



Health and Wellbeing Day: Activities and Information Sessions with Asylum Seekers and Refugees



#SpeakUp



June 2019

Background

Asylum seekers and refugees face significant barriers in accessing healthcare and also in living healthy lifestyles e.g. language barriers, extremely low incomes, family separation and trauma, stigma and prejudice and the psychological and practical problems caused by the 'hostile environment' policy.

City of Sanctuary Sheffield, the New Beginnings Project and a number of other partner organisations are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees in the city. In 2018 we held 2 consultation events with refugees and asylum seekers in Sheffield, funded by a Speak Up grant from Healthwatch Sheffield (report available from the City of Sanctuary Sheffield or [Healthwatch websites](#)). After these events, we wanted to do further exploratory work on two main issues:

1. Many people did not understand how the NHS worked, or how to access its services. We wanted to see how we could help address this problem, especially with people new to the UK
2. Asylum seekers and refugees held very conflicting views about the advice they received on healthy living and keeping well from NHS professionals. We wanted to try out different approaches to giving advice and information, and see if they were effective.

We are grateful to Healthwatch Sheffield for providing us with additional funding to investigate these questions.

Aim

Our primary aim was to explore which kind of health and wellbeing advice and activities would be acceptable and enjoyable for asylum seekers and refugees, to inform future commissioning and provision of services.

We also aimed to trial run a workshop on how the NHS works and how to access its services, and assess the workshop's acceptability and impact.

What we did

We ran a 'Health and Wellbeing Event' at The Circle in Sheffield City Centre, and provided a range of activities:

- A workshop on how the NHS works and how to access its services (provided by HARP, the Health Access for Refugees Project, run by the Refugee Council)
- Information stalls and brief talks about common health problems and disabilities, when to seek help and how to take care of yourself. The talks were provided by the British Tinnitus Association, the Smile Squad (student dental practitioners) and Weston Park Cancer Awareness
- Taster wellbeing activities, e.g. yoga and world dance classes, stress management (provided by Solace, the specialist mental health charity)
- A healthy meal and healthy eating advice

Information and advice stalls were also provided on blindness and visual impairment, sexual health, mental health and dementia. Healthwatch staff attended and held a listening activity to find out what people liked and made them happy, what they were concerned about, and where they saw themselves in 2 years' time.

A separate report has been produced on this activity, available from Healthwatch Sheffield.

We evaluated the event by getting feedback from the participants about what they had learnt and what found most useful and enjoyable.

Participants were recruited by the charities involved and at the Sanctuary and the weekly Wednesday afternoon multi-agency drop-in for asylum seekers and refugees. A total of 62 people attended, of whom 40 were asylum seekers or refugees.

Light refreshments were available throughout the day and lunch was provided by Open Kitchen social enterprise, with healthy halal and vegetarian food provided. Meals could be packed up and taken away by participants who were fasting. The food helped to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere and motivated people to attend, but also provided ideas for cheap and tasty healthy meals.

Volunteer community interpreters were available at the event, so that everyone was able to join in and participate.

Findings

How satisfied were you with this event?

The participants were overwhelmingly positive about the event and what it had offered. Of the 28 people who responded to a brief questionnaire, all said they were either 'satisfied' (1 person) or 'very satisfied' (27 people) with the day.

Many people commented on how interesting the day had been, saying that they had learnt new things, enjoyed new activities and made new contacts and connections. The sessions on Tinnitus and how to access the NHS, Healthwatch, yoga and the food were especially welcomed.

Question: *How satisfied were you with this event?*

Comments from participants:

- It's very interesting and I am very satisfied
- Very interesting and really educative
- We need more events like this
- It was a great opportunity to meet new people and get new useful information
- Great activities and great food
- Very informative
- It was nice. I learnt about tinnitus and NHS. Am happy to have done some exercises
- Good atmosphere and helpful advisors
- Very interesting event today. I am glad I was part of the day, thank you for putting this event together
- Very useful, thing I never heard or didn't have a knowledge, also food was delicious
- Really pleased with the event. Useful and so good to meet a lot of other organisations
- Very satisfied
- I really enjoyed getting information about Tinnitus, and Sheffield Healthwatch and the yoga session. I love it so much.
- Was great to meet some of the refugees/asylum seekers and meet with new partners on how we can work together
- It was interesting

Has your knowledge of health and wellbeing increased as a result of attending this event?

25 people said they had learnt 'a lot' from the event, 2 people said they had learnt 'a little' and 1 person said they had not learnt anything at all. They specifically mentioned the talks on cancer and tinnitus, the relaxation session and the NHS.

Question: *Has your knowledge of Health and wellbeing increased as a result of attending this event?*

Comments:

- Is very good
- To a great extent
- Learnt to relax myself
- Cancer talk
- Talk about Cancer
- Very useful info
- Each time I come here there is always something new to learn about
- Yes - tinnitus talk. I got some leaflet. I have a problem with loud noise
- I am more aware of the NHS way of conduct and I am very sure I have learnt a lot today
- Useful thing for myself and my family
- Its important to take good care and somewhere to start is very very good
- A lot
- I am very aware of the importance of being watchful and care for my health and those around me
- It has widened my knowledge around refugees/asylum seekers and how they can be interested into activities
- I have learnt a few points

How useful was the workshop session?

