



Reaching marginalised communities

Romanian Assembly

The Romanian Assembly is a constituted group, which is volunteer-led and provides a forum, advice and support for people from Romania and Roma communities living in Tees Valley. Activities include providing information about local services, outreach support to families and one to one help on practical issues.

The group also runs very popular English language classes three times a week, works with Health Linx on health promotion and runs youth projects to tackle issues such as bullying and discrimination.

Issues

- Many Romanian communities and individuals are isolated and vulnerable and do not feel able to access public services or are not aware of the help and support that exists
- Some people experience high levels of stress
- Cancer is considered taboo. There is a lack of knowledge and many people are frightened of it and wary of talking about it

What we did

- We held a daytime event in Middlesbrough to raise awareness of cancer, involving 30 people of mixed gender and ages
- As spoken English and written language is a barrier (with many people unable to read or write), we held the session in Romanian and focussed on verbal communication of issues, as many people are unable to read or write
- We used leaflets translated into Romanian to provide additional information

Challenges

- Language barriers, with English as a second language or no English at all, and some



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

people are unable to read or write (especially Roma)

- Ongoing isolation and a lack of engagement with public authorities and services, compounded over time
- Lack of knowledge about or distrust of the services that are available

What worked well

- Our volunteers being trained by Macmillan about cancer and its effects
- Advertising the event by word of mouth, through social and church networks, social media and English language classes
- Treating the session as a social event with games and refreshments
- Holding the event during the day to avoid childcare issues
- Not being too forceful in presenting the information so people were able to get a genuine understanding of symptoms, what to do and where to go for support
- Having the session in Romanian
- Getting people used to the language of cancer and talking openly about it
- Getting the message across about the importance of doing something about symptoms early and seeking medical advice to stand the best chance of early detection
- Offering support for people to go to the GP or hospital

Added value

- People learning to trust our volunteers and learning to talk about these types of issues
- A much higher awareness of causes of different types of cancer, with participants more likely to go to the doctor and talk about symptoms and concerns
- One Roma woman came forward with symptoms, was accompanied to the GP, had first stage cancer diagnosed and received emotional support from volunteers. She had a melanoma removed
- Men have come forward and been diagnosed with bowel cancer and are now in treatment
- Participants are spreading the health messages learned at the event to their friends and family and through everyday social activities, especially at church gatherings
- The group has been asked to present information to other church gatherings and events
- There is increasing interest from these groups in other health topics

Future considerations

- Holding men or women only sessions for specific health issues e.g. cancers that predominantly affect one sex
- Having more interaction with GPs, hospitals and community services/facilities
- Playing games (e.g. chess) and other fun activities to get people along to events
- Introducing health topics through English language courses, a useful way of engaging men
- The format was so successful the group is considering other sessions that could be delivered in this way and other ways of catering for people's needs around specific health issues
- Identifying funding to support more events and involving the media and other communities

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