

TRUST, HANOVER & BIELD HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Press Release

24 Oct 2007

Lottery funding spells good news for older BME people

A ground-breaking project to help disadvantaged older people from black and ethnic minority (BME) communities in Scotland gain access to pension benefits and services has been awarded a £220,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund.

The project, part of an Equal Opportunities Programme run jointly by Trust, Hanover (Scotland) and Bield Housing Associations, will benefit at least 600 older people from BME families, helping them to overcome a range of barriers they face in accessing benefits and services through outreach work.

Rohini Sharma-Joshi, heads the Equal Opportunities Programme which will run the project. She said the Lottery award provides three years' funding for the project which will be carried out by two dedicated Older Person's Services Co-ordinators and will assist older BME people throughout Scotland.

Sharma-Joshi said: "We are delighted to have won Lottery support for this essential project. Too many older BME people in Scotland are suffering financial hardship because they are poorly-served or misunderstood by service providers. Our project will provide practical help and support so that they can obtain the services and benefits to which they are entitled."

Independent research has shown that older people from BME communities are disproportionately represented in low-income households in the UK and that a disproportionate number do not claim pensions and other benefits.

Sharma Joshi's team devised the pensions and benefits project following the conclusion of a highly successful pilot scheme which carried out grassroots work with BME communities, highlighting the extent and nature of problems older people face in accessing pensions and benefits.

Sharma-Joshi said: "The pilot scheme raised £400,000 in benefits, directly benefiting 200 older BME people. But we only began to scratch the surface of the problem. The Lottery funding will enable us to make a material difference to the standard of living of many more older BME people in Scotland."

She added that negotiating the benefits system can be a nightmare for older BME people who face a multitude of barriers from language and literacy problems to a lack of staff trained to understand different cultural needs.

"We have identified gaps and failings in the systems which prevent older BME people from obtaining the assistance they both need and deserve. Helping people find their way through the system not only results in financial gain, it

improves their quality of life because it helps restore their independence, confidence and self-esteem,”

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About the jointly-funded Equal Opportunities Programme:

Trust, Hanover (Scotland) and Bield Housing Associations set up a joint Equal Opportunities Programme seven years ago. The Edinburgh-based team, which is headed by Housing Equal Opportunities Manager Rohini Sharma Joshi, has won numerous awards for its pioneering work to encourage and promote increased participation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in the housing sector. It has also made wider contributions to integrate BME people through the creation of multi-lingual aids to overcome language barriers such as the launch of a 'Happy to Translate' logo which is now being used by organisations such as the police and the National Health Service.

For more information on any aspect of the Equal Opportunities Programme or the three housing associations which fund it see the following websites:
Equality Scotland www.equalityscotland.com
Trust Housing Association www.trustha.org.uk
Hanover (Scotland) Housing Association www.hsha.org.uk
Bield Housing Association www.bield.co.uk

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