

# Case study

## Community Languages in London

### Community languages and research: helping people to help themselves



The world of research often focuses on black and minority ethnic (BME) groups from a social and consumer perspective. Over a decade ago, Nooruddin Ahmed, a former voluntary sector worker with a background in research, saw that the vast majority of those employed in the field were male, white and a native English speaker and so were not ideally suited to researching and interviewing those from BME backgrounds.

Interviews would often take place through interpreters, distancing the subject from the discussion and reducing the quality of feedback and the final results. Nooruddin decided it would make more sense to employ those from BME groups, equipped with the right qualifications and experience, to do the research. With set-up funding from London Borough of Tower Hamlets and marketing support from Leaside Regeneration company, he established Agroni Research in Bow, East London in 2000.

#### From strength to strength

Since then, Agroni Research has gone from strength to strength and now draws on a network of over 300 research associates who are screened and selected according to a number of criteria. Language skills are essential but only one part of the equation. Compatibility of their country and cultural background is important as well as their faith. All interviewers and researchers must have fluent written and spoken English, as this is the usual language for research reports and for most internal communications.

In a recent initiative, Agroni worked with London Underground during a research project led by RLN London looking at language and cultural barriers on the Underground. It targeted speakers of six different languages – Chinese Cantonese, Gujarati, Polish, Urdu, Somali and Turkish. Around 15 focus



groups actually took place to find out about the transport needs of these communities. All the participants involved in this research were recruited using the links between Agroni's researchers and their own communities.

### The 2012 Games and beyond

Another recent project, conducted for the Young Foundation, looked at the economic prospects of the 2012 Games for South Asian-owned businesses in Brick Lane (Tower Hamlets) and Green Street (Newham). Agroni has conducted a large number of research projects in cities with diverse communities throughout the UK including Bradford, Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester and Manchester.



Agroni's innovative approach to research is still central to their business. Nooruddin commented, "I enjoy bringing people from ethnic minority backgrounds into the research field and giving them the opportunity to share and benefit from an understanding of their languages and culture. And when it improves the quality of the research we do, so much the better."

Jane Collis, Director of RLN London, added, "Agroni's business model is a great example for others to follow. It's encouraging to see so many opportunities created for people to use their home language and community links in a specialist field like research."

## Useful links



[www.agroni.co.uk](http://www.agroni.co.uk)

To see more case studies and information on Community Languages in London, visit [www.rln-london.com/multilinguallondon](http://www.rln-london.com/multilinguallondon)

