Kingston University London

Lessons learnt from the preparatory phase to engage and implement social prescribing to address health and social inequalities in Kingston Borough

Report for Kingston Voluntary Action (KVA)
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Commissioning brief and aim of the project

Kingston Voluntary Action (KVA) is a registered charity which works to create, support, and expand community action in the Borough of Kingston upon Thames. KVA works closely with Kingston stakeholders and offers a comprehensive wrap-around service to charities and community groups of advice, guidance, training, networking, representation, and brokerage. Recently, KVA has been actively participating in the delivery of Southwest London Integrated Care System (SWL ICS) Programme which focuses on the needs of minoritised communities in areas of deprivation in the Borough. This current project aimed at discovering more about the health and wellbeing needs of minoritised communities and the barriers they experience in accessing services to meet these needs.

The Project has three interconnected strands:

1. Distribution of small community grants for minoritized communities to run activities in the community that contribute to people's health and wellbeing (social prescribing activities) (not reported here).

2. A series of poetry workshops on Cambridge Road Estate, facilitated by a multi-award winning Windrush generation poet and activist, Michael Groce, which was planning to address the wellbeing and mental health needs of Black (African and Caribbean) communities living in Kingston. This is an innovative pilot approach intended to engage traditionally underserved communities.

3. With the help of external academic support (Kingston University) to summarise the evolving data from the exploratory project, and to make recommendations for effectively involving underserved communities while addressing identified obstacles to inform future developments of suitable social prescribing approaches.

Consequently, Kingston University (Prof Tushna Vandrevala and Dr Paty Paliokosta) were commissioned to:

➢ attend a variety of meetings/a series of poetry workshops on Cambridge Road Estate (totalling 7) (addressing aims 2 and 3);

➢ design and utilise an efficient method to obtain and summerise insights from participants and stakeholders to make key recommendations to further engage

underserved communities (in this instance the black community) residing in Kingston.

Executive Summary

This project examined lessons learnt from an exploratory project involving poetry as an expression of social prescribing, as a tool to bring people together, express feelings, and connect specific underserved communities to address health and social needs. There were difficulties with consistent engagement with the Black Caribbean and African communities, indicating the need for even more pre-engagement work before designing and implementing activities. The project also demonstrated the importance of understanding the local context and demographics, as well as incorporating culturally specific interventions to ensure services are culturally appropriate and responsive.

The project has also emphasised the significance of food in building social connections and a sense of community. To further engage underserved communities, it is recommended to work further with intermediaries, such as community leaders, organisations, and advocates, and to address barriers to engagement, such as choice of workshop timings, work and family responsibilities, childcare, and religious and cultural practices. It is also essential to consult further with community members to ensure events meet their needs and are accessible to all. Addressing systemic barriers to accessing events and resources is crucial, as well as community members' voices on who should be included in the workshops.

Finally, the project emphasises the need for a long-term investment in art and culture in the community, and to capitalise on the people currently engaged in the project, some of whom are willing to take it forward. Young people can be involved in poetry sessions to take it to a next level, and the project shows how poetry can assist with interactions and building community networks, promoting positive wellbeing, and enabling community members to identify what brings them together and makes each of them unique. An added element that stemmed from the use of AI in poetry generation is the development of digital literacy that not only supports more elder populations accessing services online, but also bridges younger and older generations. All involved in this preparatory phase connected with this opportunity and gained something different, according to their own needs.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background Information of ethnic communities and deprivation rate in the local area of Kingston Up on Thames

The total population of Kingston upon Thames in 2021 was around 170,000 and has increased by 5% since 2011 census (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The percentage of Kingston upon Thames residents from Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African ethnic groups also increased from 2.5% in 2011 to 2.8% in 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2023). According to the 2021 census, 42.6% of residents in Kingston upon Thames identify as Christian, 8 % as Muslim and 34.3% as having no religion (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

According to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, 2019), the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures deprivation in terms of seven living conditions (Income, employment, health, education, crime, barriers to housing and services, living environment) and ranks every small area in England. Despite not being the most deprived borough in London, the neighbourhood around the Cambridge Road Estate in Norbiton Wards in Kingston (such as, Burritt Road, Washington Road, Excelsior Close, Vincent Road and Eureka Road) are in the 20% of most deprived areas of England, and the most deprived neighbourhoods in Kingston borough (Carr, Whitlow, Burich, et.al., 2021). Cambridge Estate Road is one of the areas in Kingston where largest population of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups were reside (Sewell & Newby, 2013). A report written in 2021 by collaboration of Kingston Hospital, Health Education England, and Royal Borough of Kingston Council also indicated that the highest percentage of working-age adults and children live in Cambridge Road Estate area comparing with the rest neighbourhoods in Kingston borough (Carr, et.al., 2021).

