



**CEO Permjeet Panesar
 Sandwell—The Corona Virus Pandemic**

**WATCH THIS SPACE
 WE ARE MOVING OFFICES**



The coronavirus pandemic, along with presenting significant challenges promoting social distancing and covid-19 secure environments has also truly been a reflection of strength and kindness of people bonding together and delivering heart-warming neighbourly and community support protecting, caring and feeding our frontline workers and vulnerable members of our communities.

Along with most other charities RES has been hit hard by the pandemic in terms of both financial and service impact. RES, financially impacted early in the Spring by complete loss of funding from SMBC, along with reduced funding opportunities whilst grants and funding providers worked through evolving their own priorities, required RES to furlough and redeploy staff from their usual roles to work in critical areas supporting the most vulnerable through our links with food distributions, prescriptions collections, transport support and phone counselling and casework support.

In September, through the National Lottery Community Fund, we established our Shield project, that came live in October, employing staff with key roles to reach out and work with all sections of our communities on the rapidly changing public health covid-19 advice and precautions. This is constantly addressed by advancing personal, social and cultural perspectives in efforts to bridge pathways to service providers, foodbanks, mental health well-being and care services, education, employment support facilities and addressing local and global perspectives on inequality and social justice. There is a particular focus in the Shield project to specifically reach out to Black, Asian and central and eastern European communities.

At grass roots levels, we networked with local people, faith and community organisations to advance public awareness and personal responsibility on covid-19 safeguarding protocols, in ways that they improved understanding of the immediate, short term impacts, along with longer term consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. *Permjeet Panesar*



RES are moving offices in January 2021

Newsletter Spotlight

- ⇒ More about SHEILD Project
- ⇒ **Support to share health messages universally**
- ⇒ **Supporting Sandwell Schools**
- ⇒ **All Saints Day All Souls Day**
- ⇒ Gyongyver visits to cemeteries
- ⇒ Asma Rhaza— Nans funeral



Our Vision

We have a vision for a more cohesive, inclusive and just Sandwell where everyone is safe, each can be accepted on their own terms, no-one is exploited, and all are free to pursue life, liberty and happiness, for themselves and their communities.

COVID -19 does not discriminate,

The current pandemic has implicated lives of people globally in many different ways. It also evident that inequality remains central in the way the virus impacts certain population's in particular older people, some ethnic groups, male sex and hotspots in certain geographical areas. The Public Health England (PHE): Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups highlights some key concerns on longstanding inequalities now exacerbated by the virus. There is ample evidence which indicates that BAME groups experience poor social economic status leading to poorer health outcomes. Data from ONS and PHE reports now indicate compelling findings that link economic disadvantage to COVID-19 diagnosis in BAME populations since the impact of poor financial stability leads to prevalence in smoking, obesity, diabetes, hypertension and their cardio-metabolic complications consequently increasing risk of infections and disease severity.

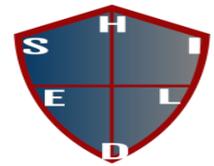
Increase in discrimination and racism has been reported as source fostering poor health and exposure to risk including disease progression. Racial discrimination combined with stigma associated with COVID-19 has had a negative impact on health seeking behaviours which has kindled fear of diagnosis and loss of life. BAME populations present late for treatment and this can also be associated to factors such as care for families and loss of income. A joined up approach is required by stakeholders to provide support to build resilience as well as address key concerns impacting BAME population health. The report acknowledges and indicates that providing advocacy, challenging racism and discrimination within the healthcare system as well as distinct commitment to provide healthy workspaces with zero tolerance for discrimination. BAME communities need to be empowered to voice their concerns on racism and discrimination and this is an approach that community organisations are encouraged to implement to ease worries of using health service in the aftermath of COVID-19. PHE: 2020. Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups

SHEILD Project

RES is pleased to announce a National Lottery Grant award to deliver activities that will directly support communities through the covid-19 crisis. This project will strengthen local communities understanding of the coronavirus pandemic – particularly on issues concerning:

- ⇒ Social distancing and what this means in practice
- ⇒ Good community and neighbour support particularly for groups identified as most vulnerable and at risk
- ⇒ Intelligence and information sharing that enables services to respond to community priorities and improves community engagement
- ⇒ Phone counselling and support across wide ranging social issues

RES have successfully appointed 5 new staff who have all commenced employment in October 2020 as per SHEILD Project anticipated start date.



Covid-19 Secure spaces OBSERVATIONS



HANDS-FACE-SPACE

Support to share health messages universally

Imagine trying to keep up with Covid news if English isn't your first language. Fortunately, there's help in Sandwell for any organisation looking for clear messages in a variety of mother tongues. Asma Rhaza and her colleagues at Rights and Equality Sandwell are keen to help promote important Covid safety messages to all of the borough's diverse communities.

