

IMPACT REPORT: MWC HELPLINE Remote Support for Muslim Women and Girls



'You are all amazing, working flat out all over Bradford to help people in need. Thank you so much!'

Service user

Background

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, we have had to quickly adapt our service to continue supporting our beneficiaries, Muslim women, and girls, across Bradford and surrounding areas alongside individuals and families struggling. While we support Muslim women we do not exclude other women.

The helpline service is an adaptation of our bereavement helpline (a telephone service that supports and advises women through the emotional and practical processes of losing a child, parent, or partner) by extending its use and opening times to 10am to 8pm seven days a week.

It now includes support for those facing actual or potential domestic violence and child sexual exploitation (CSE); updates and advice on Coronavirus in additional languages; befriending and emotional support, and signposting and connecting to other more appropriate services. It also takes emergency food provision orders for those isolating or struggling with COVID-19 symptoms.

MWC are one of the only Halal food provision services for vulnerable individuals who are self-isolating across the Bradford District.

Our bilingual staff are our biggest assets providing support in a range of different languages which is crucial. This report gives you an insight to the ongoing impact of the helpline and future development to maintain and sustain support.



Why

The adaptations we have made have come from us talking to both our members and our beneficiaries by email and telephone to help redesign the service to meet their most pressing needs.

Many of these women and girls face multiple disadvantages, including health inequalities, poverty, islamophobia, sexism, and racism; are more likely to live in households with dependent children; are more likely to live in large families; face greater patriarchal restrictions; are victims of exploitative and predatory practices; are more likely to be living in poor households; and, lack opportunity and ability to influence politics, policy, and practice that affect them and their future. The lockdown instructions have worsened the problems these women face, due to them being unable to leave their homes and having a limited understanding of how to access services available for them.



The poster features logos for the Muslim Women's Council, a yellow circle with 'myphone' text, a 'CURRY CIRCLE' logo, and a blue circular logo with a mosque dome. The main text reads 'MWC HELPLINE' in large green letters, followed by '10am-8pm 7 days a week' with a clock icon. A green box lists services: 'Food support & sign posting', 'Updates & advice on the Coronavirus in additional languages', and 'Befriending and emotional support'. Below this, it lists contact numbers: '07592 890099 - 07592 889364' and '07792 946689 - 07592 890129'. At the bottom, an email address is provided: 'DIRECTORSOFFICE@MUSLIMWOMENSCOUNCIL.ORG.UK'.



'Thank you so much for calling me & listening to me.
May Allah bring you health, wealth & happiness'.

Service user

Calls

We are part of the Race Equality Network's COVID-19 Prevention Project, which includes a wider network of helplines from different organisations across Bradford. Together we can provide support in many different languages for our multicultural community. In recent times we have provided advice on newer topics such as the COVID-19 vaccine, travel and coming out of isolation as restrictions begin to ease.

We are often contacted through our social media channels for support, either directly from the service users or through a mutual contact. We have recently implemented a live web chat element to the website, to ensure we can reach as many service users as possible regardless of the format they are using.

The impact of this additional support is that we have been able to support the most vulnerable in the community during these unprecedented times. We have been able to expand our networks and stakeholders through the work of the helpline, resulting in more members of the public and potential service users becoming aware of our work and services.

On average, calls to our helpline can take between 20 and 40 minutes, the main reasons for this are social isolation and confusion over Government messaging.

We ask our service users some basic questions during the initial call, keeping in mind their respect and dignity, to ascertain how best to help them. We have found that sometimes a cold food parcel or befriending service is required along with the hot meal, in which case we make the necessary arrangements through our COVID local services database that we collated during this past year.

Our helpline operators take the time to chat and get to know the service users, helping to put them at ease during difficult times. We keep in regular contact with the service users, ensuring the service provided is appropriate and for the correct length of time.

We also receive referrals through our helpline contact numbers directly, which have been distributed widely across the Bradford District.

