**A Living Tradition Women’s Wellbeing Report**

Background

A Living Tradition has worked with the eastern European Roma community in Gateshead since early 2018. Early on it became apparent that the community faced a number of issues. One of the largest was that of poor mental health, particularly among women. Many of thre women in the community suffered from poor mental health as a result of feelings of isolation and the pressures of navigating life in what was still in many respects , a somewhat alien environment. The community is a very poor and marginalised community and ithis poverty and isolation have sontributed to members of the community having poor mental health.

There are also two major barriers lying between the community and the support that they need. One is the language barrier, as they are an immigrant community whose first language is not English. The second is the result of conditioning from the bad expereinces in eastern europe where prejudice and sicrimination against the Roma are rife. This has tended to make it less likely that members of the community would go to get the support that they need, as they are used to being rejected and not given the help they requitre.

Then mental health issues were further compunded by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which made people feel even more isolated with the Lockdown as well as caused even greater fears about money and in some instances there were also concerns about domestic violence. There were also many concerns about the dangers of the pandemic itself. All of this helped to increase mental helath concerns in the community.

The project

A Living Tradition began a new project on Friday Friday 17th September. In the first session staff from Tyneside Mind and female members of the Gateshead Roma Community came together at Integration station and discussed the five ways to wellbeing.

These are as follows: a) be active b) take notice c) connect d) give e) learning

The participants discussed what each of these means and how they could do more to help themselves. The group then did some mindful art, this was facilitated through Betty Hill.

At the end of the session Ithe group were asked what they would like from the remaining sessions and they said definitely more art. They also expressed an interest in these topics; food and mood, sleep, depression, stress and anxiety.

 It was reported that Irma and Zaneta Karchnakova were great, translating for the clients throughout the session.

In another session, the theme was Stress and Self Care. We talked about what things make us feel stressed, what stress feels like, the stress bucket then self care – what is self care and what kind of things we can do for our own self care.

 The second part of the session was art. The group created garland pictures which framed positive words/ reminders. This was done to help the partcipants to think in more positive ways.

The following week there was a sesssion about thinking about depression - thinking about how to help people with depression and drawing a picture of depression ‘soup’

 On another occasion there was a session on dealin with anxiety followed by some in-chair yoga.

The last two sessions took place in Tyneside Mind’s office. This was done, so as to help the members of the Roma community feel more comfortable about visiting it, so that it would be easier for members of the community to deal directly with Tynesdie Mind in the future.

Drawing in the Sessions

Session one - mindful drawing

The group chose from a number of natural materials; stones, shells, driftwood and dried flower skeletons. They were encouraged to explore the natural patterns and shapes using fine line drawing pens on paper.

Session two - watercolour painting

The group explored the various shapes, colours and patterns from a selection of leaves. The session involved mindful observations using pencil and acrylic paint on watercolour paper.

Session three - positive affirmation garlands

Using positive words and phrases explored in the stress and self care session, the group created garland pictures which framed their chosen postive text. Some women used both English and Czech in the pictures which enabled us to chat about their first language.

This Wellbeing project was an important project in two respects:

a) The project has had benefits for the partciapants in the respect that they have been throiugh a number of activities, which will have helped them.

b) The project has also strengthened ties betwee the eastern European Roma community and Tynesde Mind. One of the biggest issues in dealing with the mental health issues within the community has been helping members of the community to both know where to get support and to be able to feel that they can trust service providers who can help them. This project will have helped to build up that rrust between Tyneside Mind and the Gateshead Roma community.

Peter Sagar, A Living Tradition CIC, December 2021

**Some of the drawings from the sessions:**







