

With our communities

to achieve the best for the Black Country

 Dudley  Sandwell  Walsall  Wolverhampton

Issue 1 - June 2025

Welcome from Laura Brookes

Associate Director of Partnerships, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Welcome to our 'With our communities' update sharing news, events and opportunities from our work with our partners in health and social care; voluntary, community, social and faith enterprise organisations; and our communities.

In this update, we want to share stories from our communities and our trust, the Black Country Lead Provider/Commissioner for Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism. This is our newsletter, and we welcome ideas and contributions from all of you reading this. Please get in touch if you have news, events or opportunities you would like to share with our network in this newsletter.

We were pleased to confirm continuation of Wider Determinants of Health (WDH) funding for our voluntary sector partners for an additional six months from April 2025. Within the challenging financial context, we remain committed to continuing to prioritise funding and support for these important community initiatives wherever possible.

A little about me. As the Associate Director of Partnerships, I have an important role in developing relationships and partnerships with a range of organisations and people across the Black Country.

I work for Kuli Kaur-Wilson, Chief Strategy and Partnerships Officer and Deputy Chief Executive Officer who I know many of you will know well. I also manage a wonderful team of colleagues in employment services, recovery college, specialist commissioning and health equity.



We understand that each of our Black Country places; Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton are different from the others and part of my role is connecting with partners in each area to develop mutually beneficial relationships, gain local understanding and help get mental health, learning disabilities and autism on the agenda in each place.

I am a mental health nurse by background so have experience of working alongside people who have experienced mental health illness, and their families and carers. I've held different managerial and clinical leadership roles and helped to develop community mental health teams.

Despite living close to the Wolverhampton Wanderers ground, I'm a proud West Bromwich Albion fan. Born and bred in the Black Country, I spend my weekends exploring it with my husband and our pugs, usually with a pint and a bag of scratchings as the end goal! Want to know more about me? Read my [Behind the Badge](#) feature on our website.

Lead provider/commissioner and wider determinants of health

Laura helps explain the jargon!

As the lead provider/commissioner of mental health, learning disability and autism services in the Black Country, we take a whole population approach to commissioning services to meet the needs of the Black Country population.

This includes bringing together partners across the Black Country system to support the development and commissioning of pathways of care across health and care. This means working in partnership with others to co-design and co-develop services across multiple organisations.

We all know that demand for mental health services is ever increasing, and local people have told us how challenging it is to be waiting for support or not be able to access specialist mental health support because they are 'not unwell enough'.

As lead provider/commissioner we have a responsibility to make decisions about how to best support our communities by understanding their needs and designing support, in partnership with local voluntary and community organisations where that is more appropriate. This might include offering funding or building connections between organisations. [Watch a video](#) about the difference being lead provider has made.

Wider determinants of health (WDH) are a range of social, economic and environmental factors which impact directly on the health (physical and mental) of the population. We know only 20% of health outcomes are influenced by clinical care. 50% is influenced by social, economic and environmental factors (WDH) and 30% by lifestyle choices. If we can make an impact on the WDH then we can make a real difference for people. Learn more about WDH on the [NHS website](#).

Spotlight:

Stories of success from Sandwell

Congratulations to our community partners in Sandwell, including lead organisation [Communities in Sync](#) (CIS), for the incredible success of the Wider Determinants of Health (WDH) Sandwell project.

Black Country Healthcare was proud to fund this project and to continue the funding for six additional months from April 2025.

Since the start date, 17 local organisations have provided support to 2,100 people across Sandwell. Capturing the truest sense of partnership, 406 people were cross-referred and 1,350 people were onward referrals for additional support, demonstrating how organisations have worked together to ensure people received the right support.

This support saw 3,033 interventions including budgeting support, cooking lessons, community cohesion sessions, craft and coffee sessions, counselling, digital access to health, employability support, ESOL provision, gym classes, immigration advice, mental health advocacy services, pre-school services, sound relaxation sessions, walking groups, wellbeing sessions, and wrap-around support.



95% of participants said it has made a positive difference to their lives and 98% would recommend the support to others.

“

Knowing that there is support available to help me with my emotional and physical needs has been so beneficial in helping me get through one of the toughest periods of my life.

Participant

”

Continues

“

The changes I have made to my life with everyone's help have been massive. I do positive activities that are good for my physical and mental health every single day!

Participant

”

As a trust we are proud to work with our partners in Sandwell and recognise the incredible difference that partnerships between the NHS and voluntary, community, social and faith enterprises can have for local people.

CIS are sharing some of the case studies from this project on their website and highlighting stories from Sandwell on their social media. Follow them on X (twitter) @commsinsync and using #wdhsandwell to hear more stories from Sandwell.

