

# Evaluation of Age Better in Sheffield

Deep dive: BAME involvement and  
experience – what have we learnt?

November 2021



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# Introduction

# 1

Age Better in Sheffield (ABiS) is a six-year £6 million programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The programme aim is to reduce loneliness and social isolation amongst older people (aged 50 and over) in the city by funding a range of projects. It is led by South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) and delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector, public sector, and older people across Sheffield.

This report is based on research conducted by Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) during the summer of 2021 with representatives from various organisations (herein referred to as delivery partners) across Sheffield that received ABiS funding for projects. Of note, all the ABiS projects had finished delivery at the time of the research – some a few years previous. The views and experiences of several participants previously involved in the ABiS projects are also integral to the research.

The initial focus of this research was the ABiS programme's impact on BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities in terms of social isolation and loneliness and their overall experience of the programme. However, as many of the ABiS projects were short-term and ended a few years prior to the research taking place, it proved difficult to connect with project participants as well as project leads as some had moved on into other employment. Consequently, the research centred on the learning garnered from delivery partners' work with BAME communities whilst providing some insights into the individual experience of BAME participants of the ABiS programme.

Several themes were explored with ABiS delivery partners and BAME participants:

- How participants were made aware of the ABiS projects.
- Factors that enabled participants to be involved in the projects.
- Barriers to involvement in ABiS projects.
- The impact of the ABiS funded projects on participants and delivery partners.
- BAME people's involvement in the co-production of ABiS activities.
- How, if at all, did the pandemic affect participants' and delivery partners' experience of ABiS projects?

This report is interspersed with direct quotes from BAME participants to give voice to those seldom heard in research and evaluation activities. Wherever possible, the words of delivery partners are used verbatim to accurately reflect their views. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of participants and where the views are those of a delivery partner, those quotes have been labelled as 'delivery partner' 1, 2, 3 etc. A further distinction is made to identify delivery partners of BAME backgrounds as they brought specific expertise to the ABiS programme which is noteworthy.

# Methodology

# 2

An evaluative 'deep dive' was conducted during the summer of 2021. This method relies on using a number of research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular subject – in this case, BAME communities' involvement and experience of the ABiS programme.

The following methods were used for the deep dive:

- Face-to-face in-depth qualitative interviews with BAME participants and delivery partners from ABiS funded projects. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, the interviews were undertaken online using Zoom.
- Qualitative interviews by telephone, only in a couple of cases where participants felt more comfortable with a non-face-to-face method or were unable to use an online platform due to access or technical problems.
- A focus group with participants and delivery partners from ABiS funded projects. Again, this was done virtually using Zoom.

In total, eleven people participated in this primary research; seven delivery partners, one ABiS volunteer, and three BAME participants of ABiS projects. All seven delivery partners ran non - BAME specific, generic projects that were open to all communities, including, the White British. Four of these delivery partners were of BAME background. As explained earlier, as the majority of ABiS funded projects had finished a few years previous, re-engaging with participants proved challenging for SYHA's ABiS team who acted as an intermediary to accessing research participants. Topic guides were shared with those requesting the questions in advance to prepare for their interviews / focus group discussion. In line with SHU's ethics guidelines, participant information sheets were provided ahead of the interviews / focus group and informed consent was obtained before commencing the research. With permission, all discussions were recorded and saved to the university's secure drive.

The interviews and the focus group discussion were transcribed verbatim before analysis could begin. Dominant themes on the challenges and opportunities for involving and working with BAME communities, experience, and impact, were explored, as well as the new themes emerging from the data. These are discussed in the following chapters.

# Key Learning

# 3

## 3.1. Learning point 1: The term BAME

Whilst the term Black Asian and Minority Ethnic is commonly used mainstream and sometimes contested on the basis of which communities it includes and excludes, it is a term that is problematic when large-scale programmes such as the ABiS programme attempt to provide activities and services for specific populations. The problem lies in the fact that the term BAME collectively categorises a large number of different minority ethnic communities that are diverse in terms of language, dialects, culture, beliefs, practices and so on. In turn, these differences might present different barriers and opportunities to involvement.

For a project to, for example, target the communities of Burngreave and Firth Park, in Sheffield, this could potentially involve many different communities – something which was substantiated in an account:

*25 different nationalities living [in Burngreave and Firthpark], probably more, so I was working with the Somali community, the Pakistani community, the Arabic community, I probably engaged better with the Pakistani community because that's my original background (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

The challenge here, was attempting to engage with all those communities in some way, including the White British, for the sake of equality and fairness. In practice, the delivery partner of BAME background found it easier to attract people from the community that she represented, but she also sought to work with other BAME communities and therefore began partnership work to reach into other communities:

*I think the biggest challenge is trying to engage all the BAME community...but because I probably attracted people from my own community better because I knew them, I know the language, I just kept feeling I want to get into certain other communities. I wanted to engage more with the Somali communities...we had a group of Libyan and Syrian ladies but that was a mixed age group, I got involved in that group for the benefit of both really, to engage with the over 50s but also to engage with other communities so I worked jointly with another organisation on that.*

Whilst recognising the benefits of focusing on a specific BAME community and providing a “quality” service to them she acknowledged that in her efforts to work with other communities also, she might spread herself too thin where they received less of her time or missed out altogether:

*it's good to have focused based services for that community but then your time and capacity gets taken over so you can't spread it as well as you want to. But it's good because that service is quality but then you want to engage with this community, engage with that community as well.*

By reaching out to various small community organisations in her target area, efforts were fruitful in establishing a mixed group of people from various BAME communities to meet in one place - a social café. Facilitating a mixed group also brought its challenges, for example, in the 'cook and eat sessions, people had different culinary tastes. The way forward, in her experience, was to support volunteers to start their own BAME specific groups as they "*know their community and know their people*".

Evidently, clumping different communities together under the blanket term 'BAME' presents problems for service providers and those who should receive the services. This deep dive has resurfaced some of the dilemmas that commissioners, funders and service providers have grappled with in the past and are likely to continue to do so unless some headway is made in addressing them.

### 3.2. Learning point 2: Language

The centrality of language in engaging with, and providing appropriate ABiS activities and services to, BAME communities where English proficiency was low emerged as a strong theme in the research.

