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**Adults’ and Children’s Friendships Across Social Class and Ethnic Difference**

**Information Sheet**

A research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council

**What is the project’s timeline?**

The project will begin in early 2013 and will run for two years ending in early 2015.

**What is the research trying to find out?**

There is a high level of public and policy interest in the quality of everyday life in socially and ethnically mixed inner urban localities, and in how a sense of community and social cohesion can be developed and maintained. Community and cohesion both rely on the informal connections, day to day interactions and friendship networks that people may have. We want to know more about how people living in diverse areas get on with each other, and whether adults and children make friendships with those who are differently socially situated to themselves. If so, how do those friendships develop, how do differences in social and/or ethnic background shape and affect those relationships, and how do people manage those differences?

**How will data be gathered?**

As primary schools are often one of the few sites where families from very different backgrounds come together, we are seeking to identify three or four socially and ethnically mixed primary schools to work with us.

We would like to start by working with Y4 children. We would:

• talk to the class-teacher about the friendship patterns s/he notices amongst the children in their class.

• work with the children (after having received permission from their parents and the children themselves), in small groups of two and three, asking them to draw and write about their friends, what they play with them and where they meet. We are very aware of the importance of friendships to children, and the distress that can be caused when things are not going well. We would choose the membership of the small groups very carefully, taking advice from the class teacher, to minimise the possibility of any hurt or upset arising from these discussions.

• talk to the headteacher at each school about the challenges and successes for the school in engaging with different sections of the parent body.

• Interview about 15 parents of Y4 children in order to discuss with them their views on their children’s friendships, whether their children’s friendships generate adult friendships and day to day support networks, and their own friendship experiences as adults living in diverse localities. These interviews would be arranged directly by the researchers with parents and would not need to take place in school.

**When would the researchers be in school?**

We would anticipate being in and around the school for a period of approximately six weeks during 2013 or early 2014. But this does not mean that we would be there every day! We would arrange the discussions with the children to suit the school’s schedule, whether over a number of days or weeks. We would also like to be in the playground at drop off and pick up times to introduce ourselves to Y4 parents (again, not every day!) We would also like to attend, as observers, any particular school-community events that involve parents (e.g. International Evenings, summer fairs etc). However, we want to emphasise that we are in no way ‘inspecting’ school events!

**Benefits for the school**

We appreciate that having researchers involved in school can seem like an extra demand to be incorporated into the normally busy day. We hope, however, that the participating schools would also benefit from the research. The focus on children’s friendships may contribute to work you are already doing in PSHCE. As we finish working with the children, we shall offer to fund and organise a class party as a ‘thank you’. We will provide informal anonymised feedback to every school on the patterns of adults’ and children’s friendships and networks. We will also be running two public end-of-project dissemination events where we will disseminate our findings on the role of child and parent friendships in developing and building senses of belonging to school and community, and the degree to which friendships are made and maintained in socially and ethnically mixed contexts. We will also establish a project Advisory Committee at the start of the research period, and any representation from participating schools on this group will be very welcome.

**Guarantees**

We will follow nationally recognised ethical guidelines. In particular, in our writing or public discussion of the research, we will not name the participating schools. All adults and children will be given pseudonyms. All research data will be stored in a secure, protected university site. The research team will all have a completed CRB check before starting in the schools.

**The research team**

Carol Vincent conducts research on families and their relationships with schools. She also has two children in North London state schools, and is a school governor. Sarah Neal has written and researched on communities, belonging and diversity. Humera Iqbal is a child psychologist who has researched on families from different social and ethnic backgrounds.