



Hillside Clubhouse



Islington Refugee Forum

“Dignity in Mental Health” Awareness Raising Day

Report

8th October 2015

“Dignity in Mental Health” was the theme for this year's World Mental Health Day which took place on the 10th of October 2015. Islington Refugee Forum, in partnership with Hillside Club Community Wellbeing Service, Manor Gardens Centre- Health Advocacy Project, and IMECE Women’s Centre organised a successful 2015 Mental Health event. The aims of the event were:

- To raise awareness of the mental wellbeing challenges faced by refugees and migrants from Black and Minority Ethnic, Refugees and Migrants in protecting their dignity.
- To promote the available mental health services in Islington and support to access them.
- To introduce and explain the Mental Health Act.
- To explain who refugees and migrant will need to engage with in regard to their mental wellbeing.

To explore the impact the government budget reduction are having on providing adequate mental health services and support.

There were a total of 8 speakers who addressed the issue of “Dignity in Mental Health”.

Susan Fajana-Thomas from Islington Community Wellbeing Development Service explained the importance of “Supporting Access to Mental Health Services in Islington”. Susan focused on the importance for help at an early stage. One of main points was primary care – there are services available in Islington that provide support for emotional health and wellbeing. GPs can offer support by discussing problems, prescribing medicines and make referrals to other specialists. Susan highlighted that individuals may need more intensive or specific support and that early prevention is better than a cure.

Dr Kim Ehntholt from Clinical Psychologist-Deputy Head of Service, Traumatic Stress Clinic, Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust spoke about “The Mental Health Act and Mental Health Services for Refugees and Migrants”. Dr Kim demonstrated details of The Act and a need to disseminate the document among society. It is especially required in order to educate refugees about their rights under The Act. In her presentation it was mentioned that the majority of patients receiving treatment under The Mental Health Act are voluntary patients because they have agreed to come into a hospital.. Dr Kim explained that it is Important to seek legal advice so that you can be sure the hospital has taken the right procedures.



Dr Savin Bapir Tardy from Counselling Psychologist, Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) focused on "how the dignity of the refugees, women, or in general with mental health is challenged." Dr Savin presented main ways in which to help preserve dignity in mental health. Doctors should ask their patients what their specific needs are and make sure that they not left in pain. The presentation highlighted the impact of the budget cuts on increasing the in external referrals. The other barriers mentioned by Savin were language and lack of engagement.

Leyla Hussein from Dahlia Project Coordinator, Dahlia Project- Health Advocacy Project Manor Gardens Centre talked about "The service for women who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)". Leyla emphasized that FGM is the total or partial removal of female genitals. The reason for this practice in some cultures is to control female sexuality. The process is very barbaric and leaves the victim physically and mentally scarred. She shared with participants her organisation's approach in tackling this issue through: providing counselling and group therapy for women who have undergone FGM. It is unbelievable that every minute, 1 in 5 girls are a victim of this.

Emine Yoca, Lead Counsellor from Imece Women's Centre focusing on Turkish/ Kurdish/ Cypriot Turkish Survivors of Domestic Violence highlighted "The importance of employing gender sensitive approach and speaking in a mutual language when working with women survivors of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)". The main point of presentation was addressing the need for gender sensitive care. Emine explained why charities should provide culture and gender sensitive services for survivors of Domestic Violence. Furthermore she focused on providing services in a mutual language in which it makes it easier to overcome cultural boundaries. Emine concluded that holistic assessment sessions should be offered to those in need.

Peter Leigh, General Manager from Key Changes spoke about "Key Changes: Promoting Positive Mental Health through Music". The presentation looked at how culturally-relevant music activities can support engagement and recovery for people experiencing mental health problems in hospitals and the community. Peter explained that their project is using culturally relevant music activities to support black and ethnic minorities living with severe mental health problems. He shared their findings from the positive role of music during re-coalescence, persuaded participants that music also stimulates emotional/aesthetic responses.

Baffour Ababio Psychotherapist, from Nafsiyat Intercultural Therapy Centre presented 'Distress, rupture and moments of meeting'. Baffour highlighted the importance of building relationships between clinicians and patients, called "moments of meeting". Baffour shared his experience from the provision of intercultural therapy. The talk described how the positioning of Nafsiyat, its mission statement, understanding the impact of stigma, languages on offer and choice, exploring practical concerns such as housing in the therapy, contribute in enabling clients experience moments of shared emotional meaning. Clients in this setting then begin to experience opportunity, choice, respect and dignity irrespective of their culture/ethnic origin at Nafsiyat.

Michelle Murray from IMCA (Independent Mental Capacity Advocates, VoiceAbility Advocacy) demonstrated "Mental Health Advocacy in Islington". The major point was about advocating help by allowing individuals to understand why they are being detained and how they can be protected due to the proficiencies of the Mental Health Act. Michelle explained that individuals can choose to opt for or against advocacy help.

The Mental Health Act:

The Mental Health Act 1983 (which was substantially amended in 2007) is the law in England and Wales that allows people with a 'mental disorder' to be admitted to hospital, detained and treated without their consent – either for their own health and safety, or for the protection of other people.

