

The Role of Community Champions in Supporting Communicable Disease Management – a case study

Emily Strong (Public Health, Barnsley Council), Ben Brannan (Public Health, Barnsley Council), Rebecca Clarke (Public Health, Barnsley Council), David Bagguley (UK Health Security Agency)

Introduction

- Communicable diseases such as measles pose significant public health challenges.
- Community champions, who are trusted individuals within their communities, can utilise existing social networks and life experience to bridge the gap between services and communities.
- In the Yorkshire & Humber (Y&H) region, there have been several cases that have required management by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).
- This case study explores the impact of community champions in managing communicable diseases, with a focus on the Romanian community in Barnsley, UK.

Context

- Measles is a highly infectious communicable disease associated with serious complications.
- Over the last year, there has been a national rise in measles cases.
- There have been several local cases across South Yorkshire.
- The Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine is recommended to protect against measles.
- Post-pandemic, uptake of all childhood immunisations including MMR has declined.
- There are pockets of low MMR uptake in Barnsley concentrated within our migrant communities which poses a risk for disease transmission.

Methods

- This case study was conducted in collaboration with UKHSA and Barnsley Council.
- A strengthening participation champion approach (a public health intervention) was applied. This approach can be used to train champions as connectors, boosting community involvement in health protection activities.
- A Romanian community champion was enlisted to support the management of a measles case within the community (see Figure 1).

Results

- The role of the Romanian community champion was to:
 - Facilitate communication between the family and UKHSA
 - Encourage information exchange between all parties without confusion or prejudice
- Several positive outcomes were reported (see Figure 2).
- Applying a community champion approach has several wider impacts including enhanced trust and communication, increased knowledge and awareness of the community, reduction in health inequalities and improved partnership working.

Figure 1

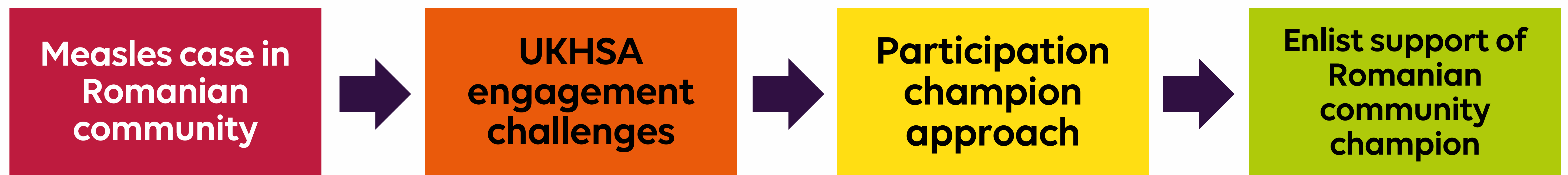


Figure 2

Outcomes

- Open communication between Romanian community and UKHSA
- Information exchanged to support UKHSA risk assessments
- Reduced risk of disease transmission amongst Romanian community

Impact

- Improved awareness and understanding of Romanian community
- Enhanced safety for local community
- Establishing trusting relationships with Romanian communities

Conclusion

Community champions are key connectors who can promote health, improve wellbeing, and reduce inequalities in communities. Their ability to utilise social networks and life experience makes them effective in addressing barriers to engagement and bridging the gap between services and communities. Embedding community champion approaches within local health and care systems can increase capacity and effectiveness in supporting local communities.

Acknowledgments

On behalf of Barnsley Council, we would like to formally acknowledge the Romanian Community Champion who supported this work.

Contact information

HealthProtectionTeam@barnsley.gov.uk