

MOBILISING FOR PrEP AND SEXUAL HEALTH (MOBPRESH)

Prepared by
Pippa Grenfell
and Sabrina Rafael

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Prepster



Yorkshire
MESMAC



CELEBRATING MobPrESH's PEER MOBILISERS

Pippa and Sabrina would like to sincerely thank all MobPrESH peer mobilisers and project staff for sharing your time, experiences and valuable insights with us during this evaluation.

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Further information on the MobPrESH pilot, including case studies, learning discussions, commentary and recommendations can be found at www.prepster.info/mobpresh

PrEPster is a project of The Love Tank CIC
159 Mile End Rd,
London E1 4AQ

hello@thelovetank.info
www.thelovetank.info

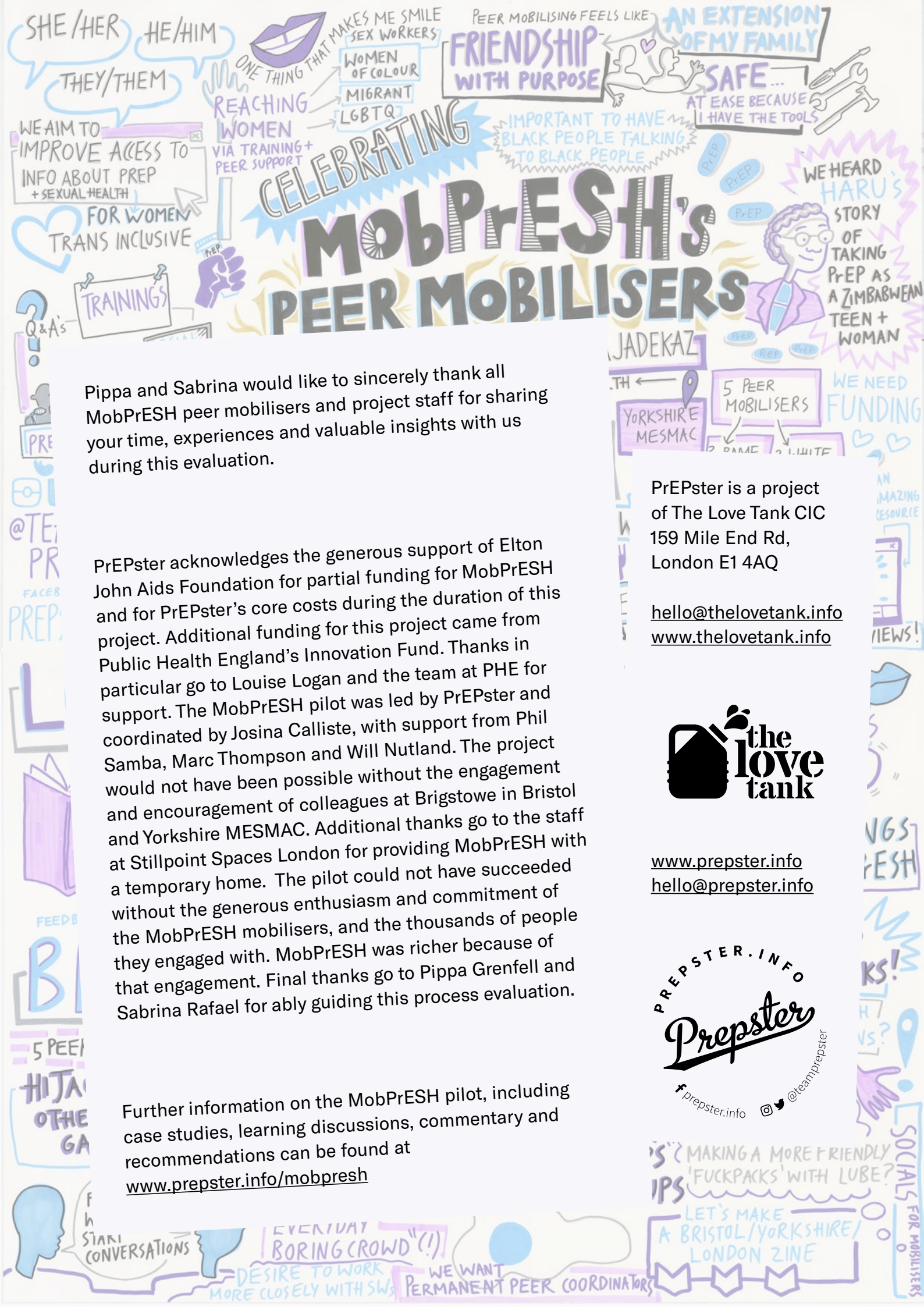


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BACKGROUND

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a highly effective method of HIV prevention (1) but emerging evidence in Europe indicates that few women have access to PrEP and related information, or see it as relevant to them (2). Peer-led interventions have been shown to be an acceptable means of improving awareness of, and access to, PrEP (3). However, thus far women have rarely been involved in such programmes. PrEPster is a grassroots, community-led organisation that aims to “*educate and agitate for PrEP access in England and beyond*” (4). In 2019, PrEPster was awarded funding through Public Health England’s (PHE) Innovation Fund for ‘MobPrESH’ (Mobilising for PrEP and Sexual Health) – a peer-led pilot project that would work with women and non-binary people in England from communities most affected by HIV, with the aim of supporting “*increased knowledge, awareness & understanding of PrEP, alongside related sexual health issues for women*” (5). In so doing, they sought to “*improve equality of access to information about PrEP as a prevention stratagem, mitigating wider HIV-related disparities affecting currently underserved populations*” (5). The organisation’s prior experience of delivering peer education informed the development of the intervention.

Between January and December 2019, PrEPster worked in Bristol, Yorkshire and London, training and supporting peer mobilisers for PrEP in their communities. This involved providing them with “*resources to develop PrEP and sexual health interventions in their own communities*” with a view to “*build[ing] capacity for community responses to HIV*” and “*creating skilled peer mobilisers who can educate and talk about PrEP*” (5). Potential envisaged interventions included “*videos, pod-casts, web pages or blogs; articles, fanzines, presentations or workshops; outreach, group-work, art projects or designing educational materials*” (6). The project aspired to work with 48-72 peer mobilisers in total, including women (cis and trans) and non-binary people (trans-feminine or assigned female at birth) across a wide age range. The project aimed to prioritise recruitment of members of communities most affected by HIV, and specifically Black and other women of colour, people who speak languages other than English, trans women and migrants, inclusive of sex workers. PrEPster (London-based) partnered with organisations with which they had existing working relations and developed the grant application: Brigstowe in Bristol and MESMAC in Yorkshire.

BRISTOL



YORKSHIRE



LONDON





AIMS AND APPROACH OF THE PROCESS EVALUATION

This process evaluation aimed to explore the accessibility, feasibility, acceptability, and ‘fidelity’ of MobPrESH, from the perspectives of peer mobilisers and project staff, using focus group discussions and short qualitative interviews.

The questions this evaluation sought to answer were as follows:

1. What are peer mobilisers’ experiences¹ of MobPrESH?
2. What opportunities and challenges have they faced?
3. How accessible, acceptable and feasible has participation in MobPrESH been for peer mobilisers, including members of specified priority communities?
4. What was the ‘fidelity’ of MobPrESH (ie. to what extent was it implemented as intended)?

Each of these questions were also explored from the perspectives of project staff (see below)², particularly question 4. This evaluation contributes directly to assessment against MobPrESH’s first two Key Performance Indicators (KPI) (Appendix 1). By also exploring how peer mobilisers felt that their encounters with members of priority populations had shaped communities’ knowledge about PrEP, other SH services and how to access them, this process evaluation also partially³ contributes to KPI 3.

Evaluation questions were drafted by Pippa Grenfell with input from PrEPster and Sabrina Rafael, in keeping with a critical participatory evaluation approach (7, 8). Critical participatory approaches seek to involve communities in generating knowledge about them, drive related action and challenge power relations of research and practice – in support of efforts to achieve social, racial, gender and economic justice (7, 8).

PROCESS EVALUATION METHODS

Between August and November 2019, Sabrina and Pippa conducted two focus group discussions and one individual interview with nine MobPrESH peer mobilisers in Bristol and London, and individual interviews with six project coordinators and managers/grant holders (collectively referred to as ‘project staff’) at Brigstowe, Yorkshire MESMAC and PrEPster. Focus groups were arranged by project coordinators in each site, who contacted peer mobilisers to gauge their interest and availability to take part. Interviews were arranged by Sabrina and Pippa in direct communication with participants. The two focus groups, co-facilitated by Sabrina and Pippa, were held in private rooms at Brigstowe and

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1 Including the training process, development of reflexive learning techniques, translation of their learning into pilot interventions, and encounters with members of target populations

2 Since fewer peer mobilisers were available to participate in focus groups/interviews than planned and we interviewed more project staff, these perspectives are more central to this evaluation than anticipated.

3 PrEPster are evaluating this directly through a separate evaluation, “adapting the GMI piloted PrEP Champions Assessment Tool to capture increases in PrEP and SH knowledge, and service access”.

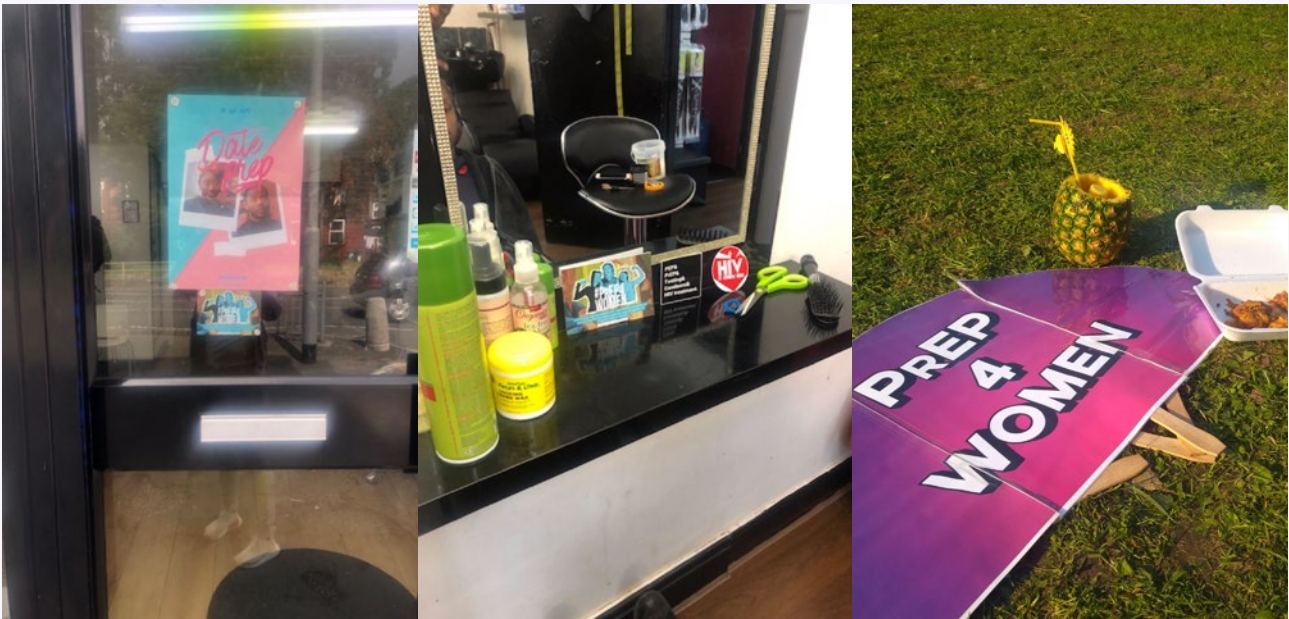
the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), respectively. Interviews were conducted in-person at participants' workplaces/LSHTM (Bristol, London) or by phone/Skype (one peer mobiliser, and Yorkshire MESMAC project staff). During focus groups light refreshments were provided, and partner organisations offered to reimburse peer mobilisers' travel and childcare expenses. Yorkshire MESMAC had planned to arrange a sign language interpreter to allow a peer mobiliser who is deaf to participate in a focus group or individual interview, but she and other peer mobilisers in Yorkshire were unavailable to participate. Focus groups lasted 67-101 minutes and interviews 37-97 minutes.

