

African Health Policy Network: No Empty Spaces

AHPN delivered a programme of workshops targeted at reducing the stigma and improving public attitudes towards mental health in Hackney, particularly within local Black led churches and amongst African and Caribbean communities.

- **7** project champions with experience of mental health issues were trained in communication and presentation skills
- **16** workshops were delivered by the project champions
- **550** people were reached through the workshops delivered at a variety of events, prayer meetings and courses
- Approximately **320** people had a one-on-one interaction with a project champion to discuss mental health issues and associated stigmas

“I am well aware of the type of discrimination and stigma many people with mental health conditions face. I believe that addressing misconceptions about mental health and the treatments available is of particular importance because African and Caribbean people are 4 times more likely to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act. There was a high demand for more information on support services. There were many people (whether they had a mental illness or not) that were eager to speak to us about the need for meaningful conversations to be started.” Sophia, a volunteer on the project

Outcomes from the project:

- People felt they better understood how stigma and discrimination might affect people with mental health issues
- An increased realisation that people can recover from mental health issues
- People felt able to speak more openly about their own mental health no longer saw it as a sign of weakness
- Volunteers on the project gained a portfolio of skills, gained experience in presenting and public speaking and developed research and design skills to create information leaflets to support the workshops

“The project had a positive impact since attitudes changed, both of those with the mental health conditions and ordinary members. In one session a member testified after the talk that she felt empowered to go and access help. Some of our team members supported her. She also got a lot of encouragement from her pastor and elders showing that the project had broken down communication barriers effectively.” Deen, a volunteer on the project