Arguably, English language is a greater issue in the over 50s in some BAME communities as they are of generations less likely to have received a British education and hence lack English language skills. This was corroborated in an account of an event where it was noted that language posed a bigger barrier for older people:

*the first young women spoke English and after that I think all of the older women didn't speak English. The one that came on her own, I think she vaguely understood but there was also a passer-by that chipped in and helped us. And the women that came with their daughter in law, the daughter in law would basically be the interpreter, so I did notice that generational difference between English and non-English speaking women (delivery partner 2).*

A reliance of older BAME people on younger members of their families for interpretation and translation emerged as a theme in the interviews. When reflecting on barriers to involvement for BAME communities, the delivery partner recognised that although English language skills were not necessary for all activities and services, a more complex programme of support could prove more challenging for staff to implement:

*I definitely think language barriers, cos with that cycling event, if there hadn't been someone to chip in and help you probably could have got by, it's quite simple, they see other people, they sit in it, you can tell them can you strap in, you would have been able to get through it, but if you were trying to provide a more complex programme of support which involved calling someone, telling them what bus they're going to get on, what time, where you're going to meet them, it would have been really difficult (delivery partner 2)*

Nevertheless, approaches to addressing language barriers were outlined in several narratives, including by the same delivery partner. She described how a generic training resource in English was supplemented with a different language to serve the Chinese community and how an interpreter was utilised for a Podcast in English:

*when we did the bus driver training resource, we did videos to go in the PowerPoint...XXXX [name] she got that subtitled so they could speak Chinese in it. I did a podcast series and a few of the participants were from [name of organisation] I think there was two or three of them, one of them spoke English during the podcast, the second one spoke Chinese and XXXX [name] was in the room with them so she acted as the translator.*

Another delivery partner recalled how their service had previously drawn on the cultural knowledge and experience of two employees to successfully engage with and provide services to members of particular BAME communities. In this case, the BAME employees not only engaged with the communities themselves but also facilitated the engagement of their non - BAME colleagues by making introductions and acting as interpreters during meetings. To expand connections with BAME communities, the delivery partner outlined their organisational drive to recruit more people from BAME communities to reflect the diverse populations they served:

*it is on our strategic plan this year to try and increase connections with the BAME community, it's always an area we've been extremely interested in but it's been quite hard to get people to be involved with us and a lot of it is the language barrier and this year we have specifically recruited some more people from the BAME community to help us increase our presence and support in the different areas (delivery partner 3).*

One of the BAME employees referred to in this example explained how between her and her BAME colleague they spoke at least seven different community languages and or dialects. With these skills they were able to provide the Somali, Pakistani, Arab, Kurdish, African Caribbean and English communities key benefits and financial capability advice and guidance:

*Interviewer (I): So seven languages between you, do you feel that language played a part in engaging and working with your target group?*

*Participant (P): It was both languages and feeling comfortable with someone from their own community, I think that was a big one (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

Of note, the emphasis on people feeling 'comfortable' with professionals from their own communities or those where there is some sense of cultural identification reinforced the benefits of a diverse workforce. Indeed, in a different account, the importance of organisations employing staff with the language capabilities to meet the needs of the populations they provide services for was reiterated:

*I: Was language a problem in any way, did that put up a barrier to people finding out about the service?*

*P: Yes that certainly was a barrier for some people. From the very start of the project looking at the recruitment we desperately wanted therapist who speaks the community language (delivery partner 4 of BAME background).*

The BAME focus group participants concurred that language acted as a barrier to communication and understanding - resulting in a reluctance to take up and participate in activities. In this discussion, an example was provided of how their organisation, through its own connections, had drawn on the language skills of a student intern and volunteer to work with them to communicate complex information on using smart phones and technology. Although, this BAME organisation's employees possessed the language skills of the community they served, they did not have the detailed subject knowledge and therefore reached out to those with the relevant knowledge coupled with the necessary language skills.

Only one participant (called Aaday), an ABiS volunteer and of BAME background himself, felt that language was not a barrier to BAME peoples' participation in the ABiS projects. In his experience of delivering ABiS activities as a volunteer, even those from different cultures who spoke very little English were able to communicate with him because he listened intently, and they trusted him:

*the BAME people I knew, some of them didn't speak English well, some of them spoke English well, but there are people from other backgrounds, Polish background or Slovakia, all those people are speaking much less English and they were finding it difficult to communicate with me but still I just listened, I took time to listen to them. So I don't think language is a barrier...It's like if they can't trust you they won't interact with you, that's the main thing.*

### 3.3. Learning point 3: Publicising ABiS projects

Language was also integral to how the ABiS projects were publicised amongst the BAME communities of Sheffield, and determined engagement with, and uptake of the provision. Efforts to involve BAME communities were futile in cases where the language used to promote ABiS projects was not one that people could read, write or understand.

A non BAME organisation's approach to publicity was a case in point. The ABiS delivery partner from this organisation explained that they had leaflet dropped homes and held pop up stalls in public places such as libraries in a predominantly BAME area of Sheffield in their efforts to involve BAME people in their ABiS project but were largely unsuccessful. When asked what language the information was provided in, she reported that the information in the leaflets was written in English.

A delivery partner explained that information in leaflets, although written in English, might work if *"quite simple with pictures"* (delivery partner 1 of BAME background). Leaflets with pictorial and simple written English have in some cases proved effective in engaging members of BAME communities who have a basic grasp of the English language (Bashir et al, 2016).

The use of local media (the Telegraph, BBC Radio Sheffield) was also reported, in attempts to raise awareness of the ABiS project and upcoming events. The delivery partner shared, *"I ran the social media channels, Twitter, Facebook, that sort of thing, so they were the main information outlets we used"*. When asked about the response to local media (newspaper articles and radio appearances) she explained that those from White English backgrounds did engage, however not those from BAME backgrounds. Further, in her experience, the use of social media was not conducive to attracting people from most backgrounds, indicating that perhaps the local communities on the whole did not use it:

*the experience I was getting from participants was that they weren't online, they didn't use Twitter or Facebook or even the internet, so how I saw the social media use was more to remind people of our existence and create awareness that other organisations similar to us would see. So it was less around reaching individuals and more around reaching potential referral sources, that's how I saw it cos from what I learnt from the participants that's not the sort of thing they would see (delivery partner 2).*

Social media seemed more effective for reaching other organisations with information about ABiS projects and activities which they could then use for potential referrals.

