



# Women's Network Group

Strategy Report 2022

THE PEEL PROJECT  
JULY 2022

# The Peel Project Women's Network Group Strategy Report 2022

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## OVERVIEW



The Peel Project was set up in 2021 to provide support services to the local Hull community with an emphasis on Black, Asian & Minority Ethnicities (BAME) communities including asylum seekers and refugee families.

An increased interest in our services by minority ethnic women, particularly Muslim women has shown us that there is a strong need to maintain a safe space that is easily accessible, and community led **by the community, for the community.**

The Peel Project Women's Network Group works to empower the disadvantaged population within BAME communities, particularly refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants from the newly emerging communities in Hull. Our initiatives and projects work to promote social integration, equality, diversity, and human rights of BAME families, with an emphasis on the mental health and wellbeing of women and children that have been victims of social exclusion and disadvantage.

This report aims to provide a detailed overview of The Peel Project's support services, activities and events that have focused on creating a more inclusive, empowering, and safe environment for BAME women.



## DIRECTORS COMMENTS

It has been 10 months since The Peel Project commenced a weekly women's befriending sessions with a view to improve the lives of families who are from one of the most socio-economically deprived and ethnically diverse communities in the Humber region,

The decision to initiate this came from our experiences in the summer holiday of 2021 and our shared lived experiences of growing up minority ethnic heritage individuals in Hull.

During the summer holidays, we provided a 5 week programme of activities as part of the DfE's Holidays Activities and Food Programme. 258 children had attended our sessions and 53% of them were in receipt of free school meals.

The Peel Project had aimed to make a positive difference to the lives of young people by providing physical activities and engagement with youth workers, Over the course of the summer, it transpired that these children came from households which were in hardship exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. We realised that our support was not fully addressing the fundamental problems which hindered these young people from living fulfilled lives and benefit from the opportunities available to those not from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It was for this reason that we commenced a weekly befriending session with the view of expanding to address a whole host of needs. We have taken a two-pronged approach; one being support services to our service users and the second engaging with a whole host of agencies to come and engage with people using our services.

The second strategic decision was to enable our service users to gain exposure to agencies which they were not familiar with or that they were not typically engaging with. These included NHS researchers, Cancer Awareness Champions, Hull Food Partnership and Yorkshire Ambulance Service.

In a short space of time, we managed to support our local agencies to train 47 women around cancer. We also supported Hull Food Partnership to obtain surveys and focus groups on food poverty.

We are pleased to have started this movement whereby The Peel Project, through limited means and via a lot of goodwill and volunteer support, have created a safe place for women to come together. Women have been able to access a whole host of

support, are partaking in weekly fitness activities, receiving lifesaving awareness and education and are partaking in research that will enable local service providers to better understand the needs and views of BAME women and ensure their voices is included in future strategies.

Progress has been made, but there is much more work that needs to be done.

The Women and Equalities Committee report says that 'Muslim women are the most economically disadvantaged group in British Society.'

Figures suggest they are three times more likely to be unemployed job seekers than women generally, and twice as likely to be economically inactive.

In terms of health, it is South Asian people are at a higher risk of diabetes, at an increased risk of cardiovascular problems and more likely to report the presence of a long-standing illness which limits their daily lives.

Mental illness is common, with 1 in 4 people being affected by it at some point in their lives. Asian women are particularly vulnerable due to the high level of responsibilities and expectations of them such as preserving honour of the family, maintaining tradition and culture, sacrificing their happiness for others, suffering in silence, caring for children, in-laws, spouses, homes etc.

In spite of all this it is widely seen that minority ethnic communities are accessing less healthcare, education, etc. Hull as a city has not prepared for the growth of BAME residents. We aim to continue to develop partnerships and provide our local health, education and employment providers access to our service users and the wider Muslim community.