1.2 What is social prescribing (SP)?

The term 'social prescribing' or 'community referral' is used in the United Kingdom (UK) to describe a method that enables health professionals such as GP, nurses, social care workers and charity workers to refer individuals to non-clinical services to improve their health and wellbeing (Khan, Al-Izzi, Montasem, et.al., 2023). For decades social prescribing was practiced in NHS, but it was in the past four years the concept has been accepted largely by national NHS bodies, as evidence highlight improvement of population health and reduction of workload for primary healthcare staff (Buck & Ewbank, 2020). Thus, since 2019 NHS bodies invested for a new non-clinical role (link worker) position in NHS that support professionals to identify issues that affect their health & wellbeing, and signposting them to non-medical, community-based activities, groups and services that meet their practical, social, and emotional needs (NHS England, 2023). Recently, social prescribing has gained considerable attention globally, for instance in the USA, primary care services monitor social needs of patients and refer them to non-profit organisation that provide low-intensity social support for employment, housing, legal, and other social needs (Alderwick, Gottlieb, Fichtenberg, et.al., 2018).

Research indicated that approximately 20% of patients in the UK consult their general practitioner (GP) for psychosocial problems, because patients do not distinguish social from medical problems, thus this can considerably increase the workload of GPs and those involved in primary care (Wild, Winter, Ress, et.al, 2022). Consequently, high demand to the primary care services, pressing need within the area, leads to poor NHS quality services and creates inequality access to health services (Wild, et.al, 2022). These problems are particularly more common in socially deprived areas with individuals living in the most deprived areas of England experiencing worse quality of care, poorer health, lower life expectancy than the rest of England (NHS England, 2022). In order, to resolve this problem NHS established a non-clinical health service provided by community or voluntary sector organisations, that focused on approaches such as, social prescribing methods (Wild, et.al., 2022).

In 2019 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) introduced five frameworks in order for the USA health care systems to identify and address social needs of their patients, that involves awareness (recognising the basic social needs), adjustment (adjusting clinical care based on patients' social conditions), assistance (connecting patients with relevant social supports), alignment (identifying the existing social services and supports in the community to facilitate collaborations and partnerships) and advocacy (promoting policies to address health and social needs). Similarly in the UK, four categories have been developed to identify social needs of patients in the NHS, collecting data of patients' social needs, connecting patients with resources to address social needs, using NHS resources to improve social conditions in the community and focusing on collaboration of local resources (NHS, local government, and other organisations) to improve local population's health (Buzelli, Dunn, Scott, et.al., 2022).

Evidence consistently demonstrate that social prescribing reduces health inequalities and demand for healthcare services around the world (South, Higgins, Woodall, et.al., 2008; Morse, Sandhu, Mulligan, et.al., 2022). There are several models of social prescribing, some of them have specific targets to prevent progression of chronic disease (e.g., physical exercise, health eating) and examined through healthcare services, but most of the schemes of social prescribing are based on an awareness of the social factors of health, social connectivity, and mental health (Husk, Elston, Gradinger, et.al., 2019). Even though self-referral to social prescribing through a GP is possible in England, a large percentage of social prescribing referrals were made by local authorities, pharmacies, multi-disciplinary teams, hospital discharge teams, allied health professionals, fire service, police, job centres, social care services, housing associations and local charities (NHS England, 2023).

1.3. Social prescribing for underserved communities

There isn't a single definition of what underserved groups means but National Institute for Health and Social Care Research (NIHR) (2020) states that underserved groups are groups with lower inclusion in clinical research, and they can also be identified how a group responds to or engages with healthcare interventions compared with other groups.