The Act can be used to override some basic human rights such as, a person's right to freedom, and also overrides a person's right to choose whether or not they want to be treated. Thus under the current legislation once treatment is deemed necessary by three mental care practitioners, the individual can be detained and treated. The Act protects mental care practitioners, and legislation also stipulates that anyone of any age group in England and Wales can be detained, also known as "sectioned". Due to these parameters an individual's dignity may be challenged and they may be:

- Unjustly institutionalised.
- Treated against their will which can be very intrusive and traumatic.

Refugees may also refuse legal help from advocates in fear of losing their status.

Cuts on Mental Health Budget

A total of £85 million has been slashed from mental health budgets for children and teenagers in England in the past five years. Additionally, with further cuts expected in the NHS and local authorities are being forced to change their approach to treatment. Currently, The Mental Health sector only receives 13% of NHS funding, despite accounting for more than a fifth (23%) of the disease burden.

Existing Mental Health Services Available to Refugees and Migrants:

1. Mental Health Advocacy - For refugees who have been detained at assessment centres. Advocates help to explain their rights under the act. Advocates can also provide practical help such as asylum claims, information on housing options, and recourse to public funds.
2. Social housing provides Mental Health Watch teams that can give primary care support and early diagnosis.
3. New approaches to mental health treatment such as the Key Changes with the aim to connect with Black and Ethnic Minority groups.
4. A number of services are available for women who suffer from post-traumatic depression. These organisations also provide a women's only environment where women feel safe to share experiences. Furthermore group therapy sessions are available that help tackle the feeling of isolation.
5. Mental health services provided in home languages. Organisations such as Nafsiyat Intercultural Therapy Centre provide therapy in 17 different languages.

Cultural, social and political challenges faced by local RCOs whilst trying to uphold dignity in mental health:

- The RCOs are being put under enormous pressure due to budget cuts.
- Budget cuts mean that there is an apparent frustration within mental health organisations.
- Organisations have had to forfeit partnerships with other mental health services because it is no longer financially viable.
- Some organisations have seen a 70% increase in their telephone consultation services.
- Mental health service providers have to reduce their number of sessions due to lack of funding. This results in incompleteness of treatment that may result in re-lapse.
- A need for more primary care objectives is apparent i.e. opening dialogue, tackling stigmatisation in communities, and use of a community support approach.
- Women living with mental health problems may neglect help in fear of losing their children.
- Refugees accessing mental health services may face a language barrier and in some cases when interpreters are not made available a family member has to translate. This can often jeopardise a person's right to privacy and in turn their dignity.



Recommendations:

- Dignity in Mental Health can be kept by raising community awareness.
- Budget cuts can be challenged by campaigning for policy change.
- A need to provide professional care that promotes “moments of meeting” building relationships between clinicians and patients.
- To educate refugees about The Mental Health Act and their rights to Mental Health Advocacy.
- Clinicians providing care to refugees and migrants in their native language to overcome social or cultural barriers.
- Because of the success of consultation given in a home language there is a need for more care given in native tongue.
- A greater need for gender sensitive support.

Islington Refugee Forum members:

Algerian Welfare Trust (UK), Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit, Arab Advice Bureau, Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group, Banadiri British Youth League (BBYL), Community Language Support Services (CLSS), Czech school without borders, Eritrean Community in UK, Halabja Kurdish Children's Centre, Hillside Clubhouse- Mental Health Community Development Work Service, Iftiin Learning Centre, IMECE Women's Centre, Indo-Pakistan Cultural Centre, Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKRWO), Iranian Community Centre, Iraqi Refugee Federation, Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants, Islington Chinese Association (ICA), Islington Somali Community, Jannaty Women's Social Society, Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation (KMEWO), Kurdish Children and Youth Centre, Kurdish Information & Advocacy Centre, Light Project International, London Training & Employment Network, Manor Gardens Health Advocacy, Mosaada Centre for Single Women, Muslim Welfare House, Nafsiyat: Intercultural Therapy Centre, Octopus Community Network, Oromo Community in the UK, Refugee Therapy Centre, Somali Banadir Association in the UK, Somali Human Hope, St Pancras Refugee Centre (Part of Holy Cross Centre Trust), Victim Support, Women's Therapy Centre .

Islington Refugee Forum Membership

The Islington Refugee Forum (IRF) is a refugee led organisation that works with all refugee community organisations (RCOs) in Islington. IRF is run and led by its members who elect representatives to the board of trustees at the Annual General Meetings.

The Benefits of Membership:

- Benefit from capacity building support and free training,
- Be part of refugee voices,
- Be part of Refugee Week organisation committee,
- Receive free newsletters,
- Have access to information related to new changes in policy and legalisations that may impact the refugees or RCOs work.

Who can be a member?

- Individual representatives from refugee communities living in Islington,
- Representatives of refugee community organisations, which are based in Islington,
- Representatives of refugee agencies, which are based in Islington,
- Representatives of mainstream voluntary organisations providing services for refugees as full members with voting rights,
- Individual professionals working with refugees in Islington,
- Representatives of public and statutory organisations,
- Organisations (rather than individuals) seeking membership must be properly constituted and must provide a copy of their governing document.

To become a member:

Please visit the IRF website and fill the membership form. Or write to: info@islingtonrefugeeforum.org.