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Oldham's Muslim Community Response during COVID 19, Prioritising Humanity both now and in any difficult period

Showing solidarity: Residents of Oldham are fortunate to live amongst those, who put their own lives at risk to reach out to vulnerable and 'hard to reach' residents, who are in greater need than ever because of the Pandemic. All of us are going through a difficult time and, for the first time in our lives, most of our activities have come to a halt and there is nothing we can do to fight it except:

- 1) isolate ourselves and follow the COVID 19 guidelines.
- 2) Keep socially distanced from our friends and loved ones (apart from those we live with)
- 3) Pray to Allah (God)

Most residents have adopted the above in order to prioritise the care of those who are in greater need, the vulnerable and those who cannot cope under these harsh circumstances.

So, when the Pandemic started in March, The Muslim community alongside many other faith and none faith communities including Oldham Action , Ghazali Trust responded in a number of ways to support residents from all communities and backgrounds; thousands of people have been provided with food packages, bereavement support, and ongoing support to people on their doorsteps.

The Oldham Mosques Council (OMC) which (formed in 2001 after the civic disturbances) includes leaders /members of 35 Mosques within Oldham. The organisation aims to tackle inequality, and to build good relations between Oldham residents from different faiths and people of no faith. It also works towards dispelling the negative myths often portrayed in the media about The Muslim community and Islam.

Abdul Basit Shah the Acting Chair of the Oldham Mosques Council (OMC) said, 'The OMC is an umbrella organisation for Mosques and Madrassahs in Oldham. The OMC has always been at the forefront in responding to challenges faced in/by the community, COVID-19 has put all the years of practice into good use'.

'OMC has been very active in helping members of the community (both Muslim and non-Muslim) to stay safe and well. Many volunteers from Mosques and Madrassahs have joined with the Statutory and Voluntary sectors in the relief effort. This includes donating and distributing food and emergency items and keeping in contact with vulnerable members of communities of all backgrounds. However, this wasn't enough, and we wanted to do something more to show our appreciation of and support for colleagues working on the frontline'.

In support of the Oldham NHS staff, Oldham Mosques produced banners and displayed them on Mosque buildings and the Oldham Hospital entrance to demonstrate our solidarity with them and our acknowledgement for all that they do..



Basit Shah said ‘Since the Pandemic started the OMC decided to reach out to communities of Oldham to give people the advice and support they needed to stay safe, alongside helping those who are in desperate need of help. OMC requested all Mosques to close during the lockdown period and asked members of the Muslim community to perform their prayers at home. We are proud to say that the Muslim community have complied with the the Government guidelines very well. We also put a call out to members and friends of the OMC to ask if they would be kind enough to donate towards a hot meal for the 350 staff at The Royal Oldham Hospital every Tuesday.

This has become a huge success and now known as the ‘curry night’ starting on the 21st April 2020 and will continue to do so until at least the end of June 2020. We have already had donations that will provide hot meals for 350 staff over 11 weeks, making an astonishing 3850 meals.

This was one of the messages from the Hospital staff



Food sponsored by Jamia Masjid Greengate





hot meal sponsored by Hussainia Islamic Mission Oldham Royal Hospital



We have been overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness of the community (List of Donors available- for each of the nights). But the contribution does not end there; everyday we are overwhelmed with offers of help and support. Muslims are taught at an early age to make sacrifices for others. They are educated to believe that whatever good deeds you do will come to protect you on the day of judgement and that they will open the gates of heaven’.

He continued ‘There are many reasons for this but the 2 fundamental reasons are: 1: it is a Muslim’s duty to champion good Samaritan work and to reach out to those who are in need and those on the frontline, no matter what faith or race, to help to save each other and to get through difficult circumstances together. 2. To show appreciation for those who put their lives at risk to protect others. For Muslims this is a small gesture of appreciation and an acknowledgement of the sacrifices made by these frontline workers.

Food sponsored by Jamia Masjid Greengate



Food sponsored by Madina Institute



OMC continues to work with colleagues in the Statutory and Voluntary Sectors as well as other faith and non faith groups to bring about a whole community effort to address the challenges posed by Covid-19. We have been working hand in hand with our Statutory Sector Partners, including The Police, The Local Authority and the NHS, anticipating and responding to challenges and opportunities as they arise. I am pleased to say that this has

been so successful because of the good relationships formed after years of working together.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Deputy Leader of Oldham Council, said: 'OMC has been very supportive of the work Oldham Partnership has been doing across the borough over the last few weeks. 'They have played an important role supporting communities across Oldham, especially during Ramadan and the Eid celebrations. 'We'd like to thank OMC for all its work and also everyone who is helping to stop the spread of Coronavirus and supporting our residents'.

