

Befriending a Community. Helping Harrow Ghanaians through the pandemic.

Samuel Botchey, Chairman of the Harrow Ghanaian Association (HARGA) has shared how they have used the Covid Awareness Fund to support and make a difference to the Ghanaian community in Harrow.

Motivation

A Father of two Doctors, Samuel heard about the reality of Covid in hospital and after losing a family member to Covid and a member of the Ghanaian community as a result of the pandemic, he wanted to take action. He saw an opportunity for HARGA to encourage their community to follow protocols and minimise the risk of infection and applied for the Covid Awareness Fund (CAF).

Communication

Once successful in their application, an activity plan was produced to raise awareness of Covid and encourage the uptake of the vaccine. The plan started with monthly meetings between the Ghanaian community and health professionals. Some meetings were delivered in their local language to aid understanding. This gave the community an opportunity to raise their concerns and ask questions directly to trained health professionals. Participants were very satisfied with the answers they received.

Volunteers made calls to elderly members of the community to encourage them to stay safe and to take the vaccine. It was clear when carrying out this activity that elderly members felt isolated and welcomed the calls just so that they could speak to somebody.

The use of Facebook live had a wide reach to the community. With a GP registrar delivering the live video to approximately 546 people. Video clips were also recorded with doctors, nurses and other health workers advising people to be careful and take the vaccine. The videos were shared widely on social media. To ensure elderly members of the community had access to the social media activities, 1:1 support was given where possible.

HARGA collaborated with Harrow Young Achievers who designed and created messages in the form of Tik Tok, flyers, and videos on Social Media to get the message across to young people.

Flyers were designed and distributed. Initially they thought it would be easy to distribute 1000 flyers but it proved quite challenging as people didn't want to come close to the volunteers because of the pandemic. The weather was a challenge as well with some volunteers reluctant to go out in the rain. However all of the challenges were overcome and lessons learnt.

A number of Covid Health Walks were organised with volunteers talking directly to members of the public about Covid and directing them to a mobile testing team at Harrow Rec. Wealdstone was also selected as an area to hold an outreach event because of the low uptake of the vaccine in the BAME community in the area. Leaflets were distributed to homes, shops, shoppers, and residents on the high street.

In addition they have implemented activities to help counter the wider impacts of the pandemic. Bringing in Benefits Officers to talk about the benefits members may be entitled to and the Nightingale Nurses Association to talk to the community in the local language about general health care.

Successes

Many things went well throughout the programme, which is still ongoing. Convincing 19 Ghanaian residents including four nurses and three health workers to get vaccinated was a great success. The weekly Covid Awareness Fund Engagement meetings between the council, public health and grant recipients are very helpful. The meetings have allowed them to ask important questions like: 'how can undocumented people can get vaccinated'? As a result of the meetings Samuel's question was quickly answered and he took three undocumented Ghanaians to a centre to get vaccinated. Following this success, three other undocumented Ghanaians followed suit!

The difference the Covid Awareness Fund has made

The Covid Awareness fund has made a massive difference to the community. The impact on the elderly community especially has been huge. Initially they felt isolated and unwell both mentally and physically but as a result of the calls they received from the volunteers, they now feel connected, are talking freely and coming out of their shells. Some have even started to volunteer to raise awareness of Covid! In addition, as a result of the talks from the benefit officers, nine members of the community now receive benefits they have been entitled to for a long time. This would not have happened without the grant.

Even if the Fund had not been available, they would have still taken action but would not have been able to reach as many people and befriend the elderly members. It was a blessing and they are grateful.

Put together an activity plan

Focus group

3 members of exec committee - staff superivosts

Volunteers

Monthly meetings to bring in health professionals to speak to community. What covid was and how it was effecting

Dispropationately affecting black communities

Meetings took place over 4 months

67 attending first meeting - a lot of questions to doctors

Satisfied with answers

A

Facebook live. As a medium to get more people. Bigger reach. Bigger audience.

