

Nedaye Zan Campaign "Justice for Afghan Women"

A report on the experiences of Afghan women in Harrow accessing local services

March 2017

Executive Summary

Introduction

Nedaye Zan, meaning "voices of women" in Dari, is a user-led mental health project for Afghan women in Harrow.

Since 2013 Nedaye Zan has supported women from Harrow's Afghan community through activities to tackle social isolation, improve access to mental health services and provide opportunities for education and training.

For the next 3 years Nedaye Zan will build upon this work through the project's new campaign "Justice for Afghan Women". Through developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of 250 Afghan women, the project will give Nedaye Zan participants the opportunity to campaign for key changes to local services. The key aim of the project is to reduce barriers to accessing services for over 1000 Afghan women.

Purpose of research

The aims of this research are to inform the strategy and focus of the Justice for Afghan Women campaign by:

- ❖ Identifying the key service areas where local Afghan women struggle to access appropriate support.
- ❖ Identifying the key barriers experienced by local Afghan women to accessing appropriate support.

Methodology

The research was comprised of data collected from surveys completed by 102 Nedaye Zan service users and narrative evidence collected from in-depth 1-to-1 interviews with 6 Nedaye Zan service users.

Summary of research findings

Participant demographics

The vast majority (97%) of research participants were adults of working age. Of these, most were unemployed (64.7%) and had children under 18 years old (56.9%).

65.7% of survey respondents said that their mental health was below average.

Among the 6 women interviewed, each of them indicated the importance of family. 5 of 6 said that their week is divided between housekeeping, caring for family members and taking part in Nedaye Zan activities.

All interviewees indicated having experienced social isolation and related periods of depression, anxiety or low mood since arriving in the UK.

Experiences of accessing services

The areas where participants had experienced the most difficulty in accessing a service were welfare benefits and housing, mental health and education and training opportunities.

Common barriers

Language barriers were identified as the most pervasive obstacles to accessing services. Barriers included inconsistent provision of a third party interpreter, difficulty accessing English classes, lack of written information in Dari or Pashto and low self-confidence in speaking English.

Lack of knowledge of local services and how to access them was identified as a key secondary obstacle, in addition to little awareness of rights and entitlement as a service user.

Poor relationships with services due to previous negative experiences, a feeling of not being understood or respected and little opportunity to build a rapport with a named contact were identified as a key obstacle.

Interviewees identified a lack of service provision that is **compatible with responsibilities as a parent and/or carer**, particularly in relation to education and training opportunities.

Priorities for the “Justice for Afghan Women” campaign

In response to the findings of this research the Justice for Afghan Women campaign activities will focus on:

- Tackling social isolation through regular group activities and outreach to new participants
- Increasing the skills, knowledge and confidence of Nedaye Zan participants through providing training opportunities including regular ESOL classes and welfare benefits training.
- Improving communication with service providers by inviting service representatives to take part in Nedaye Zan workshops, and providing information sessions to services on the needs of the local Afghan community.

The campaign will focus on:

- Recognition of Dari as a community language so that local services, including Harrow Council, local educational institutions and health services offer Dari translations for leaflets and communications.
- Advocating for consistent, affordable and accessible English classes for local Afghan women.

Conclusion

Having identified the priorities for the Justice for Afghan Women campaign over the next 3 years, Nedaye Zan and Mind in Harrow are looking forward to working collaboratively with local service providers across Harrow to improve the experience of Afghan women when accessing public services.

The success of the campaign will be monitored both by on-going review of activities and additional research carried out towards the end of the the campaign in which the findings of this report will be reviewed.