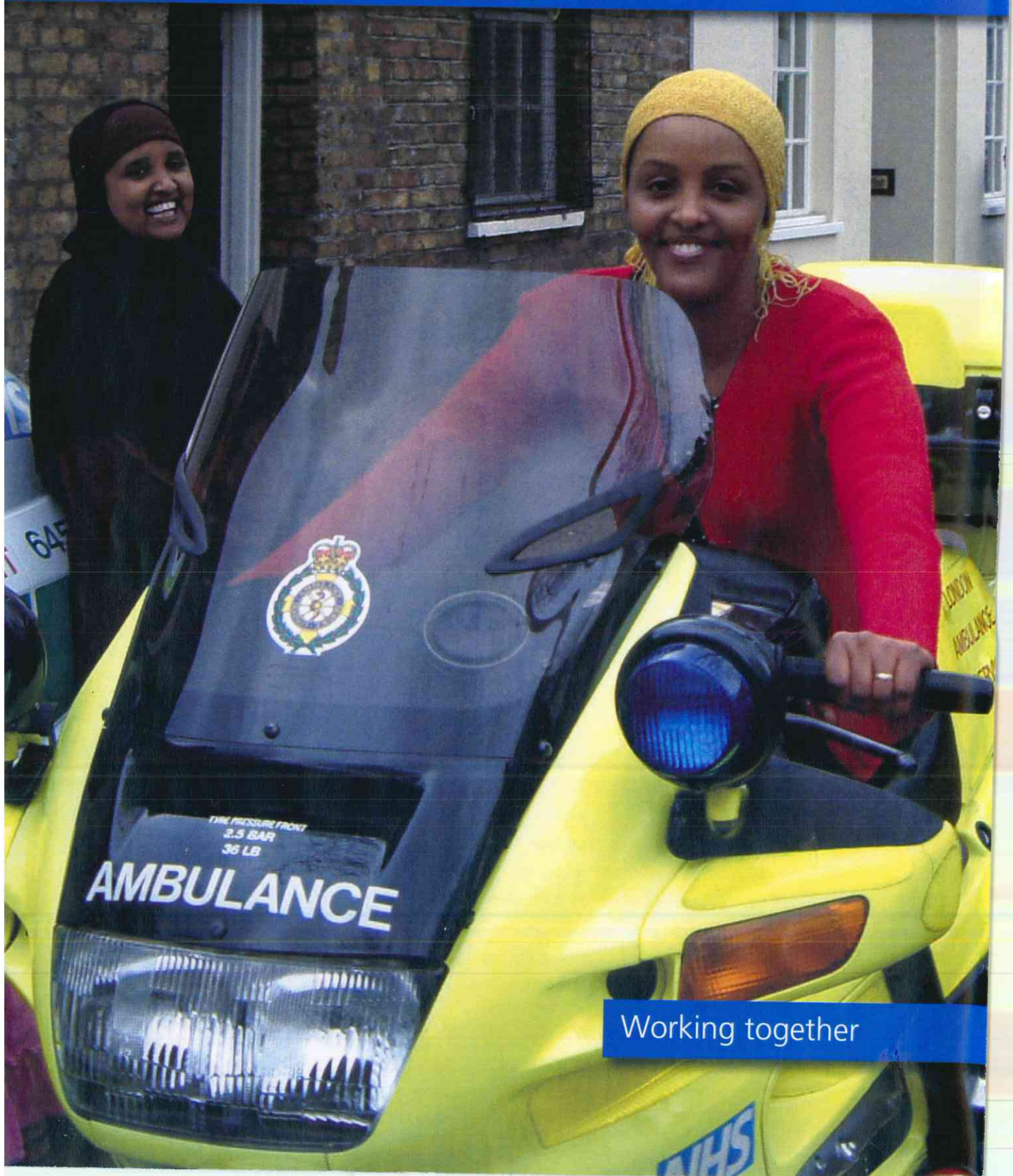# London Ambulance Service

NHS
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Community Engagement Pack

Working together

Working together

Front and back cover:
Women from the Daryeel Health Somali Community group take the opportunity to meet ambulance staff and view vehicles during a Project Harmony workshop in South East London.

