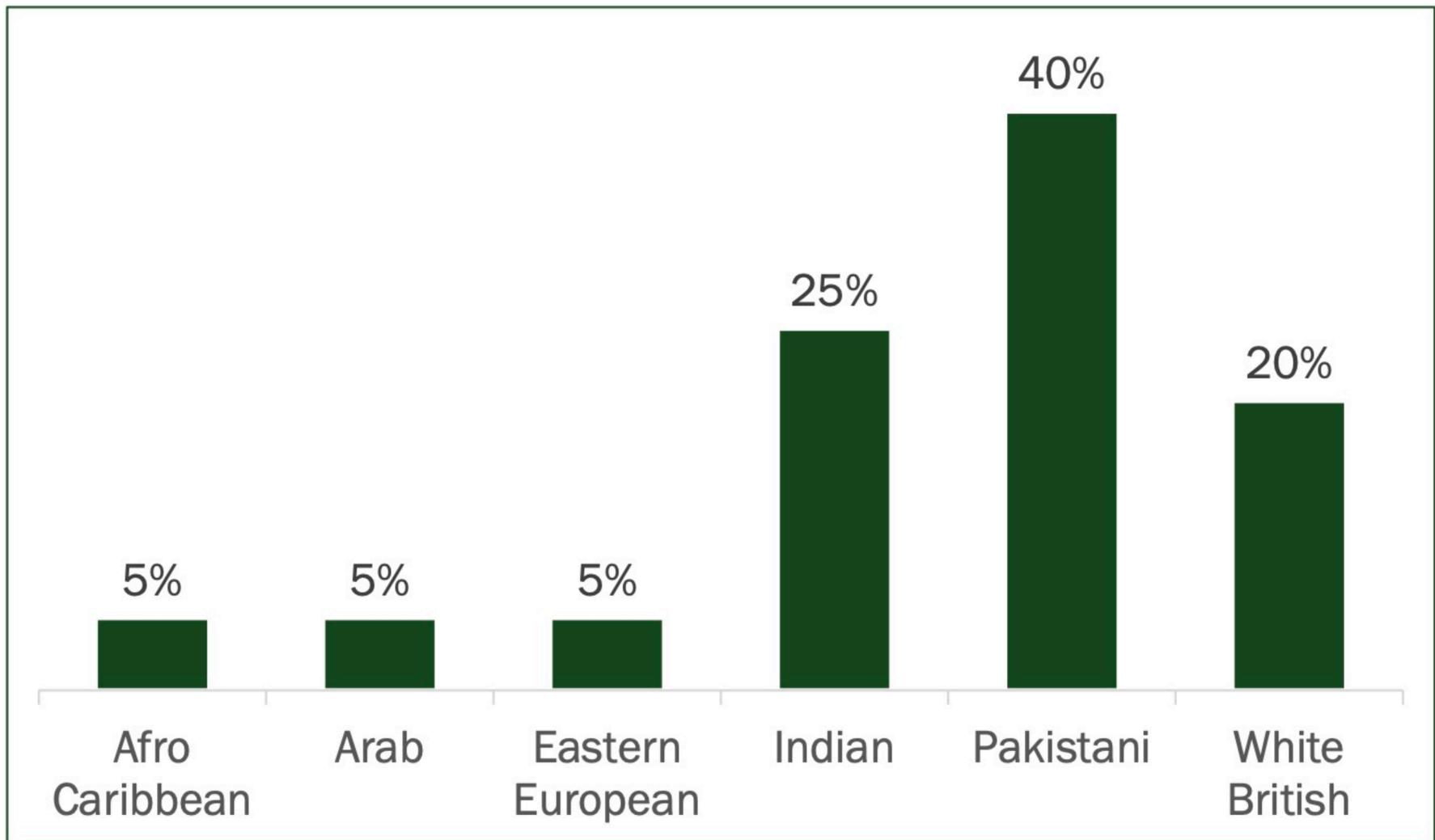




**OUR JOURNEY THROUGH  
CANCER AND BEYOND  
CANCER AWARENESS TALK**

**NOVEMBER 2024**

## Ethnicity of Participants:



## Event Overview:

This cancer awareness talk was organised to encourage open conversations about cancer within diverse communities in Bradford. The event featured two local Muslim women, Firzana and Safeena, who courageously shared their personal experiences of living through and beyond cancer. The aim was to raise awareness of the importance of early detection, offer comfort to those affected, and help break cultural taboos surrounding cancer.

## Speakers Stories:

*Firzana's Journey - "Cancer is a lottery nobody wants to win, but early detection can make all the difference."*

Firzana, a police officer, was living her regular life until she decided to perform a routine self-check in the shower, discovering a small lump. Panicked, she immediately sought medical advice. Following a series of tests, including a biopsy and mammogram, her consultant informed her of a stage 3 breast cancer diagnosis.



Her initial fears revolved around her family and children, but her medical team reassured her with a treatment plan. Surgery came first, requiring two operations to fully remove the tumour. This was followed by six chemotherapy sessions and 20 rounds of radiotherapy. Firzana described chemotherapy as physically and emotionally draining but recognized it as essential to her fight against cancer.

