



Evaluation of Age Better in Sheffield Deep dive: BAME involvement and experience – what have we learnt? Key Lessons and recommendations

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1. Large-scale programmes, such as the Age Better in Sheffield (ABiS) should move away from collectively categorising diverse communities under the umbrella of 'BAME' to adequately meet the needs of people from diverse communities. Communities that are diverse in terms of culture, customs, language, dialects and so on, are likely to experience different barriers to, and opportunities for, involvement in projects. By maintaining the status quo, resources are spread thin across different communities, usually allowing the larger and more visible communities that are easier to reach, access to greater resource than the smaller newer communities (Chowbey et al, 2008).

A key message from this research conveyed the importance of empowering members of different communities to run groups and activities for themselves, as it is them who have the reach into their communities, the language skills and insider knowledge of how their communities operate and what they need.

2. Low, or no, English language skills presented the greatest barrier to participation of some BAME communities in the ABiS projects, acting as a barrier to communication and understanding, resulting in a reluctance to take up activities. Crucially, language skills were likely to present greater issues for the over 50s in some BAME communities as older generations were less likely to have received a British education and hence lacked English language skills.

Where populations have little grasp of the English language, the following recommendations might go some way towards addressing the issues: firstly, recruiting more people from BAME communities to reflect the diverse populations they serve; drawing on the expertise of BAME organisations and volunteers with track records and or the requisite skills and knowledge to support projects; and using interpreters and translators where appropriate.

The lessons on language have implications for how projects are publicised to involve participants, and are reliant on whether potential participants can read, write, or understand not only English, but also read and write in their first languages. Indeed, in specific BAME communities high rates of illiteracy exist (in their first languages) making translated materials redundant.

3. Outreach work (through word-of-mouth) by people reflecting (e.g. the culture, language) the communities they attempt to engage with has proved effective in publicising projects, and, whilst the use of social media is largely ineffective in engaging older BAME participants, local media, such as community radio conveying information in various languages is potentially useful for reaching isolated people from BAME communities, in their homes.
4. Projects taking their services to established BAME groups and community organisations where there is 'familiarity' and 'trust' has aided uptake. In this research, a preference for group work over one-to-one support and gender-segregated spaces for specific projects were significant findings. However, the recommendation here is to consult with different communities prior to designing and delivering projects to determine their preferences, barriers and so on, as there are likely to be differences in needs between them.
5. The necessity of partnership work was a prominent narrative in this research. Strong partnership work between those organisations serving all populations and BAME specific organisations has the potential to enhance understanding of particular communities whilst sharing mutual learning. Expertise in BAME communities can be drawn on to improve provision that is targeted at the general population, leading to 'inclusivity' and the

involvement of diverse communities. Inevitably, the pandemic has impacted on opportunities for partnership working face-to-face, however, partnership work must not stall – the continuity of seminars and workshops through virtual means are strongly advocated.

6. The flexibility of programmes such as ABiS through 'test and learn' approaches to project design and delivery foster a culture of deep reflection and learning, which arguably lead to projects being more responsive to needs, if not during the lifetime of short-term projects, then future projects. Coupled with co-production principles, encouraging target groups to engage with project design and delivery, 'test and learn' principles contribute to better tailored provision for BAME communities. Moving forwards, 'test and learn' principles should be integral to all programmes, allowing projects to adapt with changing circumstances and according to the evolving needs of communities.
7. Finally, the pandemic brought with it restrictions in abundance, but also presented projects with opportunities to do things differently. Some members of BAME communities encountered the internet and online platforms for the first time for virtual activities, information, and advice. Others connected with family, friends and other project participants. During difficult times, the potential of older BAME people to engage with mediums that they had traditionally found 'alien' was released. This carries a vital message to project providers about the assumptions often made about older BAME people, particularly women, and what they can and can't do, and advises caution when subscribing to such notions.

Chowbey, P., Salway, S., Ismail, M., Gerrish, K. & Moullin, M. (2008). Responding to diverse needs: Eating disorders in BME communities in Sheffield. Report of a Feasibility Study Conducted for South Yorkshire Eating Disorders Association (Syeda). Sheffield, Centre for Health & Social Care Research.

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