



IMPACT REPORT: CURRY CIRCLE PROJECT



Written in 2021



www.muslimwomenscouncil.org.uk

Background

The Curry Circle was established in December 2013 after the team observed a need for such a service in the local community. Our team members at Muslim Women's Council noticed people searching for food in the bins outside our office building, which was heartbreaking to witness so we set about researching the current food provision available in the local area. We discovered that although there were a

few soup kitchens/food providers, not many were halal (appropriate for the local Muslim community) and there seemed to be less options available on a Thursday. We contacted local restaurants to request their help in providing food to those in need, and obtained the support of the Carlisle Business Centre to operate the sessions from their event hall on a weekly basis.

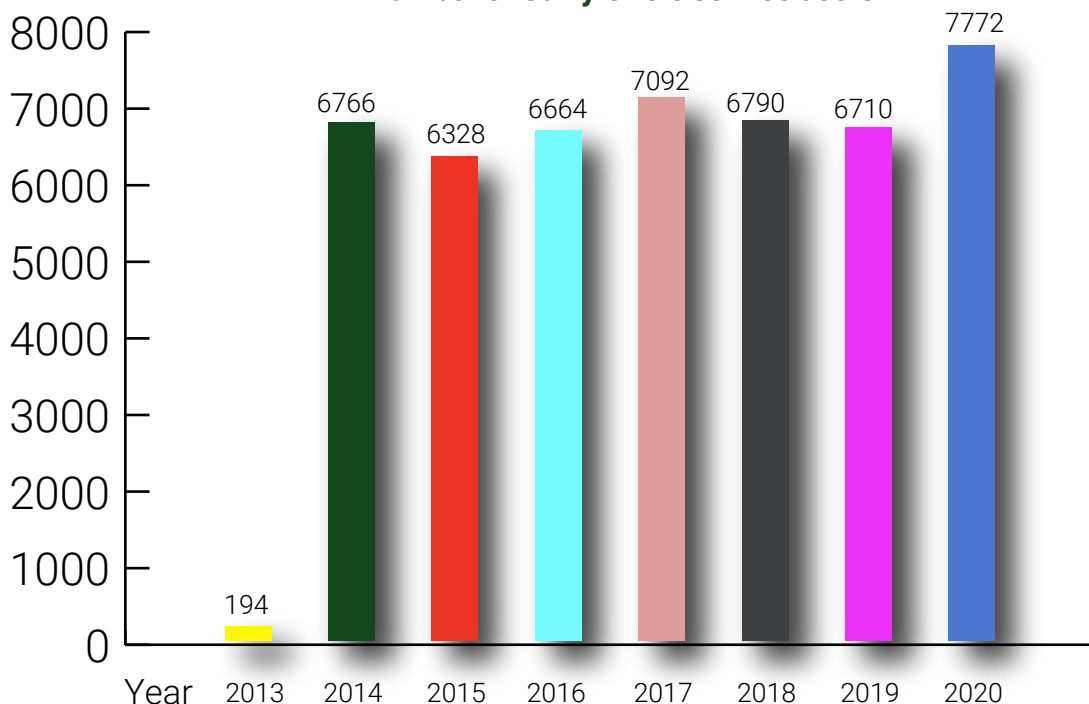
After communicating with various local restaurants and getting feedback on the food they provided, as well as overall costs, we entered into a partnership with MyLahore Bradford. They have been a consistently reliable catering partner over the years.

We have collated a database of over 450 volunteers from all walks of life, and are proud to support a fantastic group of core volunteers who operate the sessions in their free time every Thursday.

Our office is based in the Manningham ward, which is one of the poorest wards in the Bradford district. The project feeds an average of 100 homeless or destitute individuals every week, who travel from all

over Bradford whatever the weather. We have proudly provided over 48,000 hot meals since the project was launched.

