



Social Impact Report 2023

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Background & Context

Bollyfit Active was established by Shamime Jan in August 2020 with the aim of tackling the the issue of health inequality amongst South Asian & BAME women.95% of their community are from South Asian and BAME Communities with approximately 20% former Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ASR) to the UK.

*“Our goal is to create a community of empowered women who want to take control of their health, wellness and fitness”
Shamime Jan*

Poorer health outcomes and lower levels of physical activity & mental well-being disproportionately affect women from minority ethnic backgrounds. Women from South Asian & BAME backgrounds have few opportunities to establish support networks outside of their families and are less able to attend mainstream social and physical activity settings.

The International Journal of Mental Health Systems [1], highlights that Asylum-seekers and refugees in particular may experience traumatic events pre-departure, life-threatening circumstances on their journeys, and difficulties integrating into host countries related to immigration policies, social isolation, poor living conditions, and unemployment, all of which can significantly affect their mental health. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is common among ASR [2], with up to 31% prevalence for many years after immigrating [3]. Research found prevalence of depression up to 31% and anxiety up to 11% amongst ASR, with anxiety particularly increased soon after migration [4]. The UK government recognises increased risk of mental disorders among ASR in its ‘Mental health: migrant health guide’, which estimated an increased 5–10% risk of mild or moderate mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD and suggested a large proportion of migrants entering the UK are at risk

Coupled with a lack of cultural sensitivity from statutory services, this leads to a lack of appropriate support and provision for women from minoritised

backgrounds. This in turn exacerbates depression, anxiety & life-limiting illnesses, and consequently disproportionate levels of obesity, stress and disease. Issues regarding racism, abuse and poverty only accentuate such health issues and lower levels of mental & physical well-being. SA women are disproportionately affected by chronic diseases, with studies showing SA women do less physical exercise than their white counterparts:

“We know that, unfortunately, South Asian people have some of the highest rates of heart disease, diabetes, and poor health in Greater Manchester and across the UK” Bill Newman, Consultant, Manchester University NHS FT, March ‘22

We also know that existing referral methods have had limited success with women from south asian & BAME communities in Manchester. GP Dominic Hyland, Ashcroft Surgery *“I’ve been directing these women to services within the NHS for years & they just didn’t engage...Shamime offers something culturally relevant & acceptable to them and you can see the difference in the levels of engagement” Jan ‘23*

By adopting a holistic and supportive approach - establishing trust and providing social connections, Bollyfit is able to motivate, educate & retain women who have not previously engaged with physical or well-being activities. This 360 approach helps women to stay motivated, learn from and support one another and also creates that safe and supportive space to challenge myths, traditions and rethink cultural attitudes towards nutrition and exercise.

“The first thing Bollyfit Active do is to chat with someone about what’s going on in their lives, before they do any physical activity. They value every aspect of someone’s experience – make them feel seen, understood & valued. And everything is infused with joy.”

Matthew Youngson, MCR Active, Jan ‘23

Bollyfit provides holistic, accessible and culturally appropriate services to help combat some of the following:

- **Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)** is the leading cause of death in the UK - 33% of mortality in South Asian (SA) women is caused by CVD - insufficient physical activity is recognised as a significant risk factor for CVD and other chronic diseases
- **Cancer Screening** - South Asian & BAME women are more likely to be from poor, deprived backgrounds, meaning their levels of awareness of cancer are likely to be lower. National screening statistics show people from ethnic minority communities are less likely to attend health screening than their white counterparts.. In 2014, research from Bridgewater NHS found Asian women between 15 and 64 years old had a significantly reduced survival rate for breast cancer of three years. Plus the National Cancer Intelligence Network looked at census and cancer data for 135,000 women from different ethnic backgrounds from 2005-2009. This found rates of breast cancer among South Asian women had increased significantly and had risen to be 8% higher than white women.