Claire Galt, Chief Inspector Oldham, Partnerships, TRiM Practitioner and Manager said, 'We have been working closely with partners and the Oldham Mosques council during the Covid19 pandemic. Without the support and help of the Mosque Council and many members of the community this situation could have been even more challenging. The fact Ramadan and Eid has been during this period, a time when the community would ordinarily be with their friends and family deserves even further acknowledgement. Hopefully a time will come in the future when communities, friends and family can come together. As we continue to police in these unprecedented times it is reassuring to know this support will continue'.

OMC worked together with a number of organisations to develop a coordinated response and utilise resources more productively and effectively. Some examples of the great work:

AL Adab Institute: Covic 19 response. this organisation prioritised in 3 areas of work as follows: 1) Essentials PPE, 2) Medicine and 3) Food packs.

Mufti Ateeq Chairman of the organisation said; 'We distributed over 3800 hand sanitises to individuals, care homes, schools, nurses, hospices and to ROH. provided 400 Calpols and 500 paracetamols, over 2000 face masks and 400 face shields, distributed over 200 family food bags,

He said, 'Our work has reached approximately 9,000 residents in Oldham and served 30 care homes and 20 schools across Oldham. We will continue to support our Oldham residents'.

Planet Mercy UK is the charitable wing of Madina Institute, Masjid and Community Hub based in Oldham. Established in 2009, Planet Mercy UK is a national charity that works to improve the lives of those in our local communities by focusing on 4 key areas; 1) tackling food poverty and supporting the underprivileged like the homeless and refugees, 2) youth empowerment, 3) community cohesion and 4) health and wellbeing. Planet Mercy operates mainly from the Madina Institute Community Hub that was established in 2017 in Clarksfield, Oldham, which was set up with the aim of bringing communities together by being an open, inclusive centre of love and compassion catering for the social, academic and spiritual needs of the community and those who come through the doors.

Since the corona pandemic , we have initiated a project called "The Out Reach Project" which brings together a number of local charities, mosques and institute in a united cause, to support those affected by the coronavirus either through illness or loss of income, by supplying emergency food parcels.



To date, the project has distributed 1700+ Food Parcels worth over £20,000 with items of essential need that range from everyday food to sanitary products in Rochdale, Oldham, Bury, Bolton and Manchester and the community has responded with generosity through monetary donations and food donations thus enabled this tremendous effort.

Planet Mercy Director “Arshad Mahmood” who has been coordinating the distribution and partaking in it stated “We are living in very difficult times and the corona pandemic has brought the best out of humanity and brought us all closer. Unfortunately the effects of this will be felt for a long time, therefore its important that we all pull together and support one another, we aim to continue this project for as long as there is a need”.

The work of the Planet Mercy team has been recognised nationally and both Arshad Mahmood and Adil Zaman were recently awarded the “British Asian Heroes award” for their covid19 work and both have been nominated for the “Pride of Britain Award”.

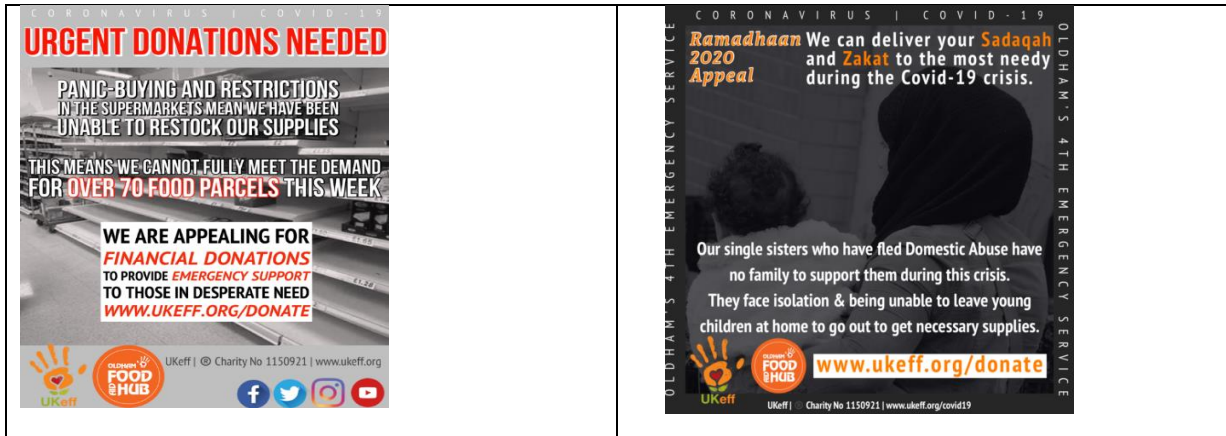
The team has been humbled by the generous support of the community and want to take this opportunity to thank everyone.

