

Mwamba Project Evaluation

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The organisational committee was comprised of:

Colleen Macauley, community leader

Anne Chilton, Relationships Scotland

Martha Baillie, Waverley Care

Jonathan Ssentamu, Waverley Care

We express particular gratitude to the Mwamba participants who took part in the focus groups for their willingness to share views which will help the programme develop and grow.

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1. Executive Summary

Background

Mwamba came about through discussions a Waverley Care African Health Project outreach worker was having in African hair salons and barbershops. It was learned that staff members in these shops wanted to be supportive and helpful but felt out of their depth; particularly around relationship problems, both between adults and between parents and children.

Waverley Care approached Relationships Scotland about developing a training programme that would help staff of the salons and barbershops. With input from the African outreach worker and a salon owner, the Mwamba course was developed as a means to provide skilled listening training while remaining sensitive to African cultures.

Methodology

The views regarding the Mwamba pilot training programme were gathered through three focus groups with training participants and meetings with members of the Mwamba organisational committee. Focus group participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Need for Mwamba

At present, many Africans are approaching mainstream services and feeling that their needs have not been met. Africans do not feel at home in western culture and can feel they are being judged when trying to engage services. If they do not achieve desired results, they are unlikely to return to the service to see the resolution of their problem or issue.

Often Africans will not know where to go or whom to contact whether it is to access services like immigration, housing, medical care and mental health support, or simply activities for their children.

Mwamba participants identify communication as one of the key barriers to successfully accessing services and feel non-Africans in Scotland will not understand the cultural aspects of the issues they are trying to resolve. Course participants see the Mwamba training as a means to helping other Africans bridge communication gaps.

Family unity is of central importance to most Africans and living in Scotland places various stresses on the family unit. The Mwamba training is seen as useful in: helping parents understand children's issues growing up in Scotland; understanding how gender roles are different in Scotland; and understanding cultural perceptions of smacking.

It was recognised that while there are no major differences in the counselling skills used in listening, the main difference is in the understanding of the context and nuances of the cultural backgrounds for the person being listened to. To have African skilled listeners serving Africans makes communication easier between the two people and it alleviates stigma an African may feel in seeking help with personal issues.

Mwamba training and outcomes

Overall feedback from Mwamba training participants indicates that outcomes outlined in the application to the Big Lottery Fund were achieved. These are:

- helping hairdressers with the feeling of being overwhelmed with the information they take in from their clients
- helping hairdressers become more effective listeners
- helping hairdressers provide more support to their clients
- helping hairdressers feel better equipped and supported

By the end of the training, people said that they felt energised because the learning will help them listen better to clients and make a difference supporting people in their communities.

Design and development of Mwamba training

The course facilitators from Relationships Scotland needed to understand who would be trained and to adapt training to suit the venues where listening to their clients would take place. They had to take into consideration different communication styles between cultures, such as eye contact.

In designing the Mwamba course, facilitators also had to look at how they discussed issues that are not usually openly talked about within African culture, such as sex. The training was continually adapted and evolved combining what the facilitators knew were necessary areas to cover and the group's knowledge on how to present these in the most culturally appropriate ways. This was achieved with trust building and good communication, and a willingness to learn on all parts.

Views on Mwamba training

The training course confirmed for participants the need for Mwamba in the communities. It was seen as a much needed way to help Africans deal with all of the issues they face here in Scotland.

Mwamba participants feel they will be able to tap into the diversity of African communities and communicate what is working for them, so that all communities make a contribution by seeing that services are tailored to them.

Training highlighted listening skills and taught participants alternatives to injecting their own views and judgements into a session. The training also showed participants that there were many skills they already possessed and gave insight into how to further improve these skills.

The training was also unifying for the group and they built a lot of trust in the five sessions. People felt safe in opening up to each other and by the end of the training, they felt much better about their ability to take the programme into their communities.

Future of Mwamba

Members of the group have already begun networking with other groups and there is interest in the communities. The group will meet regularly and receive guidance from the course facilitators. The feeling is that there is energy and enthusiasm for Mwamba and they want to maintain this momentum.

Further training will include more work on keeping personal judgements about difficult topics such as gender roles and LGBT issues out of the listening sessions. Continued Mwamba

training will look further at the issues of trust and confidentiality, and areas where this may need to be breached, such as suicide and child protection. Skilled listeners will develop a better understanding of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and in turn help people in their communities understand it.

Waverley Care will offer one of its rooms as a safe space for people to have confidential, in depth conversations. This will be on Mondays, when most hairdressers are free. The group wants eventually to establish a location independent of Waverley Care or Relationships Scotland. Members envisage a community centre which would also offer social and cultural events, alleviating the stigma people might feel being seen going into the premises.