Before beginning, participants were asked to read a participant information sheet and sign a corresponding consent form. They were assured of the anonymous and confidential nature of the evaluation. During discussions, we sought to foster open dialogue and ask questions sensitively, allowing participants time to reflect on their experiences.

We used a short series of open questions to guide the discussions, developed in advance with input from PrEPster, while also allowing dialogue to be guided by participants' narratives. Topics explored included: experiences of joining MobPrESH, training, designing and implementing project activities; likes, dislikes and expectations; what worked (less) well; factors that made each aspect easier or more difficult (e.g. training, time, funds, skills, support from coordinator, belief in project, prior experiences, support networks, (emotional) labour, competing priorities and commitments); how peer mobilisers' interactions affected people's knowledge of PrEP, other sexual health services and how to access them; how the project had worked with pre-defined priority groups, in practice; and recommendations to PrEPster, Brigstowe, Yorkshire MESMAC and prospective peer mobilisers for future projects.

We audio-recorded the focus group discussions and interviews with participants' informed consent and used these to write detailed field notes (including direct quotations that illustrated key points). We synthesised these into a detailed analytical summary for each site, including a narrative overview and emerging themes. In keeping with the participatory approach to the evaluation, where a sufficient number of people in each site took part to protect anonymity, we shared the draft site-specific summary with peer mobilisers and project staff to comment on. We then revised and synthesised these summaries, contrasting findings across and within sites to refine the emerging themes and draw out key recommendations. We also presented emerging findings and recommendations from the evaluation at a closed MobPrESH peer mobiliser Celebration Day held in London in November 2019, attended by peer mobilisers from Bristol/North Somerset and London, and project staff from all three partner organisations. Finally, we shared an earlier version of this report with project staff across partner organisations for consultation. We exclude names and identifying information, in keeping with the anonymous nature of the evaluation. This evaluation received ethical approval from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) ethics committee (REF: 17634).

YORKSHIRE



PROCESS EVALUATION FINDINGS

OVERVIEW OF MOBPRESH

→ PARTNER ORGANISATIONS, PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION

Founded in 2015, PrEPster is a small, grassroots organisation advocating and informing people about PrEP and other sexual health services, in a way that one project staff member described as “*unapologetically political*”—for example, around queer, trans and/or migrant rights—and “*peer-driven... work being done by the people it is intended for*”. In June 2018, the MobPrESH project lead was hired on a freelance basis to conduct a scoping review relating to women and PrEP, which identified a clear need for peer-led work in this area:

“We were hearing from women that they wanted to hear from women like them... ‘I want to speak to someone in the same language as me, or I’m a sex worker and I want to talk to another sex worker’”. — PROJECT STAFF

The project lead and one of PrEPster’s co-founders developed the concept for MobPrESH and submitted a grant application to Public Health England (PHE)’s Innovation Fund, in collaboration with Brigstowe and Yorkshire MESMAC—charitable organisations in Bristol and Yorkshire that PrEPster’s co-founders had worked with previously. Brigstowe has been working with people living with HIV since 1994, but MobPrESH was their first involvement in HIV prevention work. Yorkshire MESMAC, also founded in 1994, offers HIV testing and sexual health promotion to a range of communities, including Black and other people of colour, sex workers, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people and adults (9).

MobPrESH was funded from January to December 2019, with six months of funding for activities in Bristol and Yorkshire including a 1-day per week project coordinator post per site, and 12 months in London, including a 2.5 day per week project lead post (the project lead was also supported by funding from Elton John AIDS Foundation for one day per week). Project coordinators in each site were responsible for recruiting peer mobilisers, co-facilitating training, and supporting peer mobilisers to advocate for PrEP in their communities (see ‘Support, costs & group working’). At Brigstowe, the project coordinator was hired specifically to work on MobPrESH whereas at MESMAC, the post was split across two existing staff members (four hours each per week) following an internal recruitment process—one based in Rotherham, also covering Hull and Wakefield and another in Leeds, also covering Bradford and York. In each site the project was managed by an existing staff member alongside their other responsibilities. In London, the project coordinator role was fulfilled by the project lead, who was also responsible for designing the training and liaising with project staff in partner organisations, especially Brigstowe. PrEPster’s co-founder jointly managed the project lead, supporting project set-up, liaising with MESMAC, undertaking financial management and reporting to the funder.

The Brigstowe project coordinator had worked in sexual health for over 25 years in the UK and Africa, including advocating for PrEP access, and had worked in collaboration with Brigstowe previously. The MESMAC project coordinators were employed in the areas of training and communications and community development work with women and families, and this project gave them increased/new experience in managing volunteers and focusing on women and HIV, respectively. Project coordinators were highly supportive of MobPrESH's aims and ethos, particularly its focus on women, and on Black and other women of colour and trans women specifically. The role complemented their other work responsibilities and interests: *"I'm very passionate about targeting groups I recognise are underrepresented and under targeted, I do a lot of work particularly with trans women in other areas, I really recognised the value of it."* The PrEPster project lead—who had previously researched Black women's sexual health and was involved in the *DecolonisingContraception* group (10)—had managed volunteers before but not as a project lead; this role was thus a *"big upping of responsibility"*. PrEPster's co-founder had worked in sexual health promotion and research for 25 years, and the project manager at Brigstowe had worked at the organisation for 4 years, managing HIV peer support projects and delivering HIV awareness training.

Project staff described their working relationships within and between partner organisations. At MESMAC, after an initial meeting to discuss the *"vision of the project"* and logistics, the two project coordinators and project manager met regularly, initially face-to-face and then via group calls and emails, to check in on progress, expectations and plans. This offered a space to share ideas and experiences when they *"felt stuck"* over recruitment and *"re-motivate [each other] when things weren't going so well"*, and they felt well supported by their colleagues at MESMAC and PrEPster when managing challenging situations (see 'Connecting within & across communities: what it means to be a peer'). Having two project coordinators allowed them to cover larger areas of Yorkshire than would otherwise have been possible, but necessarily limited the hours each could spend on recruiting and managing peer mobilisers (see 'Time, money & continuity'). At Brigstowe, the project coordinator and manager kept in regular phone and email contact, aiming to meet at least every three weeks. Because of the nature of the project and part-time post, the project coordinator needed to be very flexible (for example, keeping materials in her car and remaining mobile, rather than being based out of the office). The PrEPster project lead and co-founder described strong working relationships with Brigstowe and MESMAC project coordinators, respectively. Both would have liked to foster more interaction and *"germination of ideas"* across sites (*"this worked really well in Bristol/Yorkshire, let's try it in London"*) but this was limited by available capacity. In Bristol and Yorkshire, project coordinators' part-time posts meant that they had limited time available to develop relationships with staff in other sites. In the case of the MESMAC split post, project coordinators had been unable to attend coordinator meetings outside of Yorkshire but the project manager had always *"checked in"* with them in advance to ensure that she reflected *"our view of things, not her view"* and fed back to them afterwards. They highly appreciated participating in a meeting held in Leeds and working with organisations in different parts of the country, to learn from varied approaches and experiences:

“I’ve really enjoyed those dynamic conversations about what’s going on in Bristol and...London...that enthusiasm from so many different people from so many different communities coming together.” — PROJECT STAFF

One Brigstowe project staff member had anticipated more frequent contact with partner organisations to share ideas and best practice but they knew that they were “*there*” and could contact PrEPster whenever needed. MESMAC’s communication with PrEPster had been good overall, albeit a bit “*up and down*” during sick-leave and particularly busy work periods (e.g. during Pride) when one project coordinator felt she had not been “*as communicative as I had hoped to be*”. One project staff member felt that management structures in each partner organisation had affected project coordinators’ relative autonomy in each site. Below we discuss perspectives on how partner organisations’ divergent approaches, particularly around the politics of race/ethnicity, and the time and budget available, affected the project (see ‘Connecting within & across communities: what it means to be a peer’ and ‘Time, money & continuity’).

→ PEER MOBILISER RECRUITMENT AND JOINING PROCESS

Partner organisations used a combination of social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), community outreach and word-of-mouth to recruit peer mobilisers and promote MobPrESH. In London, the project coordinator made use of PrEPster’s robust social media presence, while MESMAC and Brigstowe staff used their individual professional and organisational accounts, tagging PrEPster. Across sites, project staff also reached out to and visited specific organisations (e.g. a local learning centre, university, trans, sex worker and women’s groups, networks of women of colour and LGBT people). In Yorkshire, the project coordinators divided up recruitment between them, contacting communities that they were part of or worked closely with (e.g. groups/networks of Black and other people of colour, trans people and sex workers), and/or in their geographical area. They sought to use inclusive language and stressed objectives of “*upskilling*” and “*community mobilisation*”:

“Are you a woman of colour... a trans woman... a non-binary person who is sometimes read as female or sometimes identifies as female?” Are you interested in learning about sexual health, HIV prevention? Would you like to volunteer and mobilise your community?”

The selection process varied across sites. In Yorkshire and London, project coordinators adopted a more “*grassroots approach*”, arranging informal calls to assess suitability, with the aim of recruiting peer mobilisers who had connections to relevant communities—“*not just allies*”—but who did not already work in sexual health. PrEPster received a lot of interest from the latter, including staff at another HIV project and clinicians seeking to improve recruitment of women onto the IMPACT trial⁴. Brigstowe, by contrast, used

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⁴ While MobPrESH facilitated access to the IMPACT trial for women who needed it, this was not a specific goal of the project and was ultimately seen as the role of clinics.

their formal volunteer recruitment process, developing and circulating a role description, shortlisting and interviewing those they felt could reach key communities. They asked about their motivations, networks or communities they could tap into, and how they felt about “*working with people of different sexualities, cultures and genders*”, to ensure a “*safe training space*”. Candidates also needed to demonstrate leadership qualities (e.g. approaching people, holding workshops).

Partner organisations had differing experiences of recruiting and retaining peer mobilisers. In London, ten peer mobilisers were recruited and trained in three cohorts, having discovered MobPrESH on social media and via friends. At Brigstowe, five peer mobilisers—four based in Bristol and one in a smaller town in North Somerset—were recruited and trained over a 2.5 month-period, two having heard about MobPrESH directly from Brigstowe, two via other organisations, and one directly from the project coordinator. All remained broadly involved throughout the project (although see ‘Competing pressures & structural hostilities’ and ‘Money, time & continuity’). Project staff attributed this success to their community knowledge and connections, and a robust volunteer recruitment system, respectively, but the short project duration had restricted their ability to make more extensive links with communities and formal organisations (see ‘Money, time & continuity’). One staff member in particular voiced surprise that relatively few groups they had contacted had responded, given the offer of free, high-quality training.

MESMAC also recruited and trained five peer mobilisers across Yorkshire, through two recruitment waves, but experienced difficulties with retention (see ‘Support, costs & group-working’ and ‘Project activities’). Since their first social media drive had generated considerable interest from people who had “*never really engaged with MESMAC before... [who had] come across our post and liked the sound of it*”, they would recommend this approach for future projects. However, project staff in both sites noted that fixed training dates had precluded some people’s participation, particularly when coinciding with other commitments (see ‘Time, money & continuity’). Several people had dropped out of communication beforehand, just three of an anticipated eight ultimately attending in Yorkshire. When a second online push and visits to community groups and events did not generate new uptake, they changed ‘essential criteria’ to ‘desirable’ and recruited two additional peer mobilisers. Project staff noted that they had partially but not fully adhered to their definition of ‘peer’, two peer mobilisers (in London and Yorkshire) not belonging to MobPrESH’s target communities.