UKEFF: Oldham Food Aid Hub has been running from the Oldham Unitarian Chapel for 5 years supporting people from Oldham with a variety of issues and concerns, providing food parcels, hot food and advice which has been an essential part of the service. It has earned **UKEFF** the title of Oldham’s 4th Emergency Service at the House of Lords since COVID 19. **UKEFF** has changed its strategy and opened up a help line to deliver food, advice and cash top ups for utility bills for the people who are vulnerable and needy in our society.



UKEFF has worked closely with other organisations to continue its services for DV victims, destitute individuals and anyone who have no recourse to public fund.

As you can imagine **UKEFF** is more stretched than ever before and is inundated with calls and emails. As Muslims we are taught that in times that test, we must change the way we work and adapt to serve the people around us differently. We continue today in unprecedented times to serve the homeless, needy and most vulnerable who reside beside us, Islam teaches us that He is NOT Muslim who goes to bed satisfied whilst his neighbour goes hungry.



Quotes to use from Hafizan Zaman Co Founder :

1. So in short we say, it is Sunnah to send your aid abroad but it is Fardh (compulsory) to look after your neighbours.
2. Muhammad SAW, as He SAW said “He is NOT Muslim who goes to bed satisfied whilst his neighbour is hungry”

Greengate Trust:

Since Covid-19 has been taking a grip, the last few weeks have been really emotional, busy, and exhausting but there has been much to be proud of and grateful for.

The most beautiful thing that has emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown is watching everyone #Standing Together regardless of Race, Religion or Background, everyone has been there for each other.

Qari Muhammad Bilal who is the Chairman of Greengate Trust said:

Watching the smiles on people’s faces when we visit them has just been the highlight of our whole journey.

The enormous generosity of our community has meant that we have increased our aid effort from Providing 200 freshly cooked meals and 50 food packs a week, to distributing over “800 freshly cooked meals and over 200 Food Packs a week” to the Elderly, Vulnerable and Homeless.



So from all of us here at the Greengate Trust we want to say a very big thank you to everyone who has been constantly supporting us through these difficult days and allowing us to go out every single day helping the Elderly, Vulnerable and Homeless, because, without

your support and kind Donations, it would have been very difficult for us to do the work which we are getting done daily.

He went onto say that he and the team of volunteers are driven by their faith and have been taught. “ What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of human beings, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the sufferings of the injured”

Qari Bilal himself was in for a surprise! He was contacted by residents for a food parcel but when he got there they had a surprise for him! They had nominated him for our local hero award run by North West Tonight!

It doesn't end there. He has now also been nominated for the Pride of Britain Award!

#GreengateTrust #StandingTogether #HelpingTheElderlyAndVulnerable

The European Islamic Centre (EIC)

The EIC a branch of the UK Islamic Mission through its iCare project was one of the first Muslim organisation to respond to the Covid-19 situation. It has provided much needed support including food items and basic essentials, 1-2-1 emotional and wellbeing support, and signposting to essential services to the most vulnerable and needy in our community.

- The iCare was established back in 2016 as a specific division of the UK Islamic Mission to tackle poverty within the UK. It provides **Cold Survival Kits** – providing an essential kit containing a sleeping bag, rucksack and warm clothes to help vulnerable homeless people through the cold winter months
- **Neighbours in Need**
- **iCare Food Hub** – providing both individuals and families in need with food parcels to support those who are struggling

The services are open to all regardless of their faith, ethnicity, or other background. Residents from Oldham & Greater Manchester have benefited from the iCare Food Hub which runs every fortnight from the European Islamic Centre, we also have several iCare Food Hubs running from UKIM centres across the country.



Since the Covid-19 pandemic we have delivered more than 250 food parcels. Just last Saturday we served around 50 families with essential food items to which equated 128 people, we aim to provide 2 meals a day for 2 weeks to the needy and vulnerable here in Oldham. We estimate around 1700 meals were delivered by our volunteers directly to the doorstep of those who reside amongst us

We do have an assessment criterion, which we strictly follow to make sure the food reaches the needy and stops any abuse of the system.

Nasim Ashraf who is an iCare Coordinator said he is driven by what the Prophet Muhammad SAW said "Want for your brother what you want for yourself"

Fr. Phil Sumner (Rural Dean for the Roman Catholic Community of Oldham) said "Having witnessed some of this work at first hand, I must say that there has been a truly impressive response, on the part of the Muslim communities of Oldham, to the problems caused by the corona virus. It's been carried out with energy and compassion, in support of and in collaboration with those responding from the statutory, voluntary and other faith sectors of the Borough. This must surely provide a great basis on which to build further good relations across the different communities of Oldham."

Abdul Basit Shah (Interim Chair of Oldham Mosques Council) concluded by saying 'In this pandemic, communities from all backgrounds have come together and championed humanitarian work so that together we can beat this virus and get our lives back on track. We will stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with all communities, to protect the lives of all communities across Oldham and this is the Oldham we all want to see and love'!

Abdul Basit Shah

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