Welcome

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Annual Report 2016/17

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ASHA
NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT

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Chairpersons Foreword
Welcome to the Asha 2017 Annual Report.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Asha’s Annual Report, which sets out a picture of our services, partners and what we have achieved in the past twelve months. It has been another busy year at Asha and we have increased our reach to other women and children from many communities, enabling us to support many more families. It is the hard work and resilience of the staff and volunteers that ensures that Asha keeps striving and meeting its objectives.

During this last year, Partnership working has taken a central role in Asha’s service delivery. New partnerships developed: The ‘Better Together’ partnership – Asha, Health for All and Hamara - Leeds City Council funded Health contract. Women’s Lives Leeds, partnership of 11 women’s organisations in Leeds. Lottery funded, project working with some of the most vulnerable women and girls in Leeds.

Asha has also been developing long-term plans to establish a sustainable future. Working with several support organisations – Business in the Community and the Cranfield Trust – in order to secure a future for the project and its service users. With our open door policy, Asha is now attracting women from a wide range of migrant communities and we still want to continue offering a place where women feel comfortable and safe.

Services

Children’s services: Preschool nursery: Feedback from parents about their children has been positive stating improved behaviour, interaction, confidence and improved language skills. Creche: In addition, our creche has enabled women to attend classes. Playschemes: Again Asha was able to offer free or subsidised school holiday activities aimed at increasing self-confidence, reducing the effects of poverty, promoting personal development and improving social skills.

Training, Education and Employment: Asha is helping many women to achieve their goals through further education. Courses provided by Asha this year: ESOL, English, IT, First Aid, working with children and sewing, delivered by our partners: Vera Media, Learning Curve, Leeds City Council, Swarthmore and the Cardigan Centre. A total of 117 women attended courses this year. Our Employment Pathways has provided information, advice and guidance on a one to one basis - for help with making career choices, education or employment e.g. help with CV writing, job search, volunteer opportunities and mentoring.

Health Project: The Health Project has supported women to improve and maintain good standards of health and to make informed choices on matters concerning their own and their families’ health through the provision of: physical exercise activities, healthy lifestyles initiatives, health awareness/ information, health management and advocacy and support.

Advice work: Asha provided advice to many individuals and their families. Staff members have been providing support and advice covering; Benefits, Housing, Education, and signposting to other services e.g. for Immigration, and domestic issues. Asha is also a Hate Crime reporting centre and has a Level 1 Safer Leeds domestic violence Quality Mark.

Women’s Lives Leeds (WLL) project: Asha is one of 11 city wide women’s projects who have come together to form a partnership with the aim that many more women and girls in Leeds will have their needs met and be empowered to lead safer and healthier lives. Asha is employing one of the WLL Community Development Worker posts whose role includes outreach, one to one ‘light touch’ support, information, advice and signposting.

At Asha our AIM is to continue to participate in community cohesion initiatives and continue to support a greater number of hard to reach vulnerable women and families, and to do this with the support of various partners and forums. We thank all our partners, funders and members and look forward to enriching our versatile community.

Afia Khattun – Chairperson of the Asha Neighbourhood Project
Staff and Management Team

Centre Management:
Centre Manager
Centre Coordinator

Pre-school/Crèche/Playscheme:
Childcare Development Worker
Childcare Development Worker
Pre-school Worker
Pre-school Worker (left Aug. 2017)

Employment/Education/Healthy living/Advice services:
Development Worker (Advice)
Development Worker
Health Development Worker

Women’s Lives Leeds Project
Community Development Worker (started Feb. 2017)

Support services:
Cleaner

Sessional Staff:
Health Support Workers:
Halima Begum, Rina Bibi

Creche, Pre-school and Playscheme:
Shahida Khan, Shazia Aslam, Halima Begum, Majida Khan, Naseem Akhtar, Shilpi Chowdhury, Sathi Pianca, Sanya Khan

Courses delivered by external providers + Tutors

Vera Media
ESOL Tutor
Jenny Cole & Jenny Crawfurd
IT Tutor
Heather Nisbett
Sewing Tutor
Jagmohan Manku Mohani