One project staff member described recruitment as a “*hard sell*” as some people were unsure of *what* and *how much time* their involvement would require. She felt that articulating a specific but flexible goal at the outset might have facilitated recruitment and recommended this for future projects, while also noting the challenge of “*getting the balance right*” given that the project was designed to offer peer mobilisers autonomy. Similarly, another project staff member suggested greater initial clarity over the rationale, and implication for mobilisers, of a peer-led approach.

Peer mobilisers described a range of motivations for joining MobPrESH and linked prior experiences. All felt strongly about raising awareness of PrEP, HIV and sexual health, and challenging related stigmas, given how HIV had variously impacted them, their families and/or communities. In Yorkshire, some peer mobilisers had chosen to get involved out of a particular concern for other STIs and how they affected women in their communities. Some also saw MobPrESH as a valuable opportunity to develop their skills and grow their network. All Brigstowe peer mobilisers had done volunteer work before and some had a long history of HIV activism, in their countries of birth and/or the UK. London PrEPster peer mobilisers were encouraged by the focus on Black and other people of colour, among whom they felt there was a particular need for awareness and support. Most had not been involved in similar activities previously but reflected very positively on their experiences of MobPrESH. There were age differences between peer mobilisers in different sites: most in London were in their 30s and 40s (a few in their 20s), those in Yorkshire were in their 20s and 40s, and those in Bristol/North Somerset were older on average.

Appendix 2 provides a break down of the characteristics of the peer mobilisers.

→ PEER MOBILISER TRAINING

The project lead developed a 2-day⁵ peer-led training programme designed to foster interactive, “*horizontal learning*” with a view to improving retention of information and respecting peer mobilisers’ lived experience (“*[When] some of women in the room are grandmas, there’s no way I should be talking more than them*”). Day 1 involved discussions around HIV, PrEP and PrEPster and drew on materials of relevance to reproductive justice, including articles by members of *DecolonisingContraception*. Day 2 aimed to consolidate PrEP and sexual health knowledge, especially relating to different sex acts and risk, STIs and contraception. It also included a creative activity to “*integrate learning*”—such as a photography workshop; creating memes, pictures and stories about PrEP; free-writing; bodywork; zine-making with blkflyzine (<https://blackflyzine.bigcartel.com/>); and preparing a brief for a ‘PrEP for women’ booklet—during which PrEPster merchandise, such as stickers and postcards, made useful props. Although not a standalone discussion, consent was a “*thread throughout*” which project staff felt had resonated with peer mobilisers, particularly in relation to sexual violence and age-gap relationships. Materials used were trans-inclusive and the training was designed to encourage peer mobilisers to be reflexive about their power and privileges relating to sexual health:

“[Feminism is] in the training, lots about power, condom negotiation, why women would need to use PrEP; women... in various different situations relating to migrant status, language, the relationships they’re having, travel home.” — PROJECT STAFF

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⁵ All except the final session, which had just two participants and was one day only.

Although the training did not cover "*reflexive learning techniques*" as explicitly as initially planned, project coordinators used an "*interventions checklist*" to encourage participants to "*think about available evidence and rationale for taking action*". They also sought to "*address [reflexive learning]... through discussions with peer mobilisers at training follow-ups and [subsequent] discussions.*"

In London, peer mobilisers were trained in three cohorts across the year, initially by the project lead and latterly in collaboration with earlier-trained peer mobilisers and a photographer. In Bristol, the project lead and Brigstowe project coordinator co-facilitated a one-off training session in June 2019. In both sites, training was held over two days as planned. In Yorkshire, the two MESMAC project coordinators who delivered the training⁶ made some edits to the order and format, to align with their approaches as trainers ("*[to make it] more us, more Yorkshire, flow better for our style*"). They also shortened it to one day, upon learning that two of three peer mobilisers were unavailable on the second day, confident that they could cover everything in the time. They recommended this option for future projects, to improve accessibility to people with little time located across a wide area (a full weekend had been "*a big ask for people coming from all over Yorkshire to Leeds*"). By contrast, a PrEPster project staff member wondered whether a two-day training session, designed by MESMAC project coordinators themselves, might have helped communicate the identity of the project, plan activities and retain peer mobilisers. For MESMAC's second wave of recruitment, project coordinators met with the two new peer mobilisers individually, completing the training informally within two hours.

Peer mobilisers described MobPrESH training as "*highly educational*", "*fun*", "*very collaborative*", "*interactive*" and "*personal*", as opposed to being "*talked at...sitting down and being intellectual*". In London, they particularly appreciated: learning about the science and benefits of PrEP and related NHS policies; critically appraising articles about HIV and Black and other communities of colour; an "*illuminating*" exercise rating sexual activities by 'risk'; and creative activities which were productive both as processes and outputs:

"Writing about... how we feel about our bodies, it was just a really nice, vulnerable moment... because I knew the space already and I felt safe, I was able to express myself". — PEER MOBILISER

"[The zine] was really deep, really moving... [the project coordinator] brought it [to the second training session]... the poems really touched me."
— PEER MOBILISER

"It really got women to think about their stories, talking about sex on a spectrum of importance around sexual health and wellbeing; a process of doing something around artwork was really powerful." — PROJECT STAFF

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⁶ It was originally planned that this would be co-delivered by the project lead, but she was not available on the finalised date.

In Bristol, peer mobilisers valued: the breadth of topics covered; the high-quality materials and audiovisual media used; the opportunity to work together as a small group; and the creative session with an actor, which had been a good “*confidence builder*”. While the extent of information received about PrEP had been a bit of an “*overload*” for one peer mobiliser, it had been communicated clearly and the interactive format had allowed participants to raise questions and “*address grey areas*”. In Yorkshire, the MESMAC project coordinators used PrEPster-provided Powerpoint slides as a guide and videos as discussion points. Group discussions fed heavily into the training, which appeared to suit peer mobilisers well and helped achieve the learning points. MESMAC had been unable to arrange a creative activity led by an external organisation, one project coordinator wondering if such an approach was more possible and/or popular in London where there was “*a bigger DIY scene*”.

Peer mobilisers and project staff also talked about the accessibility of training spaces. In London, peer mobilisers found these comfortable, calm and intimate, noting that a larger group size or venue might have felt intimidating and clinical. The original venue had no lift, but the second training was located at an accessible venue to facilitate the involvement of a peer mobiliser who cannot always use stairs. In Yorkshire, project coordinators had arranged sign-language interpreters to facilitate the involvement of a peer mobiliser who is deaf and made provisions for those who might need to bring their children, which one participant did. Across sites, partner organisations offered to reimburse participants’ travel expenses (see ‘Support, costs & group-working’).

Peer mobilisers described how facilitators’ warm, open and respectful manner had helped to foster a space in which they felt safe to explore their views and experiences of sexual health openly, highlighting the value of horizontal, peer-led training:

“Everyone was listening to each other, we didn’t look down on anyone who didn’t know something, [project coordinator] was lovely... she’s just given us a chance to be who we are in that space.” — PEER MOBILISER

“We set down boundaries... knowing that it’s a taboo... and we’re trying to break that... how are we going to speak about it and protect ourselves in that space.” — PEER MOBILISER

Some project staff had voiced concerns about training different groups of women together (for example by race/ethnicity, religion or gender identity) who might face divergent issues and hold differing views around access to PrEP. Others articulated that such concerns made assumptions about possible prejudices held by different groups of women, and did not recognise that individual participants in the training might belong to more than one group (for example, they could be both trans and hold religious beliefs). These discussions highlight the intersecting identities and power dynamics that different MobPrESH partner organisations did/not consider. In practice, project staff felt that training peer mobilisers from different communities alongside each other had ultimately facilitated learning. This was also apparent in peer mobilisers’ reflections about what

they had learned through carrying out MobPrESH activities, discussed further below (see ‘Connecting within & across communities: what it means to be a peer’).

Peer mobilisers generally felt well prepared after the training: *“I got what I needed to know to go out there and give the information out”*. In Bristol, group brainstorming on Day 2 (*“How do we want to go out to do this mobilisation? What resources are we going to need, use, how are we going to...do it?”*) had offered useful consolidation, which the peer mobiliser who could only attend Day 1 felt she had missed. In Yorkshire, two peer mobilisers’ very late arrival had made it difficult to *“get everyone to the same place”*, engage in discussions and plan ahead, so they were *“probably not as prepared as they might have liked, and we might have liked”* (Project staff). Tools such as the framework checklist (*“a run-down of how would you go and deliver what you wanted to”*) and personal safety guidelines had helped to plan and deliver activities. Some Brigstowe peer mobilisers would have liked to be able to use and adapt the training slides, one feeling that this would help communicate unfamiliar technical terms because *“people want to know you’re informed”*. Another felt differently, preferring to tailor the information she received to her community. A third peer mobiliser reflected that it might have been useful to do more practice engaging people in discussions around sexual health, having later encountered some reluctance to talk (see ‘Navigating silence & stigma, creating trusted spaces’).

London peer mobilisers suggested provision of training certificates that could be listed on CVs. To support sustainability, it was also suggested that partner organisations and peer mobilisers could be trained to deliver onward training:

“Senior PrEPster Mobilisers or Instructors could develop trusting relationships with key members of harder to reach communities and train them to be PrEPster mobilisers, for example similar to Mental Health First Aiders or Champions”. — PEER MOBILISER

→ PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Peer mobilisers engaged with people they were connected to socially, religiously and/or professionally, via diverse formats, audiences and settings, including organised events and spontaneous discussions. Across sites, some peer mobilisers had a clear initial sense which groups they wanted to work with, what they wanted to achieve and how they would go about the work, proactively organising activities. Others, just knowing they *“wanted to do something”*, engaged in activities suggested and supported by the project coordinators. Some had proposed and planned activities that were yet to take place.

Various peer mobilisers (including all Brigstowe ones) had run workshops or planned to do so in the near future, combining presentations, Q&A sessions and informal discussion. Some incorporated these into existing groups’ activities, for example an informal women’s group that meets weekly at a mosque, a Black, Asian and Minority-Ethnic community group that offers slots to guest speakers, and a coffee morning run

by an organisation supporting African-Caribbean women and their families. Some peer mobilisers also convened events themselves, for example holding a presentation and discussion at a hired community centre, or in their work, social or home environments (for example, during an extended lunch break, hosting a dinner). One peer mobiliser planned to hold a workshop at her old workplace which supports homeless people and has many migrant service users. Peer mobilisers across sites also joined project coordinators at local events, including carnival, Pride and Black Pride, co-hosting partner organisations' stalls, handing out information about PrEP and engaging with people in the crowd (see 'Connecting & relating').

Peer mobilisers also held frequent, informal, one-to-one and small-group discussions, with friends, co-workers, family members and strangers, sometimes organised in advanced but often spontaneously. In Yorkshire and London, peer mobilisers had initiated discussions at hairdressers where they worked or visited, inviting salons to display PrEP posters and postcards provided by PrEPster⁷. One Brigstowe peer mobiliser approached women in the park, inviting them to join her for cake before showing videos and engaging in discussions about PrEP. Some planned activities in detail (*"I sat down and thought, 'Who are the targets, what do they need, how am I going to tailor the information to best suit them?'"*) while others *"play[ed] it by ear"*.

Peer mobilisers used a range of technologies and resources. Brigstowe peer mobilisers organised group and one-to-one discussions via phone, Whatsapp and Skype, and approached strangers and people they knew face-to-face. They used printed materials (e.g. PrEP leaflets, cards, postcards provided by PrEPster), Powerpoints and videos (e.g. Dr Nneka Nwokolo's TED talk (11), PrEP17 documentary (12)) to facilitate conversation and encourage women to seek more information. One peer mobiliser felt that she could have gained wider reach by posting a photo of her leaflet on social media, hinting that this approach was newer to her (*"I have a lot to learn"*). In London, peer mobilisers used social media and distributed PrEP cards in public places (such as women's toilets). Across sites, MobPrESH hosted screenings and panel discussions of the film *"Nothing Without Us: the Women Who Will End Aids"* about the role of Black women in HIV activism (13).

