and its impact on individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage. The report highlights 5 key insights:

- **LANGUAGE AND ITS SYSTEMIC IMPACT**
- **COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES**
- **INTEGRATION OF ANTI-RACISM EFFORTS**
- **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING**
- **INTERSECTIONALITY IN ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE**

By working with MEAM Approach areas already dedicated to improving services and systems for those facing multiple disadvantage, this project aimed to support the integration of an anti-racist lens into their existing frameworks. The reflections and observations shared in this report emphasise the importance of intersectionality as a key tool in anti-oppression work, recognising that individuals' experiences are shaped by the complex interplay of various forms of systemic oppression.

Definitions

We use various language concepts and phrases throughout this report, and it is important to share what these mean from the outset to allow readers to engage with the paper fully.

RACISM

A pervasive system of oppression that operates across different levels of society, perpetuating inequities based on race and ethnicity. It encompasses various forms of discrimination and oppression, which manifest at interpersonal, structural, and systemic levels.

- **Systemic Racism:** The complex interactions of large-scale societal systems, practices and ideologies that produce and perpetuate inequities for racially minoritised groups. The key aspect of systematic racism is that these macro-level mechanisms operate independently of the intentions and actions of individuals, so that even if individual racism is not present, adverse conditions and inequalities for racially minoritised people will persist.
- **Institutional Racism:** The policies, practices, and procedures within organisations and institutions that, intentionally or unintentionally, create and maintain disadvantages for individuals and communities based on their race or ethnicity. This can include oppressive practices, unequal access to resources and opportunities, and discriminatory treatment within housing, healthcare, and criminal justice systems to name but a few.
- **Interpersonal Racism:** The expression of racist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours between individuals, often manifesting as discrimination, harassment and violence, based on race or ethnicity. This form of racism occurs in social interactions and can be overt or subtle.

OPPRESSION

The systematic and unjust treatment of individuals or groups based on their social identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, nationality, religion and more. Oppression involves the use of power and privilege to maintain inequitable social structures and limit access to resources, opportunities, and rights for marginalised communities.

MARGINALISATION

The process by which individuals or groups are pushed to the edges of society, facing exclusion, discrimination, and limited access to power, resources, and opportunities. Marginalised communities often experience multiple, intersecting forms of oppression based on their social identities.

Definitions

SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

Systems of oppression are interconnected structures, policies, practices, and beliefs that are designed to create and perpetuate inequity, discrimination, and disadvantage for certain groups based on their identity. These systems, often referred to as "isms," are deeply ingrained in society, operating on multiple levels, and are often normalised and invisible to those who benefit from them.

JUSTICE

Social justice seeks to dismantle systemic barriers and address historical and ongoing inequities with the aim of ensuring that everyone can live with dignity and have equal access to rights, freedoms, and well-being.

EQUALITY

The principle that all individuals should be treated equally and afforded the same rights, opportunities, and resources, regardless of their social identities. Equality aims to eliminate discrimination and ensure that everyone is given the same chances to succeed and thrive in society.

EQUITY

The recognition that historically marginalised and disadvantaged groups may require additional support, resources, and opportunities to achieve fair outcomes. Equity acknowledges that treating everyone equally may not be sufficient to address systemic inequities and barriers faced by certain communities. It involves identifying and addressing the root causes of disparities and providing targeted interventions to level the playing field and ensure that everyone has the necessary tools and access to succeed.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality, an analytical framework, emphasises that individuals' experiences of oppression cannot be understood solely through the lens of a single identity category but are shaped by the complex interplay of multiple social factors, asserting that the various forms and systems of oppression are not separate, and cannot be isolated into distinct categories, to be addressed on their own. The opposite of intersectional analysis is analysis along single axes (e.g Women, Black people, Muslims etc)

Introduction

This reflective report is part of a deliberate effort to drive meaningful change and to complement existing initiatives in local MEAM Approach areas. By partnering with MEAM, we aimed to be able to explore the interconnectedness of racism and multiple disadvantage, recognising that systemic racism is deeply ingrained within societal structures and not just limited to individual actions.