Spotlight on Sandwell: Communities In Sync



Communities In Sync (CIS) are a dynamic partnership of quality health, social care and wellbeing providers working together to improve the lives of people in Sandwell.

CIS creates a single point of contracting, with the responsibility for setting up and managing sub-contracts with individual consortium member organisations, all of whom have met a strict quality threshold. The combined turnover of member organisations is £7m with over 350 employees.

CIS also has access to a wide range of recognised community assets located throughout Sandwell, which combined with the grassroots and user-led nature of the member organisations ensures extensive reach into communities not easily accessible by mainstream and statutory providers.

“

Working regularly with other local organisations fosters information exchange, peer learning and peer support. Working so closely on services also necessitates that best practise is shared and implemented into new services to shape delivery and transferable service models. This is good for the sector, the local community and the people who will be using our services.

Pat Johnson

Chief Executive Officer

Sandwell African and Caribbean Mental Health Foundation Trust

”

“

WDH Sandwell is a fantastic example of the third sector working collaboratively to meet the complex needs of our diverse population. I'd like to say a huge thank you to our funder (BCHFT) and our 17 delivery partners have worked tirelessly to address the needs of our residents in a holistic and empathetic manner.

Nav Rai

Chief Executive Officer

Communities In Sync

”

“

Being a member of CIS is incredibly beneficial to us as it not only offers potential opportunities through their local knowledge but enables and supports us to work on contracts as a group, which may be out of our reach as a sole provider.

We certainly reach more diverse communities that need our support and work with a wider range of partners than we would do without being part of CIS. We find CIS incredibly supportive, thorough and professional.

Khatija Patel

Chief Executive Officer

Ideal For All

”

Continues

“

Working with CIS has allowed us to reach communities that traditional NHS services have not. We can offer support to people in their local neighbourhoods and through VCSE (voluntary, community, social enterprises) and charitable organisations that they trust. This has helped us to provide an offer that is more flexible, creative, culturally sensitive and high quality.

Also, CIS have been able to mobilise projects quickly and cost effectively. Multi-partner projects allow for shared accountability, shared learning and integration that benefits communities and citizens with choice and timely support.

Laura Brookes

Associate Director of Partnerships

Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

”

“

Partnership working is now an essential requirement for any modern charity. Being a member of CIS and working with other members means that we have pre-formed partnerships which enables us to act quickly and operate with agility when new opportunities arise. The work of CIS in supporting these partnerships has been essential to Age UK Sandwell's continued development.

Steve Thomson

Chief Executive Officer

Age UK Sandwell

”

CIS want to grow their social impact and by 2028 want to see a resilient network of charities equipped to tackle complex challenges and build healthier, more equitable communities across the Black Country and Birmingham. Read more about their ambitions in their Strategic Plan for 2025-2028.

Spotlight on Sandwell: Maternal health and prenatal care event

In March, the Trust supported an event organised in Oldbury by The William Wilson Turner Foundation which focused on maternal health and prenatal care for Black and ethnic minority women.

The event highlighted the significant disparities in maternal health outcomes for these groups compared to white women.

National studies indicate that Black women are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth, while Asian women are twice as likely.

In Sandwell, 48.3% of all births are to women from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds, significantly higher than the national average of 23.3% (Sandwell Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2020).



Continues

A case study presented by Joan Blaney, CEO of the William Wilson Turner Foundation, brought to life the often-overlooked experiences of black and ethnically diverse women during pregnancy and childbirth, inadequate maternity care, lack of culturally competent services, and broader health inequalities (Head of the Royal College of Midwives).

The Trust's Lead Governor, Elsie Gayle gave the opening talk. Elsie is part of the Midwife Mimosa Midwives Group and Secretariat Black Maternal Health All Party Parliamentary Group. Health professionals, maternity service providers, and local women also shared their experiences and insights.

The role of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Specialist Midwives in the Black Country was highlighted. These midwives advocate for equitable maternity services, provide cultural competence training, and engage with local communities to improve services. Their aim is to help improve Black and Asian women's maternal health and ensure that every woman in Sandwell receives the care she deserves.

Many pregnancy-related complications that lead to hospital admissions or worse outcomes are preventable with the right interventions, including early engagement with maternity care, better community support, improved health literacy, and culturally appropriate services.

Feedback from attendees included language barriers, pain threshold misconceptions, confusing medical jargon, and trust issues. Areas for action were agreed upon, such as interpreter assistance, clear communication, inclusive engagement, empowerment, equality in treatment, and community collaboration.