There is a realisation that this takes time and that at present, Africans are a new community in Scotland and not well linked enough to take this as an immediate next step. Smaller steps in expanding the programme were advised by members of the organisational committee.

To monitor the listening process, the organisational committee will develop a questionnaire for Mwamba clients to show what they felt about the experience of talking with a trained listener.

The emotional wellbeing of Mwamba skilled listeners will be an important long-term issue. Mwamba skilled listeners will be able to check in with Relationships Scotland counsellors if they are feeling overwhelmed, or if they just want to clarify the way they dealt with a client on a given issue.

The organisational committee also recommends expanding Mwamba beyond Edinburgh and Lothian, into other urban areas, with the service to be delivered by volunteers situated within an organisation that would be appropriate for Africans.

Eventually, the Mwamba training should be delivered by one or two properly trained and qualified African counsellors. Some of the Mwamba participants are interested in pursuing professional qualifications in counselling.

Overall, the group feels very positive about Mwamba as a creative way to approach challenges that now look like they can be overcome.

2. Methodology

The views regarding the Mwamba pilot training programme were gathered through three focus groups with training participants and meetings with members of the Mwamba organisational committee.

Focus group participation was voluntary but well attended by course participants. In total six women and one man completed the training. Participants were assured of anonymity, given an opportunity to ask questions about the research, and assured that, if they decided to terminate their involvement in the focus group for any reason, it would not interfere with their participation in the training.

One focus group was conducted before the training began; one after two training sessions; and the third focus group followed the fifth and final training session. To help assure anonymity, at the start of each focus group, participants were asked to supply a name, not their own, which could be used as attribution for any quotes used. Some participants selected a different name for each focus group.

An audio recording of each focus group was made and the sessions were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher is the only person who had access to the audio recordings and the transcripts. Upon completion of the report, all audio files and transcripts of the focus groups were deleted.

The Mwamba organisational committee consisted of:

- Colleen Macauley, community leader
- Anne Chilton, Relationships Scotland
- Martha Baillie, Waverley Care
- Jonathan Ssentamu, Waverley Care

3. Background

The concept for Mwamba came about through contacts Waverley Care African Health Project has established as part of its outreach work in Edinburgh. The organisation has been delivering HIV and sexual health services, including condom provision, through African hair salons and barbershops. In conversation with staff in these premises we learned more about difficulties clients were talking about with them; staff did their best to be supportive and helpful but often felt out of their depth or concerned that they were not giving the right advice or information. They particularly raised issues about relationship problems, both between adults and between parents and children. In discussions about signposting or referring to counselling or relationship support organisations the staff felt that Africans were very unlikely to make use of these without some bridge building. As a result of this Waverley Care contacted Relationships Scotland and a meeting was facilitated between the two organisations and a group of hairdressers.

Through a number of conversations the discussion broadened to talk about challenges Africans living in Scotland have in being able to access a wide range of services, or to do so with comfort and ease. Removed from the culture of their home countries, many Africans feel cut off from support networks and find difficulty in negotiating systems here in Scotland; when Africans are unable to resolve an issue once they have contacted a service, they are unlikely to return to that service.

Most Africans do not share the western concept of counselling or therapy, so they will be less likely to pursue traditional western counselling if they or a family member has mental health needs. The hairdressers identified a need for a service that would be mindful of African cultures and communication styles.

Mwamba was developed therefore as a way for African hairdressers, barbers, and other concerned members of African communities to gain listening and signposting skills to help clients who raise serious issues in the casual conversation that takes place in the salon or shop. Hairdressers and barbers were thought of first because the shops are informal community gathering places where people feel greater ease in opening up about issues they face. These issues include, but are not limited to, housing, immigration, sport and leisure, domestic and family issues, and mental health. While many hairdressers are happy to listen to clients and want to help, they feel they were lacking important skills and knowledge to assist their clients.

The views presented in this evaluation are those expressed by participants in the pilot training programme and the members of the Mwamba organisational committee. They include reasons participants were interested in taking the training; what they learned and how effective the training was; and how the programme should be further developed.

4. Need for Mwamba

4.1. Access to services

Africans take pride in their national and ethnic identities and these identities are prominent in highlighting the need for the Mwamba programme. At present, many Africans are approaching mainstream services and feeling that their needs have not been met. When they approach services they feel different and that they will be perceived differently.

There are issues that the black minority group face but they're not actually able to speak up to people, the citizens of the country they're living in. Probably because they don't know how to go about it because they feel like they're not from the same place. It's the approach and they feel they're not actually confident that this person will be able to deal with their problems.

Chloe, Mwamba training participant

There can be a clash between the foreign culture and the culture here. After a clash we are left wondering how to handle a situation.

