

# BREAKING BOUNDARIES

## Case Study: Ujala Foundation Socialising and Exercising Women, Slough

### Activity Detail

The Ujala Foundation is a non-profit organisation based in Slough and established in 2011. The foundation aims to 'build a united and healthy community' in which individuals from across Slough can feel empowered and socially connected.



The Foundation provides a coffee morning every Tuesday for women across Slough. This activity provides women with the opportunity to try out new hobbies e.g. arts, crafts and sewing, socialise and take part in exercise.

The Manor Park Pavilion, where the Ujala Foundation is based, is a community centre in Baylis and Stoke which also includes a mosque. The inclusive and multi-cultural setting is key for the Ujala Foundation. Co-founder of the foundation Arshad Mehmood said,

*"This is something we have built up within the community. It has helped the women get out. It's an eye-opener, people didn't want the mosque initially but when people go in, they realise that it's an open space for the community. It isn't just for prayer, it's an open space for everyone. It's interfaith so that people get to know each other."*

### How Breaking Boundaries Helped

Breaking Boundaries funding has enabled the Ladies Coffee Morning to continue post-pandemic. Within this, the funding has helped the group to secure a wide range of materials, e.g. sewing machines and art supplies, and recruit a fitness instructor to offer the women heavily subsidised exercise classes (£1 per person per session).

### What's Happened – Impacts on Cohesion

The Ujala Foundation has delivered the Ladies Coffee morning with a wide range of local partners including local artists, chemists,



doctors who discussed cancer screening and the local police. Activities delivered through the coffee morning have and will continue to be decided based on participant preferences and they shape the programme of delivery. Women who attend the coffee morning described the sessions as helping them with **social isolation and loneliness, and bringing them in contact with other women they wouldn't have otherwise engaged with.** The Ladies Coffee morning was understandably



suspended during the Covid-19 lockdowns but now many participants have returned alongside new members.

The group is also run by a woman of White British ethnic origin improving social connectedness between these usually disparate groups in Slough. One woman highlighted,

*“I’ve been coming to the coffee morning for a year. I didn’t know anyone but now I look forward to coming and seeing everyone on a*

*Tuesday. I am really isolated except for when I come here.”*

The coffee morning was also described by members as helping to bring together women from different communities and cultures,

*“We’re all women, we all have problems and quite a few have health problems. It’s taken time but now we’ve come together as a group, all different ethnicities and religions.”*

With respect to their position next to the mosque and members of the coffee morning, the sessions were also suspended during Ramadan to ensure that members did not feel pressured to attend the coffee morning during that time. This reflects better understanding of the needs of different groups and helps foster improved relations with the mosque for the future.

## The Future

Looking forward, the coffee morning is set to continue, bringing in a range of partners and offering new activities such as a walking club to ensure that members stay active. Having moved out of the area, one member of the group is also planning to start a new coffee morning in their new local ward in Slough. This, they hope, will ensure that women across Slough have to opportunity to connect with others, participate in physical activity and actively participate in their local area.

## Top Tips for Effective Delivery

- **Seeking out existing activities to enhance them to have a new focus on cohesion issues.** Using an existing project and supporting it to focus on cohesion through existing social elements combined with additional facilitated physical activity sessions can be a good way to deliver these types of activities. This avoids the need to find new settings and the set up and marketing needed for newly created activities.
- **Supporting active social mixing in an informal group setting** enables a sense of belonging and confidence to be developed relatively easily. New physical activity opportunities can help foster this as all participants are at a similar level and can learn the new activity together further fostering social mixing opportunities.

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