Peer mobilisers also participated in and/or led a range of creative activities. In London, this included a banner- and pizza-making evening with a queer youth group run by a friend of the project coordinator, a vogue ball (mostly attended by gay men, but also a few trans and cis women), and various creative workshops at/around the Fringe! queer film festival (e.g. *"felting the flaps"* genital crafting, smut-writing). Some training activities had also produced outputs that peer mobilisers could use during activities, such as the zine (see 'Training'). As outlined above, the latter was highly popular with peer mobilisers. However, one peer mobiliser—noting that the zine had been shared on social media—felt that it would have been beneficial to include a *"trigger warning, considering the content, subject matter and who the zine was made for"* and for peer mobilisers to *"review the*

.....

⁷ In Yorkshire, one peer mobiliser and project coordinator had also planned to do a 30-minute workshop with the salon staff—with a view to inspiring discussions about PrEP and sexual health with their customers—but the peer mobiliser left the project before this happened.

zine before it was printed, as there were some mistakes and questionable imagery used”.

In the final London training session, peer mobilisers had provided a brief for a new PrEP for women booklet⁸, commenting on draft content, imagery, likes and dislikes. One project staff member anticipated that this could help to showcase peer mobilisers’ activities, as a formal alternative to the zine. Yet although peer mobilisers had provided “*great feedback on the copy*”, their competing requirements (that it should be concise but comprehensive, photographic but also with diagrams) raised challenges. In Yorkshire, the peer mobiliser who is deaf produced a video about PrEP in British sign language and she and MESMAC shared this on social media and with other organisations. Another peer mobiliser had planned to film various MobPrESH activities but ultimately left the project before this took place.

London-based peer mobilisers noted that PrEPster’s strong connections had helped to make events happen (“*They are good with the events, they know the people to speak to*”). Brigstowe project staff were impressed with the range of activities and reach peer mobilisers had achieved, particularly given the short time period. They attributed this to the high-quality training and peer mobilisers’ deep knowledge about how to reach out to their communities.

Appendix 3 provides a summary of MobPrESH activity.

→ SUPPORT, COSTS AND GROUP-WORKING

In sites where we were able to talk directly to peer mobilisers, they described being very well supported by their project coordinators, who they could contact at any time, through multiple channels (email, phone, Whatsapp, social media) without fear of judgement, and who supported their activities:

“I felt very safe to talk to her [the project coordinator]... [for any question that came up] she 100% answered it and there was no judgement, it was a sensitive place... very easy to email and text [her]”. — PEER MOBILISER

In London, the project coordinator sought to respond promptly to messages, including out-of-hours texts, noting peer mobilisers’ varied schedules; where possible, she sent individual rather than mass messages. She encouraged peer mobilisers to come to activities soon after the training to keep them engaged. While there had been concrete reasons to meet up at the beginning (e.g. creating the zine), some people had disengaged periodically and one fully; in future, she would recommend “*more time for calls... [and] coffee meet-ups*” to try to avoid this.

.....

⁸ Being developed by PrEPster, THT and iwantprepnw, in response to feedback over the current leaflet available (the mention of ‘sex’ on the back cover has “*prohibited women from distributing it in certain places, particularly around faith communities*”).

The Brigstowe project coordinator delivered support through *ad hoc* and scheduled one-to-one meetings, occasional group supervision, frequent Whatsapp and phone communication (including late evenings), and by participating in events at peer mobilisers' request (e.g. helping with Q&A sessions, co-hosting stall at local events). Peer mobilisers appreciated her support and advice on community engagement, such as how to tailor messages for communities less open to talking about sexual health (see 'Connecting & relating'). One peer mobiliser did not reach out initially after an activity had not gone as planned, despite knowing that the project coordinator and project lead were always there. She felt that she should "*work on [this] myself*", while reflecting "*maybe I should ask more... they may have ideas*". Peer mobilisers also received logistical support from other Brigstowe staff, including links to resources, help claiming expenses and printing leaflets, but the "*[project coordinator] has been the link*".

In Yorkshire, project coordinators indicated how they had sought to support peer mobilisers and discussed related challenges. Communication varied depending on the extent and type of support wanted and needed. The peer mobiliser who is deaf, for example, made her video independently and communicated with the project coordinator via email (having agreed this was easier than arranging sign-language interpreters for in-person meetings). Others communicated by phone and email (frequency depending on their requirements) but also met project coordinators face-to-face, for example making joint visits to hairdressers' and, in one case, visiting MESMAC to explore broader volunteering opportunities. On these occasions project coordinators also checked in on MobPrESH and discussed any concerns and/or anxieties peer mobilisers had. One, who sought to keep peer mobilisers interested without "*bombarding them with messages*", found it difficult to gauge how much they ultimately wanted to take part and felt that longer hours would have enabled more face-to-face meetings rather than relying on digital communication ("*people can put a face to the name*"). Below we discuss the specific challenges MESMAC project coordinators encountered around engaging and supporting peer mobilisers, specifically in relation to the gender and ethnicity ethos of MobPrESH (see 'Working within & across communities: what it means to be a peer'), and time, money, health and related pressures across sites (see 'Competing pressures & structural hostilities', and 'Time, money & continuity').

The extent to which peer mobilisers worked together varied across sites. In London and Bristol, some peer mobilisers held events together (see 'Project activities'). Although Brigstowe peer mobilisers had not met often as a group—because of existing commitments, and one living outside of Bristol—their Whatsapp group enabled them to share ideas, information, plans and photos of their activities. By contrast, in London, where peer mobilisers were trained in three cohorts, one peer mobiliser described her discomfort at her email address being shared with people she did not know, which could be avoided by 'bc'ing in group emails: "*This is just a gripe I have... I always reply and say please can you bc my email address, it happened quite a lot... it goes back to the safety thing, feeling safe*". One project staff member felt that MESMAC peer mobilisers appeared to work more autonomously than in other sites.

Peer mobilisers had been happy to volunteer for MobPrESH and appreciated the provision of refreshments and reimbursement of travel for meetings and events. In London, most had not needed to claim travel expenses but those who had found it had been an easy process; one peer mobiliser who had a child had not incurred childcare expenses, instead deciding to “*co-parent a bit more*”. In Yorkshire, reimbursing travel expenses had not been overly costly, despite people travelling from across the region to attend training, because of fewer than anticipated participants. In Bristol/North Somerset, it was important that peer mobilisers were not “*out of pocket*”, particularly those without regular income. One peer mobiliser, having just learned that childcare costs could be covered, had found someone to look after her children for free but would need to claim for these in future. Conscious of the small budget, Brigstowe peer mobilisers had used free spaces such as community centres and parks for activities. The organisation’s established infrastructure meant that they did not require many resources but incurred occasional unforeseen costs (such as train fares for a meeting moved to Leeds). The importance of voluntary work being acknowledged was highlighted.

→ LEARNING AND DISSEMINATING

For project staff, reflective learning was an important component of MobPrESH, in alignment with PrEPster’s broader ethos, amid frustrations over prior learning not always having been incorporated into the HIV sector:

“The thing for me is the learning from it, so that it’s not just a project that we’ve done and then the funding ends and we close everything down and that’s it...This project [MobPrESH] has helped shaped the foundation stones of how we’ll work into the future...deliver, evaluate and reflect for our and public learning or consultancy for others”. — PROJECT STAFF

Funding for experimental practice and qualitative evaluation made it possible for project staff to learn from implementation in practice, beyond a narrow focus on numeric targets:

“It’s been nice to reflect on everything and be aware of what we’ve done well and what has been difficult but what we’ve enjoyed about it.” — PROJECT STAFF

“We are always reminding ourselves that this is an innovation fund project, it’s experimental and if we don’t hit targets that doesn’t matter because we’ve got something to say about why... we’re not trying to do a slick, spin glossy piece of work... we’re saying part of this is really tough, people left the project for different reasons and this is why, this is what we can do differently in future.” — PROJECT STAFF

It also offered peer mobilisers a chance to “*reflect, reenergize*” and learn from each other’s experiences, mirroring the broader mutual learning that the project fostered:

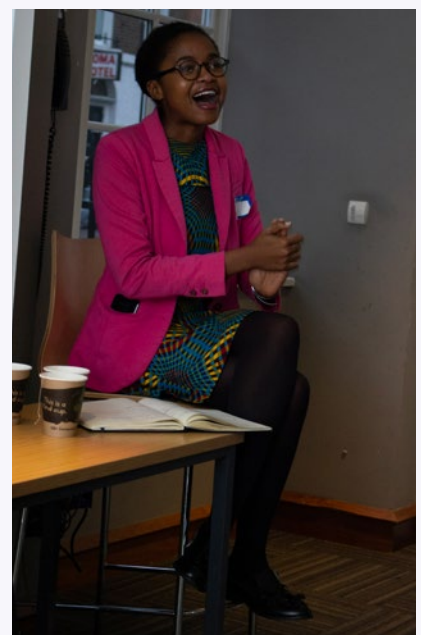
“It’s been good to learn from other people’s experiences on this as well, how they found it, what they got out of it.” — PEER MOBILISER

“I plan to incorporate a lot of what I have learned [from other peer mobilisers] from today’s [focus group] discussion, as well as tapping into [the project coordinator’s] expertise and support”. — PEER MOBILISER

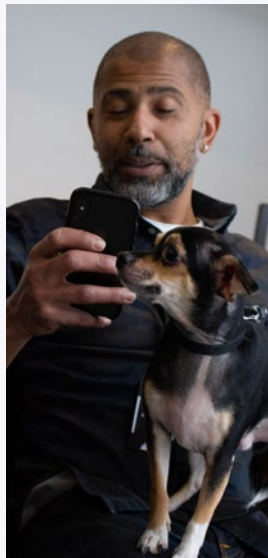
PrEPster would have welcomed more involvement from PHE’s external evaluators, Ipsos MORI, who they had not yet had any communication with, along with greater “*iterative learning*” across Innovation Fund projects: “*there was one meeting at beginning of the year, but no sense of cross-promotion, it doesn’t feel like a project as a whole*”.

Brigstowe peer mobilisers proposed how MobPrESH work could be disseminated, both within and beyond the project. At the time of the focus group, peer mobilisers had not yet met or had contact with MobPrESH peer mobilisers in other sites and were keen to do so to share experiences. The first opportunity for this was at the peer mobiliser Celebration Day in November in London, which four of five peer mobilisers from Brigstowe attended together with the project coordinator, alongside a number of peer mobilisers from London, and PrEPster and MESMAC project staff. Project staff had originally planned for cross-collaboration across regions, with peer mobilisers from London’s first cohort travelling to other sites’ training sessions, which they felt would have strengthened the project and offered peer mobilisers across sites the opportunity to meet earlier.

Brigstowe peer mobilisers felt that national bodies should be using their platforms to disseminate work being done by grassroot organisations, including those outside of London. Peer mobilisers urged us to disseminate the findings of this evaluation widely, including beyond Black and other communities of colour, and to build on previous work by community-led organisations in the HIV sector.



DISSEMINATION EVENT



PROCESS EVALUATION KEY THEMES

Through this evaluation we have identified six key themes that help to unpack how MobPrESH worked in practice and factors shaping its successes and challenges: the urgency and power of knowing; connecting and relating; navigating silence and stigma; connecting within and across communities; competing pressures and structural hostilities; time, money and continuity. We detail these here in turn, with illustrative quotes from focus groups and interviews.

→ THE URGENCY AND POWER OF KNOWING

Prior to their engagement with MobPrESH, most peer mobilisers and the women they interacted with had little knowledge of PrEP, many never having heard of it. This affected all stages of the project, from peer mobiliser recruitment and training to the ways in which peer mobilisers engaged in discussions within their communities.

