

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER⁺

Supporting people and communities to thrive and flourish

Summary of Transforming Communities Together's Surge Covid-19 work across the Black Country, in partnership with Near Neighbours and funded by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Between the start of February and the end of April 2021, Transforming Communities Together (TCT) expanded our Near Neighbours community cohesion work to support those most at risk from Covid-19.

'Surge funding' was given to TCT by the MHCLG, through our longstanding relationship with our national partner – Near Neighbours.

Black Country Near Neighbours was the first initiative of TCT back in 2014, working across Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Dudley.

Building on our existing local networks in some of the most diverse areas of the West Midlands and the areas of highest inequality, we were able to expand our existing support to include:

- Promoting the latest information about public health, personal safety and the vaccine, through key targeting of different faith and ethnic communities, encompassing different languages and cultural nuances.
- Support local groups to apply for a new small grants programme to support grassroots organisations.
- Facilitate community listening and feedback workshops.
- Recruit participants from across the Black Country to participate in new empowerment programmes to:
 - boost digital inclusion
 - enhance youth and community leadership
 - strengthen financial resilience

A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

TCT supports people and communities to thrive and flourish by taking an asset-based approach to Social and Financial Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing, Community Cohesion and development of new work. We have co-produced a range of responses to community issues including loneliness, isolation, exploitation, inequality and financial exclusion.

Near Neighbours locally and nationally is dedicated to bringing people together, embracing difference, strengthening community spirit and belonging, and increasing collaboration across community organisations, faith groups and businesses to meet local needs effectively. TCT has been delighted to partner with Near Neighbours since 2014, bringing in more than £0.5 million to fund grassroots cohesion projects across Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Here are a few examples of the work:

Case Study 1: Covid Cash Recovery – financial resilience and empowerment training



One of the highlights for our staff member Jon, was working with the Sandwell Yemeni Community Association on the Covid Cash Recovery training, which was adapted with them and delivered in Arabic to their network. Jon says “It was really positive to share the resources, to reflect on how they might be tailored to a group that was predominantly Muslim, and to refine them so they could be delivered with a translator. It was also a good opportunity to promote the work of the Yemeni Community Association, who do some great work in their local community.”



Case Study 2: Covid-19 Vaccine Webinars

Our Black Country Near Neighbours Coordinator, Shaz Akhtar, reflects on a series of webinars co-produced with the NHS and other partners, to reach as wide a variety of communities in the Black Country as possible and to promote COVID-19 vaccine uptake:

“The webinars were a great addition to the surge work. I partnered with Equality & Diversity, Healthier Lifestyles, JAIKARA, And EWA (a Polish organisation). Together we were able to deliver three webinars. The first focused on our Christian, Sikh, Hindu and Islamic communities. We also had expert input from NHS professionals - Dr Masood Ahmed (Chief Medical Officer Birmingham and Black Country CCGs) and Jennifer Nurse (Lead Vaccination Nurse Birmingham). We mobilised a speaker from each of the Christian, Sikh, Islam and Hindu faiths. The event was chaired by Bishop Sarah (Bishop of Shrewsbury and also Chair of TCT). The event had a positive response from all that participated and partner organisations said it was very well organised and they were looking forward to future events.

Our second webinar focused on working with our Black communities. Again, we partnered with the organisations mentioned above and mobilised speakers and guests from a wide range of different faiths and ethnicities. Our speakers were from Christian and Islamic faiths and we had speakers from Somalian and Ghanaian ethnicities. This event was chaired by Councillor Sandra Samuels from City of Wolverhampton Council. It was a fruitful event, with great participation and contributions from our speakers and partner organisations.

The third event was focused on Polish, Roma, Gypsy, Traveller (GRT) and refugee communities. We continued to partner with all the above organisations but also with European Welfare Association, whose work focuses on Polish and Roma communities. We secured speakers from Roma, Polish, Asylum, Refugee and Homeless organisations. It was a great event and it was evident to us all that more work was needed to spread positive vaccine messages within these communities.

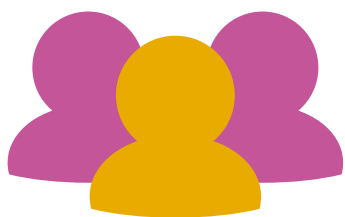
All of our events had BSL interpreters present, to ensure that people from the deaf community were fully included and we made good links with both a deaf teacher and a deaf charity in Wolverhampton, who widely shared both details and recordings of the webinars.”

Case Study 3: Walsall Hindu Forum (A reflection by Shaz Akhtar)

"In the beginning of the surge, I was contacted by a member of the Hindu Forum in Walsall. This was a new organisation to Near Neighbours and TCT and they were interested in exploring funding opportunities for their more elderly residents, who were isolated and experiencing WiFi and digital poverty. I spoke to them about vaccinations and they explained there was some reluctance in their community. The leader of the Forum explained that he would like to work closely with us to deliver messages which would engage this community and hopefully change their perceptions of the vaccine. We encouraged them to make #VaccineVoices videos in their home language (Gujarati) as well as in English.

