**UMAR @ Sampad - Celebrating Age**

Britain’s older population is more diverse than ever before. Research has shown that South Asian people in the UK underutilize health services compared with White people. Furthermore, where services are accessed, they may not adequately meet cultural and religious needs. Sampad applies arts as a tool to engage with groups and agencies who are looking to address some of the needs and gaps of the elders in South Asian communities.

UMAR /AGE is one of the priority strands within our Business Plan. We recognise that we are able to provide a specific service and cultural reference which may be required for older South Asian people.

Our aim is to –

* Develop a series of programmes that promote positive health and wellbeing and provide creative opportunities for older people living in disadvantaged and/or marginalised rural and urban areas.
* Involve Carers and volunteers in project planning, delivery and training sessions with artists. This enables opportunities for skills and intelligence sharing through enjoyable activities as well as leave a legacy of competences with all participants.
* Co-design and co-produce projects and nurture long term relationships with local groups in the Birmingham and the Midlands region.
* Continue to liaise with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Our partnership with MAC in Celebrating Age has worked really well – for a number of reasons. We know each other well, we trust and listen to each other and appreciate our complementary strengths.

An effective programme has been Chai and Chat. The concept of Chai and Chat is around comfort… both from the cup of Chai /or tea and the safe environment we aim to provide for the community – sometimes only women. We select artists to facilitate the session with their own stories and creative work – essentially to open up conversation and encouragement for others to share their stories and creative work – may be a poem, a picture or a song.

Many South Asian older people attend Day Centres – sometimes located within a faith space like a temple or Gurdwara or Mosque. With meagre resources these Centres are able to provide transport and warm food and a social environment but very little beyond that which could stimulate the interest and energy of the groups.

Sometimes they do come over to MAC but if they are unable to do that we take the art to them. We have staged performances at Apna Ghar – a Day Centre close to MAC as well as other Centres around Birmingham. As audience members they can be quite reticent to start with but we often manage to get them on their feet and join in with the dancers by the end of the session – or to sing along. We select stories that is relatable to the groups so they find a connection with the performances. We do try to make the sessions as interactive as possible to break their passive attendance as audience.

We select and prepare our artists with necessary skills and plan these sessions carefully and in partnership with Carers and Centre managers. We also involve a number of senior South Asian artists who are well experienced and can be amazing role models to inspire people to continue exploring creativity through diverse activities irrespective of age.

Covid and continued lockdown has impact on our work with older people significantly. However, we are planning activities with all safety measures in place to begin as soon as possible.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about this work from Sampad, or would like to discuss collaboration, please contact Sabra Khan (Sabra@sampad.org.uk).