

## **MHCLG Community Champions Programme Case Study**

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### **Name of scheme:**

Community Champions

### **Local area(s) covered:**

The programme is a bi-borough initiative covering the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and the City of Westminster (CoW)

### **Contact details:**

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### **How does this scheme support your local COVID-19 response? Are there other priorities for your champions?**

The Community Champions Programme in our two boroughs first started in 2008 with a single neighbourhood project and has developed from there. We currently have eleven projects as part of this work, as well as a Maternity Champions Programme. As such, our community champions significantly pre-date the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Vision** - Thriving communities that are engaged in shaping and improving health and wellbeing with their families, friends and neighbours.

**Aim** – To develop the capacity of local people and services to promote health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

**Strategic Objectives** – The strategic objectives of the Programme are to: -

- Recruit and train local residents as community champions to work with providers and commissioners
- Gather community insight and intelligence through residents' feedback, e.g. resident surveys, market research
- Improve access to local health, wellbeing, housing and employment services, particularly through proactive community outreach, and through signposting to information and local services



- Increase engagement with early intervention, health promotion and behaviour change, through local public health programmes, peer education and self-management programmes for people with long-term conditions
- Build social capital (i.e. building confidence, improving mental wellbeing, reducing isolation and promoting community cohesion) through community events
- Increase skills and competencies of community champions through personal and professional development, training and supporting access to return to work/preparation for employment where desired

Our community champions are local volunteers who are engaged and trained to help and support their communities to improve health, wellbeing and community cohesion. They work with their communities to deliver sustainable solutions to health, housing and social care issues. They show how local people can work together with statutory services and voluntary and community sector providers to deliver and improve services. We have subsets of community champions within the broader programme, which include Junior Champions (7-11s) and Maternity Champions. A COVID Health Champions Programme was started in October 2020 and runs as a separate but related programme.

Our community champions have been supporting the COVID-19 response since March 2020, including: -

- Wellbeing support – Both via phone and face-to face (socially distanced)
- Disseminating information and messages around COVID-19 (online and face to face) both with individuals and with groups, e.g. through community conversations, participating in activity/support groups. This has often involved having difficult conversations
- Activity with partners, e.g. collaboration on activities / large events, contribution of expertise, in-kind funding, etc.
- Signposting to relevant services, e.g. [Westminster Connects](#), local food banks and distribution networks, [Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service](#)
- Digital support, e.g. around home schooling, with older and/or vulnerable residents, loans/donations of devices, using digital platforms such as Zoom/Skype, etc.
- Support for food banks and distribution networks more directly
- Picking up and delivering shopping and prescriptions
- Feeding back community insight and intelligence / resident views in order to shape engagement responses with diverse local communities
- Taking on leadership roles and/or participating in local networks and partnerships
- Coordinated series of 'vaccine community conversations' via Zoom with local GPs and other partners.
- Promotion, pre-engagement and marshalling support for community and GP-based vaccine pop-ups and vaccine bus

Our COVID Health Champions is a newer, lighter-touch, borough-wide programme set up specifically to address COVID-19. It launched in Oct 2020 in Westminster and Feb 2021 in RBKC and operates as a separate but related programme. We put an



open call out to all residents with meetings taking place twice a week via Microsoft Teams (average attendance of 12 champions per meeting). The purpose of these champions is to distribute accurate information and messages as widely as possible across their communities utilising natural social networks, i.e. to friends, families, neighbours, work colleagues and wider community contacts. This helps to give a voice to a range of different groups and communities and allows us to tap into insights around various COVID-related issues / barriers in order to shape engagement, e.g. around testing, isolation, vaccine hesitancy, etc. We send out a regular e-mail bulletin to this group with accurate info, useful updates and comms materials.