Clarissa, Mwamba training participant

Africans do not feel at home in western culture and can feel they are being judged when trying to engage services. If they do not achieve desired results, they are unlikely to return to the service to see the resolution of their problem or issue.

We see people facing various issues around housing, immigration, mental health and so on but what we see is people come back to us in terms of you know, 'can you help?'

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

Often Africans will not know where to go or whom to contact to access services that most people in Scotland take for granted. Sometimes they will have a need for more important services like immigration, housing issues, medical care and mental health issues. Accessing simple services for their children can be a challenge as well. Two participants shared experiences of trying to find dance programmes and football teams for their children. The parent who sought a dance programme wanted someone to be involved who would share her daughter's cultural and ethnic heritage, which she identified as important. Unable to find this, she gave up on her search. The other parent searched for a football team when her daughter expressed interest in the sport, but could only find options that were too expensive for her household. By the time she found an affordable one it was too late.

I found somebody that could help link us to a junior team but by then, she is no longer interested. If we had such an organisation that would be able to know where to direct us to. It's not only about our marital and home problems but general problems too.

Antonia, Mwamba training participant

Signposting in cases like this was identified by the group as one of the most important functions needed by their communities. They point out that it is not always something serious like marital problems that people need help with. Mwamba participants did not feel comfortable that their knowledge level about signposting was strong enough to be effective.

Sometimes we don't have the skills to support these people. We know services are available, we don't know how good they are. You could point somebody to a service, yet you don't know exactly what they are going to offer.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

4.2. Communication

Mwamba participants identify communication as one of the key barriers to successfully accessing services. Africans feel much less comfortable approaching Europeans with issues. They feel non-Africans in Scotland will not understand the cultural aspects of the issues they are trying to resolve. If they can approach an African instead, they feel their culture will be understood and appreciated.

To actually express yourself, you'd rather go to your fellow African. You go to the GP and you don't really want to say, I'm feeling this and if there are any problems in the house, you'd rather not.

Gigi, Mwamba training participant

Participants also feel Mwamba will be the start of many conversations in their communities and helping people deal with stigmatising issues will be a major benefit.

Stigma comes about because we don't talk about things. But in a place where people can talk about things and if we have workshops and get people talking about really sensitive topics, it can be less stigma -- a good thing.

Kendra, Mwamba training participant

Course participants also identify another way in which communication can be a barrier when accessing services and they feel it is something Africans need to take responsibility for changing, and with the Mwamba training they feel they can assist people in learning new communication skills and styles. Because the cultures do not always mesh there can be a break-down in communication and an African person who is not getting the desired results, can be seen as aggressive.

If I'm aggressive I won't get what I want. Working with the community to find out if I'm not getting services how can I talk differently, to challenge without being aggressive?

Antonia, Mwamba training participant

Perceived aggression can be problematic for Africans in other ways as well. One participant recalled a time when she was called to school because her sons were being aggressive. She was tasked with trying to help school officials understand that they were not being aggressive, they were just loud, which was more in keeping with the way children play in her culture. She sees Mwamba training as an important way to help bridge similar gaps in understanding cultures.

4.3. Families and children

Family unity is of central importance to most Africans and living in Scotland places various stresses on the family unit.

Cultural differences between Scotland and the home countries abound. Strong differences are seen in perceptions of marriage and family, and the extent to which they are supported (or not) by extended family. One participant described a situation with her ex-husband that required police intervention. As she dealt with this, she was mindful that word could get back to family in Africa and prompt disapproval. She also worried about the effect it would have on her children and it took a long time for her to feel she could take action. She feels Mwamba will help people reconcile the differences between the two cultures.

We think about the wider family and we don't think about ourselves. And that is wrong. There are things we need to keep from the European culture and things we need to keep from our own. It's finding the right way.

Antonia, Mwamba training participant

Another participant observes that family expectations can make it difficult to leave violent, troubled marriages. Even when the marriage poses a risk of death, the family may not understand and a woman could find herself alone. She sees Mwamba as a way to educate people that there are other options.

As Africans it's got to be about me, my kids. Your family might not understand these things and we need to educate people about these things. Our role here is not to disconnect people but to unify.

Sandra, Mwamba training participant

4.4. African men

African men are under their own pressures living in Scotland. Gender issues were raised in the training sessions and the group considered Mwamba as a means to help men better communicate their feelings. It was acknowledged that men do talk about their feelings but usually come at it by way of something else like football or drinking. The talk goes back to family and children and men ask for advice when they know another man has been through a similar experience, but this is not always effective.

They can ask another man how he's dealt with this. If it makes sense they will use the solution but if it doesn't they will go back to their old ways.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

The group identified listening to men and helping the men listen to each other, themselves, and their children as a necessary intervention to help them understand how things need to be different here. It will help with ways to strike the right balance between home country ways of the man being in charge and adapting to life in Scotland where the woman often works outside the home, but is still often responsible for the childcare.