Despite evidence suggesting that translated publicity materials might be more useful when attempting to engage BAME communities, the complex issue of language is not necessarily resolved by doing this. For example, one of the ABiS delivery partners raised an important point in relation to the assumed literacy of the older generations that came to the UK, who in fact could speak their first languages, but were unable to read and write them. Thus, in this context, making redundant the translated materials:

*I think the promotion, just having leaflets translated into Urdu that we asked for took a long time coming but then that's presuming people can read and write, which a lot of them couldn't at all anyhow so it wouldn't matter what language it was in really. So, it's us thinking we're doing a job cos we're translating but we're not really, because these were older people that had come maybe for a lot of poor families back home and they never learnt to read and write so that was a big learning curve I think (delivery partner 3).*

Evidence suggests that apart from language, cultural perceptions and the norms of specific BAME communities presented a barrier to engagement in ABiS activity. For instance, one project which focused on better connecting people living in care homes with the community (visitors, family, friends) around them struggled to not only engage members of BAME communities but the BAME organisations that they had hoped to gain referrals from. The norms and perceptions of BAME communities 'looking after their own' were given as a reason for a lack of interest and involvement by some BAME organisations:

*often that becomes a barrier as to why would we [BAME organisations] engage with somebody from a care home because that's not linking into our community in any way because none of our community access that care home because they would be supported at home...sometimes that was seen as a bit of, I don't want to go as far as a failure, but a kind of, from some people in different communities it was seen as well if that person's being cared for in a care home then that is seen as that family haven't really supported them properly (delivery partner 5).*

This delivery partner expressed an interest in connecting a group of people from BAME backgrounds with a care home simply to raise awareness of how residents are supported and to provide insights into why people live in care homes. If anything, the barriers experienced by the delivery partner had motivated her to think about a strategy for increasing understanding of care homes amongst the BAME communities – a first step to encouraging them to engage with provision.

### **3.4. Learning point 4: what worked?**

Clearly, some approaches to involving BAME communities in the ABiS projects worked better than others. Firstly, those organisations with BAME employees were at an advantage when attempting to engage with those communities that those individual employees reflected in terms of language, culture, and so on. Extensive connections based on personal and professional experience were utilised by the BAME employees and they knew where to go (e.g., mosques, specific events, community groups) and which platforms to use to reach their communities:

*I know XXXX who worked for us at that time, he used connections and probably radio and things just to get the message out there, but we did end up with a group I think of about 30...but I think it was a specific radio for the community that we were trying to attract and he attended the mosques and things so he's quite well-respected in that community, I think it was just contacts (delivery partner 3)*

The local community radio station is one example of a live platform for sharing news, entertainment, and information such as 'what's on' in local communities. With the scope to present information in various community languages, this method does not rely on community members being literate and reaches people in the home, who might not access public places, including those who are lonely and socially isolated. Local radio is increasingly being used to engage with BAME communities to make them aware of local issues, activities, and services (Darko, 2020).

An organisation providing services to all ethnic groups, including the White British, in specific target areas, had employed staff from BAME backgrounds, who utilised their expertise and community links to refer people to their ABiS project. The delivery partner, of BAME background, reported:

*we've been working with the BAME community for a long time. I've got a couple of colleagues who work as well-being coaches, they work really closely with, they're linked to the GP surgeries, so the GP surgeries have social prescribing so they're sort of referred in, so a lot of my referrals were from there (delivery partner 1).*

When asked what she thought was most effective in publicising the ABiS projects, she reported that the type of outreach work undertaken as part of her role, routinely visiting existing groups, organisation to organisation, getting to know them, imparting information word-of-mouth and being visible in the groups, drew service users to her.

This was reinforced by a BAME participant who had accessed an ABiS funded BAME group set up by the delivery partner, initially learning about it through word-of-mouth:

*I: so how did you hear about that Age Better activity?*

*P: I know a lot of people that go to the library, XXXX I know her from there cos I know a lot of Asians from there that used to work there or just come there to library and just chat and talk about different things (Shahida, ABiS project participant).*

Aadav, an ABiS volunteer, also drew on his established networks to engage participants for the ABiS projects and activities:

*through social café and other interactions, I promoted the programme and then got so many people joining in.*

One of those activities was 'Walking Football'. In his words, "two groups were very, very difficult to engage, one is [the] BAME community and two is men". Knowing the popularity of football for so many men and that the ABiS target group was the over 50's, Aadav chose an activity that he thought would 'motivate' and engage men. It wasn't an innovative idea as the activity already existed, however, it was one that he thought would be responsive to the interests of men in general. Although the focus of the activity was to involve men from all backgrounds in the ABiS project, he noticed that men from BAME communities (Pakistani, Jamaican, Chinese and Iranian) were particularly keen to take up this ABiS activity:

*when I found that I couldn't engage men I thought what will motivate them, I thought football and to be honest I don't really like football but then I thought so many men like football so how can I engage men? Create a football event. Then most of the people are 50+ so maybe walking football, that's how the walking football happened, already the walking football idea was around so it was easy for me to get into that, it's not my idea. Engaging men, while I was trying to do that I didn't particularly focus on a particular BME community or particular group, I thought men, that's all and maybe BME community people like football, so really you have to put your thinking cap on and then you need to find ways of engaging (Aadav, ABiS volunteer).*

By taking their services to established BAME groups and community organisations in settings and locations that members of specific BAME communities were familiar and comfortable with, an ABiS delivery partner was able to effectively involve them in the project. She explained:

*we started working with smaller charities in Sheffield who are specifically BME like XXXX [name of organisation] and we put groups in their place rather than asking people to come to our office (delivery partner 4 of BAME background)*

This account revealed that lessons were learnt through partnerships, networking, and learning events with BAME communities. For example, the delivery partner established a good working relationship with a small BAME Mental health charity to learn more about BAME peoples' perceptions of mental ill health, the stigma and how to improve access for BAME communities to their generic service.

In another project, the delivery partner also took their ABiS funded service into the heart of the community but experienced a reluctance from BAME people to get involved. However, she observed that once one or two younger BAME women got involved, others too plucked up the courage to have a go, and eventually, the target group (of 50 years +) also participated, although supported by younger family members possibly due to language barriers, low confidence and so on. The following was reported:

*We went to Firth Park and gave the locals a ride [on e-trikes] round the park...we had a semi-influx of BAME participants, and it was sort of started by us taking people who weren't over 50 but we said we'll take anyone so long as there's not someone over 50 who's waiting for a ride. So we took these two sisters and their young toddler daughter for a ride around the park and we found that the other Asian women who saw them doing that, it made them want to do it as well and it was a bit like a snowball effect, suddenly we had all these Asian women who knew each other or came over and said 'so and so told me, can I have a go? But that was really interesting because whenever we arrived at the park we would always do a few laps just to look out for people, tell them where we'll be for the rest of the day, and there were always loads of people from the BAME community doing a walk of the park, often women in groups doing their daily walk, but up until that day none of them ended up having a ride (delivery partner 2).*

During the discussion, the delivery partner reflected on the potential advantages of building relationships with existing BAME groups, rather than approaching individuals to participate in ABiS projects, who perhaps due to low confidence, might not get involved. She explained that by accessing an existing BAME group, it might only take one/two people from that group to get involved, for others to follow suit:

*it made me think if I built a relationship with an existing group for that group of women then it would be easier because you're not singling out one person in a park on their own, you would hope that someone out of this community group would have the confidence to come with their friend and then open the gates to the rest of the group (delivery partner 2).*

A lack of engagement with online support, activities, and services by older people in some BAME communities was highlighted in the account of a delivery partner. Whilst the dependency of older BAME people on younger family members was described in an earlier narrative about social activities, in this example, the delivery partner stressed that engaging BAME communities in online initiatives was difficult because people from such communities did not want to seek help from and burden family members:

*we'd get a community banker to talk about how they manage their bank because people are not engaging with them online, the older generation are scared of online...you find with a lot of the communities, they do live with family and the biggest thing I learnt over Covid and generally working on this project is even if an elder is living with their family they don't feel they have the right to ask for help,*

*they feel like we've had our lives, we don't want to burden our family, we don't want to burden our children (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

As often policy and practice in health and social care has rested on assumptions about South Asian people, for example, 'looking after their own' (Katbamna, 2004), this account reiterates the need to move away from such notions, which in affect deny BAME people access to provision that is responsive to their needs.