546 people

348 likes and comments

Really successful

GP registrar who did Facebook live

Brought in 2 benefits officers talk to them about the different types of

158 people attended

A few people then contacted the officers to get benefits

Brought in Nightingale Nurses Association to talk about health issues. People not exercising
49 people. Delivered in local language.

Video clips - 2 Ghanian doctors and nurses and health workers. To create a video posted on all social media platforms. Made new Facebook Twitter Instagram accounts.

Doctors talking about Covid and how dangerous it can be. Long covid. Advising people to very careful. Encouraging to take vaccine. One person took vaccine as a result of covid.

Some people who took vaccine

Flyers - designed and distributed. Talking about vaccine. Take the vaccine. No side effect.

Went to Gahanian shops, Afro caribbean shops, barber shops, salons. Printed 1000 copies

Put some on social media pages. Local church. A lot of issues from messages with social media. Asked church leaders to encourage congregataion to take vaccine.

People living on estates.

Targeting South Harrow and Wealdstone now

Vaccine survey and questionnaire. On social media. Used volunteers to call 80 members and went through the questionnaire with them. Ask whole household the questionnaire.

Reach 548 questionnaire. Have you had covid vaccine. How concerned are you about taking vaccine. Age groups. Do you work in health and social care? Which advice do you trust (govt.doctors.gps. etc). Results: good gender balance. 60% over 60. 148 females not concened , 95 strongly concerned

172 not concerned 41 strongly (see video)

GPs

Government

380 had taken the vaccines at that time.

Covid Health Walk - walk around Harrow to do the campaign. Printed tshirts, banner, high vis jackets, first aid bag. Started from Harrow rec , walked through Harrow Centre, down to the Civic Centre. Came back on Harrow view back to Harrow rec. 40 people who registered to come. Including older members how had been isolating. Really enjoyed that day.

So successful, members asked to do another walk. Restrictions on numbers for previous walk. Doing it this Saturday. Hopefully the weather will be better! Walk around the park. Ball games.

Spoken to Sheila and the testing mobile team to come to Harrow Rec

Brought a gazebo

Tables and Chairs

Show people how to test.

Distribute more flyers. Young Achievers, group in harrow. Organising projects. All activities stopped because of covid. Spoke to leaders, to get young people to help. A few young people have agreed to help. Designed a new flyer youth . Designed video for young people and Tik Tok (hit 3000 views).

21st August - evaluation event with a BBQ. Get all the Ghanians who they have worked with and ask questions to measure if people have shifted views. Young people designing the questions. Invited the Mayor of Harrow who has accepted.

Asked Sheila (covid 19 project manager/strategy and partnerships @ harrow council) to bring her mobile team to bring testing team.

Another difference. Benefits talked to the group. 9 of them have got their benefits as a result. Very grateful.

Had it not been for CAF money these people would have not received benefits that they were entitled to.

has It was difficult initially. Unwell people. Older age group. Out of the blue getting calls. That alone to hear voices to speak 30 minutes at a time. Old people were very grateful for the calls. Mental thalth issues Reluctant to go out. Shopping for some of them. Talking freely and getting them out of their shells.

The information from the meetings meant that In addition undocumented Ghanians were afraid to go for vaccines. Through Attended the CAF meetings and asked how undocumented Ghanians could get vaccines.

Belmont Circle opened

Drove 3 of them to get the vaccine.

Encouraged 3 others to get

6 of them got vaccine

Heartwarming

1. Have there been any struggles?

Challenges - 1) distributing flyers - thought easy but it was difficult to shift 1000 flyers. How are we going to distribute people running away from us as scared of covid.

Bad weather was a challenge. So wet in May difficult for volunteers to get out. Some first time volunteering. Drive
We overcame challenges. Learnt a lot of lessons.

The old folks not used to internet. When we went to work them didnt know what to do online. We had to be there 1:1.

Without the plan - talk to two children doctors and put things on social media

Getting silly messages on social media and whatsapp including nurses.

Telling people not send this information

Wrote plan. Banked silly messages and wrote a counter message.

Saw fund - great opportunity.

Without CAF wouldnt have been able to reach so many people and get old people out

A blessing

Grateful