

we know best



The H team, part of the Coventry-based Grapevine, was nominated for a community care award in 2003. Since then, the team has been spreading the word on all aspects of healthy living



At Grapevine we wanted to do something about the poor health experienced by people with learning difficulties. We took a self-advocacy approach because often those who have most influence over how healthy one's lifestyle is are not health workers but our families and friends. The vision behind the H team is that people who have learning disabilities are experts on what it is like and the problems they face. We believe that learning disabled people have the capacity to develop supporting, teaching and leadership roles in health promotion.

Our first job was to enable people with learning difficulties to deliver health promotion training to their peers in a way that was lively, effective and gave them maximum control over how it was done. With funding from Coventry Teaching and Primary Care Trust, six people were supported and trained to deliver key messages such as healthy eating and healthy hearts, male and female cancers, especially testicular and breast cancer, smoking, sexual health and contraception. The group choose television game shows, chat shows and quizzes as a fun medium which is familiar to almost everyone. They also created their own games, icebreakers, role plays and their own dance and music sequences. More than 150 workshops were delivered to people in day services, residential homes, colleges and adult education centres. People who took part in a breast cancer awareness session told the team: 'I never knew I had to take my bra off' and 'I thought the nurse checked them'.

Leaflet success

The H team's success led Coventry's TPCT to ask members to produce

positive images



Above: H team members, Manjeet Stone and Lawrence Wilburn.
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a number of accessible leaflets on health services. There are 12 leaflets in all, including going to a psychiatrist, going to a GP and going to the dentist, using a simple step-by-step photo-story format. They were supported to organise this new development of their work, making contacts with Coventry venues, arranging visits, finding out the 'story' they need to tell in their leaflets, acting out photo-stories, and the final design of the leaflets.

The H team is currently recruiting new members and training new peer health promoters and working with Coventry's health facilitation team. They've helped to make the new hand-held medical records accessible and produced an easy-to-understand leaflet on health checks. In the spring, the H team will join the health facilitation team in helping to deliver a programme of healthy lifestyle workshops.

Sherryl Gaskell, health facilitation team manager, commented: 'The H team has been instrumental in the development of the health facilitation in Coventry.

The team have supported us in raising the

awareness of the health needs of people with a learning disability and a team member will be joining our 'Modern Matron' steering group looking at developing collaborative protocols/care pathways to ensure that a person's journey from admission to discharge from hospital is a positive experience.'

Finally, our aim for this year is to set up a health buddies scheme so that instead of just giving people information through training, we will be supporting them as well ■

