

Women's Health Sessions at the Broomhall Centre

The Women's Health Session was established following a series of Women's Health Days in the early 2000s and have continued ever since. The session allows women to come together for healthy activities such as exercise and learning about healthy diets. Over the years, we have used the session as a basis to expand to other activities when the need arises and funding allows, for instance a conversation club, sewing, health walks and health advice and signposting. The Centre is open and available on Tuesday morning/lunchtime, which makes it easy to book space for other activities. Some things happen spontaneously, such as women dropping in to use the sewing machines.

Activities in 2019

During 2018 and 2019 the session was funded by the Southall Trust and supported by a health worker, Saima Rehman, seconded by Shipshape, which runs Sheffield City Council's People Keeping Well programme. The activities were:

- **Chairobics** – the grant from Southall Trust paid for a tutor, who ran a very accessible session. Women could exercise gently while sitting or more vigorously while standing. **There were 33 women on the register with an average of 9 attending each week. The main ethnicities were Somali, followed by Pakistani, Middle Eastern and White British.**
- **Conversation Club** – SAVTE (Sheffield Association for Voluntary Teaching of English) trained 3 volunteers, paid to rent a classroom in the Centre and ran an informal English Conversation Club for two terms. There were **14 women registered and an average attendance of 4.** There was also an outing by bus in the summer.
- **Health walks** - in association with Sheffield Wildlife Trust. There were organised walks using buses to take women to beauty spots outside Sheffield. These were very popular with **up to 11 women going on 3 outings.**
- **Healthy snacks** – the women contributed £1 a session which was used to buy healthy snacks and more substantial food for celebrations such as Eid. The money also supported transport for some of the walks.
- **Health advice** – Saima Rehman supervised the sessions (taking the register and following up non-attenders) and offered individual health advice/sign posting as needed.



Impact of the activities

Saima Rehman reports how women have benefited from the sessions:

- A woman of Pakistani origin living on the nearby council estate has spent her whole adult life as a single parent, bringing up her children. She had literally never been into the countryside around Sheffield and when she did so, she was amazed. She Face timed her friend and showed her around and said, "How beautiful this place is and not far where I live, just feels like I am back home to our fields".
- Another woman who is full time carer for her ill husband, also mentioned that she feels so relaxed breathing in fresh air and having some time out from her house which she never had. She came to UK 5years ago and her family had accident therefore been house bound for years. It was encouragement from Saima and other friends that she should take some time out for her as is important for her health and wellbeing. She enjoyed so much, as she seen first time Pea District and took loads of pictures to share with rest of her family.

- During 2019, some Somali women stopped attending the Chairobics as the mosque had told them they should not be dancing to music. Shipshape made it clear that Chairobics is about exercise for health and the sessions are women-only. Gradually the women returned as they found the exercise



and friendship so enjoyable. One of them said, “This is the only fun I have, to come out of the house, do exercise and meeting other friends”.

- Conversation club, we had so many different ethnicities attending, women were at different levels of speaking English. It was amazing to see their confidence building and learning skills. One woman used to write 10 new English words on her note book with Urdu translation so that she can remember these words in order to use them.

Covid-19 lockdown March 2020

The above activities continued until March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic stopped all face to face gatherings. Saima continued to support women on the register by phone. Shipshape, based in nearby Sharrow, acted as a Covid-19 support hub and was in a position to assess and respond to people’s needs.

Re-opening: consultation and collaboration

The Broomhall Centre re-opened in early September 2020 and, following discussions with the Shipshape manager, Tanya Basharat, we have restarted the Tuesday Women’s Health session. We are also working with Rosie Chitty from the Jesus Centre. Their building, which is very close to the Broomhall Centre, is currently closed, due to Covid-19 and the leasing arrangements. They previously ran a sewing/craft group and have good contacts in the local community. The Broomhall Centre has delivered a questionnaire to 1900 local households asking what activities people would like to see following the lockdown. We have pooled all our local knowledge to come up with a plan: **initially, we will run a drop-in session** so that women who have participated in the past or who have been in touch more recently can make an appointment to discuss their needs with Saima. Rosie will be on hand to provide refreshments and will contact the sewing group participants.

We hope to provide a **range of Covid-safe activities:**

- Health advice/signposting, provided by Saima
- Health walks, lead by Saima with up to 5 participants
- Sewing/crafts, supported by Rosie and Jesus Centre volunteers
- Chairobics, run by Shahina if we get funding
- Computer skills, tutored by our Centre Manager, Rafik Al Sakkaf, if we get funding
- Conversation class/ESOL teaching, run by Learn for Life or SAVTE depending on funding and recruiting volunteers
- Covid-safe cafe, initially just refreshments for those who come for individual advice/assessment but could be expanded if we get funding and volunteers