4.5. Respect for elders

Many Africans find it difficult to accept certain things about Scottish culture and one of these is the ways in which their children, being reared here, rebel against home country traditions. The group had widespread agreement that it was difficult to see children lacking respect for elders and they look to Mwamba to help them and others negotiate expected behaviours at home versus what their children will be exposed to at school and other places.

One participant shared her experience of coping with a Scotland born and raised nephew whose behaviour she found difficult to accept and she described his mindset as being like his school friends here. The nephew, like many of his peers wanted to go out at night, though she and his parents found that unacceptable. She eventually started listening to his explanations and feels Mwamba can help people improve relations with younger family members.

It's only now that when I sit and talk to him he says, '...the way I've been brought up, there are things I have to do with my upbringing here'. So it's made me feel closer to him because we've balanced it he's balanced his ways here and the culture of back home.

Gigi, Mwamba training participant

In realising that her nephew was living separate lives, one with family and one with friends, she came to accept her nephew, which helped him realise he would need to show respect for his elders in a different way.

African reverence for elders needs to be taken into consideration as participants learn counselling principles and techniques. As well as going to someone African, participants expressed a comfort in seeking the help of an elder. Traditional western counselling is not an accepted concept for many Africans and they would rather not confide in their GP about personal issues.

As Africans, we don't believe in counsellors. You go to a therapist. We don't believe in that. We'd rather have an elder, maybe a church elder you can go to and they sit you down.

Gigi, Mwamba training participant

4.6. Approaches to counselling

It was recognised that while there are no major differences in the counselling skills used in listening, the main difference is in the understanding of the context and nuances of the cultural backgrounds for the person being listened to. This would include how respect is shown, the ways in which people present their difficulties, and the meaning of those difficulties within the wider cultural context. Finding a counsellor who understands the cultural perspective of Africans will be key to the success of that professional relationship.

There's no difference as such, counselling is counselling but it's how you relate to the person. The person who comes in will now the person will relate to them and understand what the person is going through. Issues in your marriage, what we will see as the norm is different from a Scottish person. That's where the difference will be. Understanding the background.

Kim, Mwamba training participant

How Africans communicate with other people in Scotland can affect the outcomes of counselling sessions. To have African counsellors serving Africans makes communication easier between the two people and it alleviates stigma an African may feel in seeking help with personal issues.

There is an unspoken communication between African people. There is an understanding of what people have gone through. And there can be a difference in mannerisms. Various things are acceptable here, like eye-contact but people may not want to look at you. Counselling is hard, there's a lot of barriers that need to be broken down, shame and things like that, building trust. It's a shared cultural experience that is difficult to put into words. That non-verbal communication is picked up by someone who shares that culture. That sense of embarrassment or shame, it makes it just a little bit easier.

Kendra, Mwamba training participant

The need for men and women to have a place to seek help from elders was identified and participants point out the concept of going to elders for advice is not an exclusively African practice. While following familiar patterns of confiding in elders, they noted a risk, expressing that there is a thin line between trust and confidentiality. They know the elder they go to for help will understand what they are going through from a cultural perspective but they can often wonder after the fact if word of their problems is being spread.

Bringing it to the 21st century, maybe you'll think you've done something that you don't want everybody to know – there is that little breach just in case someone is thinking maybe this might be passed on.

Sandra, Mwamba training participant

Participants believe that when they are helping people, the Mwamba training will help balance the two needs of providing cultural perspective while maintaining confidentiality in a way that is consistent with European culture and western styles of counselling.

4.7. Smacking

One of the most discussed issues raised in the focus groups was African perspectives of 'smacking' children and how the practice is perceived here in Scotland. Participants identify it as a part of their culture and something they learned from their own parents but they realise it can be a barrier in adapting to a more Scottish way of life. This was acknowledged as one of the most difficult issues in which to find the right balance and participants look to Mwamba to help their communities achieve this.

Many Africans describe the practice as part of a loving relationship between parents and children and a means of instilling discipline in children.

I've never heard that parents smack their child and they've died, so they smack with love, not hatred. It's just a part of demonstration to show how angry you are. It's not like smacking becomes a hobby. It's part of our culture. We smack with love not with hatred. As the bible tells us, you use the right hand to beat your child, and your left had to draw your child to you for love. We find it very difficult to avoid that living here.

Antonia, Mwamba training participant

The group pointed out that as recently as a few decades ago, the issue would have been seen very differently here in Scotland and that smacking was an accepted practice in many western countries. It was acknowledged that there are still people in Scotland who find corporal punishment acceptable.

I've heard even just a year back that maybe we need to bring back the cane because the children were getting out of hand.

