

*Equally Connected** Report 11

Fashion Talks!

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**Equally Connected* is an action research project using community development approaches, including the creative arts, to learn from Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities about:

- attitudes to, and experiences of, mental health
- what helps maintain well-being
- effective ways of challenging stigma and discrimination

This evidence will be used to improve understanding and help ensure that services and systems of care (such as the Integrated Care Pathway (ICP) for people with depression) are designed to meet the needs of the diverse BME communities within Edinburgh and the Lothians.

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Fashion Talks!

"People can't always express how they're feeling by words so sometimes they do it with fashion" (participant)

1. Background

In initial scoping work done by Equally Connected, partners suggested there was an unmet need amongst particular groups of young BME people, including young women of Bangladeshi origin and those with a Sikh background. In order to engage this younger group of women it was agreed to use a more creative approach, ideally involving fashion.

Fashion Talks was initially a joint project between Equally Connected (EC) and Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project (MECOPP), both of whom had an interest in working with young BME women to learn more about their views on, and experiences of mental wellbeing. Our initial idea was to work with young BME women to create a fashionable logo, projecting positive mental wellbeing, which could be printed onto a T-shirt.

2. Partnership

Saheliya has worked with young BME women for several years and run a regular youth group. Following on from other successful partnership working between EC and Saheliya, it seemed natural to them to get involved in this particular piece of work. Health All Round (HAR) is a community health initiative based in Gorgie with a new worker focusing on BME people. With various activities and services available, including sexual health services, it seemed good local service to introduce young BME people to in Edinburgh. For these reasons, HAR also joined the planning group.

3. Planning

To avoid school and work commitments, it was decided that the project would take place over a weekend and take the form of art workshops facilitated by a community artist, Jo Hodges.¹ One day would have a specific focus on teasing out issues of mental health and wellbeing among young BME women in their daily lives and ways of coping, as well as promoting positive messages. The second day would have a focus on designing suitable images/logos and selecting the winning design for printing onto a T-shirt. The programme was also structured to include short wellbeing tasters for the girls.

To encourage the development of future work with young people in Gorgie, it was agreed the workshops would be held at the HAR office. Different tasks were allocated to the four partner agencies, including providing venue, materials,

¹ For more details <http://www.johodges.co.uk/>

promotion, snacks, arranging the wellbeing tasters, agreeing the programme and so on.

Although agreed that most participants would come from the Young Saheliya group, all partners had contacts with other young BME women and they were also asked to join in. We decided to keep the age range as wide as possible (between 11-25 years) in order to attract as many young women as possible. A colourful flyer was designed and distributed to the Young Saheliya group and others.

4. February Events

A total of three days were planned - a half day event for instructions and themed group work, a full day of art workshops the next day and a follow up day a few weeks later.

4.1 Turnout

Monitoring sheets were completed by the young women. A total of twenty-two young women attended between the ages of 11 to 21. The young women came from a wide range of cultural backgrounds including Sudanese, Chinese, Sikh, Moroccan, Gypsy/Traveller, Palestinian, Bengali, Guyanese and many more.

4.2 Ground Rules and Icebreakers

A few ground rules were set by the young women and the staff. Key rules such as respecting one another, confidentiality and participation were agreed upon. The main facilitator took the young women through a number of fun and interactive ice-breaker games, to get them feeling more at ease with one another. One exercise asked the young women to write down their feelings:

- I am glad that...: I am a Gypsy, I am a Sikh, I have friends, I am a girl, I got my family support all the time
- I get angry when...: People be racist, when people call me names, when people say bad things to me, when people treat me wrong, when I don't sleep, when I don't eat
- I am happiest when...: I am with my family, I am with my friends, I can be myself
- I find it difficult to....: be myself, talk to colyers (non-travellers), speak my mind to new people, make someone smile

As can be seen from the comments above there is a lot of reference to identity, fitting in, fear of discrimination and also pride in who they are. These themes were explored further in group work.

