

17. DCDP Case Study: Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre

Amina aims to support Muslim and Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic Women in Dundee aged over 50, through both group and one-to-one befriending. The client group stems mainly from the established community of Urdu/Punjabi-speaking economic migrants from Pakistan who settled in Dundee in the late 60s and 70s. Despite having lived in the UK for years, many of these women continue to face complex and multiple barriers to full and active social engagement. The project aims at providing women with access to reliable information which allows them to make better choices in relation to their health, as well as increasing their networks and reducing social isolation.

Nagina's story

Amina's Employability team received a referral from the Dundee Job Centre for a 52-year old woman called Nagina. At the Job Centre, Nagina had been told that she was at a risk of losing benefits after being assessed fit for work. With very little English, little work experience and no CV, Nagina was in a difficult position. Nagina was introduced to Amina's services, offering women the chance to develop new skills, meet other women and participate in a confidence-building activities in a safe, faith- and culturally-sensitive environment. Nagina was registered for conversation classes. The Job Centre agreed that participation in the befriending service as well as the English conversation classes would be sufficient to continue claiming benefits.

Nagina had survived an abusive marriage and widowhood; her health had deteriorated in recent years, and she told the team at Amina that, most days, she felt unable to leave the house due to debilitating migraine. She also suffers from arthritis and asthma which worsen during the winter months. Nagina's social circle was limited; she looked forward to visits from her grandchildren, but would have liked these to be more frequent. Apart from this, she met people when she could manage a trip to the mosque.

Initially, Nagina met other women in smaller groups, in locations she was familiar with. This step-by-step approach proved to be effective. As Nagina started to attend regularly, she appeared to become stronger and more assertive. She attended health sessions, yoga, walks and lunch clubs. Nagina also took part in a three-day workshop delivered by Amina's 'violence against women' team, which supported her in beginning to deal with her abusive past.

New developments

A number of the Amina group participants reported that they had experience with cancer; in some instances, it was the women herself who had survived cancer, and in others, women had either lost or had some caring responsibility of a relative with the disease. From listening to the women's thoughts and concerns, Amina came to see that the service could do more to support women experiences around cancer. The service might provide a platform for improving the representation of ethnic minority voices and experiences of cancer in the health sector.

Making a difference

Joint activities with other projects funded through the Dundee Community Development Programme have been positively received, including connections with the V&A regeneration programme, and the Dundee Repertory Theatre.

We know that the women sometimes have to make tough financial decisions about how their time and money are spent, but the Amina service is able to subsidise activities in order to make local facilities more accessible to the group.

Positive outcomes from the project include the fact that women are much less isolated, more confident and are learning new skills. The project lead has been key in facilitating and creating a safe space for women to participate and confidently engage with all aspects of the service and, indeed, go on to access other sources of support within Dundee.

Going forward the main concern will be the sustainability of the service and how Amina, as an organisation, can better support participants to become confident, independent and self-reliant.

**Lubaba Qasim, Amina
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