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Bristol and Avon Chinese Women's Group Group Work Peer Support Pilot

August 2016 - July 2017

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Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership of organisations working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them to live fulfilling lives. In Autumn 2015, BAB began to commission sixteen pilot projects as part of the Group Work Peer Support Service. These pilots tested different methods of group work and peer support in tackling loneliness and isolation.

Group work and peer support use peers to help people focus on their assets, abilities and potential routes to recovery and general wellbeing. It mobilises the insights and empathy of people who share similar problems or experiences to support their peers, in this case regarding loneliness and social isolation.

This report provides an overview of the pilot project delivered by Bristol and Avon Chinese Women's Group (BACWG), including their successes, challenges and learning. In line with BAB's 'test and learn' approach, this report will highlight key points of learning and advice which may be useful for other projects within Bristol Ageing Better or the other thirteen Ageing Better areas funded by the Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme.

Project overview

Bristol and Avon Chinese Women's Group (BACWG) delivered 24 cookery sessions over a 48 week period. A different recipe was cooked each week, from a wide variety of cultures, enabling participants to learn about different cultures and to expand their cooking skills. Sessions were led by older volunteers, with participants encouraged to lead future sessions in order to improve their confidence and share their knowledge.

BACWG worked in partnership with Dhek Bhal, Bristol Black Carers and Bristol Multi Faith Forum to find participants for this project, as it was open to all BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities. They also distributed flyers in a variety of community centres, libraries, cafes and leisure centres in St Paul's and Easton, as well as promoting the pilot during other events they were hosting during October 2016 – January 2017.

Participants

In total, 20 participants provided demographic information. Of these, 10 were female (50%), 9 were male (45%), and 1 chose not to provide this information (5%). 18 participants (90%) reported that their current gender identity was the same as at birth, 1 participant

(5%) reported that it was different and 1 person chose not to provide this information (5%).

Ages ranged from 42 to 85, with an average age of 68. 16 of these participants were from a Chinese background (80%), 1 was from another Asian background (5%), 1 was African (5%), 1 was White English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British (5%), and 1 was from another White background (5%).

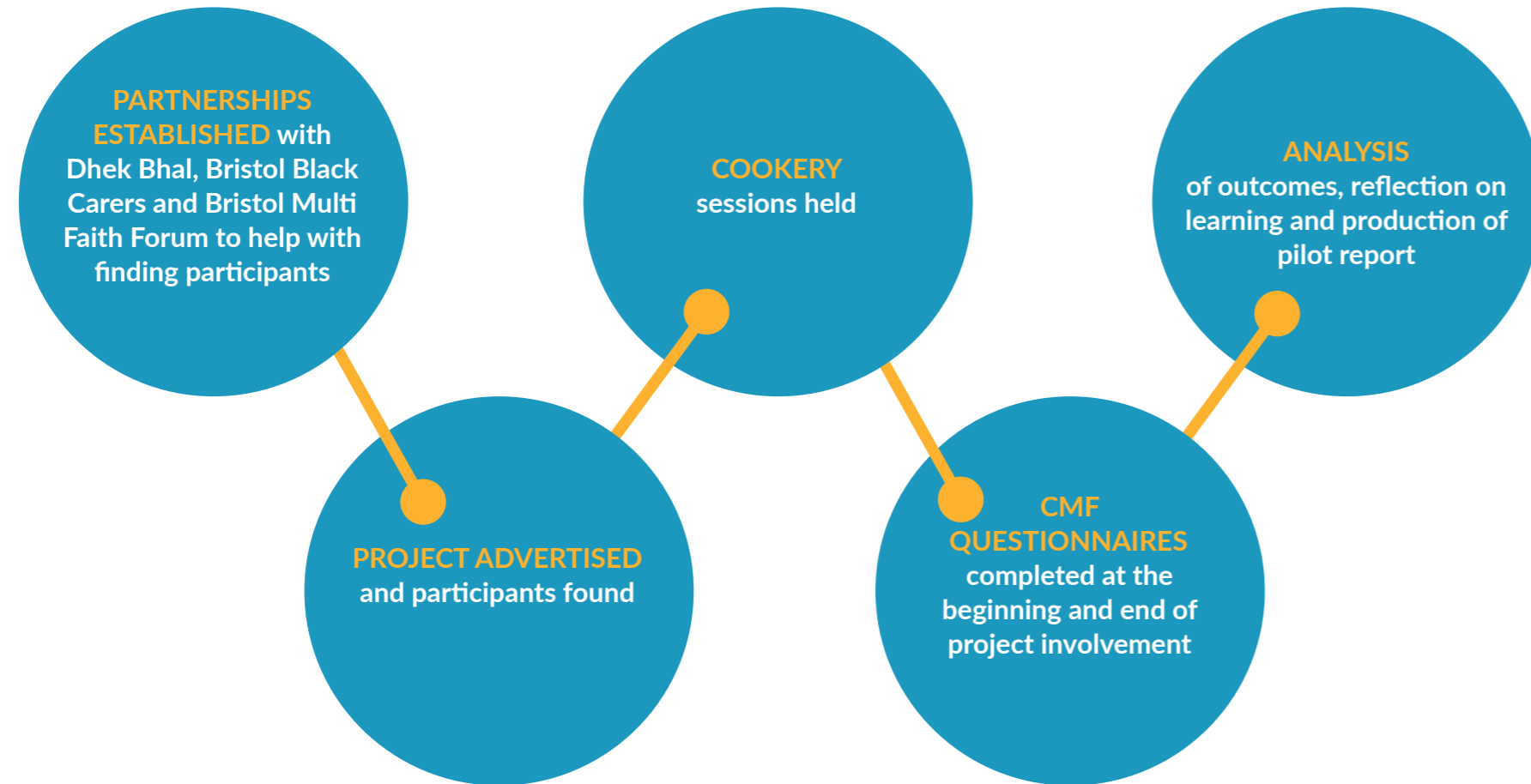
3 participants were Christian (15%), 3 were Buddhist (15%), 2 had no religion (10%), 1 had another religion (5%) and 11 chose not to provide this information (55%). 17 participants reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual (85%), while 3 people chose not to provide this information (15%).

