

Touchstone - Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service Outreach to Underrepresented Population Groups



What is it?

Touchstone is a third-sector organization that has specialised in direct therapeutic work with people from Black and ethnically diverse communities. They had a direct referral route for this community, provided clinics in community venues, delivered adapted interventions for clients of the Islamic faith and piloted a new stabilisation model for people seeking asylum and refugees.

When Touchstone joined the Leeds IAPT consortium 10 years ago, only a small percentage of referrals were from Black and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Within one year of involvement, this percentage rose to 15%. They were successful in recruiting a diverse team of clinicians over the past 10 years and reached points where their team that had 50% staff from Black and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

How does it work?

The wider Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service has been re-contracted since November 2019 to have an additional focus on improving access for communities who suffer health inequalities in the city. The focus of this work is to improve outreach out to communities with low referral and retention rates who face additional barriers in accessing the service, this includes Black and ethnically diverse communities, those who are seeking asylum or have refugee status, those in the sex working industry, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, LGBTQ+ communities, carers, older people, younger people.

In order to meaningfully carry this work out Touchstone have been involved in leading on 3 new parts of the service alongside our partners and contract lead Leeds Community Healthcare. One of these is a co-production team to bring a range of staff, stakeholders, clients, ex-clients and those living in local communities together to work on projects to influence key decisions. The second is a made up of both staff and volunteers who use their lived experience of mental health difficulties to support clients entering the service, in order to improve access, retention and recovery.

The third is a new role of mental health support workers who provide brief interventions and helpful conversations to help people enter the service more successfully. One specific intervention the mental health support workers and peer supporters will carry out post lockdown will be co-located drop in's in the community to help engage people with informal conversation and improve access into the service.

Any challenges?

Covid has proved to be a challenge in managing face to face capacity for staff, with a focus to more digital delivery but managing clients who have limited access to digital assets. The new Peer Support team within the service have been carrying out digital inclusion support as

digital champions to improve client's digital literacy and confidence in using digital forms of therapy.

What's been the impact?

The team aim to meet the needs of the communities who face health inequalities in Leeds. A key driver for this has been a diversity inclusion working group which was set up to agree a strategy and approach. They have delivered training to staff for unconscious bias in recruitment, ensure interview panels have representation from service users and panel members who are from Black and ethnically diverse backgrounds. They have also made additional adjustments to the recruitment and interview processes to ensure equity for applicants from these communities. They also started a mentoring programme offering information sessions particularly for those from Black and ethnically diverse backgrounds for trainee PWP and CBT posts.