London Ambulance Service NHS

NHS Trust

Community Engagement Pack

Contents

Working together

This pack was originally put together by the London Ambulance Service's diversity team to address the need for engaging with communities of all types across Greater London. It has been recognised, however, that the pack forms a useful tool that should be shared with ambulance services across the UK, allowing a greater number of people (both staff and public) to benefit from structured community involvement.

This pack has been adapted so that it acts as a generic guide, designed to assist staff in overcoming initial community barriers by providing advice for getting started on this important work.

These guidelines are not meant to be followed strictly, but can be used as a reference or source of inspiration when planning community events.

Introduction

Ambulance services provide vital emergency health care to a public across a given region, and that diverse public is made up of many communities. The traditional service has been roughly 'one size fits all', but this approach is no longer correct, especially in a country that is becoming increasingly multi-cultural.

Within a National Health Service that is being urged constantly to place the patient at the centre of its planning for the future, it is necessary to grasp the challenge – and opportunity – of developing responses and services which are more appropriate to the varying needs of the communities we serve.

To do this, we need to understand the communities we serve. To understand the communities we serve, we must get closer to them. To get closer, we must engage more with those communities.

Community engagement is not always easy. It is a relatively new concept for most ambulance trusts, making it a learning curve for those involved and there are often cultural and language difficulties along the way. This should not be a deterrent as there will be organisations in your area who can assist with translation and provide interpreters.

Ambulance services have traditionally tended to be inward looking, but there is a need to change and look outward into the community and work more closely with patients, the public and fellow health and social care professionals. All NHS Trusts should have a designated senior manager responsible for Patient and Public Involvement (PPI), to co-ordinate PPI activity and ensure the organisation works towards meeting the wide-ranging requirements of the Healthcare Commission's standards. This person, or team, can be a useful resource.

Community engagement will give you the opportunity to improve communication with the people in your region, including the more marginalised communities and hard to reach groups. Not only will this work enable them to understand how you operate as a service and help them to appreciate the constant pressures faced by those who work in an ambulance service, but it is also an ideal opportunity for staff to learn more about how different communities view the ambulance service and subsequently respond to misunderstandings. There is often confusion regarding when to call for an ambulance and some ethnic groups wrongly believe that they must pay to use the service, which deters them from dialling 999.

Engaging successfully with communities will have many benefits. As well as assisting in improving the quality of patient care that is given, it will have a positive impact upon attitudes and behaviours of those involved. Community engagement can also provide personal empowerment, confidence and self-esteem for staff taking part and give them a better understanding of the community they work in.

What is a community?

'People living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, background or nationality.'

Cambridge Dictionary definition

Communities are as difficult to define as people. Just as we might consider our own identities as multi-dimensional, with developments occurring in different aspects of our lives at different times and rates, so might we consider the nature of communities. For example, a person may describe himself as a lawyer who is married, African-English, Catholic, a father of two, a football fan, a musician, a member of the local residents' association and an environmentalist. At a given time, he is likely to be more involved in one aspect of his life and less so in another. Likewise, communities are unique, with their own histories, beliefs, personalities and combinations of organisations, more or less active at different times and whose activities affect each other.

Mother and child from a Project Harmony workshop

What is community involvement?

Community involvement is about the active inclusion of people in issues which affect their lives. It happens by harnessing the skills, knowledge and experience of individuals and communities and enabling them to grow and change according to their own needs and priorities. Community involvement engages people as users of services or citizens with rights and so community involvement must therefore be integrated within organisations' own strategies and into the wider strategies which affect health. It requires the following:

- **Community capacity building**: this means recognising and/or finding out what the community has to contribute to the common agenda and how it can be supported in participating fully in the process.

- **Participation**: this means ensuring that people and organisations are fully engaged from the earliest opportunity in all stages of service development and planning.

- **A 'whole system' approach**: this means taking an approach which crosses service and agency boundaries, ensuring that organisations respond appropriately to issues which arise from community involvement.