### **How did the scheme come about? When did it first come about?**

As already stated above, the programme first started life in 2008. A rough timeline is given below: -

2008	Began life as a single neighbourhood project in White City, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham (LBHF). Run by H&F primary care trust (PCT), funded by Well London Programme. Later taken on by Inner North West London PCT Public Health.
2012 –13	First period of rapid growth in to a 'programme' covering three boroughs (H&F, CoW, RBKC). Six new projects scoped & commissioned in a seven-month period (two in each borough), based on public health data regarding areas of deprivation/high health inequality.
March 2013	Public Health transfers over to local authorities. Programme of seven projects moved over to a 'tri-borough' approach, with Westminster City Council (WCC) taking the lead for public health.
2015 –17	Second period of rapid growth with six further projects added (again two per borough). Maternity Champions initially piloted in two projects, then scaled up to borough-wide and embedded within the wider programme in 2017. Some joint funding agreements established with local clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) & housing providers.
April 2018	Transition from tri-borough to separate LBHF & bi-borough (RBKC and CoW) governance arrangements - 7 LBHF projects / 11 bi-borough projects (incl. Maternity Champions)
2019 –2020	Pilots run in South Kensington resulting in one new full project and one 'Community Champions Light' pilot.
2020 – 2021	Development of COVID Health Champions initiative – different, lighter touch, directly delivered model.

**Please briefly describe your local population. Does your scheme target any specific population groups?**



### Kensington and Chelsea

population size: 159,000

70% White (all groups), 37% BAME (5% Arab, 8% Asian, 6% Black)

28% main language other than English.

Health inequalities:

Life expectancy for men living in least deprived areas is almost 16 years longer than those living in most deprived areas. For women the gap is 4 years.

Variation in years of healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived is almost 25 years for men in Kensington and Chelsea (the highest in England) and 21 for women (2nd highest).

### Westminster

population size: 250,000.

60% White (all groups), 40% BAME (9% Arab, 11% Asian, 6% Black).

31% main language other than English.

Health inequalities:

Life expectancy for men living in least deprived areas is almost 17 years longer than those living in most deprived areas. For women the gap is 10 years.

Variation in years of healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived is 20 years for men in Westminster (6th highest in England); and 19 for women.

## **How does the scheme work? Which organisation or groups are involved?**

The Community Champions Programme is commissioned by public health and funded by the Public Health Grant, with some contributions from local CCGs and housing providers. It is largely delivered in each neighbourhood at a project level by local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (& currently one social housing provider) on five-year contracts.

Each project is led by a project manager skilled in community development and volunteer recruitment, retention, management and support; this role is pivotal to the success of each project. The programme is centrally managed, developed and monitored by a Programme Manager located in public health. This role includes oversight of all programme-wide activity, such as some learning & development, the annual conference, reporting, procurement, partnership development and maintenance.

The Programme adopts an asset-based community development approach and remains a health and wellbeing programme. Additional activity in relation to COVID is outlined above, with much of the regular activity having moved on-line. As the road map to recovery opens society up again, a blended approach to online and face to face activity is now developing.

## **How are champions recruited?**

Recruitment sits with the local project manager and can occur in a range of different ways. Champions are recruited from the immediate neighbourhood or area of



benefit. Word of mouth often works best but other methods are also used, e.g. local surveying, leafletting, social media, pop-up events, partner visits, etc. Often, residents attending and benefiting from champions activity become interested in the role. There are no restrictions on who can become a champion.

Champions are volunteers and, as such, are not monetarily reimbursed for their time (other than legitimate expenses). They are, however, incentivised through: -

- A tailored training, development and support offer (detailed below)
- Out of pocket expenses
- Health benefits, such as reduced social isolation and improved mental / physical health
- Increased health literacy and awareness of local services
- Increased employability
- Rewards and recognition, e.g. award ceremonies, annual conferences, local events

At end of March 2021 there were 195 active champions across the programme.

### **How are champions trained and supported?**

Champions are offered the following training, development, and support: -

- A personal development plan tailored to how they want to use their volunteering experience to support own growth and skill development
- Both accredited and unaccredited training, e.g. RSPH Level 2 [Understanding Health Improvement](#) and [Supporting Behaviour Change](#); safeguarding; [Mental Health First Aid](#); NCT [Birth and Beyond Community Support](#) & [Breastfeeding Peer Support](#) (for Maternity Champions); food hygiene; chair-based exercise instructor, etc.
- Support from an experienced community development worker / volunteer co-ordinator / project manager, incl. through 121s, team meetings, etc,
- Where relevant, increased employability and support in to work, e.g. through a current South Westminster Community Health Workers pilot with the NHS
- A peer support network

Inductions are conducted either individually or in groups at a project level. Training has continued throughout the pandemic though much of the delivery is now online. Additional training has been delivered in relation to information and messaging around COVID, e.g. Test and Trace, vaccines, etc.

