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Quetzal



Breaking the Silence Initiative

EVALUATION

Executive Summary

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Executive summary

Introduction

Quetzal was funded for the Breaking the Silence Initiative in 2019 through a grant co-funded by the Tampon Tax Fund through a partnership between Comic Relief and the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport.

The project aimed to mitigate the impact of sexual violence in childhood experienced by Asian women in Leicester, to improve their mental health and well-being, and to equip them with the knowledge and tools to make positive choices about their lives. This included: 1. setting up a web-based self-help package and awareness-raising strategy tailored to the needs of Asian women; 2. supporting isolated survivors of childhood sexual abuse with multiple complex needs into therapeutic counselling; 3. testing new monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches, be more reflective and to share learning in Leicester, Leicestershire and beyond.

The impetus for the project came from analysing Quetzal's data around who was using the service, and identifying that South Asian women were under-represented compared to the make-up of the local community as well as from looking at issues raised by external research around the involvement of South Asian women.

Evaluation questions

The final evaluation set out to answer the following questions:

1. Has the Breaking the Silence Initiative facilitated an effective community-based approach and awareness-raising strategy for South Asian women in Leicester?
2. What hinders and supports the delivery and replicability of the community-based approach for this client group?
3. What plans does Quetzal have to ensure continuous improvement in maintaining relationships with the South Asian communities and in reaching new communities?
4. To what extent has Quetzal strengthened its MEL systems and effectively integrated the learning into the organisation's practice?

Breaking the Silence Initiative activities

Project activities have included:

- **Delivery of counselling sessions especially for South Asian women** – since the implementation of Quetzal's new database in August 2020, 424 counselling sessions delivered to approximately 53 South Asian women have been recorded.

- **Recruitment of Community Connector volunteers** to open up opportunities for relationships and build connections with universities in particular, involving volunteers from South Asian and other communities. Volunteers have been involved in delivering training to a range of different groups about the issue.
- **Website and social media development** including promotional videos.
- **A self help guide** downloadable from Quetzal's website, <https://quetzal.org.uk/read-our-self-help-guide/> which has received 269 downloads.
- **YouTube videos** made with Leicester videographer Nikhil Mistry to animate the words of clients who have accessed counselling through Breaking the Silence, available on Quetzal's [YouTube channel](#)
- **Community awareness raising sessions** where Quetzal held discussions with local communities to ask what can be done to raise more awareness about the issues
- **Training and workshops** with the Project Facilitator and/or Community Connector volunteers attending online meetings of external organisations and groups
- **Increased referrals for counselling** through outreach to partners

Findings

Question one: has the Breaking the Silence Initiative facilitated an effective community-based approach and awareness-raising strategy for South Asian women in Leicester?

Working with South Asian communities

The main differences that interviewees identified in working with South Asian women as opposed to other communities were:

- Access to information.
- Concerns that the services are not for them or won't help them.
- Freedom of access.
- Wider cultural expectations in relation to honour and shame and what will happen to if information is shared.
- Feeling disloyal to the community by talking about experience of sexual abuse.
- Lack of disclosure to family and friends compared to other communities.

Changes as a result of Breaking the Silence

The main changes for **Quetzal** have been:

- The change to an outreach model through Breaking the Silence made a significant difference, changing Quetzal to a much more outwardly focused organisation, increasing its reach, reputation and influence.

- Involving Community Connector volunteers to engage with different communities.
- Establishing 16-week counselling delivery and working with counsellors to focus this.
- Delivering wider range of services than solely one-to-one counselling, creating more of a community outside the therapy.
- Improving how services are monitored and evaluated and how stories of change are collected and told, including through using the Lamplight database for better analysis.

Changes for **beneficiaries** (clients) include:

- An 80% increase in South Asian female survivors accessing counselling since the beginning of the project¹, including more younger clients and more self-referrals.
- Following counselling, women have gone on to gain paid employment, undertaken talks about childhood sexual abuse, reduced unhelpful habits such as substance misuse, and identified changes such as an increase in self-awareness and confidence.

Individuals who were interviewed identified changes such as an increase in skills (particularly for volunteers), increase in awareness around childhood sexual abuse in South Asian communities, and more appreciation of the benefits of partnership working.

Partner organisations interviewed identified how working with Quetzal had enhanced the services that they provided for their beneficiaries. Working together for strategic purposes, influencing and leveraging funding, and mutual support were highlighted as important. Working with partners has been crucial to the success of the Breaking the Silence project, including outreach and participating in joint delivery of workshops, which then created referrals to Quetzal for counselling services.

Changes for **South Asian communities** as a whole were more difficult to quantify within the scope of this evaluation, although interviewees thought that there had been a shift in the people that they were working with South Asian women being more comfortable in talking about issues that have been taboo. The videos were identified as helpful for this.

What hinders and supports success

Question two: what hinders and supports the delivery and replicability of the community-based approach for this client group?

What factors support the delivery of a community-based approach?

- The Project Facilitator with the right skills and experience, particularly around Asset-Based Community Development.

¹ Monitoring information available on Quetzal's website <https://quetzal.org.uk/break-the-silence/>

- The Project Counsellor's commitment and developing expertise, having one person who could focus on the project and build up knowledge and expertise.
- Involvement and support of Community Connector volunteers giving greater representation across different South Asian communities.
- Taking an incremental approach with it was highlighted that lots of small changes helped, coming at the issue from different angles and involving different people.
- Telling stories about the project, using information from women outside the organisation to give them a voice.
- Having existing community groups to work with in Leicester with many organisations with a strong history of working with the South Asian community.
- Trust between stakeholders including trust between organisations as well as trust of organisations by (potential) beneficiaries.
- Enthusiasm of partners to work together, including this being easier with more online meetings and a greater desire to reach out for peer support during Covid.
- Being able to talk to South Asian women directly not through intermediaries who may censor information, with the importance of women only space identified.
- The power of women connecting with others with shared experiences.
- Working with partners to support individual clients through casework and referrals.
- Publicity targeted towards South Asian women using specific language and imagery.
- Helping women feel that services are for them so they are more likely to come forward.
- Flexibility of delivery to suit partners, enabled in part by volunteers.
- The combination of outreach and counselling and self-help guide so that there was a specific offer for beneficiaries from Quetzal rather than it just being awareness-raising.
- Clinical supervision for staff to make sense of their experiences given the nature of the work.
- Getting involved in national campaigns on social media to increase awareness of what was happening in Leicester and Leicestershire.