Breaking the news to her children was especially challenging, explaining that "mummy would get sick before getting better" and preparing them

for visible changes like hair loss. Despite their struggles, the experience strengthened her family bonds.

Firzana emphasized the critical role of early detection, urging others to perform regular self-checks, especially one week after their period. She shared how her faith, community support, and the NHS's compassionate care helped her navigate the journey.

Her message was clear: "Cancer is a lottery nobody wants to win, but early detection can make all the difference." Firzana is committed to raising awareness and encouraging conversations about cancer, especially in her community.

*Safeena's Journey - "This experience changed me. It stripped away everything material and left me with what really matters, faith, love, and purpose."*

Safeena's cancer journey began during the COVID-19 lockdown. She initially noticed a lump in her throat but dismissed it as insignificant despite experiencing occasional food getting stuck and mild indigestion. After three endoscopies and multiple rounds of antibiotics, her symptoms persisted.

It wasn't until she spotted an unusual contour on her neck while brushing her teeth that she decided to take it seriously. Following her GP's urgent referral, a hospital scan confirmed a stage 3 throat tumour. Having cared for her parents during their battles with cancer, Safeena had an inkling of what lay ahead but still felt unprepared.

The lockdown exacerbated the challenges, isolating her from loved ones and delaying surgery. She was forced to confront her fears alone, unable to have her husband or family by her side during crucial appointments. Her diagnosis forced her to reevaluate priorities, including pausing plans to open a flower shop she had poured her heart into.

The path to recovery was tumultuous: delays in surgery, losing her voice post-operation, and a recurrence of cancer. Her faith, which wavered initially, deepened through these trials. A transformative experience during Umrah, a pilgrimage her husband insisted on, helped her regain strength and acceptance.

Despite the repeated setbacks and another surgery, Safeena's resolve only grew stronger. Her journey reshaped her perspective on life, detaching her from material things and focusing on faith, family, and resilience. By 2023, she fulfilled her dream of opening her shop, a testament to her determination.

## Q&A Session Highlights

A short but powerful Q&A session followed the talks. Women asked personal, practical, and emotional questions, clearly moved by what they had heard.

*“How do you stay strong in front of your children?”*

*Firzana: “I told them the truth; in a way they could understand. I let them see me cry too, because strength is in being real, not in pretending.”*

*“What should we look for if we think something's not right?”*

*Safeena: “Don't dismiss anything unusual. If you feel something strange, get it checked. Push your GP if you have to. Be your own advocate.”*

*“How can we support someone going through cancer if we don't know what to say?”*

*Firzana: “You don't need to have the perfect words. Just be there. Listen. Check in. Even a text message saying, 'I'm thinking of you' makes a difference.”*

## Shared Lessons from Firzana and Safeena

Both women emphasized the importance of:

- **Early detection:** Regular self-checks and paying attention to subtle symptoms can save lives.
- **Faith and community:** Their spiritual beliefs and the support of loved ones carried them through dark times.
- **Talking about cancer:** Breaking the silence around cancer, especially in close-knit communities, can encourage early action and provide support for those affected.



## Feedback

The talk was met with heartfelt appreciation and emotional responses. The atmosphere in the room was both reflective and empowering, with many attendees expressing how much they needed to hear stories like these, especially in their own community settings. Attendees expressed the following:



*“Hearing these sisters speak today has made me realise how important it is to listen to our bodies. We ignore things out of fear, but fear can cost lives.”*

*“I’ve always been terrified of the word cancer. Today I felt less alone. It felt like someone put words to everything I’ve been bottling up.”*

*“The courage these women have shown is beyond words. I lost my sister to cancer and wish we had talks like this back then.”*

*“I didn’t realise throat cancer could happen so quietly. I’ll be keeping a much closer eye on any small signs.”*

*“These kinds of events are so important in our communities. We need to be talking about these things, not whispering behind closed doors.”*

**Outcomes and observations include:**

- **Increased Awareness:** Many attendees shared they had never heard such open discussions about cancer in a community setting.
- **Action Taken:** Several women stated they would be booking GP appointments or performing self-checks that same week.
- **Desire for Continuation:** Multiple participants asked for follow-up sessions, including support groups and talks featuring healthcare professionals.
- **Emotional Impact:** Tears, nods of empathy, and visible support among women created a safe, honest, and healing space.

## Conclusion

This event was a powerful reminder that sharing real stories saves lives. Firzana and Safeena's bravery helped not only raise awareness of cancer symptoms and treatments, but also highlighted the importance of early intervention, community care, and spiritual strength.

The overwhelming response from attendees affirmed the value of grassroots, culturally sensitive health education. With continued efforts, more women in Bradford and beyond can be empowered to take control of their health, without fear, shame, or silence.

The women attending requested the following:

- **More Storytelling Events:** First-hand experiences resonate far more than statistics. Future talks could focus on other health topics such as mental health, menopause, or diabetes.
- **Multilingual Resources:** Some attendees expressed the need for printed materials or recordings in Urdu, Punjabi, and Arabic.
- **Faith and Health Collaboration:** Consider working with local mosques, churches, and community leaders to widen outreach and reduce stigma.
- **Post-Event Support Circle:** Establish a women's health peer-support group in Bradford to build ongoing connections and awareness.

**Report created by the Tea & Chat participants  
supported by the MWC Team**