Learning Curve
ESOL entry levels 1/2/3 & English Level 1 Tutor
Lisa Davis
Supporting teaching learning & Working with children Tutor
Zaima Mahmood

Swarthmore Centre
IT Tutor
Heather Nisbett

Cardigan Centre
ESOL
Jenny Cole
Sewing Tutor
Jagmohan Manku Mohani

Placements/Volunteers
Sanya Khan, Rabya Begum, Chro Mohammed, Zara Jahoob, Masuda Ahmed, Nafisa Zafar, Imtiaz Riaz, Rinu Baksh, Shahmina Bibi

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (as of Sept. 2017)

Members of Management Committee:
Chairperson
Afia Khattun
Deputy Chairperson
Parveen Akhtar
Secretary
Dot Read
Treasurer
Katy Ashworth
Shopna Begum, Liz Johnson, Katrine Bay Madsen, Thelma Thomas, Dawn Smith-Eccles

Friends of Asha:
Katie Hume, Farida Rashid, Elizabeth Schweiger, Sharon Heleine

Thanks to……
Everyone who has helped Asha to continue delivering services throughout this last year. Directors and staff who have moved on: Shilp Chowdhury, Shahmina Bibi, Helen Bishop, Hazel Millichamp, for their hard work and positive contribution to Asha.

All our staff, volunteers, placements, Management Committee, Partners and Funders and to all our Service Users for their support and participation.
Advice, Advocacy and Support Services

I’m a local who drops into Asha for advice with complex issues as I find it helpful for someone to break it down and simplify it in a way that I understand. I’ve been coming to Asha since it was first established back in 1985 so I feel very comfortable going there. I feel at ease talking to most of the staff which helps me with my emotional wellbeing. ZA

SB dropped in for advice. She said, “I get all the help I need from Asha to improve my life and my family life. Most helpful and useful is advice. I am interested in ESOL for beginners.”

ZB dropped in for advice. ZB has limited English and poor writing skills. She gave written feedback to say she finds advice and Asha guidance most helpful and useful. She said in Urdu, “The support worker helps me deal with bills, appointments and helps me engage with the local services.”

I live on Stratford Street and Asha is my local drop in centre. Over the years I have used Asha on and off. I have attended various classes at Asha and found the centre and staff welcoming and friendly. My son’s first experience outside home was the Asha Nursery, it helped my son to socialise and interact with other children. Due to my health issues I do access the support services available there. Most of the staff are bi-lingual therefore can facilitate the support needed for the wider community who don’t speak English. I would personally recommend that people seek support from Asha as it is a good starting point to UK life. CD

KB has been using the drop in service for advisory, health and personal support for number of Years. She is an elderly person who is a widow and a full-time carer.

KB cares for her disabled daughter who is an adult with severe disabilities. Mrs Bibi has low self-confidence and limited English. Mrs Bibi was asked what was most helpful and useful in Asha. She said, “I find the support most helpful. There’s is always someone to help me in Asha. Most helpful is getting help from familiar staff that understand my situation.”

SB has been using the drop in service for advice and support since 2009 after she became a widow.

Mrs B cared for her disabled husband for several years and raised 4 children alone. Mrs B is not able to speak English. She had low self-confidence and, due to family responsibilities, was initially unable to attend ESOL classes. As her relationship developed with the Asha Neighbourhood Project she started taking part in activities.

Recently Mrs B was asked what she found most useful about Asha. She replied she relied heavily on information advice and guidance from Asha staff. She stated, “I do not know what I would have done if Asha project didn’t support me during the times of crisis. My problems were sorted early on, before they become big problems.”

SB

My journey since arriving in the UK has been interesting to say the least. Starting in a new country is a challenge in itself and not speaking the language poses more difficulties. I came to find out about Asha, 6 months after arriving in the UK where my life took a positive turn. There are no words to really describe how relieved I was once I realised the level of support I would receive.

