



Reaching marginalised communities

Straightforward

Straightforward is a constituted community organisation led by black women volunteers providing support to vulnerable women and men from BME communities, refugees, people seeking asylum and mainstream communities around health and wellbeing in Tees Valley.

Primarily concerned with raising awareness of the causes and effects of female genital mutilation (FGM), within these communities, the group also provides a range of support services to people who have experienced FGM. As part of its wider mission, Straightforward proactively engages with health, education, police, criminal justice, universities and local authorities to raise awareness and find solutions to problems associated with FGM.

Issues

- Those experiencing FGM tend to be vulnerable, feel stigmatised and suffer from depression, anxiety and low self esteem
- Refugees and people seeking asylum are under a lot of stress and fear being sent back home
- Mental health problems are common and many cannot access psychological therapies due to their asylum status
- Language barriers and cultural differences in the UK cause additional challenges for people who are already under much pressure
- Poor health and diet are common in some of these communities and there is a lack of knowledge about services and support
- Older people are more likely to discuss health issues, whereas young people are apprehensive and less likely to engage



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

What we did

- We held a focus group with people to explore how best to approach the subject
- We produced leaflets to inform the wider community about our events and targeted these and cancer leaflets in places used by women, including toilets
- We engaged people through the Refugee Service, which is the first point of contact for many people
- We engaged 40 people in two daytime events in February and March; one for women and one mixed, involving a range of ages
- We produced a PowerPoint presentation and information that people could take away with them to discuss with friends and family

Challenges

- A lack of knowledge and understanding

of cancer in general and taboos around discussing this between men and women

- Multiple languages spoken and lack of confidence in English or little English
- Some participants had lost family members to cancer and it was very emotional for them
- Having sessions with men and women together was uncomfortable for some

What worked well

Our advanced preparation, engagement and word of mouth encouraged attendance and people were receptive to the information and felt able to engage and ask questions. We also found having a separate session at which women could speak freely was helpful, as well as providing interpretation into mother tongues: French, Arabic, Somalian, Portuguese.

One participant was a doctor from Sudan, who was able to explain technical terms to the group and answer questions and the Macmillan representative was able to demonstrate different types of cancer using simple models.

Added value

- We became more experienced, informed and confident to talk about the issues and able to signpost people to advice and services. The participants also said that they were more confident about discussing cancer, encouraging family members and friends to check for cancer signs and symptoms and engaging with health services. Women felt able to encourage men to check for signs of cancer, as well as themselves
- The healthy lunch provided reinforced positive messages about the benefits of a healthy diet and dietary links to cancer

Future considerations

- Having information in people's mother tongues for them to take away and share with their families and friends
- Training community leaders in health issues, such as cancer, to enable them to spread messages and awareness on an ongoing basis
- Having space available for people who have lost family members or friends to cancer and providing counselling for them
- Having enough funding to be able to provide childcare would enable more people to engage in events and activities where Straightforward could promote a wider range of health issues, information and services to these vulnerable communities

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