We would like to say a special thank you to our female volunteers. This work has only been possible through the countless hours of a small team of people who have admirably used their lived experiences and understanding of our service users to develop the outreach and engagement in creating opportunities through a safe and trusted environment. Additionally, I would like to thank Spring Bank Community Centre for working closely with us.

Looking ahead to winter and beyond we hope to continue progressing and diversifying our services and become sustainable. We aim to expand our capacity to take on more service users and continue to encourage our service users to engage with local agencies and provide the insights that are needed to make services inclusive; leading to an increased uptake from BAME communities.

## **START-UP STRATEGY RECAP**

As part of our start-up strategy and long-term vision, we devised a two year plan within which we based our programmes around the following four key areas:

- 1. Health and Wellbeing**
- 2. Community Integration**
- 3. Education**
- 4. Employment**

With the help of our small team of female volunteers, we have been able to commence the befriending sessions, whilst also arranging for a women and children's bazaar. Our work included introducing women's only swimming sessions, distributing refurbished laptops, providing meals through community kitchens, boxing sessions, yoga sessions, arranged numerous family-friendly fairs and events locally. We also delivered many more health and wellbeing activities and information sessions for local women.

As a result of this, we have seen an increase in female service users that have come forward with their own personal experiences, insights, and requests regarding existing and future services. Many of them have also come forward to gain confidential support regarding personal issues on topics such as:

- Mental Health
- Loneliness
- Financial Hardship
- Health and wellbeing
- Domestic Abuse
- Lack of cultural activities and events

Since commencing our services in September we have been developing more support, but we have increasingly had to be heavily reliant on the goodwill and donations from partners, volunteers and through our networks and connections. On some occasions we have also signposted and referred women to relevant services such as NHS, Hull City Council, local mosques, and others to gain specialist support for their individual needs.

We aim to improve our services by introducing more BAME champions to provide better informed advice and support to our service users. We believe there is a need for minority ethnics with lived experiences to both deliver and create solutions to support underprivileged women as they have nuanced knowledge of their cultural and spiritual values.

## **BEFRIENDING SESSIONS**

Various consultations with female volunteers and residents, The Peel Project recognised a need for setting up a weekly ladies befriending session. The purpose of these sessions is to provide a safe space for women to come together, meet new friends, have discussions on topics of interest, receive seminars on health and wellbeing. This also creates an opportunity for improving employment skills and accessing support.

The first few befriending sessions were used to discuss what the service users would like to use the sessions for and identify how they can be better facilitated to their needs. It was agreed that mothers cannot leave young children at home.

Consequently, arrangements were made to provide crèche facilities in October 2021 ensuring women can continue attending sessions without having to compromise their parental responsibilities by creating a safe space for toddlers and avoiding school run timings.



### **WhatsApp Chat**

During the befriending sessions we identified most BAME women use the WhatsApp application on their mobile phones. To stay connected with our service users and provide them with updates, we created a women's only group chat; now has over 200 connections. This is regularly monitored by The Peel Project volunteers and has provided female service users with a safe space on which they share tips, advice, and recommendations and stay connected.

### **Digital Exclusion**

Throughout the befriending sessions many women spoke about digital exclusion and not being able to access a pc or laptop. We recognise the world in which we now live is heavily reliant on technology. For instance, initial GP appointments are now virtual, academic research and submissions is done using the internet, and the best way to find a job is by using the internet. Therefore in response we got

17 refurbished laptops that were then distributed amongst our female service users.



## Community Kitchen

In November 2021 to address highlighted problems from our service users, we sought to incorporate a Community Kitchen into the organised sessions. We successfully applied for funding from Hull Food Partnership.

The Community Kitchen was to help ensure everyone can experience the benefits of healthier cooking, eating together, regardless of financial constraints faced by the attendees. Since commencing the programme in January 2022, we have purchased various cooking utensils and an air fryer and introduced the benefits of air frying. In the 6-month period Jan 22 – June 22 we have facilitated 18 Community Kitchen sessions whereby each week our service users have volunteered to cook a meal in the community centre during the befriending session. The Peel Project will in advance purchase the items that was requested by our service user and at the end of the session our service users will join to partake the food together or take the food home to consume.

