



COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION

FACTFILE

NAME

WAQAS KHAWAJA HAMEED

ALTOGETHER BETTER PROJECT

SHEFFIELD COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPIONS

ORGANISATION

SHIPSHAPE

WHAT HE DID

Participated in training which allowed him to engage with traditionally hard-to-reach groups in the Muslim community by running smoking cessation sessions at a local mosque.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID HE MAKE?

Broke down barriers to healthy lifestyles in the Muslim community by building up trust. Helped a number of people to stop smoking. Found an identity within his community and has taken his first steps in a career in community work.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Sheffield Community Health Champions supports individuals to use their knowledge and motivation to improve the health and well-being of their own communities. Through a consortium of voluntary and community organisations throughout the city, the project is empowering Community Health Champions to share their skills where they are needed most.

‘I FEEL REWARDED AND PROUD AND DETERMINED TO DO MORE TO HELP THE COMMUNITY. I BELIEVE THAT I CAN DO IT’

A desire to give something back to his community prompted Waqas Khawaja Hameed to join Sheffield Community Health Champions.

After seeing a leaflet asking for people to support and create awareness about smoking cessation at mosques in Sheffield’s Sharrow district, Waqas volunteered for the Sheffield Community Health Champions through one of the project’s partners, ShipShape.

“I was passionate about making a difference in the community, and this project was giving me the opportunity to do that and gain a lot in return,” he said. “I wanted to give the community their voice and a positive identity that will allow them to access services that they didn’t know about.”

Waqas initially signed up to a number of one- and two-day courses, gaining an insight into the principles of smoking cessation, healthy eating, improving mental health and physical activity and how these messages



▶ could be spread within the local community.
 “I tried to help people to think more positively about their health and lifestyle,” he said. “I supported with healthy eating sessions which looked at practical ways of changing the way they cooked and the benefits it brought.

“My main focus was the Asian community. Some of the people that I was supporting did face a lot of barriers, such as language, confidence, lack of education and not knowing about what services were available for them in their area.

“I was able to break these barriers as I was able to speak their language and the training that I had had from ShipShape helped me to pass on what I had learned. I was able to tell them about the services that they could access. I also looked at ways to build individuals’ confidence.”

Waqas’s next success came when he got involved in a Stop-Smoking Ramadan Campaign at the Madina Mosque in Sharrow. The aim of the sessions was to bring health services closer to the local community and break down barriers as well as helping those who wanted to quit smoking.

“I carried out a table-top display about stopping smoking every Friday as people came in to do their Friday prayers,” he said. “I spoke to people to let them know how I could support them and over the sessions I was approached by individuals wanting my support.”

Waqas spent time with people building up their trust in order to persuade them to participate.

“One client wanted to quit but also wanted to know why I was so passionate about helping,” he said. “I had a chat with him and explained that I was a volunteer health champion and I wanted to help and support people to

meet a goal in life. I allowed him space to speak and built a friendly environment. It helped that I was from the same community and spoke his language.

“This individual is a non-smoker now and is a lot more active with his children. He is a totally changed person and feels more energetic and good about himself.”

It has been a big turn-around for Waqas as well. Before he joined the project, he was finding it difficult to find a career path and was struggling with his identity as a Pakistani in Britain. Now he feels he has a place in his community

“Over the six months I have not only made difference within the community but also within myself,” he said. “Being at the mosque dramatically built my confidence. I built an identity within the community and individuals felt comfortable in approaching me.”

The Sheffield Community Health Champions Project, he says, has given him a platform for his skills and has continued to support him since he completed his 100 hours of voluntary work. He has subsequently begun a part-time degree in Working With Communities, has taken a Health Trainer course and is about to begin paid sessional work for NHS Sheffield’s Stop-Smoking Service.

“I feel rewarded and proud and determined to do more to help the community,” he said. “I believe that I can do it!”

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Altogether Better was founded on the firm belief that community health champions have the potential to make a significant impact on health inequalities. In 2008, we were awarded £6.8m from the BIG Lottery Well-being Fund to run our innovative, five-year programme in Yorkshire and the Humber. We have 16 locally-delivered flagship projects across the region, testing out different community health champion approaches in a range of settings.

