

*Equally Connected** Report 14

Wellbeing Melas

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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.

Equally Connected is funded and supported by NHS Lothian and NHS Health Scotland and based at Health in Mind in Edinburgh

Wellbeing Melas



Rhythm Sticks at the Edinburgh Wellbeing Mela

1. Introduction

'Mela' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'gathering' and is traditionally a time to come together with friends and family to watch, and participate in, diverse artistic performances and workshops. Throughout the life of Equally Connected we used the concept of a Mela to promote health and wellbeing to diverse BME communities in Edinburgh and Midlothian. This report will provide a summary of using this approach, as well present as our key findings to emerge from this work.

2. Edinburgh Mela stall

The Edinburgh Mela is an annual multi-cultural festival which takes place during the summer months, often as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In early August 2010 Equally Connected, along with Men in Mind and staff from Stress Control (East Lothian), hosted a weekend stall at this popular event.

Initially, there had been some reservations about having a stall, in previous years partner agencies told us 'health' stalls were often quiet and staff had found it particularly difficult to engage with BME community members about mental health and wellbeing. With this in mind, Equally Connected staff thought long and hard about fun and creative ways to engage with community members about this sensitive topic. In order to attract people to the stall we firstly, employed a face-painter for children - as children queued to have their faces painted this

provided a 'captive' audience of parents/guardians. Secondly, for some of the time we offered short taster sessions of back/shoulder massage. Thirdly, we created a Stress Buster quiz, a highly effective way to engage with community members. In return for completing the quiz, people were given an Equally Connected bag full of leaflets and information about local Primary Care Mental Health (PCMH) services, and a balloon!

The forward planning worked well as the stall was one of the busiest stalls at the 2010 Mela, by the end of the first day we had ran out of quizzes and mental health promotional materials. After quickly re-stocking overnight the stall was just as busy on day two.

3. Wellbeing Melas

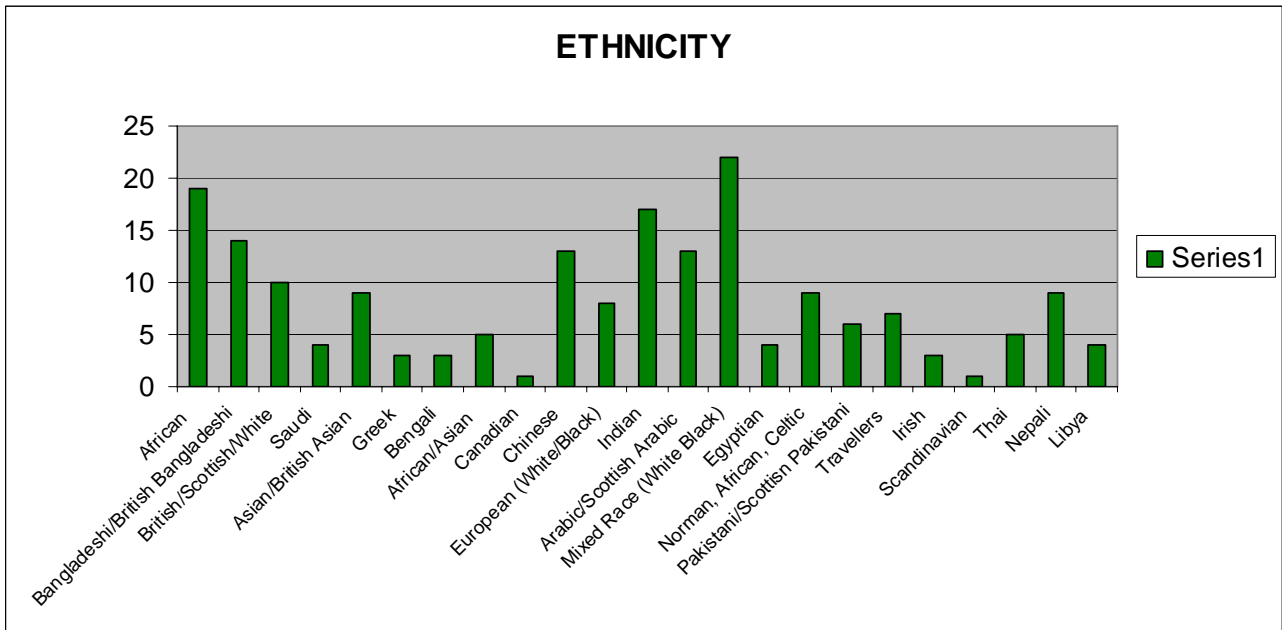
Following the success of our presence at the Edinburgh Mela, we co-organised two Wellbeing Melas in Edinburgh and Midlothian. Working with partners, we sought to challenge the stigma often surrounding mental health by using the concept of a Mela and adding a new dimension of promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. To our knowledge this is the first time this approach has been used in Edinburgh and the Lothians. The two Melas followed a similar structure and were promoted as a community event for the whole family. In total the two Wellbeing Melas were attended by approximately 500 people, the majority from BME backgrounds.