Further research shows Cancer survivors from White communities are more likely to receive follow-up screening than cancer survivors from BME communities. -Treanor & Donnelly BMC Health Services Research. 2012 Language barriers and poor understanding of cultural and religious needs prove to be a barrier to screening and effective follow up and initial diagnosis of cancer

- **Diabetes** - people from Black African, African Caribbean and South Asian backgrounds are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes from the age of 25. This is much younger than the white population, as their risk increases from 40 ([Diabetes UK](#))
- **Obesity** - British South Asians have a high prevalence of obesity than the wider population which puts them at greater risk of type 2 diabetes & cardiovascular disease
- **Lack of Activity** - while 62 per cent of adults in England currently do 150 minutes of physical activity a week (as per the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines) only 56% of Black people in the country and 55% of Asian people (excluding those of Chinese heritage) reach this goal ([Sport England](#) (2020)). People from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are seven times more likely to live in an urban area than someone from a white ethnic background and so are likely to have less access to varied outdoor space.

- **Trauma and PTSD** - Asylum-seekers and refugees are particularly likely to experience PTSD, depression & anxiety as a consequence of traumatic events pre-departure, life-threatening circumstances on their journeys, and difficulties integrating into host countries related to immigration policies, social isolation, poor living conditions, and unemployment. (International Journal of Mental Health Systems)]
- **Loneliness/social isolation** - British ethnic minorities are more likely to suffer from loneliness/social isolation, which has been linked to an increased risk of developing coronary heart disease and stroke. Discrimination is one clear driver with almost half of people (49%) who experienced discrimination at work or in their local neighbourhood reported being always or often lonely, compared with just over a quarter (28%) of people who hadn't. A barrier to accessing support can be stigma and/or fear of discrimination which causes people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds feeling less able to access community activities and support. Almost 60 % across ethnic groups, admitted they did not feel confident talking about loneliness, with a third more saying they would never admit to feeling lonely, leaving many people suffering in silence. [Barriers to Belonging Report \(British Red Cross\)](#)
- **Barriers to Employability** – There are a range of barriers to educational attainment and discrimination in the work place, coupled with a prevalence of those growing up in South the Asian households in the UK to be 2.5 times as likely to be persistently low incomes (2021 Census/ONS) However even prior to entering the workforce, on average, it takes Black and South Asian women in the UK at least two months longer than their white colleagues to secure their first job after leaving education ([Totaljobs](#))
- An additional outcome of Bollyfit's culture to empower women is that they are enabling and encouraging women to develop their skills and employability. Women across all ethnicities have seen their employment disproportionately affected post-Covid. Overall, 52% of women have seen their employment affected because of the pandemic (compared to 45% of men). South Asian women have been particularly affected 70% of South Asian women reporting a loss in income, or change in their employment situation. [Asiana TV](#)

Over the last 2 years alone Bollyfit has increased the skills of 2000+ women, and supported 38 long term unemployed women to access work experience through volunteering. Overall 140 volunteering opportunities have been created since 2018, totalling 4621 volunteer hours equating to an economic value of £46,200.00 and creating significant benefits for those involved.



Mission & Priorities

“We want to empower women of all cultures, religions and races, creating a community of independent women united by fitness, health and well-being”

Shamime Jan



Mission

Bollyfit Active’s mission is to empower and inspire a generation of independent women to believe in themselves and to value their health & well-being. With protected women's-only fitness spaces, they empower South Asian & BAME women to find their voice in society and take ownership of their well-being. They actively tackle obesity, depression, anxiety, isolation and are working towards improving the health and well-being of South Asian and BAME women & girls. Fitness sessions focus on physical health and mental wellness, incorporating culture, religion and individuality into their classes. Through inspiring South Asian and BAME women to trust in their own voice, Bollyfit Active aims to tackle the health inequalities which disproportionately affects women from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Priorities

- Relationships focused on responsibility, expectations & obligations
- Health issues such as obesity, depression & anxiety
- Lack of support networks outside family circles
- The harmfulness of traditional family roles
- Lack of identity outside the family
- Abuse, Control & Manipulation
- Racism & prejudice
- Poverty in society

Bollyfit is an Award Winning Social Enterprise with a range of accolades including:

- Member of the Greater Manchester Intergrated Care Commission Diabetes Forum for BAME communities in Levenshulme and Gorton
- Commissioned partner delivering sounding board sessions for Covid Health Equality Manchester
- Founding member of BASE a new social enterprise support agency for BAME Social Entrepreneurs
- Ubele investee/partner 2022
- UnLtd Award Winner 2022



Activities & Impact

Bollyfit Active's women-only fitness programmes allows members to express themselves freely in a safe and secure environment.

