



Case study: Self-Discovery – Driving positive changes

Mathew Kuruvilla

Chair of the Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) network
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust

In his role as a lead clinical engineer Mathew Kuruvilla works with two other engineers taking care of all the renal machines at Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust. As the Chair of the Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) network, Mathew Kuruvilla supports efforts to progress workforce race equality. Representing almost 20% of the total NHS workforce, the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff – working as doctors, nurses or in other clinical and non-clinical roles do not always reflect the values of the NHS. The BAME network provides support to its members – helping them to be heard and driving change within the NHS to promote equal opportunity. At the Self-Discovery workshop, Mathew was introduced to the concept of compassionate leadership. This resonated deeply with him as a foundation on which to build real and lasting change towards race equality. The time he had to reflect and process his own experiences was invaluable in helping him see new possibilities. He would like every BAME staff member to have the same opportunity to understand where they are on their career journey, where they would like to go and how to make that happen.

Stepping back to reflect

There is a significant cost in terms of staff and patient care from any discrimination in the workplace. The BAME Network at Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust was established in 2000 and has an active membership of over 300 NHS staff. For many members who have experienced discrimination, self-esteem can be extremely low and finding the energy to consider their careers can be a challenge. One of the most fundamental issues that Mathew saw impacting members was this difficulty to move forward. Individuals needed to take a step back and reflect before they could consider progressing.

Initially sceptical, Mathew attended the Self-Discovery workshop with other BAME members and it provide him with the clarity he himself had been missing up to that point. ***“In just one day, an exhausted person, with low esteem can see they are not alone in what they are going through. That is Self-Discovery right there.”*** The pre-course work started the process of reflection. The day gave him time away from his work as an engineer and as the BAME network chair, to look at his own story. Mathew’s own experience on the workshop could not have been more positive. Having previously given little thought to how his career could advance, he was able to look at who he was, where he wanted to go and identify the possibilities.

Moving forward

In looking at his career journey to date Mathew could clearly see and better understand what his own experiences had been. Through the information and guidance provided and discussion with other participants, he began to develop a vision of where he would like to see his own career go. By the end of the day, all the participants had written their own personal action plan, outlining the next steps they would take to develop their careers and had the information on what career development opportunities could be found and the tools they needed to pursue them. Mathew was elated by the end of the day, not only for his personal outcomes, but for finding a workshop that was exactly what so many of his BAME



colleagues needed. He felt that everyone should be given the opportunity to participate in the Self-Discovery workshop.

Practical and relevant

This one-day workshop gives BAME members time away from their day to day roles to focus on themselves. The focus of the day is on the individual and helping them gain a better perspective on how their careers have developed, where they are going and helping them with advice on the resources and support available to help them to make the next step. Very practical sessions on communication give attendees insights and invaluable tools into how they can use and manage their own impact effectively. Mathew saw this as extremely relevant to the BAME staff, many of whom struggle to find their voices and speak up for themselves.

Endorsement

Research from the 'Developing People – Improving Care' framework showed the importance of leadership as an essential factor in influencing culture. Leaders who model compassion create environments where there is no bullying, and where learning and quality improvement become the norm. Hearing more about the role of Compassionate Leadership, Mathew could see the potential the fundamental change in culture essential to changing the experiences for BAME staff across the NHS.

The workshop had a meaningful and lasting impact on Mathew. Although he was encouraged to attend for his own personal benefit and as an opportunity to address his own career development, it was the relevance to the entire BAME membership that has had the most powerful outcome. Mathew experienced first-hand the value of the workshop and the impact to him as an individual. He now promotes the workshop as an effective experience that empowers those that are struggling with deep self-esteem issues and challenged with making themselves heard, with essential insight and resources.

Encouraging BAME staff members to attend the Self-Discovery Workshop can be a very simple, but very effective way of supporting the wider NHS efforts to improve workforce race inequality. As research clearly BAME staff face an additional layer of challenges to overcome in the workplace. Giving them the time, the tools and the support to help them clarify where they are and where they are looking to go is invaluable in supporting their development. By attending individuals also benefit from having a greater understanding of their longer-term career goals - and how to achieve them.

Driving efforts to achieve workforce race equality needs to look beyond operational changes and incorporate cultural changes. From a foundation of compassion and inclusion, the Self-Discovery workshops creates the conditions for individuals to look at their career development and provides the information and support to plan and take next steps. Compassionate leaders play an integral role in the process – by looking to understand the challenges their staff face and helping them – giving them the time, space to reflect and creating an environment that is supportive and engaging.

Keep in touch:

E: localevents.twvla@leadershipacademy.nhs.uk | kss@leadership.nhs.uk

W: www.twvleadershipacademy.nhs.uk | www.kssleadership.nhs.uk

Twitter: [@TVWLA](https://twitter.com/TVWLA) | [@KSSSLC](https://twitter.com/KSSSLC)