

Case Study



Project

SEMSA Women's Active Pathways Project (SWAPP)

Organisation

SEMSA (Scottish Ethnic Minority Sports Association)

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About the Organisation

SEMSA (Scottish Ethnic Minority Sports Association) is a voluntary organisation set up some 16 years ago to address a lack of participation in sport and physical activity by black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. Its work to date has involved many partners including Culture and Sport Glasgow, engaging in specific activities and running sports for the BME community, such as, kabaddi, football, badminton and cricket.

Though a great deal of progress has been made over the 16 years, analysis of monitoring data showed that their programmes did not attract young women aged 17-24 years. Subsequently SEMSA was successful in obtaining a BIG Lottery Active Futures grant in 2007 to develop and implement a programme of sport and physical activity for the target group.

This was followed with research that was commissioned to investigate the reasons for the dip in activity in this age group and to identify the barriers to participation. This project is about both addressing some of these issues and putting into place programmes of activity.

Project overview

The project has focused on the following objectives to:

- Acknowledge and build upon the research into barriers to participation for young BME women;
- Appointment of a development worker to focus on the issues and build capacity;
- Develop and commission specific programmes of activity;
- Build ownership for the initiative as a means of contributing to its sustainability through volunteering opportunities and improving employment prospects.

What has it achieved?

The project has experienced a series of delaying factors, as a result of the political climate with local government freezing posts, due to the Pay and Benefits Review. Nonetheless significant progress has been made towards achieving its objectives. As a way of overcoming the delay, The Glasgow Anti-racist Alliance (GARA) hosted the project co-ordinator but has since moved to be based within Culture and Sport Glasgow's Sports Equalities Team.

In terms of the commissioned research, it delivered very much what was expected. Overall participation in physical activity amongst the cohort was low. Not being aware of programmes for women in their area featured highly as a barrier to participation alongside, unsuitable locations/facilities and not enough female coaches to deliver sessions.

The project manager was appointed in July 2007 and as a result, the official launch of the project took place in November 2007. The launch attracted some 150 young women with presentations from local young women and then an opportunity to participate in activities – belly dancing, football, self-defence, yoga and aerobics.

A strong advisory group has been formed consisting of 20 young women who meet every 6-8 weeks to help guide and develop the project. Their local knowledge, expertise and understanding of cultural norms have proved very valuable in selecting and adapting particular programmes.



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What was innovative and what worked well?

Activities have been changed to meet the needs of the women attending the project. A jogging network in an area of Glasgow changed its routes based on the women's feelings about going into particular areas of town, and welcomed women to take part in traditional dress if they felt comfortable doing so. Thus the project has been successful in equipping 15 young women with the confidence to run 3+ miles in a safe and structured environment.

Activity programmes have seen a spin off in volunteering and coaching amongst women in other SEMSA initiatives. For example, SEMSA's Summer Academy provides activities for 5-15 year olds and is primarily staffed by volunteers. This year 15 of the 23 volunteers were women in comparison to 2 or 3 in previous years. Post event evaluations suggest that some of these women are now also considering working in this field.

One of the key barriers identified was parental attitudes. Often young women have familial responsibilities such as childcare or housework as well as their studies. There is no easy answer to this, but the project is finding that parents require reassurance and contact, often on a one to one basis. Where they have had this and where they can put a face to a name, they have been much less reticent towards activities.

This outward facing personal approach is a good example of the whole ethos taken by the project. It combines a sports development approach with youth work. It is much more about developing and building relationships, which led to the programme of activities.

How did the project get people involved?

Marketing was an area, which required attention. Little of what is available resonates with young BME women, and therefore the project gives thought to the images that are being portrayed. It is also an opportunity to engage women and build ownership. For example, young women from the Advisory Group have set up Facebook and Bebo pages and in such a short space of time 60 and more women had joined the network.

The project retains its outward focus and is looking to set up visits for women and parents to other projects in particular so far, Elite Youth in London and London Tigers. This brings in new ideas about what is possible and creates new aspirations as well as valuable links.

The future...

The original work plan, though facing a year of delay still holds good and the project worker has brought in volunteers and sessional staff to deliver a programme of activities. The key aim is to establish the project and then work towards trying to mainstream it.