Through an action-oriented approach, the project sought to identify practical steps and strategies for local areas to create more equitable access to systems and services. The insights gained from this work underscore the need for ongoing collaboration, learning, and adaptation as local areas strive to address systemic racism and its impact on those experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Acknowledging the vibrant landscape of anti-oppression activities already underway in local areas is important as this project seeks to amplify their impact rather than duplicate or overshadow these efforts.

Central to our approach is the concept of intersectionality, an analytical framework that recognises the complex overlap of different forms of oppression. We acknowledge the interconnected nature of oppressive systems and resist single-axis analyses wherever possible, understanding that individuals that face multiple disadvantage experience the very real compounding effects of racism alongside other forms of marginalisation. However, we also reject the sort of binary thinking that oversimplifies these complex realities. Instead, we aim to centre anti-racism while embracing the nuance of what this means for Black and Brown individuals experiencing multiple, intersecting oppressions.

By acknowledging the unique challenges faced at these intersections, we can develop more comprehensive strategies for promoting equity and inclusion.

This report is more than just words on a page; it is a call to action. We invite local areas and the wider MEAM Approach network to challenge the status quo, interrogate power, dismantle oppressive systems, and actively build more inclusive and equitable systems for all. Through collaboration and intentional action, we believe that meaningful progress can be achieved.

In the following pages, we will delve into our journey, sharing insights, reflections, and actionable recommendations drawn from experiences in Oxfordshire and Birmingham. By exploring the transformative potential of anti-racism systems change work, we hope to inspire bold collective action across the MEAM Network and beyond.

Join us in this crucial work to provoke, disrupt, and inspire change in your local area, as we come together to create a more just and equitable society for all.

Limitations on the Scope of Work

By explicitly recognising the limitations of this project and the broader systems change efforts undertaken by MEAM Approach partnerships, we hope to foster a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in combating systemic racism. Through this acknowledgment, we affirm our commitment to continuous learning, reflection, and adaptation in our collective pursuit of racial justice and equity.

LIMITED DURATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- The project's duration of six months posed a significant challenge to its objectives, particularly in terms of capacity building and expertise transfer. Local areas took time to fully engage with the work, which limited the impact of the additional capacity and expertise brought in by MEAM and Kusoma.

SHORT-TERM FUNDING CYCLES

- Short-term funding cycles hinder the development of long-term strategies and sustainability planning within local partnerships. The limitations imposed by short-term funding underscore the need for sustained investment and support in anti-racism initiatives. Achieving meaningful and lasting results requires long-term commitment and resources to address systemic issues effectively.

Why Consider Systemic Racism in Our Work on Multiple Disadvantage?

There is a need to emphasise that for many, systemic racism is a significant factor that shapes and impacts their experiences of multiple disadvantage. By applying a race equity lens to partnership work, it becomes possible to uncover how systemic racism intersects with and compounds all other forms of multiple disadvantage. Recognising that the complexities of systemic racism intersect with various co-occurring issues, such as homelessness, mental health challenges, involvement in the criminal justice system, experiences of interpersonal violence and abuse, and the need to access drug and alcohol services, should be central to any local approach to tackle multiple disadvantage. The MEAM Approach Network, operating in 42 regions across England, is committed to improving services and systems for individuals facing multiple disadvantage. To effectively fulfil this commitment, it necessitates an approach that fully embraces the interconnectedness of all forms of and experiences of oppression, grounded in principles of equity and inclusion.

Despite significant efforts across the country to mitigate multiple disadvantage, current approaches often overlook critical factors, where normalised systems of oppression are rarely addressed in mainstream discourses of social change. Therefore, it is crucial to confront systemic racism and integrate it into efforts to dismantle both overt and subtle forms of oppression.

Much work has been done to show all the ways in which systemic racism is deeply embedded in institutions, structures, and policies, perpetuating inequities and limiting opportunities for marginalised groups. That is not the work of this paper. However, we see that acknowledging the historical and present-day impacts of racism enables organisations to create more inclusive and equitable systems that prioritise the needs and preferences of racialised communities. We encourage partnerships to engage with this body of work.

Integrating a race equity lens fosters a deeper understanding of how racial discrimination intersects with other forms of oppression and how these intersections shape experiences of multiple disadvantage. By centering race equity, organisations can promote social justice and challenge discriminatory practices.

