



## Sport England: Bright Futures Impact Report 2018-2021

### “Enable, Empower & Grow”

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## Executive Summary

Bright Futures was a partnership project, funded by Sport England to engage with local BAMER women in Tameside to promote health and wellbeing outcomes by supporting them to be more active within their communities.

The partnership included **DMNW, Action Together, Active Tameside and Jigsaw Homes**, to collectively develop a combined and co-ordinated pathway for quality, meaningful volunteer opportunities and a co-produced training programme.

We put local BAMER women at the heart of the project design and delivery, testing new ways of working to ensure their aspirations and hopes were realised, as well as tackling and understanding the barriers they faced when accessing mainstream opportunities, in particular sport and physical activities.

DMNW, as the lead organisation, recruited a bilingual Volunteer Coordinator who engaged with **160 BAMER women** over the life of the project. Using an asset-based approach, women were supported to learn and grow, by building confidence, identifying individual strengths and encouragement to develop their new ideas and find their own solutions.

In the remaining year, the **Global Health pandemic; Coronavirus 19** significantly altered the direction of the project, with all community led activities closed, and volunteering and training opportunities ceased. Lockdowns and social restrictions presented considerable challenges for women on this project and exacerbated the widening health and social inequalities already seen within Tameside's minority groups, with the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on these communities; from access to and knowledge of local emergency support, lack of digital access, increased caring responsibilities with school closures, and not least the fear and increased vulnerabilities of Covid 19.

This impact report has been produced with the aim of capturing the learning and disseminating to partners and key decision-making platforms to further highlight the effectiveness of:

- a) Co-produced and collaborative working
- b) Place based, asset based, and community led interventions.
- c) Impact of investing locally to organisations who have experience and knowledge working with the target audience and who are already embedded in the community to conduct the intervention work.
- d) Understand that working with minority groups take more than double the time to engage and achieve goals.
- e) Amplify the role of local people and VCFSE organisations from BAMER communities who came forward to support people during the pandemic, in particular individuals whose need may otherwise not have been met.

## Background

This impact report gathers our learning from our BAMER Women's Physical Activities project in Tameside during the period of January 2018 to March 2021. Our multiagency approach to tackling barriers faced by women within these communities enabled us to develop a volunteer passport which encompassed volunteering opportunities, training and the set-up volunteer led social activities. This report aims to capture the work conducted throughout the project and highlight the impact of our approach on individual women from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Tameside using both statistical and narrative data.

### *Bright Futures Project*

In 2018, Diversity Matters North West Ltd (DMNW) was awarded a sub-contract to deliver the Sports England (SE) funded project via Acton Together CIO (ATCIO). Ending in March 2021, we used an asset-based approach, to target BAMER women across Tameside and develop a combined, co-ordinated pathway for quality, meaningful, accessible volunteering opportunities working with partner organisations (ATCIO, Active Tameside (AT) and New Charter -now known as Jigsaw). This will, ultimately, increase the number of social and physical activity sessions in the borough led and shaped by the volunteers we recruit. The project worked towards SE priorities of:

1. Enabling adults from disadvantaged communities to experience the benefits of taking part in quality volunteering opportunities, using sport or physical activity.
2. Learning about what works to support different groups of people into volunteering.
3. Finding successful approaches which can be replicated or scaled up.

To achieve the above outcomes, we focused on:

- Empowering BAMER women to develop their skills, experience, and confidence to take-up opportunities and ultimately be in a better position to find work.
- Developing a co-produced volunteer passport scheme that is accessible to marginalised groups and provides training and support that develops people's confidence, skills and expertise.
- Increasing provision of social and physical activity opportunities at a local level that are led by local people.

### *Diversity Matters North West (DMNW) Ltd*

DMNW is a medium sized local charity dedicated to challenging inequalities in health and well-being, helping people develop their potential and support each other. DMNW are the local experts in community development with BAMER women, having worked with this group since its inception in 2007. Our award-winning, trailblazing volunteer programme works with women from different ethnic backgrounds to:

- Improve the wellbeing.
- Increase their confidence.
- Gain skills and knowledge that will increase the ability to take up new training or employment opportunities.

DMNW have existing, strong connections within the BAMER communities in Tameside, therefore, we maximised our existing networks to drive the project forwards.

### *Action Together CIO (ATCIO)*

ATCIO charitable purpose is to strengthen the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE), maximising opportunities to create positive social change, promote social justice and harness social benefit across Oldham, Rochdale, and Tameside. They are the local infrastructure support agency in each of the 3 localities for the VCFSE and volunteering.

### *Active Tameside (AT)*

Active Tameside is the leading sport, health & leisure charity in Tameside with a strategic aim to improve the health & wellbeing of local people.

## *Jigsaw Homes*

Jigsaw Homes is Tameside's largest social housing provider and a charity with over 14,500 homes in Tameside and deliver a wide range of commissioned specialist services that support residents of Tameside.