Another lesson was that in therapy, group work with a creative focus was preferred by members of some BAME communities rather than one-to-one support. Further, where the therapist was of the same cultural background a fear around confidentiality was expressed. Evidence suggested that issues of familiarity, confidence, and trust underpinned the preference for group work:

*we have learnt that it's not always natural for them [people from BAME communities] to sit one to one with someone, especially if the therapist is from within the same community, there was a massive fear that confidentiality will not be part of it. People from certain communities feel more confident in a group situation so because Age Better in Sheffield is very much a test and learn programme we thought how about we offer creative therapy and hence we put an offer of art therapy in group setting and that was a big hit. That showed us that through creativity, through group work people from certain communities feel much more comfortable to engage (delivery partner 4 of BAME background)*

When asked whether some BAME communities might feel more comfortable accessing and participating in projects that offered women-only or men-only spaces, the narrative in a different account affirmed that this was the preference of older people from Muslim communities in particular:

*I think it does work better if you have men-only spaces... There is a Muslim elders group that works at one of the centres locally and that's popular but that's because they've got Muslim elder men group and then Muslim elder women group, so they've segregated that, that's quite popular (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

In this interview, the delivery partner expressed that sensitivity to gender segregated communities such as Muslim communities when promoting projects and activities had the potential to generate greater interest and engagement. Although she expressed some reservations towards running gender segregated groups, this was balanced with the need to respond to communities' needs and preferences. She described working with her male colleague to sensitively provide support, assisting him by translating and acting in the capacity of a chaperone when he worked with women from the Pakistani community:

*I: Did your colleague, who was male, find it easier to engage and involve men in the ABIS activity?*

*P: Yeah and when there was women involved, especially the Pakistani community, he would ask me to come and sit and translate for them and stuff like that.*

### **3.5. Learning point 5: The significance of 'trust'**

Several accounts placed 'trust' at the cornerstone of BAME communities' interactions with ABIS delivery partners. Engagement and uptake of projects was expressed as very much dependent on the trust between them. In one example, Aadav reported that his established working relationships with individuals (mainly non BAME) created 'trust' which 'motivated' them to be involved in the ABIS activity in the first place above

anything else – including his explanation of the programme. He described his efforts to help participants to complete the ABiS paperwork, but fundamentally it was the ‘trust’ that aided engagement:

*there was a social café, that’s where I started yeah...I had this Age Better joining form with me so I’ll keep a bunch with me at the back of the room and then go and talk to people and tell them about the Age Better programme. I think it is because of the trust they had in me that they agreed, it’s not my explanation of the programme but the trust they had in me actually motivated them to join. There are lots of questions to answer, some of the people are not happy to do that so I did it for them, sitting with them, it takes quite a lot of time cos it’s a long questionnaire (Aadav, ABiS project volunteer).*

When asked what facilitated the involvement of BAME communities with whom he had not invested time building trust, again, he reported that it was trust in something other than an existing relationship - perhaps in his character, that led to their engagement:

*I can tell the reason in one word, trust. They trusted me, they knew me, I never knew them before but it’s the way of interaction and they knew that they can trust me and I totally trusted them.*

During further probing into whether it was his identity and cultural background that might have helped to create that trust, Aadav’s account revealed that rather than identification, it was his involvement in the social café and other activities outside of the ABiS programme that created some familiarity and trust.

In another interview, the delivery partner for a non - BAME specific ABiS project reflected on her learning around ‘trust’, which was concerned more with investing time in building trust rather than expecting it to be instantaneous:

*we all know that building trust and relationship with anyone takes time so it’s not like you’re going to go to a person within the black community and say ‘listen I have this service, do you want to take part?’ ‘oh yeah sure, why not’ it doesn’t work like that (delivery partner 4 of BAME background).*

Trust was described as a two-way process in relation to the success of the ABiS projects delivered by another delivery partner. She emphasised the importance of trusting the target groups for such programmes to inform provision – their needs and preferences:

*trust your people to tell you what they want and I think the benefit with ABIS, it was flexible around that, it was a test and learn (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

Trusting BAME people to lead activities with their own communities potentially benefited delivery partners in meeting their targets, the volunteer(s) leading the activity, and crucially, the communities involved in the activities. As conveyed in the following account, being from those communities themselves, volunteers know what is needed in them, and usually possess the skills to be responsive to needs. Once supported to lead, and having nurtured a sense of ownership and promoted independence, people in such roles could be left to sustain activity:

*I think letting them lead, the one group that the volunteers ran, they kind of like led it well, you can trust them to know their community and know their people. People, to me, are education more than a book is, so they’ve got the skills and things to know, it’s the barriers that you just need to support with, the barriers of language, of accessing services. So, one thing I did really learn is they know what*

*they want, they just need that support to get there (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

The interviews revealed that those organisations with track records of supporting BAME communities were able to deliver ABiS projects involving BAME people with few challenges, if any. Conversely, those delivery partners with little experience of working with BAME communities encountered numerous problems in trying to reach into, gain the trust of, and involve, BAME people. For a couple of ABiS projects with no track record of working specifically with BAME communities, the largely BAME target areas, such as Firth Park proved very difficult to successfully deliver in. In this one area, for example, a vast range of languages were spoken and different religious and / or cultural norms around uptake and involvement in services /activities existed. Significant learning had to occur about the different communities and their needs before projects could make any headway, if at all, due to the short-term nature of the ABiS projects and given the time required to build trust and relationships.

### **3.6. Learning point 6: Co-production**

Age Better in Sheffield placed ‘co-production’ at the heart of the programme, ensuring that service users, volunteers, and delivery partners were all given the opportunity to shape the ABiS activities and services to best meet needs. This principle applied to the local evaluation of the programme as well as at the Core Partnership level.