Research indicates that despite the high burden of disease, people from minority ethnic groups are under-represented in clinical and health research (Redwood & Gill, 2013).

According to the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (2007) report in the UK, generally Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups experience poorer health and health inequalities than the overall population and these were exacerbated during COVID-19 pandemic, due to environmental factors, including socioeconomic inequalities (e.g., higher rates of poverty, low standard of housing conditions, and insecure jobs), poor health and less access to health services (Wheatle, 2021; Cheshmehzangia, 2022). The World Health Organisation (2023) explained that unmet social needs such as food insecurity, lack of education and poor housing, low income, unemployment, job insecurity, isolation and discrimination has an ability to influence between 30 and 55% of health outcome of individuals.

Research has consistently shown that engaging on social prescribing activities benefits the health and wellbeing of people from ethnic minority groups. For instance, African and Caribbean young men living in East London who use mental health services of Hackney, Newham, and Tower Hamlet who participated in a creative art project with their carers reported increase in ability to express themselves, feeling of togetherness and establish their identity by learning their history and culture through art (Griffiths, 2005). Overall, social prescribing has reported its effectiveness on reducing loneliness (Reinhardt, Vidovic & Hammerton, 2021), enhancing social connectedness (Wakefield, Kellezi, Stevenson, et.al., 2022), boosting self-confidence and self-esteem (Stathi, Milton & Riddoch, 2006), improves individual resilience, community resilience, mental health, quality of life, employment, and volunteering opportunity. Social prescribing has been found to be effective in addressing unmet needs of patients and marginalised groups of society (Thomson, Camic & Chatterjee, 2015).

A recent systematic review highlighted some facilitators and barriers on implementing and delivering social prescribing services in the UK (Pescheny, Pappas & Randhawaet, 2018). Research has demonstrated that facilitators include series of workshops to design and discuss a social prescribing service prior to its implementation, using flexible approaches, arranging regular routing group meetings to discuss processes, working procedures, and react to challenges, as well as developing a shared understanding about the agenda and expectations between involved partners, stakeholders, and service users in order to avoid tension and discontent during the delivery of SP services (Pescheny, et.al., 2018). Barriers that hinder implementation and delivery of SP programmes, include lack of a targeted approach to planned project, lack of shared understanding among stakeholders and partners, disengagement of patients, and lack of confidence to explore the social determinants of health, were recognised as barriers to successful delivery of social prescribing programmes (Pescheny, 2018).

Additionally, lack of knowledge of social prescribing, lack of interest and uncertainty of SP's potential benefit, lack of motivation and confidence, fear of stigmatisation, monetary issues, and transport issues to the prescribed services were identified as barriers of patient engagement of SP activities (Pescheny, et.al., 2018). There are also barriers that obstructs clients to actively engage on social prescribing activities, such as undeveloped trusting relationship of link worker and clients (Wildman, Moffatt, Penn, et.al., 2019), less encouragement or support of the link worker to attend the first session, negative experiences and relationships with activity leaders and perceived lack of change in client's health status (Husk, Blockley, Lovell, et.al., 2020). Culture, language, low health literacy levels were also identified as barriers to engage with health services for ethnic groups in the UK (Zeh, Sandhu, Cannaby, et.al., 2014) For instance, O'Connor and his colleagues (2021) discovered that patients from Black or Black British-Caribbean- African are the second largest population in Merton borough of London, but almost half of the referral for social prescribing was made to white British groups than other ethnic groups. Government guidance on social prescribing states that, it needs extra caution delivering SP for immigrants comparing with the general population which includes considering priorly preferences of cultural, gender, language, and service provision procedures in order the

people successfully address their social, psychological and health needs (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2021).

2. The local context and current project

KVA organised a series of poetry workshop aiming to reach out minoritised communities, particularly the black community resided in the most socially deprived area of the Royal Borough of Kingston, Cambridge Road Estate. The aim of the project funding by Southwest London Integrated Care System (SWL ICS) was to:

1. Increase engagement with members of the black community living in Cambridge Road Estate
2. Investigate psychosocial needs of the minority groups living in the area, specifically ethnic minorities from Black Caribbean and African communities living in borough.

