**‘Knock Knock brings hope, light and friendship at the end of the tunnel’**

A leading women’s organisation Sangini (a friend in Hindi) is helping women from Black Asian Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) in the Tyne and Wear region hit by COVID-19 and facing isolation, depression which has been psychologically and physically challenging for them.

Knock Knock - a well-being project was established during the lockdown in 2020, after an outcry of BAME local women feeling helpless and struggling with mental health issues. The project was designed to reach out and support BAME women through creativity, with the help of artists to express their emotions. Advisory and meditation sessions are amongst a few that the project offers which is supported by specialists and medical professionals, in a non-judgmental environment.

The six-month project funded by the Coalfield Regeneration Trust, County Durham Community Foundation and Voice4Change was rolled out adhering to the COVID -19 guidelines by virtually knocking on women’s door and instilling a practical and emotional support network. Through Zoom video communications women get together and discuss a broad range of complex issues from health inequalities to employment, finance and housing. Through Calligraphy, felting and creative workshops, delivered by local artists Roohia Syed Ahmed, Parvin Abdur and Lena Archbold the women express their emotions, share personal experiences of survival which helps them to prevail and maintain emotional and mental stability.

Craft packs were delivered to over 50 women from two women’s groups – Sunderland Women’s Art Group and Srijoni Women’s Group delivering nearly 100 workshops so far.

Asma Begum, Engagement Officer said: “The project has proved to me that ‘mental health’ and depression still remains a taboo subject in the Asian community and we need to tackle it. We invited healthcare professionals to join us in the sessions which was a huge success and we now have separate sessions mainly focussing on health issues.”

Research has shown that lockdown has had a significant impact across the board but especially for the BAME community in comparison to other ethnic groups. The Knock Knock project has been an answer to a call for help and a light at the end of the tunnel for the women who access it. The project has given the underrepresented groups of BAME women a platform to voice their often hidden anxiety and concern and most importantly be heard. This has resulted in having better coping mechanisms, managing anxiety levels and learning new skills.

Participant Shakira Khatun shared: “Free time is a time when people feel down and miserable. Engaging in these sessions has helped reduce stress levels and has given a sense of positive mental energy. The sessions are structured, and we learn new things each time despite our differences and are now like a family.”

Padma Rao, Project Manager, Sangini expressed: “Knock Knock has given the women a sense of identity, well-being and pride.”

“Our aim was to help marginalised women experiencing isolation and depression from the BME community through arts and crafts. Four months on it has been a collective journey and this idea, that, we are all in this together has given everyone strength and hope. We learn, encourage, motivate and support each other.”

The project has delivered an exceptional level of support during a challenging period.

All women especially from BAME community are welcome to join the project. The sessions are held weekly online via zoom on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Fridays.

Funding from the Coronavirus Community Support Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, has also helped us to support women in Sunderland and South Shields through Knock Knock. Thank you to the government for making this possible.

For more information contact Padma Rao, Project Manager via email: padma@sangini.co.uk or 07885982436.

ENDS

Sangini has been supporting BME women in the Tyne and Wear region for 17 years with their arts led projects. Women are encouraged from different communities to engage and interact with educational and creative activities to reach their full potential and overcome barriers in order to achieve a better quality of life and cultivate new skills. Thus, new learning approaches and confidence boosting support prevails significantly in relation to physical and mental health. Sangini offers easily accessible venues, childcare support, transport and language interpretation where required.

Due to COVID -19 and government guideline all sessions are held remotely.

Ends

Looking further into the future, successful funding wouldenable the organisation to continueits outreach engagement activities for women to address health and wellbeing issues using arts, crafts and social activities. The organisation is interested to hear from other groups and always welcomes new members to join the Knock Knock Group.

For more information about the Knock Knock or take part in any of Sangini’s activities, please contact Padma Rao via email: projectsangini@gmail.com or 07930175319