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Awards Category: Category 9: Head Above The Parapet

Awards Entry Number: C90013

Name of project, service, individual entering or nomination: Bright Choices

1. Overview

Please provide a short introduction to the person, project or service. Briefly mention any aims and objectives if you think they are relevant. You must clearly outline how it relates to the [category](#) you are entering. You should answer any questions we have asked in the [introduction](#) for this award category:

Bright Choices is a partnership service between Sacro, ELREC (the Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council) and MCFB (the Multicultural Family Base) and it supports individuals, families and communities affected by Honour Based Violence (HBV).

'Honour' is 'the unwritten book of rules to live by', which dictate anything from dress code to the rights to marriage and lifestyle. People are subjected to HBV when they are perceived to have 'transgressed' those codes of behaviour. HBV can range in severity from coercive control to domestic violence, forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and 'Honour' Killings.

Bright Choices supports survivors of HBV and prevents HBV against vulnerable community members through holistic support: emotional and practical support to individuals and families; mediation and conflict resolution; outreach within affected communities; and training to frontline professionals.

HBV, especially forced marriage and FGM have been cultural practices that span millennia. As a result, Bright Choices is vocally challenging ancient practices that continue to victimise vulnerable members of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities on every level, from the individual to the collective and from the grass-roots to the strategic and statutory levels, with a view to promoting informed choices and human rights.

2. What did you do?

Please describe the work carried out and explain how it meets the [criteria](#) we have asked for in the '[what we are looking for](#)' section for this award. Highlight any practice which was distinctive, innovative or creative and include details of on-going work still in progress.:

Since its start in June of 2015, Bright Choices has taken numerous steps to advocate for the human rights of vulnerable people by taking an innovative approach to HBV prevention:

- Professionals trained by Bright Choices are required to look at what 'honour' means to them in their own culture and religion. This helps to challenge the preconceived ideas of 'honour' as a BME issue which alienates and 'others' the concept from mainstream culture.

- Professionals are also asked to address their own ideas and preconceptions around working with individuals from BME communities with a view to overcoming the fear of being called 'racist'.

- Individuals, families and communities affected by HBV are often those least aware of the fact that their rights are being abused. To address this, Bright Choices offers a low key intervention during which the people concerned become aware of their rights, the legal status of HBV in the UK as well as their responsibilities towards their children and families.

- Bright Choices challenges HBV through an approach that is deeply culturally sensitive and stems from an empathic understanding of why HBV still occurs: instead of dictating 'what should be done', Bright Choices understands that often a lack of knowledge or a perceived lack of options forces communities to adhere to strong traditional values. As a result, the interventions provided take into consideration both the cultural expectations placed on migrant communities and their migratory

journey when offering alternatives to practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

- Bright Choices has developed the first module for secondary school pupils on their rights, responsibilities and choices with a specific focus on Honour and Honour Based Violence. This module, titled 'My Life, My Choices' presents young people with their rights while sensitively raising their awareness to abusive traditional practices such as Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation and provides them with information as to where support and information can be found.
- Bright Choices has successfully delivered Conflict Resolution Workshops to BME groups across Edinburgh. These workshops raise awareness of conflict in the context of HBV with regards to traditions from the home culture versus the law in the UK; conflict in intergenerational contexts whereby the younger generations in a community may be less willing to adhere to traditional values; and finally, ways in which conflict can be constructively addressed and resolved in a way that respects all values and opinions.
- Most recently, Bright Choices, in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Child Protection Committee, organised an event for frontline professionals on the 6th of February, the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM. This event, for the first time raised awareness with professionals in social care, health, education and the police force on FGM by involving survivors sharing their own stories, examples of good practice and having their voices heard in terms of what they would like to see happen to support survivors and protect children from FGM.

3. What did you achieve

Please describe and provide evidence of how the work has made a positive impact to the lives of those you have helped to support. Evidence can include research, practice, wisdom, service data or lived experience. Aim to reflect the criteria in the ['what we are looking for'](#) section where possible.:

- To date, 30 families have been supported to overcome the physical and emotional trauma resulting from different forms of HBV. This has been achieved both through individual and group work, as well as through signposting and referrals to relevant specialist organisations for more targeted support, such as psychiatry, medical and social work interventions.
- Bright Choices has trained over 200 professionals across Edinburgh on Honour Based Violence, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation for free
- Bright Choices actively contributed to the 'Together Scotland' report titled 'The State of Children's Rights in Scotland' which was presented to Ms Amal Aldoseri, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, Geneva, September 27th 2016 (<http://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/pdfs/TogetherReport2016.pdf>). This report will subsequently be submitted to the UK Government with specific recommendations on improving outcomes for children.
- When assessing risk in service user's lives, Bright Choices a system which offers scores from 1 (lowest risk) to 5 (highest risk) across 12 different dimensions. At the initial assessment stage, the average score for service users is 43.5 (highest: 58 and lowest:29) while after 9 months of support, the average score for service users on average drops to 22.5 (highest: 30 and lowest: 15). This is an excellent testimony to the effectiveness of Bright Choices in empowering service users to make informed choices while also ensuring their safety and wellbeing.
- After attending the Bright Choices workshop, 99% of secondary school pupils stated that they understood that nobody can make them marry someone they don't want to marry and that nobody has the right to alter their body for non-medical reasons; while 95% said they better understood unhealthy relationships with family and other people and where to find support if they need it. In 'additional feedback', pupils added :
'Great and Informative lesson'
'Brilliant' and
'Thank you. You have opened my eyes' (following a session on FGM)
- In terms of direct work with service users, Bright Choices carries out regular feedback sessions in order to ensure that the needs of people accessing the service are being met and that positive change is occurring. During a feedback session, service users are asked to talk about what difference Bright Choices has made in their lives in their own words. Below are some quotes from Service Users:
'I have hope now and I no longer feel that I live in a fog, I can see clearly, I can breathe and I know that myself and my children have the whole life ahead of us and we can be happy. That is thanks to Bright Choices'
(Service user with two young daughters who have now escaped the risk of domestic violence and FGM from their father).

'Without Bright Choices I would most probably not be here right now. I did not see the point in living...please just keep doing what you are doing!'
(Service user who has been violently targeted by her community for marrying outside her caste. She and her family are now safe).

4. Why should you receive an award?

Please summarise the reasons you feel this person, project or issue deserves an award in no more than 100 words.:

Bright Choices has been operating since June of 2015 and has already made a huge impact in the lives of those affected by Honour Based violence across Edinburgh. The team bravely and openly address and challenge HBV and promote human rights while managing very high risk situations with a long term view to eradicating HBV in Edinburgh from the very heart of the communities who practice it. The service sets an excellent example for equality in practice while advocating for the rights of the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach individuals in society.

