

Birmingham

Black
Thrive



Black Thrive Birmingham

Impact Report 2023-2024

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Introduction to Black Thrive Birmingham

Black Thrive Birmingham is hosted and managed by Catalyst 4 Change, the West Midlands African and Caribbean Mental Health Hub. Black Thrive's mission is to improve Black mental health outcomes in Birmingham and the West Midlands by enabling individuals to receive the right support at the right time and by creating a networked ecosystem of strong social sector Black-focussed organisations that can influence the system, hold it to account and ensure continuous improvement in access, experience and outcomes.

During 2023-24 Black Thrive Birmingham's work has involved the following key programmes and activities:

1. Patient and Carers Race Equality Framework (PCREF) Advisors
2. A Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Advocacy Pilot - Advocates for Change
3. Pathway to Independence
4. Community Engagement in Research



Black Thrive Birmingham Catalyst teams members

PCREF Advisors programme

Our team of 5 PCREF Advisors, hailing from Birmingham's Black communities and including individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges and unpaid carers, is led by a PCREF Lead part funded by Black Thrive Birmingham. The team facilitates community and mental health service workshops and meetings, gathering stories and data to evaluate the effectiveness of mental health services for Black communities.

Collaborating with the PCREF Advisors, we analyse the collected data alongside the engaged community members and groups to:

- Identify prevalent themes regarding the strengths and weaknesses of current services
- Pinpoint actionable steps for service enhancement
- Identify specific areas where targeted changes could yield significant improvements
- Recognise systemic opportunities for innovative approaches
- Promote and facilitate greater community involvement in driving system and service change.

During 2023-24, the PCREF Team played a role in the DHSC-funded "Advocates for Change" pilot programme, which aims to inform the future commissioning of culturally appropriate mental health advocacy. This programme began in October 2023 and will conclude in March 2025.



Catalyst and Black Thrive Birmingham teams

Advocates for Change

Advocates for Change is a mental health advocacy partnership designed to meet the cultural needs of African, Caribbean, and other racialised communities in Birmingham and Solihull

The partnership comprises the following organisations, which provide the services listed below:

- **POhWER:** Provides inpatient advocacy, in both one-on-one and group sessions, to help individuals express their cultural and faith needs and challenge discrimination.
- **Sandwell African and Caribbean Mental Health Foundation (SACMHF):** Focuses on community-based support, helping individuals reintegrate after hospital discharge by connecting them with local services. SACMHF also works with carers to provide resources and information for ongoing support.
- **Catalyst 4 Change:** Raises awareness of the Patient and Carers Race Equality Framework among service users and carers; co-runs carer groups with SACMHF; delivers community-based group advocacy sessions for unpaid carers; and collates service user and carer concerns, highlighting these collective concerns to the Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust (BSMHFT) and seeking redress to promote more equitable and responsive services..

The need for greater advocacy to centre service users in decision-making about their care and involve their carers was a key theme that emerged from the Patient Carer RACE Equality Framework engagement session in 2021/22 (**Catalyst and PCREF - CATALYST 4 Change.**)

Outcomes and Impact

In the last year, we have achieved the following outcomes and impact of Advocates for Change programme:

Service User Support

- Feeling listened to
- Support with raising cultural and spiritual needs to clinical staff and exploring how these can be addressed
- Addressing digital poverty: support to access a mobile phone immediately upon discharge
- Understanding how to access a GP surgery and prescriptions
- Better understanding benefit services and how to navigate the system
- How to make complaints to the client to consider completion of evaluation of their hospital treatment experience and where necessary to challenge decisions through the complaint process
- Access to support and services in the community
- Support with addressing long standing issues with family

Carers

- Carers attending Advocates for Change meetings reported that have found them useful, and that they created an opportunity to share their concerns about advocating for their family member/friends in mental health services
- Increased awareness of different advocacy services available (through POhWER) to Carers and their family member who have mental health problems
- Increased awareness of their rights as carers

Service user and carers feedback

- Advocates for Change has provided one to one and peer Advocacy support to Service Users and delivered Carers groups and meetings.
- Feedback forms, testimonials and ongoing conversations highlight satisfaction with the service. Individual service users and carers have viewed advocates for Change as an important resource.

Key Emerging Themes

Black Thrive Birmingham commissioned Ratio Consultancy to deliver two data analysis training workshops for the PCREF team. The workshops aimed to support the team in analysing data collected from the Advocates for Change activities, delivered in partnership between January and July 2024.