Local Area Work

The work in Oxfordshire and Birmingham reflects unique local contexts, priorities, and approaches in addressing systemic racism and multiple disadvantage within their respective communities.

BIRMINGHAM

INTRODUCTION

Birmingham, a diverse and dynamic city, joined the action learning project with a clear commitment to addressing systemic racism and multiple disadvantage. Building on its prior experiences as both a Fulfilling Lives and a MEAM Approach area, MEAM Approach Birmingham is keenly aware of the intersections between racism and various forms of disadvantage. With a commitment to contributing to anti-racism systems work, the partnership approaches its initiatives with an intersectional lens, recognising the need for holistic solutions.

PROJECT ACTIVITY AND FOCUS

Birmingham started with a period of planning led by influential local leads occupying strategic positions within the MEAM partnership. The project began with engaging workshops, mapping exercises, and facilitated spaces for dialogue, diving into systemic racism and multiple disadvantage. The mapping exercises revealed a complex landscape of valuable and ongoing initiatives to tackle racism in systems and services, this facilitated the leads' involvement in influential spaces, shaping strategy and design, especially in areas such as workforce development and race equity. These conversations deepened understanding, prompting the leads to include a strategic aim in the 12-month plan for MEAM Approach Birmingham, focusing on exploring and addressing racism, trauma, and multiple disadvantage. This aim will guide the partners' actions and direction over the next year, aligning with the project's commitment to avoiding duplication and promoting collaboration.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Moving forward, Birmingham is dedicated to sustaining the positive momentum generated by establishing a collaborative partnership space. Aligned with local initiatives targeting systemic racism, the partnership aims for a holistic, whole-systems approach, breaking down existing silos to address systemic racism and multiple disadvantage comprehensively. Through collaborative efforts, MEAM Approach Birmingham seeks to craft a comprehensive and interconnected anti-racism forum, fostering significant and enduring change. In a promising development, a key local organisation with expertise in this area has offered to provide critical support to the group's development and the establishment of a practice network; this is in addition to facilitated sessions focusing on developing anti-racist practice for the network once established which will further enhance the impact and effectiveness of Birmingham's initiatives.

Local Area Work

OXFORDSHIRE

INTRODUCTION
MEAM Approach Oxfordshire demonstrated a deep commitment to exploring racism and multiple disadvantage within its local system, driven by a dedication to addressing harm, abuse, and neglect affecting marginalised and racially minoritised groups. With a focus on amplifying voices against racism and fostering challenging conversations on race equity, Oxfordshire envisions a transformed narrative around race that significantly impacts safeguarding and the quality of life of minoritised individuals. This commitment extends beyond the immediate project, aiming for a paradigm shift in conversations around race, safeguarding, and life trajectories.

PROJECT ACTIVITY AND FOCUS
Embarking on this journey, MEAM Approach Oxfordshire set out to deepen its understanding of the interplay between multiple disadvantage and systemic racism. Extensive discussions among leads, workshops with external stakeholders, and detailed mapping exercises were conducted to gain insights into the current landscape of anti-racism efforts. A key finding highlighted the challenge of accessing mainstream services for individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage, particularly refugees and asylum seekers who have English as an additional language. This informed the development of a guiding enquiry for the partnership's next phase;

> *How might we, as a partnership, work together to identify and address the challenges faced by individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage in effectively accessing services, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers with English as an additional language?*

FUTURE DIRECTION
Looking ahead, Oxfordshire is committed to maintaining the positive momentum achieved during the funded period. With active engagement among partners, the focus is on crafting a comprehensive action plan to understand and remove barriers for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, especially those with English as an additional language. The commitment to creating a paradigm shift in the conversation remains central to future anti-racism and multiple disadvantage work locally. Plans are underway to integrate this work into a strategic county-wide partnership group, recognising the need for high-level cross-sector strategic support. By sustaining a collaborative spirit, Oxfordshire aims to envision a sustained impact on systemic racism within local services and systems.