In terms of living arrangements, 7 participants lived alone (35%), 4 lived with their spouse or partner (20%), 8 lived with family (40%), and 1 person chose not to provide this information (5%).

6 participants reported having a long-standing physical or mental illness or disability. 0 participants looked after or provided special help to someone who is sick, disabled or elderly.



Project process



Project successes

English language skills:

- **Language diversity:** In addition to these outcomes relating to loneliness, isolation and wellbeing, this project also provided participants with the opportunity to improve their English communication skills. Participants came from a diverse range of BAME communities, meaning that the shared language was English even though this was not a first language for most participants and many could not speak it fluently.
- **Communication:** They improved their English through communicating with each other and also by reading recipes and food packaging labels.

Sharing learning with others:

- **Informative:** Most participants informed BACWG that they learnt something new from each session such as a new food, a new cooking method or information about the history of the food and related countries.

- **Sharing at home:** 95% of the participants tried to cook the food they learned at home and shared with their families and friends.

Finding participants:

- **Community organisations:** It worked well to find participants, particularly those from other BAME communities, through the help of other community organisations.
- **Word of mouth:** Some of the older people who had attended BACWG activities in the past helped to spread the word about this pilot project, and brought newcomers with them to almost every activity session.
- **Increasing over time:** It also worked well for current participants to help find other older people to take part. Some posted photos of the activity on their personal social media pages, which helped to attract other older people in their network to participate. Others invited their neighbours to join.

Project successes (continued)

Working in partnership with other organisations:

- **Volunteer tutors:** Working in partnership with other organisations to find participants helped BACWG to find volunteer cookery tutors from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Future partnerships:** It also led to increased partnership working beyond this pilot project, for example BACWG have started discussions with Dhek Bhal about exchange visits between their elders in the future. They are also planning to hold a carers information day together with Bristol Black Carers.

Feedback and coproduction:

- **Session delivery:** The theme of each cookery session was designed by the older people, who also volunteered to lead the sessions. Some participants used to work in the catering industry and could offer great support to the other participants by running these activities. By leading a session and sharing their cookery skills, it helped participants to feel more confident.

- **Marketing coproduction:** Older people also contributed to the project by designing the poster and marketing materials and by giving their feedback during each session so that future activity sessions could be tailored to meet their needs.

Increased awareness of different cultures:

- **Cross-cultural:** Participants were encouraged to learn about different cultures through cooking a wide range of recipes. This pilot was open to a variety of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities, not just those from Chinese backgrounds, meaning that participants could learn about each other's cultural background.
- **Public awareness:** BACWG used the pilot to raise public awareness of different cultures through posting photos on social media (Facebook and Wechat) after each cookery session. The mayor of Bristol joined one of the cookery sessions, which also helped to raise public awareness. Furthermore, BACWG showcased this project at the Bristol Ageing Better Loneliness summit in May 2017, from which a video was made and uploaded to the BACWG Youtube channel.

Case study: Mrs H

Mrs. H lives with her disabled husband. She started to have early signs of dementia about two years ago. Her daughter who is also over 55 has to cope with their care and her two part-time jobs.

Her daughter heard all the good things about the cookery sessions from her friends and saw the pictures through the social media so she brought her parents to these activities. All of them enjoyed themselves. They all made some new friends. Mrs. H said, "I enjoy the lovely food, nice people and the friendly environment. Some Hong Kong Street food has brought back a lot of my early memories in Hong Kong. I feel happier and less isolated after I shared my life experiences with others". She also helped with some preparation work like doing dish washing and cleaning the table, etc. The daughter was also able to speak to other carers to reduce her stress, loneliness and isolation.

Case study: Mr Z

Mr Z was a retired Chef. After he retired, he had felt a loss of purpose and stayed at home on his own all the time. He was encouraged by his friend, who is our member, to join our activities.

He commented, "I am not particularly a fan of food, but I extremely enjoy chatting with other participants and sharing our backgrounds and stories, so I become a regular attendee now, and feel less lonely and isolated. Also, I was encouraged by other participants and BACWG's staff to deliver a session. I was pleased that I could still make a contribution to the community in this way."

Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

Finding older people to participate in the project:

- **Through current participants:** If the project has a drop-in style, then it can work well to find new participants through those who are already involved. For example, asking them to bring a neighbour. If they use social media, you could ask them to post photos of the project or to share your page amongst their network.

Working in partnership with other organisations:

- **Partnership working:** If a project involves working in partnership with other organisations, it can be useful to think about the other ways your organisations can work together beyond this project. For example you might be able to help each other with events or sharing information.



It can work well to ask current participants to bring a neighbour or acquaintance with them to future sessions.

Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them live fulfilling lives.

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