### What was the problem we were trying to tackle?<sup>1</sup>

ATCIO engaged with the public on a range of health and wellbeing topics that have informed the GM #TakingCharge programme, the local Care Together Programme, and local strategies for the integrated care organisation. Through their work with the most marginalised communities, we have found that local people wanted to:

- Take better care of themselves and their families, and know that physical activity, healthy eating, and better lifestyle choices improve things.
- Make the most of the support available to them to improve theirs and their families health and wellbeing

Limiting factors to people engaging with the local offer included:

- Not knowing what is available - particularly if English is not your first language.
- Price and time - particularly acute for people with caring and parenting responsibilities from low-income households.
- Accessibility - people are prepared to travel within Tameside but would rather go with someone they know and trust.

BAMER women in Tameside told us that a particular challenge for them accessing physical activity is cultural sensitivity e.g., women only classes, areas to pray. The lack of crèche facilities, managing their caring responsibilities and finding something the family can do together can also be a challenge and where these have all been identified as limiting factors for women.

Working with DMNW, ATCIO carried out a piece of research with local Bangladeshi Women. These women told us that they would value a developed volunteering offer, particularly in terms of skills and experience that will better enable them to find work; examples included: shadowing, learning transferable skills, developing their leadership skills, and developing their confidence and independence.

### What did we do?

Taking the findings of the previous consultation and local needs of BAMER women in Tameside, one of Tameside most marginalised groups, DMNW recruited a fulltime bilingual Volunteer Coordinator, who took on our people and communities led approach and co-produced a volunteer passport consisting of local training and volunteering offers. We ensured that the activities we delivered were asset and place based, culturally sensitive, within school hours and outside of school holidays and religious festivals, in addition, we ensured we were able to cover childcare and volunteer expenses, so we were able to reach and effectively engage women early, with minimal disruptions and barriers. The co-produced volunteer passport included:

- Training opportunities
- Voluntary opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from initial bid

- Workshops and social activities
- Local community engagement events

Quarterly partnership steering groups were held to ensure the project maintained a collaborative working approach, providing support to the project, and widening engagement of BAMER women in other opportunities. Key partners offered in kind support and opened hot desking opportunities for staff to work with different teams, in a view to nurture and strengthen collaborative working relationships.

### *Women's Community Consultations 2018*

As with many asset-based, community development approach, we wanted to ensure that the needs and gaps we identified were still relevant. So, with this in mind we worked with ATCIO and AT and embarked on conducting two focus group consultations with local women in Tameside's hot spots areas of Hyde and Ashton, where the highest % of BAMER residents reside. The consultation posed 3 questions, 1) what physical activities were available for them in their local areas, 2) what stops them from engaging in physical activities and 3) what types of activities they would like to see. We offered bilingual support and held the sessions in local community venues to enable greater participation.

Ultimately women told us that are very few, culturally sensitive, women only, local physical activity provisions across Tameside, outside of DMNW provisions. Barriers discussed ranged from childcare responsibilities, to not knowing where to go. The women identified activities from physical, social and training opportunities that they felt that they would benefit from participating in (Refer to Appendix 1: Women's Community Consultations 2018 Analysis).

In addition to this being the start of nurturing the relationship between the staff, service users', volunteers and service providers, the consultation confirmed our initial findings of the lack of and need for women only sport sessions and engagement activities, to encourage women from these communities to get moving. The many barriers that they faced drastically reduced the chances of them taking part. Using this intelligence, we tailored our original project activities and embarked on developing existing physical activities to be more inclusive for these women, whilst increasing provisions that are volunteer led. This process of consultation and revision of our activities and project was repeated annually to ensure we were still meeting the needs of our target group.

### *Service User Focus Groups / Volunteer Forums*

We worked closely with our core partners and pooled resources to host and deliver our focus groups and forums. We alternated venues from each partner so volunteers and service users were more familiar about the services that existed in Tameside and how they can help support their volunteer journeys. We tied in our travel training days with some of these sessions, supporting women to build their confidence, their skills, their knowledge, and breakdown their fears on getting on public transport, therefore, widening their own access to services and opportunities.

### *Volunteer Recruitment & Support*

Working with our key partners we advertised and recruited volunteers, offering both one to one and group trilingual induction and registration sessions, locally accessible, therefore, enabling increased accessibility of the project. We worked with ATCIO and delivered confidence building and introduction to volunteering training as part of the recruitment process. We also worked closely with local adult education providers to reach a diverse range of people. We worked with local primary schools where there were a high percentage of BAMER pupils so we could engage with parents during school pick up and drop off times or meet parents at the school, local faith centres and businesses to build voluntary opportunities and partnerships. Ultimately, we focused on taking the project to women, to where they felt comfortable, rather than expecting them to come to us.

**Taking the project to women, to where they felt comfortable, rather than expecting them to come to us!**

Staying true to our community led approach, many of the opportunities at DMNW were created as a result from the needs arising from volunteers. We often found that volunteers wanted to start off volunteering at DMNW as they grew in confidence, skills and developed their knowledge of volunteering. Once they felt they were ready, they were supported onto external placements and training opportunities.

#### *Training & Learning Opportunities*

The training offer was put together by all key partners, pooling our resources, and tailoring the offer to reach and engage women that would not have normally accessed these opportunities given the barriers and challenges. We built in travel training and taster days as we knew women from these communities have little or no experience in using public transport or know of other providers. The impact of this has been phenomenal, where we heard reports of women that had low confidence, struggled to speak in English, never been out of their local area by themselves, now getting on public transport to travel to access training and voluntary opportunities.