Due to lack of prior engagement between Black Caribbean and African communities, local authorities and charity services in Kingston borough, KVA aimed to gather members of the community and begin engaging with them with the aim to tackle crime, unemployment, physical and mental health issue, and other psychosocial needs in the community. KVA and other stakeholders decided that one approach to promote engagement with the black community in Cambridge Road estate would be to arrange a series of poetry workshops in Cambridge Road Estate, facilitated by a multi-award winning Windrush generation poet and activist, Michael Groce, which ran for 7 weeks on Monday evenings between 6pm to 8pm. The activity leader introduced new themes to the group every session, recited a poem related to the evening's theme and prompted participants to write collectively using a poem generator website. The aim of the sessions was to create a trusting and friendly atmosphere for the attendees and to engage participants to discuss the social needs of the community through the poetry project.

2.1 Engagement activities to promote the poetry workshops

KVA used different methods to promote the event and invite participants from the targeted group of the population in Kingston. Some of the methods included distributing door to door 700 leaflets on Cambridge Estate accommodations, advertising on Facebook and through KU ELEVATE newsletter (a newsletter dedicated to black home students in Kingston University), posters/leaflets displayed in Smokey Barbers (Barbers with clients from Black community) in Tolworth and Surbiton, on hair products shop in Kingston, and Mom's Kitchen (Afro-Caribbean food stall in the market). Additionally, KVA staff contacted key community organisations and community leaders in the local community including SAYED, Helmar Care and Community Services, Mencap, Achieving for Children (a youth club at Queen Mary's Hall on Cambridge Gardens), Royal Borough of Kingston (RBK) Communication team, Head Nurse at Kingston Hospital, Refugee Action Kingston to promote the event. KVA staff also visited RCCG Rivers of water – Berrylands Christian Centre in Surbiton, Ghanaian church in Kingsgate Building, the Potters House Church in Kingston to promote the events. After every session staff from KVA also encouraged participants to invite friends and community members to attend future sessions.

Despite efforts to promote the events, the engagement and attendance of the events was lower than anticipated. This can be attributed to the lack of prior engagement and formed, known links with community organisations representing Black Caribbean and African people. KVA had few established routes for communication with black community in the area. The majority of the participants who attended the events came through invitation made in churches by KVA and via word of mouth. In future, organisations should incorporate in the planning to consult the community about the project prior to organising events and sufficient time should be allocated to engagement activities.

2.2 Poetry workshops

On the first few weeks of the workshop, the activity leader explained what poetry means, the difference between poetry, prose, and drama, and showed the participants step by step

how to write a poem. Additionally, at the end of every session feedback was collected, and participants were asked what topics they would be interested in, in order to raise in the coming sessions.

The facilitator motivated participants to actively participate in the activities, such as generate words to produce a poem together with the group, write their own poem and to read to the group and they also gave them a chance to lead the activity. The activity facilitator created a warm and friendly atmosphere for the group, and when the sessions progress, participants seem to feel relaxed and started confidently reciting their poems to the group, and openly discussing their feelings and thoughts about challenged within their community with the wider group.

KVA worked alongside Kingston council (add partners) and Kingston University. Kingston University's role in the project is to offer academic support in summarising emerging data and making recommendations for successfully engaging undeserved communities and overcoming identified barriers to inform future developments of suitable social prescribing approaches. This was done by attending the poetry workshops run for 7 weeks every Monday, collecting information at the session and through informal conversation with participants. We also had regular weekly post event meetings with KVA to discuss progress of the session and ways to further increase engagement, to develop and use an effective approach to elicit and summarise responses from participants, to inform key insights and recommendations, and finally summarise these in a short.