A pertinent theme when exploring BAME communities’ involvement in co-production was the low level of understanding of what co-production means and involves. For example, this was conveyed in the following accounts:

*The whole co-design and coproduction is such a new concept as well and particularly for our members, they’re so used to things being set in stone and they take part and just following an instructor, so maybe it’s something new for the whole charity I think as a concept (delivery partner 6 of BAME background).*

*I think there were two main things, not understanding the language when it comes to co-production, it’s too much of a jargon (delivery partner 4 of BAME background).*

Further, based on previous experiences of being consulted with, but to no avail, participants weren’t always convinced that their say mattered and that they would influence any change. Delivery partners then set about proving that it did and that they had listened, whilst managing expectations at the same time.

In some cases, a preference was expressed for influencing and shaping aspects of the ABiS programme in an informal and unstructured way, which involved consistently providing ideas and feedback whilst involved in ABiS projects. The narrative of a delivery partner revealed this:

*Obviously, I used to do a group plan for each week, and I used to say what would you like to do and if they wanted to do trips out and stuff like that, we’d do that... Even when I were doing online, I would say to them ‘what would you like on this online session?’ Obviously you’re enjoying the exercise’ ‘oh we’d like to do pilates’ so I got them some pilates, so that type of coproduction in terms of group planning did take place (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

In another example, ABiS participants informed many aspects of their project ranging from the dates and times for meetings to when they wanted to take breaks to accommodate other important events in their lives. The delivery partner relayed:

*from the very obvious elements of co-production of how often do they want to meet, how long will be the session, what topics they will be covering, even to things like including breaks for any of the religious celebrations, Ramadan, having those breaks, sharing their food within their culture and community (delivery partner 4 of BAME background)*

ABiS participants in a different project communicated their needs by making cardboard models of smartphones to illustrate what they wanted to gain from using a real smartphone. The delivery partner recalled that during this exercise, ABiS participants, who had little or no experience of using smartphones clearly articulated their needs through pictorial means and using post-it notes:

*Now I'm thinking about it the smart phone one was actually influenced by the participants but because we had, I think it was a three month trial of doing the project and one of the things we had people do was use a cereal box and make their own smart phone and using post-it notes to tell us what would they like to get out from the smart phone which tailored our yearly project which was we'll teach you these cos clearly you want to use these (delivery partner 6 of BAME background).*

# Critical reflections

# 4

## 4.1. Critical reflection 1: Could the ABiS team have done anything differently?

The extensive connections of some organisations, groups, and individuals within them, enabled reach into diverse communities, however, in cases where ABiS delivery partners did not have connections in BAME communities, the need for assistance from South Yorkshire Housing Association's (SYHA) ABiS team was expressed. In one example, a delivery partner considered whether a facilitative role by the ABiS team encouraging "working more between the delivery partners" particularly those with expertise of working with BAME communities might have helped their organisation to access and consult with BAME people to better understand the needs of their own target communities, she commented:

*I think XXXX who works for SOAR, she definitely speaks other languages, so whether there could have been maybe more overlap. but teaming up with another delivery partner and can we talk to your participants and get feedback in terms of what can we do to help the people in Firth Park who we're not getting to (delivery partner 2).*

This view was echoed in the account of another organisation that had struggled to engage with members of BAME communities. She felt that the connections of the ABiS team might have facilitated better partnership work from the outset of delivery of ABiS projects with all networking organised by the team to happen around the same time:

*I think sometimes that might have been more useful to spread around a little bit more the connections that Age Better might have had in terms of the community because often we were trying to start from scratch, but everyone was...everybody's talking to the same people...I think sometimes we were all spending time trying to forge the same connections when if we'd had more involvement of okay you want to involve this church or this mosque or whatever, you all want to do that so let's all go together and interlink with each other a bit better (delivery partner 5).*

She went on to convey that the ABiS team might have saved them time and effort by being instrumental in sharing and facilitating connections to community gatekeepers, she commented, "rather than us trying to build that relationship from scratch we probably could have been introduced much earlier to the right people, to those gatekeepers". Perhaps SYHA's involvement/influence might have secured the cooperation of gatekeepers based on their existing relationship.

Indeed, the importance of building relationships with BAME community gatekeepers was a notable theme in the interviews. A delivery partner emphasised that, in her view, such relationship building was necessary at the outset or ideally before the project delivery commenced. She remarked, “*if I would have a chance to do it all over again, I would certainly try to build those relationships with BME communities, with the gatekeepers to those communities, much earlier, wherever possible prior to starting the project*” (delivery partner 4 of BAME background).

## 4.2. Critical reflection 2: The impact of the pandemic

The unprecedented worldwide pandemic undoubtedly impacted on everyday life, creating sea change to how people conduct(ed) and experience(d) work amongst a whole raft of other changes. Inevitably, the impact of the restrictions impacted on how the projects engaged with BAME communities and on how they were run, if of course, they were able to continue operating. Of the few examples emerging from the interview data, those with established connections with BAME communities and track records of working with them, were able to sustain project delivery, albeit on a basic level. The example of an organisation that was dependent on accessing ABiS participants through BAME community groups, GP surgeries etc rather than its own contacts with participants highlighted that the pandemic impaired their progress significantly.

When asked what affected their work with the BAME community during the pandemic, the delivery partner shared:

*what I mentioned before in terms of what I imagined in terms of being able to access community groups that were more likely to include BAME people. Even GP surgeries because the BAME population in those communities is so high that means they'll also be going to GP surgeries, but Covid has prevented all that sort of thing (delivery partner 2).*

This delivery partner’s model for engaging BAME people rested on working more with other delivery partners, particularly those with expertise in working with BAME people. She had anticipated consulting with their BAME project participants, in community languages, using delivery partners of BAME backgrounds as interpreters, to gain a better understanding of what was required to engage BAME participants for her own ABiS project which was targeting an area with substantial BAME communities. The pandemic prevented this partnership work from occurring and consequently the project was unable to fulfil its ambition of reaching the diverse communities.