Key Learnings and Insights

> *'Language is systemic, and it's not just about English being the language but it is how we use language that marginalises people and how that is embedded in daily practices' Partner in attendance at partnership meeting Oxfordshire*

LANGUAGE AND ITS SYSTEMIC IMPACT

- Language emerged as a recurring theme, highlighting its systemic nature in shaping partnerships and impacting accessibility. Both groups emphasised that language choices have far-reaching implications, influencing how racism, disadvantage, and oppression are perceived and addressed within the community. Additionally, the power dynamics inherent in language were acknowledged, with marginalised individuals often excluded from defining terms that directly affect them. Therefore, ownership of language and its definition by marginalised groups was emphasised as a crucial step towards fostering inclusivity and empowerment.

- Recommendations include addressing language barriers beyond mere proficiency, encompassing the use of exclusionary terms and overly complex language within systems and processes. Strategies for achieving this involve providing training and resources on inclusive language, creating safe spaces for discussions about language use and its effects, and actively involving individuals with lived experincein shaping language choices.

> *"I'm just glad we are having this conversation. In all my time in homelessness, I don't think I have been part of a conversation like this." - Workshop participant*

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES

- Addressing systemic racism and broader oppression requires cohesive collaboration among various local initiatives. Despite the abundance of valuable work, the lack of spaces for initiatives to converge ultimately limits knowledge sharing and resource utilisation, which risks duplication and reduced effectiveness. Challenges were also encountered in integrating anti-racism efforts into existing MEAM partnerships, hindering the effective mobilisation of resources and expertise.

- Recommendations involve widening networks and establishing forums or networks where organisations and initiatives can converge, share insights, and accelerate impact. Additionally, it is crucial to incorporate equity and diversity criteria into partnership evaluations to ensure that racial equity is prioritised and maintained throughout the collaboration process.

Key Learnings and Insights

> *"The only challenge has been time limitations, capacity issues due to other workstreams." - Partner in Birmingham.*

INTEGRATION OF ANTI-RACISM EFFORTS INTO EXISTING INITIATIVES

- Equity and inclusion work must be prioritised and integrated as core principles in strategies and activities. Recognising that systems change requires a holistic approach, it is imperative to embed anti-racism efforts within the fabric of existing initiatives rather than treating them as standalone projects or add-ons.
- Recommendations include centring race equity at partnership formation stage, advocating for equity and inclusion goals in strategic plans, ensuring accountability mechanisms to monitor progress, and offering training programmes focused on anti-racism. By mainstreaming anti-racism efforts, organisations can create sustainable and impactful change within communities.

> *"When you start to talk about this stuff people will say things like 'What we do is already inclusive, we already do EDI', and what can you say that?" Partner in attendance at partnership meeting Oxfordshire.*

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Comprehensive workforce development and capacity building are essential components of integrating anti-racism principles into partnership work and wider systems change initiatives. This entails equipping organisations and individuals with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to effectively challenge systemic racism and promote racial equity. Existing legislation may have limitations in protecting marginalised groups, necessitating a proactive approach to capacity building and continuous learning.
- Recommendations include offering training programmes, workshops, and resources that promote cultural humility and an understanding of intersectionality. Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous learning within organisations is essential to ensure ongoing commitment to anti-racism principles and practices.

Key Learnings and Insights

INTERSECTIONALITY IN ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE

- Embracing intersectionality as an analytical framework is vital for understanding and addressing the complex interplay of racism and multiple disadvantage within partnership work and broader systems change initiatives. This approach acknowledges that individuals experience oppression differently based on their intersecting identities and lived experience of systems of power and oppression.
- Recommendations include providing training on intersectionality theory, emphasising specific language that accurately reflects the interconnected nature of oppression, and encouraging a nuanced understanding of racism across interpersonal, institutional and systemic levels. By incorporating intersectionality into practice, interventions can be tailored to address root problems effectively working to promote equity and inclusion.

'... it's what we use as collective language, as a systemic weapon, the way language is re-purposed by the system, thats what is really harmful' Partner in attendance at partnership meeting Oxfordshire

Recommendations for the Central MEAM Team

LEADERSHIP AND GUIDANCE

I) INTERNAL LEADERSHIP

- Provide dedicated time and resources for the central MEAM team to engage in critical self-reflection and exploration of systemic racism.
- Offer opportunities for team members to deepen their understanding of how systemic racism influences their work with local areas and impacts the support provided. This should include formal opportunities for learning about historical and contemporary experiences of systemic racism. Prioritising anti-racism education to enhance MEAM's capacity to deliver equitable support, furthering its mission of improving outcomes for individuals facing multiple disadvantage.
- Cultivate an organisational culture that encourages open dialogue, learning, and growth around issues of race equity.
- Encourage team members to explore personal experiences of power, privilege, oppression, and disadvantage, fostering a collective commitment to anti-racist practices.
- Develop clear anti-racist language and principles that guide internal and external work.

