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MODEL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH MINORITY ETHNIC FAMILIES IN A RURAL SETTING

Celebrating the increased diversity of cultures on the Western Isles using food, dance/music & dress

Rationale for proposal

In response to Scottish Executive policy relating to inequality and diversity, Western Isles NHS have developed a Diversity Strategy, a sub-group of that being a multi-agency Racial Equalities Group, which is committed to delivering five major strands of policy (based on the HDL) that all NHS organisations are expected to deliver on:

- Energising the Organisation
- Demographic Profile
- Access and delivery
- Human Resources
- Community Development

This proposal intends to use an innovative way of producing policy requirements using community development methodology and ultimately share awareness with the different cultures that reside on these Islands.

Aim of the proposal

The strategic aim of the project is *to improve community relations through engagement and dialogue not only with the indigenous community but also involving in particular ethnic minority communities on the Western Isles – facilitate greater sensitivity and integration to multiple identities.*

The implementation phase would be to *to celebrate the diversity of cultures on the Western Isles, using food, dress, and the arts (music and dance) as a vehicle for raising awareness and understanding of the various communities which also includes newer migrant families from the ‘accension’ countries of Eastern Europe.*

Benefits/Outcomes

- Raise awareness of the different cultures living on the Islands.
- Improve community relations and integrate greater sensitivity to multiple inequalities.
- Allow different communities to respect their differences and also acknowledge their similarities which will ease any tension.
- Provide an opportunity for sustaining multicultural activities through the setting up of an integrated minority ethnic forum.

Implementation

This demonstration project will be carried out in partnership with NRCEMH.

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It will include the following groups of people living on the Western Islands – majority of whom have indicated their willingness to participate:

- Pakistani
- Irish
- Polish
- Indian
- Russian
- Mainland
- Thai
- Ukrainian
- Scottish
- English
- Latvian
- Chinese
- Island Gael
- French

This model will be implemented in a phased approach over a two year period. The multi-agency Racial Equalities group will oversee the work, but will be dependent on partnership working through engagement and dialogue with the relative participating communities. Consequently, representatives from each community will be invited to participate in the proposed multicultural forum, which will co-ordinate the various activities and which culminate in a yearly major event - a Multi-cultural festival in Stornoway that will focus on food, dress, arts (music, dance) and will include the screening of some specific films which deal with different issues in different generations.

It will also include documentary screenings which could, for example, contribute towards palliative care for terminally ill patients. Sensitive and intense imagery could intensify the message that one needs to add life to the days of terminally ill patients rather than adding days to their lives.

In the lead up to the main event - the Festival - smaller social events are planned, in the hope of gently introducing the different cultures to each other. The Forum will be given time to build up a relationship, which will ultimately benefit the main event. A Community Development Co-ordinator will be employed to liaise with all concerned and he/she provided with assistance in the form of a p/t Assistant and other necessary resources.

Activities throughout cultural awareness programme

As part of the cultural awareness programme, some specific activities will take place that will inform all the communities of the individual needs of people based on their needs.

Needs Assessment

It is a crucial participatory rapid appraisal of the needs of the various communities. It will also give not only a baseline information in relation to their demographic profile but also give us their perception, knowledge and attitude towards health and social welfare needs, as well as how to improve community relation.

Through discussion with the various communities there is concern experienced around the decline in the numbers of the local Pakistani community, with an increase in numbers of Chinese. The Islands also have a growing number of immigrant workers, some who have decided to settle on the Western Isles. This is just a small example and does not take into account the increased number of mixed race families in the community. Priority should be given to this research.

Youth Input

Certain members of the youth from different cultures have approached and requested they become involved in this proposal and this will be encouraged. Many are already integrated

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through school and their involvement could influence the adults. This would also break down age barriers and raise awareness within Island born minority ethnic youth learning about their own cultures.

For example, an adult representative from the Chinese community commented on how his children did not take an interest in their culture - a similar complaint echoed by an elderly Gael who believed that, "the youngsters of today are not interested in where they come from!". This may well turn out to be a common thread, which will show up in the final evaluation.

Festival- Shared Roots

This will be a fun event, possibly covering two days, with a carnival atmosphere to attract families. With the focus on food, dress and the art, this will act as a catalyst for informal conversation between people from different backgrounds and with different beliefs and cultural values.

For example, The Western Isles describes itself as Gaelic speaking and 'God fearing', the predominant religion being Calvinistic Presbyterianism in Lewis and Harris with reformed Roman Catholicism in South Uist and Barra. It is accepted that within the Protestant denomination there are varying factions and different interpretations of the literature associated with that particular religion. The Islands have experienced this over the years with the continuous break-ups within the Church system. Information on each of the religions and culture would be available, whether it is through leaflet form or the use of the WI NHS touch screen Health Information system. All willing members of the community will be invited to participate in whatever way they feel most appropriate. The event will consist of food tasting sessions, demos, dancing troupes, henna tattoo workshops, films and arts - the list is endless, but, more importantly it will be up to the communities themselves.

Benefits

The development of a programme of interactive workshops through food, dress, music and arts will be an innovative way of beginning to create positive community relations. It will enable people to begin to understand each others diversity whether it involves issues relating to gender, disability, race, age, spirituality/religion or indeed sexual orientation. It is an indirect way of exploring how to begin to involve and integrate people of different backgrounds who recognise a common set of values some of which may be expressed in a different way.

There are the obvious social, education, leisure benefits, but also environmental benefits as many cultures 'grow their own' food organically. A major focus of this initiative is health and it will be important to have appropriate information on both Western and traditional health.

Health checks could be made available, but in a non-threatening manner complementing the information already available on the HI project in different languages. The mental health and well-being of the community as a whole are high on the agenda and there is a strong feeling that this project would have a positive effect on all involved, plus an easing of any potential tensions, which we are currently facing as a result of misinformation.

Western Isles is becoming a multicultural island but all local inhabitants have to be kept informed of the 'why' factor. For example, island Pakistani families question the need for immigrant workers, as do island Gaels. This is due to decisions they feel are being made

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without consultation and "these people being thrust upon the islands", (quote from local resident).

Evaluation

The programme will be subjected to monitoring (interim reports) and to independent qualitative and quantitative evaluation. If evaluation is part of the whole process than it should be embedded into the work from the beginning. The development of the outcome measures proposed in the document 'Checking for Change' should be a catalyst which could inform other health boards and local authorities on how to engage and develop a dialogue with local communities based on innovative ways of winning 'hearts and minds' of people rather than using any legislation.

Additional Resources

Substantial in-kind contributions will be provided by Western Isles NHS Board and this will include staff time, accommodation,. Western Isles Enterprise and the Local Authority will also be approached for support which will also include funding as appropriate.

Outputs

This two year project will provide clear and concise information with regard to the needs of population groups in Western Isles. It will also raise awareness between the different Island cultures and recognise their similarities as well as their differences. As the number of immigrant workers to the Western Isles continues to rise, the raising of awareness and shared information will, hopefully, contribute to improvement in community relations which will help to decrease unnecessary tension.

This model will also include all other strands of diversity and inequalities and act as a template for other rural/urban rural areas to tailor their engagement process in community development according to their local needs. It will act as a learning tool to develop training and management guidelines to promote the ongoing development of sensitive approach to inequality.