When I first made contact with Asha I was staying with a family I met at church who kindly gave me and my disabled son some space on the floor as they didn’t have any spare beds. Initially I came to Asha almost every week and was supported with housing, education, school transport, benefits, employment, and Specialist Support for my son and generally supported with any challenges I faced.

A year after I came to the UK my daughter joined us, which alleviated much of the pressure, her English was very good so she was able to take over the support I depended on Asha for. Four years on and I’m in a better place where I rarely need to access support at Asha. I still love to pop in and join activities where possible.

Asha has played a vital role in my life, without the support and commitment of staff there I’m not sure how I would have coped. I sincerely thank Asha for everything they have done for me and my family. AC

KB
Students currently attending an English Level 1

I have been coming to Asha for around 20 years. I like the courses they provide and the trips. As the majority of the people in Asha are women I feel more comfortable in such an environment. I have been using services like the Nursery and Playschemes as well as other services. RB

I completed a Childcare course at Asha and now I am doing an English course. I have been a service user for a very long time. The staff are very friendly and helpful at all times. As a person coming to Asha I feel like they are able to help me with any problem that I may face. Over the years they have helped many women in the community who are facing difficulties. The Crèche is a valuable part of the service they provide. Without this many women would not be able to attend. Over the years I have done the following activities at Asha: English class, computer class, First Aid course, cooking class etc. I feel Asha is an important part of the community, helping women in the area to access courses and getting used to life in the UK. MK

Students currently attending an ESOL Entry level 3 course

I have been coming to ASHA for two years. I came to learn English. I have improved my English and I am more confident than before - I am definitely less shy.

I can see that ASHA's community care about the people. They let me know about anything at the centre that they think will interest me. AC

I have been coming to ASHA for five months. I came here to make a better future for myself and my family by learning English. The lessons are easy to understand and I learn useful things. The workers at ASHA are so good and my classmates are so friendly. I can really see some changes in myself - my speaking is really improving. DN
Children’s activities – Preschool, Crèche and Playscheme

Both pre-school & Playschemes celebrated excellent Ofsted reports this year. Comments from Ofsted:

• “Staff are very good role models and display the utmost respect for children as they join in their play. Children are very calm, kind and considerate towards each other. Their behaviour is excellent”

• “Staff have created a friendly and welcoming environment. They individualise settling-in arrangements to ensure that children feel safe and secure from the start.”

• “The well-qualified staff know how children learn and translate their knowledge into practise well. All children learn new words rapidly and are strong communicators.”

Feedback from Pre-school families:

“I feel my son has progressed a lot since starting at the pre-school.”

“My son’s words and sentencing has improved dramatically, and is able to communicate well with both adults and other children. His social and interaction skills with others have also improved. He is a very outdoors person and loves all the outdoor activities such as walks to the shops, parks and Monster Kidz. I feel Asha Pre-school and staff are all doing a fantastic job in helping to support and encourage my child’s development which is much appreciated”

Feedback from Playscheme families:

When asked what benefits their children get from coming to the playscheme:

“Happy when they come home, showing what they have made. They talk about making friends, they learn good manners and their behaviour improves.”

“They really enjoy it, they learn how to share and play with other children.”

“Interacting with other children, they are still learning. The activities are educational and she loves going on the trips.”
Women’s Lives Leeds (WLL) Project

WLL Vision: That many more women and girls in Leeds will have their needs met and be empowered to lead safer and healthier lives.

The WLL Community Development Service offers light touch support, information, advice and signposting through the provision of drop in and outreach sessions at community settings throughout the city; by working in partnership with local community groups, partners and organisations, in a range of community venues.

Asha, as one of the 11 partners, has employed one of the WLL Community Development Workers since February 2017. The CDW has established local relationships with partners and other service providers in order to co-produce sustainable and local opportunities for women and girls.

