



Sharpen Her: The African Women's Network

An Anti-Stigma Project Case Study

At A Glance

- 20 African women recruited and trained as mental health ambassadors to initiate mental health conversations and encourage help seeking behaviours
- Exhibition of the learning (via story telling and artwork) showcased at International Women's Day 2021 event in collaboration with the South Women's Health Network



"I have learnt not to make assumptions that because someone has a mental illness they cannot think or comprehend things. It's important to listen and not just suggest they take a pill"

Adeola: Mental Health Ambassador

Background

Sharpen Her: The African Women's Network are an organisation working with women from African backgrounds in Glasgow as a community that experiences disadvantage on the basis of sex and race. Members of the group are predominantly refugees and asylum seekers. The African community operates from a culture in which mental health is not talked about therefore any illness thereof will be classed as taboo. As such shame, embarrassment and ignorance hounds the community and thereby limits help seeking. Creating safe spaces provides an opportunity to challenge some of the misconceptions attached to mental health, can develop understanding, help recognise the impact experiences can have on mental health and ultimately enable women to seek help for their mental health.

Methods

20 women were recruited as Mental Health Ambassadors to initiate mental health conversations in their community and encourage help seeking behaviours. One to one Cognitive Behavioural Therapy taster sessions were available to those women seeking help from trained therapists (network members) at the beginning and end of the project. The women expressed the importance of having a therapist from the same community who can identify with their culture. Using creative outlets the Ambassadors developed stories and art work to demonstrate their new understanding of mental health.

Outcomes

Benefit One

Increased awareness and understanding of mental health in African Women

Benefit Two

Mental Health Ambassadors reported increased confidence in discussing mental health and signposting to other supports

Benefit Three

Reports of improved mental health and wellbeing