

Volunteering in Mental Health

Brent Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Project aims

- Explore potential for volunteering to play a far more significant role in supporting people's emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Align the project to Brent Health Matters (BHM) and focus work as a pilot on two communities in Brent - Church End and Alperton. Both suffer from extreme health inequalities, exacerbated by COVID 19

The project is about building stronger more resilient communities - creating the conditions for volunteering to thrive

Community outreach and research

- Co-produced with community groups, local people and statutory providers
 - Community Champions (volunteers)
 - Local third sector groups
 - People working in the communitiese.g.
 - Community Connectors (CNWL)
 - Community Coordinators (Brent Council)
- Survey of local people - 120 responses



Key findings

- People don't know what is available locally to support them
- People want to get more involved incl. volunteering
- There is nowhere for people to gather locally to discuss issues

- Opportunities being missed
 - e.g. 600 people waiting in queue for foodbank on Ealing Road (Alperton) not being asked, whilst waiting, what other support they need?
 - Vicar in Church End not aware of other services locally available



Setting up forums in Church End and Alperton

- Been challenging
 - Communities have been let down and feel ignored, marginalised, and sometimes abandoned.
- Set some key rules
 - Don't dominate the conversation - really hard when people have strong views derived from their own lived experience
 - No presentations from statutory providers
 - This is your meeting we are just helping facilitate

Shift focus from being where statutory sector “**does to**” or “**does for**” to one in which the statutory sector “**does with**” or better still - what needs to be done is “**done by**” the community.

What's emerged from these meetings

Local information

Need to understand what is available locally and how to share and keep up to date

Sub group established

Equipping local people

Training in MH First Aid and MH Awareness for volunteers

Training provided by Brent Council

Specific volunteer led events

Community Garden in One Tree Hill Park

Setting up a Dementia Cafe

Projects underway

Continuing the forums

In both places there is a commitment to maintain and develop the forums

Future meetings scheduled

What has it felt like to local people?

Weaving a mesh and creating a safe space around local communities



“The mesh in communities that holds people together in love and compassion is not as tightly woven as it could be - all too often the gaps in that mesh mean that people fall through to more acute services rather than being supported in their community”.

“Creating a space around the community so that the connections being made could limit the impact of COVID”. But more than COVID, this was about building strong, sustainable, resilient protected communities that will better withstand the onslaughts that these so called “deprived” communities regularly face.

Local views



This is what happened in Alperton through understanding the needs of the community, a series of meetings have happened where community members, leaders and organisations have started to create a “mesh” where it can be the first port of call for anyone needing support.

Umit Jani, Alperton Community Champion volunteer who then joined Brent Council as Community Coordinator



Local and hyper local communities are far more agile, quicker to respond, have local knowledge and are able to make change quicker than large institutions... I have seen greater togetherness and collaboration in the last 18 months than I have seen for years.

Danny Maher, Chair of Brent Mental Health Forum



Volunteering encouraged and equipped me to apply for a role as a Health and Wellbeing Community Connector with the NHS. It has been rewarding so far to be part of projects such NHS-CNWL health inequalities team and Brent hyper local forums whose goal is to reduce health inequalities, tackle mental health and emotional wellbeing at a local level.

Thandie Lawrence Local Church End resident and volunteer who later joined CNWL as Community Connector

Next steps - Brent Health Matters to take forward the work

“Enormous gratitude to Helpforce for their work and tremendous effort and advocacy of people in our hyper local areas. The work has given us the opportunity come into the communities’ space, listen to them, reflect and examine our practice. It is enabling us to begin to empower local people to develop and use their own resources to manage their health and wellbeing.

We want to move away from looking at communities as passive recipients of services planned and delivered by statutory providers. Thus, we will be guided by the local communities on what their priorities are and how they can be supported to make the change they want to see.”

Jenny Lanyero (CNWL) and Nipa Shah (Brent Council)

Resources