Number of Curry Circle service users



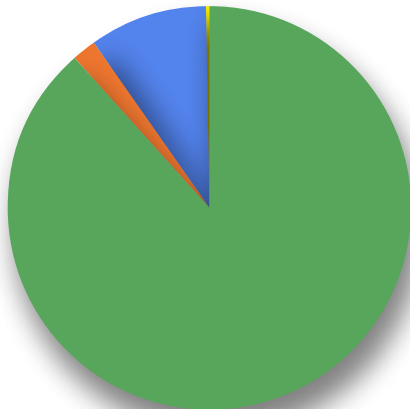
Delivery

We have been delivering the sessions every Thursday since 5th December 2013. Our service users are always treated with respect and dignity, as we do not ask for any proof of eligibility or ask for them to go through a referral process. It is direct access and an open-door policy; whoever is struggling with meals can just come to the session. We arrange the venue with round tables and seating, and the food and

We organise an annual Christmas Party for the service users, coinciding with our anniversary. We invite our service users, faith representatives, volunteers and local business owners to join in the celebrations. Everyone enjoys a delicious Christmas meal with the full trimmings, a prize raffle, lots of gifts and

hot drinks are served in a buffet style by our volunteers, who take the time to chat and get to know the service users. For a lot of our service users, it is one of the only warm meals they obtain in the week. They appreciate the warm environment and the chance to sit down at a table, get to know each other and spend time in a friendly atmosphere.

live musical entertainment. The Christmas parties are very popular, and we hope to continue hosting a Christmas Party every year for service users. The Party is often the only festive celebration for some of our service users.



Ethnic background of service users

- White British (86.8%)
- Pakistani (9.4%)
- Eastern European (1.7%)
- Asian (0.1%)

In January 2020, members of the Curry Circle team met with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge during their visit to MyLahore restaurant. The royal couple were delighted to hear about our joint charitable work and how the project has positively impacted service users' lives. We invited one of our service users, Keith Marsden, who shared his experience with the Curry Circle, how it had helped him turn his life around and get back into employment.

Additional services

As well as providing a warm meal, we have provided various other services over the years. The Samaritans provided one to one mental health support to the service users at the sessions. We worked in partnership with Bevan Healthcare to provide clinical care via a street medicine team, which was invaluable as many of the service users did not have access to medical care or had not thought of getting a medical condition seen to, which only got worse due to their living conditions.

We have provided mental health support to younger service users in collaboration with Youthtrain, via art workshops delivered during the sessions. The workshops were very popular with the service users, with them being described as 'my happy place' and 'where I can really express myself'.

Based on requests from users we explored how to address 'period poverty'. With increased migration to the area and growing poverty the issues surrounding menstruation have increased. We have found that there are not many food banks and asylum seeker drop-in centres providing feminine hygiene products

Furthermore, through our regular engagement and services supporting local women and girls, we know there are many of them who are still facing taboo and stigma surrounding period and menstruation. Much of this is based on cultural/religious thinking

We signposted service users to employment & financial support, emergency accommodation and other relevant services.

In 2019 we piloted our Curry Circle Youth Social Action Project, engaging 200 young students from across Bradford's secondary schools and colleges, and educating them on food poverty, loneliness, isolation and homelessness. Students worked towards designing and delivering responses to these issues. The project encouraged ownership, learning through



- despite a growing desperate need. In this current time of poverty, women have to decide between their sanitary health and food on the table, with some resorting to using toilet paper, scraps of fabric, or nothing at all.

and taboos around menstruation and has an effect on how women can define their lives. Poor menstrual hygiene has negative effects on both the environment and the education and health of girls and women, and can also diminish economic opportunities.

doing and discovering personal responses to social issues. The students felt it boosted their confidence, expanded their social circle and enhanced both their life skills and future employability. We look forward to working with more of our city's young people on lots of future projects.

