

Reaching marginalised communities

Branches

Branches is a constituted group, supporting Tees Valley families and carers who are affected directly and indirectly by substance misuse, with the aim of improving their condition of life and overall wellbeing.

Issues

- There is a ripple effect from the behaviour of someone with drug/alcohol problems throughout their entire family, on siblings, parents and children
- Carers maybe looking after grandchildren, due to the condition of parents with drug or alcohol dependency/problems
- Carers own health often comes last because of health issues and concerns related to other family members
- Many carers are time poor and do not have time to go to the doctor
- Carers are willing to talk about their health problems in a group setting
- Carers often live with high levels of stress
- Carers may have financial difficulties and other issues on top of their caring roles
- There is a taboo around people admitting that their loved ones have drug or alcohol problems

What we did

We prepared leaflets about the services and support Branches provides and held group meetings and one to one discussions with people. We also held a coffee morning in Middlesbrough for carers and the public to raise awareness of cancer, provide information and support to which 17 people attended, 3 men and 14 women ageing from 20 to 75.



Over 2014/15 MVDA ran a project to increase awareness and early detection of cancer among Middlesbrough communities likely not to have been reached by public health information.

Grass roots community groups were targeted and asked to propose small-scale initiatives to spread key messages about cancer, including the link between healthy living and reducing the risk of developing cancer.

Groups considering proposals received cancer awareness training from a Macmillan professional from the the Tees Valley Public Health shared service.

The successful groups received grants of up to £500 to implement their proposals. They were responsible for managing, advertising, running and evaluating their work. This case-study is supplemental to the evaluation of the work of the group.



tackling cancer together

We also hosted an outdoor event in Stewart Park as part of a fun day, with activities for children, tombola and sponsored walk to engage the wider public.

Challenges

- Some people do not identify themselves as carers and understand that they have rights and can access support
- Getting people to realise that they are not responsible for their loved ones drug and/or alcohol problems
- Getting people to talk openly about cancer
- Engaging male carers in activities and discussions over a longer period of time
- Having enough volunteers and funding to run activities

Added value

- Helping people to talk about cancer and think about getting help and seeking advice
- Participants are spreading the health messages from the event to their friends, family and other carers through word of mouth
- People being more likely to go to the doctor and talk about symptoms and concerns
- Increasing interest from these groups in other health topics

Future considerations

- Having men or women only sessions for specific health issues, e.g. cancers which predominantly affect a particular gender
- Getting more men to join the group
- Progressing ambitions to become a charity and improving our reach and services
- Have regular meetings and discussions about health issues affecting us as carers and making sure we lead by example acting appropriately
- Engaging other services to speak to the group, having successfully done so previously (e.g. Lifeline, Hope North East, Home House, Fulcrum, Kinship Carers and Middlesbrough Recovering Together)
- Exploring a wider range of health topics which could be presented in this way to reach carers and their loved ones

What worked well

- A high level of trust in Branches as a service supporting carers and their loved ones
- Advertising the event by word of mouth, through posters, in local shops and centres
- Treating the sessions as social events
- Holding the event through the day, to avoid childcare issues and school-runs
- Our volunteers being trained by Macmillan about cancer and its effects
- Showing the symptoms and physical impact of different cancers
- Enabling people to ask questions in a relaxed environment
- Having information (leaflets and online) to back up the presentation and knowing what other support is available

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