II) EXTERNAL LEADERSHIP

- Provide the central MEAM team with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to effectively lead the network in addressing systemic racism and applying a race equity lens to local work on multiple disadvantage.
- Offer guidance and support to local areas in navigating the complexities of anti-racism systems change work, ensuring that initiatives are grounded in equity, inclusion, and justice.
- Actively promote and amplify the voices and experiences of racially minoritised communities within the network, centering their perspectives in decision-making processes and resource allocation.
- Champion transparency, accountability, and collaboration within the network, fostering a collective commitment to advancing racial equity and dismantling systems of oppression.

Recommendations for the Central MEAM Team

REVIEW AND REVISE EXISTING RESOURCES

- Conduct a thorough review of all existing training materials, resources, and approaches, including the MEAM Approach Wheel, to identify opportunities for incorporating and embedding a race equity lens. This proactive measure ensures that anti-racism remains a central focus and mitigates the risk of it being perceived as an "added extra" or falling off the agenda.
- Engage diverse stakeholders, including individuals with lived experience, in the review process to gain valuable insights and perspectives on how to strengthen the resources.

FACILITATE KNOWLEDGE SHARING

- This presents an opportunity to emphasise the importance of creating spaces for knowledge sharing on anti-racism practice, both internally among central MEAM staff and externally with partner organisations. Establishing formal mechanisms for sharing insights, resources, and best practices can enhance collaboration, foster continuous learning, and provide peer support. By implementing structured platforms such as regular meetings, workshops, online forums, and resource repositories, organisations can facilitate the exchange of valuable information and promote a culture of collective learning and improvement.

POLICY

- Advocate for policy decisions that reflect the interests and experiences of individuals facing multiple disadvantage, including racially minoritised communities. Integrate an anti-racist lens into policy analysis and decision-making processes at both local and national levels, addressing root causes and promoting equity and inclusion. Foster a shared commitment to action across local areas, advocating for suitable funding models, prioritising accountability, and investing in services that meet the needs of marginalised groups. Empower individuals and support networks to engage in the policymaking process effectively and amplify their voices in decision-making.

MONITOR AND EVALUATE IMPACT

- Develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan that helps with learning and improves current limitations in the work surrounding multiple disadvantage.

Conclusion

The journey undertaken by MEAM and Kusoma in partnership with local areas in Birmingham and Oxfordshire builds on the work of others to shed light on the critical need to address systemic racism in the context of multiple disadvantage. By applying an intersectional lens and working with diverse groups of stakeholders, including statutory and voluntary sector partners, this project has highlighted the complex interplay of various forms of oppression and their impact on individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage.

The insights gained from this collaborative effort underscore the importance of integrating anti-racism principles into existing initiatives, fostering inclusive language practices, and prioritising workforce development and capacity building. The challenges encountered, such as navigating partnership dynamics and ensuring the sustainability of anti-racism efforts, serve as valuable learning opportunities for future work across the national network.

Moving forward, it is essential that the central MEAM team provide strong leadership and guidance in addressing systemic racism, both in its local area work and externally in its work on the policy landscape. This involves creating spaces for critical self-reflection, amplifying the voices of racially minoritised communities, and championing transparency and accountability within networks.

The recommendations put forward in this report, such as examining language, facilitating knowledge sharing, integrating an anti-racist lens into policy decisions, and establishing comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plans, provide a roadmap for driving systemic change.

As we continue on this journey towards equity and justice, it is crucial to remember that progress is not achieved through complacency, but through intentional and collaborative action. By embracing the transformative potential of anti-racism systems change work, we can inspire bold collective efforts across the MEAM network and beyond, working together to dismantle oppressive structures and build a more just and equitable society for all.

This project serves as a catalyst for change, inviting us all to challenge the status quo, learn from one another, and take decisive steps towards creating a future where every individual, regardless of their background or experiences, can thrive.

KUSOMA