

Black & Minority Ethnic funerals

■ Summary



Death affects everyone – without discrimination. So Bereavement Services needs to respond to whatever the varying needs of the bereaved may be in an equally non-discriminatory fashion.

A representative of the Muslim community in Bath wrote to the Council indicating that the growing community would like to bury their dead nearby instead of sending them back to their motherlands.

This led to consideration of the needs of other minority communities and the requirements of their beliefs.

■ The problems and how we tackled them

Following consultation and visits by representatives of the Muslim community, an area of Haycombe Cemetery was identified as being suitable.

The area was plotted to exactly orientate the graves so that they were facing Mecca – not a huge variation from the east facing graves in the rest of the cemetery, but significant and vital to the peace of mind of the Muslim community.

The need to bury their dead within 24 hours (or as soon as practicable) led to a policy of having a grave dug and prepared for burial at all times in this area – suitably covered to ensure visitor safety. It is not usual for members of the community to place their dead in a coffin, but a compromise was reached with the full cooperation of the community whereby the body is laid in a coffin without a lid. And lastly, the mourners (who are generally all male) prefer to backfill the grave themselves, not a problem except that our 'earth' is solid chunks of oolite limestone excavated by machine from the ground; solution - we bury in soil to enable them to do so.

■ Outcomes and impact



Following on from this, it became obvious to Bereavement staff that there were other sections of the community who had some of the same, or similar, requirements.

- African and Caribbean communities also like to backfill graves themselves.
- Members of the Baha'i faith prefer their own allocated section – they require burial within a given distance from the place where the death occurred.

So policies were put in place to address all these needs and feedback from funerals is very good. Staff feel very privileged to have such unique opportunities to learn of the diversity in the ways people bury their dead.

■ Next steps

We are looking at introducing equalities monitoring to help us check that we are providing a fair and equal service.

Our equality journey

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