



Press Release - 9 December 2009

NEW 1 MILLION POUND INITIATIVE LAUNCHED TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY BASED PREVENTION WORK ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

City Parochial Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Rosa (the UK Fund for Women and Girls), three independent charitable organisations, have collaborated to establish a new UK-wide Special Initiative to fund community based, preventive work to safeguard children from the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The initiative is supporting organisations based within practising communities - in particular, women's organisations. Approximately £1million has been invested in 15 organisations throughout the UK over a three-year period. The projects will start in January 2010.

Baroness Ruth Rendell, Ambassador to the initiative, said, 'It's wonderful to know of this FGM initiative. I find it extremely heartening that people are giving up their time and devoting their energy to working against FGM. It's very different now from what it was ten years ago when I first learnt of it and began to combat it. So many organisations, motivated by goodwill and deep sympathy with affected women, are making a difference. Determination of the kind shown by the FGM initiative will eventually have the hoped-for results.'

The funded organisations will undertake activities including:

- Working with young people to become ambassadors for prevention
- Reaching out to practising communities through counselling services and awareness raising programmes including workshops on women's health and child protection
- Partnering with faith leaders to challenge the notion that FGM is linked to faith
- Producing awareness raising resources such as community language information materials and tool kits for front-line workers
- Establishing 'sister circles' and other safe spaces for women to share experiences
- Developing a multi lingual telephone helpline to offer advice and support
- Leading accredited women's leadership training and developing 'community champions' to challenge FGM
- Training for statutory services and improving links with education and health infrastructure to improve support for victims and those at risk

The initiative's aim is to reduce the risk to girls and young women in the UK of undergoing genital mutilation in all its forms. Research undertaken by FORWARD in 2007, in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Department of Midwifery at City University, estimated that nearly 66,000 women with FGM were living in England and Wales and 21,000 girls under the age of eight were estimated to be at risk of FGM. These figures are based on the 2001 census and are likely to have increased since then due to migration to the UK from practising countries.

Maggie Baxter, Chair of the initiative's Advisory Group, said: "For too long FGM has remained a subject couched in silence, with communities fearful to speak out about the practice and its implications. This initiative will support a wide range of community-based activities and is a huge step forward in supporting communities to have a voice, take a stand, and make lasting change."

For more information please contact Maggie Baxter on 07817 785 225.

Notes to Editors

1. Initiative grantees

Work across the UK

ACCM UK - Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire
Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid - Birmingham
Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO) - Cardiff
Bolton Solidarity Community Association - Bolton
Forward - London, Bristol, Middlesbrough & Manchester
Granby Somali Women's Group - Liverpool
Somali Development Services - Leicester
Women's Health and Cultural Organisation (previously known as Teesside African Health Community) - Stockton-on-Tees

Work within London:

African Advocacy Foundation & North Brixton Islamic Cultural Centre - Lambeth & Southwark
Black Women's Health and Family Support - Tower Hamlets, Hackney & Newham
British Somali Community - Camden
Manor Gardens Centre - Hackney, Haringey and Islington
Ocean Somali Community Association - Tower Hamlets and Newham
Southall Community Alliance, TALLO & Acton Community Forum - Ealing
Sudanese Women's Association - Camden

2. Why the initiative was launched

The initiative was developed as a result of discussions with voluntary and community organisations, as well as specialist midwives and statutory agencies that have an interest in tackling the practice of FGM. In addition, the Women's Resource Centre was commissioned to undertake a UK-wide survey of women's organisations to assess the level of activity being undertaken to address this practice. A policy seminar was organised which brought together the Police, Government, Safeguarding Children Boards, the Health Sector, voluntary and community organisations, and other relevant agencies, to discuss the need for investment in community based prevention work.

3. Defining the problem

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), otherwise known as Female Circumcision or Female Genital Cutting, is the partial or total removal of any part of the female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or any other non-therapeutic reason. There are four types of circumcision which girls/women undergo depending on their country of origin or ethnic group and range from Type 1 to Type 4 depending on the extent of the procedure. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics, communities from 28 African countries, some countries in the Middle East including Egypt, Yemen, and Syria and the Kurdistan community of Northern Iraq, practise FGM. The practice has been brought to the UK (and other countries) by migrants from these countries. WHO estimates that between 130 and 140 million girls and women are victims of FGM.

4. Legislation in the UK

The UK Prohibition of "Female Circumcision" Act (1985) makes it an offence to carry out or to aid, abet or procure the performance by another person, of any form of FGM, except for specific medical purposes. Further legislation, the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, makes it an offence for FGM to be performed anywhere on UK nationals or UK permanent residents of all ages. The 2003 legislation carries a maximum sentence of 14 years imprisonment or a fine or both. To date, no prosecutions have been made under the UK legislation although two doctors have been found guilty of serious professional misconduct by the General Medical Council.

5. Initiative Aim and Objectives

Aim - To develop and/or strengthen community-based preventive work to protect the rights of children (as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) with a particular view to reducing the risk to girls and young women in the UK of undergoing genital mutilation in all its forms.

Objectives

To develop projects within community organisations to raise awareness among practising communities about UK law and the health and psychological risks of FGM.

To increase the confidence of women, men and young people within practising communities to reject this procedure as part of their identity.

To increase the skills and capacity within practising communities to influence individuals, groups, and statutory agencies.

To strengthen the voice of women and communities speaking out against FGM.

To improve co-ordination of activities amongst voluntary and community groups and statutory agencies working on this issue.

6. About the funders

City Parochial Foundation is an independent charitable foundation established in 1891. It aims to enable and empower the poor of London to tackle poverty and its root causes, and to ensure that its funds reach those most in need. www.cityparochial.org.uk

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funds the charitable activities of organisations that have the ideas and ability to achieve change for the better. Its primary interests are in the UK's cultural life, education and learning, the natural environment and enabling disadvantaged people to participate more fully in society. www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

Rosa is the first UK wide fund for projects working with women and girls. Her vision is that every woman in the UK has what she needs to be the best she can. Rosa will achieve this by championing women and girls, raising and distributing new funds and influencing change. www.rosauk.org