In Yorkshire peer mobilisers knew less about HIV, and wanted to talk more about broader sexual health, than project coordinators had expected. In London, peer mobilisers—described by project staff as a “*self-selecting group*”—had varied knowledge of sexual health services such as contraception. Brigstowe peer mobilisers, some of whom had engaged in HIV activism for many years, consolidated their knowledge about PrEP and HIV, and new ways to reach out to their communities, through training, support from the project coordinator and other peer mobilisers, and by “*learning while doing*”. Peer mobilisers across sites mentioned learning new information about HIV through MobPrESH, for example that a person living with HIV who has an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus to others (‘undetectable=untransmittable’ or U=U).

With the exception of trans groups, most of the organisations that Brigstowe project staff contacted when promoting MobPrESH had not heard of PrEP, so intensive work was required to explain the relevance of the project. Indeed, many of the women peer mobilisers talked to—with the exception of some young people—knew little about HIV more broadly and were variously unaware of advances in HIV treatment and its implications (e.g. U=U), how HIV is transmitted, and where PrEP, HIV testing and sexual health services could be accessed. Gauging women’s existing knowledge thus formed a core part of initiating discussions:

“If you’re talking about PrEP and people don’t know the basics about HIV, you have to go back. But with young people who have background knowledge, PrEP was easy to get into and they sort of got it.” — PEER

MOBILISER

Although everyone anticipated or experienced some reluctance to engage in such discussions (see ‘Navigating silence & stigma, creating trusted spaces’), they also described women’s interest in learning about PrEP and other aspects of sexual health,

such as condom negotiation and STIs. Brigstowe and London peer mobilisers, and the women they engaged with, questioned the lack of information “*out there*” about PrEP, HIV and sexual health. They felt that these topics deserved far greater media attention, and conveyed urgency to inform themselves and others:

“[My children] said, ‘We don’t know about this and it’s going on in our university.’” — PEER MOBILISER

“People are asking, ‘Why don’t we know?’” — PEER MOBILISER

“More people need to know about it [PrEP]... I had no idea what it was, how accessible it was, and I’m wondering why is it not in people’s faces?”

— PEER MOBILISER

“I didn’t even know [before MobPrESH] that undetectable equals untransmittable... this should be on the news... It should have been a massive headline across the paper... how do I not-, I come from a health background and I don’t know about this.” — PEER MOBILISER

Some peer mobilisers themselves described learning about PrEP as a “*revelation*” and participating in MobPrESH as “*enlightening and enriching*”. They felt that this knowledge helped them to “*empower*” themselves and their communities (“*knowledge is power, we just have to empower ourselves and disseminate the message that this is happening*”). One Brigstowe peer mobiliser described striking up conversations about PrEP immediately after the training, feeling highly motivated and “*fresh*” with new knowledge. Another had been invited to speak about PrEP and sexual health in two other cities after presenting to her women’s group at a mosque, which project staff considered a testament to the quality of peer mobilisers’ work and ability to reach out within and beyond their communities:

“They told women in their group what I had informed them about PrEP and they said they’d like me to come... I was really amazed at this progress, the power of the word of mouth.” — PEER MOBILISER

In Yorkshire, although some peer mobilisers were not involved in MobPrESH for long, project staff felt that they had ultimately “*learned a lot and... were empowered to go and have those conversations*”. In addition to discussions that project staff had witnessed/engaged in (such as while visiting hairdressers and at events), this was likely to have generated the “*ripple effects*” of onward conversations that “*will have changed some people’s views... made a difference*” but that were not “*recorded officially as volunteering*” and thus not possible to “*tangibly report on*”.

For some, MobPrESH training had given them confidence, and a sense of legitimacy, to share what they had learned. Indeed several peer mobilisers noted that people appeared more at ease to talk upon learning that they had been trained and were connected to a

sexual health charity. For others, MobPrESH offered “*another angle*” for their existing HIV activism. However, because PrEP involved medication, one project staff member noted that peer mobilisers were “*very wary of saying they had knowledge about it*”, evident in how an experienced HIV activist rated her understanding of PrEP during training. In London, for more technical questions asked at events (e.g. about hormone interactions), peer mobilisers had needed to consult with project staff, partly because of the extent of knowledge required to keep up with rapid developments in research. To avoid misinformation, one project staff member proposed an alternative model for future projects, although there were concerns that this may not inspire sufficient confidence in communities and could feel patronising to volunteers:

“Having five volunteers and two experts there to ask technical questions might be a good model but we also know people would say “you don’t really know what you’re talking about, I’m going to the bar, bye’ without talking to the expert. Some of the volunteer work has to be quite basic and that can be quite patronising.” — PROJECT STAFF

→ CONNECTING AND RELATING

Peer mobilisers described the importance of connecting and relating with women during MobPrESH activities, at the moment of initial interaction and through ongoing dialogue. Visible cues, such as wearing and displaying “*PrEPster gear*” (e.g. badges, stickers, t-shirts, postcards), and the specific focus on PrEP, helped spark curiosity and interest (“*People wonder, ‘what’s this about?’*”). This, in turn, could lead to lengthy discussions both at organised events and during everyday interactions. In Yorkshire, during visits to hairdressers, although some people were initially a bit “*taken aback*”, they had ultimately had good conversations and “*seeming interest in furthering those conversations*”, three different salons having displayed PrEP-related postcards and posters. One Brigstowe peer mobiliser described the importance of leaflets standing out and resonating with people, noting the popularity of a leaflet featuring a Black woman: “*When you’re speaking with black people and they see a black face they resonate immediately, and they want to hear*”. London peer mobilisers felt that activities worked best when they were relatable, culturally relevant and humorous, in the absence of existing messages from people “*who look like you*”:

“You know how TLC used to wear condoms on their jackets? I’ve always wanted to do something like that...for teenagers... promote being safe and get rid of whatever the shame or the stigma is...quite like fun and lighthearted with music and all that retro 90s stuff, and be relatable...sometimes I think that’s where the issues come from, if there’s no one relatable putting the message across...you feel there’s no one to ask or...talk to, if no one looks like you, no one shares the same issues as you”. (Peer mobiliser)

“I feel like humour can diffuse a lot of situations and open up a conversation in a different way... I’m very into stand-up [comedy], like Paul

Chowdhry is really filthy and has a way of opening up [conversations], if you can have those cultural references.” — PEER MOBILISER

One peer mobiliser noted how on-screen representation of Black LGBT people's experiences of HIV stigma (e.g. the American drama series, *Pose*) had helped initiate discussions, in one case leading to a friend feeling confident enough to get tested for HIV. Another peer mobiliser noted how being open about her HIV status helped generate curiosity and then “*engage with people on a personal level*”.

Peer mobilisers sought to incorporate PrEP, HIV and sexual health into everyday conversations, rather than “*pitch style*”, without “*forcing it*’ on people:

“I was always aware that it sounded like a spiel because I don't like speaking like that and I don't like hearing people speaking like that, ‘Ok, what're you trying to sell me?’ I try to find a way to be relatable so that it feels a bit less of a pitch, I don't quite know how...I'm probably more self-aware of what I'm saying or not saying...I always try to think of ways to make them feel more comfortable with the conversation.” — PEER MOBILISER

“I try not to force it down, but whenever the opportunity creeps in, for example something on the news, or my little sister talks about sex ed class...I'll be like, ‘Oh that's really nice, I'm doing something similar to that’... just telling them things I've learned, it helps.” — PEER MOBILISER

One peer mobiliser described how she sought to “*plant the seed*”, gently linking the conversation to women's broader concerns (“*A lot of women were really interested in speaking about [condom negotiation]...it opened a lot of doors*”), supported with statistics and discussions around why women might not attend health services. Another peer mobiliser described tailoring messages, resources and formats to the needs, knowledge and expectations of her community, specifically Muslim women (for example, “*enjoying sex*” was not something she felt was appropriate to say), and gauging what mattered most to them. Following valuable advice from the project coordinator, she began engaging in conversation about women's primary concerns, which in turn sparked their interest in PrEP:

“[The peer coordinator] told me, ‘just make it natural, let them voice their thoughts, to know what they need and then tailor message’. I made sure the message over PrEP was there, but also gave them an opportunity to discuss what was on their mind”. — PEER MOBILISER

Interactive formats—for example following Powerpoint presentations with informal discussion—helped conversation to flow as participants became “*less apprehensive*”. Building informal discussions around creative activities also helped remove the formality and pressure of more structured, didactic interventions:

“We had a pizza evening with a younger [LGBT] group, we painted a poster... because the space was less formal there was less of a barrier, we were able to have these little conversations as opposed to this big formal lecture type thing...painting and talking”. — PEER MOBILISER

One Brigstowe peer mobiliser noted particular success engaging with young people, some of whom had questioned the targeting of specific age groups. Two others had reached out via their own young-adult children, some of whom had invited their friends to a group discussion. In London, some peer mobilisers used different approaches to connect with younger and older women, for example asking the former about their weekend plans and inviting the latter for “*a quick chat*”. In Bristol and London, two peer mobilisers felt that middle-aged and older women considered these discussions relevant only for young people, but others described good success with these groups, women showing interest for themselves and their children:

“That older generation that I spoke to...it was generally older African and Caribbean women...I didn’t expect it to go so well but it did...by the end everyone was very open...I just think communication is everything. Intergenerational especially.” — PEER MOBILISER

“I gave them opportunity to discuss what was on their mind, their children, they started saying to each other. ‘we need to talk to our kids in university to let them know about it.’”— PEER MOBILISER

Peer mobilisers talked about the role of emotions in making these connections. Peer mobilisers described their satisfaction when discussions went well and, for some, their disappointment when they did not. A Brigstowe peer mobiliser described how her momentum was affected by moments of engagement. When women did not show up to her first group session she “*hit a rock*” and still feels unsatisfied about this. By contrast, engaging women in conversations about PrEP were her “*most successful and happiest moments*” during which she felt “*very proud because we really engaged, people showed interest, they really seemed like they wanted to be involved, be part of it in whatever small way they can*”. Some felt anxieties, awkwardness and pressure in advance of engaging in discussions, linked to lack of confidence or shyness (“*Some people it’s in their nature... for me it’s probably more of a pressure...which is why partly the whole [workshop at former workplace] I haven’t done it yet... but I will do it*”) and concerns over how people in their communities would react (“*Would I be accepted [in my community]? People are conservative and Muslim women in particular do not like to speak about sexual health openly*”). Yet they developed strategies to deal with this by anticipating and planning for different situations, seeking advice from the project coordinator and other peer mobilisers, building up conversations gradually (as described above), and using social media:

“The way I overcame it was just take it one day at a time, there won’t be people to speak to everyday but it’s the fact that you had the training...

there will be someone and there's ways you can do it if you're shy... I really used social media to... talk about these things." — PEER MOBILISER

"If you don't feel like they're reciprocating... it's easy to start fumbling... they might be listening to you but they don't maybe come across... having a toolkit of how you go in and gauge quite quickly how to handle each situation". — PEER MOBILISER

One of the MESMAC project coordinators noted peer mobilisers' feelings of pride at participating in MobPrESH activities, particularly those who experienced anxiety.

→ NAVIGATING SILENCE AND STIGMA, CREATING TRUSTED SPACES

Most peer mobilisers anticipated and/or experienced some reluctance to talk about PrEP and sexual health in public. In London, one peer mobiliser linked this to women's concerns about "*where their information is going to go*" and how it could be "*exploited and used against them*", in the context of a government-funded project and women's uncertainty over its focus. More frequently, peer mobilisers linked silence to blaming discourses around HIV, bodies and difference, reinforced through language, music and assumptions that HIV only affects gay men and "*PrEP makes people more promiscuous*". Peer mobilisers highlighted the influence of social, religious and legal oppression of sexual and gender minorities, particularly where colonial-era laws criminalising homosexuality persisted:

"In the Caribbean and certain parts of Africa where it's actually illegal to be gay...even having that conversation, where do you start?"; "With a history lesson"; "You literally have to go to colonial-, oh my god, it's so much. It's all conditioning as well...so much to unpack". — PEER MOBILISERS

Peer mobilisers anticipated difficulties engaging with Christian and Muslim women, particularly in religious spaces (i.e. churches and mosques) and where men were present. Some women had voiced concerns that attending MobPrESH events and talking about these issues would imply they were HIV-positive, promiscuous and/or mistrusted their partner; for women who were HIV positive but not public about their status, it could also raise suspicions with partners, families and communities. One peer mobiliser also linked this reticence directly to HIV-related blame, compared with conditions not perceived as a person's 'fault':

"So that [health condition affecting the woman's community unrelated to sexual health] you feel very strongly about but this, for some reason, is not as important because you assume that people who are found in this situation, it was on them, their fault". — PEER MOBILISER

Yet unwillingness to talk did not necessarily mean unwillingness to listen, and peer

mobilisers described various ways they navigated these silences and related stigmas. One peer mobiliser felt that if people knew more about advances in medicine (such as U=U), and that HIV is now comparable with other chronic illnesses, “*the stigma would probably go*”.

