



BME Elders Housing and Health Promotion Project

Although there is a strong evidence base identifying the housing and health challenges facing older people, this evidence base often fails to pick up in detail the emerging needs among older Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. As a result, it has been difficult to understand the specific and complex health and housing needs of these groups, and how to shape interventions to support them.

This case study focuses on a project which was undertaken and jointly funded and delivered during 2014 and 2016 by a range of Oldham partners – the Council, Housing & Care 21, Aksa (part of New Charter Group) and Oldham Housing Investment Partnership (OHIP) and Clinical Commissioning Group.



The project worked with Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities living in Oldham to understand their current housing needs and future housing aspirations, and explored the potential to facilitate healthy lifestyle behaviour change within these communities.

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Introduction

Oldham's Older Person's Housing Strategy (2011-2014) recognised the challenges faced by the increasing numbers of older people across Oldham. Challenges included an ageing, low income population in the private sector housing stock; how to improve the coordination of specialist accommodation; and how to improve health and wellbeing of older people. However, it was clear that the emerging needs within older BME communities in Oldham was poorly understood or often based on hearsay or opinion.

In 2013, a study was commissioned by AKSA Homes (part of New Charter Housing Association) and the Oldham Housing Investment Partnership (OHIP) to explore the attitudes to the housing, care and support needs of older people within BME communities, particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. The study, *Developing an evidence base for housing and related services for older people*, gathered views from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. The research found – among other things – that language is often a fundamental barrier preventing older people from BME communities accessing services; cultural and religious values remain a significant factor determining the choices people make; people are aware that there are housing options for older people, but there is confusion over the differences between sheltered housing, extra care and residential/nursing care; while take up of care and support services is low, yet there are people who feel they need services but do not know how to get them.

As a result of this study, a project was undertaken during 2014 and 2016 by a range of Oldham partners – the Council, Housing & Care 21, Akxa, OHIP, and the Clinical Commissioning Group. The project was selected by the CCG for funding as part of its Innovation Fund “the Dragon's Den”. The research focused on the following key areas:

- Working with Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in Oldham to understand their current older people's housing needs and future housing aspirations;
- Raising awareness of older people's housing opportunities across Oldham;
- Exploring the potential to facilitate healthy lifestyle behaviour change within Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities through Outreach Support Staff; and provision of this through culturally and religiously specific awareness and information sessions;
- Exploring what kind of care and support might be required in the future.

The project funded two Outreach Support Workers whose role was to engage with the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities to achieve the outcomes above.

The Pilot - Initial Work

Outreach Workers started in post in October 2014 with the purpose of exploring the potential to raise awareness about housing options and facilitate healthy lifestyle behaviour change within Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Promotion of the outreach service utilised culturally-specific approaches: the Outreach Workers were bilingual, which enabled them to navigate linguistic differences, as well as having a significant level of cultural knowledge.

Awareness of the service was raised through the Bangla and British Asian Press, and notices were printed in the Jonosheba and Probash Bangla newspapers; leaflets were distributed to Asian areas, schools, businesses and Mosques; information stalls were manned in primary and integrated care centres.

Following the initial awareness raising, a range of early intervention sessions were held which focused on health and well-being, together with community involvement. These sessions were held in Mosques, specific community/leisure centres, and some one-to-one engagement through door knocking exercises. Approximately 200 people engaged with these early intervention sessions, which had a range of focuses, including Dementia Friends, mental health awareness, sign-posting for early help, awareness of sheltered housing and extra care, and health checks.

As an example, a health chat session was delivered to a group of girls and women aged 15-60 at the Medina Mosque in Glodwick, Oldham. The outreach worker outlined the “Five Ways to Wellbeing” (a set of evidence-based actions which promote wellbeing); and looked at mental health, with links made to the attendees’ Islamic faith. The focus was on the importance of incorporating simple lifestyle changes for improved mental wellbeing.

A clear part of the overall programme was to develop initiatives which would be sustainable and continue to provide benefits to communities. For example, the Outreach Workers delivered an event in partnership with *Early Help* at the Oldham Leisure Centre. Several service users had health checks undertaken, alongside awareness raising around housing options and other health initiatives. As a result, the leisure centre is partnering *Early Help* to deliver monthly health checks at the centre.



The service also arranged community days at local housing association schemes to raise awareness of housing options and encourage community cohesion. In addition to health checks, craft activities and henna painting were offered.