Bollyfit Active places particular emphasis on each participant's cultural background, encouraging every member to connect with music that is culturally significant to them. This allows participants to understand & relate to the music on a much deeper level than the average fitness class.

“Shamime fosters a welcoming, friendly and jovial environment that allows women of all abilities to express themselves through the medium of culture, music and dance and participants have formed long-lasting friendships, bonding over a shared love of dance, fitness and wellbeing.”

In addition to Bollyfit Active's in-person fitness classes, they have also moved onto online platforms, using Zoom and WhatsApp, to ensure members have 24/7 access to support and a safe-space to express their feelings. This has also enabled Bollyfit Active to expand their community to those who are unable to leave their homes due to health/mobility or caring responsibilities.

Participants are supported and their individuality celebrated which not only encouraged them to be themselves and express their feelings but also helps the, to build the confidence to move out of their comfort zones and makes changes to their lifestyles.

Shamime placed particular emphasis on 'adaptation', which helps members adapt to an ever-changing society and teaches that 'new things' can be as good as or better than old traditions.

During sessions, Shamime invites attendees to take the lead in the Confidence Builder Circle of Dance, allowing participants to exhibit their individuality whilst building confidence and leadership skills. Women can showcase their achievements & accomplishments at a range of events and progression pathways have been created through creating the Bollyfit Active Coach training programme which has now enabled 19 group members and wider women to train as Bollyfit Coaches and access work. Plus created 12 further sessional work opportunities across the organisation.

Key areas of intended impact:

- Reduction in GP visits
- Reduction in medication
- Weight Loss
- Increased Activity
- Increased Emotional Resilience
- Increase personal wellbeing
- Increased confidence
- Reduction in social isolation
- Upskilling and empowerment of diverse communities
- Increased Employability, Skills and Access to work

Following a focus group with 15 Bollyfit members the following impact and feedback was captured:

- 90% feel fitter
- 100% feel healthier, feel more positive and have made friends
- 90% lost weight and in some cases that was between 2-4 stone within a 6 month period
- 90% say they keep in contact with other group members between sessions and value having new friendships and a broader peer support network
- 90% have learned about new cultures
- 90% feel more connected to others
- 80% attribute Bollywood sessions and support to helping them overcome depression
- 80% gained skills and confidence
- 80% feel they have gained a sense of identity and become a stronger, more resilient woman since joining the BollyFit group
- 90% Have used health services less
- 80% say they are visiting their GP less since joining BollyFit and Chat and Chai sessions
- 70% have reduced their need for medication
- 90% say their children are better informed about health
- 100% (10/10) say they now have a more positive home-life
- 100% (10/10) feel they know more about health services and opportunities since joining BollyFit and Chat and Chai sessions
- 80% (8/10) have encouraged friends (women who would never usually come to such an activity) to attend the classes with positive effects
- 90% (9/10) have use their new skills and learning from BollyFit and Chat and Chai and started volunteering

Programmes, Activities & Services

Bollyfit have a range of flagship programmes seeking to improve health, fitness and lifestyle. Additionally they harness specialist skills, networks and trust within the community to lead and facilitate a range wider health and regeneration initiatives. They are also recognised for their specialist cultural and wellbeing expertise and have contributed significantly to the development of local community networks, service improvement and policy change.

Healthy Lifestyles: 135 Beneficiaries

300 Hours of Activity/600 volunteer hours

Volunteer opportunities for 10 people created

12 week programmes running across multiple areas which combine dance, fitness, specialist advice around body composition and nutrition and supportive conversations and peer support around lifestyle.

Learn & Move: 370 Beneficiaries

336 Hours of Activity/432 volunteer hours

Volunteer opportunities for 10 people created

A weekly session running since 2021 combining dance, fitness, supportive conversations and peer support around lifestyle. Now running across 5 locations in Manchester.

Afro-Fit/BollyFit: 100 Beneficiaries

165 Hours of Activity/330 volunteer hours

Volunteer opportunities for 3 people created

A collaborative weekly session running since 2021, plus promoting fitness and wellbeing from a range of cultural perspectives through music and dance.