The aim of this analysis was to:

- Identify concerns and complaints
- Understand service user and carer experiences
- Including impact and outcomes of treatment

The key themes from the analysis were as follows:

Insights: Service users

- Need for more inclusive services that consider service user's religious, spiritual and/or cultural needs
- Religious and cultural misunderstanding leading to misdiagnosis
- Racial discrimination on ward
- Overmedication or unsuitable medication
- Lengthy time on ward

In terms of transitioning out of the system and discharge, there is a strong need for support around the following:

- Addressing stigma & lack of understanding of mental health in the community
- Housing support
- Access to finance and benefits, education, employment and positive activities

Insights: Carers

- Carers lack of voice, influence & agency when engaging with clinical staff
- Poor communication between carers and clinical staff
- Carers feeling dismissed or ignored

In terms of relationships between carers and their family member in mental health service:

- Strong desire for connection with family member to foster family bonds and celebrate milestones e.g. birthdays
- More involvement in their family member's inpatient care
- Request for more than 2 family members during inpatient visits

In terms of carers own needs and experiences:

- Strong need and wish for support
- Negative emotional Impact of caring on wellbeing
- Feel neglected and overlooked by mental health services.
- Need to understand their rights to support their family member who are in mental health services
- More support for their family member when they are discharged in the community



Sandwell ACCI Stall holders

Wider System Change Activities

The PCREF Team led on the development of the Advocates for Change Advisory Group whose aims are to:

- support the activities of Advocates for Change in accordance with the service specification
- improve the service and its engagement with its stakeholders
- co-produce service and system change identified through the Project's service user and carer's engagement
- contribute to the services understanding of a Culturally appropriate advocacy service that will support the Projects independent evaluation activities
- contribute to the Project's sustainability plans

The membership comprises:

- Mental health service users and carers from racialised communities.
- Staff from Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust (BSMHFT)
- Voluntary and community sector leaders from Global Majority or marginalised communities who are providing mental health services, support and representing people racialised from communities in the West Midlands.

The Advisory group has worked to promote system-wide changes to tackle the inequalities that have emerged from the work undertaken by the Advocates for Change team. These themes have been raised and addressed at BSMHFT's Secure Care Clinical Inequalities committee and the Trust-wide Health Inequalities Board, due to the ongoing relationship between the project and the Associate Director for Equalities, Inclusion and Diversity and the Clinical Inequalities team for Secure Care. Additionally, the PCREF team is collaborating with the Psychology team at a Secure Care unit at BSMHFT to co-develop a standards charter with carers to guide staff's engagement with Carers. The Advocates for Change programme is currently undergoing an independent evaluation commissioned by DHSC; the evaluation will be released in 2025. Finally, a number of themes and issues that have emerged from Advocates for Change align with an initiative called Pathways to Independence, which will be managed by Catalyst 4 Change will commence in January 2025.

Pathways to Independence

Pathways to Independence will deliver bespoke, co-designed activities to reduce patient boredom, reduce patient length of stay, supporting patients in transition and discharge from Secure Care Services.

The service is also designed to support BSMHFT in the delivery of its objectives relating to the health inequalities review, priorities and action plan and the introduction and delivery of the mandatory patient and carer race equality framework. Feedback from Secure Care Service User and Staff Consultation undertaken in 2022/23 and more recently from the Advocates for Change activities in secure care has helped shape this development.

Pathways to Independence will be delivered by a network of Community based organisations primarily Black led called Sustainable Community Initiative (SCI). SCI has a membership of 22 Health, Social Care, Housing, Sport, Creative and Well Being services. The Community Engagement Team at BSMHFT initiated SCI. Black Thrive Birmingham assumed management of SCI between 2023- 2024.

Funding was secured from REACH the West Midlands Provider Collaborative (PC) for adult secure mental health services and learning disability and autism service for the delivery of SCI first programme Pathways to Independence.

During 2023-24 Black Thrive Birmingham has led on the implementation of the Pathways to Independence programme which has involved commissioning, contract management; evaluation and monitoring arrangements and timetabling of delivery across 4 Secure Care units.

Community Engagement in Research

Catalyst with the support of Black Thrive Birmingham is a member of a collaborative network called Birmingham Research & Community Engagement Hub (BIRCH), led by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC). BIRCH brings together healthcare, local government, the voluntary and Community sector (VCS) and academia to enhance research engagement and participation.

BIRCH identifies gaps in community engagement in research; develop and coordinate networks to prevent duplication, and work with communities to address power imbalances. We will empower communities, foster trust, and create long-lasting relationships ensuring sustainability. Birch participated in the NHS Research Engagement Network (REN) development programme funding from NHS England (November 2023- April 2024) to:

- Grow local research engagement networks within underserved communities and
- Embed consideration of diversity in research within the Integrated Care System

As part of this programme Catalyst and two other Community Led networks (Community Connexions and Flourish) held focus groups with community organisations and community members to explore strategies to remove barriers to engagement, involvement, and participation and empowering communities to become active partners in research.