'Whole system' approach to community involvement

A 'whole system' approach means creating a situation where plans for community involvement can be developed and implemented in an integrated and inclusive way (Pratt et al 1999; White et al 2000). Where the strategy for community involvement is too complex for any one organisation to manage, a whole system planning approach can be employed at a multi-agency level. It requires partnership working and getting a whole range of diverse interests, knowledge and perspectives – from all involved – to develop strategies to solve problems or design better futures. This means including people who represent, or can bring the perspectives of, the whole range of stakeholders who have an interest in the topic at hand. It provides both the 'larger picture' and the opportunity for people to work together so that any gaps in their knowledge can be filled.

Community involvement and changes in practice

Engaging in community involvement will lead to changes in a number of different areas of work and not just to practice. Community involvement can lead to changes in organisational working or structure and it is important, therefore, to understand how to manage the changes that might occur. It helps to be able to describe what changes have occurred through community involvement. Continually monitoring and evaluating what you are doing will help, but more importantly, you need to continually reflect on what is happening so that an appropriate response is made.

Community involvement and health

Can community involvement lead to improvement in a community's health? It can certainly be a step towards that goal. It can be used to help local people to do the following:

- Obtain better access to information about health and community issues
- Identify and articulate their own health needs
- Set up and run community facilities, events and activities
- Strengthen community networks, relationships and support
- Promote a stronger sense of 'community'
- Develop self-esteem, confidence and personal skills

Community involvement can be used to improve organisations through:

- Improved planning of services
- Better targeting of services
- Increased take-up of services
- Greater levels of commitment and motivation
- Greater shared responsibility and partnership in local provision

Getting started

Getting started can seem very daunting, so it is best to break the task down into smaller steps.

Mothers from the Somali women's group learning resuscitation skills for infants and babies

Step1:
What are you aiming to achieve?

It is not possible to be everything to everybody, so it is best to adopt a rational approach. Start small, define what you want to achieve and do not take on too much. Research is the key.

Look around your working environment to see what engagement work is currently taking place. It may be that your own staff already have a high level of awareness and are involved in local schools or club visits. A point to remember - working with schools may not be at the level of community engagement needed to achieve real results in improving

access to services. Are there any projects underway by other NHS or government agencies?

Who are your local communities? The most visible community may not necessarily be the one requiring the assistance. This is why researching is vital. A good place to start is your local Primary Care Trust (PCT). The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) office should have good links and knowledge of the communities, including health issues around ethnicity and culture. Once you have identified possible communities conduct a 'health needs assessment', sometimes called a 'gap analysis', to help you prioritise your project.

The voluntary and community sector

The voluntary and community sector can provide a route to the wider community and to hard-to-reach groups. They are also the key source of good practice and innovations in community involvement. In order to engage the sector in partnership for a community involvement exercise, it is necessary to understand its particular characteristics:

- The sector is mainly value-driven
- The organisations in the sector have a wide range of stakeholders with their own perspectives on an issue
- There is a culture of involvement and participation
- There is a wide range of activities undertaken
- Many are well-networked.

Your research will ensure you can answer the following questions:

- Are your aims clear to everyone?
- Are they informed by external drivers and clinical governance priorities?

and most importantly...

- Has the community been involved in choosing them?

SMART objectives

Now you must decide on a clear and *SMART* set of objectives.

Why *SMART*?
    Specific
    Measurable
    Achievable
    Realistic
    Time-based

SMART is a tool used in managing projects and people. Goals must focus on specific actions so try to avoid being too general or vague in your project.

An example of a vague goal could be:

'To engage with the local community and raise awareness'

This example does not explain which community you will be engaging with, what subjects need raising and who needs to be made aware - the community or your own staff? In fact, it is two goals written as one.

Rewritten using SMART it might look something like this:

'To establish a project with the Somali refugee community and Lambeth PCT in the borough of Lambeth.

'The project will develop awareness of ambulance staff to the needs of the Somali community within Lambeth and influence the quality and appropriateness of the ambulance service provided.'

If your objectives meet all the aspects of SMART, the project will be easier to follow and assess since it has been properly defined.

Key Points to Remember

- Involve communities from the very beginning and at all stages.

- Before you start, gain the enthusiasm and commitment of all those who will have to redesign the way they do things.

- Make sure that frontline staff and managers (including union representatives) know your plans and will support any findings to improve practice.

- Make sure you learn as you go, so that you can change things accordingly next time.

- Provide appropriate resources and support to all involved.

Step 2:
How will you achieve your aim?