Less face-to-face contact and more virtual contact during the pandemic was also conveyed as preventing meaningful partnership working, sharing good practice and so on. This was expressed in the following narrative:

*instead of the delivery partner meetings being over Zoom, if they'd been face to face would that have facilitated more partnership working? I feel like working from home meant that the partnership working opportunities were really, really limited cos there wasn't the opportunity for you to access a working group all at one time cos they're not holding working group meetings...I think you work differently when everyone's working from home in terms of sharing best practice and tips and stuff like that, I think it makes it much more difficult (delivery partner 2).*

A delivery partner who was working closely with women from BAME communities reported having to change the way they worked because of the pandemic and restrictions, which confined the women to the home. This was described as impacting on their health and wellbeing:

*we started to do more phone calls, more home visits, like I said I'd go outside and meet them outside their homes or go in and then there was the groups that we were doing, we had to look at different ways because they were getting bored and depressed at home (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

With some funding for the tablet computers from the ABiS programme, the delivery partner began the challenging work of showing BAME women who had little, if any, prior experience of setting up and using technology to get online. Once online, the women accessed a virtual group for their financial, health and wellbeing needs:

*I set up a virtual one, did this group for people to get together and discuss Covid, discuss any well-being things, any financial things and then we did some exercises and stuff.*

A group, usually perceived as hard-to-reach, was enabled to access a gateway to online interaction, largely through their own perseverance, which calls into question the often-used term hard-to-reach when explaining endeavours to engage BAME people. Evidently, by investing time and effort the delivery partner established meaningful engagement with community members that did not speak or understand English and were not IT literate. She was able to provide support and guidance to engage the women in an entirely new experience that had implications for their ability to maintain contact after the life of the ABiS project. She recalled:

*I think the perception is they're hard to reach but the enthusiasm and the passion they have, the groups that I worked with, was amazing. If they didn't get online one week they wouldn't give up, they were like 'we'll try it again next week' (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

The impact of being able to access the virtual groups was discussed by the women, without which, the depression, loneliness, and social isolation would have recurred. This was conveyed in an example provided by the delivery partner:

*There was one lady, even in Covid when I did the digital class, one lady said 'I'm so glad I've come online, I've been missing everybody and my depression that I had before was going to come back'.*

Fortunately, a different BAME organisation (mentioned earlier) had already worked (as part of an ABiS project) with its group to assist them to become capable and confident in using smartphones to connect with others. With this project occurring prior to the national lockdown members of the group were well prepared in using the phone technology and connecting with people, which went a long way towards relieving their loneliness and isolation. As was recounted:

*With the smart phone...I think it really benefited the members especially because that was done before lockdown and with the pandemic and isolation it meant that it enabled people in the Lai Yin Association to keep contact with friends and family. I think without that they would have been in real difficulties, so it just came at the right time (delivery partner 7 of BAME background).*

Whilst the pandemic affected experiences of the ABiS activities, by restricting them to virtual platforms like Zoom, this deep dive discovered two strong examples of how working differently with BAME populations, building basic skills and understanding patiently, allowed continuity in project activities and services. Virtually connecting for coffee mornings, dance and or exercise sessions, welfare advice and so on, all played a significant part in alleviating loneliness and isolation.

### 4.3. Critical reflection 3: The Legacy of Age Better

Evidence from the interviews revealed that the learning gained through the ABiS programme in relation to engaging and working with BAME communities was a catalyst for change. Whilst the uptake of specific ABiS funded activity might have been low, in some cases, providers had started to think about the causes of this and how they might work better with BAME communities. The Deep Dive captured evidence of considerable learning resulting from the lack of involvement or uptake of BAME communities. ABiS funded projects started to think more about tailoring current and future provision to better meet the needs of diverse communities. Reflection triggered an eagerness to make changes. Perhaps one of the legacies of the ABiS programme was setting thoughts in motion for creating change. This was reinforced in the account of a delivery partner who stated:

*maybe the seed was planted but it's taken other thing[s] to align in relation to that...not just in terms of XXXX [name of project] but also in terms of funders, commissioners, people wanting to do better, people wanting to do more and looking to engage different communities and that not being seen as that's that community's problem...I think there's so far to go in terms of lots of different elements but things always plant a seed and make you think about things, not maybe at the time but make you think as you go along and have that experience and that makes you think about something in a different way (delivery partner 5).*

In this account, the delivery partner reported that before involvement in the ABiS programme they weren't doing as much targeted work with BAME communities, although their services were generic and did not exclude BAME communities. However, reflection on, and learning from, the programme led to concerted efforts to better meet the needs of BAME communities through more targeted work – “we weren't targeting in the same way that we are doing now, we're trying to learn a bit more and be a bit more open”.

The networks established during the programme and collaborative work led to mutual benefit for some ABiS projects beyond the lifetime of the programme and facilitated learning that enhanced understanding of BAME communities. In one example, the ABiS delivery partner outlined how the collaboration had aided knowledge exchange and opened opportunities for the BAME charity they worked with:

*I introduced her [the lady from the charity] to some of my contacts, I know now they're doing really well, we're still in contact. We're still sharing learning, but it was the first proper contact that I had during my time at XXXX [name of organisation] with someone from a different community where we sat in a very open and honest way, started talking about what mental health means to me and what does it mean to them, how they see it, how we see it (delivery partner 4 of BAME background).*

Perhaps a legacy of the ABiS programme is that it has put other projects that specifically cater for BAME communities on the map by raising their profile through joint work.

The 'test and learn' principles underpinning the programme certainly provided ABiS delivery partners the scope to think carefully about what worked, what didn't and what might have been done differently. This, coupled with the co-production philosophy of the programme allowed thorough consultation with ABiS participants in encouraging them to shape provision to reflect their needs. As was emphasised, “trust your people to tell you what they want and I think the benefit with ABIS, it was flexible around that, it was a test and learn” (delivery partner 1 of BAME background). Both 'test and learn' and 'co-production' approaches to the ABiS projects fostered a culture of reflection

and adjustment, which generated benefits for BAME participants, in some cases, and where delivery partners learnt lessons towards the end of ABiS project delivery, they demonstrated a strong commitment to improving future provision for BAME communities.

# Impact

# 5

The accounts revealed that the impact of the ABiS programme on BAME people occurred on an individual level and community level. On an individual level, ABiS project participants reported the benefits of getting out of the home, getting to know people, participating in activities and learning new things, which all contributed to reducing loneliness and social isolation.

In one case, Shahida, who had recently been widowed, and had no contact with family, shared how prior to participating in the ABiS activity she had lacked the confidence to get to know people and express herself. These were local people that she often saw in public places but did not have the confidence to speak to. She commented:

*I: So do you feel getting involved in that project [ABiS] has helped you be more in touch with people?*

*P: Yeah cos I feel more confident, and I say what I have to say.*

*I: Have you got to know new people?*

*P: Yeah, I knew them before but didn't speak to them, XXXX said do you know this aunty, do you know that aunty and did you know this person and I said not by name, I just see that person in the Firth Park shops and things like that.*

The ABiS project provided the opportunity for group visits to cities outside of Sheffield for shopping, food, and conversation. The range of activities were especially appreciated: getting to meet new people, singing, talking, and experiencing different places to eat. Prior to her involvement in the project, the participant went out less often, usually on her own. She reported:

*I: Do you feel that helped you to overcome your isolation or feelings of loneliness?*

*P: Yeah it did a lot, I used to go out but not too much, just go out to town and come back and look round (Shahida, ABiS participant)*

