

Out & About

How we can ensure mental health care works for everyone in our communities? We speak to three local Minds that support refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minority communities.

Mind in Harrow



Harrow is a very diverse area, with a lot of new migrants and refugees, and communities from Afghanistan, Somalia and South Asia. But we recognised that there was a big gap in terms of people from those communities feeling able or willing to engage in mainstream mental health services.

So we now run a range of services to help fill that gap. We have a project specifically for Afghan women called Nedaye Zan, which means 'voices of women'. It's in its fourth year and we've already worked with around 400 women. The project is focused around workshops that bring Afghan women together to improve their wellbeing and to feel more confident negotiating things like social welfare support.

There are now a core group of women who are very engaged and have become the project's ambassadors. They're involved in campaigning and advocacy work to make sure services locally and across London meet the needs of Afghan women. For example, they work with GP surgeries to make sure appropriate translation services are available – which the surgeries appreciate too because they feel supported to deliver better care.

I'm the coordinator for Bridging Cultures, which works with faith groups to tackle mental health stigma, improve access to mental health services and build cultural understanding among health professionals.



I run workshops and events in collaboration with the local community. It's very much about working together, building relationships and instigating change from within communities – allowing things to grow over time rather than imposing a service on a community.

We also run a project for the local Somali community called Hayaan – which means 'moving on to a better place'. The fortnightly workshops have become almost a drop-in for the local Somali community. We have a Somali consultant psychiatrist who comes to give people advice and support.

To get to the situation where people are happy to talk has taken a long time because mental health is generally a big taboo in the Somali community. People seek more traditional support through the mosque and faith healers too, and one thing this project tries to do is let people know there is no conflict between seeking spiritual help and seeking help through medication.

Through all of this work, we've definitely seen a big shift. We've created these environments where people start to feel comfortable talking to each other about their experiences. And what's grown out of that is that people gradually gain the confidence to want to change things for others in their communities too.

Emily Danby, Bridging Cultures Project Coordinator