### **How do you engage and communicate with champions?**

Project managers are in regular contact with all of their champions. Formal team meetings and 121s take place every four to six weeks (more often when necessary). Informal support is given on a more regular basis.



Information is disseminated to champions via meetings (running virtually throughout the pandemic), social media, WhatsApp groups and email. Champions run, support and/or promote all project activity to friends, family, neighbours and wider community contacts. Each project collates insight and feedback from champions, which then goes on to inform project activity and planning. At programme level this is fed in quarterly via the monitoring process, fortnightly via regular managers meetings and by email or phone as needed in between. Projects at a local level translate information as needed into community languages and/or official resources already available in community languages are disseminated.

Our COVID Health Champions differ from the above in that they meet remotely twice a week via Microsoft Teams. We send out a regular e-mail bulletin to them with accurate and up-to-date info, messaging and comms materials. In public health, a coding framework has been developed for all community insight in relation to COVID.

### **Has the scheme been evaluated in any way?**

An internal monitoring system is in place to track outputs and outcomes. The system supports collection of qualitative and quantitative data and includes the following: -

- A standard service specification outlining deliverables (outputs) and overarching desired outcomes
- A framework for volunteer recruitment & training (incl. in specific target groups, e.g. older people, expectant & new parents), with activity measured against KPIs
- Real time data capture via an online database (developed & hosted by Imperial College London)
- Quarterly performance monitoring reports capturing outputs, narrative recording of how these meet outcomes and other qualitative data e.g. participant feedback, case studies, champions journeys, etc.
- Quarterly performance monitoring meetings with the Programme Manager
- Quantitative & qualitative data used as the basis for annual end of year reports, councillor briefings, performance reports, etc.
- Data which can be interrogated at project, borough and bi-borough levels
- Quantitative and qualitative data collected used as secondary data for evaluations

The scheme has been evaluated in four major externally commissioned evaluations and a series of smaller scale evaluations/impact studies, which can all be found [here](#).

### **What outcomes has the scheme led to?**

The below is taken from our 2018 social return on investment (SROI) evaluation <sup>1</sup>: -



*“The value created annually is almost £5 million (including c.£1.9 million for the local authority), from an investment of £930,000.*

*This SROI analysis estimates between £5 to £6 of social and economic value is generated for every £1 invested of which over £2 is generated for the local authority and housing from resource savings related to: prevention and delayed onset of health and mental wellbeing conditions; community cohesion and resident participation; reduced isolation of families and older people; and sustained tenancies”.*

### **What has been your key learning from the scheme to date?**

Community champions are local residents and have reach within their communities that many professionals do not. Many become trusted and respected sources of local health and wellbeing information within their diverse communities. Investment in developing such local assets leaves communities encountering health inequalities better informed and more resilient to addressing entrenched issues. It is a cost-effective approach, as our two SROIs have shown, and outcomes are hugely positive for the level of investment. Longer term (five year) contracts enable projects at a local level to really grow and make a difference within their communities. Excellent partnerships with other VCS organisations, local authority departments and health and social care organisations all help.

However, community champions are not a ‘quick fix’ and cannot in themselves fix persistent inequalities and inequity caused by factors such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing and discrimination, all of which require a whole system approach.

### **How are you planning to develop your scheme moving forward?**

We hope to continue to contribute to the pandemic recovery within our most deprived communities. Currently the greatest focus is on helping residents to come together face to face in safe ways, get outside again and take up or return to physical activity, thereby supporting physical / mental health and wellbeing and reducing the social isolation which has been created / exacerbated by the pandemic.

### **Links to any further information**

<https://www.communitychampionsuk.org/what-we-do/publications-and-films/>

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<sup>i</sup> Community Champions and Envoy Partnership. Community Champions Social Return on Investment Evaluation: October 2017 to May 2018. Available online at <http://www.communitychampionsuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Community-Champions-WCC-SROI-2018-envoy-FINAL-with-Appendices.pdf>