

LEWISHAM COVID-19 COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME EVALUATION

PROGRAMME SUCCESS

Lewisham Council introduced the COVID-19 Community Champions Programme in 2020 to help communities meet the health challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

People living and/or working in Lewisham were trained to become COVID-19 Community Champions. The evaluation of the Lewisham COVID-19 Community Champions Programme was carried out by independent consultants at Justice Studio.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach – literature reviews, online surveys, in-depth interviews, discussion groups with young people, and participant observation.

Evaluation participants included Lewisham COVID-19 Community Champions, Lewisham Community Members, Young Research Advisors, and key Programme Stakeholders.

A group of 9 Young Research Advisors – young people who lived in Lewisham – were recruited and trained in research methods. They collected data for the evaluation and will be displaying information about the Community Champions on posters for an exhibition.

HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS THE PROGRAMME BEEN IN ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY?

The Programme has been successful in engaging and empowering Community Members to become Champions. There are now 200 Champions in Lewisham and a Young Champions network has been launched.



The Programme has been successful in engaging with members of communities in Lewisham. Members of communities have appreciated the factual and locally-informed aspects of the Champions role.

Champions have had some success at empowering Community Members to make informed decisions in relation to COVID-19 vaccinations and social guidelines.



The majority of Champions feel that the Programme is inclusive but they feel that further work needs to be done as not all communities are represented. Continuing to recruit trusted community leaders and volunteers to the Programme is recommended.

HOW SUCCESSFUL HAVE THE COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS BEEN IN INFLUENCING COVID-19 BEHAVIOURS?

The Programme has had a positive influence on COVID-19 related behaviours in some places in Lewisham, including vaccine uptake. Some Champions felt very positive about the impact they had had in their communities.



Some Champions had encountered a small group of people who were resistant to vaccination but felt they had provided an important role in providing accurate information for people, which countered some of the misinformation people had seen online.

Local and factual information should continue to be disseminated by Champions, particularly as the path out of the pandemic is still unclear.

PROGRAMME SUCCESS

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE PROGRAMME HAD ON HEALTH INEQUALITIES?

The majority of Champions thought they helped to overcome health inequalities in their communities.

Community Members felt the approach of Champions having the autonomy to decide how to disseminate COVID-19 information was beneficial.



Community Members were complementary about the Champions they had interacted with but some felt that more needed to be done to counter the negative impacts of misinformation in communities, particularly those who are impacted the most by health inequalities.



Further work to overcome the challenges of health inequalities is needed and participants felt that the Programme had potential in this area. Countering misinformation online could be a priority area for the Programme.

HOW HAS THE PROGRAMME INFLUENCED FEELINGS OF COMMUNITY AND OWNERSHIP IN THE BOROUGH IN BOTH THE CHAMPIONS AND THOSE THEY ENGAGE?



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HAS, AND IF SO, HOW HAS THE PROGRAMME ENABLED COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

The Programme has been successful in enabling community leadership, with Champions being informed of public health information, some receiving additional training and in the leadership role of disseminating information.



The majority of the Champions have found the emails and webinars to be accessible but it may be helpful for some graphics and easy-to-digest formats to be introduced. The title and timings of webinars do not suit all Champions.



The variety of opinion and approach needs to be considered in the development of the Programme. Champions may not want to take on a role of community leadership for health and wellbeing beyond the pandemic.

WHAT ARE THE BEHAVIOURS AND ROLES OF STATUTORY AND VOLUNTARY SERVICES THAT ENABLE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP?

The evaluation has found some positive ways in which the council has enabled community leadership under the Community Champions Programme.



The weekly Community Champion emails and bi-monthly webinars were appreciated by Champions, as was the accessibility of the Lewisham team if they had any questions. The ways in which collaborative working and information sharing is developed and maintained within the Community Champions Programme is vital to its success.

With the emerging issue of trust and the covert way in which some Champions prefer to be active, it is important that the assumption is not made that all Champions want to fulfil the role in the same way across all communities in Lewisham

The collaborative nature of the Programme and Champions' ways of working is beneficial and should be continued in the Programme development.

PROGRAMME SUCCESS

WHAT WIDER ISSUES WITH RELEVANCE TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND ITS WIDER DETERMINANTS HAVE BEEN HIGHLIGHTED THROUGH THE PROGRAMME?

Community Champions can be key connectors in communities and have an important role in helping council information reach people in communities that may be particularly disadvantaged



The majority of Champions felt that the Programme had a role beyond COVID-19 in relation to communities' health and wellbeing.



The Programme needs to continue to be applied flexibly so that Champions can choose the best ways to engage with communities based on their existing knowledge, including covertly.

A focus on mental health and wellbeing would be welcomed by all those engaged in the evaluation. It is an obvious 'next stage' focus in the development of the Programme.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST WITHIN THE PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT ONGOING SUSTAINABILITY AS A COMMUNITY ASSET FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND THE REDUCTION OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES?

THE 200-STRONG NETWORK OF COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS IS A GREAT ASSET FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND THE REDUCTION OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES ACROSS LEWISHAM.

Champions have engaged with communities who are particularly marginalised, increased their access to COVID-19 health information and health services.



Champions' social networks, connections and trusted ways of having conversations provide a good foundation on which to develop the Programme sustainably.



A dedicated website and social media channels for Community Champions may help to raise awareness of the Programme, and increase the availability and impact of reliable, local health information from the Programme.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES THE PROGRAMME PROVIDE FOR COVID-19 RECOVERY AND WIDER ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP IN HEALTH PROMOTION AND REDUCTION OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES?

The evaluation data has shown that distrust permeates many initiatives and activities that are led by the council, particularly in certain communities.



The overall positive reception and interactions of Champions in Lewisham suggests that the Programme is a good model for other healthcare initiatives.

Community members becoming Champions and then delivering health information in accessible, relevant and appealing ways, increases trust within social networks. However, overcoming health inequalities is a long-term, structural challenge.



The issue of maintaining and further building trust is crucial to the future development of the Programme. Champions have developed their role as trusted members of the communities in Lewisham and have been able to give accurate information about COVID-19, vaccinations and the pandemic situation in Lewisham.

The Programme could be specifically identified as a health-related Programme rather than a community programme.