4.3 Group work

The young women were split into five small groups. One girl in each group was chosen to lie on a piece of paper as a model for a body map. Though there was

some initial reluctance to being put on the spot for the body mapping as it was thought to be embarrassing, eventually the groups reached agreement between themselves and actually had a good laugh carrying out this task.

The groups were then asked to make up a personality for this imaginary 'body' giving her a name, ethnicity, age etc. They were then asked to write or draw all the negative things that this young woman could face in her daily life on one side, and then on the other side come up with ways of dealing with those same problems. The main point of the group work, besides finding out what stresses and pressures young BME women may face, was also to focus the workshop on mental health and wellbeing. As the groups came together and presented their body maps to each other, different positive and supportive messages, promoting self-confidence, started to come across.

4.4 Using the arts

The second day began with a short re-cap of group agreements and the activities of the previous workshop as new women had joined.

4.4.1 Art and Design

After a short introduction to the art tools and crafts available, the young women each started working on their own unique design and logo to promote positive mental wellbeing. The artist and staff were available to help where needed. Some were very eager to and willing to express themselves through art, whereas others found it difficult at first.



4.4.2 Voting and Panel

Towards the end of the workshop participants were asked to place their designs on the table. Each participant was then given three tokens to place on their

three favourite designs (but not their own!). Out of the 20 designs 4 were chosen to be presented before a 'Dragons-Den' panel.

Four young women were randomly selected, along with the artist, to make up the panel. In making decisions as to which design should win, the panel was asked to consider three main questions:

- Is it eye-catching?
- Does it get across a strong message about positive emotional health for young women from different cultures/communities?
- Would you wear it?

The rest of the participants were then split into teams, and each team was given one of the final designs that they had to 'pitch' to the panel members. The teams were given some time to prepare their pitch, keeping in mind the three key questions. With much hilarity and determination, the young women worked hard to equally promote the designs and logos, some of the comments made when they were 'pitching' their designs to the panel are listed below:

- *"It is a good message about being an individual with confidence, self-worth and having strong self-esteem, and belief in yourself basically"*
- *"It is made by a girl for girls and is about female empowerment. Simple and strong."*
- *"The colour is good, it is bold and it would feel good to wear. The message tells you to be proud of what you are and who you are"*
- *"It is a cool design, you'd be proud to wear it and that is really important because it affects how you feel inside too"*
- *"Young girls from different cultures are like other girls, no different, that's what it says. Also it is about being an individual, with confidence in yourself"*
- *"It doesn't matter what country you come from, or your culture or religion, it is about you and feeling good about yourself. It says wherever I am I am proud to be me"*
- *"The messages say 'I'm me, from a different culture and I am proud, it gives a positive personal message"*
- *"Self-esteem is within all of us, but sometimes people try to take it away, they think they are doing it for the right reasons but that isn't how it feels. For me, this design promotes that which is inside of all us just trying to get out"*
- *"It says girls are proud of who we are and it is cool to love yourself too"*
- *"It is about promoting confidence, some younger girls might not feel confident but they need to believe in themselves whatever the pressures put on them"*
- *"We like the way it has been layered, with words cut out of magazines, very artistic and eye-catching"*

The young women left the room while the panel deliberated and picked the winning design. After a long discussion they picked two designs, one for the actual design and the other for its strong slogan **"girls together bring peace within"**. The panel wanted to combine the two into one design with a slogan. Some of the comments from the panel:

"It promotes love and happiness between all people; it also gives a sense of light-heartedness. It is simple and feminine and the colours are very much BME colours and it would be wearable in all weathers. It is colourful and has lots of contrast so it catches your eye too"

"Everyone can have their own understanding of this message, peace within you but also it promotes peace and love amongst everyone"

'Combining the two just says it all - we love ourselves, we're feminine and unique - a message about yourself but also about other people'

'of all the designs it gets the message across strongly, the girl who designed this said it came from how she felt just coming to this group, not alone, with friends around her and that brought peace within her. That slogan just touched me'

'Love is a powerful thing, across all cultures and it has the power to change things if we work together. Support each other through our ups and downs, but it is also important to love yourself to remind yourself, and others, how important this is. These themes work well together and come out in this design and message'

The entire group was satisfied with the decision of the panel. The young women who had created the winning designs had never met before the Fashion Talks workshops and were also pleased. Much consideration, creativity and positivity had gone into the winning design and slogan. The young woman behind the slogan had just recently moved to UK from her home country, but despite language barriers was determined to write a positive message, primarily about she felt during the workshops. She had the final message translated from Arabic to English by a member of staff.