Consider the involvement approach that is most likely to help you achieve your aim. It must be acceptable to all those involved. It is important that all those involved feel that they are donating their time for a worthwhile cause.

- Have you decided who to involve – e.g. community members, staff?

- Who do you need in the team to do this? (consider skills)

- What role will each staff member play?

You will need to check whether the community members and your staff want to be involved on a continuous basis. They may prefer to undertake a specific role for a specific project and then hand the role over to someone else for the next event. Some may need some skills or other input in order to maximise their ability to participate. It is important to build relationships and reduce anxieties. Sharing knowledge and experiences can prove a fertile ground for innovation and creativity.

Make it clear to the community members that their commitment and input is greatly appreciated, that their involvement is treated seriously, and that it will be followed through to achieve results.

Step 3:
What resources do you need?

The three key elements you will need to consider are:

1. Time
2. Funding
3. Resources and support

Time
Communities and staff who would like to get involved will need to make a time commitment. You will need to make staff available from their normal duties as time is a precious commodity. There may also be naturally occurring 'life cycles' for different aspects so it is helpful to try and identify these.

Funding
It is important to make sure you have adequate funding to support your project. These expenses may be for translators, venue hire, advertising, catering and even crèche facilities, as well as staff cover and time.

Resources and Support
The resources and support needed for the community members and staff involved in the project should be clearly identified and steps should be taken to ensure that it is made available. It would be helpful to nominate an officer who will take responsibility for this.

Step 4:
What arrangements need to be made?

Once decisions have been made about the correct approach to use, and the resource issues have been addressed, it is important to make practical arrangements.

Make sure that everybody involved has been informed and is kept up to date. You must be clear about who is leading any particular initiative and they must be given appropriate support to undertake this extra role.

Meetings and workshops will need careful planning to ensure people are available to attend. Don't forget, time to reflect, share and learn is an integral part of the planning process.

The four Rs of working together
Remit
- Does the group have clear terms of reference? *(objectives, aims and scope)*
- Does everyone have a copy?
- Has the meaning been discussed so that everyone has the same understanding of what they are there to do?
  (if not, people may be working in different directions and working at cross purposes)

Role
- Is each member clear about their particular role?
- What contribution and skills does each person think they are able to bring to the project?
- Do other people understand what your role is?

(People may make assumptions about the roles of each group member based on their job title, or the group/organisation that the person belongs to. Be clear about whether a person is a representative of an organisation or whether they are bringing their own individual perspective to the discussions)

Relationships

- Does the group feel like a working team?

- Do people share a common purpose and goals?

- Do you know each other as people, or just as strangers in a team bound by your roles?
  (this will make a difference to how open and honest you all are about the issues faced)

Responsibilities

- What is the group responsible for?
  (see terms of reference above)

- Is the group clear about issues of responsibility or is it left to the chair person?

- Does the whole group take responsibility for seeking user views, putting them on the agenda, and ensuring that members have sufficient information for discussions and decision making?

- How are decisions implemented?

- Is the group clear about how their decisions are fed into the wider change agenda within the ambulance service, community health and PCT strategy?
  (It is a good idea to map out the lines of communication within your group)

Step 5:
How will you create improvement?

Having identified where changes might lead to improvement, you need to test them out in practice. It is sensible to keep them small and implement them quickly.