***“First time that I went on the bus and I feel good” (Project Participant Feedback)***

#### *Events*

Annual Volunteer Celebration: Working with women who would not have normally engaged in volunteering outside of the project, we felt it was important to recognise and celebrate their achievements by hosting our popular annual volunteer celebrations where family and friends of volunteers were invited alongside



keynote guest speakers to come and acknowledge the amazing work done in Tameside by these women. Guest speakers included MP Jonathan Reynolds, Civic Mayor/ess of Tameside, Public Health Director, local Councillors, and key partners working on the project. It gave the opportunity for those women who were not volunteering, to consider doing so.



Diversity Matters in Tameside: This event brought all partners, volunteers, and service users together with an aim to bring services locally and recruit women from different ethnic backgrounds into their services, training offers and voluntary opportunities. It also offered an opportunity for volunteers to hold cultural stands exhibiting key facts, showcasing traditional attire, food, and an opportunity to converse with people outside of the culture and ask questions, ultimately increasing cultural awareness amongst partners and of the diverse cultures that exist in Tameside.



### *Volunteer Led Social & Physical Activities*

This was a pinnacle element of the project, to support and upskill volunteers to confidently deliver and run their own social activities. Therefore, leaving a legacy of the project. Using the intelligence from the consultation we planned training and developed voluntary roles around the activities that were requested. These were mainly the women's sports club, chair-based exercise, and health walks.

## Our Achievements

We worked in collaboration with multiple stakeholders and successfully recruited 160 BAMER women onto the project to volunteer their time and skills to develop the local provisions. These are 160 women who would not have traditionally accessed voluntary opportunities elsewhere. Volunteers were allocated over 316 roles, 76 roles (24%) were external of DMNW, where women volunteered with local organisations and business to develop knowledge and skills for future employment as well as to further develop confidence and English-speaking skills. More than often, this project was seen as a steppingstone for many women stepping out from their homes, to focus on themselves, to learn and grow.

*The project was a steppingstone for many women stepping out from their homes, to focus on themselves, to learn and grow!*

The project developed and set up volunteer led social activities which increased local culturally sensitive physical activities and provisions for women. These sessions have developed stronger relationships between women from the local BAMER communities and the local churches, breaking down stigmas and barriers for healthy, tolerant, and prosperous community.

We successfully re-introduced young people's work in Hyde after nearly a decade after the local council cutbacks to youth work. The sessions now provide a safe space for young girls to come together, to socialise and to get active for better mental health and wellbeing.

We worked with and upskilled:

- 11 BAMER women in Sports leadership training to support the continuation of the women's sports club in Hyde. 3 are now in paid employment.
- 13 BAMER women in armchair exercise training.
- 9 BAMER women trained to deliver health walks in Tameside.
- 46 BAMER women were trained as first aiders, 21 women in health & safety, 10 women as community interpreters, 36 in food safety, helping the women to upskill for future self / employment.
- 11 BAMER women were equipped with enterprise skills to set up their own business.



- 16 people of BAMER backgrounds were trained in mental health aware to support themselves and others to recognise when support is required and navigate them to the correct services.

Project participants gained valuable skills, knowledge, and confidence to move forward and confidently accessing external volunteer placements, applying, and securing jobs and actively registering to access further external training opportunities. At the end of the project, 50% of the registered volunteers remained active within DMNW.

#### *Wider Reach*

Overall, we reached 648 individuals from across Tameside from various ethnic backgrounds, that engaged on the project, not including attendance at community events. Largest ethnic group engaged was Bangladeshi. 44% of the project participants were from Hyde and 31 % from Ashton. Largest age group engaged was 31-40 (26%) and 41-50 (25%). 160 registered as volunteers. This shows that volunteering was not appropriate for many of women that engaged on the project but took benefit from the project offers around training and engaging in social activities and workshops. This was a main attraction of the project.

#### *Project Activities*

Throughout the duration of the project, we delivered 42 different activities consisting of:

- 4 community-based events
- 12 different types of volunteer led social activities developed and ran either weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. Of those that were recorded, the social activities engaged nearly 340 women and had 703 attendances over the project duration. 4 sessions were sustained including women's sports club, girls sports club, chair-based exercise group and the women only health walk. Our most popular social activity, where we saw 79 different individuals attending and over 270 attendances, over 25 sessions, was our volunteer led women sports club in Hyde.
- 26 different types of community-based training, equal to 308 sessions, and where we had 776 attendances. Our most popular training course was our conversational ESOL, confidence building and introduction to volunteering, where we saw over 70 individuals attend for each of the type of training.

We saw over 1499 attendances throughout the life of the project, these figures are in addition to individuals that attended our community events. This was only achieved through the close collaborative working relationship we developed throughout the project.

The impact of the project was felt with all stakeholders, including:

#### *BAMER Women*

The project provided support for women to take their first step into the unknown, to empower and enable women to see their potential, to move forwards, challenging themselves and inspiring others to reach their goals. The impact on BAMER women accessing this project has been life changing. From getting the confidence to get out of the house to travelling on public transport to access external training and voluntary opportunities, and for some, securing jobs! Providing internal volunteering at DMNW has helped to build confidence to access external opportunities. Through the volunteering experiences, we know that those volunteers that exited the programme, approximately 14% gained employment, 14% moved onto external voluntary opportunities and 17% onto further education, external to DMNW.

