

## Practitioner Guide

### Working with Black and Minority Ethnic Communities on a physical activity project

#### ***The Mentro Allan programme***

*The following practitioner guide draws on the experience of an action research programme called 'Mentro Allan' (MA) which ran for five years and was designed to test ways of helping different hard-to-reach sedentary groups to become more physically active in the outdoors. It will suggest ways to contact and effectively engage with people from diverse communities based on the lessons learnt from the two projects that worked specifically with BME communities in Cardiff & Vale of Glamorgan and Newport.*

*All of the local projects were participant led, with project development guided by feedback and ideas from the participants. Feedback was gathered both formally, through regular evaluation events using a participatory group discussion process, and informally, through chatting to people during the activity sessions.*

#### **Introduction**

Many services and public facilities are under used by members of BME communities. The reasons for this may be related to a lack of awareness that services or facilities exist, or issues around how to access them. In addition to this some service providers may not be fully informed as to how to get information to the right people, or how things need to be run to attract people from diverse cultural communities. The Equality Duty is a duty on public bodies and others carrying out public functions<sup>1</sup>. It ensures that public bodies consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services, and in relation to their own employees. The new Equality Duty supports good decision-making – it encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs. By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people's opportunities, public bodies are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective.

This guide aims to provide some practical suggestions for project staff and organisations working with a BME target group. Whilst we focus on the projects that worked with groups from BME communities many of the points made in this document are relevant to engaging other excluded groups.

Through experience we have learnt that **Participant-led projects produce sustainable results.**

If a project is developed in response to the needs and interests of the participants, the participants will become more confident and motivated, as well as developing the understanding and skills to make positive changes in their lives. Through this approach the service provider will also find more effective ways to engage this group both initially and in the longer term. Both of the Mentro Allan projects found that through regular communication with participants they were able to develop good relationships. Through these relationships they were able to openly discuss issues and barriers with the participants, who were then able themselves to find solutions and compromises.

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(1) <sup>1</sup> A public function is a function of a public nature for the purposes of the Human Rights Act 1998.

## Project management

### When planning a project or activity, ask the target group! Don't make assumptions

- When working with people of diverse backgrounds there are likely to be different needs associated with food, gender, clothing, cultural differences, physical contact, type of activity, timing. It is important to ask 'Is there anything we need to know?' rather than assume, and don't just expect participants to come up and tell you.
- These differences aren't a matter of right or wrong, or people being difficult, they're just different cultural norms that need to be accepted and understood. Open and regular discussions will assist this.
- It's also important not to make assumptions about BME communities as a whole or about particular cultural groups. There are diverse BME communities in South Wales, and within communities. There are also many differences between individuals.
- Within the parameters of the project aims, let the group decide about the type of activity, when/times, mix of gender, location, etc.

### Accessible Service Provision

- Service Providers need to be aware that many facilities are not easily accessible to BME communities, because the sessions and facilities have not been designed with their cultural needs in mind.
- Service Providers should work with local BME organisations to establish the needs of the community in terms of services, activity, time, cost, etc.
- Service providers should not assume that because they are part of a large organisation that their facilities or services are automatically accessible. Accessibility should be reviewed regularly in line with legislation and local guidance.
- Take the service out to the community - don't expect people to come looking for the service. Community based and outreach programmes are likely to be more successful at engaging participants. In the longer term the activities could be moved to other places.
- Take time to develop community relationships, this may involve three or four meetings before any progress is made. Once there is a mutual trust the project can move at a faster pace.
- Some community groups will not participate in projects funded through sources that relate to gambling such as the lottery or specific sponsors. Other communities will not participate in gambling but will find it acceptable to be a beneficiary of a project funded by the lottery. Speak with community leaders in advance of setting up projects in order to establish whether this will be a barrier.
- Project staff should conduct facility and access audits and conduct risk assessments with cultural diversity in mind prior to setting up any activities.

### Marketing services to BME communities

- Working through organisations familiar to the participants, where there is already a trusting relationship means that the engagement can be a much faster process. Use the voluntary sector, community development workers, community leaders and groups, local association of voluntary organisations, local equality council, community centres, GP surgeries, as well as word of mouth from community leaders or through existing groups.
- When promoting events understand that it is sometimes easier for people to access an activity for the first time when they come as a group, so make it clear that family and friends are welcome.
- Publicity works best through word of mouth, with back up details on a poster or flyer. Often information about times and locations can be understood even by those without much ability to read English. Where possible use pictures to get information across as these can be understood by all.

