| **THIFF Forum Meeting Minutes: Faith & Mental Health** |
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| **Location:** | Online, Zoom |
| **Date:** | Monday 22 March |
| **Time:** | 2-4pm |

## **Welcome – Rev Alan Green, Chair**

Forum has been busy during pandemic, working to ensure the work faith communities in known and linked into work that the borough is doing. Successful work taking place.

New Equalities strand from Council, aiming to bring together various networks: BAME, Women, Disabled Persons, LGBT+ and Faith & Belief.

Home Office has been moving asylum seekers into borough – placing them in Limehouse Hotel, East London Hotel and student accommodation. The borough had not been informed but people made contact via faith setting. Borough has done good work in getting them registered with doctor surgeries and getting children into education. Happening in the more deprived areas across London.

Faith Covid Assistance Project – trying to engage with smaller faith settings that may not have contact at all. There is concern that small mosques/Pentecostal churches may not have sufficient info to open safely and to access the resources safely. Also working with Positive East that are engaged with BAME to build relationships and contacts.

Working with Abbas Mirza, Community Engagement Lead at Barts Health, responding to need of those in hospital during the pandemic – ensuring that faith communities could communicate with hospitals to explain needs of people. Developing work on lots of fronts – seeing need for family and friends contact centers and other areas outside of pandemic that can be communicated well through faith communities. Building good partnerships between faith and NHS.

## **Najnin Islam, Project Manager, & Shakila Ali, Community Connector: Community Mental Health Transformation Programme, East London NHS Foundation Trust.**

**Najnin Islam:**

* Ambitious programme to improve support for those on severe end of spectrum – serious mental illness.
* Guidance for improving support
* ELFT plan – passionate about improving boundaries between primary care and specialist services. Often not enough communication.
* Better integration between mental and physical health.
* Reducing health inequalities and improve outcomes for underrepresented groups.
* Community Connectors – help bridge gap between public and services.
* Improve integration with social care, CVS and NHS.
* Key principles: Experts by experience helping shape the project by taking part in meetings. Better coordination with social workers and involve carers more. No bouncing around between services - a ‘no wrong door’ policy. Genuine focus on what matters to service users (community connectors, are vital to this). Evidence based interventions.
* Blended teams – no working in silos, working holistically and with lots of different professionals working together and advising each other.

**Shakila Ali:**

* Also works for Women’s Inclusive Team.
* Role is to be the voice of the community
* In some communities’ mental health issues are not really spoken about due to stigma and fear.
* Focus on holistic aspects, other issues can cause mental health issues such as a lack of food for essentials e.g. food.
* Part of blended team working with nurses, physios, doctors etc. – looking at the person as one.
* Running workshops, breaking language barriers.
* Helping people to be heard without a fear of being labelled or medicalised. Something as small as housing repairs or accessing food bank can have a big detrimental impact on someone’s health.
* Aiming to work with faith settings to break taboos.

**Questions & Comments:**

Chair: A great opportunity to share resources that we have and to ensure that faith groups are tied into a response to mental health across Tower Hamlets.

Q: What illnesses does the term severe mental health illness include?

Najnin: For example, unstable bipolar disorder, personality disorders, severe depression, but many people are without a diagnosis so looking complexity rather than traditional diagnosis. Roles like Shakila are really helping. Checking in with people is important.

Q: What can faith settings do to help? My church support First Love Foundation but sure that people interested in helping.

Najnin: Faith networks are very important as support networks – some health professionals are not aware of what is on offer but the community connectors bridge between community and NHS. Faith groups should let the Community Connectors know of their offer.

Comment: Community Connectors should visit faith settings as it may get their ask over better in person.

Chair: It is an important role for the forum to help navigate – hard for secular organisations to know what faith communities are doing in response to someone vulnerable and needy.

Shakila Ali email: [shakila.ali3@nhs.net](mailto:shakila.ali3@nhs.net)

Najnin Islam email: [najnin.islam2@nhs.net](mailto:najnin.islam2@nhs.net)

## **Caro Smith, Development Manager, Breathing Space London at London Buddhist Centre**

* Health & Wellbeing project since 2004, secular project that runs mindfulness courses and retreats.
* Bespoke room at London Buddhist Centre, mindfulness is a tool that promotes positive mental health.
* Went online last May, meeting face to face was important but needed to serve people during the pandemic.
* Typical structure over three months – mixture of mindfulness, stress reduction, cognitive therapy.
* Wanted to address issues like staying well, developing resilience, acknowledge loss and look at gratitude and appreciation.
* Launched nature course and mindfulness.
* Resilience Training - special scheme for unpaid carers in Tower Hamlets & Hackney. Had a drop-in group pre pandemic – great for people sharing experiences. Retreats in Suffolk. Offers respite – carer duties intensified during pandemic. Also an online space for mediation and mindfulness. Carers have said that the connection has helped the reach out and have a lifeline, decided to do a phone service where team would have a rota to call to check in.
* Staying Well – guide to looking after yourself, benefits of mindfulness are compelling with evidence of mindfulness being equal to taking antidepressants. Own evaluation showed that 76% of people able to deal with situations more calmly. 70% better mood less stress.
* Mindfulness and men – men have high depression rates. Feedback is that they can share experiences of depression within the course. Social structures and cultural ideas can impede this.
* Take referrals from GPs. Good relations with Tower Hamlets Carers Centre. Running course for frontline workers in Newham. Two four-week courses, kindness behaviour training and mindfulness – run by GPs who are part of Buddhist Community.
* Running a bursary scheme for those in financial difficulty.

**Questions & Comments:**

Q: How would you describe a typical attendee or user?

Caro: We have very diverse attendees ranging from people who are stressed at work with low mood and depression.

## **Krzys Rycerz, Met Police**

* 243 hate crimes in last quarter – a 20% reduction.
* Majority offences race related.
* Hotspots – Bethnal Green and Whitechapel.
* Tuesday – many of the offences occur on this day – unsure why.
* 12-6pm most common time of these crimes.
* Spate of anti-Semitic graffiti across the borough, still looking for suspect, increased patrols, working with partners to solve the crime.

**Questions & Comments**

Comment: I am noticing an increase of purposefully placed litter in front of the synagogue – a regular occurrence.

Krzys: If you perceive it as a hate crime then please make sure it is reported.

## **Information Sharing**

Jan McHarry, THIFF steering group: Involved with Cornerstone bid for equalities partnership and a new model of decision meeting – interesting process. Also involved with Tower Hamlets Climate Change event last week – borough declared climate emergency two years ago, has been recording carbon emissions during this time. Slides and material will go on THIFF website when available.

Maryan Nur, Mind Tower Hamlets: Main project develops peers within community to be leaders – people that have had formal or informal diagnosis of mental health that want to contribute to community. Keen on taking mental health into community and into faith spaces. Email Maryan at: info@mithn.org.uk

**The next forum meeting is on Monday 10 May 2021 at 2pm and will be held online, focusing on Dying Matters Week, raising awareness of dying, death and bereavement. More information will be sent out soon.**