Evidence from Sports England Volunteering Dashboard in July 2020, highlighted that, those that were able to complete both the registration and experience surveys, reported 100% in the project having a positive impact on them<sup>2</sup>. The report also evidences that over 55% of the volunteers felt less anxious because of being part of this project, 55% also felt more confident to have a go at new experiences and where 64% felt they were able to achieve their goals.

### *Local Community*

Creating sustainable volunteer led activities in the local communities allowed BAMER women and girls to access local, free, female friendly, culturally sensitive, safe venue, to take part in sports related activity without feeling judged. With more women engaging in exercise may result in fewer visits to clinical health services as people would feel healthier. Those that had siblings, relatives, daughters brought them in to join the group to exercise and have fun together, educating the next generation on a healthier lifestyle.

### *Partners*

This programme allowed a minority group that would not have traditionally accessed services, to be supported into services. This resulted in increased take up services, training and volunteering opportunities offered by the partners we worked with throughout the project. Where partners struggled to engage and recruit these learners, this project provided the local connections and support with covering cost of childcare and travel, which, for many women, was the only support they required to help boost their personal development and / or help them to access physical activities to improve their overall health and wellbeing.

### *Organisational (DMNW)*

The programme has strengthened our relationships with key organisations across the public, voluntary and private sectors. We are being recognised for the key work we are conducting in Tameside and starting conversations with new partners on collaborative working.

We have been able to upskill our volunteer pool, recruiting 3 volunteers into paid roles, which has meant we have been able to develop our grow our own approach. Supporting those who are ready to take the next step and explore further employment opportunities has been an ambition for us, and something we have achieved through this project.

## Measuring Success

Measuring success of the work within this project was always going to be a challenge with our target audience. As part of the funding requirements, we completed national and local evaluations including:

- Completing funders national registration and experience survey for each volunteer enrolled capturing impact data and demographic information.
- Completing funders national inputting tool to record volunteer activities, hours, and frequency.
- Quarterly narrative report capturing the local data.

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<sup>2</sup> Where we were able to ensure that all volunteers involved in the project completed the registration form, getting the experience survey completed proved to be a huge challenge as the evidence suggests, therefore, the results may be inaccurate and not present a true reflection of the impact of the project on BAMER women.

- Attendance registers: Attendance in activities itself demonstrates evidence of the high engagement achieved throughout the project, recording over 1499 attendances. Our classes were always full, with a 99% retention rate.
- Case studies: this was the main method in capturing the true journeys for volunteers, their stories which demonstrates the impact of the project.

### A Volunteers' Journey

*"I live in the local community where often I would be at home feeling bored. I wanted to get involved in my community, but I just did not know how to. I always felt that because my English is not good, I would not be able to. My confidence was low, I didn't go anywhere, it was a scary thought, even to speak to anyone!*

*I had a leaflet posted through my door about DMNW, they were running ESOL classes, and it said they had staff that spoke in Bangla, I knew I needed to improve my English, so I went to see them. That was the point I felt a positive change in my life! The staff were friendly and approachable, they listened and made me feel comfortable and at ease. They registered me for English class, Confidence building and then I started to attend their social activities and health walks. I really enjoyed it and could see myself develop! I wanted to help others, so I then registered as a volunteer. My skills, knowledge and experience had increased, I got to meet other people, I was able to speak more confidently in English (although it's not perfect!). I took a lead to help the Kreative Krafts group which I enjoyed, and I have now set up my own Business!*

*My family are proud of me! I feel happier and better, I have grown and flourished. I now tell others about volunteering and how it has helped me, I will continue to volunteer as I know it can only mean better for me!"*

Case Study: SN: Project Volunteer

## The Challenges

The women that engaged on the project faced considerable barriers and some required close supervision and handholding.

### *Lack of Accessible Opportunities*

- When we conducted our initial mapping exercise on what was available, we found that although there were many opportunities to volunteer and access training, much of these involved online registrations and took away vital human interaction which coupled with the language and confidence barriers, became a larger mountain to climb for many of the volunteers that engaged through the project. By developing our in-house provision and working with partners we combated many of the barriers which enabled women to participate without fear or judgement. This trilingual service offer meant that many women were able to understand volunteering, their responsibilities and build confidence in a safe and comfortable environment. Despite this being pivotal to people's development, it was unsustainable long term. We explored a buddy model however, with the skills sets we had and the limited availability of volunteers, this area of work stalled as we needed to carry on meeting the project outcomes.

### *Holidays*

- Largest BAMER population in Tameside are mainly from Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage. Majority of people from these background practice the religious faith of Islam, therefore, religious holidays of Eid and Ramadhan impacted on engagement levels in addition to school holidays. This posed a significant challenge when engaging with BAMER women and ultimately slowed down engagement in the first 6 months of the project, stalling recruitment into volunteering and training. However, we tailored the programme around this and schedule majority of the project activities outside of these parameters, therefore, increasing participation levels and engagement. This worked well as during periods of low engagement, we focused our efforts on planning, developing partnerships, and organising family friendly events.

