

Connect Hackney – recommendations for working with older people from ethnically minoritised communities

Research shows that ethnically minoritised communities are at higher risk of social isolation and loneliness. This is due to many factors including the impact of structural and interpersonal racism and xenophobia. In 2018 Connect Hackney funded five culturally specific projects aimed at Somali, African Francophone, Chinese and Vietnamese, Latin American and Turkish/Cypriot/Kurdish older people. These projects were delivered by organisations embedded in these communities and were evaluated as a group in order to identify successful approaches common to them all.

- 1. Reputation and word of mouth play an important role** - Organisations that are known and trusted by the communities they worked with are able to recruit via word of mouth and can be enormously successful in keeping participants engaged.
- 2. When promoting the project highlight the opportunity to make friends and connect with others** – creating a social network is especially important for people who are facing language barriers and who do not have family nearby. Many participants were explicit about their isolation and feelings of loneliness in later life and actively wanted to develop their own social life.
- 3. Culturally specific arts and leisure activities that include sharing food can strengthen social bonds**– participants enjoyed taking part in culturally specific activities including cooking, singing, music, storytelling and dance. Sharing food is a powerful way to celebrate a shared cultural heritage and bring people together. Participating in these cultural activities helped participants to develop friendships.
- 4. Projects that are tailored to specific national cultures are highly valued** – there is a need for projects that have a nuanced understanding of the differences between cultures. When culturally specific projects are delivered by project staff with a high level of cultural competence they are able to respond to the specific needs of their participants. This understanding is key to keeping participants engaged, creating social connections and reducing their loneliness and isolation.
- 5. Creating a safe and welcoming space for people who have experienced trauma can improve their wellbeing**–people who have experienced trauma (including racism and displacement) benefit from spending time in a safe and inclusive space. Projects can create a feeling of ‘home’ through the use of familiar and comforting elements such as food, smells, sounds, TV news and documentaries.