Typically, there has been 20 to 30 meals cooked at each session and this has been helpful to many women and children from underprivileged homes, and we have noted how some service users have taken hot meals home for their children.

The Community Kitchen has been very popular and the variety of cuisines that have been prepared has meant our service users have been able to try foods that they otherwise would not have been able to. Dishes include Jacket Potatoes, Sweet Potato Wedges, Pakoras, Parathas, Chicken Pasta Bake, Samosas, Vegetable Curry, Onion Bhajis, Potato Patties, Quiche, various salads, and fruit platters.

In June 2022, we have secured continuation funding from Hull Food Partnership. The funding from Hull Food Partnership goes beyond providing us with the weekly ingredients and the various cooking appliances and utensils, it pays for the venue hire for the whole befriending session.





## Accessing Essentials

During the sessions it came to our attention that women and children from underprivileged households, primarily including refugees and asylum seekers were struggling with nursery items, clothing, and sanitary products. In response to this, we approached Hull Help for Refugees and set up a clothing bank and received donations of toys from residents. We also campaigned for sanitary products and received donations of over 2000 packets of sanitary products which are regularly available throughout our befriending sessions.

We also provided free masks and home testing kits during and after the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure our service users are taking safety precautions to protect themselves and others.



## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

As a people focused organisation, we recognise that we have a responsibility to drive positive change to reduce health inequalities within the city. In response to this, we arranged several sports activity sessions accessible to men, women and children that have been incredibly popular amongst the service users. We look forward to continue increasing these activities and working with potential partners to help deliver on the newly updated [Hull Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022](#) and pledge to continue doing our part in creating fairer access to health and wellbeing services for all.

The following timeline provides an insight of the health and wellbeing focused activities The Peel Project has delivered on for BAME women.

### Swimming

In September the service users requested for women's only swimming sessions. With swimming being an essential life skill, we decided to prioritise this activity and arranged a meeting with HCAL to request ladies only swimming sessions at Beverley Road Swimming Baths along with the prospect of also using the gym. Initially these sessions were not as popular however, by October we had several women attending the sessions, with 80% of them from BAME backgrounds and over the age of 30.

### Yoga and Boxing

Besides swimming, many women also addressed their desire to learn boxing and yoga. These free to attend sessions were arranged in November on a weekly basis. However, they turned out not to be so popular amongst the service users. Due to this, we discontinued the sessions unless there is a larger demand in the future.

### NHS Research

In January 2022 we invited researchers from the NHS to attend the ladies befriending session to talk to our service users and about their views on research and complete surveys. The researchers have continued to attend and engage with the service users and have used our service users in focus groups to consult on BAME characters for an NHS cartoon.

## Cancer Research – Signs and Symptoms of Cancer

We recognise that there are barriers to expert guidance on healthcare for BAME women due to several factors such as culture and language. To overcome this barrier, we invited Cancer Champions in January to discuss the signs and symptoms of Cancer in a safer space suited for BAME women. During the sessions they elaborated on the importance of testing and how to get tested as well as which services are available to them. We aim to continue inviting healthcare experts to our sessions to inform BAME women on how to better manage their health.



## Gym

The service users highlighted that they would prefer women's only gym sessions. In response to this, in February 2022 we moved our fitness sessions to a fully equipped gym with an instructor. For many women, it was the first time using a gym. The location we chose to arrange these sessions at is equipped with a children's play area in the form of a sensory room, allowing the ladies to use their time at the gym efficiently without having to compromise their parental responsibilities. Since Jan 2022 to June 2022 we have held 31 fitness sessions and 219 women have partaken in the free fitness activities. The sessions have enabled many young mums with toddlers to attend and be supervised by a trained instructor all whilst their children are supervised by our volunteers.