Sandra, Mwamba training participant

But the group generally agreed that the issue of smacking is something that definitely sets them apart from Scottish people and they expect that Mwamba will help with the issue. Group members feel there needs to be better communication on the issue. They see the discussions needing to take place with African parents.

Now people realise there are better ways to discipline a child. The challenge is telling African parents this is not the best way to do this. They think, 'I've got this right', so how are you going to tell me that in this culture, having kids on the street, telling off adults. Getting that balance is difficult.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

Better communication about smacking needs to take place with African children as well as adults.

You can smack your child before you realise you are doing it. Half the time we go wrong. You smack and you don't tell the child why you are doing it and they find themselves repeating what it was that made you smack them. It becomes a way of life.

Sandra, Mwamba training participant

Living in Scotland for years has led to some Africans seeing the issue of smacking from both their home country's cultural perspective and the Scottish perspective.

We become much more emotional than we used to be. If I go back home and I see a child being hit, I wouldn't like it... but once upon a time I was there and being hit and it didn't mean anything to me. These are the things we need to talk about and explain. This is what you need to do to integrate.

Gigi, Mwamba training participant

For the children being raised in Scotland, comparing the two cultures can raise questions of fairness and lead to questioning the culture of the home country.

For a child in the western world, you see that as something that is not supposed to happen. You compare that to your peers and wonder why they don't get smacked and I do. We have to move away from that because it's not working.

Sandra, Mwamba training participant

The importance of the issue of smacking in African cultures, and Mwamba's capacity to help the communities begin a conversation about better ways to discipline, cannot be emphasised too strongly. Waverley Care knows of several child protection cases where children have been removed from the home. Mwamba can help members of communities to understand Getting it

Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), Scotland's framework for protecting children, through schools, social services and other organisations.

Mwamba will be able to see that when discussing the issue of smacking, parents are supported and not judged because their cultural background is understood. Group participants feel that Mwamba will also help them recognise signs of stress and help parents before situations reach a crisis point.

5. Mwamba training and outcomes

5.1. Outcomes outlined in the application to the Big Lottery Fund

In the application for funding, several outcomes were mentioned as important to the group of hairdressers who would undergo training. They are:

- helping hairdressers with the feeling of being overwhelmed with the information they take in from their clients
- helping hairdressers become more effective listeners
- helping hairdressers provide more support to their clients
- helping hairdressers feel better equipped and supported

Overall feedback from Mwamba training participants indicates this was achieved. One participant referred to the Mwamba training as a bonus. Participants were confident that there would be support for them from Relationships Scotland as they took their new learning into their communities. They felt energised because the learning will help them listen better to clients and make a difference supporting people in the communities.

5.2. Design and development of Mwamba training

The main points course facilitators from Relationships Scotland needed to explore in the development of the training included both practical and cultural.

They had to understand who would be trained and the restrictions and constraints that might be around as the hairdressers in the main were working; and had to find times that took this into account. Facilitators had to consider the venue – where the listening would take place and then build consideration of that into the training – for example listening within a salon is different to listening one to one in a private room.

The facilitators had to consider language and how people speak. They had to understand the different way of listening and speaking within the different cultures. For example understanding the different use of eye contact; in western counselling this is considered to be an essential; in African culture not having eye contact is a sign of respect.

The design of the training required using some western skills and adapting them to the African context.

In designing the Mwamba course, facilitators also had to look at how they discussed issues that are not usually openly talked about within African culture, such as sex.

It was a continually adapting and evolving training in that as facilitators they knew the areas necessary to cover and the group developed the ways in which they could be covered in the most culturally appropriate ways.

The training then became a collaborative venture evolving to meet the needs of the work taking understanding, trust building and good communication, and a willingness to learn on all parts.

5.3. Views on Mwamba training

The training course confirmed for participants the need for Mwamba in the communities. It was seen as a much needed way to help Africans deal with all of the issues they face here in Scotland.

They see the programme as an effective way to communicate with Africans needing services.

Mwamba is like a mouthpiece to signpost and also to give counselling on how you deal with these issues. This training has done this for us because when it gets to the NHS or the council or other places where they have things set in place to meet our needs. Where we are not accessing these needs because we don't know how to access these needs, Mwamba steps in.

Fiona, Mwamba training participant

Mwamba participants also see the programme as a way to communicate with organisations that provide services for Africans, and eventually improve what is available to their communities.

It's a range of things policy makers need to know. One size doesn't fit all. As an African community we understand our community better than anybody else. We've seen it in the past where an organisation represents Africans but when you look at what has been delivered on behalf of Africans, it doesn't work and there is a lot of anger about what is not working for them.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

Mwamba participants feel they will be able to tap into the diversity of African communities and communicate what is working for them, so that all communities make a contribution by seeing that services are tailored to them.

