



**Sporting Equals**  
Promoting ethnic diversity in sport & physical activity



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**BREAKING BOUNDARIES**

# Case study: Breaking Boundaries in Barking and Dagenham

## Re-establishing Community Links

Al Madina Mosque

September 2021 - January 2022

### **Detail of the Activity.**

This case study provides some useful insights on how a key partner in Barking and Dagenham, has helped the Breaking Boundaries project rebuild links and activities in the local community following Covid lockdown. It also highlights how linking project activities, particularly sporting activities, to other services available at the Mosque enables connections with young people who are participants in the programme to be made that are more focused around their needs including mental health. A key message is to make sure that enough time is given for relationships with participants to be built.

### **How Breaking Boundaries Helped.**

Breaking Boundaries has supported the project lead to make contact, and engage with, other senior leaders in the Mosque about the importance of providing a greater range of sports activities but particularly emphasised on opening their premises to non-Muslims and engaging with other faith centres.

Breaking Boundaries has funded several activities at the Mosque that use the coaches there (many non-Muslims themselves) to deliver activities. Activities fuse sporting activity with socialising to bring different groups of young people across religious and ethnic group to take part together. BB has facilitated the resumption of this activity after the pandemic. Breaking Boundaries resumption has also come at the right time providing activities that enable people to get together again:

"I don't think we've had any difficulties in getting things going again it was just the stop start nature of the lockdowns...we just had to do posters again. Getting the numbers wasn't at all difficult because people wanted to get out of the house and have someone else to talk."  
(Project Lead, Al Madina).

## What's Happened – Impacts on Cohesion.

The ongoing work at Al Madina Mosque demonstrates outcomes against social cohesion in three areas:

### Attitudes to diversity.

Delivery of activities at the Mosque has encouraged a wide range of non-Muslim groups to visit it and the mixed groups in delivery also mean they can encourage participants to understand each other but also appreciate that challenges don't differ too much between each other. The lead also highlighted how this meant that participants seemed to better understand the lives of others who are different to them. The lead also believes that the fact that many of the coaches come from a non-Muslim background helps improve attitudes to diversity because many of the young people who attend Mosque are being coached by them.

### Increased community involvement.

Breaking Boundaries has also encouraged them to have a wider focus in their sports activities around other issues that might be affecting participant's lives. Conversations with Activators and taking part in some of the previous sessions has highlighted that their focus on needs of young people needs to be wider and that the activities they run need to make specific efforts to identify these. Through this the services at the Mosque have wider community involvement and encourage them to share their own experiences with others in their lives, encouraging others to attend activities at the Mosque.

"We're getting regular numbers taking part in exercise and we tag on social interaction. So, after the session they go into a room for chats and refreshments. We make sure our mentors are there and through that it has highlighted a need for a focus on mental health amongst young people. We've then linked them up with other mentors who are specialised in counselling young people. We can support so much because of the other services and the wraparound services. We offer from cradle to grave support and we cater for mental health, physical and nutritional health." (Project Lead, Al Madina).

### Improved partnership working.

The project lead highlighted how during the pandemic many faith centres had been involved in a wide range of welfare support (food parcels, check ins with local residents) which often involved them working with other faith centres. Breaking Boundaries work had offered the chance to build on this and Al Madina were reaching out to some Christian centres to see how they could support them through their provision of physical activity so that those individuals could come to the Mosque to take part in the activities on offer.

This has led to members of the Nigerian community using the Mosque facilities and there are plans to see how this could link further with the physical activity sessions on offer. This is aimed to help tackle Black African groups separation from other communities in the borough, and they are looking at similar work with East European groups.

"[The Mosque]...can spread the word as well, we are a sounding board for other organisations." (Project Lead, Al Madina).

In these cases, other places of worship will 'check in' with them about the programme and whether they should be involved. The organisations are important advocates and brokers for the programme with a wide range of other community organisations as a result. Again, this emphasises that such partnership development work doesn't always need to be done by City staff they can instead facilitate other community organisations in their targeted areas to do it on their behalf.

### The Future.

Al Madina aims to be central to delivery of Breaking Boundaries in Barking and has further plans to offer activities for the programme through its facilities at the Mosque. It will be hosting the next city leadership forum to connect further with other community organisations. They reiterated the need to keep local messaging with community groups going so that understanding of the purpose and aims of Breaking Boundaries keeps being heard, as the lead highlighted that sometimes people don't always pick up or listen properly to your message, they often need to hear it several times.

## Top Tips for Effective Delivery.

- ✓ **The pandemic changed some attitudes to working together to be much more open to this.** A lot of faith centres were delivering lots of welfare activities during lockdowns with other faith centres, many they hadn't worked with much, or at all, before. There's an opportunity to build on this further working across faith centre networks in areas targeted by Breaking Boundaries.
- ✓ **Designated socialising time really helps understand the challenges participants are facing in their lives.** Participants will often reveal much more about these issues and having staff/volunteers on hand can help identify some of the issues people might want support around – perhaps mental health or financial issues – where they can be encouraged to work with specialist support staff but also make links with others around those experiences building better social connections between them.
- ✓ **Reaching out through interfaith community organisations is a good way to reach into communities,** consistency of delivery is key here to ensure that trust is built overtime and build confidence of participants to attend regularly. Though you need to be prepared to tackle silo working and make a specific effort to bring different organisations together.