Posters and leaflets generally do not work well and do not attract new participants when used in isolation.

- Creative and imaginative marketing worked well in Mentro Allan to encourage people to attend “trips” or “fun days” rather than walks or activities.
- Spend less on translation and design and more on opportunities for personal engagement, such as launch events or providing stands and activities at local festivals. Money may be better spent by being given to respected local community based organisations that will do the job of recruiting participants than on translation and glossy materials. Small amounts of funding used in this way will go much further and achieve more.

## Participants

**Make sure participants know what the aims, objectives and boundaries of the project are, as well as how decisions will be made:** Transparency of decision making about service provision is in the best interests of both participants and project, this is done more easily when the boundaries are made clear from the outset. It's useful to be aware that for some participants the project may be an important part of them developing an understanding of how British society works, and as such, of their progression into the wider community, education and employment.

### **Open and frequent consultation is particularly important in early stages of engagement**

- Understanding the motivations for participants to attend is essential in planning activities and marketing the activities. Health and wellbeing along with socialising were high priorities for Mentro Allan participants for initial engagement. Socialising remained important throughout and therefore group or collective sessions were more likely to be successful. Physical activity was often an incidental benefit not really an acknowledged or desired aspect of the activity.
- Once participants experienced and became confident in the outdoors, the type of activities that they were willing to try became more adventurous and more varied. Continuous discussion, reflection and checking with the group can aid this progression.
- Using participatory methods of engagement and evaluation will make sure that everyone's voice is heard, and that project development is built on the needs of the participants. As participants become more confident with project staff and activity leaders they can become more open in the discussions and with their feedback. If relationships are not developed to enable this, the participants will drop out.
- Formal participatory consultation events can be very useful for group development or transparent decision making. If gathering large amounts of information or conducting a detailed review, it should be held in a venue where the participants feel comfortable to talk openly. Taking language into consideration, this may need a translator and some flexibility in the wording of questions.
- Informal consultation will go on all the time through individual conversation, or group discussion. Project staff should consider and prepare in advance the questions they want to get answers to, and also be ready to respond to the feedback they receive.

## Project staff and activity leaders

- Project staff and activity leaders need access to other professionals working with the target group in order to be introduced to key people within the community, seek guidance, ask questions and make links to other projects.

- Project staff must be culturally aware and able to empathise with people who are communicating through a second or third language. It helps if this is through personal experience which may be gained through education, travel and other life experiences.
- Speaking the language of the target group is helpful during initial engagement. Where project staff is not able to do this, working with community leaders or other professionals is an alternative approach which could be equally successful.
- Regular personal contact is essential to keep people attending. Making personal telephone calls to participants is really beneficial but time consuming and can be difficult where there is not a common language. Mentro Allan project staff found that setting up a “phone tree” or agreed “chain” of calls was equally effective and less time consuming, when working with a group of regular participants.
- Whilst email and text messaging do prove useful for some people it cannot be guaranteed that all of the group have access to mobile phones or the internet.

### **Skills, behaviours and actions of project staff are crucial during both the project set up and delivery stages**

- Softer skills are essential, project staff and activity leaders need to be open, patient, kind, genuine, reliable, visible and ready to listen. They also need to give respect, work flexibly, develop relationships with individuals in order to build trust and mutual understanding, value the feedback they receive and respond appropriately.
- It is important that project staff do not make assumptions or judgements based on their own knowledge or culture. It is crucial that project staff accept the differences and understand that participants are coming from a different place in terms of experience and knowledge.
- Cultural awareness training can help people to be more informed and make them more confident in asking questions of the group about appropriate activities and dress. It also helps to understand the different names of cultural dress and particular items of clothing as well as differences in religion and religious festivals.
- Attending and joining in as one of the group members helps project staff to develop relationships through shared experiences.
- Where their request for change cannot be resolved immediately it is essential to demonstrate that work is being done to meet the expressed needs and expectations of the group.

### **Language**

- In any BME group there will usually be a leader or members who can speak English and will pass on information, therefore, the ethnicity of project staff is not necessarily important. Spend some time checking out how translation is working in the group.
- There may be many different languages spoken within the same group, as the BME communities in South Wales are very diverse. It’s often better for this reason to rely on people in the different language groups who speak English to communicate with others than to arrange a single translator.
- Some information will be lost in translation, for example, an informal translator may not know specialised or technical vocabulary. Allow time for questions and discussion and break up the message into bite size chunks to help the translator.
- Be patient and flexible – repeat instructions several times, or repeat main points, accept that the group will be talking when you talk as translation takes place but don’t be afraid to ask for attention to explain important points.
- When giving Health and Safety information don’t just announce it then assume it’s been understood. Give time for people to translate and explain, then double check.
- When explaining concepts, be clear and concise, using plain English without jargon or buzz words.

