

## 7.1 The Bromley Bow Centre



### **Name of Project/Service:**

The Bromley by Bow Centre. Tower Hamlets, East London, United Kingdom

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### **Description of the Service:**

The Bromley by Bow Centre is an innovative community organisation in East London. Working in one of the most deprived wards in the UK, the Centre supports families, young people and adults of all ages and backgrounds to learn new skills, improve their health and wellbeing, find employment and develop the confidence to achieve their goals and transform their lives.

### **Mission & Values**

The Centre's mission is to help create a cohesive, healthy, successful and vibrant community, and to remove the negative label of 'deprived' from the area of Bromley by Bow, which is situated within the East London district of Tower Hamlets.

### *Integration*

The Centre runs a very diverse range of projects and activities, integrated in a complementary and cohesive way. Programmes are designed to interlock and fit together to form a logically connected holistic service, with both programmes and programme staff overlapping. This contributes to the overall mission of tackling deep-seated problems, thereby enabling a huge number of people to grasp opportunities and build a better future for themselves and their families.

### *Excellence*

Staff are committed to ensuring a high level of quality both in the delivery of services and in the venues in which they are delivered. This is fundamental to the ethos of the Bromley by Bow Centre as a mark of respect to its community. For example, by delivering high quality services, the community grows to expect this level of quality, in turn raising local aspirations.

### *Partnership*

By working in partnership, we can achieve so much more. By recognising that different people have different skills, and celebrating the richness of these differences, we can learn from each other and bring equity to our relationships.

### **Background of the Project:**

*Pollen* (People, Life, Landscape & Nature) is a social and therapeutic horticultural project for adults experiencing mental distress. The project grew out of Bromley by Bow's experience of working with the local community to develop the surrounding park. From this experience we learned that the most vulnerable people in the community would hang around the edges of the landscape and not enter the buildings. This led us to set up informal horticultural projects, over the years, to engage with this hard-to-reach group. *Pollen* is a funded project that has now been set up formally since January 2010 with a target group of 50 members per year.

*Fresh Start* is a National Health Service (NHS) funded yearlong weight management and healthy lifestyles programme for overweight and obese adults from the Tower Hamlets district in East London. Participants have a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 25 (kg/m<sup>2</sup>) and above. The programme provides tailored dietary, exercise and motivational coaching support enabling adults to develop and sustain good health behaviours. The programme combines

advice, learning and activity, enabling participants to develop, maintain and advance upon weight loss and improved health behaviours.

**Description of Good Practice:**

**Pollen** – The overall aim of the project is to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of individuals by working in an integrated setting, thereby reducing the stigma attached to mental health. The project is run within the gardens of the Bromley by Bow Centre. Members have access to activities such as vegetable and flower growing, flower arranging, garden maintenance and art related activities such as ceramics. Pollen is also a registered Green Gym.

There is a grey area between mental distress and mental illness. There are many different high quality services in the surrounding districts, specifically designed to help people suffering with mental illness symptoms. Unfortunately, there are far fewer services in place for the far greater number of people suffering with mental distress.

The mental distress referral criteria for Pollen are as follows:

o Stress	o Anxiety
o Low mood	o Panic attacks
o Agitation	o Low-self esteem and confidence
o Inability to cope with day-to-day life	o Poor motivation

Referrals to the project come from general practitioners (GPs), community mental health teams (e.g. social workers, community nurses, and psychologists), voluntary and independent services such as mental health charities, or self-referral. Pollen promotes the restorative benefits of increased activity through horticulture. Engagement with the project is also aimed at increasing confidence and self-esteem through the use of motivational coaching sessions. To further support members suffering from depression and anxiety, we have recently partnered with NHS Tower Hamlets Psychological Services through the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) scheme to provide counselling.

Pollen is funded from January 2010 to January 2012 by Ecominds (which is part of the Big Lottery Fund) and the J Paul Getty Charitable Trust. From 2012, we hope to secure further funding, but also to attract members wishing to use their personalised budgets to access the service. We also aim to develop a social enterprise strand to the project with sales of our horticultural grown products.



*Two Pollen members working in the Bromley by Bow Centre gardens.*

### **Case Study:**

Steve\* (white British man aged 52 years) worked for London Underground as a cleaner until approximately 12 years ago when he was made redundant. Around this time, his father suddenly became very unwell and had a leg amputation, resulting in him becoming wheelchair-bound. Steve was living with his parents at this time, and found himself helping his mother as carer for his father. His father died two years later, and Steve remained unemployed for a further eight years. Two years ago, Steve's mother became increasingly unwell with Alzheimer's disease, and when she became too unwell to be cared for safely at home, she was moved into permanent nursing care. Steve found that he had little structure to his day and realised that as it was several years since he had worked, it would be difficult to find employment.

