

## **Inner City Health Improvement Team** **Community Health Champions:**

### **Background:**

The inner city health improvement team has been for the past eight years working very closely with voluntary and community sector such as schools, places of faith and work, groups of special interests and equality groups (wellbeing hubs) to address health inequalities in the neighbourhood. The community organizations and leaders have been providing points of access, information and intelligence to our local Public Health team, and support us to effectively run health interventions. The network is an excellent tool to engage local communities around topics such as mental health stigma, obesity, low level of physical activities and healthy eating matters. We have developed training package to train some of the community leaders to support the work of our local team, for example 100 people were trained as mental health first aiders to address the high risk factors of mental health in the area through running mental and emotional awareness sessions. We have also trained local volunteer walk leaders and also trained special health advocates to champion the campaign to combat the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The team and in response to the eagerness and excellent community engagement in health has decided to develop the partnership further by introducing the Health Champions Initiative. Community health champions are individuals who are engaged, trained and supported to volunteer and use their life experience, understanding and position of influence to help their friends, families, neighbours, communities and work colleagues in leading healthier lives. They are able to inspire and support others to make positive lifestyle changes and they work very closely with local health improvement team in addressing health inequalities and to improve the quality of local health and social care services by contributing local intelligence, experience and knowledge of community skills and resources.

The initiative is also supported by the Department of Health and the Marmot report as one of the excellent tools to promote community engagement address health inequalities. The Department of Health's Strategic Vision for volunteering talks of the necessity to celebrate and strengthen the contribution of volunteers, stating that: "There is untapped potential in our communities that we cannot afford to ignore". It sets out a vision "to create a society where social action and reciprocity are the norm and where volunteering is encouraged, promoted and supported". Currently we have around 62 local health champions who being trained as diabetes advisors, cycling instructors, Health Check champions, Dementia awareness advisors and stop smoking advisors.

### **The project:**

The inner city health improvement team has so far trained around 80 health champions and aim at training 100 local health champions over the next two years to support the delivery of public health work in the area. The health champions are not to replace the public service staff but to complement the work delivered by the public health team and they are local community resources whom experience is vital in delivering effective health improvement interventions.

The health champions are also vital in addressing the health inequalities within local communities and within groups of special high risk health factors. For example a health check champion is devoted to encourage BME men to undertake our national health check through peer advice and support and act as a key player in reducing health inequalities within such group that is hard to engage otherwise. The project provides access to training and work experience in health improvement and may lead to paid opportunities.

The main expected outcomes of the project are:

To support public health team in the area to address health inequalities in the area for example:

- 1- High mental and wellbeing risk factors mitigation through peer awareness raising and signposting people to appropriate services.
- 2- Teenage pregnancy awareness and peer support.
- 3- Health check update by raising awareness and support local health trainers to encourage eligible people to go their GPs or to support the community outreach clinics.
- 4- To support the inner city health improvement team in organizing outreach health awareness workshops for healthy eating and weight management referrals.
- 5- Support the diabetes awareness raising events for groups at higher risk of diabetes in the area.
- 6- Champion physical activities project such as health champion to encourage cycling or trained as cycling instructor to run cycling training for local residents.
- 7- Deliver stop smoking interventions.
- 8- Develop good working relationships with various community organisations
- 9- Refer and signpost clients to Health Trainers

The public health inner city health improvement team in partnership with local community organizations, groups of special interest and interested local individuals is to identify suitable persons and to commission and contribute to the delivery of the following training:

### **1-RSPH Level 2 Award in Understanding Health Improvement**

This award provides an introduction into the fundamentals of health and well being, of barriers to making a change of lifestyle and of how to help people to make changes to improve their health.

**3- Topic based training:** depending on the personal development plan and interest for example: Diabetes awareness training, walk leaders training, older people gentle exercise training, health check awareness training and cycling instructor training.