



In Partnership with:



Habib Counselling

# Learning together - overcoming stigma around mental health in Islington's Somali community



Islington

Supported by [Clinical Commissioning Group](#)

# Contents

Summary	2
Background	3
Activities	4
Findings	5
Recommendations	7

## Summary

Islington's Somali organisations and service providers can work together to overcome the stigma around mental health but this will only happen if efforts are made to overcome the barriers to effective collaboration.

In August 2019, we published a report entitled "Mental Health Stigma in Islington's Somali Community". This report, which was based on community led research, found that mental health is stigmatised in many parts of the Somali community.

We found that some of the most promising approaches to overcoming stigma are:

- Supporting people within Somali community to break down stigma
- Supporting leaders and institutions to develop their knowledge of mental health and mental health services
- Explore ways of bringing mental health services and Somali community spaces closer together

Subsequently, in partnership with Islington CCG, we have undertaken a number of activities to bring together both people from Islington's Somali community with a variety of experiences and knowledge of mental health and mental health experts. These activities have been opportunities for people to learn from each other about both mental health and how to best work with the Somali community.

The pandemic, and the Government's response, have had a significant impact on this project. Not only are face to face meetings no longer possible, but the organisations with which we have been working have had their focus shifted to responding to the pandemic.

Nonetheless, we have undertaken enough activity to be able to say that:

- There is a large amount of goodwill in both statutory services and in the Somali community to address this issue
- However, statutory services and Somali organisations do not find it easy to work together
- Somali parents could play a significant role in overcoming stigma around mental health but the situation is complex. Many are keen to support their children's wellbeing but may have their own unmet mental health needs and may not find it easy to navigate mental health services or even to speak about mental health

To overcome the stigma around mental health in Islington's Somali community we recommend that:

- Create tailored mental health first aid training for leaders in the Somali community
- Co-design mental health service providers' community outreach programmes with Somali organisations
- Create a bespoke Somali parent champions programme

## Background

In August 2019, we published a report entitled "Mental Health Stigma in Islington's Somali Community". This report, which was based on community led research, found that:

- Mental health is stigmatised in many parts of the Somali community
- This stigma means many people are experiencing mental health problems and not accessing services that could help them
- The Somali community is diverse. Some are well informed on matters to do with mental health, others less so. There are people of all ages and positions within the community who are keen to talk about their community's experiences around mental health and want to take action
- The specific and traumatic experiences of many Somali parents adds additional complexity to the situation

In that report, we found that some of the most promising approaches to overcoming stigma are:

- Supporting people within Somali community to break down stigma
- Supporting leaders and institutions to develop their knowledge of mental health and mental health services
- Explore ways of bringing mental health services and Somali community spaces closer together

Subsequently, in partnership with Islington CCG, The Peel and Galbur Foundation have taken forward these recommendations.

This report summarises the activities we have undertaken, our findings and recommendations.

## Activities

The Peel and the Galbur Foundation, in partnership with Islington CCG, have undertaken a number of activities to bring together both Somalis with a variety of experiences and knowledge of mental health and mental health experts.

These activities have been opportunities for people to learn from each other about both mental health and how to best work with the Somali community.

### **1. Workshop at 3 Corners - December 2019**

We organised a workshop in December 2019 at a community centre in South Islington. At the meeting we:

- Explained the background to the project
- Presented findings from our research
- Facilitated group discussions on how to reduce the stigma around mental health in the Somali community

A short video of part of the meeting can be found here: <https://youtu.be/czNYxupAA4U>

We had 40 participants from mental health providers, mental health charities, Islington Council, the Somali community, and the police.

### **2. Workshop at Al-Risallah - January 2020**

We organised a workshop in January 2020 at a Mosque by the Seven Sisters. At the meeting we:

- Summarised the discussions from the December workshop
- Facilitated group discussions to design projects to overcome mental health stigma

We had 38 participants from mental health providers and the Somali community.

### **3. Workshop with iCope - March 2020**

We organised a joint meeting with iCope's BME network At the meeting we:

- Discussed the challenges of partnership working and ways to overcome these challenges
- Agreed a joint approach to undertaking outreach to the Somali community

### **4. Activities during 'social distancing'**

The pandemic, and the Government's response, have had a significant impact on this project. Not only are large face to face meetings no longer possible, but the organisations with which we have been working have had their focus shifted to responding to the pandemic.

