



Improving Population Health



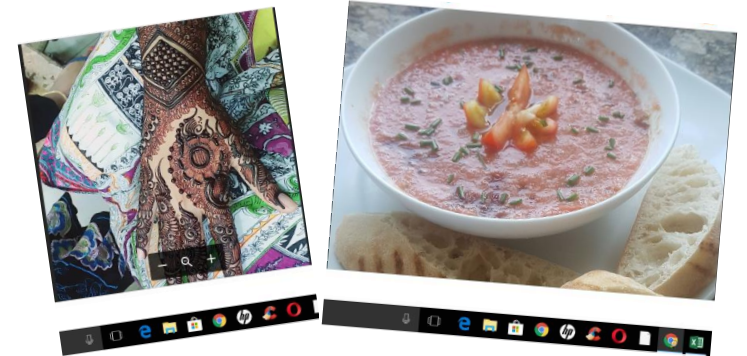
Community Skills Centre at Hillhouse Community Centre

Staying well – creating a social approach to health and wellbeing

Loneliness is very bad for our health – and social isolation makes it more likely. This project aimed to help refugees and asylum seekers with language skills and feelings of isolation during the pandemic.

People taking part did not have strong local social roots or networks. The project:

- created social connections for 25 people for two nine-week periods in Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021
- supported weekly online sessions focusing on health, food, exercise and managing stress and anxiety
- worked with tutors to support people who had limited access to technology. We contacted people regularly and enabled them to use the centre when possible



We could share ideas and healthy recipes

“ *It has lessened the loneliness, especially for those who do not have family members or friends nearby.*

It has helped us to help each other. ”

What we have achieved

Creating connections and capacity by:

- building confidence, connections and a positive approach
- supporting conversational English
- giving practical advice and reassurance through our weekly sessions. The mutual support spread to participants' relatives and friends
- helping people to get food parcels, housing advice and support for domestic abuse
- helping people to practice English and feel valued
- creating daily social moments on WhatsApp that opened up opportunities for friendly check-ins and to feel part of a friendly and supportive group
- hosting a walking group which was a great success
- tutors calling people regularly and organising access to computers and resources at the centre when possible

Supporting healthy behaviour by:

- helping people to understand public health messages about Covid-19
- exchanging healthy recipes and ideas to improve wellbeing
- creating a walking group and raising awareness of the importance of exercise
- holding sessions focusing on exercise, healthy eating and managing stress and anxiety. People enjoyed talking about cooking, travel and families as well as coping with lockdown and keeping safe and healthy
- creating videos to share recipes and gardening tips

Feedback – service users

The sessions helped people in a range of ways:

- *“All the advice has been brilliant. You have helped me get domestic abuse support for someone really close to me. Thank you”*
- *“I learned to make face masks for my family and I can now help out with making face masks for our centre”*
- *“Thank you all for helping and supporting each other. I loved the videos of places to visit in the UK”*
- *“You know at times you kind of feel empty as a single parent on your own with your child, no one to share ideas, it gets lonely at times but I try to be strong. Thank you so much”*

The self-assessment questionnaires at the beginning and end of the course showed:

- An improvement in individual physical and mental health and well being
- reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation
- reassurance and peace of mind grew as contact and communication developed within the group - friendships were built through mutual understanding
- regular food parcels helped reduce anxiety for many families
- the fun activities were a respite from anxiety and worry and gave people something to look forward to

“Thank you all for helping and supporting each other. I loved the videos of places to visit in the UK”

This is one of six Marginal Gains case studies.

Third Sector Leaders Kirklees took an asset-based approach to community-centred health and wellbeing. We supported established organisations to create new offers and activities for marginalised people. These included online social support, growing projects, learning and cultural exchange.

We've also summarised five key factors that emerged from this programme in a separate overview.



What was most useful?

Participation

People responded and shared, both in the weekly sessions and - those who could - daily to the WhatsApp group. This helped us know that the sessions were meeting a need and encouraged us to co-create with the group.

Technology

Being able to easily take and make pictures and videos and share information. Although finding a platform that everyone had access to was not possible, we worked as inclusively as we could.

What's next?

- **Resume in-person sessions** – reduced capacity, due to restrictions, but greater enthusiasm and belief in creative solutions
- **Enjoy outside space and experiences** – involving more people in walks and facilities such as libraries, gyms and parks
- **Cultural and heritage experiences** – realising all those resolutions made in lockdown: discovering Marsden Moor, the Huddersfield Canal and its history, looking at local buildings and the industries behind them. Helping our learners to feel a part of Huddersfield
- **Use WhatsApp creatively** - share recipes, health tips and food cultures as well as courses, good news, keeping in touch and chatting. We use our WhatsApp pages for individual courses, sending homework, marking work and sharing ideas

Learning points

1. The digital divide has an impact

- Access to devices and broadband varies. Lockdown increased pressure on digital resources for individuals and families
- Difficult to sustain online learning - we discovered that most of our learners had little ability to sustain online learning and keep in contact with each other
- Causes anxiety - many people have the most basic telephones and limited amounts of credit and internet access. Keeping enough credit for important calls and emergencies is a priority - and an anxiety
- Some learners had no access to laptops, tablets or computers. This restricted access to the outside world and fed their anxiety and isolation. We provided support and, where possible, facilities to improve individual and family circumstances

2. Trust the group to co-produce

We planned the sessions in advance, the group responded positively and made rich contributions.

3. Our community rose to the occasion

Getting to know the group meant becoming aware of a wide variety of needs. We achieved a lot on a limited budget.

Friends and volunteers as well as organisations such as Regen, Connecting Opportunities and Paddock Trust (and carers from local care agencies) all responded. For example, we had friends donating face masks and food and then using their own transport to deliver to those who were unable to collect food parcels, either through illness or isolation.

Keeping in regular contact with learners was a group effort. Sometimes we needed to be in touch on an hour by hour basis. Tutors supported each other and found great uplift and hope in the comfort we created.