

tackling cancer together



Reaching Refugees and Asylum Seekers

North East Women in Action

North East Women in Action is a constituted community group run by volunteers that provides support to refugees, people seeking asylum and other people from BME communities.

Issues

Refugees and people seeking asylum have experienced trauma, violence and persecution in their own countries. They can feel afraid, isolated and detached from society and often lack the confidence to engage in the local community or interact with public services.

There are also different cultural attitudes and taboos that can prevent people from seeking help about their health. In many African and Asian countries in particular, there is a lack of awareness and understanding about cancer and not a tradition of seeking professional medical advice and intervention for health problems.

What we did

We held a daytime event in Middlesbrough for refugees, people seeking asylum and BME communities to raise awareness of cancer. It involved 45 men and women from over 10 different African, Asian and European countries.

The format was so successful that we are investigating what other health messages we could deliver in this way and what improvements we can make to reach more people and cater for different needs.

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 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.



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Challenges

- Language barriers, with English as a second language for most people and some with no English
- A wide range of nationalities from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe with different cultural and social backgrounds and attitudes to health
- A tendency for men to fail to engage with health issues or to go to doctors
- Cultural sensitivities for some BME communities around women being in an environment with men

Added value

- Participants are spreading the health messages learned at the event to friends and family and through everyday social activities and religious gatherings
- People are now more likely to go to the doctor and talk about symptoms and concerns
- There is increasing interest from these groups in other health topics

Future considerations

- Having men or women only sessions for specific health issues e.g. cancers that predominantly affect a particular gender
- Facilitating women only sessions for communities that do not find mixed sessions culturally acceptable
- Providing a crèche for those who cannot attend without childcare facilities
- Exploring a wider range of health topics that could be presented in this way to reach communities that would not otherwise engage

What worked well

- Building on the strong reputation of North East Women in Action with refugee, asylum seeking and BME communities
- Advertising the event through social and religious networks, social media and leaflets
- Treating the session as a social event
- Including food as an integral part of the event, drawing men, in particular, to attend
- Those who do usually engage in activities bringing others with them
- Holding the event during the day, to avoid childcare issues
- Our volunteers being trained by Macmillan about cancer and its effects
- Presenting the information in a culturally and socially sensitive way
- Using simple English and a lot of strong visuals to get messages across
- Showing the symptoms and physical impact of different cancers
- Enabling people to ask questions in a relaxed environment
- Having information leaflets to back up the presentation

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