After a long and very creative day, as a treat, the young women had henna art done on their hands and wrists

4.5 Evaluation

As they left the young women gave feedback on a large poster with happy/sad faces. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

5. Follow up event

A few weeks later, after the T-shirts had been printed, a follow up session was held to give the women their T-shirt and to allow them to personalise their T-shirt with 'bling', sequins, etc.

For EC this was also a good opportunity to get a bit more information about what young women may feel about seeking help and coping when feeling low, especially now that the young women had already spoken about these issues.

This time the venue was at Saheliya, a safe and known environment to the young women. Due to other commitments the turnout was not as great as with the previous workshops, six young women showed up, two of whom had not been at the previous workshops but were still keen to 'bling' their T-shirts.

5.1 Seeking Help

The young women were given a short vignette to highlight the situation of an imaginary young BME woman. The participants were then asked a number of questions used by EC in other groups and individuals, to gain more information about help seeking behaviour and opinions about appropriateness of services. At first, the young women were somewhat shy to speak openly in this part of the session as it referred to their own experiences as well. However they managed to help each other with the answers.

Issue	Solution 'quotes'
Teenager Rosie, from New York City. Feeling low. What to do to feel better?	<i>Talk to somebody so she is not by herself</i> <i>She needs to trust someone that can tell her things to do to feel better.</i> <i>Speak to mother or father.</i>
How does she feel?	<i>If you feel like this you can feel everything in one go.</i> <i>Angry, sad, confused</i> <i>I have spoken to friends, but not everyone would</i>
Should she speak to a professional?	<i>No</i>

	<i>They might not understand. Better to talk to someone who knows what she is going through - friend like herself.</i>
What professionals?	<i>If you speak to a teacher, they might talk to head teacher or others and make a big deal. Some teachers would understand, some wouldn't.</i>
Should she speak to a GP?	<i>No It wouldn't be easy to explain They don't know how you feel Will GP speak to parents? Confidentiality?</i>
How can a GP help?	<i>Would give medication for stress GP might think sadness is depression</i>
Where can she go then?	<i>Young Saheliya You are surrounded by people who have been through what I have been through. You can share things and people will understand</i>
How can a T-shirt like this help young women like Rosie?	<i>You feel good to wear t-shirt with a good message. Funny t-shirts can make you laugh. A nice T-shirt can make you feel pretty, and that feels good.</i>

6. Learning

For EC a number of learning points arose from this innovative project:

- Partnership working was successful, introducing partners to work together further in future.
- Arts, design and fashion are good tools for talking about mental health with young women.
- The February workshop were very intense as time was limited
- Recruitment outside of Young Saheliya users could be improved to reach other isolated young women
- The previous trust that parents have with Young Saheliya, meant that it was okay for the workshops to finish late.
- Other young women were interested but could not attend as they have jobs at the weekends.
- The young Gypsy/Traveller women who took part in the first workshop, thought the event was for Travellers only and felt very uncomfortable in

the unknown environment. This indicates a need for further outreach and encouragement in this community.

7. Conclusions

Staff were so impressed by the artwork produced by the young women that all the designs have now been turned into an exhibition, along with the winning design, which has already been shown at the Happy Souls festival in London in June and will also be displayed as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival in October 2011. There is also the potential to turn some of the quotes and designs into resources like 'Tips Cards' with tips to stay happy on the flip side of the designs, or on postcards. These could then be used with other people. Fashion Talks generated some impressive artwork and has great potential to be taken forward in the future.

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