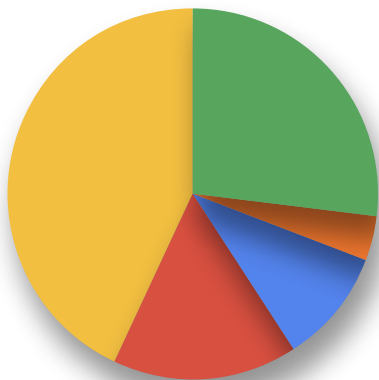
Volunteers

The Curry Circle sessions are delivered by volunteers. Our voluntary team over the years has consisted of women and men of various ages and backgrounds, including many women who are not working and had time to spare, and professionals who want to utilise their free time to make a difference to their local

community. We have also recruited large numbers of students who use the experience to fulfil the requirements of extra-curricular courses like the Duke of Edinburgh award, and many go on to participate in more social action. We currently have 57% female and 43% male volunteers on our database.

One of our core volunteers said “The work of the Curry Circle is important because sadly there is a need for provisions and services like this. There are people out there that don’t know where their next meal is coming from”.

A student volunteer said “I volunteer to make a difference. I don’t want my free time to be wasted like most teenagers, I want my free time to be used effectively to help the needy”.



Age breakdown of volunteers

■ 16-18 (10.0%)

■ 19-25 (16.0%)

■ 26-40 (43.0%)

■ 41-60 (27.0%)

■ 60 plus (4.0%)



‘The Curry Circle helps a lot of people and I know it helps me a lot. The service is good and the volunteers are all lovely people. You guys are really wonderful; you always help us and always with a smile, so I’d like to say thank you’. *Service user*

CASE STUDY 1

A 16-year-old female student asked to volunteer at our session as she was undertaking her Duke of Edinburgh Award. Part of the Award involves volunteering in the community, and she had heard about the Curry Circle through her friend at school. The student began volunteering at the weekly sessions, and was initially very hesitant as it was the first time she had volunteered anywhere. The team of core volunteers welcomed her and helped put her at ease by buddying her up with another young volunteer who had been with the group a few months. The student got to know the team and started by helping prepare the cold drinks.



She soon progressed on to serving the meals and hot drinks, and built a good rapport with the volunteers and service users. She felt the project developed her character and confidence, expanded her social circle, and enhanced both her life skills and future employability. It also encouraged her to continue doing work in the voluntary sector. The volunteer now regularly helps at our events and has developed her organizational skills.

Partnerships

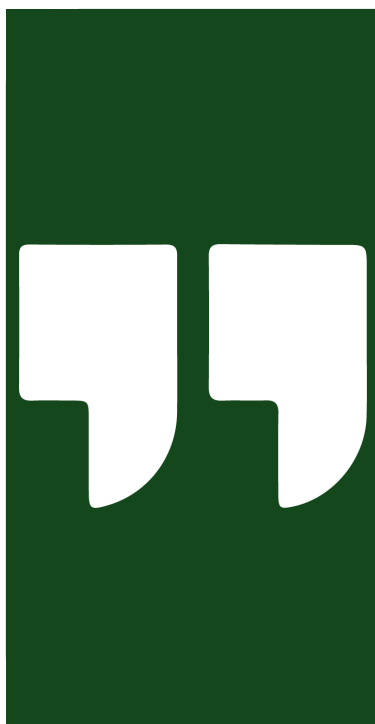
We work in partnership with MyLahore restaurant (catering partner), Tesco (surplus food partner), secondary schools across Bradford, as well as members of the wider public to deliver this project. It has grown from strength to strength, supporting new service users every week, and enabling those homeless to develop the confidence to move on in their lives.



We hold regular fundraisers open to anyone wishing to support our project. Some of the sponsored activities we have completed include climbing Mount Snowdon, Ingleton Falls and Malham Cove.



We regularly post on our social media channels about the Curry Circle project and explain how members of the public can donate to the initiative. We receive direct donations from the public through our online payment system on our website, and through cash donations during our weekly session.



'The Curry Circle is a great cause and a great idea. Everyone understands that the current economic climate is difficult for a lot of people. In any situation where individuals are struggling, we must try our best to help. We live in Bradford, and we know there is a need to tackle particular issues such as homelessness'.

