**Case studies – community conversations and public mental health**

**Case study – London-wide community conversations**

Poor mental health is a major challenge facing London, and the prevalence of mental health problems is often much higher in the communities facing the deepest inequalities.

Recognising this, in 2017/18 the Mental Health Foundation and Thrive LDN co-ordinated 17 community conversations across half of the city’s boroughs, involving more than 1000 Londoners, with the aim of finding out how local systems could best implement a public mental health approach.

These conversations went far beyond the consultations that communities had previously seen on mental health services: as well as getting ideas for providing ‘services when and where needed’ they were designed to find ways of improving the determinants of mental health to enable prevention for everyone, early intervention for those at risk, and effective support for those who need it.

Evaluation of these conversations by the Mental Health Foundation found several ways that they tangibly influenced public mental health initiatives in the areas where they were held.

The community conversations led to local plans and strategies being changed, and even brought together public health and planning teams around the design of a new leisure centre in Hackney, to ensure high quality community space.

Also, in Hackney, the workshops led to the development of a series of support information resources for people facing major life changes, such as births and bereavement, which the evidence suggests can make people more vulnerable to mental ill health.

In Enfield, the community conversation influenced the plans for a major regeneration, prompting greater focus on creating ‘mentally healthier’ places with better access to green and community space.

The community conversations also led to the development of a network of mental health champions, and new job roles, including a specialist public mental health position and a voluntary sector liaison post.

In some boroughs, organisers said the community conversation was a revelation in terms of the approach to working with local residents and led to the adoption of more co-production as a means of developing other areas of public health work.

**Case Study – Lambeth**

The Mental Health Foundation and Thrive LDN held several community conversations across London, resulting in local systems implementing new measures to improve public mental health.

Public mental health is the improvement of mental health through preventative work involving communities, organisations and individuals. It therefore requires the involvement of many parts of local systems working together: a role that ICSs are well placed to co-ordinate.

In October 2017, Lambeth Council’s public health team supported a community conversation. The community conversation was held at the Mosaic Clubhouse, a centre which supports people with mental health conditions, including the provision of an evening sanctuary that provides an alternative to clinical crisis services.

Nearly 70 people attended, including service users, carers, councillors, NHS and council staff. They heard from a representative from Black Thrive, which supports liaison between Lambeth’s services and Black communities to improve provision for people diagnosed with mental health problems at disproportionate rates.

The workshop contributed to the development of a new mental health alliance contract between the council, NHS and voluntary sector which pools resources to provide better ‘whole person’ support rather than disjointed services. Launched in July 2018, the Lambeth Living Well Network Alliance aims to improve support in the community and keep people well outside of hospital.

**Case study – Hackney**

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One of these community conversations facilitated by the Mental Health Foundation and Thrive LDN was held in Hackney, where people said that they needed more free, safe, community space where they could meet neighbours and take part in activities. On the strength of this, public health officials were able to work closely with planning officers during the development of plans for a replacement leisure centre. Issues including access to play space and design issues relating to social cohesion were highlighted by the public health function.

The community conversation also led to the development of a series of support information resources for people facing major life changes, such as births and bereavement, which the evidence suggests can make people more vulnerable to mental ill health.

**Case Study – Barking & Dagenham**

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Some boroughs, like Barking and Dagenham, have taken the feedback from their community conversation and used it to design a whole new approach to supporting their communities.

In July 2017, nearly 100 residents, councillors, officers and partner organisations came together for a community conversation in the borough’s civic centre. For some it was their first experience of co-producing solutions and inspired commissioners to do things differently with communities rather than to them.

Working with the Mental Health Foundation and Thrive LDN, Barking and Dagenham Council have commissioned and helped design a mental health improvement programme for one of their large social housing estates, Thamesview.

A project manager, commissioned by the council and employed by the Mental Health Foundation, co-ordinated a range of peer-support programmes with Thamesview residents, aiming to improve people’s skills, confidence and relationships, and build community cohesion. Projects included peer parenting support, school-age mentoring, support to start businesses and a group to combat loneliness and isolation among the elderly.

**Further information:**

Please do link to our [Londoners Said](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/londoners-said) and [Londoners Did](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/londoners-did) reports, which include these case studies as well as further information on the process and its results.