2.3 Summary of the Poetry Project

Session	No of people that attended	Summary of session	Key observations and challenges
1	3 from people from Black community	KVA opened the event with an introduction of the purpose of the workshops and the method of using poetry to address things that prevent people from having good mental wellbeing. Theme of the session - 'Be Positive'. Auto-biographic experience shared by poet and participants encourage to engage with poetry writing using paper plate technique (write a short poem on a paper plate written in one side 'what is on my plate?' and in another side 'what matters to me?') Dinner served as an integral part of the engagement.	Delays in pre-engagement activities may have resulted in low participation rates. Lack of existing community relations made pre-engagement actives time consuming. Participants reported difficulties in finding the venue.
2	8 participants (5 women and 3 men) from Black community 1 man and 1 woman were resident of Cambridge Estate Road	Theme of the session - 'Selfcare'. Poet introduced rhyming schemes of an ABA pattern and spoke of the difference between poetry, drama, and prose. Group collectively offered a selection of words as a stimulus and wrote a poem together. Dinner served and voice recorded feedback was also collected at the end of the session.	Map of the location of the venue was provided in KVA website. Posters and leaflets also distributed in churches and Black community owned shops. Young people attended the session. Due to Monday evening services in some churches, people were not able to attend the event. Participants reported they were warmly welcomed.
3	12 participants (3 women and 9 men) from Black community attended the session.	Theme of the session - 'Ubuntu' (I am because you are) and 'Loving a Purpose'. A visiting black poet and unpaid carer read his poetry and explained how writing poetry has positively impacted his mental health. He shared his book with the attendees and encouraged them to read some of his poems aloud. This encouraged some participants to stand up and share their own poetry and sing songs to the group.	Participants reported they were interested in topics related to nutrition, mental wellbeing, children, and family support, housing issues/support, religion, and music. Participants reported they were happy with the location of the venue, and enjoyed the session, food, and interacting with new people. Participants suggested that they were keen to explore topics

		Dinner served and written feedback was collected at the end of the session.	related to impacts on black people in their local are. They also asked for more clarification about the purpose and goal of the project.
4	7 participants (1 women and 6 men) from Black community	Theme of the session- 'Building relationships' The poet recited poems that reflected on his past struggle to maintain relationship with his family. Some participants encouraged to share their personal relationship struggle and recited poems related to the theme. With the help of the activity leader, using metaphorical words the group together produced their first poem in Poetry.com. KVA manager introduced Kingston's Social Prescribing Digital Platform, connected Kingston and other services in Kingston that might be helpful to the participants. Dinner served and feedback collected at the end of session.	Participants reported they enjoyed working together to create a poem in the session. Only few people were consistently attending the session, and not many women from black community were able to attend the event. Participants responded that the cost-of-living crisis affects their mental health and others were worried more for members of their communities. They also reported that they support from the council or family members.
5	8 participants (4 women and 4 men) from Black community	Theme of the session- 'Appreciate the Little Things' Three participants shared poems they wrote independently with the group. With the help of the activity leader, the group together produced a poem on an AI website called poem generator; the topic was 'appreciation of little things' (power of gratitude). All participants were actively engaged in the activity. Dinner served and feedback collected via recorded interview at the end of the session, by KVA staff.	Participant reported the skills they learned in the poetry workshop would be likely to be used in their work setting and shared with families and friends. Participants suggested if young generation of the community were involved in the poetry workshop, it will give them opportunity to learn and take it to higher level. They also suggested if the sessions were offered to people with mental illnesses would help them to express themselves without fear. Participants appreciated the friendly atmosphere of the poetry event and the opportunity it creates to experience a feeling of togetherness, to interact with people living in the same community. Some participants also reported their confidence was boosted since attending the workshop. Participants reported the workshop enabled them to express their feelings and emotions and inspired them to write more poems.

