

REGIONAL ROUND-UP

Improving Understanding & Breaking Down Barriers

North Kirklees Learning Disability Ethnicity Group



North Kirklees comprises the towns of Dewsbury, Batley and Cleckheaton in West Yorkshire. The area has a significant black and minority ethnic population - with the 2001 Census identifying that 17% of the people are Asian or white Asian. In 2004, staff in the local Community Learning Disability Team (CTLDT) set up a small working group, called the Ethnicity Steering Group (ESG). The aim of this was to look at ways of improving services to Asian service users. The impetus for the group came in part from some key national documents (e.g. DH, 2001; Mir et al 2001). However, it was also a response to local concerns that (i) staff lacked knowledge and confidence when working with Asian families, and (ii) the resources available to them were often not appropriate to people's cultural or religious needs.

The ESG was launched in December 2004. It was made up of members of the CLDT, a representative from the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and a carer. Initially the group conducted two surveys. These looked at the uptake of services by Asian people with learning disabilities and the concerns of staff working with them. Following this, the group has implemented a range of initiatives aimed at building understanding, and improving services. It has also begun to focus on two new aims. These are to improve the relationship between services and local Asian organisations, and to encourage the latter to be more inclusive of people with learning disabilities. These new aims reflect an increased awareness that strong relationships are key to working successfully, and a growing confidence in challenging community organisations to play their part in supporting disabled people.

Throughout its work, the group has maintained a steady eye on the objective of improving outcomes for Asian service users. However, it has deliberately adopted a flexible approach - looking for opportunities and trying to make the most of them. The following are two examples of work the group has undertaken:

Workshop with Local Imams

An event was hosted with local Imams and other key people from the Asian community. The timetable included discussions about "What is learning disability?", "What services do we have for people with learning disability?", and "What support is available for people within the local community?" This event was a milestone in developing links with key people in the community, and improving understanding across the board. Afterwards an Imam wrote "Can I just congratulate and thank you for the wonderful and enlightening programme?" It was also instrumental in triggering

the establishment by local Asian community leaders of a new group called the “Hidaya Disability Group”, which includes amongst its aims making the community more inclusive to individuals with disabilities.

Talking Together Group

The Talking Together Group (TTG) involves staff, Asian people with learning disabilities and their carers. It meets bi-monthly for two hours, in various local community centres. Each meeting has a theme - often with an invited speaker. The theme is discussed separately by service users, carers and staff to ensure that everyone has an equal say. Everyone then comes together to give feedback and ask questions. Key points and unanswered questions are directed to the Learning Disability Partnership Board.

TTG provides a forum for everyone to learn and exchange ideas. Topics to date have included staff recruitment, direct payments and respite care. Service users and carers enjoy the group and appreciate the chance to have their say. Tariq Masaud, a carer, describes TTG “as a group that I really value attending. I have learned about many things and got to know many people really well, including professionals. The group provides me with an opportunity to have my say, without it I don’t know how I would be heard”. Staff have learnt that people respond positively to questions about their religion and culture, if they are asked with respect and in good faith.

Like many groups Talking Together has encountered challenges and we have needed to respond creatively. It has proven difficult for example to draw in female Asian service users and carers. In view of this, the group is now working to establish a separate Asian Women’s Network, so women can support one another and also feed their views into the process.

Current Position

The group has been very successful and received a good amount of recognition as a result. The work has been presented at various conferences and workshops and the Department of Health are now using it as an example of best practice. The group has now also formally become the ethnicity sub group of the Learning Disability Partnership Board for Kirklees.

References

Department of Health (2001) [Valuing People A New Strategy for Learning Disabilities for the 21st Century](#)

Mir G, Nocon A, Ahmad W and Jones L (2001) [Learning Difficulties and Ethnicity](#)
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