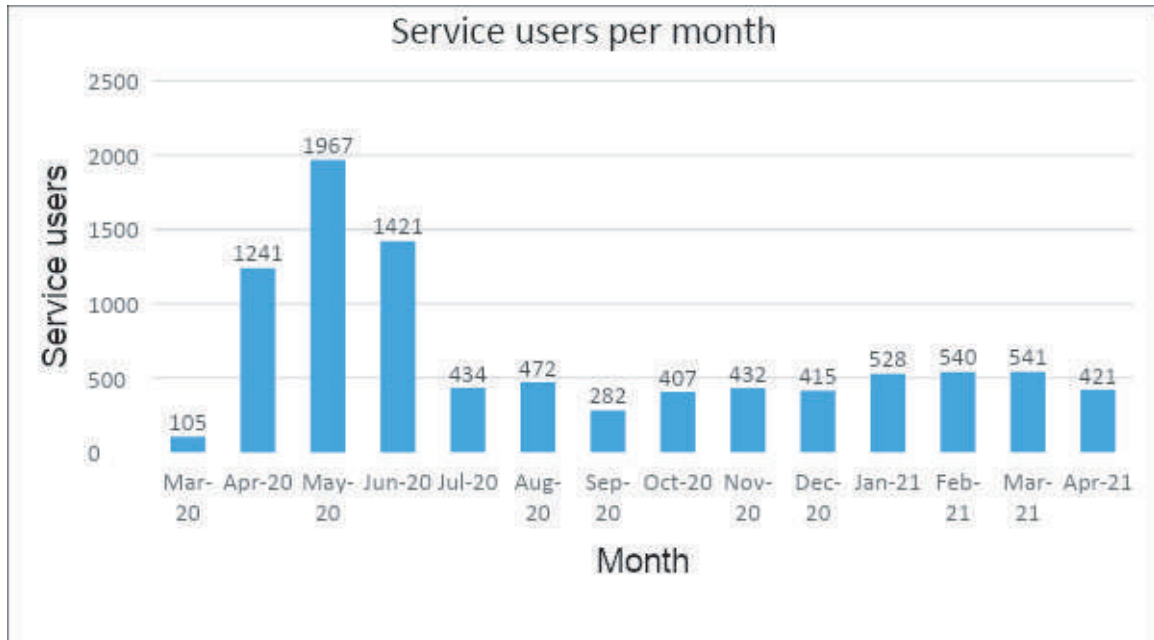
The majority of referrals and calls come from:

Bradford Council	Hot food support, advice on vaccines
Citizens Advice Bureau	Food parcels
Housing Associations	Hot food support
Other Food Banks	Bereavement support, hot food support
Sharing Voices Bradford	Befriending support, advice on domestic violence issues
Immigration and Asylum Team support and advice network	Bereavement support
HALE Health Action and local engagement health and wellbeing	Emotional support & advice on CSE issues

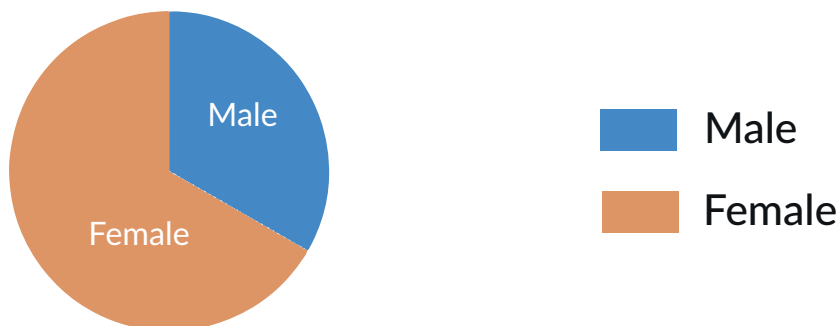
The list of referrers continues to grow including West Yorkshire Police, Carers support groups and Samaritans amongst others.

Our Local Authority are struggling to cope with the demand on their services, which we seemed to be responding to.

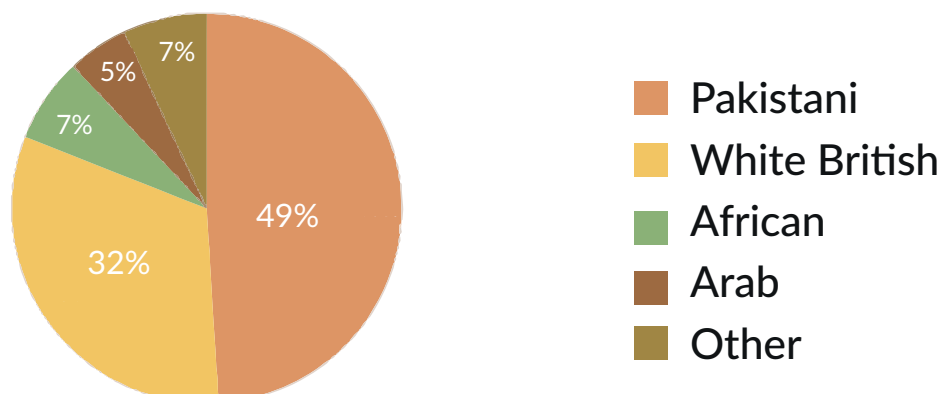
Up until April 2021, we have delivered the following support through the helpline:



Gender breakdown of service users



Ethnic breakdown of service users



Helpline staff

The helpline is managed by a staff team of women, of various ages and backgrounds. The staff team were able to adapt their work, taking calls whenever necessary and dealing with the deliveries while working from home. One staff member has taken responsibility for collating the calls at the end of each day from all staff, recording the information in a central database.

One of our staff members said “It is very humbling speaking to members of the public who have struggled so much during this pandemic. I am glad that we are able to support as many people as possible through this initiative”.

The overall impact on our staff has been that they have increased their skillset, through learning how to operate a team helpline and use the online web chat facility. They have also expanded their knowledge on other services and support groups available by compiling the referral services database.