			Participants arrived late, and some reported the start time didn't fit with family responsibility and work hours.
6	5 men from Black community	Theme of the session- 'win- win'. The poet introduced a digital poetry generator to participants and demonstrated usage to produce a poem, which was circulated to all participants. The poem was recited and recorded. Dinner served at the end of the session.	The group formed in the poetry project was relatively small but participants expressed a desire to continue attending the poetry workshop KVA manger announced to the group that Kingston Stronger Together (part of the Council) will be attending celebratory event to offer advice to struggling with high living cost.
7	2 men from Black, African, and Caribbean community	No theme for the session The 14th April celebration event details and structure were discussed with the group. People discussed openly why the event was advertised for black communities while it was of diverse ethnic groups. The KVA manager explained to the group clearly what the aim of the project was, and the reasons for specifically targeted members of the Black community. Discussed the notion of digital literacy and inclusion in the context of using AI for generating poetry, and the struggle some people face to book GP appointments through Apps. Dinner served at the end of the session.	A group with a small number of participants was formed at the end of the workshop, but the group are enthusiastic to see continuation of the poetry workshop. Organisers informed participants that 14th April event will be hosted to celebrate the black community in Kingston and end of the poetry sessions.
Celebration 14th April	58 people	Feedback collected via Mentimetre survey. 14 people responded were from black community. From 22 responses 13 attendees responded there is not enough opportunities for people from Black communities to meet & enjoy each other's company through sports / arts / education. Majority of respondents reported they were looking for help to meet their practical, social, and emotional needs from friends, family, GP and church or a place of worship.	Regarding future activities, majority of participants responded they would like to attend sport activities, summer festivals, cooking classes, health promotion events and poetry workshops, history and education programmes, understanding discrimination and stigma, music workshops, drama, art classes- painting, sculpture, and drawing.

3. Lessons learnt and recommendations.

The poetry workshop highlighted that the community values the experiences as it helped create a sense of togetherness, build trust and strengthen social connections of feeling part of a community with shared experience and values. The workshops also were perceived by participants to improve mental health and a mechanism to support each other.

These poetry sessions were viewed as a preparatory phase, though several lessons were learnt from the project, such as the need for a long-term investment in art and culture in the community, and to capitalise on the people currently engaged in the project, some of whom are willing to take it forward. It also opens a path to understand the community's needs and preferences, and how to further co-design interventions and infrastructure for effective social prescribing services that are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the community.

To effectively provide social prescribing services that are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the Black community, it is recommended to engage further with community stakeholders and work with intermediaries such as community leaders and advocates to design programs and interventions that meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the community.

3.1 Creating a sense of togetherness via poetry and food

In the current project, poetry was seen as a great tool for bringing people together from different backgrounds, a way to express feelings and emotions, and to connect communities and supporting them address their social needs.

> *'Everything I feel here - generosity, creativity, colours, light… It feels like a coming together of different voices…… It's like a warm embrace'* (White British woman, from 5th session feedback).

> *'I am enjoying being part of this community….'* (Mixed race male participant, from 5th week feedback)

'Helps identify what brings us together and makes each of us unique. It's something that should be supported and encouraged by everyone in the community.' (Black African Male participant, from 5th week feedback).

The feedback about the workshop from participants indicated that poetry was a great tool for social prescribing as it helps them to express their feelings and thoughts, help participants to address their psychosocial issues (e.g., relationship problems) in positive ways, create a sense of togetherness and community, helps to enhance their self-confidence and self-expression, reduced isolation and creates opportunities for social contact and participation in the community. Poetry can promote connections, break barriers and hierarchies, and equalize individuals, regardless of their social status or background and this started happening in the context of this group.

Even though the project was aimed to improve engagement with the Black communities in Kingston, due to small number of attendances from Black community members, the organisers also invited other ethnic groups to attend the workshop. Having a diverse group in the workshop gave a different dimension in understanding the experiences of the targeted group alongside other ethnic groups. Participants from different ethnic groups but with similar socio-economic status, gender and age had similar shared experiences:

'Covid has done my head in completely… I've got into a routine, which is comfortable, of staying in… this (poetry workshop) along with a few other things has allowed me to come out and get back to normal' (White British participant, from 5th session feedback)

'I have been in hospital for 10 months because of Covid………this (poetry workshop) gave me an opportunity to come out from my house and socialise with other people…...' (Black African participant, informal conversation on 5th session).

The two older gentlemen mentioned how Covid-19 affected their lives and how the event has positively impacted them and their shared economic and living conditions created a sense of community.

Dinner time created a welcoming and hospitable environment, which can help to build trust and strengthen social connections and feeling part of a community with shared experience

and values. For instance, the cook (who prepared African food for all the workshop sessions) shared a song which others joined in singing. This contributed to the sense of community and promoted positive well-being; it enabled the participants to relax and further laugh and talk more during food. Food was an extremely important factor; it is indeed acknowledged that offering food can help to build social connections and a sense of community in various ways:

'The food helps you to relax and make friends and mingle' (Black African Male participant, from 5th week feedback).