Feedback and case study

“My life was really dark and I had so many issues, but after being supported by the CDW at the WLL drop in held at Asha, I now feel as though I have had a weight lifted off me, and I am so grateful for the support” MT

“I feel better after accessing the WLL drop-in, as I am able to offload and get support with making sense of what my options are” EP

XZ was introduced to the Community Development Worker by a local professional. XZ was feeling very vulnerable and suicidal when she arrived at the Asha drop-in. XZ felt totally overwhelmed by the situation she had found herself in, and as she told her story, it became clear that she was facing a whole host of complex issues:

- XZ had been in several abusive relationships over many years with some very serious incidents of physical harm, and her confidence and self-esteem had been severely affected.
- XZ had unresolved mental health issues after having two miscarriages and coping with the death of an ex-partner.
- Most recently she had been exploited whilst on holiday abroad, where she had entered into a marriage contract with someone - she later realised – who only wanted to obtain a visa to the UK.
- XZ was also dealing with (false) charges of assault filed against her by her ex-partner here in the UK.
- There was also social care involvement, with serious concerns of sexual abuse against her daughter’s father, XZ’s ex-partner. Throughout the residency case that was pending at the time, there was continuous and ongoing supervised contact between XZ’s daughter and her father, which XZ felt to be unsafe due to the nature of the supervision.
- XZ’s daughter was presenting major behavioural issues both at school and at home.
- XZ was facing problems with her benefit entitlements which were causing a great deal of financial strain.

How we helped:

- XZ was immediately offered emotional support, and a referral was made into the Women’s Lives Leeds (WLL) complex needs service.
- WLL were able to provide support on a one to one basis; support with attending solicitors, GP appointments, Children In Need planning meetings etc.
- Access was provided to group work focused on healthy relationships and a local initiative to address the debt and financial issues XZ was facing.
- WLL funds were also utilised to purchase some essential items for her daughter.

What happened next?

- Several months on, XZ says she has good and bad days, but she now feels as though a weight has been lifted from her, and that her quality of life is so much better.
- Now accesses the local one stop for support with welfare Benefits, and is actively contacting her fuel and Water suppliers to seek help with arrears.
- XZ was also able to successfully gain full residency of her daughter.
- Her daughter was also supported by the WLL complex needs service, and she too is doing much better.
On 8th February 2017 Mrs Bibi was invited to enrol on a course at the Northern College. The weekend course was part of a mental health project. As we were helping her complete the well-being assessment form Mrs Bibi broke down into tears. She mentioned she had little interest and no pleasure doing anything at home since her husband’s death in 2015. She had trouble sleeping and felt a burden on her family. Thoughts of being better dead would come to her mind but her faith kept her strong. She stated, “She feels useful and relaxed when she takes part in activities in Asha with other older Bangladeshi women.”
At a meeting of the Beeston St Mary’s Mothers’ Union, a group of women from Asha demonstrated some traditional South Asian cooking. They also explained why they used particular herbs and spices – flavour etc. The session was enjoyed by all and demonstrated a good way to develop community relations.

The women from Asha were asked if there was anything the Mothers Union women could show them and the answer came immediately, “Baking”.
Thank you to our funders this year: Leeds City Council, Headingley Orphanage, The People’s Health Trust, The Lottery (through WLL)

And thank you to the following organisations for their support and partnership working: Vera Media, Learning Curve, Health for All, Cardigan Centre, the Women’s Lives Leeds Partners, Swarthmore Centre, Bradford College, Hamara, Leeds City Council, our local Councillors, Northern College, the Church of the Nazarene, Faith Together in Leeds 11 partners, Building Blocks Nursery, Advice Leeds, Black Health Initiative, Neighbourhood Police Team, Care & Repair, Touchstone, Preschool Learning Alliance, Voluntary Action Leeds, Leeds MIND, Holbeck food bank, Groundwork Trust, Volition, Ed Carlise, South Leeds Life, Concord – Leeds Interfaith fellowship, South Leeds area team, Leeds Museums, National Citizens Service, Leeds Federated Housing Association, the Aspire partnership, Leeds Play Network, Early Years’ Service, Asian Blind Association, South and East Locality PH Team, Cranfield Trust, Bart de Leeuw

Please contact the ASHA Neighbourhood Project for further information
43 Stratford Street, Leeds LS11 6JG
Telephone: 0113 270 4600
Email: info@ashaleeds.org.uk