#### *Low Skillset*

- The low skillset of the client group posed a challenge for us, but not one we had not worked with before. However, this did mean that the probability of volunteers moving on to external opportunities without the help and support of DMNW staff, would remain low. Our approach has always been to be led by our service users or the community, so we work from an asset-based position where we identify the volunteer's skillset and work from that point, whether that is DMNW developing roles and opportunities in - house or working with external providers to do so, proving them with much needed guidance around culturally sensitivities.

#### *Mainstream Offers*

- Volunteer programmes were inaccessible due to accessibility online, times and days of volunteering required, and no translated materials or language (oral / written) support offered within the services.
- Formal accredited training: Many of the opportunities and easily identified. They often did know what was on offer and where to go seek the information from. Many women told us that the statutory offer of training and education has been inaccessible to them due to the costs and travel time. In addition, many women told us their fear of being judged and be treated differently due to their attire. Many women spoke of their racial discrimination and blatant racism they encountered daily and how this became difficult to manage. This added to their anxiety and ultimately resulted in non-engagement.

#### *Partnerships*

- For the project to achieve its outcomes it was vital that there was buy in from partners from the onset. This was made difficult when core partners underwent organisational restructures, therefore, individuals who initially bought in to the partnership, could not engage, due to change in roles. This presented a challenge for us, as one of the key players, it soon became apparent that we may be able to deliver what we initially planned. However, through developing new links and partnerships, delivery staff were able to foster strong relationships and resumed delivery of the project.

#### *Monitoring*

- Given the many barriers the target audience faced, with limited English speaking, reading, and writing skills coupled with low levels of IT skills, it quickly became time consuming to conduct monitoring requirements of the project. When translating, we found many of the words did not translate well into another language. People

often did not have time and felt the survey was very excessive. The only way to overcome the challenge was to train volunteers to help complete the surveys. Conversations were held with funders to agree a possible solution.

- Volunteers have always struggled to keep volunteering records as it does not seem like a high priority for them as they just want to help. We could only capture where we had the information. For the volunteers that we did not, we could not know how many hours of volunteering and frequency of volunteering people have done, therefore, that data will not give a true reflection to the extent in which the volunteers have supported the project.

## Our Learning

Being embedded in the target community was a critical factor to the success of the project. The support of our volunteers and partners, enabled the project to reach the huge outcomes. We know that face to face intervention is key to engaging people from ethnic minority backgrounds and that one-to-one support is invaluable to one's development, therefore, going forward, we need to ensure we invest more time to help to reach and engage people from an ethnic background in services and activities. This is often missed and not considered by many funders when funding projects like this, instead a focus shifts to value for money.

We know from experience and during the life of this project that offering bilingual, localised and culturally sensitive services is crucial to building strong relationship with this group of individuals, as trust is a huge factor for their disengagement. Therefore, listening to the needs of the community and working with them to achieve the outcomes is essential for longer lasting impact on people, their wellbeing and of their learning journeys.

We saw the greatest engagement when we ensured we listened and tailored the project to remove barriers to engagement. We understood our target audience therefore, we ensured that the following were part and parcel of the project:

- Deliver during school hours, outside of holidays.
- Deliver activities outside of religious festivals.
- Covered childcare costs so people can start their journeys early and engage in physical activities.
- Provided culturally safe local environment where women can come together without fear of being judged or stigmatised.
- Recruited bilingual staff and volunteers to support the target communities, enabling effective two-way communication.

Having a bilingual staff member who had lived experience, from the local community and who understood the target audience was crucial in the level of engagement achieved by the project. Hyde has very little or no women's only facility. The only physical activity BAMER women tend to access, external to DMNW, is the women's swimming session which takes place once a week, late evening at the local active Tameside centre. Our volunteer led activities in Hyde proved highly successful with both weekly women's sports club and health walks.

### *Partnerships*

- Throughout the life of the project, we worked with many partners across the sectors, to source in localised offers and help support increasing their volunteer capacity and diversity. For a more effective cross sector collaboration there needs to be a

common strategic alignment and purpose that each organisation can invest time and support long term to enable real, systematic changes.

### *Volunteer Opportunities*

- Throughout this project we saw first-hand the challenges many organisations faced when involving non-English-speaking volunteers. Capacity and resources to support non-English-speaking individuals was limited and despite the partnership models we had developed, sourcing culturally sensitive roles which offered additional support was difficult. More often we took an asset-based approach and worked with the women to identify their skills and interests to design and develop opportunities, led by and for these women.

