

Press release from Trust, Hanover & Bield housing associations

New recruits boost service for older BME people

Lottery funds aid rollout of award-winning project

Edinburgh, Feb 27, 2008 - Two bilingual recruits have been appointed to work on a ground-breaking equal opportunities project to help older people from black and ethnic minority (BME) communities in Scotland to access benefits and services.

The Older People Services Development Project, created through a partnership between Trust, Hanover (Scotland) and Bield Housing Associations, has appointed Neeru Bhatnagar and Anthony Li Chu, as Older People Services Co-ordinators.

Neeru Bhatnagar, who has significant experience of working with ethnic minority communities, speaks Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu while Anthony Li Chu who speaks Cantonese and Mandarin has extensive contacts in Scotland's Chinese community.

The new appointments follow the project's success in securing a £220,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund to fund a three-year programme which will help at least 650 older BME people and their families to overcome obstacles to accessing pensions, benefits and services.

Rohini Sharma-Joshi, who established the Older People Services Development Project, is the head of the Equal Opportunities Programme for the three housing associations.

Sharma-Joshi said: "Our new recruits will improve the lives of older BME people in a highly practical way by helping them to understand their entitlements and giving them the confidence and support they need to access them. Lottery funding has been vital in allowing this critical work to go ahead."

The Older People Services Development Project was established in response to research which identified many barriers from language and literacy issues to lack of staff trained to understand different cultural needs – all of which prevent older BME people from receiving benefits and services to which they are entitled.

Sharma-Joshi said: "Our new staff have an excellent blend of professional and language skills and sound understanding of issues faced by people from ethnic minorities living in Scotland."

She added: “We have done a lot of groundwork to identify gaps and failings in the provision of services to older BME people. Our team is focused on bridging these gaps and improving the quality of life, both financially and emotionally, for hundreds of families.”

The project will entail a mix of grassroots work among ethnic minority communities as well as work with statutory and voluntary bodies throughout Scotland who are involved in delivering services to older people.

It will include special seminars and events and open surgeries and also the creation of a Good Practice Guide for service providers and an accessible information guide for service users. The project will also involve encouraging older BME people to participate in the development of future policy related to service provision in Scotland.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

If you wish more information please contact the following:
Equal Opportunities Programme Public Relations - Valerie Darroch
Tel: 0141 585 3169 or mobile 07970 737708
Email: valerie.darroch@ntlworld.com
Rohini Sharma Joshi, Housing Equal Opportunities Manager
Tel: 0131 444 4950
Email RSharma@trustha.org.uk

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 used by organisations including the police and the National Health Service.

For more information on 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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