

Asthma and Allergy Foundation: Asthma Self-Management project – June 2021



Organisation name: Asthma and Allergy Foundation

Project name: Asthma Self-Management project

Location: Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Grant amount: £5,000

Award date and duration: May 2018, 1 year

Project context: Following on the Foundation's success in helping children across schools in Aberdeen who had asthma through practical guidance on how to manage their disease, the Foundation acquired funding to deliver this project again, this time targeting older people living in sheltered housing.

Project aims: The Asthma and Allergy Foundation aimed to expand and develop the range of support on offer to older people in sheltered housing who live with asthma in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. They ran a programme of self-management sessions to help them become more aware and informed about recognising symptoms of asthma.

Project aims

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation's aims are to improve the health outcomes and overall quality of life for people living with asthma in Aberdeenshire. They do this by providing information, advice and practical guidance – such as using the correct technique with inhalers – to those with asthma as well as their families and carers.

This project builds on the success of a previous project where the organisation delivered a programme in schools targeting children who had asthma.

About the grant

Following on from the previous project's success, the Foundation then applied to The National Lottery Community Fund for funding to deliver the project which is the basis of this case study, called the "Asthma Self-Management project" which would be specifically targeted towards older people living in sheltered housing. The initial grant was for £10,000; the £5,000 that this case study relates to allowed them to continue their work with a new audience.

The grant helped to cover the cost of a number of aspects of delivering these asthma education workshops across the county. This included costs associated with:

- **Training materials:** The funding received went into producing information leaflets, pamphlets, posters and booklets which would all go together in an information pack.
- **Training staff:** Martina, CEO of the Foundation, talked about how guidelines for asthma changes every year so its crucial for her and her staff to stay updated and deliver the most up-to-date guidance at workshops.
- **Volunteer expenses:** This money was crucial in allowing volunteers to travel across the county to deliver these seminars. The volunteers were mostly young people so covering expenses was important as to not leave them out of pocket from their travel costs.
- **IT equipment:** As a charity, inevitably resources are very lean. However, this funding allowed them to purchase two computers, which not only helped the delivery of this particular project, but because it was an investment they have been able to use them for future programmes as well.

Project set up and delivery

To deliver this project, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation first had to collaborate with third parties. They worked with the local authority as well as housing managers first to gain permission to deliver the workshops on their sites.

The organisation also had to recruit volunteers and collaborate with universities. One example was someone studying social work at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen who worked on placement at the charity on this particular project. They had medical students from the University of Aberdeen volunteer as well to gain practical experience of working with patients. The Foundation also had a partnership with the local Job Centre in order to provide young people with work experience.

The workshops themselves lasted from anything between 20 minutes to an hour. There would be, on average, around ten people in attendance at each session so they were fairly intimate. The presenter would introduce what asthma is, **how to identify symptoms** and being **aware of triggers** that might cause symptoms in a person.

The workshop also offered practical guidance by explaining what an inhaler and a spacer is and how to use them properly, and crucially **how to be aware of inhaler and spacer technique** as a way to get the most out of their medication.

"[Being an asthmatic] I have to admit when I previously took my inhaler prior to joining the Asthma and Allergy Foundation, I had no idea that my technique was as bad as it was" **Rob, volunteer**

Project impact

Key highlights

Numbers supported

- 1,900 elderly people attended the workshops
- 18 young people have gone on to secure work after gaining experience as volunteers on this project.

Key impacts

- It helped older people living in sheltered housing understand asthma by identifying symptoms and triggers and learning how to manage their condition.
- Carers who attended these seminars also learnt how help and to assist even in very serious situations where someone might have an asthma attack.
- It provided valuable work experience for volunteers as well as increasing their confidence through improving their presentation and communication skills.

Website

<https://asthmaandallergy.org.uk/>

Both Martina and Rob felt as though the project had a positive impact. Overall, **1,900 elderly people** took part in the workshops, more than Martina initially thought they would reach. The workshop presenters handed out questionnaires at the end and attendees were invited to complete an evaluation of the seminar. They were asked to rate their understanding of asthma and how to use an inhaler amongst other statements on a scale of 'poor' to 'excellent' from before the workshop and after. It was both Martina's and Rob's impression that generally they received good feedback from them.

Not only this, but they both thought that the experience provided to volunteers who worked on the project proved valuable too in terms of their future career prospects.

People's physical health was better

Martina felt that the programme helped those that took part in the workshops to manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life. She stated that hospital admissions had reduced too based on the feedback from workshop attendees.

Rob felt that one of the elements of the presentation that probably helped the most was the demonstration on how to use the inhaler and spacer properly. Having the correct medication is only useful if you know the correct technique so displaying how to take their medicine was crucial in helping to manage their symptoms and reduce hospital visits.

"Very informative, spacer knowledge very useful, would recommend to others as they may be using their inhalers incorrectly as I have" **Geoff, Beneficiary**

People had access to information and support to improve their knowledge and skills

Carers also attended these seminars as they wanted to be aware of symptoms in order to care for those who they were looking after who were asthmatic. The workshop helped them to understand how help and to assist even in very serious situations where someone might have an asthma attack.

People's confidence, self-esteem and resilience, and employment situation was improved

In delivering this project, Martina recruited volunteers from a range of backgrounds, from those currently studying medicine at university to young people who were unemployed. She believed that experience provided by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation during this project made them "work-ready" and stated that **18 young people** have moved into work as a result of this project.

Rob agreed with this, reflecting on his own experience of the project. After first joining as a volunteer, he was promoted to Project Coordinator. This involved coordinating volunteers and planning who would go to which sheltered housing that day as well as ensuring there was enough training material stock for the workshops. Rob personally felt that his communication and presentation skills had improved, as had his confidence thanks to regularly having to present to groups of people he had never met before. Teamwork was also a key skill that Rob took away from his

"Teamwork and communication are definitely two hugely important factors that I developed when I was at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation which helped me where I am today" **Rob, Volunteer**

experience in the role. As the Foundation had a relatively small team, it was important it ran as efficiently as possible.

Rob now works as a trainee solicitor. He believes that the experience he gained on this project helped him in his career and he continues to use the skills he learnt whilst delivering workshops for the job he has now.

Overall reflections

This project was a success in that they were able to deliver the workshops to more residents than Martina initially thought would be the case. Furthermore, based on Rob's feedback, as well as the comments from attendees, **beneficiaries gained valuable information from the sessions on how to manage their asthma**. In particular, the demonstration on proper inhaler and spacer technique has been useful. Moreover, having carers attend also meant that knowledge was shared among those who look after people who are asthmatic.

The project has also had a **positive impact on the volunteers** who delivered the project, as they would have gained several key skills useful for future employability. Rob talked about how the experience working at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation made him more confident and helped him secure the role he is in currently.

About the case study

As part of this case study, IFF Research spoke to Martina, CEO of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation, along with a volunteer and later project coordinator, Rob*. IFF Research also received several testimonials from those who attended the workshops. **Names have been changed*. Due to the age of many of the attendees, as well as how long ago these seminars were delivered, it was not possible to speak directly with any of the beneficiaries.