When asked if she had learnt anything new through the ABiS project, Shahida recalled that she had found out about different places, some she had been to, and others she hadn't visited before. The delivery partner for this project emphasised that the activities were influenced by the participants; they decided where to go and what to do. In light of some of the restrictions at home experienced by the women, alluded to in the interview, the project was liberating. Women in their 80s and 90s were getting out of the home and meeting up with each other on their own terms:

*I think it empowered them in some ways getting out together because these were a lot of older ladies in their 80s and 90s so they were quite, not getting out and about so it was good to just totter down locally and get together and I felt they*

*enjoyed the social environment because not everyone's experiences at home were great, without going into detail, but it just felt they could be their own person was some of the feedback I got and they could talk about issues that they can't to their family and things together. I think they decided what they wanted to do on the activities, it was down to them. We planned a trip to Bradford because I think that was a key area with the markets and things that they wanted to go. But most of the time it was more about just socialising and having a few hours together and doing a bit of craft type work as well (delivery partner 1 of BAME background).*

In another example, Ju, an ABiS project participant, aged 65, living with her husband, rarely went out due to a knee problem. She described feeling lonely and at times depressed prior to taking part in the Age - friendly Group:

*I: Can I ask do you see your friends often or rarely? Do you have any friends and how often do you see them?*

*P: For me before when I take [part in] Age - friendly Group [ABiS], before I stay at home more and just do my housework, things like that, not go out much because I have a knee problem.*

*I: So XXXX [name of participant] when you say you didn't go out much, how did you feel when you were at home all that time?*

*P: Feel a bit lonely, you're just on yourself, you can use that word isolation because you only see your husband so sometimes you feel depression I would say (Ju, ABiS project participant).*

A different member of the Age - friendly Group, Fen, aged 64, explained that although she didn't feel particularly unhappy before getting involved in the ABiS project, it was only through the project that the relationships between her and the other participants and volunteers improved by spending more time together and communicating more. Her experience through the project enabled her to help others, making her happier and feel a sense of personal fulfilment. The interpreter relayed, *"even though at work she's very talkative it's not the same, it's like this project's helped her be more confident and just happier that she's been able to help at least one person"*.

Fen first accessed the ABiS programme through the 'Smart Phone' project, where she learnt how to use YouTube, Google and WhatsApp, and teach others how to use it as well. Sometimes, when meeting up with others for a walk or lunch, the participant reporting using WhatsApp to arrange the meeting and then Google maps to find the place and the bus times.

Learning how to use WhatsApp was pinpointed as being particularly useful for connecting and communicating more with friends and family abroad. The Interpreter relayed:

*She says it's definitely helped her to connect a lot more, it's not just saying hello, goodbye or how's your day, it's having a lot more conversations and because her brother is in Hong Kong and before WhatsApp they might have a phone call on the landline and that's very inconvenient so to use WhatsApp, and she had to teach her brother how to use WhatsApp and now they're using it to talk a lot more and share stuff between them.*

Ju reported that involvement in the Age - friendly group influenced her to think in depth about ageing, and what she had in her life. Rather than focusing on what she hadn't got, her focus shifted to the positives in her life. Since involvement in the group, she was able to stop negative thoughts building up by adopting a more positive mind-set:

*that [the Age - friendly - Group] make me think about why do I think negative more, why I not thinking what I've got or what I have, life has a lot of nice things, so it made me completely different thinking. I would say it changed the way I think ageing [about], so I go out more, I meet people more and do something I like, we go swimming three times in a week now... have a dance class even though I can't dance much but I sit down and move my hand, move my leg and meet people, it's a much different feeling, I feel happier, you feel you've got people to talk to and you enjoy what you're doing and to talk to people, to share things to people...I think when I've gone through that Age - friendly Sheffield my life has changed and the main important thing is my mind and my thinking (Ju, ABiS project participant)*

By going out more – talking and sharing her experiences, keeping active by swimming more often than she had done previously and trying something new like dancing, Ju was able to turn her life around and feel greater happiness. Her narrative revealed that her attitude towards ageing facilitated the practical changes to her way of life which in turn improved her physical wellbeing, in addition to her mental wellbeing:

*I think I go swimming more because it helped my knee more flexible, more smooth when I'm walking. I enjoy doing it as well because when you feel good, when you're not in pain that much you feel more happier.*

Both participants reported additional benefits emanating from their involvement in the Age - Friendly Group. For example, they independently arranged lunch with other groups outside of the ABiS funded activities and connected with walking groups to discover new places. Fen commented:

*If I've got free time I will text a message to my friend, if we can meet together, have a coffee, have a chat. It changed me, [I] go out more.*

Older people from BAME backgrounds benefited from an ABiS project (targeted at people from all ethnic backgrounds) which focused on the relationship between visitors to care homes, exploring why some people visit and other people don't, and how to better connect the person living in the care home with the wider community as well as family and friends. The delivery partner recounted the following example as a positive outcome for the husband of a lady in care:

*So we had a gentleman whose wife was Hungarian and it would take him two buses to get there, to then get there and she might not be in the best mood or she might not particularly want to have a conversation with him. So it was things like looking at ways in which he might want to engage in the care home in a bigger way, so doing things like there was a little garden so we got him gardening equipment and he set up some tomatoes and strawberries and it's engaging him in terms of I can come and feed the tomatoes while I'm there and do something and feel like I'm actually part of something rather than just coming to see my wife and maybe not getting much interaction from that in some way (delivery partner 5).*

In this case, the ABiS participant was better engaged with his wife's care home and perhaps given a sense of purpose and reward in a situation where he might have felt powerless in relation to contributing to improving his wife's circumstances. His gardening efforts might also have benefited the wider care home community of staff and residents.

In another example from the same project, the delivery partner recounted that residents, their families, friends, and staff interacted and engaged in the different cultural experiences promoted in the care home, which possibly increased their knowledge and understanding and /or added to a sense of feeling valued amongst the

BAME residents. Importantly, efforts were made to ensure that the 'moments of joy' (pamper sessions, art, music etc) created by the project were inclusive and reflected the experiences of the BAME residents. The delivery partner reported:

*I think the connection was huge really in terms of interaction with others, interaction with different cultural experiences as well both ways...there were a few people from a Caribbean background and so that was quite interesting in terms of looking at that role and their relationships with their family, but also looking at some of the moments of joy that we created were linked into some of their experiences and I think that was really important from a care home point of view (delivery partner 5)*

A different delivery partner specifically recalled the involvement of a woman from a BAME background. She recounted her journey from initial involvement with the ABiS funded service, and her progression into other provision and then becoming a volunteer for the project. This account revealed how a service user was supported and empowered to support others:

*I remember specifically one lady from the Asian background who benefited from one-to-one therapy then she went into art therapy in a group setting and then she became our peer mentor and she was very much an Age Better ambassador for the project because she had that journey (delivery partner 4 of BAME background).*

Another example highlighted the experience of Aadav who started his Age Better journey in two roles; as an ABiS Champion and ABiS Mentor, moving onto peer research to contribute to the evaluation of the programme, and, lastly, sitting on the Core Partnership to influence at a strategic level. He received training for the different roles through the ABiS programme. Aadav explained that his motivation for involvement in ABiS was to help others, which he did directly or indirectly in his various roles, and this gave him satisfaction as well as keeping him busy. When reflecting, he realised that he didn't feel lonely because of his heavy involvement in voluntary work. He commented, "*the other thing is I don't have loneliness and social isolation because I am busy all the time... that's one way of becoming not lonely*".