Participants found the process interesting and were glad that topics they were uncomfortable discussing, such as sex, came up in the training. They were grateful to learn ways of listening to uncomfortable topics and learned that they had to put their own views, religious or otherwise, to the side if they were going to help people in their communities.

We've learned how not to be judgemental, to show empathy. My listening skills are going to be helpful.

Kim, Mwamba training participant

Injecting their own views and their own methods of problem solving into someone else's situation was identified as something Mwamba participants had been doing, but the training helped them find approaches that would be more helpful.

Learning to listen is one of the most important things about the training. It's different from the way we normally support people – where someone talks to you and you already have a solution. We learned, how do you listen and where do you show empathy? I feel much more able to take a step back and reflect on what people are saying.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

The training also showed participants that there were many skills they already possessed and had been using well. The training gave insight into how to further improve these skills. Listening to people was given as one example. Through the training, people learned how they were already listening effectively, but learned new listening skills that will help them better understand a client's situation and be more effective in helping the person work towards a solution. One participant said the training gave her skills to handle personal issues and repair a friendship.

5.4. Establishing trust in themselves and each other

The training required people to come up with different scenarios of situations they had dealt with or heard about. The role-play gave them confidence in handling these situations and helped them to feel they could trust themselves as they tried to help clients.

The training was also unifying for the group and they built a lot of trust in the five sessions. People found the group improved the way it worked together. People felt safe in opening up to each other and they felt they were being listened to differently. By the end of the training, they felt much better about their ability to take the programme into their communities.

The training in a way is a counselling session for us because people are bringing up all this stuff and trusting each other.

Kendra, Mwamba training participant

Group members feel confident that they all have the skills to help fellow Africans normalise their feelings and know that there is nothing wrong with feeling frustration, particularly when it comes to family difficulties and issues with children and teenagers. The group feels the listening skills they have improved will aid in helping clients work towards solutions.

Generally, domestic issues were difficult topics for Mwamba participants, but an important part of the training. Many of these issues were interconnected: abuse, partner break down, gender roles, other family issues. The training programme established a safe space for participants to talk about what these issues meant for them and they valued a setting where they knew they would not have people criticising them for their views.

6. Future of Mwamba

6.1. Letting people know about Mwamba

Members of the group feel confident in their abilities to take Mwamba into their communities and have already begun networking with other groups, such as student groups, and there is interest in getting the group to come back and deliver training. In order to do this in the most effective way, the group will meet regularly and receive guidance from the course facilitators. The feeling is that there is energy and enthusiasm for Mwamba and they want to maintain this momentum.

We will need to look to a next step soon. If there is a big time period between taking the next step, people get on with their lives and old habits can come back.

Kendra, Mwamba training participant

To get the word out to the communities, the Mwamba group wants to hold seminars for families to attend so they know what the service can provide. They also plan to produce a leaflet to outline the ways in which they can expect a different service from Mwamba.

Because we understand the African community and we understand their needs, it will be very important for us to get this right. Counselling in Scotland has been based on the western culture, whereas, we know what suits us.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

6.2. Gender roles

During Mwamba training, participants discussed and explored gender roles within the African communities. Participants feel that as the listening service is developed it needs to be mindful of perceptions of gender.

Barriers would be the difference between services for men and women. Having the same counselling for men and women, sometimes we work with people in a relationship but we see that there's a gap between a male and female in the African context. As a group, we need to look into how we're going to address those differences.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

6.3. LGBT issues

African communities often attach stigma to LGBT issues and do not accept them as a part of their culture. During the training LGBT issues were only hinted at but they will be a part of the continued Mwamba training. For the skilled listeners there is the hope that they will be able to put religion and other cultural values aside and approach the issue as professionally as they plan to deal with all other issues.

There might be things that will be difficult to listen to but the training has helped so we'll be able to listen and not be judgemental. The thing is to mask that so the person doesn't feel like they're being judged.

Kim, Mwamba training participant

The organisational committee stresses that the response will be about what needs to be done to help the client and while skilled listeners need not personally agree with LGBT causes, they will have to be aware that the issues exist. Mwamba skilled listeners will also need to be aware that in the African communities: LGBT people are often not strong enough to talk about it; parents can be in denial; or a child is not able to bring it up. When the issue arises, in addition to listening to their clients, they will signpost to the voluntary sector to help ensure that needs are met.

6.4. Trust and confidentiality

Continued Mwamba training will look further at the issues of trust and confidentiality. Trust is seen by some participants as the most important aspect of the listening work they will do. The group will look at confidentiality and how to move from chat to something more in depth. They will need to make certain that clients understand Mwamba's commitment to confidentiality, and both clients and listeners will need a clear understanding as to when confidentiality needs to be breached.