Again, one specific tool we used at the Wellbeing Melas, to impart information on PCMH services as well as gather views, was the 'Stress Buster Quiz' - a fun, non-threatening, easy to complete, exercise which was completed by 333 people, the majority from BME backgrounds, and produced many interesting results (see section 4).

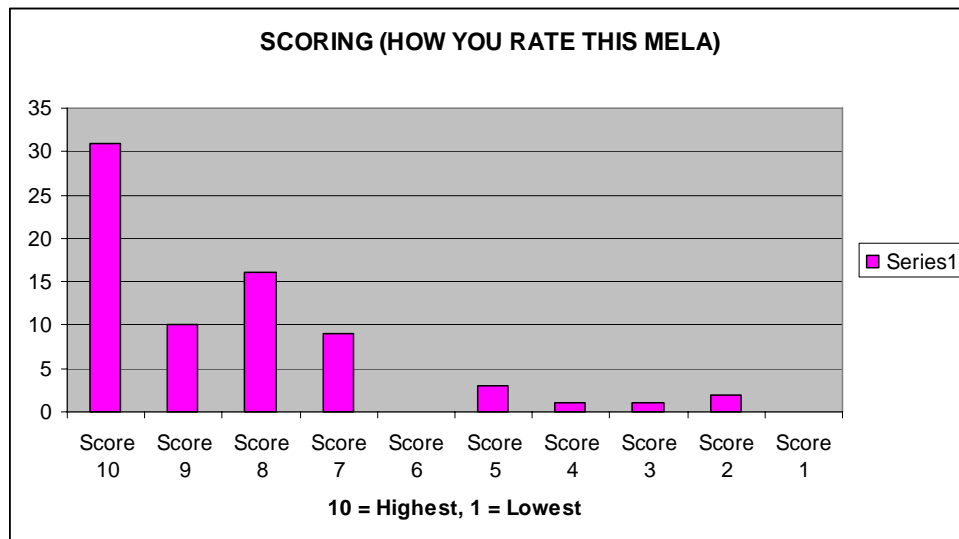
3.1 The Edinburgh Wellbeing Mela

This event, held in the middle of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival (SMHAFF), took place on Sunday 17th October 2010 at the St. Bride's Centre in Edinburgh. It was co-organised by staff from Equally Connected, Men in Mind, NHS Lothian and 'see me' and was funded by NHS Lothian, see me and NHS Health Scotland. The purpose of this event, as noted above, was to take the successful model of a Mela but to also add a new dimension - promoting positive mental health. The event also promoted cultural diversity and different ways of maintaining wellbeing. The event was very successful with approximately 300 people attending over the course of the day. The event began at 11am with a lively Bagpipe and Dhol Sikh performance. There were several performances in the main hall, including Tibetan dance, African choir, Rhythm Sticks, drama and Bollywood dance. In other rooms, various complementary therapies were on offer, as well as a laughter workshop, Chinese knot therapy and Thai fruit carving. Children's activities included a magic show, face-painting and hair braiding. Lunch comprised of Polish, Indian and Middle Eastern food from local caterers.

Feedback forms were completed by many participants and there was also a Graffiti Board for participants to write their own comments. Using details from the feedback forms, the chart below illustrates the wide range of people, attending the event (self-ascribed ethnicity):



Participants were also asked to rate the Mela on a scale of 1 to 10. As the chart below shows the results were very positive, with the highest rating (10) getting the most votes (31).



Specific comments were also positive. When asked what they enjoyed about the event, some comments were: *"Very good for all family and to learn in happy atmosphere"; "The complimentary therapies were lovely. The facial reflexology was so relaxing and she told me that I really needed to relax as my face was very tight"; "Enjoyed Rhythm Sticks."; "Different, various, creative, active activities"*.