The focus group was attended by 5 Black led Voluntary sector organisations.

Top-level findings from the focus groups

Funding

- Fair and transparent application processes for all.
- Funding for community assets: training and education in research.
- Funding for community events where research can happen, and data can be gathered informally

Collaboration

- A single 'research hub' for research information, support, guidelines and templates.
- Bring together completed research and implement findings before starting anything new.
- Research literacy campaigns for the community

Engagement and Accessibility

- Community engagement/cultural competency training required.
- Ensure representation on teams who engage with the community.
- Resources in community languages, funding for interpreters.

In addition, Catalyst's focus group recommended:

- Development of research mentors
- Matching research partners with community organisations to share skills and knowledge
- Community organisations to secure funding for researchers or consider secondment to strengthen and build research literacy.

Further to these findings, the BIRCH network has secured additional funding to increase opportunities and access to take part in research for diverse communities and to the sustainability of approaches.

We continue to be a Birch partner developing opportunities for Black communities and their organisations to ensure that they are more actively involved in shaping and delivering research that is meaningful to their community and make a difference to their health and wellbeing

Through Catalyst's and Black Thrive Birmingham's engagement with BIRCH, it has secured funding for a part – time Research & Evaluation Lead post to:

- Deliver ongoing Birch funded initiatives
- Work alongside the Black Thrive Global's (BTG) Research Observatory to evaluate Black Thrive Birmingham's services, analyse data, and review frameworks.

Community-led research – Black Mothers in Birmingham

Black Thrive Birmingham and Catalyst 4 Change are proud to continue their partnership with Maternity Engagement Action (MEA), supporting MEA's provision of safe spaces and leadership opportunities for Black women throughout pregnancy, birth, and early motherhood. Through this collaboration, MEA has been introduced to Black Thrive Global's Research Observatory, Ratio, and Breezee Lab to support their work, which includes:

- Co-create research with a 'for us and by us' process for Black maternal women.
- Gather intersectional data that integrates not just race and gender, but other areas of life impacted by inequality.
- Curate grassroots solutions through the lived and living experiences of Black women.

This work has led to the MEA See Me Hear Me Campaign, which aims to highlight and address the lack of Black perinatal voices in the research and data space.

In 2024 MEA launched their See Me Hear report that shared their findings from participants' insights and described the process of how they worked alongside members of the Black maternal community to analyse and interpret the data using their lived experiences.

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Our partnerships with Catalyst4Change, Black Thrive Global, and Ratio have given us a better understanding of Systems Change and how we, as an organisation, can work alongside system players to create new and innovative pathways for better maternal experiences and outcomes for Black families.

As a result of our partnerships with Black Thrive Global, Breezee Lab and Ratio, our understanding of how community-led research can influence systems change is growing, and we aim to continue to develop our skills in this space.

Amanda Smith, Founder and CEO at MEA

Conclusion

During our third year of delivering the Black Thrive programme in Birmingham, we have achieved the following:

1. PCREF Advisors Programme: Our PCREF Advisors programme has enabled us to continue developing a 'backbone' role, facilitating collaboration between communities and (mainly health) systems. This work supports the addressing of the mental health needs of Black people by providing support, facilitating discussions about data, coordination, and leadership to ensure collective efforts are aligned.
2. Sustainable Community Initiative: We built the capacity and leadership capabilities of Black-led civil society organisations through the Sustainable Community Initiative. This empowerment enables them to make a positive impact on the emotional and mental wellbeing of African and Caribbean communities (and other communities) in Birmingham.
3. Advocates for Change programme: Through the Advocates for Change programme, we facilitated individual and group advocacy so that the voices of over 150 Black people facing poor mental health and their carers are heard and contribute to service change.
4. Community engagement: We engaged with Black community members and Black-led civil society to encourage their participation in the movement to drive the change that is required to ensure that they thrive.
5. Community-centred research: We increased opportunities for Black communities to be more meaningfully engaged in research that is important to them and centred in the evidence which informs mental health policy, practice and resource allocation.
6. Anti-Racist System Change: We further developed our understanding of an Anti-Racist System Change model and approach through our PCREF programme in collaboration with our Black Thrive partners and BTG's Learning Partner.

Glossary of Terms

Acroynm	Expansion
BIRCH	Birmingham Research & Community Engagement Hub
BSMHFT	Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust
BTG	Black Thrive Global
BVSC	Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
CATALYST	Catalyst 4 Change
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
ICS	Integrated Care System
MEA	Maternity Engagement Action
NHS	National Health Service
PC	Provider Collaborative
PCREF	Patient and Carers Race Equality Framework
REN	Research Engagement Network
SACMHF	Sandwell African and Caribbean Mental Health Foundation
SCI	Sustainable Community Initiative
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector



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