In Bristol, one peer mobiliser produced small, inconspicuous leaflets, to quickly let people know where they could access information and support, and sought to get a slot at an existing forum to reach women who would not come to an advertised PrEP event. Two peer mobilisers stressed in discussions with women that PrEP allowed them to make choices, protect themselves and take control of their sexual health, with or without their partners knowing:

“I tried really hard to make people aware that you don’t have to be sleeping around to get HIV, you can be a most faithful wife... [you might not] know what your husband is getting up to, as a woman you have a choice, if you have PrEP to protect yourself with”. — PEER MOBILISER

London peer mobilisers described how initiating discussions required them to understand, and attempt to undo, homophobic conditioning and assumptions, including in spaces which might foster such ideas (such as churches and schools):

“I like to ask questions...‘What would you do if... you had a family member like this?’ You kind of recognize...maybe they don’t feel that badly against the situation, it’s just the things that they’ve...been learning ever since they were little.” — PEER MOBILISER

“I always think about spaces in our community that have really strange hang-ups about sexuality...the church was one place where I was like, ‘I need to go there’...I didn’t go there with it yet though...I went to a wedding and the priest started the ceremony by saying...only men and women should get married and I was just like, ‘I’m about to walk out the church’, I remember feeling so frustrated...he was like, ‘Does everyone understand?’ and literally everyone was like, ‘No, it’s 2019, we’ve moved on’”. — PEER MOBILISER

Some compared this to the privilege of safe family and school environments that had allowed them to talk openly, and intergenerationally, about sex and sexuality:

“My parents are more open-minded...the views back home, they have that inside of them, but living here a long time they have been exposed to different things and they’ve come to different conclusions...my privilege is to have parents who sat me and my siblings down to talk about sex, created the safety in our home”. — PEER MOBILISER

“At my daughter’s school they have a lot of conversations and it’s really

healthy...I was having a conversation with her and I was being really awkward, ‘When you’re older you might have a boyfriend or you might not even have a boyfriend, you might have a girlfriend’ and she was just like, ‘Mummy, I know!’” — PEER MOBILISER

Across sites, fostering such environments was a major motivation for taking part in MobPrESH, and was achieved by embedding PrEP discussions in existing, trusted spaces of relevance to women’s lives:

“[MobPrESH] has made me think how it’s difficult for some people to do things I think is really easy and that’s what makes me want to do this even more, giving something back...giving them permission to feel alright about whatever it is they don’t feel ok about...At first people just want to feel safe and that someone in the room understands...creating that safe space is what makes people be a bit more open...comfortable.” — PEER MOBILISER

After poor turnout at a larger group, one Brigstowe peer mobiliser noted how ‘mini sessions’ with women who knew each other well allowed them to talk discreetly without embarrassment, and to respond to spontaneous interest from strangers (“*If I had three to four women [e.g. in the park] and they wanted to have a conversation, I would just do it*”). Where they had little control over the broader environment (e.g. people coming and going in a large group), this was more challenging but still “*worth doing*”. MobPrESH training had equipped peer mobilisers to challenge preconceptions safely, and initiate hitherto off-limits conversations, particularly in religious and/or family environments:

“The whole programme has made me more confident to have conversations...with people about HIV and sexual health. Before it was really awkward and my background...is majorly religious, growing up in the church...we do talk about sex but...there are a lot of boundaries, a lot of places that you can’t go...[Now] I can go up to my mum and be like, ‘I’m learning about this’ and she’s happy about that too”. — PEER MOBILISER

→ CONNECTING WITHIN AND ACROSS COMMUNITIES: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PEER

With MobPrESH, PrEPster sought to move away from the more usual “*volunteer profile*” of other HIV organisations, which they described as an “*‘aunty network’ of older African HIV-positive women*” who wanted to participate in the project to engage their nieces and daughters (as opposed to their peers) in discussions about PrEP and sexual health. Instead, PrEPster sought:

“People who have some level of political or activist sensibility. [In London] one or two are in their early 20s, most are in 30s and 40s, most are black or brown...quite articulate around sexual and reproductive health...[able] to jump into a crowd and talk about sex”. — PROJECT STAFF

BRISTOL



This had created “*insider outsider perception[s] of the project*”, but one project staff member felt that PrEPster’s reputation as “*edgy*” and peer-driven had facilitated engagement:

“[People say] I love the work that you do, I engage with it, I know it comes from people like me...people have an attachment to it.” — PROJECT STAFF

Peer mobilisers variously described being a peer mobiliser as “*an extension of family*”, “*friendship with purpose*”, and disseminating information for people to use as they wished:

“It feels very normal to me to speak to people, it feels like an extension of my family...I’m always looking for pockets of community...mum advised if I ever feel lonely to go to the local African Caribbean centre and just do stuff...I’ve always done that, it helps me to stay grounded, keeps me in the community”. — PEER MOBILISER

For some, it meant feeling “*safe*” and “*equipped*” to talk to people but for others it involved responsibility and “*a bit of pressure to deliver*” (“*I didn’t just come on this training [for myself]*”). Project staff considered peer mobilization, “*not coming from outside... like, ‘Why can’t we help them?’*”, but led by people who “*look like or have some similar experiences to people in need of PrEP or who should know about it*”, for example shared ethnicity, language, age, and/or experience of the kind of sex they had. For MobPrESH specifically, it meant experience navigating sexual and reproductive health services. One project staff member voiced disappointment at not having recruited an out PrEP user, but also noted that few other projects had achieved this.

Peer mobilisers interacted with people within and beyond their existing family, social and community networks. They often set out to engage with specific groups they were part of, including Black and other women of colour, Muslim women, asylum seekers and refugees, younger people, and trans women (“*We go where we know, I wouldn’t have gone to [name of peer mobiliser]’s community*”). Most also engaged people of nationalities, ethnicities, generations and genders different from their own. For example, one Brigstowe peer mobiliser, who lived in a predominantly white town, ran group discussions attended by Black, Asian, Latinx and white women and men, and eight white co-workers, respectively. This was partly because of the heterogeneous composition of existing networks but also out of a sense that “*everyone should be targeted*” (“*Because this programme is for women, it doesn’t mean that only women should hear about it, even men can spread the news*”; Peer mobiliser). In London, activities such as the event at Black Pride had involved reaching out to people of all genders. This helped foster shared understanding:

“We had a small group... we were all black there, but upon going to further events with the LGBT community...people...from all walks of life and communities...It helped me to understand people who are different from me...with different sexualities, especially in my community, I now

understand how hard it is to come out to everyone, not having anyone to speak to, how are you supposed to learn? I have a friend who is bisexual and I didn't know how to talk about it...now I feel better equipped.” — PEER MOBILISER

Despite Brigstowe and MESMACs' concerns over training different communities of women together (see 'Peer mobiliser training'), this diversity had ultimately been a strength, allowing MobPrESH to bring people together around “*a common cause*”:

“We had a deaf woman who's living with HIV...people from quite different communities, different ages, different places lived, lots of really interesting interaction during the day, people took a lot away from day, a lot of really vital information they learned”. — PROJECT STAFF

“I think that diversity and bringing people together with a common cause and educating people in different areas in their life that they can go away and be empowered...and empower others in their community...has potential for huge benefit...the vision of it was brilliant.” — PROJECT STAFF

London peer mobilisers felt that MobPrESH had engaged women from diverse communities, although one had hoped to meet and work alongside more trans women and sex workers:

“I wish I could have met more different groups of women...I thought there would be like trans women, sex workers...this amazing rainbow of different women doing all this work...that sounds like I was really disappointed, I wasn't, it was just different to what I imagined”. — PEER MOBILISER

Under the next heading, we discuss the competing pressures and structural hostilities (such as transphobia and precarity) that shaped possibilities to work with these groups and some migrant and refugee communities (see 'Competing priorities & structural hostilities').

Peer mobilisers had had great interactions engaging with women of multiple nationalities and ethnicities:

“My community is very diverse, I could bump into 10 nationalities in a 2-minute walk.” — PEER MOBILISER

“Not everyone is homogenous...refugees and asylum seekers...have their different groups.” — PEER MOBILISER

“[Women at the mosque include] south Asians, Indians, north Americans, Black Africans.” — PEER MOBILISER

A number of project staff and peer mobilisers voiced their belief and pride in MobPrESH's focus on Black and other women of colour, given how neglected they had been in sexual health promotion and service access to date. Yet peer mobilisers also understood why some of the women they interacted with questioned and/or felt defensive about this approach (*"People ask] 'Why are we only focusing on Black women? Really defensive... I understand"*). MESMAC had encountered particular challenges in this respect. One peer mobiliser felt that Black women reaching out to other Black women singled them out unnecessarily. Following lengthy discussions around the reasoning for this approach, this disagreement could not be reconciled and she decided to withdraw from the project. Some Brigstowe peer mobilisers echoed these concerns: while they were aware of the epidemiological rationale for focusing on Black women (which they had covered during training)⁹, some felt this could reinforce blame (*"I'm sick and tired of hearing 'BME group is very high' because it makes them look irresponsible"*) and miss other groups with rising prevalence (e.g. older people, heterosexual middle-aged white women). One peer mobiliser attributed this to a misconception that white people are not affected by HIV (*"HIV is not seen as a white person's concern, it's seen as a black person's illness"*) and urged more research in this area. By contrast, a project staff member considered resistance to this focus a matter of *"ideology"* that could not always be countered with quantitative data:

"No matter what you say about the epidemiology of it, there are people who say, 'Why can't we just talk about women, why do we need to talk about race?'...I believe in the process I'm doing, I think there's a dearth of people taking this kind of approach...You're never going to change everyone's minds about why we're doing what we're doing. It's easier for people to think about sexual health for group they're not in. Aunties will say, 'I need to tell my daughters this', not looking at the epidemiology...you need to tell your friends'. — PROJECT STAFF

One peer mobiliser in London also described difficulty convincing (older) women that the project was for them, as women:

"[The project coordinator] and I wanted to create a tool box for them, for women to take care of themselves but a lot of the women were still concerned with men, if they're having sexual relationships with men...it was really difficult to get them to understand that this is for you, this is for us...they were a little bit arguing, 'no we have to consider them to', no we don't!" — PEER MOBILISER

London and Brigstowe peer mobilisers linked the absence, and importance, of projects like MobPrESH to prevailing sexism, misogyny and racism. They variously highlighted the necessity of spaces that *"empower"* women, in the context of an over-policing of their bodies, expectations that they protect their partner's sexual health, gendered

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⁹ I.e. research evidence about which groups have the highest HIV prevalence and late diagnoses rates

double-standards and related ‘slut-shaming’, discourses around sexual violence activism limiting men’s freedoms, and broader neglect of women’s health promotion. One peer mobiliser directly linked the lack of access to PrEP to the fact that HIV is no longer seen as a “*white man’s problem*”:

“The face of HIV before was a white man, now that the problem belongs to the BAME community...we’re not receiving enough attention”.