Community members should continue to be involved throughout all stages of the project process. Think of the project as a continuous partnership involvement, and not merely as one with a beginning, middle and end. It has to be sustainable in normal working practice after the initial work has been completed. Simple measures are important to the success of the project, and should be planned from the beginning.
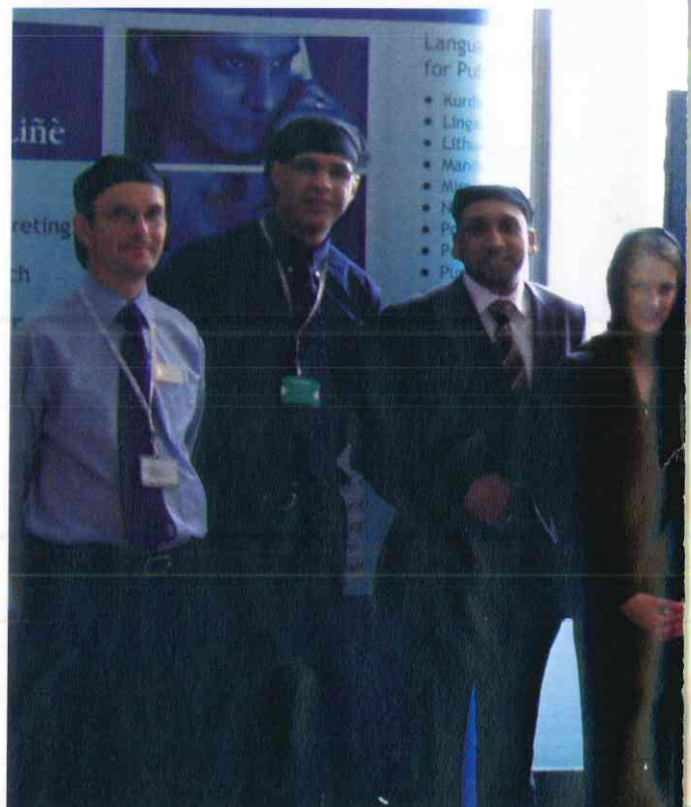
Step 6:
How will you evaluate and inform?

It is import to evaluate what has been done. Measures to show how effective you have been in creating improvements should be built into the improvement process itself.

Regular checks on the project are important from the perspective of all the members. Reflecting on these will strengthen the learning and involvement for the future.

Finally, at regular intervals, check that the current priorities and activity are still relevant. Go back to the first steps and see whether you are still aiming to achieve what you set out too. Does it need adjusting due to a change in circumstances? Involve all the members in this process.

Consider using the 'Significant Event Audit' process.

Below is a visual aid that puts the above steps on a clock face…

London Ambulance Service, Language Line and British Heart Foundation staff formed the presentation team for the public launch of the DVD Cardiac Arrest at the North London Brent Sikh Centre

Techniques and approaches used to involve, engage and improve

We need to explore different ways that bring about improvement through the engagement and involvement of local diverse communities.

Patient involvement across the NHS is complex and challenging, is embedded in policy and statutory requirements, and therefore should not be looked at as 'flavour of the month'. When carried out correctly and with integrity it can bring real benefits to communities, patients and staff alike.

Members from the Sikh Centre talking about arranging Basic skills classes

Below are some recommended techniques:

The Critical Incident / Significant Event. This is a fairly unstructured way of listening to a community member and allowing the 'interviewee' flexibility to talk about their views. You describe the scope of the improvement project by outlining the area you wish to cover in the session.

Q: What is a critical incident?
A: An action or inaction that causes an opinion to be formed.
A: An environmental or other factor that causes an opinion to be formed.

These sessions should be recorded with the person's permission, in order to make an accurate transcription of the interview.

Interviews have a typical length of one hour.

When to use it?

- To identify where perceived problems come from

- To find out how common the problem is

- As an introduction involving communities and staff in projects who have little knowledge of this type of involvement.

Drama and role play techniques

Drama is a useful way to examine most themes. It can be especially effective in building group cohesion, individual confidence and communication skills. Through a range of techniques such as still images and improvisation, drama can be used to stimulate discussion on issues that concern the group. Other ways that drama can be used are: role playing as part of interviews or focus groups; discussing plays that a group has watched together; acting out a play or scene relevant to the group; using storytelling as a springboard for enactment; and asking groups to devise their own plays about specific themes. Drama can also be used for raising personal and sensitive issues.

Facilitation of drama in this way would need to take into consideration the fact that powerful emotions may be released in this process, and care needs to be taken in planning support for participants. It should also be borne in mind that some people may be put off the activity or involvement if they feel under pressure to 'perform' or 'act'.

Focus groups

A focus group is an informal group of people who share common characteristics, who meet and share their experiences about a specific subject or topic. Group members can be recruited from a variety of agencies: voluntary, statutory, heath care professionals and self help.

Focus groups usually last from one to two hours. They are facilitated and use prepared questions and themes relating to the topic.

Why use them?

- To find a wide range of experiences around specific topics with various members of the community and staff.

- To find new information from the participants' views.