Steve was referred to Bromley by Bow Centre's 'Life Begins at 50' project, where he chose to focus on the employment component of the variety of courses offered. Participants of this course were able to apply for voluntary placements and Steve chose Pollen, as he wished to gain practical experience in garden maintenance, as he felt this would help him to find a job as a caretaker. Over time, Steve steadily increased the sessions he attended at Pollen and gained in confidence as a result of being a volunteer.

In summer 2009, Steve started studying the NVQ Level 1 in conservation at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park and achieved his qualification in March 2010 this year.

Recently, Steve has been supported through Pollen to gain paid work experience in a local horticultural organisation, which he is hoping will lead to full time employment.

*\*Real name not used*

**Fresh Start** – Fresh Start's key objective is to improve the long-term health and wellbeing of the participants. Fresh Start takes a 'whole body' holistic approach to weight loss, addressing activity levels, nutrition, and social and personal drivers to weight loss.

To date 344 participants have registered with the Fresh Start programme. On average, a participant will lose 4.3% body mass during the first 12 weeks of the programme and an average of 5.6cm in waist circumference. Heart rate is measured during the programme as an indication of fitness, which on average will decrease by 5.9bpm (beats per minute), indicating improved heart function and fitness level. A large component of the programme is 'lay-led': run by members of the community who have training in mentoring, but do not have a medical qualification. Participants follow both a syllabus and direct their own learning, covering health topics of interest, such as diabetes control through diet. Data indicates that while weight loss appears to tail off over the yearlong programme, most participants manage to maintain an average body mass loss of 6.7%. It is thought that by following a lay-led, yearlong methodology the programme becomes more sustainable, rather than a short-term intervention.

Participants may be referred to the Fresh Start programme via a health professional (e.g. general practitioner, nurse or physiotherapist), by members of the community acting on behalf of the programme (e.g. health trainer or health champion), or self-refer. Data shows that participants who self-refer achieve better weight loss results and stay on the programme for a longer period, as motivation is already higher before embarking with Fresh Start.

Motivational coaching supports Fresh Start's holistic approach, encouraging behavioural change via life evaluation and goal setting. This approach aims to provoke a proactive response, encouraging participants to take ownership of their actions, promoting sustainability and long-term success.

### **Case Study:**

Nargis\*, a Bengali 28 year old mother of four, had spent the last ten years focusing on her family and husband rather than looking after herself. When Nargis heard about Fresh Start through her midwife and after the birth of her fourth child, she decided to take part. When she came to meet the team she was shy and withdrawn, but communicated her sadness with allowing herself to put on 40 kilograms over 8 years. She felt embarrassed in front of her husband and felt she was setting a bad example for her children. Nargis had tried to lose weight on her own, but was never motivated enough to keep exercising. She was also confused about which foods she should be eating to help with her Type II diabetes. Nargis had just a small amount of self-belief, but was prepared to give Fresh Start a try.

Nargis was an avid attendee at all the nutrition classes. She enjoyed the cooking sessions most, often bringing her older children along to watch and learn. She learnt which foods would help balance her blood sugar and help her lose weight at the same time. By keeping a diet diary, Nargis became more structured with her eating and stopped skipping meals. The quality of her diet improved, abstaining from her favourite crisps and chocolate, something her children also took part in when at home. Nargis made friends with another Bengali mother on the programme, and they created a baby-sitting system so that they could both attend their exercise sessions. Nargis found an answer to her lack of childcare support in the area and helped herself in doing so. Through active exercise and an improved diet Nargis managed to lose 6 kg during the programme, and is starting the maintenance programme with confidence that she will continue these positive steps. Nargis believes “she can now pass on what she has learnt to her family, who can now look after their own health”. She feels healthier and much more confident to be able to “keep up with her children”. Nargis is determined that she will not allow herself to fall back into old habits.

*\*Real name not used*

#### **Identification of Needs and Evidence:**

The Bromley by Bow Centre works with 2,000 people each week, and delivers services that are tailored to the needs of the whole community - families, young people, vulnerable adults and elders. The Centre supports people across a range of projects and services in four main ways:

1. Supporting people to overcome chronic illness and unhealthy lifestyles
2. Enabling people to learn new skills
3. Supporting people to become less dependent on benefits and to find work
4. Providing the tools to create an enterprising community

The Centre provides an integrated range of locally provided services in locations where they are needed and where people can access them. The Centre prides itself on the quality of the services provided, and is committed to delivering the highest possible standards.