Feedback from attendees included language barriers, pain threshold misconceptions, confusing medical jargon, and trust issues. Areas for action were agreed upon, such as interpreter assistance, clear communication, inclusive engagement, empowerment, equality in treatment, and community collaboration.



I learnt that women of colour are not always treated fairly and in order to transform the narrative we need to speak up and be the change for the next generation.

One thing I will take away from this workshop is to not keep quiet and make sure my voice is heard as we should be treated equally no matter what colour we are

Kaddy Fairin-Hall
Attendee



Spotlight on Sandwell: The William Wilson Turner Foundation

The William Wilson Turner Foundation was established in 2022 in memory of Dr. William Wilson Turner, MB BCh, a GP of over 40 years, who was a passionate advocate for preventative medicine. Its mission is to work in collaboration with others to empower individuals with skills and resources, provide holistic health education, and promote involvement in healthy activities.



Continues

Joan Blaney, CEO of the foundation, and his widow, herself a nurse, has received funding and support from the [Black Country Integrated Care Board \(ICB\)](#) and [West Midlands Combined Authority \(WMCA\)](#) to run workshops for Black and ethnic minority groups in Sandwell.

These workshops included topics such as cardiovascular health, mental health and resilience, digital literacy, diabetes, and alcohol and substance misuse awareness. They were funded by the ICB and supported by the Trust, and local community sector organisations such as [West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre](#), [The Dorothy Parkes Centre](#), [Black Country Housing Group](#), and [Kaleidoscope Plus Group](#).

“

When it comes to maternal health, silence is not an option. Tackling inequalities begins with honest conversations and continues through meaningful collaboration.

This event in Sandwell was not just a workshop—it was a call to action

Joan Blaney

Chief Executive Officer

The William Wilson Turner Foundation

”

Read the [Foundation's Healthwise Prevent and Prosper Report](#) about the workshops.

Talking Therapies Plus

The Trust is proud to be working with community and voluntary organisations to provide a Talking Therapies Plus service across the Black Country.

The service aims to support underserved communities across the Black Country; those people who may not have previously accessed support or who have not had the same recovery when compared to others accessing the service. This may include: Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups; refugees and migrants; LGBTQ+ people; older adults; deaf and hearing impaired people; and men.

It does this by taking a flexible, creative and culturally appropriate approach to delivering Talking Therapies, for example, providing access to therapists with a range of language skills and matching service users to therapists with the same background.

Counselling and therapy is delivered by community organisations in places familiar to, and trusted by, the people who choose to access the service (e.g. GP practices, community settings, voluntary organisations). People will be able to choose which area of the Black Country they receive their treatment allowing greater flexibility. They can also access employment support, courses through the Trust's [Recovery College](#), and additional support such as: digital training and equipment; advocacy; pre-counselling engagement and more.



Talking Therapies Plus

Some services are provided by The Trust and some by community or voluntary organisations. The service is a partnership between the Trust and community and voluntary sector partners across Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. In each area a lead organisation represents different community organisations in their area and works with the Trust to deliver the service. These are:

Dudley



Sandwell



Walsall



Wolverhampton



Continues



Communities In Sync is proud to be supporting Sandwell residents who are struggling with their mental health. We believe that by supporting residents in a responsive, flexible, and person-centred manner, combined with addressing the individual's underlying needs (e.g. finances, physical health, future aspirations), helps to make a real difference to the lives of those we support.



Through our partnership with the Trust we, at **Aspiring Futures CIC**, are reaching out to people who might have struggled to access conventional talking therapies. This programme is flexible, accessible and meet diverse needs of our communities



What type of support might people receive?

After an assessment people will receive personalised support that may include:

- Group and one-to-one counselling in their language
- Bereavement support
- Domestic abuse support
- Peer support for young men
- Support in the outdoors and local neighbourhood centres

Counsellors speak a range of languages including:

- French
- Gujarati
- German
- Hindi
- Italian
- Polish
- Ukrainian
- Urdu
- Patois
- Punjabi and more.

They will also meet people wherever they feel comfortable, for example, a local community centre.

How do people access the service?

The voluntary and community lead organisations in Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton will be promoting the service to communities and groups in their area.

Some communities they hope to reach are:

- Central and Eastern European communities
- People from African, Caribbean and dual heritage
- Asian women
- South Asian communities
- Young men
- Women and girls affected by female genital mutilation
- LGBTQ+ communities

What difference will this make?

People will have choice and culturally appropriate support that meets their individual needs and circumstances. There will reduced waiting times, especially where interpreters are required, and support offered during your wait and longer-term. People will benefit from a diverse, culturally appropriate and skilled team, and locations and resources, across the voluntary and community sector and NHS.