The following outlines the average day of a helpline staff member:



Every day I discuss with my colleagues any concerns or points of interest, this is in addition to the written notes regarding any ongoing support we are offering. I ensure I am up to date with current events and news. This is important as it may potentially impact those that I am supporting.

Taking calls is the main aspect of the role and the calls which we handle vary significantly. I may answer a call which is a person seeking advice or needing food delivered, or a call which is a crisis in which the emergency services need to be engaged. This unpredictability of the role makes the job an interesting, fulfilling and challenging one.

When answering a call my attention is undivided and I utilise active listening skills to truly understand what the caller is saying and to assess which is the appropriate support to provide. After each call we make a log of the reason for the call and the intervention.

No two days are the same due to all the different tasks that need to be completed depending on what the service users need. Some days can be more challenging than others, however I feel satisfied that I helped someone who needed it.

Case Study



Female aged 42, Pakistani, unemployed, Bradford

"I heard about the MWC helpline service through my mental health support worker. I am a single mum with bipolar disorder & I have 2 teenage children with behavioural issues. I am struggling financially due to increased costs in lockdown & I need support with dealing with my children.

The helpline is supporting me by providing hot food since mid-April and has provided a befriending service whenever I need someone to talk to. They have also provided contact details for financial support services currently available.

This support has made a massive difference to my family, as due to no income, providing food has been a struggle. So daily meals are helping so much. I don't think there is anything that needs improving with the helpline service.

The current lockdown situation has affected me a lot, as I am a single mum with 2 kids and on benefits. I am not used to having the kids at home all day, as I have to feed them three meals a day and they want snacks in between so it's hard when I don't have the money to provide them with all this.

I have had to turn to volunteer services due to financial difficulties and emotional support. In my time of need, the MWC helpline staff have been there for me. Financial support would help me through this situation right now. From my experience, I feel like all the support has come from the Asian and Muslim community, the Government should learn from them".



'The extraordinary service and dedication to community is exemplary. Well done Muslim Women's Council and MyLahore. May you prosper. Stay safe'.

Service user



'Many sincere and moving thanks to the MWC team for the parcels dropped off yesterday. May Allah reward you all and the whole team, I feel very humbled by all that you do to support others'.

Service user

Case Study



A female client called our helpline and wanted to speak confidentially. She was 17 years old, and said she felt like she was going through depression. She was living with her mother but did not feel she could discuss this issue with her as they had been through many arguments recently.

She felt the lockdown was making things even more difficult to deal with. She disclosed to our staff member that she had been sexually abused by an older man at the age of 11 and had never reported it. She told the staff member that the abuser was a neighbour near her previous home, who invited her over to his house on an occasion when she was playing outside, and offered her a drink. She was then locked in and sexually abused by the perpetrator, who threatened her with dire consequences if she told anyone. Her mother was at work at the time, and the client was fearful of speaking up due to the threats from the abuser. The abuse did not happen again and the client moved to another address shortly after.

The client still did not feel like she could tell anyone as the threats were so intimidating and she feared her mother would not believe her, as she had a friendly relationship with the perpetrator. She struggled at school over the years and her relationship with her mother deteriorated. She felt like her mother thought she was purposely not behaving well at school. The COVID-19 lockdown had restricted her movements and activities, and because the client had more time to think, the abuse was constantly on her mind and affecting her mental health.

She felt isolated from her friends due to the lockdown and was home learning due to schools being closed. The client was very hesitant to approach the police as she felt nothing could be done. She also felt ashamed and that it would be seen as her 'fault', especially in her community and family.

Our staff member encouraged her to speak with a trusted family member, and offered to support her if she did so.

Over the next few months, the client disclosed the incident to her family with the help of our staff member, and lodged a case with the police.

We put her in touch with a local female police officer who works with us, who spoke to her in confidence. The police officer encouraged her to report the incident and helped her to understand the procedure she would need to go through. The police case is currently ongoing.

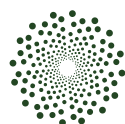
The staff member also liaised with the client's school, as she had missed quite a lot of days due to this issue and her depression. We put her in touch with a local young people's counselling service, which she found very beneficial.

To help her with her mental health, we suggested she speak to her local GP, who referred her for some more counselling and medication if she felt it was appropriate.

We suggested she join our membership page and take part in any online events we organised. This has lifted her confidence and helped her make new friends. She now has a much better relationship with her family and enjoys attending our online events, always offering to help wherever she can. Her studies have improved and she is looking forward to developing herself further. She was recently recruited to our Think + Do Tank programme and actively participates in workshops and research.

***Report created by Think + Do Tank participants
supported by Saadia Mushtaq***

Published August 2021



**MUSLIM
WOMEN'S
COUNCIL**



MWC_Bradford

muslimwomenscouncil.org.uk

directorsoffice@muslimwomenscouncil.org.uk