

Doing things Differently – Making
Cancer Screening More Accessible

Smears Means Years Project 2022-23

May 2023

Background

In 2019/20 Healthwatch Bolton undertook a piece of work which highlighted low uptakes of cervical cancer screening in the Bolton area. [Cervical Cancer Screening Project Report](#). This report highlighted barriers to accessing cervical cancer screening, people's experiences, cultural beliefs, stigma, and misconceptions. These combined issues significantly impacted on incidences of lower cervical screening uptakes amongst women from minority ethnic communities. Numerous recommendations within the report were made to help inform and understand cultural awareness within health and social care services.



In 2021, Bolton GP Federation sought to address some of the recommendations. The main objective of the Smears Means Years project was to look at how barriers to attending cervical cancer screening can be addressed. This led to the formation of "The Rumworth project" in 2021, which became a joint collaborative partnership and community led initiative, facilitated by Bolton GP Federation supported by Answer Cancer and Healthwatch Bolton.

The Healthwatch Bolton report from 2020, recommended that cervical cancer screening should be made more accessible, ensuring access is more tailored to clients and an understanding of the religious and cultural aspects that can stop women, particularly from ethnically diverse backgrounds, from attending screening. From this a 'drop-in screening clinic was planned - the first one being at Garnet Fold GP surgery. Two women attended this clinic and useful conversations were held, to encourage and support women in accessing screening.

The drop-in screening clinics were set up to help offer a more personalised approach to cervical cancer screening, allowing convenient drop in sessions, with no appointments required, flexibility around school times and work, utilising community locations for easy access, with language support available currently offered in Urdu or Gujarati.

The clinics also offered an opportunity for women from diverse communities to come together, to have a hot drink and a chat with team members or nursing staff for clinical advice.

Some women greatly fear cervical cancer screening, this is an opportunity for the nursing team to help understand why this happens. Unfortunately, there are additional barriers to consider which require further help and support due to sensitivity around incidences of sexual abuse and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Areas of deprivation across Bolton which included Rumworth and Halliwell neighbourhoods were identified in having the lowest uptakes or no responses to cervical cancer screening invitations. These became focus areas and moreover also identified a higher percentage of women from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds.

Following On – 2022-23

Since then the project has grown and gone from strength to strength. The 'Rumworth Project' became "Smears Means Years" as the project broadened to other areas across Bolton. Throughout 2022, the drop in clinics led by Bolton GP Federation continued to follow a unique, non-clinical holistic approach which has greatly helped to break down stigma, cultural barriers, misconceptions and has provided advice and information on cervical cancer screening, addressing language barriers and has generated important dialogs and conversations empowering women to access health opportunities and understand more about their own health and wellbeing.

Working with our local community to raise awareness

Our role within the project is to network and use our connections and contacts within the community to help identify seldom heard from groups and ethnically diverse minority groups and locations for outreach screening sessions. We had the opportunity to further promote the work of Healthwatch Bolton and listen to experiences, comments and feedback around health and social care services in Bolton.

Throughout 2022/2023 the project reached out further to seldom heard from groups and marginalised communities, developing partnerships with organisations, charities, community groups and even primary and secondary schools.

As the project was developing more health needs were being addressed and met. The project secured venues in local primary schools which included:

-  Sy Bede's
-  Sunning Hill Primary School
-  Ladybridge High School



In addition to the cervical cancer screening information and testing, Bolton GP Federation also offered blood pressure and BMI checks, height and weight checks, Flu and Covid vaccinations. Answer Cancer offered information on additional cancer screening which included bowel and breast screening.

Working in partnership with other many other charities, organisations and community groups has helped us to enable Bolton GP Federation to reach out and identify potential screening clinics and engage with marginalised communities via community outlets which include:

- ✚ Fleet House
- ✚ The Salvation Army
- ✚ All Souls
- ✚ Changing life directions
- ✚ Eves Space
- ✚ Sapphire (Learning Disability Clinic)
- ✚ Bolton Deaf Society
- ✚ Sunning Hill school
- ✚ Ladybridge high school

Summary of venues and cervical cancer screening statistics

Overall, the nurses from Bolton GP Federation performed 75 cervical cancer screening tests (smears), many of the women were greatly overdue and some had never had a cervical screening test done before. Many health and wellbeing concerns were also highlighted at the clinics.

Venues	Date	Smears performed
Rumworth Pilot Garnet Fold Health Centre		2
BCOM	02/03/2022	8
BCOM	13/06/2022	4
All Souls	14/07/2022	7
Urban Outreach	30/08/2022	4
All Souls	04/10/2022	11
Sapphire (LD Clinic)	05/10/2022	3
Fleet House	03/11/2022	3
St Bede Academy	14/11/2022	6
Deaf Soc	06/12/2022	1
CDL Halliwell	14/12/2022	13
Sunning Hill Primary	18/01/2022	2
Fleet House	22/02/2003	3
Salvation Army	01/03/2023	4
Lady Bridge	29/03/2023	1
Former Baptist Church	04/04/2023	3
Total		75

Case Study

Mrs S aged 28

Attends a community centre for respite and peer support following domestic abuse. She arrived in UK 3 years ago, speaks no English and has little understanding of British Life.

Mrs S attended the drop-in smear clinic, she has never had this screening done before despite receiving invites by her GP. Mrs S has no understanding of what the screening is about or the importance, she felt very anxious and frightened about the procedure.

Nurses from Bolton GP federation spent time reassuring and educating Mrs S on the importance of screening and she was offered a test. Mrs S said she was not comfortable having it on the day, but will now make the appointment as she understands the importance and how straight forward it is. Having this knowledge and information explained to Mrs S, she managed to have her cervical cancer screening test done, and afterwards she shared the knowledge and experience with four other women who have also had their first smear test done. One of whom found out she has needed a further follow-up test.

Feedback/Comments

"Staff were really helpful, learned the importance of smear tests and will let family and friends know"
Raesa (65)

"The clinics allowed marginalised Indian and Pakistani women to attend, learn more about smear clinics in a culturally appropriate environment".

"I think the 'pop up' cervical smear tests are a really good idea. The client group that we have at Fleet House have often led chaotic lifestyles so things like regular appointments and check ups are often missed so bringing the service to the residents rather than telling the residents to 'go somewhere else' for their health matters is making sure that the residents are not missing out on essential health appointments and check-ups".

'I work within a health and social care setting however due to the pressures of being a carer I kept putting my screening appointment off even though I had a reminder. Within my role I encourage people to access screening but always put myself last. The pop-up clinic gave me the opportunity to have my cervical screening done at a convenient time, no waiting and within a friendly relaxed environment'

Future Plans

Bolton GP Federation have submitted a business case to request that the project is able to continue to provide this much needed service in the community. Screening is a vital public health strategy for the early identification of cervical, prostate, breast, and colorectal cancers as it allows for more timely access to treatment and care, which directly impacts survival and long-term clinical outcomes. For example, according to NHS England, if every person with a cervix regularly attended a smear test, 83% of cervical cancer deaths could be prevented. Around 2,700 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in England each year, but the NHS screening programme helps save around 5,000 lives each year [NHS England](#)

In addition to this, Bolton GP Federation have also set up a Wellbeing Hive in Bolton town centre, where people can walk in to receive blood pressure checks, vaccinations and other health advice. There will also be opportunities for cancer screening. Further venues are being identified throughout Bolton.

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