When asked what they learned from the event, comments included: *"What a Laughter Workshop is...good health advice"; "The leaflets were very useful"; "Had lots of new experiences."; "About stigma and happiness"; "How tired I am and to be honest with people about my own mental state"*;

"Mental health and wellbeing concerns everybody and all communities"; "Relaxation"; "What a lot of lovely people live in Edinburgh and how we can all get along".

During the event people were asked to write their feedback on the Graffiti Board, comments included:

- *Fantastic community event - lots of entertainment for all. Thanks!!*
- *It was fun! Wellbeing is about family and being connected. A great event!!!*
- *Wow! Try the head and shoulder massage. Utterly blissful. Thank you*
- *A really friendly and inclusive event with all kinds of things to try out and lots of info. I didn't realise from the e-mail all the things that would be on offer. Lots more friends would have come if they had known*
- *Great day - historical, thank you*
- *Really excited about this event and its focus on wellbeing!*
- *This is what wellbeing and community caring is truly about*

During discussions with BME women in Midlothian, another part of the Equally Connected research, several individuals expressed a concern that events such as Wellbeing Mela almost always take place in Edinburgh. From this discussion, the idea for the local Wellbeing Mela - the first intercultural Wellbeing Mela in Midlothian - came about.

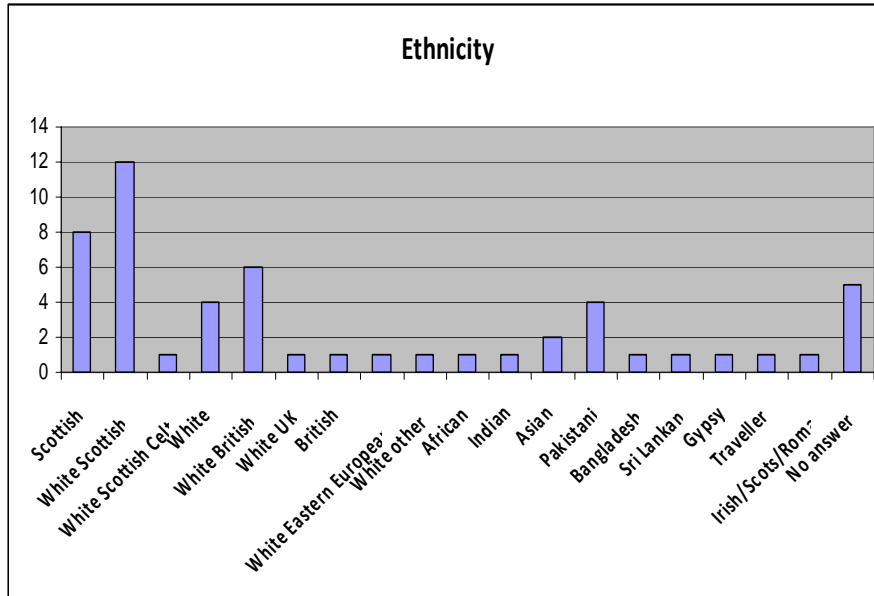
3.2 Midlothian Wellbeing Mela

This event took place on Sunday 6th March, 2011 at Loanhead Miners' Welfare. Using the successful format set out by the preceding Edinburgh Wellbeing Mela, this Mela attracted up to 150 people over the course of the event. The Midlothian Wellbeing Mela was a collaboration between Equally Connected, Men in Mind, see me, Midlothian Council and the Midlothian People's Equality Group. Funding came from NHS Lothian, Midlothian Council and see me.

The success of the Wellbeing Mela in Edinburgh was partly due to the focus on using the arts as a means of achieving better wellbeing, as well as it being a day for all the family. In Midlothian we wanted to keep this focus, with various interactive workshops, performances and activities for different age groups. Again, this event had a structure which allowed people to choose workshop activities instead of simply watching a fixed programme of performances:

- An open main room with performances throughout the day
- A workshop room where people could book places
- An open children's entertainment and activity room
- Two therapy rooms where people could book tasters of different complementary therapies

The event attracted an audience from various ethnic backgrounds and many different age groups were represented. Again, feedback forms were available for attendees to complete, these were optional and not completed by all who attended. The chart below highlights the ethnicity of those who completed a feedback form:



Although many BME people did attend, in order to increase representation in the future, it is suggested that further thought is given to where and when the event is promoted, for example, through BME businesses or by visiting locations where BME people gather.

