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# Connecting with underserved communities in Bristol: insights from the Health Research Ambassador project

Kennedy, Mari-Rose

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University of Plymouth

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#400WORDS: DELIVERING A RESEARCH SKILLED WORKFORCE SPECIAL EDITION

## Connecting with underserved communities in Bristol: insights from the Health Research Ambassador project

Mari-Rose Kennedy<sup>1</sup> Carmel McGrath<sup>2</sup> Roy Kareem<sup>3</sup> Olivia Sweeney<sup>3</sup> Asia Yousif<sup>3</sup>  
Holly Ayres<sup>4</sup> Shoba Dawson<sup>5</sup> Aaruni Suresh<sup>6</sup> Andy Gibson<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Associate in Public Involvement and Qualitative Research, University of Bristol, BRISTOL, BS1 2NT, UK. <sup>2</sup>Research Fellow, NIHR Applied Research Collaboration West, University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust, BRISTOL, BS1 3NU, UK. <sup>3</sup>Alumni Health Ambassador, NIHR ARC West, BRISTOL I, BS1 2NT, UK. <sup>4</sup>Communications and Engagement Manager, NIHR Clinical Research Network, BRISTOL, BS1 2NT, UK. <sup>5</sup>Senior Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, SHEFFIELD, S10 2TN, UK. <sup>6</sup>Research and Engagement Coordinator, Caafi Health, BRISTOL, BS2 8QN, UK. <sup>7</sup>Associate Professor Patient and Public Involvement, University of West England, BRISTOL, BS16 1QY, UK.

Email: [mari-rose.kennedy@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:mari-rose.kennedy@bristol.ac.uk)

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### Background

In the UK, certain communities are underserved by healthcare and research (e.g. ethnic minority communities). Underserved communities frequently carry a higher healthcare burden that does not receive corresponding attention in research and are often underrepresented in research (NIHR, 2022). Recent Covid-19 vaccination up-take highlights that there are important differences in how communities respond to health interventions (The Kings Fund, 2021). To effectively respond to these challenges, it is important to develop methods that ensure the voices of people from underserved communities are heard in the planning and delivery of research (McGrath *et al.*, 2023). Building on the Ujima Radio / Bristol Green Capital Partnership's Black and Green Ambassador scheme, we have adapted the model to the health research context. Health Research Ambassadors (HRAs) are individuals from underserved communities acting as a bridge between research institutions and communities, building trusting relationships and undertaking leadership roles in research decision-making. This helps ensure that community interests can directly influence research priority setting and implementation.

### Method

Three ambassadors ran five workshops with nine women from different migrant communities and experience of seeking asylum in the UK. Workshops explored mental health and wellbeing and were co-produced with participants. Each workshop built on the last, and employed creative activities to build reciprocal relationships, for example foraging and shared meal preparation and provision of information to 'give-back' to the community, such as ways to wellbeing session with a Health Psychologist.

## Results

The project was evaluated in several ways including a Cube Evaluation (Gibson *et al.*, 2017) and recommendations have been developed (Kennedy *et al.*, 2023). Workshop activities included learning about mental health, wellbeing and coping strategies delivered by a Health Psychologist, training in understanding and using research evidence, and undertaking a range of activities to promote wellbeing. The women shared experiences and knowledge and identified needs around mental health and wellbeing. They learnt about the importance of health research, the HRA role and how they might contribute more in the future.

The workshops benefitted the women directly, and helped build relationships between them, as well as with the research team. The HRAs facilitated trust and connection with the women that would have been difficult for the research team to develop alone, enabling sustainable, long-term relationships with the women.

## Conclusion

This work has subsequently received funding from NHS England and is being led by a community partner, Caafi Health. This will enable us to sustain and expand this initiative, creating longstanding, mutually beneficial relationships while helping to ensure that research engages with community needs and concerns.

## References

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## Further information

Black and Green Ambassadors. Available at: [https://bristolgreencapital.org/project\\_cat/blackandgreenambassadors/](https://bristolgreencapital.org/project_cat/blackandgreenambassadors/)

Caafi Health. Available at: <https://www.caafihealth.org.uk/our-health-ambassadors>



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