Zaheer Ayub, sponsor

COVID-19 Impact

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, we reviewed the Curry Circle sessions as we could no longer deliver them in the same way due to the Government's social distancing guidelines. We wanted to support our service users in the best way possible, as we were aware that the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns would have even more of an adverse effect on the

vulnerable members of our community. We were unable to use the same venue due to the restrictions, and so decided to adapt the sessions to a hot meal takeout service from the Manningham Library, from 4pm to 6:30pm on Thursdays, with a limited team of volunteers following the Government's social distancing guidelines.

This new system ensures both our volunteers and service users are kept safe while enabling us to continue providing as much support as possible.

As of March 2021, we have distributed over 8,500 takeaway meals to service users since the first lockdown in March 2020.

CASE STUDY 2

Female age 34, currently unemployed, Bradford



"I heard about the Curry Circle project through Bradford Council. The Curry Circle supported me for three weeks by providing hot meals and gave advice on other food provision services available. The food helped me and my family a lot as financially I had no income. I am extremely thankful for the support. I recently moved into a new rented accommodation and had no income, savings or financial support. Due to the lockdown, I was being very careful as my daughter has a compromised immune system. I had to apply for help with Universal Credit benefits and my rent payments. I have received financial support through social security benefits.

Horton Housing helped me with my accommodation, and the hot meals provided by the Curry Circle helped a lot with getting by when I was struggling with putting food on the table. I have now started receiving the relevant benefits and everything is sorted financially".

Future Ambitions



- More medical support for service users
- Creative sessions to encourage service users & develop their skills/talent
- More activities to promote mental & physical wellbeing
- Long-term mentoring support & skill development for service users wanting to gain employment
- Develop Curry Circle projects in other towns and cities

CASE STUDY: CURRY CIRCLE MANAGER

A male volunteered at our Curry Circle session, where we feed the homeless & destitute in the community on a weekly basis. He disclosed to another volunteer that he was suffering from depression, and felt very lonely after the breakdown of his marriage and losing custody of his children. He was also struggling financially due to losing his job, because of his mental health issues, and felt very isolated. He was struggling to communicate with his extended family as well.

After he volunteered at a few Curry Circle sessions, he enjoyed meeting new people, socialising and develop new friendships. He was initially hesitant as he felt he lacked the confidence and skills to volunteer. However, we offered him support and guidance through a regular volunteer from our core team, who guided him at each stage of the

session. He was soon a committed volunteer, attending and helping at the sessions every week, setting up the venue, organising the food and drinks layout, and helping to serve the food to the service users.

Over the next six months, his confidence developed during each session, and he started to become familiar with the service users, building up a rapport with them and with the core team of volunteers.

However, he was still struggling financially, and so we offered him some paid work to manage the Curry Circle session as there was a vacancy in that regard. This involved him managing the supplies needed for each session, using his organisational skills to buy stock at the local

cash & carry, and liaise with the food providers for each session. He also developed the project further by linking in with local supermarkets, and collecting any surplus stock from them and organising the distribution of this during the Curry Circle sessions.

Due to his previous experience, he also assisted with updating our policies and procedures, as well as fundraising for the Curry Circle. This included organising a sponsored climb to Mount Snowdon and walks. He was instrumental in managing all the logistics of each event.

He took on the responsibility to organise a Christmas party for the Curry Circle service users, liaising with a local hotel to provide a complementary Christmas meal and serving

staff, as well as local businesses to provide gifts for the service users. This was a huge benefit for the service users and it became a highlight of their year, as many do not have families/friends to celebrate with.

He has found the management of the Curry Circle very rewarding and has said it has really helped him overcome his depression and loneliness. It has allowed him to regain his confidence, which has helped him to rebuild relationships with his children, who he sees regularly now, as well as his extended family.

The core team of volunteers view him as a valued member of the Curry Circle family, and are happy to consult with him on any issues arising at the sessions. He has become an invaluable asset to our organisation.

**Report created by the Think + Do Tank
participants supported by the MWC team.**



**MUSLIM
WOMEN'S
COUNCIL**



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