## Global Health Pandemic

In 2020, the pandemic shone a spotlight to the widening inequalities for many people from a different ethnic background other than White British. Governments ONS figures reported disproportionate impact on people from ethnic minority backgrounds, where they are up to 90% more likely to die from contracting the virus and where Bangladeshi ethnicity has been found to be twice as likely to die of the virus than people of White British Ethnicity<sup>3</sup>. These stark figures hit DMNW fast and hard as more than 80% of their workforce and 90% of the volunteers and service users were from a BAMER background, therefore, drastic precautions had been made very early on to prevent further vulnerabilities and mortalities. 2021 Muslim census report highlighted that although Muslim's account for just 6% of the total UK population, Muslims represented 17% of all positive COVID -19 cases in the country and a reason for this has been associated with 92% of Muslims living in a multiple occupancy household, greater than the UK average of 2.4 people<sup>4</sup>. This meant the immediate closure of all activities during the final 12 months of the project, until remote working and delivery of services could be implemented. As of 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, Tameside had 1512 cases confirmed of the COVID-19 virus<sup>5</sup>. Hyde South has been the area worst hit by the COVID-19 virus in Tameside, where, between March and May 2020, there had been 24 deaths, highest in Tameside<sup>6</sup>.

We knew from 'Sport England Active Lives Adult Survey' in 2018 that activity levels were the lowest for South Asian communities and that inactivity levels for these communities remained high in comparison to their White British counterparts. The report also went on to highlight further inequalities where women are less likely to support sports activities than their male counterparts and that women from South Asian communities are under-represented within volunteering in sports<sup>7</sup>. In 2020, the updated survey reported that the COVID pandemic has only increased these figures, where they found that the groups that found it hardest to be active during the pandemic included Black, Asian, and other minority

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<sup>3</sup> BBC News, ONS data, May 2020

<sup>4</sup> Muslim Census April 2021 <https://muslimcensus.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/year-of-lockdown-revised-v1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/feed/SK141JH/Hyde,Backbower,Godley,Flower%20Field,Gee%20Cross,Godley%20Hill,Haughton%20Green,Woodley,Newton,Werneth%20Low,Newton%20Wood,Denton,Yew%20Tree,Bredbury/live/all/coronavirusAreaStats>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/hardest-hit-area-tameside-covid-18413643>

<sup>7</sup> Sports England Active Lives Adult Survey 2018

<file:///172.16.110.2/Hyde%20Community%20Action/Chief%20Officers%20Data%20Files/Research/active-lives-adult-november-17-18-report.pdf>

ethnic groups, further widening the inequality and accessibility of services gap<sup>8</sup>. This was also apparent locally.

### *Our Crisis Response: Adapting our Programme*

As the government announced the nation-wide lockdown in March 2020, DMNW identified immediately that many 'emergency supports services', statutory and grassroots, were inaccessible to our target audience as almost all the information and support was only available online. This excluded people who could not access online services whether that was due to a lack of IT proficiency, have no access to resources and language barriers. We witnessed many local groups and service shutdown, furthering people's vulnerabilities, and anxieties.

Almost immediately, all face-to-face activities ceased, and we focused on what was happening locally. DMNW approached funders and commissioners and agreed a different course of action for the projects. Planning in advance was impossible as we encountered several lockdowns and ease of restrictions. However, working in collaboration with the Local Authority, Voluntary Infrastructure Organisation: ATCIO, other community groups and our local community members, we set out to re-design our activities and help bridge gaps in services and meet the imminent crisis support needs, whilst simultaneously, advocating for equality and equitable access to local council's humanitarian hub, being a voice for the unheard.

When the pandemic hit, our project was in the midst of delivering key training courses and running face to face sports and social activities across different venues in Tameside. As a result of the pandemic, we cancelled all activities in accordance with the government lockdown and social distancing guidelines. Social distancing put all volunteering, training, social and physical activities at a stop and we started to plan alternative ways we could encourage volunteers to engage such as via social media/zoom. With this we started to:

1. *Conduct volunteer reviews:* We contacted all volunteers and service users engaged in the project over the phone to ensure they were all well and linked into local support services. We used this opportunity to recruit the volunteers for local emergency support, we quickly found that women were eager to re-engage, but could not leave their homes, instead we supported them to volunteer and support on local peer mentoring, buddying and befriending projects.
2. *Gather local data on services that were still in operation:* As a Charity we have been actively gathering local activity data to help glean a picture of what is happening in the local community and gain a picture of mutual aid support taking place in the community. This is so, when engaging with service users we can effectively link them in with activities already taking place in their local areas. This resource will aid our volunteers who have also been equipped to support other people during this pandemic.
3. *Support Local Food Offer:* Working in partnership with ATCIO with the recruitment, induction, and coordination of volunteers for the local satellite foodbank in Hyde. As a result of the lockdown, the local food bank in Hyde shut down due to volunteers shielding themselves. With no immediate plans for re-opening, DMNW approached Action Together to explore how this can be addressed. We helped develop bilingual

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<sup>8</sup> Sports England Active Lives Adult Survey, 2020

<file:///C:/Users/Rehana%20Begum/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/Q3FFY0KL/Active%20Lives%20release%20overview.pdf>



literature to cascade and encourage local donations to the new foodbank, linking in with the Tameside South and Longdendale Foodbank. Bilingual volunteers were recruited, inducted, immobilised where we coordinated door to door leaflet drop and collection of food donations. A bilingual volunteer was also recruited to support the foodbank centre on a weekly basis. We recruited an additional 38 volunteers during this period to support with this work.

