Plain English summary: Project Community evaluation

Project Community evaluation

What is Project Community?

Project Community is a project run by the charity Positive East in City and Hackney. Its goal is to improve the sexual and reproductive health of people from Black and other ethnic minority communities, aged 16 and over.

We know that people in these communities, particularly those of Black African, Black Caribbean, and Mixed heritage, often face more challenges in getting the sexual health support they need. Project Community tries to address this through things like:

- Community outreach events.
- Workshops and training.
- Social media campaigns.
- Giving small grants to other community groups to help spread the word.

Why did we evaluate the project?

We wanted to evaluate two main things:

1. **Is the project doing what it planned to do?** (e.g., are they delivering agreed activities and meeting targets?)
2. **Is it making a difference** to people's sexual health and wellbeing in the target group?

To answer these questions, we looked at project reports, spoke to Project Community staff and community members, interviewed other local health services, and analysed sexual health data.

Our Findings and Recommendations

Is the project doing what it planned to do?

Project Community is performing well in some areas. It has met or exceeded targets for community engagement and social media. However, in other areas, there have been changes to the original specification and KPI targets have not been met. This includes connecting people to sexual health services.

Is Project Community making a difference to people's sexual health and wellbeing?

For the people who have engaged with Project Community, the evaluation has highlighted many positive outcomes. But when we look at health data for the wider community, we see that health gaps and challenges still exist. This is likely to be caused by a wide range of factors: Project Community is one part of a complex system working to improve sexual health outcomes. affecting sexual health outcomes and service access.

More detailed findings and recommendations are included below.

1. Community engagement and outreach

- **What we found:** Project Community is good at reaching out to the community, but it has been difficult at times. It could do more to connect with new people who might have engaged less to date, including young people and men.
- **Recommendations for Project Community:**
  - Deliver more engagement in public places like barbershops, markets, and parks.
  - Use partner networks, like community WhatsApp groups, to spread the word.
  - Create simple, visual guides (like infographics or short videos) about the basics of sexual health, as many people in the target group were reported to lack this foundational knowledge.
- **Recommendations for Project Community and City and Hackney Public Health team:**
  - Address practical problems, like getting parking permission for their community van.

2. Referrals and connecting People to Health Services

- **What we found:** It's hard to assess how well the project is referring and connecting people to other services because there has been a change in approach and, relatedly, limited data collection in this area. While ProjectCommunity has helped some people access services, it's not a consistent part of the project delivery model.
- **Recommendations for Project Community:**
  - Rethink how to refer and connect people to services. This could mean offering more hands-on help, like assisting someone to book or get to an appointment. It is acknowledged that this was trialled through a "befriending" approach that was not successful. But it would be worth exploring the reasons for this and whether there are ways in which it could be delivered more successfully.

- ○ Work more closely with local sexual health clinics to make the process of referring people clearer for everyone.
- ○ Help with wider efforts to get more people registered with a GP. For example, through supporting people with an online application.

3. Stakeholder engagement/working with other organisations

- **What we found:** The project works well with its partners, but it has struggled to get some planned community groups off the ground, including the Community Interest Groups (CIGs).
- **Recommendations for Project Community:**
  - ○ Rethink the purpose of the community groups and small grants programme, perhaps focusing them on reaching groups that have been hardest to connect with so far, including young people and men.
- **Recommendations for Project Community and wider partners:**
  - ○ Create a shared calendar with other health organisations to avoid having multiple services show up at the same community event.

4. Social media and media coverage

- **What we found:** The project is meeting its targets for online activity, but online engagement didn't come up a lot when we talked to people in focus groups and interviews. The project is not meeting goals for getting coverage in the media.
- **Recommendations for Project Community:**
  - ○ Decide if social media is the best use of time and resources. The project could either refocus its online work on a clear campaign with key messages, or use those resources for more face-to-face community work instead.

5. What people know about sexual health outcomes and services

- **What we found:** People who have taken part in Project Community activities said their knowledge about sexual health has improved. However, there are still significant knowledge gaps in the wider community.
- **Recommendations for Project Community:**
  - ○ Use the findings from this review to create new resources that directly address the most common gaps in people's knowledge.

6. People's experiences of sexual health outcomes and services

- **What we found:** People who engaged with the project reported having better experiences with their sexual health. However, practical issues like travel costs and language barriers are still making it hard for many to access services.
- **Recommendations for Project Community:**
  - ○ Find ways to help people overcome these practical barriers. This could involve offering more direct support or raising these issues in wider sexual health forums.
  - ○ Consider using a "mystery shopper" approach, where a trained community member pretends to be a patient to see what barriers people face when trying to use a service.

7. Learning and impact

- **What we found:** The project is good at learning from its work, but this isn't always done in a structured way. With resources spread thin across many different activities, it's hard to know what's having the biggest impact.
- **Recommendations for Project Community:**
  - Create a simple, consistent way to track the results of the small grants programme
  - Share learnings with other health services through the newsletter.
  - In performance reports, include a breakdown of engagement in the City of London and engagement in Hackney.
  - Consider delivering a further survey (following the 2023 survey) to monitor and review any changes in knowledge and experience in the target group.
- **Recommendations for Project Community and City and Hackney Public Health team:**
  - Review and update the project's main plan and goals. This will help them prioritise the activities that are most effective.

8. Outcomes and inequalities: is sexual health improving in the target group and are gaps in outcomes and access closing?

- **What we found:**
  - There have been improvements in self-reported measures of sexual and reproductive health outcomes for Project Community service users.
  - Across City and Hackney, new STI diagnoses dropped after the COVID-19 pandemic, but they are now rising again. Currently, people who identify as being from a Mixed ethnic group have the highest rates of diagnosis.
  - Inequalities between different ethnic groups still exist, and in some cases have grown since the pandemic.
  - However, it's worth noting that the gap in diagnosis and consultation rates for people from Black and Mixed ethnic backgrounds combined, when compared to other groups, is smaller in City and Hackney than it is across England as a whole.
- **Recommendations for the City and Hackney Public Health team:**
  - Review the evidence on which activities are most effective and best value for money in reducing health inequalities in sexual and reproductive health.
  - Review STI diagnosis rates in the Mixed ethnic group to see if more targeted support is needed. This would also be supported by learning and insights from Project Community.
  - Continue to track local data on sexual health outcomes and service use by ethnicity.