Newham Borough Council Covid-19 Health Champions

Newham Borough Council has brought together a group of COVID-19 Health Champions as part of their response to the Coronavirus pandemic. The COVID-19 Health Champions role was created for two reasons: to ensure that key COVID-19 messaging was reaching all communities in the Borough and to hear back from residents about their experiences in order to improve the response from the council.

Drop-in sessions hosted by the public health team, are held two times a week, induction sessions are held every other week. Champions receive messages through WhatsApp broadcast and email on most days. These include infographics about key aspects of COVID-19 such as the latest rules on socialising, what happens if a child is sent home from school, how to get a test. These are sent as JPEGs so that they can easily be shared with the wider communities. Champions also receive a badge, a fridge magnet and a window sticker so that they can show they are champions – and so that they can feel part of the wider group.

COVID-19 Health Champions ask questions and share concerns directly with the Champions team. Any queries are answered by Public Health team or relevant colleagues quickly (usually within a few hours. These questions also influence the policy and delivery of COVID-19 support in Newham. For example, feedback about concerns around venues not adhering to guidelines result in quick action from the environmental health team. Feedback about test centre experiences have influenced training and support for staff in those centres.

The Champions share the information they receive with their peers, colleagues, friends and family – and to feedback questions and concerns from the wider community. This is happening in a number of ways including champions' own WhatsApp and email groups, school newsletters, zoom catch-ups with parents and children, print outs in windows and on doors, Facebook, LinkedIn etc. The programme works with the Mutual Aid in Newham to get messages out as well. The infographics are available in a range of languages including Bengali, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), French, Guajarati, Lithuanian, Hindi, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Tamil, Somali and Urdu. All of the infographics are available through a google drive so that it is easy for champions to download them. https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1Qt91zU20mKNhhtkBFr5zO3B40bSDw4DP

Champions now also share and support each other through a WhatsApp group and at the drop in sessions. They are sharing their own stories of COVID, answering each other's questions and often sending words of encouragement.

With the volunteers from a wide range of ages and backgrounds, Newham are able to have a broad reach across the community. Since the launch of the work, more than 410 people have registered. More than 100 champions attended the council's recent summit to celebrate their work and develop the ideas further.

Newham is now launching a young champions programme, seeking to recruit young people to share information with their friends and families, and to feedback questions and concerns for the council to respond.

Newham has supported more than 30 councils to develop their programmes, including hosting two 'how to' sessions for other councils. Newham has now convened a best practice sharing session for other co-ordinators and will continue to support other boroughs to develop their programmes.

https://www.newham.gov.uk/covidhealthchampions