'The food is beautiful. I wasn't expecting that at all. It's really delicious. If people knew there was this sort of food here, I doubt this hall would be able to fit everyone!' (Black African Male participant, from 5th week feedback).

3.2 Improving mental health and mechanisms to supporting each other.

This shared experience seems to have helped break down barriers, facilitate conversation and create a sense of community. Participants disclosed more personal information about themselves in the conversations during dinner. For instance, some people were explaining their reasoning for being late to the session, others seeking information regarding support for their children, how to develop their careers and so on. This helped facilitate services to information and signposting them to other organisations that could support them.

'I didn't know how to do that before………. I've learnt that I can express my feelings and explain things better to people in words' (Black African man, from 5th session feedback).

Participants commented on how attending these workshops had a positive impact on their mental health by regularly interacting with their community. Others discussed how the workshops helped increase their self-esteem and ability to express themselves.

'From a mental health point of view, this helps people come out and meet other people from the community.' (Black African Male participant, from 5th week feedback).

'Coming here gives you confidence. No judgement. Able to express yourself and start building yourself. If you had an inferiority complex, no confidence, feel beaten down.' (Black African Male participant, from 5th week feedback).

Poetry takes you to another realm. It helps mental health. People with bad mental health often think people don't understand them. If you are able to put how you feel down in a poem, others can have a feeling and understanding.' (Black African Male participant, from 5th week feedback).

3.3 Challenges encountered while engaging target communities

Consistently the organisers struggled to reach the black community to publicise the event and increase engagement with the poetry workshops. Based on our observations and conversations with participants and stakeholders, this was due to a variety of reasons and there are some suggestions on how the sector might increase uptake of participation of harder to reach communities in future workshops and engagement activities.

3.3.1 Clarity and focus and objective

There was a tension between wanting to include members of the community from the black community, residents from Cambridge Road estate or people residing/working in Kingston who were interested in the poetry workshop. The lack of clarity on who was invited the workshop often left participants confused about their role, aim of the project and the agenda of the workshops and perhaps delineated from the main outcomes. As a result, one male participant who was invited via a church and attended two sessions suggested

'The purpose, mission, goal and objective of the group need to be well defined to the participants...' (Participant from Black community, from 3rd session feedback).

A white British woman who actively participated in the majority of the sessions stated during the 7th session that *'the atmosphere was inclusive and inspiring',* but confided that she had hesitated to attend as the event was advertised for black African and Caribbean community only. The aim of the workshop and the reason why only members of the Black community were invited in the project was clearly explained by KVA manager to the group on the last day of the event (7th week feedback). It is worth considering introducing the focus and be explicit from the very beginning and seek appropriate ways for doing so.

3.3.2 Considering issues of access and inclusivity

Majority of participants in the workshop were men and those women who attended often arrived after the event stating that the timing of the event during regular work hours or during family/childcare commitments made engagement challenging. There were some suggestions by women about future events regarding the availability of childcare or creche options to make events more accessible to female caregivers; they were basing this on prior experiences of church related events, where such service was managed within the community, cost-free. Choice of workshop timings can have implications for engagement (Cohen, et. al., 2019) and therefore considering should be given to holding events on weekend to differing schedules.

> *'I enjoyed everything, but due to work will not be able to attend on time'* (Black African Women participant, from 3rd week feedback).

Some participants also suggested that the workshop was a prime way to engage young people in the community, who often felt excluded from the community and were likely to be future leaders.

> *'I would love to get more young people involved in this. Applies to people all ages, yet it was really interactive. Young people could take this to a higher level. Who might be the poets of tomorrow'* (Black African Male participant, from 5th week feedback).

Therefore, to address these barriers to engagement, consulting community and education services would be helpful to determine the most convenient times for events and to ensure that they meet the needs of the community. Efforts should be made to consider avoiding scheduling events during religious or cultural holidays or times of prayer to ensure that everyone is able to attend.