Evidently, members of BAME communities benefited from their involvement in the ABiS projects, particularly those provided by delivery partners of the same, or similar BAME backgrounds. Notably, where non-BAME specific projects provided examples of BAME peoples involvement these were limited to narratives of one or two individuals' trajectories through the programme who inevitably stood out due to their minority position. As one delivery partner commented, "*I wish we would have many more of those stories within the BME communities*". Whilst the stories of BAME people should be told, the amplification and repetition of these stories should act as a reminder that the challenges and solutions to BAME underrepresentation in generic services and activities require investigation proactively.

The accounts evidence that benefits of the ABiS programme were derived on a community level. A case in point is a project which engaged people across different generations and connected families, friends, and the wider community with people in care homes. Through her own reflexive practice the delivery partner demonstrated an awareness of, and commitment to, valuing diversity and better meeting the needs of BAME residents of care homes. She stressed that the needs of White British people were met in such settings, in terms of food, activities, entertainment and so on, but little thought was put into how someone from a different community might be best supported. Instead, a 'one size fits all' approach was taken. The learning from the ABiS project led to a commitment to provide for those from BAME communities in ways that best reflect their identities and help preserve their identities:

*supporting somebody from a different community means we need to think again about some of the stuff that we might be putting on, what moments of joy are we creating that are maybe very white British specific that doesn't tap into a person's experience or knowledge, and yes that's fine maybe once or twice for that person, actually to be forever denying their identity and their experience is incredibly difficult for that person along with their potential experience of dementia where they're losing quite a sense of identity as well, that can be really tricky for a person and for family in terms of dealing with that double-edged loss of identity (delivery partner 5).*

The connections that were forged when delivering ABiS projects, in some cases, had wider benefits for BAME specific organisations and the BAME communities supported by them. For example, the account of a delivery partner revealed how she had worked closely with a charity supporting the mental health of Sheffield's Black communities. This link led to shared learning on BAME peoples' experiences of mental health and the need for educating BAME communities on mental health. Consequently, a joint conference was held where a huge amount of learning took place:

*That conference brought a lot of people on that day including people from NHS, from different community backgrounds. I'm not saying we're taking credit for it but because we started shouting about it a little bit more they kind of became more visible in Sheffield (delivery partner 4 of BAME background).*

# Conclusion: Key lessons and recommendations

# 6

1. Large-scale programmes, such as the Age Better in Sheffield (ABiS) should move away from collectively categorising diverse communities under the umbrella of 'BAME' to adequately meet the needs of people from diverse communities. Communities that are diverse in terms of culture, customs, language, dialects and so on, are likely to experience different barriers to, and opportunities for, involvement in projects. By maintaining the status quo, resources are spread thin across different communities, usually allowing the larger and more visible communities that are easier to reach, access to greater resource than the smaller newer communities (Chowbey et al, 2008).

A key message from this research conveyed the importance of empowering members of different communities to run groups and activities for themselves, as it is them who have the reach into their communities, the language skills and insider knowledge of how their communities operate and what they need.

2. Low, or no, English language skills presented the greatest barrier to participation of some BAME communities in the ABiS projects, acting as a barrier to communication and understanding, resulting in a reluctance to take up activities. Crucially, language skills were likely to present greater issues for the over 50s in some BAME communities as older generations were less likely to have received a British education and hence lacked English language skills.

Where populations have little grasp of the English language, the following recommendations might go some way towards addressing the issues: firstly, recruiting more people from BAME communities to reflect the diverse populations they serve; drawing on the expertise of BAME organisations and volunteers with track records and or the requisite skills and knowledge to support projects; and using interpreters and translators where appropriate.

The lessons on language have implications for how projects are publicised to involve participants, and are reliant on whether potential participants can read, write, or understand not only English, but also read and write in their first languages. Indeed, in specific BAME communities high rates of illiteracy exist (in their first languages) making translated materials redundant.

3. Outreach work (through word-of-mouth) by people reflecting (e.g. the culture, language) the communities they attempt to engage with has proved effective in publicising projects, and, whilst the use of social media is largely ineffective in engaging older BAME participants, local media, such as community radio conveying information in various languages is potentially useful for reaching isolated people from BAME communities, in their homes.

4. Projects taking their services to established BAME groups and community organisations where there is 'familiarity' and 'trust' has aided uptake. In this research, a preference for group work over one-to-one support and gender-segregated spaces for specific projects were significant findings. However, the recommendation here is to consult with different communities prior to designing and delivering projects to determine their preferences, barriers and so on, as there are likely to be differences in needs between them.
5. The necessity of partnership work was a prominent narrative in this research. Strong partnership work between those organisations serving all populations and BAME specific organisations has the potential to enhance understanding of particular communities whilst sharing mutual learning. Expertise in BAME communities can be drawn on to improve provision that is targeted at the general population, leading to 'inclusivity' and the involvement of diverse communities. Inevitably, the pandemic has impacted on opportunities for partnership working face-to-face, however, partnership work must not stall – the continuity of seminars and workshops through virtual means are strongly advocated.
6. The flexibility of programmes such as ABiS through 'test and learn' approaches to project design and delivery foster a culture of deep reflection and learning, which arguably lead to projects being more responsive to needs, if not during the lifetime of short-term projects, then future projects. Coupled with co-production principles, encouraging target groups to engage with project design and delivery, 'test and learn' principles contribute to better tailored provision for BAME communities. Moving forwards, 'test and learn' principles should be integral to all programmes, allowing projects to adapt with changing circumstances and according to the evolving needs of communities.
7. Finally, the pandemic brought with it restrictions in abundance, but also presented projects with opportunities to do things differently. Some members of BAME communities encountered the internet and online platforms for the first time for virtual activities, information, and advice. Others connected with family, friends and other project participants. During difficult times, the potential of older BAME people to engage with mediums that they had traditionally found 'alien' was released. This carries a vital message to project providers about the assumptions often made about older BAME people, particularly women, and what they can and can't do, and advises caution when subscribing to such notions.

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