

Increasing Diversity in Peer Support Volunteers in Glasgow City

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Aim

The Breastfeeding Network delivers infant feeding support in Glasgow in partnership with the Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership. The aim of this project was to collaborate to increase the number of ethnic minority families in the city taking up peer support. In addition, we also wanted to increase the diversity of the peer volunteers in the hope that parents might feel support was more relevant to them if the volunteer or staff member was someone from their own community or who spoke their preferred language.

Background and Situation

The funding for the work was generated from findings of research originally carried out by the HSCP to look at the breastfeeding support needs of the South Asian and Polish communities in Glasgow (1). This was based on research carried out by Glasgow Centre for Population Health on changes in breastfeeding rates among black and minority ethnic communities who would traditionally breastfeed but acculturated to the Scottish culture of lower breastfeeding rates the longer they were settled here.

The original research found that women from the South Asian and Polish communities reported that getting support from someone who understood the cultural barriers and challenges they might face with breastfeeding would make a difference to them. At the time there were very few minority ethnic peer supporters in Glasgow City. When the work was started we were unable to offer face to face support so we tested telephone peer support for parents alongside training new volunteers. The work was supported by a multi-agency working group with representatives from third sector organisations, health visiting, midwifery and health improvement.

Breastfeeding initiation in Glasgow City is around 63% with 28% of babies still being exclusively breastfed and 48% of babies getting some breastmilk at 6-8 weeks. Around 17% of the Glasgow City population are from minority ethnic groups. Glasgow City has high levels of deprivation and about 52% of children live in the 20% most deprived areas.

Process

The service:

Telephone peer support for up to four months offered to all mums discharged from hospital breastfeeding alongside delivering accredited peer support training to train new volunteers in Glasgow City.

Implementation:

- Key local organisations who worked with minority groups in the city were identified and links made in order that they could help to promote peer training opportunities to their service users.
- Service and peer training opportunities shared with partner organisations and local integration networks in order to widen the reach of the project.
- Awareness sessions were held with midwifery and health visiting staff to encourage them to let families know about the service and to identify women from minority ethnic backgrounds who might like to train as volunteers.
- Information about the training shared in other languages (Urdu, Punjabi and Polish). We also shared testimonials from existing volunteers in other languages. In all adverts about the training we highlighted our focus on increasing diversity in our volunteers and encouraged women with additional languages to apply. We were careful to always be clear that the training is delivered in English.

“ When you become a new mum, you can feel lonely at times. Becoming a mum during a pandemic can make you feel very isolated and lonely. Being in a new country, away from your close family and in the Covid19 times, can be an even more lonely experience.

I have experienced it myself and I know there are mums who are feeling the same. Who need a friendly person to talk about their concerns about newborn. There are many mothers who want to breastfeed their little ones, but give up due to lack of support. I joined BfN because I want to help women in similar situations, at least a bit. I want them to know that they are not alone, that they have the strength to raise their children according to their beliefs.

Breastfeeding is a great start for any newborn baby, and I don't want any mum to give up or get discouraged just because she doesn't know where to find support. For me, as a Polish woman living abroad, it was difficult to find out about the types of help and places where I can look for it here in Scotland when it comes to breastfeeding. I want other mums to have it easier.

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“ This group has been of huge help for me not only in regards with breastfeeding, but also has helped me to practice my language skills taking conversations with other group members. Moreover, it gave me endless number of information about breastfeeding tips and tricks.

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“ Zostałam wiele ujętą mamą, można czuć się czasem samotną. Zostałam mamą w czasie pandemii, można czuć się bardzo odizolowaną i samotną. Zostałam mamą w nowym kraju z dala od najbliższej rodziny i w czasach Covid19 może być jeszcze bardziej samotnym przeżyciem. Sama tego doświadczam i wiem, że wiele jest mam które czują to samo. Mam, które potrzebują przegadania ośoby do rozmowy o swoich troskach związanych z macierzyństwem. Jest wiele mam, które pragną zacząć karmić swoje małe pociechy, ale poddają się z braku wsparcia. Dołączyłam do BfN, bo chcę mieć odrobina pomocy kobietom w podobnej sytuacji. Proszę, żeby wiedziały, że nie są same, że mają w sobie siłę wychować dzieci według swoich przekonań. Karmienie pierśmą to wspaniały start dla każdego noworodka i nie chcę, by żadna mama poddała się czy zrezygnowała tylko dlatego, że nie wie gdzie znaleźć wsparcie. Dla mnie jako Polki mieszkającej na granicy trudne było zorientowanie się w rodzajach pomocy i miejscach, gdzie mogę tej pomocy szukać tutaj w Szkocji jeśli o karmienie pierśmą chodzi. Chcę, aby inne mamy miały łatwiej.

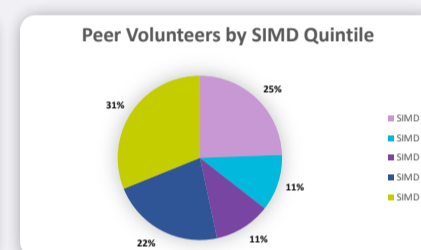
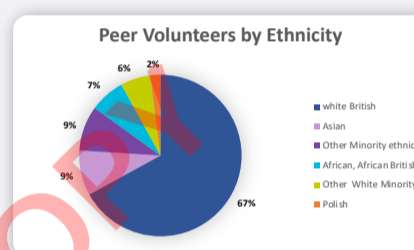
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Key learning and achievements

- We saw an increase in applications from women from minority ethnic backgrounds. Collecting demographic data from applicants and current volunteers helped us to offer places to women from underrepresented communities.
- Being able to start offering support in other languages - we now have around 13 volunteers that speak other languages and are happy to support women in these languages.
- We set up an online Muslim Mums group run by a volunteer who also speaks Urdu and we hope that this will soon become a face to face group.

Outcomes

- 7% of our volunteers are from Black backgrounds and 9% are from Asian backgrounds which is an increase from 2021.
- In total 24% of BfN peer volunteers in Glasgow are from minority ethnic groups.
- Our volunteers in Glasgow are able to support families in 12 different languages. Our volunteer badges now say what language our volunteers speak to encourage mums to ask for support in their preferred language (if available).



- We now have translated resources about the training and support.
- Around a quarter of our volunteers live in areas of Glasgow with the highest deprivation (SIMD quintile 1).

Next Steps

- We are now routinely collecting demographic data from all volunteers across Scotland which will help us measure progress towards increasing diversity.
- We can see that we are getting more applications from minority ethnic trainees but not all of them are completing the training or going on to volunteer. We would like to find out more about this and consider any extra support we could put in place. For example, developing a glossary of common words related to infant feeding and translating it into other languages. We would also like to test delivering training in venues that women from minority ethnic backgrounds are familiar with as this might help them feel more comfortable.
- We are keen to see diversity among volunteers lead to more diversity in our staff and leadership so will explore opportunities to support volunteers from ethnic minority groups to access development opportunities and paid roles if they wish.
- We are in the process of opening community based support groups across Glasgow City, focused on areas of high deprivation and areas with a high percentage of minority ethnic communities to try and expand the options for accessing infant feeding support in the area.



Further Information

Please scan the QR code for further information about BfN support in Glasgow.



References

Please scan the QR code.



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