— PEER MOBILISER

Another noted that race and class privilege meant that “*a lot of my middle-class white friends, even if they don’t have a lot of information about HIV, if shit goes down, they’ll still be OK*”. (Peer mobiliser)

One project staff member noted the positive impact that this project had had on the gender make-up of PrEPster—an organisation founded by four men—while also noting that women were in the minority on staff. PrEPster project staff reflected that it had perhaps been easier for them than partner organisations to articulate the “*racial and gender identity politics*” of the project because PrEPster’s staff are predominantly Black and many of their volunteers are people of colour and/or trans, involved in contemporary discourses around race/ethnicity and gender identity in London. By contrast, several project staff noted that Brigstowe staff are predominantly white. Project staff from different partner organisations noted the need for active efforts to achieve racial and gender equality in staffing within these organisations, and for further peer-led projects centred on the sexual health of Black and other women of colour.

→ COMPETING PRESSURES AND STRUCTURAL HOSTILITIES

A key reason some peer mobilisers disengaged from the project periodically or permanently was their health and social care needs. One peer mobiliser described being unable to take part in MobPrESH activities during periods of ill-health. Similarly, MESMAC project staff described how the complex social care needs of some peer mobilisers in Yorkshire—which came to light in part because of the “*nourishing*” space created by the project—meant that they ultimately had to withdraw. Project staff sought to support these needs where possible but had limited capacity to do so and inevitably these efforts left them with less time for delivering other intended activities. Indeed, one project staff member reflected that, had the project recruited anticipated numbers of peer mobilisers, it would have been unsustainable for project coordinators to support them.

Relatedly, project staff described systemic pressures and hostilities that had hindered peer mobiliser recruitment for some communities and engagement with women from others—particularly migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, trans women and sex workers. In London, project staff also noted that MobPrESH had not recruited as many migrants as hoped and just one peer mobiliser each from south Asia and Somalia. Similarly, a Brigstowe project staff member noted that they were many ethnicities and

nationalities not reflected among peer mobilisers. Conscious that refugees and asylum-seekers were “*vulnerable*” and had “*other things on their mind*” as they navigated the asylum process, one Brigstowe peer mobiliser had limited activities to briefly providing information rather than “*a platform for anything else*”. In Yorkshire, language barriers and enforced transience brought about by a hostile immigration system limited possibilities for working with some groups:

“[On other projects] we work with migrant groups in Wakefield a bit, but it is really short-term, with people in ‘holding centres’ for 4 weeks, with really low-level English.” — PROJECT STAFF

Just two MobPrESH peer mobilisers were trans women. Although neither were able to participate in focus groups for this evaluation, project staff described how one peer mobiliser had done extensive work with trans and non-binary groups in Bristol and another planned to carry out a workshop at a support group she attended in London. In Yorkshire, project coordinators were disappointed not to have recruited any trans or non-binary peer mobilisers, despite working a lot with these communities on other projects. One had had interesting conversations with people attending an *International Non-Binary Day* event, noting that these had effectively functioned as one-off interventions, but “*nothing with longevity I guess*”.

Project staff described a range of reasons they felt they had not been able to recruit more trans and non-binary peer mobilisers, related to timing, language, imagery, competing pressures and structural hostilities. In Leeds, MobPrESH activities had clashed with Pride-related ones and in London, PrEPster had since had more trans people join as volunteers who had not been available or aware of MobPrESH earlier. While project staff were glad that two trans women had considered MobPrESH a “*space safe enough to come*”, they had anticipated greater potential to attract trans and non-binary peer mobilisers, given their use of “*explicit non-binary*” imagery and language about “*self-identifying women*”. However, one project staff member felt that they had not used clear enough language, noting that one non-binary group had contacted them to clarify eligibility (“*There was something around wording of ‘non-binary people assigned female at birth’ that I don’t think we got completely correct... what we meant was non-binary people who may be read as female*”). It was suggested that more extensive prior consultation with non-binary people might have helped to “*get the wording right*” and this was recommended for future projects.

One MESMAC project coordinator also noted that trans people had been engaged in fighting extensive transphobia, particularly in Leeds, which had drained collective emotions and energies for other work:

“One of big things was...how much trans people have been taking on transphobia in general this year...I think a lot of trans people’s emotions and energies have been put into that... the ones that would do this kind of thing, I think they’ve been quite exhausted”. — PROJECT STAFF

Project staff in Yorkshire and Bristol also voiced disappointment at not having recruited any ‘out’ sex workers as peer mobilisers. In Yorkshire, one project coordinator linked this to “*anti-sex worker rhetorics this year*” that had gone “*hand-in-hand*” with transphobia: “*there has been quite the double attack on those communities which has taken away the energies*”. This is in the context of fierce debate and hostile media coverage surrounding a ‘managed zone’ in Leeds where adults are now allowed to sell sex on street between 7pm and 7am without fear of arrest (14, 15). The zone is opposed by some residents and by feminist groups advocating the criminalisation of the purchase of sex, despite the documented harms of the latter approach for sex workers’ safety, health and rights—reflective of broader debates on sex work policy across the UK (14-16).

It was also recognised that competing priorities, pressures and support needs may have affected MobPrESH’s ability to recruit sex workers as peer mobilisers on a voluntary basis. In Yorkshire, sex worker support organisations that MESMAC typically worked with felt that the project would not work with their service users because they were generally seeking support rather than volunteering opportunities. In Bristol, the sex worker support service manager they had liaised with indicated that they would need to compensate their service users (e.g. using vouchers) for participating in activities. In London, no peer mobilisers had talked publicly about doing sex work but some were privately supportive and/or had been involved, and discussions during training were designed to be sex worker “*inclusive*” and “*positive*”. In previous projects with male sex workers, PrEPster had paid what they would otherwise have earned for an hour of work, but this had not been possible on this project and would have caused “*huge inequity*” between peer mobilisers. Although not discussed during focus groups and interviews, it is also important to note diverse realities and inequalities within sex-working communities, affecting income and the extent to which sexual health may or may not be a priority relative to other aspects of health, welfare and rights—a point that one project coordinator made with reference to multiply-marginalised members of trans and non-binary communities:

“When you’ve got communities who are marginalised in so many other ways, sexual health isn’t necessarily...on top of the list of things they need to get equal...they’ve got so many other things going on for them, I think that kind of speaks volumes, in terms of the privileges I have in that I haven’t got that many other things that I need to be concerned about...if we talk about transition and about trans and non-binary people, sexual health is often really low on their list because of all the other things that they’re going through”. — PROJECT STAFF

The need for future projects working with trans women, sex workers and migrant communities not reached through MobPrESH, alongside continued projects working with Black and other women of colour, was noted across sites.

LONDON



→ TIME, MONEY AND CONTINUITY

One of the main constraints on MobPrESH project activities was time, related capacity and funding. Although peer mobilisers had done significant work in the time available, and project coordinators had found the work rewarding and inspiring, there was consensus that the short duration of the project, and the part-time project coordinator posts, had limited capacity to recruit peer mobilisers, forge links with communities and ultimately engage in MobPrESH activities—particularly given the project’s ambitious breadth:

“A project with such a wide pool of people to work with...to do in such a short amount of time is very difficult, six months...to get it set up, to get people interested...trained, to give it the time to dedicate to it and then for it just to end, but that’s no-one’s fault in terms of who was involved, that’s just the constrictions of the funding, the bid.” — PROJECT STAFF

In the case of MESMAC, splitting the project coordinator post between two people had allowed them to share ideas and reach more communities across Yorkshire but had limited what they could each achieve, including travel and face-to-face meetings with peer mobilisers. Strict four-hour blocks (as opposed to adding an hour on the end of working days) would have been more manageable but less flexible for project coordinators and peer mobilisers alike. For some Brigstowe peer mobilisers, the short duration raised questions over how important the project was for PrEPster and partner organisations. Peer mobilisers and project staff recommended longer for future projects, with an extended period to prepare and promote the project, including more intensive outreach to identify peer mobilisers from the groups who needed it most, and more funded time for project coordinators.

The project timeline and budget reflected pressure to demonstrate cost-effectiveness, itself complicated by difficulties measuring and anticipating the outcomes of projects striving for long-term social change:

“It’s partly the game everyone plays with things like funding and the Innovation Fund, we want to get funding...if we had said we needed a full-time worker in Bristol to recruit that number, as a funder I would think this doesn’t even come close to being cost-effective.” — PROJECT STAFF

“Peer education when it’s done well is really effective but there’s also a cost attached to it...The work I’ve done over past 25 years is a direct result of joining a peer education project...if I was the only outcome 25 years later of that £16,000 investment in a project that recruited 12 men over 18 months...it was worth every single pound that was spent on it...We won’t see the benefit of that from MobPrESH for years. We don’t know if [peer mobiliser name] is going to...get a job in sexual health and be a complete star.” — PROJECT STAFF

“People talking about [PrEP] more, it’s hard to evaluate, we’re going for long-term change.” — PROJECT STAFF

The project lead’s concurrent role of London project coordinator had been “a *big ask*” and posed challenges of balancing “*structural stuff and work[ing] with people*”, although her work had been well supported managerially by PrEPster’s co-founder. One staff member reflected that an expanded programme of work in one site might have been more effective. However, another noted that including three sites—while ambitious—had enabled better understanding of how the project worked in and outside London, given the quite different experiences in each site. It was suggested that the approach’s effectiveness could be improved through more intense partnership-working and related resource commitment. One project staff member noted that the budget was a flat rate per organisation rather than per peer mobiliser and was interested in how the budget had been allocated and spent across projects (partner organisations had complete flexibility over their allocated budget).

For a new peer-led project for queer men of colour, modelled on the experiences of MobPrESH, PrEPster have hired a full-time paid project coordinator who recruits and trains volunteers to support specific activities. This was proposed as a potential future model, albeit with recognition that other MobPrESH members may not agree:

“The model we used to recruit, train volunteers, ‘What would you like to do?’ I would turn on its head, ‘recruit, come up with workplan of evidence-based health interventions, recruit and train volunteers and say, ‘this is what we’re doing, what do you want to be involved in?’ Then if the project coordinator has no volunteers, it doesn’t mean nothing happens...I would pay someone like [Brigstowe project coordinator] full time...a peer but one with key skills with the ability to deliver interventions themselves and then train volunteers to support her in delivering those interventions...for example, ‘I’m handing out condoms...this weekend, I need 5 volunteers to help do packs, you need basic literacy in HIV and PrEP and I’m providing a half-day training, and an uber there and back...peer mobilisers would still have opportunities to bring their own ideas, for example in month 3, but these would be planned and coordinated’”. — PROJECT STAFF

An example was given of the high number of events that PrEPster staff had been able to run, and the number of people they had interacted with, during the Fringe festival weekend: “3-4 PrEPster staff ran 12 events over 2 days, 300 people came” (Project staff). However, as discussed above, the difficulty of evaluating such projects in quantitative terms alone was recognised. Additionally, one project staff member felt that peer mobilisers who had been most “*empowered*” by the project were not necessarily those who had “*got [most] done*” in terms of measurable outputs.