Between them they can communicate in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Mirpuri, Pothwari, Hindko, Russian, Slovakian, Polish and Hungarian.

Asma says it's really important to make sure residents speaking a language other than English fully understand the importance of things like regular hand-washing for example. "We're working with Public Health Sandwell to make sure the right messages about health and wellbeing are translated," she said. "We can talk to groups or individuals and explain things like it's not enough to sanitise your hands in a morning, then go round touching things all day and not clean them again."

In some South Asian cultures when someone dies they find it really disrespectful not to visit regardless lockdown or not mixing. So a lot of these communities will go and visit the deceased household and sit in a room of 30, sometimes a lot more and not realise you are not only risking your health and everyone in that room but you are then bringing whatever you picked up (symptoms) from their home to your loved ones at home. I think it is really important for this message to be understood.

Please share messages with your communities



Asma Rhaza— Case Study—Nan's funeral during Covid-19

I started my new position for RES ON 13TH October 2020 as a BAME Community Advisor for the SHEILD Project. Exactly a week into my new job and the inevitable happened, unfortunately my Nan died on the morning of Wednesday 21st at 6.00am.

After turning up at RES offices early morning I was sent home immediately. Due to the restrictions in place I returned home and was comforting my mother on the phone because my mother was not local to me or part of my social bubble, hence social distancing measures needed to be implied. It was so difficult trying to console my mother on the phone and share her grievance as I could not be there by her side providing comfort for each other. Some of my reflections when dealing with loss of a family member during the pandemic;

- The coroner signed the body as COVID NEGATIVE which helped in us saying goodbye to our Nan. Those tested positive for the virus may have not had the chance to say goodbye.
- Small funeral with 30 immediate family to consolidate each other whereas previously it would run into hundreds, however with complete lockdown restrictions this would not happen and you may have to grieve in isolation without your family and friends.
- Even though there was a small turn out compared to what we are used to, a lot of phone calls from families and friends to pay condolences.
- Normally families and friends would be visiting for many weeks more than once but due to daily changes to the restrictions this did not happen.

Supporting Sandwell Schools

Our staff have been actively reaching out to all schools in Sandwell. RES would like to develop outreach and engagement activities and encourage a better understanding of coronavirus safety.

The Community Advisors are able to offer help and support disseminating information and advice to children/families from BAME and Eastern European communities. With our support we are hoping to bridge any gaps in cultural, religious and language awareness to help schools to communicate and strengthen their relationship with children and families. The support made available includes email, telephone and face to face contact in line with the guidelines and restrictions in place by the government. RES also have a wide range of Public Health informative literature in different languages that can be displayed in schools where there are a bigger BAME or Eastern European Communities.

Between all three Community Advisors they speak Hungarian, Italian, Slovakian, Czech, Russian, Polish, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Mirpuri, Pathwari and Hindko. Please contact us if you also need support for your organisations and service users.



Meet SHEILD Project Community Advisors



Anna Horvathova



Asma Rhaza



Gyongyver Dorogi-Janya

Collecting information to inform and learn from experience of Covid-19 and its impact on local people.

The current covid-19 situation changing daily has an impact on consistency and compliance of guidance provided to prevent the spread of infection. There are many varied forms of information challenging through social media platforms and some of this information can build resilience as well as misguide some of our vulnerable communities.

RES will be working closely with Public Health to collect useful data to understand why certain populations are presenting with higher rates of infection with a particular focus of those populations that work in routine and manual jobs and cannot work from home.

RES will be hosting a Covid-19 Myths event to present how populations make choices based on most popular and common myths and what strategies can we put in place to tackle such information. It is vital for organisations to understand incorrect information that we are put up against when trying to keep our communities safe and informed with correct sources of advice and guidance on the virus and its impact.

We would also like to invite organisations that have been awarded short term Covid-19 funding to have a discussion on what services/interventions you will be providing to the most vulnerable communities during lockdown and tighter restrictions.

UPCOMING Covid-19 Myths & how best to challenge these effectively.

**Book FREE on Eventsbrite
Tuesday 8th
December 2020
10.30 to 12.30**

Our Focus

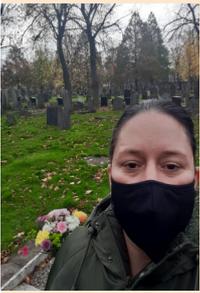
In December we will be actively working on capturing the experiences of routine and manual workers from BAME and Eastern European communities including those with disabilities. We would also like to focus on Public Health information/leaflets disseminated in different languages and carryout an impact assessment on how effective these messages are in local communities.