There were a number of interesting findings from this type of engagement: the people who engaged were women, who are generally more difficult to

engage; and a number expressed the view that having seen the accommodation, they would not be against moving in; in essence, coming into contact with older people’s accommodation started to change people’s views about whether it would be appropriate for them.

Dementia Friends

Research shows that awareness about dementia is lower among BME communities, and there is still a huge amount of stigma associated with it. This can prevent people from seeking help and can cause people with dementia to become isolated.

One element of this outreach programme has been to engage with the Alzheimer’s Society Dementia Friends initiative, which is about building dementia friendly communities through a social action movement. It is hoped that gradually increasing awareness among community leaders, family leaders and children will change attitudes towards dementia.

Dementia Friends sessions were delivered to a range of settings, including the Oldham Race Equality Partnership coffee morning group, to New Charter staff, Hopwood Court residents, Wood Square Court residents, Year 8 pupils at Radclyffe School, the First Choice Homes

Oldham Neighbourhood Staff Team. As a result of the project, 113 Dementia Friends have been made in Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, all of whom have committed to actions which improve the lives of people living with dementia.

As part of the programme, the outreach worker has joined the BME Dementia Reference Group – a new group working in Oldham – to jointly review the training materials, look at the gaps regarding BME communities and begin to resource and co-produce new materials which may better represent and communicate with different communities. This will result in the production of *Hamaari Yaadein* (Our Memories), a bespoke Dementia awareness session for Oldham.

Outcomes

The Outreach Support Service has utilised a typical grassroots approach to building trust in the community and developing a service which is embedded in community networks. A lot of the work that the outreach service has done is raising awareness, sharing messages and identifying community champions (such as through dementia friends).

The initial project ended in October 2016 and there were a number of key outcomes:

- The project had identified the need for a culturally sensitive dementia awareness package, utilizing the experience of Bangladeshi and Pakistani people. This is being taken forward in partnership with other groups in Oldham;
- The project has developed a pioneering pathway to communicate with local mosques and involve them in the local health and housing agendas. Access was gained to the mosques through the wives of the Imams and Mosque Committee members;
- A grassroots approach proved successful in communicating with established groups, raising awareness of healthy lifestyle behaviour among BME communities;
- Awareness was raised of sheltered schemes and extra care courts, leading to increased interest in these as housing options.

It has been integral to the project that the Outreach Support Worker shares the background and communities of the people they are engaging with, as well as the languages. This has contributed to the trust in the service and minimised barriers, however it has still been a slow process which has steadily gained traction.

Although lack of awareness is often cited as a reason why people from



Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in Oldham do not access services, there are also clear cultural norms that prevent people accessing health services (including, for example, views around mental health and dementia). It is very clear from the service that attitudes are changing among younger generations, but not necessarily among older generations - and for this reason, take-up of services can be much slower.

Many of the barriers around accessing more suitable housing are perceived rather than actual barriers, for example arising through lack of contact and shared negative perceptions. The majority of people who attended events at sheltered housing and extra care schemes were pleasantly surprised by the facilities, and may consider moving into such schemes in the future. This is important and shows a continuing need to provide opportunities for people to physically engage with these housing options.



The outreach work has highlighted the lack of awareness BME communities in Oldham have of services for older people, such as Age UK. The work has shown that people anticipate accessing services through the local authority, and therefore, it is important that local authority and registered provider routes are clear, well-advertised and utilise culturally sensitive approaches.

The service has engaged with a significant number of women which is key for two reasons: firstly, there are often more barriers for women accessing support services, including health awareness services; secondly, women are more likely to spread the word among their friendship groups and influence children and families. However, there is significantly more work to be undertaken around mental health awareness, including depression and dementia.

Next Steps

Housing & Care 21 is following up the project during Spring 2017, with the intention to explore how to make sustainable, long term change. They will employ an Outreach Worker to continue liaising with BME communities, encouraging them to visit and consider sheltered and extra care schemes as an option, delivering Dementia Friends and health and wellbeing improvement sessions, and looking at external funding and links with other local services to continue this offer in the future.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

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We are a sophisticated network bringing together over 40,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'knowledge hub' on specialist housing, our online and regional networked activities:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing choices that enable older and disabled people to live independently
- provide intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice developments, and
- raise the profile of specialist housing with developers, commissioners and providers to plan, design and deliver aspirational housing for an ageing population.

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