

Why we signed the pledge

The African Community Centre Wales (ACCW) is proud to have signed the Time to Change Wales Organisational Pledge – demonstrating our commitment to challenging mental health stigma and discrimination in our community. This is a significant step forward in our mission to promote diversity, community cohesion and wellbeing for all of our community members. Ethnic minority communities have long been affected by the taboo surrounding mental health. Historically, mental health has not been openly talked about, and seeking help has been seen as a sign of weakness, particularly for men, and individuals are seen as being crazy or mad and therefore are stigmatised. This can create barriers to accessing support, which can have serious consequences for individuals and their families.

This cultural barrier, combined with language difficulties and other issues facing immigrant and refugee populations, makes accessing mental health services even more challenging for African and African-Caribbean communities. We, at the African Community Centre Wales (ACCW), are passionate about raising awareness of mental health and tackling the stigma behind it, particularly within minority ethnic communities. Over the years, the discussions around mental wellbeing have become more and more prevalent within the communities we serve, and within the organisation as well. As the need for our services such as counselling and transport schemes become greater, we knew this could potentially affect our work-life balance, so we made a conscious and proactive effort last year to focus more on improving staff wellbeing at work, and as soon as we came across the Time to Change Wales Employer Pledge, we knew it would be the perfect initiative to help us achieve that, and we are pleased to have signed the pledge in February 2023.

How to promote mental health awareness

We plan on promoting mental health awareness by supporting national awareness days such as Mental Health Awareness Week in May and World Mental Health Day on 10 October. We also plan on promoting the following within the organisation:

- More 1-2-1 sessions – to regularly check-in with colleagues.
- Running internal anti-stigma campaigns using Time to Change Wales materials and inviting educators to deliver anti-stigma training.
- Looking at policies and culture to ensure that our workplace is supportive of people with mental health problems.
- Promoting mental health awareness messaging externally to people who use our services and the wider community through our communications/social media channels or by running a campaign.
- To pin mental wellbeing resources on noticeboards for staff and visitors.

To continue the mental health conversation through activities, we hope to:

- Run wellness activities such as homeopathy therapy and sound bath exercise (this is due to increasing interest in exploring different approaches recommended by employees to promote mental health and general wellness).
- Run movie and karaoke nights.
- Organise outdoor engagements like the 3 peak challenge and weekend retreats.
- Organise group lunches outdoors.
- Set healthy wellbeing boundaries between staff and service users.
- Promote a healthy work-life balance.

We will be sharing these wellbeing priorities with staff through our internal and external communications such as regularly updating our intranet, website, noticeboards and informing colleagues of mental wellbeing events in team meetings and 1-2-1 sessions.

How this helps the workplace

At the African Community Centre Wales (ACCW), we are dedicated to supporting staff wellbeing by implementing the following on a long-term basis:

- Promoting physical and mental health activity for staff and service users.
- The African Community Centre Wales Office Manager to organise 1-2-1s for staff.
- Staff to attend regular mental health awareness sessions.
- Encourage staff and service users to talk about mental health stigma and discrimination.
- Recruit and train more Champions from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.
- Promote the use of Time to Change Wales' community language resources.
- Fundraise for mental health charities.
- Signpost mental health services to staff and service users.
- To organise team bonding exercises to spend more time with colleagues.
- Launch a podcast for internal staff – one of the episodes will be on tackling mental health stigma and discrimination within the workplace and communities.
- Safeguarding in the workplace – set up private locations to discuss mental health for staff if needed.
- Peer-to-peer mental health support for staff and service users starts on 31 March 2023 called The Harmindise Project – ACCW Wellbeing Officer to facilitate the discussions.
- Run a men's chai and chat every Thursday.
- To establish a mental health awareness focus group to discuss how we can continually promote mental health within the organisation and to service users.
- Clues on desks – as a signal that a staff member would like to discuss their mental health recognised by line managers/colleagues.
- Encourage staff to take annual leave and have a healthy work life balance by not answering emails outside of working hours.

In addition, we are also taking steps to provide direct support to our community members. We have developed a counselling service, which provides a safe and confidential space for people to talk about their mental health concerns. We are also working to develop peer support networks where people can connect with others who have experienced similar issues, and receive guidance and support from those who understand.

ACCW is taking proactive steps to combat mental health stigma by creating a safe and supportive environment for staff members to discuss their mental health issues openly. The organisation is promoting the importance of self-care and encouraging staff members to take time off when they need it.

ACCW is also providing mental health training and resources to its staff members, ensuring that they have the knowledge and tools to support individuals who are experiencing mental health problems. We recognise that tackling mental health stigma requires a multifaceted approach, which is why ACCW is also working with other organisations, agencies, and groups to build solidarity and create a unified front against mental health stigma and discrimination.