Our Community Advisors will be visiting local shops and supermarkets to make sure information is displayed in the languages spoken by their regular customers. This is to help our communities to understand the guidance provided and how to keep safe during this pandemic as well as complying with local restrictions. We are also working with partner organisations such as Healthwatch Sandwell to help conduct their Digital Inclusion surveys in different communities. This is to capture the voices of people without English language or English not their first language and those with no access to online platforms. Healthwatch Sandwell would like to understand and identify the barriers and challenges in accessing and using primary care services to help inform and develop those services improving patient experiences.

We would like to support organisations in making sure populations are being reached out to and to reduce experiences of inequalities. Please do contact us if you also need some support for your projects.

All Saints Day—All Souls' Day 1-2 November

Gyongyver—Cemetery visits 1st November, All Saint's Day



The year 2020 has been a different year, with families having to adjust their holidays including all annual celebrations. Likewise All Saints' Day is generally celebrated on 1st November as a commemoration day for all Christian saints. It may also be known as **All Hal-lows' Day, Solemnity of All Saints, Hallowmas, or Feast of Saints**. The holiday honours all those who have passed on to the Kingdom of Heaven. **Polish communities refer to All Saint's Day as Dzień Wszystkich Świętych** and All Souls' Day is known as **Dzień Zaduszny** or **zaduszki**. **Hungarians** also celebrate traditionally by lighting candles at graves but expat-inspired events are growing in popularity. **Czechs** celebrate 2nd November as Commemoration of All the Departed and remember their loved ones with prayer, flowers, and candles.

Gyongyver report: "It is a big day in Central and Eastern European culture. People say good bye again to their loved deceased ones by visiting cemeteries, laying lanterns of remembrance".

"I thought to visit a couple of Smethwick and a local cemetery to see how people are celebrating in this irregular year".

"It was busy, people were parking on the side. There were mainly Asian people paying their respect to their lost ones. They seemed to follow all regulations despite the fact that there wasn't any information about social distancing".



People said they were coming because of the announcement about the national lockdown and they wanted to make sure their loved ones' grave is neat and tidy and looks wanted before the cemetery closes for an unknown time. They didn't allow me to photograph them or include their name. One of the couples said they are here every Sunday, but now they are uncertain of the effect of the national lockdown. They said the cemetery was closed with gates locked for 4 months at springtime/early summer. They wanted to make sure they have their parents' grave tidy and covered in flowers until the cemetery can be visited again. They kept social distancing as well, however, there was no information about it anywhere. I laid flowers for wife of a friend of mine who is severely disabled and could not come to visit his wife

but wanted to make sure she has flowers on All Saint's Day.

Bushbury Cemetery and Crematorium.

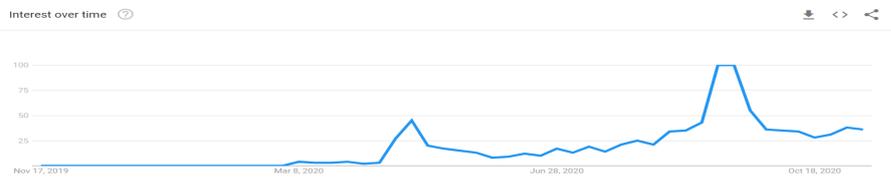
There is a larger Eastern European community in the area. It was very busy and people were laying flowers and putting down lanterns. One Hungarian family said they are here every year on All Saint's Day and they join the memorial service as well. This year the memorial service is via Zoom which made them feel uncomfortable. They said it feels that they cannot pay their proper respects to their loved ones and they miss the face to face service. They like to light a candle for Virgin Mary as well, and this year it was impossible. They feel they cannot practice their religion as they love it and did it for the last 70 years of their lives.



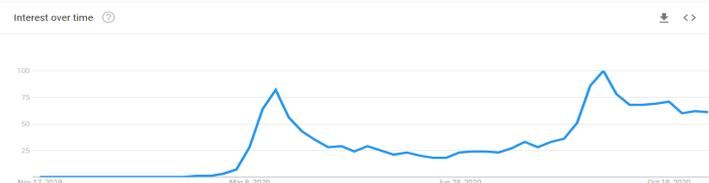
COVID -19 Trending on GOOGLE

One way to keep informed

As the lockdown restrictions are eased with schools, colleges and universities opening in September, so has the search to identify covid-19 testing sites. The highest numbers of searches were 6-12 September.



There was also a peak in people searching for the Covid-19 symptoms both in March and then again in September 2020.



The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of a **new continuous cough** or a **high temperature** or a **loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)**. More info on Covid-19 guidance, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>.