We will have to deal with our emotions in a professional level. The training we're getting is helping us deal with other people's emotions, to help someone coming to you to pour out their concerns, their problems. And we have to keep things confidential as well. I think there is not anything we would not be able to deal with if people bring it to us.

Clarissa, Mwamba training participant

Suicide and child protection are seen as major areas where Mwamba listeners may need to breach confidentiality. Further training will look at signs to watch for that may indicate a person or one of their family members is feeling suicidal. Some listeners want to explore ways to prevent it from happening. Others feel it is rare in the African communities and that if people cannot handle the stress of everyday life, they will just kill themselves anyway. Waverley Care is aware from other studies that many Africans know about suicide in their communities, particularly with LGBT young people. Clarifying this disagreement should be a part of the extended Mwamba training.

6.5. Child protection

The practice of smacking children has been identified by course participants as a major cultural difference between African and western cultures; something that African parents have learned from their own parents; and something that is done with love. Waverley Care knows of families where children have been removed from the home because of child protection issues. Corporal punishment and other child protection issues will need to be a part of extended Mwamba training. Emphasis will need to be placed on the listeners' understanding so they can help their clients. The feeling is that the topic will be of interest to people in the community.

A better understanding of GIRFEC will help the Mwamba listeners serve their communities. They will need to look at how to communicate important aspects of this legislation to a community that does not see corporal punishment as wrong. As well as helping community members find their own solutions, Mwamba will need to help create an understanding that Africans are not the only cultural groups facing a struggle to reconcile the cultural issues with the legislative and legal.

6.6. Safe space for private conversations

Mwamba participants emphasise the need to have a private place for confidential conversations to take place. While clients may feel comfortable broaching certain issues in the salons, these are not environments conducive to in depth conversations, and with other people present, ensuring privacy will be unlikely. As a start, Waverley Care will be able to offer one of its rooms on Mondays, which is a day most hairdressers are free. One of the members of the organisational committee will take responsibility for overseeing all appointment scheduling so there is no overlap.

Using a room within Waverley Care is a starting point for Mwamba listening sessions but the group feels funding needs to be sought for a single private room in a more discreet setting; one that is not connected to Waverley Care or Relationships Scotland. The course facilitator feels that since the Mwamba work will be about listening, a private room will be important so people can feel free to open up about their issues.

6.7. Community centre

Ideally, some members of the group want to see a community centre that would be separate from Relationships Scotland and Waverley Care. The community centre could offer a wide variety of services beyond the listening service of Mwamba. Having a place where people also gathered for social events could alleviate the stigma some Africans might feel if they are seen going into a facility known as a place for people to talk about problems.

Everything under one umbrella so people won't be afraid people will see them going in. It could be a community centre so people could come in for a chat, young people could come and hang out. It wouldn't necessarily mean that you have a problem if people see you walking in. A centre that could have African days. Always something going on.

Kendra, Mwamba training participant

There is a realisation that this takes time and that at present, Africans are a new community in Scotland and not well linked enough to take this as an immediate next step. Smaller steps in expanding the programme were advised by members of the organisational committee. The key is not to grow Mwamba so quickly that the core group will be overwhelmed with response.

6.8. Effectiveness and wellbeing

To monitor the listening process, the organisational committee will develop a questionnaire for Mwamba clients to show what they felt about the experience of talking with a trained listener.

The emotional wellbeing of Mwamba listeners will be an important long-term issue. The organisational committee agrees on keeping it to a slow start so people are not overwhelmed. Trained listeners will deal with one client at a time rather than two or more cases. The group members will continue to support each other in a monthly meeting, which will be facilitated by a Relationships Scotland supervisor. Because there can be an emotional toll in listening to other people's problems, Mwamba listeners will be able to check in with Relationships Scotland counsellors if they are feeling overwhelmed, or if they just want to clarify the way they dealt with a client on a given issue.

Mwamba skilled listeners will also need to be mindful of how easy it will become for them to feel responsible for everyone in their communities. As Mwamba becomes more and more well

known, they will be having many different conversations in various settings. This will need to be supported and managed.

We might be overwhelmed with numbers of people approaching us when we let people know that we are here.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

6.9. Expanding Mwamba

The organisational committee also recommends expanding Mwamba beyond Edinburgh and Lothian. Other urban areas will be targeted with the listening service to be delivered by volunteers situated within an organisation that would be appropriate for Africans. Eventual expansion of the Mwamba programme should include training programmes in other cities once or twice a year. But a participant in the training sees a need to make sure a firm foundation is in place before branching out.

Looking at the African community we are over thousands, so we should build a stronger foundation before we scale up to other regions in Scotland.

