



💡 *My ambition is for our health programmes to have a national reach, based centrally but not detached because we are part of the community. At Community Links you learn anything is achievable, there will be a way.* 💡

Zoraida Colorado

Health Programme Manager, Community Links
Former volunteer

“My ambition is for our health programmes to have a national reach, based centrally but not detached because we are part of the community. My team of multilingual Health Facilitators and I run a series of programmes to raise cancer awareness and to increase the take-up of cancer screening services, in London. Our work is all about prevention, early action. We are thinking of a name, perhaps a Life Savers or Early Action Hub, where the passion, love and care runs through everything we do. Where the numbers of people we reach keep rising.

My journey at Community Links started 15 years ago. I was a new mum in a new country away from family, feeling lonely and depressed. I volunteered at Community Links and developed my skills. I had the chance to apply for an administrator job in the Policy team – and got it!

In 2010 we won funding from our local Primary Care Team for a project we had developed to increase the uptake of breast screening by calling women. That was the breakthrough. The increase target was 3%; by the end my team managed an increase of 16%. After that the contract was expanded to many other boroughs.

We also expanded our new ways for increasing breast screening take-up to schools, to reach girls to reach their mothers. On the first day a member of school staff discovered she had a lump and was treated successfully. It was really powerful. Quickly the project spread to other schools.

Above all is our drive to ‘prevent illness and save lives’, because at Community Links we see that ill health can be the start of so many problems. I hear people say ‘My husband or wife is ill, I cannot afford the bus fare, I’ve lost my job’ and they really begin to struggle to make ends meet. Keeping people healthy is good economically for them and also for us all.

People ask, how do we succeed where others have not? We use relationships to help overcome the barriers: understanding, language, culture, transport, anxiety and so on. We used to have a script but no longer; because we are part of the community, the conversations are real and create change.

Recently there was another big leap. We won our biggest contract yet, to reach 85,000 people in North and South West London, for bowel screening take-up this time. We are thrilled because we have always wanted to reach more people. It is so exciting; in this amazing organisation we have gone from a tiny project to a massive health programme.

So, I have the ambition for our health programme to have its own base, where our commitment shines through and our reach is national. There may be real hurdles but they are not going to hold us back. At Community Links you learn anything is achievable, there will be a way.”