Research and Statistics for Tower Hamlets, East London: (*from 2001 census*)<sup>1</sup>

- 61% of households are from ethnic minorities
- 43% of people aged 16-74 have no qualifications

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<sup>1</sup> 2001 Census for England. Office for National Statistics; 29<sup>th</sup> April 2001.

- Unemployment is at almost three times the national level, with 16% of unemployed people having never worked, and 35% are long term unemployed
- Almost 70% of tenure is council/housing association compared with less than 20% for England
- Overcrowding is at almost five times the national level

More than three quarters of children living near to the Bromley by Bow Centre live in low-income families, which is a strong indication of child poverty.

Health in this area is poor. A study carried out by Queen Mary University showed that the local population has a higher than average incidence of coronary heart disease, stomach and bowel cancer, asthma and other respiratory problems. Infant mortality is 50% higher than the national average. The standard mortality ratio is above the nation average for all malignant cancers, particularly lung and cervical cancer, tuberculosis (TB), suicide and poisoning.<sup>2</sup> There is a high psychiatric morbidity in the area and a major problem with drug abuse.

The Bromley by Bow Centre became the first UK designated Healthy Living Centre in 1999, through funding an initiative to promote and improve the health and general well-being of the most deprived sections of the population. This initiative aimed at delivering services that responded to public health priorities. "It is impossible to build a prosperous community unless it is a healthy community."<sup>3</sup>

General Practitioners (GPs) at the Bromley by Bow Centre prescribe not just drugs, but also exercise classes, gardening classes, or anything they think will be of benefit to the patient. The Health Trainer/Health Champion teams are a vital component of the Centre's work. These teams are composed of local people acting as advocates for healthier lifestyles, empowering the community to make choices that will improve their own lives and that of their families.

Many non-indigenous communities suffer from poorer health outcomes. The Centre employs local staff from the Bengali community, as well as other who acts as advocates for clients, and a recent collaboration between GPs and the education programme at the Bromley by Bow Centre has created new teaching resources for English classes that focus on prevalent health issues.

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<sup>2</sup> Reducing Health Inequalities in Tower Hamlets. Queen Mary University (Dr J Robson) 10<sup>th</sup> April 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Healthy Living Centres three year summary. Big Lottery Fund Research issue 19. (2005)

All projects within the Bromley by Bow Centre have their own individually tailored outcome measures to capture the progress of individuals.

For example, Pollen uses the following range of assessments to monitor both the physical and mental well-being of members:

- Individual Assessment
- Personal Development Plan
- Health and Wellbeing Questionnaire (which includes SF-12®)
- Physical Assessment Questionnaire
- Motivational coaching (using Wheel of Life scores)

### **Ten Tips for similar projects:**

- 1) *Integration/interdisciplinary approach* – programmes are designed to interlock and fit together to form a logically connected service. When designed in this way, to overlap, the services provided are more likely to address the needs of the community in a holistic way.
- 2) *Accessibility* – informality and creativity have been key to the engagement of the community. For example, the GP reception area of the Centre creates a welcoming and exciting atmosphere through the use of art. Informality is encouraged in order to create more approachable relationships, i.e. the GPs at the Bromley by Bow Centre are known to their patients by their first names.
- 3) *Flexibility* – by encouraging shared workspaces, knowledge and information are also shared more easily. This encourages a more cohesive approach to service delivery.
- 4) *Sustainability* – imbedding knowledge within the community increases social capital, thereby strengthening and empowering local neighbourhoods.
- 5) *Quality* – the Bromley by Bow Centre ensures a high level of quality both in the delivery of services and in the buildings and open spaces in which they are delivered. This raises aspiration levels within the community.
- 6) *Holistic* – using a ‘whole person’ approach to address individual needs. For example, whilst visiting the GP practice a patient suffering from anxiety may be referred directly to Pollen to benefit from its therapeutic horticulture programme.
- 7) *Action* – “seeing is believing.” When communities witness positive change, they are more likely to engage in future processes.
- 8) *Collaboration* – appreciating the value of forming beneficial partnerships in order to share information.

- 9) *Participation* – engaging the community in both delivering and accessing services in order to foster empowerment and ownership.
- 10) *Empowerment* – provide the tools not handouts. The Bromley by Bow Centre is committed to delivering services that increase social and economic strength, thereby developing confidence and capacity within the community.

## **References**

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