However, we have been able to undertake a number of activities, including:

- Mental health awareness sessions with parents at Al-Risallah
- Myth busting activities with the Somali community
- Wellbeing/self care promotion to the Somali community, including ways to manage stress and anxiety caused by the virus

## **Findings**

Although the project has been interrupted by the Coronavirus, we can confidently say that:

- There is a large amount of goodwill in both statutory services and in the Somali community to address this issue

- However, statutory services and Somali organisations do not find it easy to work together
- The language around mental health is a challenge to collaboration between mental health services and Somali organisations
- Somali parents could play a significant role in reducing stigma but the situation is complex. Many parents are keen to support their children's wellbeing but may have their own unmet mental health needs and may not find it easy to navigate mental health services
- As with any community, there are a range of opinions and perspectives within the Somali community. Some are resistant to work around mental health, while others are enthusiastic
- The Somali community is rich in social capital. There are numerous people, places and organisations that have deep roots and are able to bring together significant numbers of people
- The Somali community faces multiple challenges. Many have low paying jobs, Somali organisations are often grassroots with limited resources and many Somalis experience discrimination and racism

Most of the above points are self explanatory but the role of parents and challenges around collaboration require some elaboration.

### **Challenges to collaboration between mental health service providers and Somali organisations**

Although there is a good will on both sides we found that there are numerous challenges to collaboration between mental health service providers and Somali organisations. For example:

- Many Somali organisations prefer to meet in the evenings, since leaders often combine their roles with other responsibilities such as paid work, whereas mental health service providers often prefer to meet during office hours
- Many Somali organisations prefer to meet in community facilities while many mental health service providers prefer to meet in medical facilities
- Many Somali organisations prefer a relational approach to meetings, including having meals together or getting to know participants on a personal level, while many mental health service providers prefer a more focused approach to meetings with a clear agenda with timings assigned to each topic

- Many Somali organisations prefer to discuss mental health using language of emotions and spirituality and are not comfortable using medical language. The reverse is true for many mental health service providers.
- Many Somali organisations consider religion to have an important and complementary role in responding to individuals who have mental health needs. They may not feel comfortable entirely separating discussions around mental health support from discussions around religion. The reverse is true for many mental health service providers.

### **The role of parents in reducing stigma around mental health**

We found that parents within the Somali community could play a significant role in overcoming stigma around mental health but there are challenges.

- Many parents have unmet or undiagnosed support needs around mental health, unless these are addressed parents may find it harder to support their children's wellbeing
- Many parents do not find it easy to speak with their children about mental health. This is partly a result of stigma but also a result of parents not being confident with language around mental health
- Many parents are attempting to support their children with a range of complex issues which could include concerns around youth violence, substance misuse and debt or poverty

## **Recommendations**

To overcome the stigma around mental health in Islington's Somali community we recommend:

### **1. Create tailored mental health first aid training for leaders in the Somali community**

Mental health first aid is a well established intervention. However, it has proved challenging to deliver this to leaders in the Somali community. This is because:

- Many leaders are not able to attend training courses during office hours, but the mental health first aid training course are typically delivered over 2 days, during office hours

- The training materials used for mental health first aid are not culturally specific. This can present a barrier to engagement for Somali leaders, who may require some additional work to translate some of the core concepts and ideas.

Given this we recommend creating a more tailored mental health first aid training course for Somali leaders which could be delivered during evenings or weekends and which includes a session on language.

## **2. Mental health service providers' co-design their community outreach programmes with Somali organisations**

We know that:

- Many mental health service providers dedicate some resources towards community engagement, for example to promote their services or provide wellbeing advice.
- A number of these organisations do not find it easy to engage with the Somali community.
- The Somali community is rich in social capital
- Many Somali organisations are grassroots charities with few resources

Given the above, there is great potential for mental health service providers to design their community outreach activities in partnership with grassroots Somali organisations.

## **3. Create a bespoke Somali parent champions programme**

Time To Change has an established process for supporting people to become champions so that they are better able to speak about their experiences with mental health and thereby reduce stigma.

There are a number of parents within the Somali community who have expressed an interest in becoming champions. This could be a powerful approach.

However, we know that a significant percentage of these parents have unmet support needs around their own mental health and may require tailored help around the language of mental health.

Given this, we recommend creating a tailored version of Time To Change's existing champions programme to be aimed at Somali parents. This programme would include supporting parents to access mental health support services and training around the language of mental health.