Tips

1. Establish how you will fund the event.

2. Find a comfortable, neutral venue which is accessible to all the participants. (Not just location but also time of day or weekday)

3. Check beforehand to see if members of the group need additional support e.g. translator or sign language interpreter (see Involving people with disabilities).

4. Provide culturally appropriate refreshments.

At the meeting

Make a record of the meeting, using a flip-chart.

Explain what will happen after the meeting.

An audience may turn out to be hostile – you will need to consider how to deal with 'worst case scenarios'.

How can you prevent the event being dominated by articulate individuals or an active minority whose views may overwhelm those who are less articulate?

Presentations at public meetings are not always the best way of conveying information; you need to keep presentations to a minimum to leave more time to encourage exchange. How can you make the event as participatory as possible?

This final section looks at some further issues you will need to consider when planning a strategy for involving the community. We look in particular at what you should consider when you are working with particular groups of people.

Involving black and minority ethnic communities

There are obvious issues that need to be taken into account when consulting with black and minority ethnic communities, e.g. language, lack of confidence, disenchantment, actual and perceived racism. Any involvement strategy also needs to recognise culturally specific issues. Some points to consider when trying to involve the black and minority ethnic communities are:

- Recognise that there might be a lack of established networks.

- Make use of established community groups.

- Understand language and cultural needs.

- Establish links between community and religious leaders.

- Be aware of how information is presented.

- Contact people who don't belong to any particular organisation or network.

Paediatric resuscitation techniques being taught to woman from the Daryeel Health Somali Community group

Involving older people

Older people are often more isolated than others in the population and may lack information and knowledge about services or rights.

Some points to consider when trying to involve older people are:

- Consider the appropriateness of certain methods for involvement, for example, questionnaire or telephone interviews may elicit a poor response.

- Be aware of the needs of people with disabilities or who are frail or housebound.

- Contact service providers and groups that work with older people.

Involving disabled people

It may be surprising to find that many disabled people have little contact with agencies. Additional effort will need to be focused on reaching them. Some points to consider when trying involving disabled people are:

- Form links with self-help organisations, advocacy groups, carers' forums, special schools and colleges.

- Be conscious of particular information needs (Braille, visual and audio).

- Take account of carers' needs.

- Respect people's independence.

Frequently asked questons

Q: How can we engage communities from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds?

A: Make use of contacts within their communities, such as healthcare workers, especially link workers. They are trained to communicate as well as being part of the community.

Be prepared to go out and meet them, rather than them coming to you. Use local community centres to hold workshops.

Be sensitive to cultural and religious issues. Cultural calendars will help inform you of major festivals (available from the Ambulance Service Association) or the Ambulance Service Association Cultural Awareness Information Handbook.

Advertise in places where people go on a regular basis, such as shops or community centres. Make sure the benefits of involvement are clear.

Q: Do I need ethical approval?

A: Generally speaking, if you are only conducting 'customer satisfaction' type work, this does not need approval. If you are using patients' records in any way (including using their records to contact them) you do need ethical approval. The best option is to check with your Clinical Audit and Research Team who will advise you whether you need ethical approval and, if you do, they will help you to obtain it.

Q: How do we decide who to involve?

A: First be sure of what you are trying to accomplish.

Chinese couple taking part in a role play exercise on "how to call 999" during a workshop at their community centre in the heart of London's China Town.

Useful websites

Database of individual patient experiences
www.dipex.org

NHS Modernisation Agency:
www.wise.nhs.uk

NHS Modernisation Agency Clinical Governance Support Team:
www.cgsupport.org

Strengthening Accountability:
Go to http://www.dh.gov.uk
and type 'strengthening accountability' into the search facility.

The National Centre for Involvement
www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk

Useful reading

London Ambulance Service Ethnic Health and Cultural Awareness Information Handbook.

NHS Modernisation Agency Improvement Leaders' Guides.

Project Harmony, London Ambulance Service.

References

Pratt J et al (1999), *Working Whole Systems*. King's Fund, London

White et al (2000), *Community Matters, A guidance pack on community involvement*.
HAZ Camden & Islington Health Action Zone

Credits

A child receives her emergency life support certificate after attending a Project Harmony work shop for the Vietnamese Woman's group in south east London.

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