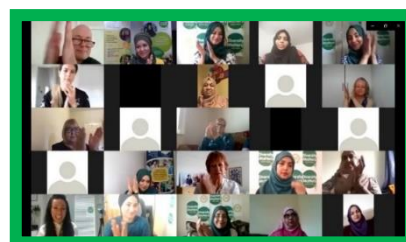


(Left to right: Michaelle Lukanu: Action Together, Imam Kamal Uddin: Hyde Jamia Mosque, Councillor Shibley Alam: Hyde Werneth)

Once set up, we organised a live talk on a TV channel which many of the Bangladeshi community from Hyde viewed in a bid to raise awareness of this partnership approach and the service itself. We worked tirelessly with local faith centres to encourage take up of the service by BAMER residents as the service itself held a stigma, especially for those experiencing food poverty for the first time. We knew that having the local masjid endorse the service was powerful and will encourage those who are struggling to access this help. As a result of our efforts, we witnessed a surge in BAMER residents accessing the service.

In addition, we developed a bilingual video working with the local Councillor and DMNW staff to spread the message. The video will be used by Trussell Trust to publicise the service with Bangladeshi residents.

4. *Tackle Inequalities: TMBC Recovery Plans and Equality Impact Assessment:* Working with partners across sectors we worked to ensure emergency services were inclusive of their diverse residents and communities. Through conversations with key partners, DMNW reached out and engaged with the local council leader, to help support DMWN to link into local discussions around COVID in Tameside to advocate for BAMER residents and the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on these communities. DMNW initiated conversations with TMBC and ATCIO and inputted into the local plans for recovery and how we can work together to enable a transition which is inclusive of all its residents. Through this work DMNW have been able to form stronger relationships with the local Council which has enabled DMNW to address service gaps for BAMER residents.
5. *Host online activities:* This included confidence building, volunteer forum and young girls sports club. We developed ESOL workbook for low skilled learners to post out, however, found that it was difficult to engage them in learning due to home schooling children and not having time, space or privacy to learn themselves.
6. *Online Volunteer Celebration:* The pandemic hit BAMER communities hard. As a result, many of our volunteers were unable to continue their roles. The invaluable work of volunteers to help run the services of DMNW has always been a key factor to our success and with reports of our volunteers feeling anxious and lonely we felt it was important for us to continue to host our annual volunteer celebration. For the first time in the



history of DMNW working in this community, we hosted our very first online volunteer celebration. We knew that technology was always going to be an obstacle for our service users, so the whole team engaged in supporting women on a one-to-one basis to get online on the day.

With over 54 people attending on the day, we heard many stories about the progress of our volunteers and the impact that it has had on them. We made recognition to our volunteers and specifically our unsung COVID heroes, who have made a huge difference to the local BAMER communities through the pandemic.

7. *Women's Physical Activities Consultation 2020*: We knew that the COVID pandemic had changed the landscape, therefore, it was important for us to re-engage with our service users on the project to understand the impact on them. We carried out a questionnaire on a sample group of 40 women via group sessions online and over the telephone to find out how the COVID pandemic had impacted on them, their physical activity levels, explore how we can encourage them to keep moving and whether there is any support that could be provided that is not currently met. We found that women were missing the sports club, this provided much need break away from home, social aspect, a fun, and culturally safe environment for women from BAMER communities to come together and enjoy themselves whilst still improving their mental health and wellbeing. The COVID impact on people's mental health dominated the discussions, where people were feeling stressed and finding it difficult to cope. Digital exclusion was a huge factor for many women, where they have not been able to engage online due to their lack English literacy skills, IT literacy and no access to IT resources.

With this intelligence, we proceeded to look at how we could address some of the new emerging challenges for women that once again prevented them from accessing services in the final 3 months of the project. With reduced capacity and funding, we resumed some level of activities addressing the key findings from the consultation. This included:

8. *Virtual Women's Sports Club*: We set up a group WhatsApp and invited women to join with the aim of encouraging and motivating each other to increase physically activity levels. Staff and volunteers shared exercise videos and encouraged other to do the same and share ideas on how to exercise and keep moving at home and whilst working. We found one volunteer was only doing 300 steps a day but through the encouragement from others in the group of doing short bursts of exercise at her desk when working, she was able to reach 1000 steps a day. Through the support of the group, she has now started to do early morning walks for 30mins before she starts work!

Staff set monthly competitions to further encourage people to keep moving. Since the group started, we noticed people were struggling to keep track of their steps, so we sent out 'fit bits' to all volunteers who are actively involved. This provided motivation for women to continue to keep moving at home.

9. *Young Girls Sports Club: Engagement / Challenges*: The young girls told us that they did not want to engage in online zoom sessions due to the many additional barriers they faced at home. We found that they were helping younger siblings at home with homework and focusing on college / university assignments as end grades would depend on this as exams were not taking place. On some cases, we found that young girls were not receiving the encouragement they required to engage in social activities, physical activities as this was seen as lower in priority than their studies.

With this in mind, we explored the re-start of outdoor face-to-face girls' sports group, and engaged in discussions with local council around outdoor spaces. However, due to the changing guidance's from the Government, this was not possible.