Rating the Mela

Participants were asked to rate the Mela on a scale of 1 to 10, the table below illustrates the feedback. Collectively, 86% of people who completed the feedback rated it in the 8 to 10 range which is a very positive result.

Table 1 - How would you rate this Mela? (10 = highest; 1 = lowest)

Total number of ratings	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
49	19	14	9	3	3					1

3.2 Learning

Though a success for the people who attended the Wellbeing Melas, Equally Connected staff were also keen to record the learning to aid others in planning future events. Some of the key learning points are listed below:

- Promotion - a clear promotional strategy should be in place so that promotional materials can be effectively disseminated, this strategy should include agreement on how to respond to any negative reaction (as in Midlothian)

- Finance - the handling of finance and invoicing between partners should be negotiated and agreed at an early stage, ideally it is easier if one partner takes responsibility for financial matters. A budget of committed expenditure needs to be agreed by all partners, to avoid 'hidden' or unknown charges
- The need for an MC at each event to ensure smooth-running and explanation of any programme changes
- Changing areas for performers.
- Planning meetings should be minuted to avoid misunderstanding and circulated to all partners to ensure that those who cannot attend all meetings are kept fully informed
- Invoicing procedures should be made clear to all artists/workshop leaders at the time they agree to participate
- Lunch - the location of food/refreshments should be arranged to minimise queuing
- The allocation of tasks should be distributed evenly amongst the planning team members
- Simplify the feedback form to encourage higher completion rates
- More staff at registration and workshop 'sign up' desks

4. Stress Buster Quiz

As noted earlier, the Stress Buster Quiz was a straightforward tool to gather research data and impart knowledge about local PCMH services. 333 people completed the quiz at the Edinburgh Mela and two Wellbeing Melas. The results are listed below:

- 1) Eating a balanced diet *only* improves physical health?
True 47% False 53%
- 2) Sleepless nights can be a sign of stress or anxiety?
True 91% False 9%
- 3) Gardening can have a positive effect on mental wellbeing?
True 83% False 16% No answer 1%
- 4) One of the best places to find out about health and wellbeing in Edinburgh/Midlothian is the Yellow Pages?
True 45% False 50% No answer 5%
- 5) Keeping in touch with friends and family can be a good way of staying healthy and happy
True 91% False 7% No answer 2%
- 6) Treating yourself to something good/nice is just selfish and has no health benefits?
True 19% False 80% No answer 1%
- 7) Exercise can make you happier and increase your energy levels?
True 89% False 10% No answer 1%

8) During their life 1 in 5 people in Scotland will experience depression?

True 75% False 24% No answer 1%

9) Guided Self-Help involves using a guide dog for the blind?

True 49% False 49% No answer 2%

10) Some stress is good for you?

True 58% False 41% No answer 1%

11) Depression is just a sign of weakness?

True 38% False 61% No answer 1%

The results highlight a pressing need to improve awareness of social prescribing initiatives -for example 49% of people believed that Guided Self-Help involves using a guide dog (this question was included as a member of the EC team was asked this very question in Midlothian during the early months of the project). Another interesting finding is that a reasonably high number (47%) believe that a balanced diet only improves physical health, revealing a lack of awareness amongst some regarding the links between physical and mental health. Similarly it is worrying that 38% thought depression was just a sign of weakness. We found the quiz to be a highly effective, non-threatening, way to engage with BME people about issues affecting mental health.

5. Conclusions

At the time of writing, another Wellbeing Mela is being planned in Midlothian for this winter and there is interest in holding another Wellbeing Mela in Edinburgh as part of this year's SMHAFF. The aim of the events was to bring people together to promote cultural diversity and wellbeing and to impart a message of positive mental health. It was encouraging to see so many people from different backgrounds enjoying the events. Our group work in Midlothian and Edinburgh has shown that sometimes members of BME communities do not always feel included as of the wider community. When people feel isolated from their local community, that isolation can have a serious impact on their wellbeing. Feedback from participants, and staff observations on the day, suggest that both Wellbeing Melas were opportunities for people, with varying customs and beliefs, to share and celebrate their differences as well as their similarities. The events were highly successful and provide an adaptable model which can be used in future, with many different groups of people, to promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

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