3.4 Engagement and co-design with community intermediaries and members of the community

It was clearly observed that majority of the participants attended the event were invited from churches and through word of mouth. This indicates that the community has a trusted relationship with their faith leaders and other community leaders.

Engage further with community stakeholders, such as faith-based leaders and organisations to develop partnerships and leverage existing resources through working with community intermediaries (community leaders, organisations, and advocates) are required in future engagement work. Majority of the participants were from the Christian faith, and it didn't include views of people from other religions background and walks of life in the community.

Engaging further with community stakeholders and working with intermediaries, such as community leaders and advocates are required to ensure that programs and interventions relating to social prescribing are designed to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the Black community. These can be achieved by:

- Developing and sustaining partnerships with stakeholders, including faith-based leaders and organisations that have already been identified during the preparatory phase, as well as other community organisations that have a presence in the target community. This will ensure that services are culturally relevant and used language that is familiar to the community.
- It is also important to have an "insider" from the black community residing in Cambridge Road estate to engage with further social prescribing projects. These "insiders" from the community can assist with ensuring that future social prescribing interventions are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the community. There is scope to capitalise on the people currently engaged with the project (two participants were willing to take continue engaging with services).
- Co-design interventions and infrastructure for effective social prescribing services using focus groups, community meetings, or other types of engagement events to gather input and feedback from the community on their needs and preferences.

3.5 Framework for long term strategy for engagement with the black community

The work conducted by KVA and stakeholders engaging with the black community has demonstrated that the communities are keen to engage but time, and resources are required to ensure that social prescribing activities are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the community. There is a need for long term investment in supporting arts and culture for ethnic communities.

A long-term strategy for engagement with the black community should prioritise community involvement and partnership, mental health support, addressing systemic barriers, and providing resources in accessible formats. By taking a holistic approach and working collaboratively with the community, it is possible to create a more equitable and inclusive engagement strategy.

Here's a framework for a long-term strategy for engagement with the black community, based on the findings of this consultation engagement:

1. Positionality and agency: It's important to reflect on who is at the table and who is making decisions about the engagement strategy. It's essential to include members of the black community in the planning process and to ensure that their voices are heard. This will help to ensure that the engagement activities are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the community.

2. Consideration of underpinning mental health needs of the community, as this repeatedly occurred in the findings. This can be done through a variety of activities, such as providing integrated arts workshops and connecting participants with mental health resources in their community.

3. Address potential feelings of mistrust or lack of direct links between the organisers and the community. This can be done by working with community leaders and organizations that are trusted by the community, as well as by being transparent and honest about the goals and intentions of the engagement activities (Samuels et al., 2020). Again, the use of poetry and other integrated arts have the potential to create spaces of connection and understanding, promoting a sense of empathy, equality and break down hierarchies, castrating people of their roles and creating connections that transcend societal divisions.

4. Address systemic barriers to accessing events and resources for members of the black community, ensuring that resources are equitable and accessible to all, while still recognizing their specific needs and experiences.

5. Address and enhance digital literacy issues that can be a barrier to accessing resources and events. This can be addressed by exposing the community to direct or indirect training (like the AI poetry generation workshops) or by providing resources in a variety of formats, such as printed materials or audio recordings.

Conclusion

These poetry sessions can be viewed as a preparatory phase, as an avenue for understanding the community's needs and preferences, and to further co-design and co-produce interventions and infrastructure for effective social prescribing services that are culturally responsive. Co-production involves a shift away from a traditional, top-down approach to research and evaluation in which researchers or evaluators design and carry out studies without input from stakeholders. Even in the context of this consultancy a willingness to share power and decision-making with stakeholders was modelled alongside openness to feedback and suggestions. A long-term strategy for engagement and co-production with the black community requires a thoughtful and holistic approach that considers the unique needs and experiences of this community. By prioritizing community involvement and partnership, addressing underpinning mental health needs, addressing potential feelings of mistrust or lack of direct links, addressing systemic barriers to accessing events and resources, and addressing digital literacy issues, it is possible to create a more equitable and inclusive engagement strategy. By investing in supporting arts and culture for ethnic communities and ensuring that social prescribing activities are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the community, we can foster greater social connectedness and improve the mental health and well-being of members of the black community and beyond.

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