- Ask participants their preferred language. This is important to know and to understand, as the language of preference or communication may not be what they would state as their first language. This should also be considered when setting up the monitoring and evaluation categories if language is to be included as a measure.
- Form filling may take longer than you expect so allow plenty of time to explain things and consider if it may be possible for people to write in their preferred language.

## Activities

**Be aware of different cultural needs, expectations and behaviours:** Understand that there will be preferences and differences in the types and timing of activities that are appropriate for the different groups. There will also be differences in terms of what is acceptable by the target audience. Consideration should be given, when mixing groups to the demographic characteristics such as age, gender and religion. If you are providing refreshments, ask what sorts of food and drinks will be acceptable to your participants. Vegetarian foods are generally appropriate to all cultures. Muslim groups would expect to find Halal meat if meat dishes are to be provided.

### Type of activity

- Some groups initially prefer to be active in local places that they know and where they feel safe. Other groups may initially prefer to be active in a place where they would not be seen by other members of their community. In both cases the preference can be relaxed over time. Starting in a place where the group feel most confident is important for engaging people.
- Activities held in places that participants could access on their own can be popular, as people may return with their families once they know of the place, and know how to get there. Local awareness and knowledge of facilities and places to visit can be very limited. Awareness of places further afield could be even less likely, but again proved popular when participants could return in their own time.
- Having some additional point of interest provided with an activity can be of benefit as it helps participants to socialise or learn about their local area. Using activity leaders who are able to give information relating to local history and the natural habitats of flowers and animals may be popular.
- Indoor activities are favoured by some people and are likely to be requested. Yoga and various forms of dance often proved to be popular with female participants.

Mentro Allan focussed on the provision of activities in the outdoor environment, in order to engage with new participants, to learn new skills and to continue activities in winter some sessions were provided indoors. The range of activities provided through the projects included:

- Walking: local walks, walks in parks, walks on rural or coastal footpaths, gorge walking, Nordic walking.
- Climbing and Abseiling
- Cycling and cycle maintenance
- Yoga
- Dance: Bollywood, Salsa, Latin
- Sailing, Canoeing, Kayaking
- Horse riding
- Fishing
- Spontaneous activities took place in the outdoors as part of family fun days or walking trips: football, aerobics, jogging, playground activities
- Day trips, Camping trips, Picnic's and BBQ's
- Gardening and conservation support activities

Depending on the aims of the project this may be appropriate but if not, running several different taster activities to show people what they could do outdoors usually works well to engage people to try out the actual activity sessions.

### **Timing of activities**

- Be aware of the community calendar, religious events, special dates and specific times for prayer. These can change so keep up to date by asking community leaders to share this information with project staff, do not assume it will be the same as the previous year. Also find out additional information about what the different dates mean for the participants in a wider context of eating, drinking, attending and communicating.
- Consider whether the women the project is trying to reach are mothers or grandmothers who need activities to be run when children are at school, or who will need some form of child care to be available to allow them to attend.
- Activities held during school holidays will need to be inclusive for all family members.
- If the activities are being run for a particular community group, the session timing will need to fit in with other weekly activities of that group.
- With some communities there are differences in the way people keep time. If you're organising activities that have a specific start time, it may be useful to set an earlier meeting time to ensure that people arrive before the start deadline.

### **Identifying and providing for appropriate groups**

- Some established groups, although new to physical activity, were not happy to be open and accommodating to new members, without those members joining in the other aspects of the group and their regular meetings. Project staff should be aware of this before inviting new people to the group. Where groups were open to new members, some individuals found it difficult to integrate in to a tightly formed group, especially when from a different culture.
- Mixing groups: activities such as walking and cycling can be provided successfully to mixed gender groups. Family activities can successfully be provided to mixed cultures.
- Mixing cultures works well and where both groups are generally culturally aware and open, most will enjoy meeting, socialising and learning from others. Activities with a picnic which included sharing of food were generally well accepted.
- Gatekeepers and community leaders are very good sources of information, they can also provide opportunities to meet with potential participants. Usually these are paid or professional people from within the community. Ensuring that the gatekeepers are engaged and supportive is essential to the success of the project. This does not mean that they have to attend or be used to communicate through on a long term basis. Keeping them informed is helpful to the ongoing commitment of the participants.

