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4M 'my health, my choice, my child, my life': Developing a national network of 'Mentor Mothers' to support women living with HIV through pregnancy – A 6 month evaluation



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<http://tinyurl.com/4MProject>

Background

Despite biomedical advances in the prevention of vertical transmission, pregnancy for women with HIV is a particularly challenging time. Complex, HIV associated psychosocial problems are common and compromise maternal, infant and family wellbeing. In 2016, the 4M project trained 46 women living with HIV in 8 UK regions to become "Mentor Mothers" (MM), using an innovative community-led programme with a focus on psychosocial support, to promote grassroots ownership and sustainability. We now report on the 6 month post programme evaluation of the training programme

Objective

To evaluate MMs' and host organisations' experiences of the 4M training programme and its potential for long-term impact on them.

Methods

An online survey was designed and delivered to: (i) 46 women who had undergone the MM training programme and (ii) 8 HIV voluntary sector programme host organisations. Free text was analysed thematically.

The training made [me] feel comfortable around other people with the same condition. I have been hiding away try to avoid those I knew were in the same situation as I am. Simply because I am shy and thinking that I will be stigmatised within the society (MM4)

The training has helped me consolidate my understanding of guidelines and how they push us into a one size fits all which doesn't fit our realities (MM5)

It has made me more aware of what pregnant HIV women go thru. I have not yet been able to support anyone as I feel I am not ready yet but my time will come when I can do that (MM8)

It had a positive impact and gave me the skill and know how on mentoring mothers living with HIV. I feel more confident to advice in a more informed way (MM9)

Results

Mentor Mothers

- Almost half (22) of MMs responded; 12 (54%) completed the whole survey and 10 partially completed.
- Of the 21 who responded to the question, all reported that the 4M training programme had significantly improved their knowledge of HIV, pregnancy and action planning.
- Additional self-reported impacts included improved self-confidence, reduced sense of isolation and a greater sense of community.
- 20 of 21 (95%) reported improved confidence in using creative writing to support other women living with HIV.
- Nearly three quarters (8/11) said they would benefit from refresher sessions six months (4), nine months (1) and one year (3) after initial MM training.
- 8 of 11 (73%) also expressed interest in becoming trainers.

For me the training was just perfect as we were all able to talk openly without fear or judgement. It was wonderful, they were amazing (MM3)



Host Organisations

- Of the 8 host organisations approached, 4 responded and all the programme managers (PMs) reported the training as valuable, engaging and relevant.
- They described the programme as opening up an empowering dialogue between women.
- Key challenges included limited training time, participants' changing circumstances, volunteer retention, limited referrals from services and clinics, suitable timing and person-centred ongoing training for MMs.

Conclusion

Evaluation of the training programme was positive at an individual and at an organisational level 6 months after completion of training. Developing a community-based network of trained MMs provides an invaluable sustainable resource to provide psychosocial support and complement clinical care of pregnant women living with HIV across the UK. A training of trainers' workshop will be conducted before the end of 2017.

We would be interested in doing further training with you in the future, should there be an opportunity. The biggest challenge is working with the mentors to offer them the type of mentoring they would like to do and at suitable times whilst working within our limited resources (PM4)

Most of the African women we approached were very enthusiastic and understood well the aims of the project, but others couldn't quite grasp the concept and in particular how they themselves might benefit (PM3)

The young women want to carry on creative writing as an activity. However, being so small; we do not have money to put into that (PM1)

This training has opened up dialogues that mothers can use to support newly diagnosed women or pregnant women (PM2)

Not as much of an impact as I expected, but this is due to only 2 referrals of pregnant women since the end of the training and also the difficulty in retaining volunteers (PM3)