They were able to mobilise well-known local people and connected us with a local charity - Sewa Kitchen. A lot of the volunteers from Sewa Kitchen had already had their first dose of the vaccine, which was great and their videos were widely shared on social media! Seeing congregational members take up the vaccine encouraged others to ask further questions and make up their minds. It was a great pleasure working with this community and seeing the impact this had made."

Stories from our Vaccine Voices Covid-19 Champions



Jane in West Bromwich

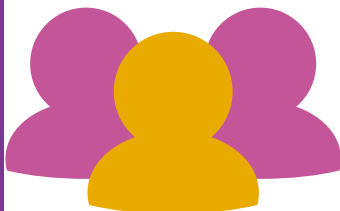
"I have some great stories of people persevering with the vaccine, even though the first dose made them feel a bit ill and a young man celebrating his 18th birthday by getting the vaccine the day after!"

Amanda in Wolverhampton

"My work has been mainly sharing as much information with the people who need it, and also with those who can pass on the information, thus widening the reach! I have shared the positive stories from the vaccine voices videos, and I have also personalised the messages from my context to make it more 'real'."

More stories from our Vaccine Voices Covid-19 Champions

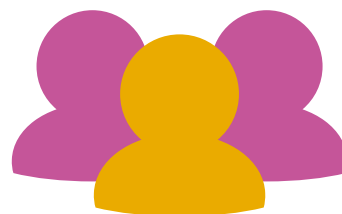
Rupinder
in Wolverhampton



"I approached the local Gudwara congregation to talk to them about the vaccine. There had been a lot of reluctance, but there was a group of people from the congregation that were for the vaccine and I invited them to the webinar to speak to us. When others (at the Gudwara) found out that, they joined the webinar too. This changed their minds and they began to think positively about the vaccination.

Together with Shaz, we also targeted people who were well know in the Black Country, asking them to do short video clips encouraging others to take the vaccine. I believe all this contributed to the rise in vaccine uptake amongst the congregation."

"We have been supporting diverse families to raise awareness of the COVID vaccines in particular the Kashmiri, Bangladeshi, and Polish communities. There was sadly a lot of conspiracy theories that residents where being sent through WhatsApp and other social media platforms."



Shubnum in Sandwell

"We delivered a 10 minute session on a ESOL class online. That put people's mind at rest about taking the vaccine, removing some of the myths and people's concerns.

There had been lots of hearsay about the vaccine being full of bones, animal guts, and other unpleasantries and people saying that the side effects that can kill people, paralyse them or have other effects.

We made it very clear the vaccine was vegetarian, and had very little side affects. An important point to bring home, was that the vaccine not only protected them but also their families, friends and people around them in the community." Sanjay in Walsall

Some comments from our partners:

Mohammed Yasin
Community Development Worker
Equality & Diversity, Inclusion Team


Black Country Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust



"Thanks for all your help with the webinars over the past months, they were certainly beneficial in helping to eliminate some of the myths, false information circulating on social media etc.

Because of how great our partnership worked in bringing communities from all backgrounds together, I am keen to continue to do some work on a local level (Black Country wide)."

Dr Masood Ahmed
Chief Medical Officer
Black Country & West Birmingham CCG



"It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Near Neighbours to spread the word, answer questions and connect with communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Near Neighbours are at the heart of our communities, working together to reach the fantastically diverse people and communities whom we serve. With the support of organisations like Near Neighbours I am confident that we have helped to reduce hesitancy and activate the hope that the COVID-19 vaccinations give our communities so that they can be protected from this deadly virus and continue to thrive."


**Black Country and
West Birmingham**
Clinical Commissioning Group

OUR IMPACT:



A total of 158 people attended a series of three webinars co-produced with Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Black Country and West Birmingham CCGs and NHS Trusts and longstanding TCT partner – Jaikara CIC.



We recruited 20 Covid Champions to work in communities to promote vaccine take up, encouraging them to join their local authority schemes too.

Over the course of this work, we have partnered with 143 faith, community and civic or charitable organisations.



41 people recorded their #VaccineVoices stories to encourage others to take up the Covid vaccine. These included a range of community languages including videos in Gujarati, Somali, Punjabi, Hausa, Urdu and Pashto.

www.tctogether.org.uk/initiatives/vaccinevoices

Analysis of the sharing of these videos on social media helped to demonstrate their impact (stats as of end of April 2021)

* Total Facebook reach = 9,336
* Total Facebook engagement = 1,052
* Total YouTube views = 414

* Total Twitter impressions = 49,830
* Total Twitter media views = 5,827
* Total Twitter engagement = 1,040

- Diverting 2 Digital (upskilling with digital skills): 18 people from 18 different organisations
- Ripple Effect (young people's empowerment): 14 young people from 3 organisations
- Community Listening (experiences of community leaders during lockdown): 22 people from 20 organisations