## Community Gardens

In May 22 we received funding from Active Humber to set up a Community Garden. This funding has been used to transform the gardens surrounding the community centre, each week our service users have been clearing the garden and laying flowers vegetables and fruits. Over 13 different fruits and vegetables have been planted and we have already had our first harvest. The vegetables have been used in our community kitchen or have been taken by our service users to consume at home.



### Knitting

In June 2022 we commenced knitting exercises following requests from our service user of our befriending sessions to encourage engagement and develop new skills. For many this was the first time, for others this has become a permanent hobby.



### Hull Food Partnership

In June 2022 we invited Hull Food partnership to perform surveys around food poverty with our service users, the £100 fee that was paid to Peel Project for facilitating this was distributed to the participants of the survey as many are unemployed, unskilled and in receipt of benefits.

### Yorkshire Ambulance Service – First Aid Training

In August 2022 Yorkshire Ambulance Service will commence 4 sessions of community first aid training as we know that these women have never received first aid training and therefore do not know the symptoms or how to respond to strokes, heart attacks, seizures and so forth.



## EVENTS

We listen and understand to the needs of Muslim women and set up activities and events that are culturally appropriate, fun and therefore create good engagement.

### **Peel Project Women and Children's Bazaar**

In October 2021 we launched a ladies bazaar event, there was a lack of ethnic retail stores but there were many home businesses. By providing a platform for these micro businesses and giving them exposure to more clients we empowered women and gave them a financial boost. Many have gone on to progressing with their small business.

The half yearly event has been well received and we have had 21 stalls selling food, perfume, jewellery, books, ethnic clothing and fashion accessories and there have also been information stalls including the Police and Crime Commissioners Office, Hull Food Partnership, Neighbourhood Network and Humber & North Yorkshire Cancer Alliance. We aim to continue inviting other partners to increase engagement with our service users for future events.

The event in October 2021 was attended by over 400 women and children and the event in March 2022 was attended by over 500 women and children. The events has been well received as it came at a time when many people had not seen each other due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was the first event of its kind in Hull, within which many women and children were able to reconnect with old friends and residents.



## Eid Fair & Eid Prayer

For the first time ever, the city hosted its first outdoor Eid Prayer at Peel Park which had a turnout of over 2400 people. This was a huge step forward in terms of fostering good relations with the Muslim community by the council as it holds great significance in the Islamic faith. We feel fortunate to have partnered up with Islamic Relief and Hull Berkely Mosque to advocate for this on behalf of the Muslim community. Not only did men attend, but also women and children, who would normally miss out on Eid prayer due to limited spacing available at the mosques or other responsibilities.

This was followed by an Eid fair that included fairground rides for children, scrap stalls, sports activities, bouncy castle, and mini food stalls run by local businesses. We believe events like these are making a huge difference in our city as they are an excellent way to break barriers, encourage participation, overcome misconceptions, and increase integration and diversity in Hull.



## NEXT STEPS

The Peel Project has a good engagement and trust of BAME Muslim women, and we believe we can attract more service users, once we address our current limitations and restrictions. The project will get more women partaking in fitness activities and group activities which will help improve their wellbeing and encourage people to live a healthy lifestyle.

We are seeking more agencies to come and talk to our service users around community safety, hate crime, employment, and education and much more.

We are keen to get our service users to partake in research and surveys around food poverty, health, and wellbeing to ensure that local authorities have the views of minority ethnics, and this data is used to shape services that will lead to an increased uptake by BAME communities.

There is a need for more focused work and a strategy with local partners to support these disadvantaged women who are economically inactive and include people who do not speak English as a first language or are in financial hardship and therefore have barriers and restrictions to live a fulfilled life.

In the current cost of living crisis, we know most of our service users will experience further hardship that will affect their mental health and lead them to make tough decisions, and therefore it is important for us to keep our services and engagement with them and for us to develop more services and community champions to provide support and signposting for these marginalised groups.





ACTIVE HUMBER



Recipient of 2022 East Riding of Yorkshire High Sheriff Award



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