How does a national mentor mother training project support women living with HIV through pregnancy?

A qualitative evaluation of 4M: My health, My choice, My child, My life

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BACKGROUND

Women living with HIV can face psycho-social challenges during pregnancy and motherhood.1 Peer-support to women living with HIV during pregnancy improves wellbeing, self-efficacy and adherence.2,3 Here we present a qualitative evaluation of a mentor mother programme (4M) for women living with HIV.4

4M trained 46 mentor mothers across eight UK regions in April-October 2016. Led by women living with HIV, workshops comprised training on pregnancy and HIV, and a creative writing session.5

RESULTS

Overall feedback was positive. Mentor mothers reported improvements in self-confidence, social networking and coping. They described developing empathy through personal sharing, increasing their sense of belonging and reducing isolation.4 They highlighted project leads’ sensitivity and reflection, which contributed to an inclusive and safe space. Training provided facts, “It feels good as a woman living with HIV to be able to give the right information” (Mentor Mother 11), confidence, encouragement, offered a fresh perspective “I have learnt a lot from the training, I am able to practise in my own life” (Mentor Mother 19), and optimism, “Training has given me hope that there is more to life than worrying about am I going to die and what am I going to do?” (Mentor Mother 3).

Mentor mothers particularly valued the creative writing component, and its potential to draw out resilience and increase self-confidence in delivering peer-support. Five mentor mothers had provided peer-support to 11 women following 4M training. Barriers to providing ongoing peer-support included mentor mothers’ social circumstances; health issues; and lack of robust links with local clinics and support services. Project leads described 4M as reinforcing the importance of sustaining community-based support and creative spaces. “The training made me realise how crucial it is to continue working with women and organisations on a grassroots level” (Project Lead 2). However, capacity was identified as a challenge in terms of number of women trained and geographical coverage.4

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

4M is a highly valuable and acceptable peer-led platform for the education and self-development of women living with HIV, fostering resilience and self-confidence. As well as individual benefits to mentor mothers, 4M is a sustainable model of peer-support for women living with HIV during pregnancy and early motherhood, in line with the ethos of national standards for peer-support.4 Challenges include ongoing support for mentor mothers and a lack of awareness and uptake of their expertise.

We encourage care providers to work collaboratively with this mentor mother network in order to support women living with HIV effectively during pregnancy and beyond.

REFERENCES


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