Competing schedules and responsibilities had also limited peer mobiliser recruitment and participation. In Bristol and Yorkshire, fixed training dates, the requirement

commitment of a weekend, and activities taking place over summer had restricted recruitment, particularly for women who had children and for trans women occupied with Pride-related events. For peer mobilisers who did not work full-time, their role fitted well with their schedule and that of women they were seeking to engage. The suitability of meetings on weekdays and weekends depended on peer mobilisers' work schedules and childcare responsibilities. Peer mobilisers who had competing work, studying and caring responsibilities, particularly in London, had not been able to commit to as many events as they would have liked, although they had sought to incorporate MobPrESH activities into their schedules where possible. Yet many were keen to continue this work, considering this an ongoing process, and envisioned doing so by staying in touch with other peer mobilisers and project staff:

“I know the project ends this year but hopefully after that, if I stay in contact with [the project coordinator] and stuff, I will be able to continue and do more, that’s something I want to do for the future.” — PEER MOBILISER

“I still feel like I’m very much at the beginning of this journey.” — PEER MOBILISER

As larger organisations, Brigstowe and MESMAC had been able to offer peer mobilisers volunteer opportunities beyond the MobPrESH timeline. At Brigstowe, once the project coordinator role ended, peer mobilisers were due to be supervised by another Brigstowe staff member and join their group supervision, which had until then comprised predominantly white gay men. One project staff member noted that the organisation *“really value[s] how this [MobPrESH peer mobilisers staying on as volunteers] can enrich Brigstowe and its services”*. The organisation would not have the same funds to cover travel expenses¹⁰, leading two peer mobilisers to question whether they would be able to accept pending invitations to speak at community events, including in other cities. However, project staff noted that they strongly supported such activities and continued to invite MobPrESH peer mobilisers to speak at activities and events. Without funding to continue this project, PrEPster have sought to direct London-based peer mobilisers to other organisations where they can volunteer (such as Positive East). Project staff across sites stressed the need for sustained funding for peer-led projects focused on Black women’s health, alongside institutional action to achieve deeper change:

“I think everything that needs to be done is being done by [organisations delivering MobPrESH] to be honest. Everything else that needs to be done is by people at the top, that’s where the problem is. We can spend hours and days talking about what we could do together, but I truly believe it is in somebody else’s hands, not all of it, but you know what I mean.”

— PEER MOBILISER

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10 Because MobPrESH had a specific travel expense budget, they had been able to cover one peer mobiliser’s travel from North Somerset (approximately £25), but for other projects all volunteers are based in Bristol and can claim travel expenses up to £10.

“It’s a great project and it’s really working. It’s a great shame it’s ending. The model of community to community, it works. Well done for doing this, this demographic has been totally left behind, it’s working and needs to carry on in some format”. — PROJECT STAFF



KEY LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MobPrESH offers an example of a grassroots, peer-led project that has worked successfully with diverse communities of women across three distinct UK sites, primarily Black and other women of colour, who are rarely centred in sexual health projects. Amid prevailing silence, stigma and misinformation surrounding HIV and sexual health, peer mobilisers and the women they engaged with demonstrated a thirst and urgency for acquiring knowledge in this area. They engaged most in discussions when women from their communities connected with and related to them, sharing (rather than imparting) knowledge and fostering trusted, safe spaces for open discussion, of relevance and with sensitivity to their lives, needs and experiences. Through peer-led, horizontal training and activities, the project created opportunities for mutual learning and understanding, both among peer mobilisers themselves and the women they engaged with, centring on what mattered most to them. The project highlighted the importance of everyday conversations and their “ripple effects” beyond predetermined metrics of success, in addition to more formal health promotion activities. It also challenged the notion of communities that are ‘hard to reach’ and traditional approaches of working with communities grouped according to single dimensions of identity and experience.

This evaluation has also highlighted a number of key challenges and linked recommendations for future projects. A primary limitation was that of resource and capacity, particularly the short time and duration allocated to project coordinators in Bristol and Yorkshire. Project staff and peer mobilisers across sites recommended an extended timeline for future projects, particularly to recruit peer mobilisers and build connections with communities. Supporting the health and social care needs of existing peer mobilisers also required time, resources and expertise and ultimately limited some peer mobilisers’ capacity to remain in the project. This highlights the often unseen/unmeasured labour of projects led by marginalised communities who lack access to appropriate services, in contexts of austerity, racism and other forms of structural discrimination. It also helps to explain why it was not possible to meet ambitious recruitment targets inevitably driven by competition for limited funding and concerns with cost-effectiveness. Indeed, peer-led projects focusing on communities that are widely neglected in mainstream funding and priorities are likely to require more, not less, resource commitment, to forge links with and support marginalised communities in the process. Project coordinators also recommended more time for informal, face-to-face catch-ups with peer mobilisers. A number of peer mobilisers highlighted the emotional dimensions of this work—including moments of intense satisfaction and happiness but also disappointment, pressure and anxiety—which could be addressed through building in more practice during training and through ongoing supportive supervision with project coordinators. Establishing people’s communication preferences, including (not) sharing names and contact details, and respecting these throughout would also help to allay any concerns around privacy.

Although MobPrESH was able to work with diverse groups of women, partner organisations faced challenges in recruiting sex workers in all sites, and migrants,

refugees, asylum-seekers, trans women and non-binary people in some sites. Project staff also highlighted a range of structural hostilities and pressures, specifically transphobia, anti-sex worker rhetoric, a hostile immigration system, language barriers and precarity, that they felt had left communities without energies or resources to prioritise participating in a sexual health project and/or volunteer. In previous projects, PrEPster had been able to pay male sex workers for their participation but this project did not include such funds. Concern around compensating some peer mobilisers and not others was also raised. Offering payment to all peer mobilisers would be the best way to ensure accessibility to the most marginalised individuals and communities. If adequate resources cannot be secured, an alternative might be to offer payment and expenses that can be claimed by those who feel that they need this and donated back, or paid forward, by those who feel that they do not. Because health programmes for sex workers have often centred on HIV and sexually transmitted infections without considering their broader needs and priorities, some may also have understandable reservations about participating in sexual health-focused projects. Consulting with a wide range of sex workers, both those who use specialist health and support services but also diverse activist, community and social networks, during project development, could help to identify and address any such concerns. Although MobPrESH imagery and language were designed to be explicitly non-binary and trans inclusive, it was also recommended that future projects engage in early consultation with non-binary people to ensure precise wording. Other ways to maximise accessibility and engagement include offering flexibility over training dates, duration and format, allowing for partner organisations to tailor materials to the needs and expectations of the communities they would be working with across regions, and ensuring that venues and activities are accessible to people with disabilities and, where possible, people who speak languages other than English, through provision of interpreting (spoken and sign-language) and other resources. Peer mobilisers also suggested providing certificates for completed training and opportunities for experienced peer mobilisers to become accredited to deliver the training to others in future.

Peer mobilisers, particularly in London, supported a focus on Black and other women of colour, but some in Bristol and Yorkshire were concerned that this stigmatised and discriminated. PrEPster felt well-positioned to navigate these politics and those relating to gender identity, partly because of their staff and volunteer make-up. Partner organisations, by contrast, had prior concerns around bringing together women of (potentially) different ethnicities and gender identities, although ultimately recognising this as a strength. Some peer mobilisers in these sites also challenged and outright rejected a focus on Black and other women of colour. For future projects, staff recommended more explicit, upfront explanations and goals around the purpose of the project and what it means to be a 'peer', in practical and political terms. This would best be supported by collective critical reflection, involving all partner organisations and peer mobilisers, about how power and privileges around race, gender (identity), class, migration status and linked institutions affect how projects such as MobPrESH are funded, staffed and managed, and the need for improved racial and gender diversity within organisations delivering them. Reflective discussions would require time, capacity

and mechanisms for more intense communication across sites, and could be integrated into any efforts to train partner organisations and experienced peer mobilisers to deliver future training.

Peer mobilisers were highly enthusiastic about MobPrESH and many felt that their knowledge and confidence had grown considerably through their participation. However, their availability to participate in activities varied, depending on competing work, study, caring and other responsibilities, and some lacked confidence in answering particularly technical questions about PrEP. One project staff member proposed an alternative model of paying full-time project coordinators supported by peer mobilisers for specific, assigned activities. It is worth considering the relative benefits of structured health promotion activities in which people closer to health institutions engage large numbers of people on a one-off basis, versus growing networks of people less connected to such institutions who may be able to engage deeply within their communities with as-yet unknown productive potential.

This project and its qualitative evaluation have offered important opportunities to pilot and learn from a short-term experimental project, through a focus on participation and lived experience beyond fixed, quantitative metrics. As peer mobilisers noted, it is crucial that such projects are adequately funded and foregrounded, inclusive of communities outside of London as well as those in the capital. It is equally important to challenge the linked social, economic and political structures that have precluded such funding and projects to date, and that continue to threaten the health and lives of Black and other women of colour, trans women, sex workers, migrants and other marginalised communities. It is also important to recognise that the productive potential of peer-led sexual health projects are not easily reducible to quantitative metrics over short time periods. Understanding how such projects can achieve lasting improvements in sexual health and wellbeing requires long-term commitment, and longitudinal, community-led qualitative research, invested in tracking and documenting how such projects navigate and challenge the social, economic and political hierarchies that shape (sexual) health and impede broader social change.

APPENDICES

→ APPENDIX 1: MOBPRESH KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

(1) Mobilisers have been sufficiently trained, supported and equipped to develop and deliver peer-based PrEP + SH interventions

(2) Mobilisers are able and facilitated to use reflexive learning techniques to translate their learning in the pilot into recommendations for future development of a peer-led community mobilisation project

(3) Those encountering the mobilisers have increased knowledge about PrEP + other SH services and how to access them.

→ APPENDIX 2: MOBPRESH MOBILISERS

- Fewer mobilisers were recruited than had originally been anticipated. Issues pertaining to recruitment and retention of mobilisers are discussed in the main report.
- Five mobilisers were recruited in Bristol, 5 in Leeds, and 10 in London. A further three participants were involved in London through involvement in activities during training events.
- London participants were mostly in the 30s and 40s, with a few in the 20s. Participants in Yorkshire were in the 20s and 40s, and those in Bristol/North Somerset were older on average.
- In Bristol and London, the majority of participants were from Black or other ethnic minority groups.
- Across all regional groups there were participants who were living with HIV or were, or had been, in partnerships with people with HIV.
- Participants also included people identifying as transgender or non-binary.
- A small number of mobilisers had had direct experience of sex work.
- A number of mobilisers were parents, and there were mobilisers with care responsibilities for family members or partners.
- Mobilisers included people with disabilities.
- A small number of participants were engaged in full time or part-time education. Many were employed, or volunteering for other projects or organisations.
- A small number of participants were members of faith communities.
- Participants came from a broad range of sexual identities.

→ APPENDIX 3 – MOBPRESH ACTIVITY

BRISTOL AND NORTH SOMERSET

Activity	People engaged
St Paul's Carnival	22
Community Fun Day	34
Nothing Without Us Film	30
Disability adviser workshop	6
Muslim community workshop	8
Muslim women's group	8
African women's group	6
Disability advisor workshop	8
BAME network	8
Mosque outreach	20
Refugee rights event	5
Radio show	Unspecified

Activity in Bristol predominantly targeted women from Black and other minority ethnic groups. Some of the interventions also reached men. In excess of 142 hours of outreach activity was undertaken. The numbers above reflect the direct one-to-one interventions that occurred. Numbers encountered via radio, information distributed from stalls etc. is not captured above.

YORKSHIRE

Activity	People engaged
PrEP information into 3 hair salons	Unspecified
Leeds Carnival	20
Leeds Pride	20
Non-binary event	25
You Tube video	600 views

Activity in Yorkshire targeted a range of women, with outreach at Carnival targeting Black and African-Caribbean women.

LONDON (AND OTHER WORK CONDUCTED OUTSIDE OF LONDON)

Activity	People engaged
LGBT Foundation workshops (Mancs)	23
Collage and writing workshop	6
Vogue ball outreach	200
LSHTM PrEP panel	40
Writing workshop	4
Decolonising contraception panel	25
Nothing Without Us film	30
Communications workshop	4
UK Black pride	300
Photography and meme workshop	5
Banner marking for trans rights	12
Bi Pride - panel	75
Bi Pride – info stall	200
Coffee morning	24
Fringe film workshops	60
Smut writing workshop	6
Coffee morning	10

In London, activity was predominantly targeted to women from Black and other minority ethnic groups. A small number of activities also encountered men. In addition to the above, the London mobilisers contributed to articles in Gal Dem; Vice; Black Ballad; and the Independent, bringing the reach of the project to many additional thousands of women. The PrEP fanzine (an output of one of the mobiliser rounds) has been distributed to 800 individuals and downloaded 450 times.

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SOCIALS FOR MOBILISERS