*BAMER Young Girls Community Consultation:* In 2021, given some of the barriers young girls were telling us about, we felt it was important to understand how the pandemic had impacted on young girls from BAMER background living in Hyde. Working in partnership with Active Communities Network, we conducted a small consultation with this age group to find out any new emerging needs. We learnt that 55% of the young girls experienced some level of anxiety as a direct result of the pandemic and where over a quarter felt a lack of motivation impacted on them day to day, interestingly, 65% of the girls requested support with sleep better and coping with stress. All respondents wanted to see some localised physical activity opportunities ranging from dance to boxing. In addition, we have worked with A.C.N to provide 5 young girls with IT equipment to help them engage online from home.

10. *Supporting Better Mental Wellbeing:* The pandemic has exacerbated health inequalities where some people are experiencing new, returning, or worsening feelings of depression, stress, loneliness, anxiety, reducing likelihood to be physically active (Sports England Active Lives Survey, 2021). The findings highlight that women and young people are more likely to be affected than men, specifically those from lower socio-economic groups. Our consultation in 2020 highlighted a demand for women to access help and support around coping with their own mental health during the pandemic. With this in mind, we sourced in an external training provider to deliver 2 training sessions online where women and men attended from across Tameside. The training focused on raising awareness of mental health & wellbeing within the BAMER communities to encourage people to speak up about mental health, removing shame and stigma. On completion of the training all delegates will be trained as mental health aware where they are able to spot the signs and symptoms of mental health and have the tools and techniques to help others in their communities.

11. *Digital Inclusion:* We know that 6 million people in the UK (13%) are digitally excluded<sup>9</sup>. Our consultation with women told us that this was also a barrier for them. We then set up one to one appointment so women that struggled to get online to contact staff and access support to help get them online. We linked with local projects providing IT equipment and linked this to women who were in need. As a direct result, we saw women who were not digitally literate and struggled with English language, confidently engaging with DMNW activities via zoom.

*“I am really happy I could join the zoom it’s been a year I could not engage or see anyone I’m glad I came” (Project Service User)*

## Next Steps

The project came to an end in March 2021, however, before doing so, we used the information gathered from the consultation and supported volunteers to exit the programme and engage in other opportunities. In addition, we developed and ensured further support was available to re-start the following post COVID lockdown restrictions:

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<sup>9</sup> Sports England Active Lives Survey <https://indd.adobe.com/view/8ef74aa1-65b5-4d6f-b4ea-197927c0dc08>

- Re-start both the young girls and women’s sports club via our partnership with Active Communities Network
- Continue to develop women as local sports leaders via our wider work with Active Communities Network
- Evidence gathered and lessons learnt from this project will feed directly the local ‘Volunteering Delivery Group’. This is a partnership approach to collectively address barriers people face, and achieve solutions to these, providing strategic support for volunteering in Tameside.
- We are working closely with TMBC<sup>10</sup> to research and gather evidence around the barriers to accessing to information. This will form part of a wider strategic priority in Tameside to tackle inequalities in services.
- Continue to work alongside local ACTIO, as the local infrastructure organisation to advocate to funders and commissions regarding the work related to targeting specific vulnerable and marginalised groups and aligning funds and monitoring requirements to tackle the challenges that this often brings and recognise and value the work that is required for long term impact.

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<sup>10</sup> Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: BAMER Women's Community Consultation Analysis 2018

#### BAMER Women's Consultation Analysis 2018

Hyde (May) & Ashton (Oct)

Partners: AT & ATCIO

Number of Women Consulted: Approx. 30

Ethnicity: Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Arab, Polish

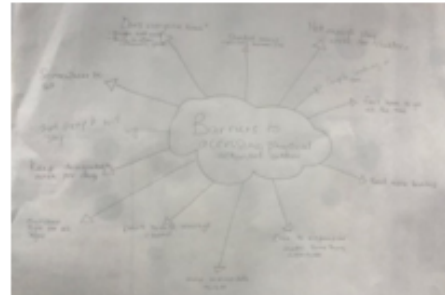
Staff: Hasina

#### 1. What physical activities are available in their local areas?

It was unanimous that women from BAMER background in Ashton did not know of any physical activities that were culturally accessible and female friendly. Some women told us that they went on walks by themselves, which they found demotivating and lonely. Women that participated from Hyde said they only know of some existing activities at DMNW and of one woman only swimming session at Active Hyde, but for many this was inaccessible as it was once a week, late evening, the building, and the area was still accessible by males accessing other facilities.

#### 2. What are the Barriers for women accessing activities?

- Childcare and extended family responsibilities
- Laziness
- Never done anything
- Not sure where to begin
- Money
- No time
- Transport
- Not many women only sessions
- Lack of confidence and knowledge
- Outdoor spaces: nowhere to sit, not private, people look at you, no access to toilet facilities, cafes are expensive, a lot of dogs off leashes / irresponsible dog owners



#### 3. What activities would you like to see?

- Physical activities that are women friendly: Badminton, sports, netball, basketball, walking, exercise, chair-based exercise, women only gym & swimming, Zumba
- Social Activity: women friendly social activities in Newton, cooking and baking sessions, chat group, allotments to do gardening, mental health support, arts & crafts.
- Training & Volunteering: localised training offer: Using computer, netball coaching, coaching skills, ESOL, Food Hygiene, First Aid, Confidence Building, one to one volunteering support, accredited learning, business skills, theory test / learning to drive.