What hinders the community-based approach?

- Initial lack of contacts in the community, with the facilitator needing to make a lot of "cold calls" at the beginning.
- The difficulty of talking about childhood sexual abuse.
- The capacity needed for outreach work, ameliorated to some extent by the involvement of the Community Connector volunteers.
- Not delivering in community languages, one of the challenges of delivering ongoing services with volunteer counsellors who may only stay for a short time and not wanting to set up expectations that cannot be met.
- Proportion of people not attending for counselling appointments over summer, when holidays (including from university) disrupted normal attendance.

- Lack of childcare for women to be able to attend.
- The length of the project - the bigger picture around the work that needs to be done is not a three-year project, but activity that may need 5-10 years of funding to achieve.

Changes in plans

There were some plans that were changed during the delivery of the project:

- Setting up the project, particularly staff recruitment took longer than planned and in turn this affected target numbers, although funders Comic Relief were very receptive to working with Quetzal around this.
- It was initially planned that counselling would be provided within people's communities, but many women fed back that they preferred to attend Quetzal in the city centre because it was more private.
- Recruitment of volunteer Community Connectors because the need for outreach capacity was greater than envisaged.
- Covid-19 halted all of Quetzal's face to face counselling temporarily and services were delivered online or by telephone, but South Asian clients were less likely to want to undertake online or telephone counselling because of the difficulties of finding a place in their home to talk safely and confidentially, so face-to-face counselling on the Breaking the Silence project started back in person before mainstream counselling.
- Outreach moved online, which may have opened up more opportunities for women who would not have attended an event in person, but this may be at the expense of depth of connection which may be important when dealing with these issues.

The background of staff

Staff and volunteers delivering this project and evaluation were from a range of backgrounds, not solely South Asian. There were mixed views about this. Some interviewees highlighted that there were benefits to having people who were not from the South Asian community and that other factors were also important, having someone to listen and understand who would not judge them. For people who are concerned about information being shared in their community, having someone who is not part of the community is a clear barrier. Creating connections across different groups of women was also mentioned as important so as not to see this as solely something that happens in South Asian communities.

Some interviewees thought that it was important to have South Asian staff or volunteers, for example they would better understand the culture without it needing to be explained; it would help women not feel they are being disloyal to their community, including concerns about racism and discrimination, or about feeling their community is being

judged; or that women are better able to identify with other South Asian women, or having South Asian women as “role models”.

Interviewees identified that Quetzal had managed relationships across communities sensitively and regardless of ethnicity, interviewees emphasised the importance of staff and volunteers having the relevant background so that the knowledge is held by everyone that women come into contact with, not just within one element of the service.

These findings are similar to external research that finds a mixed picture.

Future plans for South Asian and other communities

Question three: what plans does Quetzal have to ensure continuous improvement in maintaining relationships with the South Asian communities and in reaching new communities?

Although the specific counselling provision will end with the end of Breaking the Silence and South Asian women will join the main waiting list, there is an intention to continue to partner with organisations working with South Asian women and a desire from partners to continue to undertake this work, so it will be important to take time to mainstream the work to sustain the changes that have been made as a result of this project.

Interviewees felt that the approach of the Breaking the Silence project would translate to other communities, those mentioned included Black British / African Caribbean communities, who one interviewee thought had similar taboos to South Asian communities; Eastern European people where there may be parallels in relation to religion, as many have Catholic upbringings; and traveller communities. It was suggested that starting with volunteers and partners from these communities at the project development stage rather than getting people involved just in the delivery would help.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning systems

Question four: to what extent has Quetzal strengthened its monitoring, evaluation and learning systems and effectively integrated the learning into the organisation's practice?

Quetzal staff indicated that there had been a step change in the information that is collected in tandem with the introduction of a database that is able to collect and analyse data in a more sophisticated way for strategy, influencing policy, impact reporting and marketing, or informing service delivery. This is still under development.

Gathering people's stories and using these in different ways has been key; Quetzal is considering what happens with the data and stories to further publicise the project.

Recommendations

Recommendations have been made for further development, including in areas such as:

- **Continuing work with South Asian communities** – such as focused work considering where change might be best achieved; identifying whether developing services in community languages is feasible and considering other developments to meet the preferences of women; working with funders to identify longer term funding.
- **Maintaining and developing relationships with partners** – including meetings specifically looking at working with the South Asian and other communities for referrals, joint projects, and influencing decision-makers; identifying organisations working in the South Asian community for future joint work.
- **Collecting, analysing and using data** – for example measuring changes for partners and communities as the work progresses; reviewing CORE outcomes to provide information on access to services and outcomes for people from different communities; reviewing how data is used and whether the right things are being collected; considering how to monitor the longer-term impact of the project.
- **Continuing outreach and marketing** – including use of materials developed for the project; and using the approach of capturing women's stories can for other projects.
- **Mainstreaming services and learning** – ensuring that learning is shared with trustees, staff and volunteers across the organisation; utilise learning about the time taken for start-up in future projects; ensuring that there are exit plans for staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries where work is no longer continuing.

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