

Story: Engaging hard-to-reach groups in Worcestershire

Worcestershire County Council, NHS Arden & Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit, and local health organisations were working with Gypsy, Roma & Traveller (GRT) communities in the area. They wanted to improve health outcomes among these groups.

GRT communities tend to have poorer health and lower life expectancy. They are often indirectly excluded from accessing services. The GRT community is also likely to have poor literacy skills and a lack of trust in agencies, meaning it is a particularly hard-to-reach community.

Along with the other organisations mentioned above, Worcestershire County Council wanted to explore current engagement levels with the area's large GRT population, so as to build links and improve outcomes.

A GRT Health Engagement Forum was established a project bringing representatives from a range of organisations together with members of the GRT community. This built on existing links between council staff from different departments and the GRT community. The overall engagement process built on this, with GRT training offered to staff at agencies across the area.

The aim was to deliver an effective two-way engagement opportunity, allowing members to have a greater say in local health services, and providing decision-makers with a better understanding of the specific needs of the GRT community.

During the time when the project was being delivered, the groups brought significant benefits in terms of addressing health inequalities. They also helped to increase trust between service providers and the GRT community. The forum also highlighted the need to include GRT information in diversity monitoring forms, something that was then picked up at a national level with NHS England.

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