

“Caring for Carers”; a training course for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Carers and Organisations

“Caring for Carers” is a training programme for carers of people experiencing mental health difficulties, with a specific emphasis on the needs of Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) carers. The programme has been developed by the Meriden Family Work Programme (www.meridenfamilyprogramme.com) as a direct result of work undertaken by the BME Sub Group of Carers in Partnership. Its initial pilot project was delivered through the support of the West Midlands Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP), which provided funding for both the course delivery and venue.

The “Caring for Carers” programme is designed to bring together small teams of carer workers/carers to participate in an initial 3-day training event. During these 3 days, the teams are trained in the practical skills necessary to deliver a rolled-out 11-week carer education package with specific reference to the experience of black mental health service users, their families and communities. Learning objectives for the 3 days are for participants to:

- Develop a knowledge base for sharing information with carers, and for helping them to develop a range of coping strategies.
- Demonstrate presentation skills required to share information with carers
- Demonstrate ability in planning, organising and delivery of courses, delivery of presentations and facilitation of group learning
- Have an understanding of the resources available to support the planning and delivery of courses
- Develop an overview of the programme to be delivered to carers

In using this cascade training method, the intention is that participants will go on to deliver locally tailored carer support and education packages that specifically meet the needs of their local communities. Delegates signed up to the training on the understanding that they would “roll out” a programme of carer education and support on completion of the initial 3-days training. As such we expect that, as a result of this pilot, several “Caring for Carers” programmes will be running for BME carers across the West Midlands. Following the 3-day training, contact with the cohort will be maintained via a number of existing networks/groups, and a series of follow up events have been scheduled. An evaluation of this initial pilot has also been commissioned through CSIP West Midlands, data from which will allow for any changes/adjustments of the programme and support future roll-outs of the training in both the West Midlands and further a field.

The first pilot of this programme ran in January 2007 at a central Birmingham venue. A total of 17 delegates attended from a number of BME community organisations from across the West Midlands representing Asian, African Caribbean, Chinese and Irish communities. Representation was made by AXIS (Birmingham), ACCI (Wolverhampton), Coventry Mental Health Services, the Heart of Birmingham PCT, the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre and Sandwell Health & Social Care Trust.

Participants consisted of BME carers and professionals from both statutory and non-statutory sectors. The rationale behind this combination stemmed from the programmes previous experience of training carers in isolation, which highlighted a need for support and supervision at a local level. For subsequent “rolled out” carer education and support programmes to be implemented and mainstreamed, a level of collaboration between carers/service providers seemed advantageous.

A comprehensive training manual was designed by the Meriden Programme, which gives clear guidance and session plans for an 11-week “Caring for Carers” package. During the initial 3-day training course, participants were introduced to this manual through a range of exercises, which aimed to develop teaching and communication skills, presentation and facilitation skills.

In terms of BME service user and carer involvement, both have been involved in the planning of this training through the work of the Meriden Transcultural Family Work Forum. The workbook, designed by Meriden, has been

reviewed by BME service users, carers and BME clinicians/health workers who have been able to comment/add to its structure and content. In addition the 3-day training was co-delivered and facilitated by carer Peter Woodhams.

Links with Delivering Race Equality Framework (DOH, 2005)

A BME specific Carer Education programme provides a unique forum to address some of the issues faced by BME Carers and clearly fits with the current Delivering Race Equality framework (DOH, 2005). A comprehensive, community based programme would address some of the issues of access faced by members of BME communities, especially if on-going support programmes were to be delivered within existing community/voluntary organisation venues by trained, confident and appropriately supported carers. Indeed, the DRE refers specifically to services that offer,

“a more balanced range of effective therapies, such as peer support services and psychotherapeutic and counselling treatments...”

(DOH, 2005, p.4)

and also those which facilitate a

“more active role for BME communities and BME service users... in the planning and provision of services”

(DOH, 2005, p.4).

In terms of engagement issues, “Caring for Carers” has made active attempts to both engage communities and develop partnerships. It also has direct links with the “more appropriate and responsive services” aspect of the DRE framework in terms of workforce development issues and in improving clinical services. We feel it is a unique and innovative approach to meeting the needs of BME carers, which clearly responds to the call for more information and support by BME carers, while demonstrating a new way of partnership working which ensures that local programmes are appropriate, accessible and meet local need.

Comments received by the “Caring for Carers” participants

“Excellent course and a great confidence booster”

“The information provided was top class and the information inside very relevant”

“I thought the presentations were excellent and covered the topics that I was interested in”

“Very, very useful indeed”

“Loved the course. I really feel very confident in using these skills I have learned - not only in the 11-week roll out, but in my home life”

“A personal thanks for putting together one of the first carers training courses specifically aimed at BME carers!”

For further information about the BME Caring for Carers programme, please contact Paula Conneely on paula.conneely@bsmht.nhs.uk or telephone the Meriden Programme on (0121) 678 2896.