Our commitment to reducing racial inequalities

The Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework

Over the next few months, you will start to hear a lot more about The Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF); NHS England's first anti-racism framework for all providers of mental health services (not just the NHS).

The aim of PCREF is to hold organisations accountable for being anti-racist in the way it provides mental health support.

The Trust is an early adopter of this framework (amongst the first NHS Trusts in the country to start using it) because it reflects the commitment we have already made to our patients, service users, staff and communities; to be active in achieving the Best for the Black Country.

"Those that feel it, know it".

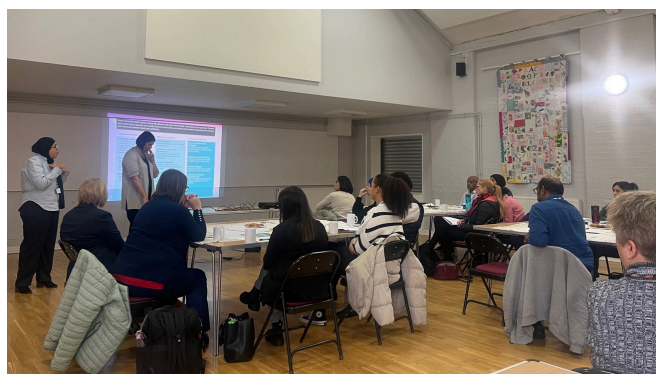
This was part of the feedback that came from one of the first community conversations that we had about PCREF. We really wanted to hear from communities, patients, carers and staff working clinically. So, during autumn 2024, we held community conversations in each Black Country locality; Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, as well as online.

These conversations between organisations, advocates and trust staff were uncomfortable and difficult at times, but mostly people told us they felt hopeful, energised and inspired to stay involved with the PCREF work and be part of the next steps.

All the feedback we received has been used to develop the Black Country Healthcare PCREF improvement plan. This plan sets out where we will start the work of eliminating racial inequality from our services.

This work won't be easy and will take many years, but this plan is our shared starting point based on what is most important to our communities and patients; transparency, accountability, partnership working.

Maybe most importantly, valuing the experiences of patients, carers and communities by listening, valuing their perspective and taking action when we are given feedback.



Community organisations and advocates have been essential in bringing patient and carer feedback to us. Understandably, patients and carers often don't want to complete our surveys and come to our events. But through the expert support and trusted voices of the community organisations, their voices and experiences have been part of this process, and we want to thank them for their time and for sharing their experiences and ideas.

The improvement plan was approved by the Trust Board in May, and you can read some of our Board's reflections, along with a personal reflection from community leader Jessie Allen on our [website](#).

We will keep you updated on progress, including how you can get involved in this important work. If you would like to be included on our PCREF mailing list, please email: bchft.pcref@nhs.net.

Meetings and events

The **Black Country Mental Health Stakeholder Advisory Forum** is a regular forum and network for organisations and advocates to work alongside each other to co-design and co-deliver mental health support, making a positive difference to the mental health and wellbeing of our Black Country communities.

Learn more in the [forum leaflet](#) and email bchft.bcmhstakeholdergroup@nhs.net to receive an invitation.

Future meetings are:

- Friday 18 July 2025, 1-4pm
- Friday 24 October 2025, 1-4pm
- Friday 23 January 2026, 11am-1pm

Learning and resources

The **Recovery College** provides an educational learning environment for people who have an interest in, or personal difficulties with, mental health. Their courses celebrate our successes and build on existing skills and strategies rather than highlighting problems or failures.

Courses are free of charge and open to anyone, aged 18 and over, registered with a GP in the Black Country.

Learn more on their [website](#) or email info@therecoverycollege.co.uk to get in touch.



News from...Dudley

Dudley Place partnership has an engaging newsletter bringing together news and events from around the borough. If you'd like to get 'The Place to Be' in your inbox email: dgft.place.comms@nhs.net.

Be well - quick links

- [Help in a crisis](#)
- [Healthy Dudley website](#)
- [Sandwell All-Age Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services Directory](#)
- [Walsall Wellbeing Directory](#)
- [Wolverhampton Information Network](#)

A final note from our...

...Chief Strategy and Partnerships Officer, Kuli Kaur-Wilson

I really hope you have enjoyed this With our communities update. As Laura mentioned in her introduction, we welcome contributions. Have you something to share with our network of organisations and individuals? Would you like us to feature your organisation or a particular project, initiative or event? Please get in touch with us.

We will be back soon with another update. Until then, thank you for everything you do for our bostin' Black Country communities.

