

Women's Leadership Programme

مركز أبوظبي
للصحة العامة
ABU DHABI PUBLIC
HEALTH CENTRE



In December 2021, the Leadership Centre designed and delivered a leadership programme focussed on supporting women in leadership roles across the healthcare sector in Abu Dhabi.



What did the work seek to achieve?

The Senior Leadership Team at Abu Dhabi Public Health Centre are making a significant investment in women across their organisation and developing a culture in which every woman sees themselves as a leader.

The programme was delivered in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Public Health Centre, the British Embassy in Abu Dhabi, UK Health Security Agency and Leading Communities, an organisation with extensive experience in developing local leaders. The aim was to develop a group of female leaders who had the potential to operate at a senior level, and who, as a result of their learning, might bring greater diversity and representation to issues affecting women's health.



Supported by a
senior leadership
commitment

Who participated?

28 Section heads and specialists, working in both clinical and non-clinical roles from Abu Dhabi Public Health Centre came together in the UAE with the programme facilitated remotely by the Leadership Centre in the United Kingdom. The programme was co-designed with the Abu Dhabi Public Health Centre, including a number of the participants, helping to ensure the design met the needs of the group.

Features of the programme

Developing leadership self-awareness

The participants were encouraged to think about what mattered most to them in their leadership – what type of leader they are and want to be, as well how others perceive them. Each participant completed a diagnostic tool to understand more about their leadership preferences prior to the programme, which helped to develop a greater understanding of the power of difference. Using a variety of models, the group explored themes of integrity and authenticity, as well surfacing their own individual values. Inputs focussed on the difference between management and leadership, developing personal and collective resilience as well as the ability to coach others.



“This course has made me more open to different ideas and different personalities.”



“I see myself leading with coaching. I like to see people leading and being supported and I learn from this...”



“There is a leader behind everyone, in work, at home, in our families. Our leadership skills need to be seen more. We can now share our knowledge with others.”

Tackling systems challenges by applying multiple lenses

The group explored four key issues in teams, applying different lenses and taking a layered approach, designed to surface new insights. The issues explored were:

1

How might we get greater take up of screening and vaccination opportunities by older women so improving their health and wellbeing?

2

How might we co-design and improve our vital ongoing health work programmes at the same time as tackling the current Covid emergency and other emergency situations in the future?

3

How can we better support women in the workplace in UAE so that mental health concerns are recognised and supported earlier?

4

What more can we do to create healthy lifestyles so that we can improve health and wellness among women?

The thinking universally changed with each new lens that was applied. The approach initially opened up a thorough exploration of different perspectives on the issue, then narrowed back down to generate some innovative, original and practical ideas which can now be tested back in the workplace. The groups described how the process allowed them to re-imagine the whole issue.

"sketching to understand the challenge from the view of different stakeholders really shifted the mindset and will help us collaborate more with other authorities."

"Having team members with different backgrounds really added to the innovation possible."

"Leadership is about getting into those tough challenges and together working a way through."

"We are not waiting until next week to use the new tools and thinking, we are doing it now!"

Sharing of skills and experiences between leaders in the UAE and the UK

Women leaders from across Abu Dhabi Public Health Centre joined participants and shared their experience of leading in complexity. Participants really valued the opportunity to have exploratory conversations together and in a way they had not done before.

A number of international speakers attended the final day of the programme to join in a conversation with the teams about the system challenges and also share their leadership learning. There was a huge thirst to hear and learn from different parts of the world and the benefit was reciprocal with leaders in both locations taking away valuable insights.

One UK Director of Public Health said, "I had imagined being in this group would be fairly routine but I was blown away. They had reimagined the whole concept of vaccines – patches and AI as a way to encourage vaccine take up and keep in touch with older women." A UK Local Government Chief Executive explained, "The challenge today has been inspiring and I have heard a deep understanding about complexity and what it is to be a leader in public health. We have the same shoes wherever we are in the world. I am proud to be here today."



"I have a lot in common with others. I do have leadership skills. I see different personalities. It's important in leadership to empower others especially our teams. Dr Farida and Dr Shereena talked about knowing your weaknesses and working on them. This was very helpful."



"I am very thankful to be part of this programme. We have had a great time together and learning from each other. The UK stories added a lot to our understanding. I am thankful to all who have been involved."

What impact did the programme have?



Individually, the leadership learning appeared to be significant, with participants realising that you can change the system just by the way you are as leaders. Metrics from a pre and post programme survey showed a positive shift in participants' sense of leadership capability, and everyone left the programme with a Personal Development Plan to support their ongoing development over the next year.



"I feel I can develop outside of my comfort zone and do some skydiving in the job. I can be bolder."



"I am seeing myself like a seed growing...I have lots of skills to master. We all have ups and downs but we have to push on. I now have new milestones to work towards."

Bringing people together from different directorates seemed to create a new realisation of shared challenges. The lenses applied to these issues helped participants to re-think new approaches to systemic issues, with individuals leaving the programme equipped with new insight and potential solutions to test.



"It's been an amazing series of workshops. We know ourselves and each other better. And we've worked on four challenges to support women in society."



"The most important thing is learning from each other. As a group we have learnt from the different experiences and sharing of knowledge."

"I feel so fortunate to have been involved in leading this programme. The energy and freshness of ideas of all the women involved will be a lasting memory for me. We all rose to the challenge of 'online' leadership learning and showed how a group of committed women can work together and create the possibility of change in health outcomes for people."

- Mari Davis, Director, Leading Communities

"It has been a fantastic privilege to be involved in the design and delivery of this programme, the first of its kind in the region. Our whole team has been truly inspired by the women's commitment to leading positive change for the communities they serve, which I have no doubt they will achieve."

- John Jarvis, Chief Operating Officer, Leadership Centre

