British Heart Foundation chooses Nottingham to run a unique health awareness programme – and local people are at the heart of it

The British Heart Foundation has chosen Nottingham to run a unique health awareness programme and the first of its kind outside London – aimed at raising awareness of heart health in the African Caribbean community.

**Crucially, many people don’t realise that their ethnicity makes them more at risk of heart and circulatory disease and that’s what the programme aims to tackle.**

The national charity is teaming up with local organisations Bright Ideas Nottingham, MonOlisa and BME Cancer Communities plus a team of local volunteers called the Love Hearts to deliver the programme, which includes awareness-raising events and activities designed to be relevant to people from an African Caribbean background.

The programme will also raise awareness of the British Heart Foundation itself, as many people think of it as a ‘charity shop’ and don’t realise it provides a range of services including information on all aspects of heart health, Heart Nurses who treat people in their own homes and funding for researchers.

**Black people more at risk**

Cardiovascular diseases like coronary heart disease and stroke are the main cause of death in the UK and people from some ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be affected, including those from African Caribbean communities.

The British Heart Foundation is researching how cardiovascular disease is linked to ethnicity and its findings so far suggest there are many possible reasons why some ethnic minorities are more at risk including genetic make up, cultural and social practices and risk factors like obesity and diabetes.

For example, African Caribbean communities are twice as likely to have a stroke as people of European origin. They also have the highest risk of high blood pressure of any ethnic minority in the UK and they’re twice as likely to develop diabetes than the general UK population.

The charity also found some evidence to suggest there are ethnic inequalities in the way that people access healthcare and treatment, whilst measurements like body mass index, used to monitor people’s health, are less useful for non-white populations with different body mass ratios.

**Ali Orhan, Project Manager for BME Communities at the British Heart Foundation says:**

*“The fact that one in four African Caribbean adults don’t realise their ethnicity increases their risk of health problems that can put their heart health on the line is very worrying.*

*The good news is that you can make simple changes to your lifestyle, such as reducing the amount of salt you eat and getting more active to help you lead a long and healthy life.*

*The challenge now is to make sure African Caribbean communities take on board just how important these changes could be.”*

**The programme and the Love Hearts**

Bright Ideas Nottingham has recruited and trained a special team of volunteers from Nottingham’s African Caribbean communities, known as the Love Hearts, to support a diverse range of awareness raising events and activities being run by Bright Ideas and the British Heart Foundation.

**Christine Ricketts, Love Hearts Coordinator, Bright Ideas explains:**

*“The Love Hearts is a group of lively local volunteers who are committed and passionate about engaging with communities to promote the different ways they can be healthy. We’ll be promoting ‘heart health’ through a range of fun activities.”*

For example, volunteers will be handing out information packs on the street and at community venues and events.

They will also help to run activities like Reggaerobics v Zumba exercise classes, the first class of its kind in Nottingham designed to encourage people to get active and be healthier. To find out more and to book a place, please call Bright Ideas on 0115 837 9474 (Monday to Thursday during office hours) or email events@brightideasnottingham.co.uk

Plus cooking demonstrations and food-tasting events at two of Nottingham’s African Caribbean restaurants – Chez Coor’s and Jamaican Ways – to promote the programme’s book of healthy African Caribbean recipes, championed by celebrity chef Patty Dumplin (a larger than life character created for the programme by MonOlisa).

The restaurants will also play host to events based on the popular TV programme ‘Come Dine With Me’, which will be called ‘Come Nyam With Me’ after the Jamaican word to eat. The first of these will run from 12th to 19th November from 7pm to 9pm at Chez Coor’s, followed by another event at Jamaican Ways from 26th November to 3rd December. Bright Ideas Nottingham will film the events to help raise awareness of healthy eating African Caribbean style.

In addition, the Love Hearts and the British Heart Foundation will be running training sessions for anyone interested in finding out more about the issues raised by the programme, whether they’re from an African Caribbean community themselves or work closely with communities as part of their job.

For instance, they’ll be training 100 people in life-saving resuscitation skills.

They’ve also put together a training toolkit called ‘Pass it On’ which will be available to anyone who wants to find out more.

**Rose Thompson from local organisation BME Cancer Communities, a partner in the programme, says:**

*“As the British Heart Foundation’s research shows, your ethnicity can play a big part in your health.*

*It can also determine how you access healthcare services.*

*For example, very few people from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities attend cardiac rehabilitation programmes.*

*By working alongside communities themselves and through the amazing insight and dedication of the Love Hearts volunteers I’m hopeful we can really help to tackle some of these issues.*

*It’s fantastic that Nottingham is benefiting from this unique programme and hopefully it will help to save lives, not just now, but in the future too.*

**Christine concludes:**

 *For the Love Hearts, volunteering has helped them to meet new people, learn new skills and gain confidence. More importantly, the work will enable volunteers to strengthen their connection to the community and really get the message across to people that making healthy changes to their lifestyle can improve their heart health and help them to lead a longer life.”*

To find out more call Lisa Robinson from Bright Ideas on 0115 837 9474, email lisa@brightideasnottingham.co.uk or visit [www.thelovehearts.wordpress.com](http://www.thelovehearts.wordpress.com)