Participants were asked about the workshop sessions. 23 said they were 'very useful', 4 said they were 'useful' and 1 said they were neither useful nor not useful. The dancing, exercise and meditation (or relaxation) sessions were mentioned: the information sessions on cancer and tinnitus were also seen to be very useful.

Question: *How useful was the workshop session?*

Comments:

- Is good workshop session
- I learnt and got advice on different voluntary and jobs in voluntary work. Thank you very much, I really appreciate many thanks
- I have learnt a lot of things that is going to help my family and me
- Participating in every session was useful
- Would recommend it to my friends
- Dancing and lunch
- Dancing, exercise and meditation
- About the cancer, it was something which was very touching and scary. I learnt a lot and it was very useful
- About the cancer, it was very useful
- Useful to get more information
- Tinnitus especially relevant to me
- This was a remarkable workshop and I hope lot of people have benefit from this today
- Really enjoyed and guide so much knowledge to be aware if it, Thank you forward

- anything like that in future
- Really enjoyed and pleased to come
- Useful
- Beautifully planned, everything was brilliant, can't wait for another event. Thanks so much
- They informed us with detailed info, and how we can contact services

What have you liked most about the event?

The question 'What have you liked most about the event?' was able to identify some activities that were particularly appreciated by participants, although 6 people said 'everything.' It was evident that the workshop on the NHS was particularly appreciated. There was also positive feedback about the mix or range of activities and the atmosphere at the event.

Question: *What have you liked most about the event?*

Answers:

- Learnt a lot of things
- Everyday
- Lecture on cancer and dental advice, and healthy living
- Everything
- Every part of the event has been very useful
- The information
- Yes, everything
- Everything
- Dental care
- Openness and conversation workshop
- Mix of different activities and organisations
- The range of activities
- Everything
- Range of topics and positive atmosphere
- About the NHS
- NHS workshop
- The talking - NHS talk, food and there was a reception
- The talks, stall and food
- Talking with participants/partners and making them aware of what we do and how we can work together
- Yoga, health talk, tinnitus

What have you not liked about the event?

There were 13 responses to the question, 'What have you not liked about the event?' All 13 respondents said there was nothing they had disliked. Similarly, of the 14 respondents to the question 'Is there anything that could have been done differently?' all 14 said Nothing, or No.

Any other comments?

The responses to the comments section were also very positive. 6 people said they had no other comments. The other comments included:

- I don't like staying home without doing anything
- Really enjoyed every session
- Amazing
- I have learnt many things. Thank you to all the members of staff for making this wonderful event
- Thank you Sheffield from A
- It was nice
- Want to know about more events
- No, but a very big thanks to you
- Very very pleased for been here and to have met so more people
- That was a great event, thank you

Conclusions

The feedback suggests that there is a big appetite for further health and wellbeing activities among the refugee and asylum community in Sheffield. Exercise activities like yoga and dance were very popular.

Accessible health information delivered by enthusiastic individuals was also very well received, and there is evidence from the comments that there is a clear need for this kind of information among refugees and asylum seekers. Both voluntary and statutory health organisations have a role to play in providing clear and accessible information for refugees and asylum seekers.

The workshop on understanding the NHS and how to access its services was particularly appreciated, and the need to offer it more widely was recognised.

Recommendations

From our experience of running the event, the feedback and findings we recommend the following actions:

- 1) Run regular workshops on how to access the NHS, especially for people new to the UK
- 2) Hold more healthy living days with different information and activities - to see what works and what people find most useful
- 3) Find resources to provide regular yoga, dance, walking and other physical activities to promote health and wellbeing
- 4) Publicise the 'Asylum Journey' (www.asylumjourney.org.uk) to health providers and the health-related voluntary sector. The website 'the Asylum Journey' includes information about health services and free wellbeing and other activities for asylum seekers and refugees in the city.

We would also encourage health providers and health related charities who want to reach out to under-represented groups to work in partnership with the charities supporting refugees and asylum seekers. We found a great eagerness to learn more about how to look after yourself and your family among the people who took part in the day.

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City of Sanctuary Sheffield

Winnie Lutakome and Michele Ward

About Healthwatch Sheffield

Healthwatch Sheffield is the city's local consumer watchdog for health and social care services. The organisation exists to help adults, children and young people to influence and improve the way health and social care services are designed and run in the city. Healthwatch Sheffield is completely independent from the NHS and Sheffield City Council.

About the #SpeakUp grants

In 2018/19 Healthwatch Sheffield ran a small grants programme called 'Speak Up'. Sheffield-based voluntary and community sector organisations were invited to apply for a small grant of up to £1,000 to run consultation and engagement activities. Organisations were asked to relate their projects to one of the aims and priorities in the 2018 – 2020 Healthwatch Sheffield '[Together for Good](#)' Strategy.

The programme was designed to enable local organisations and community groups to gather views and experiences of health and social care services from Sheffield residents, especially from those who do not traditionally have a voice. The aim is to ensure that health and social care decision makers in the city hear from a diverse range of people about their experiences of services.



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