**Intergenerational events and days out** are generally successful where there are different activities available to suit different age groups. The outdoors provides plenty of opportunity to vary the activity and to cater for different levels of ability.

### **Women only sessions**

- Women only sessions may be necessary for some activities, particularly if target the audience is young, single females.

- Women only services may need to be run behind closed doors, or be curtained where the activity requires some protection of modesty.
- Some families will want to have a greater understanding of the activity and may wish to meet the activity leader before they agree for female family members to attend. This can easily be achieved by working with community elders and leaders or by running separate family based events using the same instructor. This is about understanding and trust which can be gained through some simple measures.
- Some activities such as swimming and yoga will require a female leader but this is not always essential where the instructor is considered to be a professional or expert in the field. Ask the group before appointing anyone and introduce the group to the activity leader if this is a new person.

### **Men working with women from BME communities**

- This may be an issue particularly with women from Muslim communities. This does depend sometimes on the type of activity and the group. In some instances male leaders can provide security, and male leaders from outside the community may be preferred as there would be less of an issue with confidentiality, as the group would be able to speak freely in their own language.
- If in doubt ask: “Is it OK for me or “x” to lead your group, or would you prefer someone else?”
- A male leader may help make the group feel safe. In one example a white male leader defended the group against racist remarks. Some women expressed confidence at visiting quieter or more rural places when they had a male leader, where usually they wouldn’t go alone or as a female only group.
- Whilst some women may not mind a male activity or project leader, other family members might. It would be helpful to organise family friendly events to build relationships between the families and the activity leaders.
- A male leader needs to be particularly careful to give participants personal space. Let them determine how much they need – be friendly, and if they engage, great, but if they don’t, step back to give them the space they need.
- Generally avoid physical contact, unless it’s necessary for health and safety or instruction, for example cycle skills training. Always ask for permission.
- Shaking hands with Muslim women is usually not appropriate. Only shake hands if the woman offers her hand first.

### **Suitable Clothing for activities:**

- Initially it is important to accept that participants will attend activities in their usual day to day wear. As people become more familiar with the demands of the activity they will gradually wear and purchase clothing and footwear that is appropriate to the activity and also their culture. Once one person makes a change, the rest of the group generally follow quite quickly.
- Providing clothing for individuals to keep such as tracksuits and trainers can be an incentive to get people to join, but this is expensive to sustain and does not necessarily lead to long term engagement.
- Waterproof ponchos that are held by the activity leader as spares can be shared and do provide suitable cover for all forms of cultural dress. This is a good solution until the group are able to bring their own waterproofs. People want to know what’s required in terms of health and safety, and will be happy to be asked about what clothing changes may be appropriate within their culture, or given the information they need in order to adapt their dress themselves.

### **Preparing for sustainable service provision:**

- Prepare people well before the end of the project, even from the outset, if it is intended that the funding is to be provided for a limited period or that the activities should become self sustaining.

Remember that BME communities come from a different starting point in terms of understanding mainstream conventional structures, so explore with them what support they'll need to take on responsibility. This might be training or support for confidence building, an understanding of committee structures, how to access funding, etc.

- Support groups to build relationships with helpful people in the local authority and with local voluntary organisations that are able to work with them beyond the life of the initial project.

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### **The Mentro Allan programme**

There were fourteen Mentro Allan (MA) projects across Wales, running between 2006 and 2011. The aim was to learn about the most effective ways to support sedentary people to develop the habit of physical activity in the natural environment. The projects had a range of target groups: young people, older people, women, BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities, people with physical and learning disabilities, mental health service users, carers, people at risk of rural isolation, people with low incomes. The approach to project development was participant led; using a Participatory Action Research model of evaluation. A copy of the guidance notes given to project co-ordinators is available through the website. Projects were encouraged to focus on doorstep activities, as being more easily sustainable. [www.mentroallan.co.uk](http://www.mentroallan.co.uk)

Readers interested in working with BME communities may also wish to access the following documents relating:

- Case studies: 3 from the Newport project, 6 and 7 from the Cardiff and Vale project.
- Short practitioner guide: Engaging BME participants in physical activity outdoors.
- Briefing Papers: Support for demographic groups; Physical Activity Outdoors.
- Research Reports: Final project report, Summary report and the External report from the CCRI and the University of Bath.