FORWARD (Foundation for Women’s Health, Research and Development) has been delivering FGM awareness sessions for students as well training teachers on FGM and how to respond appropriately. In the past 12 months, FORWARD’s Youth Programme has delivered:

- 45 student awareness sessions in schools throughout London.
- 9 schools and colleges have been engaged on the topic of FGM.
- Over 1,000 students received FGM awareness – average class size is 25 students.
- 4 staff briefings/trainings
- In boroughs as diverse as Greenwich, Lambeth, Hounslow, Westminster and and Haringey.
- Students are therefore equipped to be able to support themselves, peers and siblings who may be at risk of or affected by FGM.

Schools engagement in most cases involves training teachers, meaning that they are able to support girls who are affected by FGM as well as protect those who may be at risk of the practice. This work is essential in breaking the silence around FGM and has in fact led to several disclosures following the sessions.

Content of sessions includes:

- FGM definition and types, prevalence
- Health implications
- Socio-Cultural Context of FGM
- UK context of FGM; including the law and support services available.

All sessions are delivered in a culturally sensitive and age appropriate manner. Sessions are structured in an interactive format and exercises are used to allow young people to consider how they would support a friend who is afraid that they would be taken to undergo FGM. Some sessions have an activity base which reinforces learning as well as getting them to think of actions they can take e.g. creating posters about FGM to be displayed in the school. Sessions are usually part of the school’s PSHE classes although some schools have sessions for their Health and Social care students – which ensures that those who are going into caring professions or into professions where they work with young people have knowledge on FGM. Extended sessions have also been facilitated with students who are engaged in a leadership role within their schools and so they can act as peer supporters, initiating a campaign or actions in the school to support their fellow students.

Feedback from students has been very positive and they have expressed that they have learnt a lot and have an understanding of FGM. ‘I learnt that FGM is a terrible thing to do whether it’s type 1, 2 or 3. The fact that you guys are working towards changing it is such amazing work. I didn’t even know about this. Thank you for the lesson!’

When asked what students can do with the information some students have said:

- ‘If I had a friend with this problem with things that I learnt today I would help my friend with doctor or police’
- ‘One thing someone could do is make sure that there is somewhere for victims of FGM to and talk about it e.g. youth club or a specific centre’
- ‘I’m going to talk about it on the social networking sites so I can provide information for the people that don’t know about it’
- ‘One thing I can do it to be aware it happens in the UK and to write to David Cameron to ask him to do so some more work on it. I would ask him to get more involved with the FORWARD organisation’

Feedback from teachers has also been positive, one teacher at a school said:

‘I spoke yesterday with my class about the sessions – and the AMOUNT of information between them that they came with is excellent – I was so proud and impressed with them and that is all down to what you taught them. They even taught me some things | I wasn’t aware of. Despite my initial reservations, I would definitely like to have you back to our school... I really do think it is valuable for the students and something they would know very little about otherwise.’
Following sessions FORWARD also offers additional support this includes:

- Youth Friendly FGM resources
- Facilitating a Parents Evening
- Staff training or sessions
- Outreach or Drop in sessions
- One to One support for young women affected by FGM
- Advice and guidance for schools on how to respond to FGM

Contact the Youth Program Assistant (Saria) for information about upcoming events and free training opportunities at youth@forwarduk.org.uk.