

Reigate & Banstead: Health creation networks



Reigate & Banstead Borough Council: Health Creation Networks

The project

Given the council's responsibilities for wellbeing, it can see the impacts of the wider determinants of health are leading to evermore pressure on overloaded services and that a radical solution needs to be identified. The council is therefore using its team of established local authority community development workers to support an integrated approach to health creation in some of the borough's most vulnerable neighbourhoods, empowering communities to tackle health inequalities.

This work brings communities, community development workers, GPs, Primary Care Networks (PCNs), and voluntary sector partners together. It has developed from a small-scale health creation project led by a GP in one neighbourhood. Health creation approaches seek to change the emphasis from system led 'fixing' of problems, to community led identification of local issues and responses to those issues.

Health creation seeks to remove barriers for communities to make positive lifestyle choices, empowering people to influence the conditions that impact their health. This could include social activities to prevent loneliness and isolation, green space projects to increase access to healthy places, food projects to increase access to fresh foods and help to prepare and cook this food.

Funding from East Surrey Place has allowed the council to release its community development workers for one day per week for the next two years to support the delivery of the project (£99,000 over two years), and work directly with GPs from each of the local PCNs. This work is also encouraging the council to look at its culture – how it provides opportunities for citizens to participate and lead on delivering activities and services and identifying barriers they have inadvertently placed in the way of community empowerment.

The council is currently working with C2 Connecting Communities, a unique and dynamic community strengthening programme founded by front-line health workers with senior Research Fellows from Exeter University to provide training to staff and community members to understand the principles and practice of a health creation approach. It is now considering projects to train local people as ‘Community Connectors’ (who can help signpost their friends and neighbours to local activities and services) and ‘Community Health Champions’ (who can give basic wellbeing information) to increase understanding of how people can ‘help themselves’.

The benefits

Since July 2022 the project has delivered some early outcomes:

- An Asian Women’s group – The group is self-directed and members have been exploring ways to keep healthy together. For example, they are looking at one member training to lead walks for the rest of the group.
- A ‘listening event’ – In the most deprived area in Surrey to find out how residents want to change their area. Three projects are being developed and led by residents as a result of this event. Despite significant investment over 15 to 20 years, this is the first-time people living in this area have been asked what is important to them, with no agenda or attempt to ‘fix’ things for them. The council asked partners to take off their lanyards, sit down and just listen!
- A social group for people of African heritage living locally – This group delivered events for Black History Month in a local library and now meet monthly.