Romeo, Mwamba training participant

Eventually, the Mwamba training should be delivered by one or two properly trained and qualified African counsellors. The organisational committee sees this as a way to respect and maintain African cultures without diluting or isolating problems that community members bring in.

One of the Mwamba participants believes there is a need to have skilled listeners trained from each of the different African groups and nationalities because there are cultural variations from one national or ethnic group to the next. She sees this as a way to avoid all of the workload falling to the core Mwamba group as more people from other ethnicities are trained.

6.10. Further training and professional qualifications

The organisational committee sees Mwamba, at present, as more of a listening service but there is scope for some participants to go on to take further courses in counselling. There is interest in this among some of the participants. Funds are limited but there is a need for counsellors. With further immigration by Africans, trained qualified counsellors are seen as necessary.

We can see that there is a lot of influx of African people getting into Scotland and if you look maybe two or three years from now, there will be a really big need for stuff like this, this kind of education.

Fiona, Mwamba training participant

Balancing other aspects of their lives will be a challenge for some Mwamba participants who wish to pursue a professional qualification in counselling.

I'm happy to get qualification but the issue is it's a long process that I'm afraid of. Is that 4 years, two and a half years? It depends. And looking at our job, it's going to be a very tough challenge for us, going to the school or training and at the same time working. And there's no support.

Matinda, Mwamba training participant

We can do so much within ourselves, but we need support to achieve some of the things we're trying to do.

Chloe, Mwamba training participant

As the Mwamba programme develops and expands, course participants are confident they will succeed as they take their skills into their communities, and see it as a creative way to address problems that used to feel insurmountable.

7. Conclusion

The Mwamba training came about as a result of discussions a Waverley Care outreach worker was having with staff in the African hair salons and barbershops about the difficulties they were having in discussing the organisation's sexual health services and condom distribution. This raised other issues such as relationship support and counselling and highlighted some of the difficulties Africans had in accessing services. Waverley Care contacted Relationships Scotland.

Relationships Scotland worked with hairdressers and Waverley Care to modify existing training programmes and teach listening skills to fit the cultural needs of Africans living in Scotland. These modifications addressed the feelings Africans have of being cut off from the support they would have in their home countries; difficulties in negotiating support systems here in Scotland; the fact that traditional western approaches to counselling are not widely accepted in African communities; and communication styles Africans feel are unique to their cultures.

The organisational committee set the following as important outcomes of the training. Hairdressers were helped:

- with the feeling of being overwhelmed with the information they take in from their clients
- to become more effective listeners
- to provide more support to their clients
- to feel better equipped and supported

Through a series of focus groups with Mwamba participants and meetings with the organisational committee, we found that the training was successful in helping people to achieve these outcomes. They felt better able to support members of their communities in accessing services and communicating their needs to Scottish people in a way that would help them achieve solutions. As members of communities negotiate the pressures of acknowledging two cultures, Mwamba participants feel better equipped to support in issues such as: families and children; the role of African men; the cultural importance in African cultures of respecting elders, which they feel is missing in Scotland; reconciling African views of traditional approaches to counselling; and the different cultural views of smacking children.

The training was seen as valuable by participants who felt that in the process, they were undergoing counselling themselves. The group came together as very supportive and trusting, and it is their plan to continue this atmosphere into the next stage of Mwamba training.

Looking to the future, the core group of Mwamba participants feels confident in approaching their communities and letting people know about the service.

They feel a need for continued work on African views of gender roles, a subject that came up during the training but merits further exploration. LGBT issues were only hinted at in the training but participants are aware the issues exist in their communities and are prepared to learn to put their own views aside as they help people, and they will also signpost to LGBT organisations.

Trust and confidentiality were explored during the training and will be further examined in the future. Participants feel confident in helping their clients understand trust and confidentiality in the context of Mwamba. The Mwamba participants will also communicate more with clients about issues of child protection and corporal punishment with a view to helping families see the need to understand the cultural differences and their relation to the law.

Mwamba established a need for a safe space away from the hair salons for clients to open up about the issues they are dealing with. Waverley Care will make a private room available for sessions. Some Mwamba participants see the eventual need to create a community centre, separate from other organisations where cultural and social events could take place and people would not fear being seen going into a facility known as a place for people to talk about problems.

Mwamba participants will begin the service by taking on only one client at a time. They will meet monthly to support each other and to receive support and guidance from a Relationships Scotland counsellor.

The plan is to take Mwamba beyond the Edinburgh and Lothian area, into other urban areas. They will network with appropriate organisations in these cities to draw participants. Some members of the core Mwamba group are interested in pursuing further training and qualifications in counselling. The plan to make Mwamba a service with a truly African approach is for a couple of trained and qualified African counsellors to run the programme.

Overall, the group feels very positive about Mwamba as a creative way to approach challenges that now look like they can be overcome.

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