Friendship, Chai & Chat: 460 Beneficiaries

180 Hours of Activity/630 volunteer hours

Volunteer opportunities for 9 people created

A weekly event led and designed by Bollyfit members combining health promotion, current affairs, peer support and social activities. Now running across 3 locations in Manchester.

Convening Community Lunches, Trips & Social Activities: 755 Beneficiaries

50 Hours of Activity/625 volunteer hours

Volunteer opportunities for 15 people created

Frequent events and trips to build friendships, confidence and independence, plus reduce isolation and create opportunities for Bollyfit members to explore leading their own events and visits for their wider community. So far 10 Lunches and several group day trips have been convened.

Specialist services, expertise and representation

- BASE is a newly forming Social Enterprise Network and Support Agency for Greater Manchester. Bollyfit are a founding member.
- Bollyfit are commissioned to join into specialist policy conversations including for VOCAL and DPACT

Outdoor Wellbeing & Community Space Regeneration

138 Hours of Activity/876 volunteer hours

Volunteer opportunities for 20+ people created

RUSHFORD RETREAT – after lobbying Manchester City Council to take on the disused Rushford Gardens in Longsight a team of 10 core and 10 ad hoc volunteers set to work in regenerating the space for community use, growing project and wellness activities. To date 660 volunteer hours equating to £6,600.00 social value investment back into the community have been delivered.

FRIENDS OF CRAWCROFT PARK – a group of 3 core volunteers plus 15 wider volunteers have been meeting with Council members and wider associates since 2021 to develop a Friends of Group to improve the space, environment and inclusive access.

Health Promotion, Outreach & hardship support

257 Hours of Activity/1884 volunteer hours

Volunteer opportunities for 57 people created

- SureStart Early Learning Promotion a 2 month intervention to encourage improved Early Years/Nursery place take up amongst the South Asian Community to prepare children for school. This engaged 200 people across 4 sessions
- CHEM (Covid Health Equity Manchester) brings the Pakistani Community together to address inequalities particularly during and post covid. Bollyfit are a core member on the Pakistani Sounding Board Sessions bringing expertise on Mindfulness with Community Groups and specialist community and cultural intelligence
- Community Fridge set up by Bollyfit members in response to post Covid challenges and the Cost of Living Crisis it provides culturally appropriate free food and care packages to local families in need. Since starting in January 2022 150 people have benefited plus 2 volunteers have provided over 480 hours of volunteer time to coordinate the service.



Referral partners & Testimonials

Bollyfit Active has developed a number of trusted partnerships which help to reach diverse women within the community who might not otherwise have the confidence or opportunity to access culturally appropriate support for their health & well-being.

These include a range of referral pathways and partnerships spanning:

- **GP surgeries**
- **Community health professionals**
- **Local schools**
- **Housing associations**
- **Faith groups & community hubs**

Bollyfit Active also promotes its work among other women's organisations and in VCSE sector newsletters

They also promote sessions/activities on social media and have an active WhatsApp group with 150 members. Word of mouth is a key referral pathway to enable women to feel safe and able to join the sessions.

Ashcroft Surgery

Bollyfit Active was identified as part of a NESTA Challenge as a social prescribing partner.

"They're great from a GP perspective – I can offer patients something that I'm confident will actually be relevant to them & will make a difference."

Dominic Hyland, GP

MCR Active

As part of a project with Better Health Manchester, Bollyfit Active was commissioned to deliver a 12 week programme for 20-30 women who needed support with keeping fit and maintaining a healthy weight. The results were transformative.

"The first thing they do is to chat with someone about what's going on in their lives, before they do any physical activity. They value every aspect of someone's experience – make them feel seen, understood & valued. Everything is infused with joy. It is a joyful project...people create friendships in the group & these meaningful connections help them to keep engaged & they look forward to the next session. It becomes their happy place to be."

Matthew Youngson, Physical Activity & Movement Officer

Manchester Vineyard

Bollyfit Active has run fitness programmes at the 422 Community Hub and also partnered with projects such as the Pantry Project -providing the local community with food support.

"We've signposted women who were looking to manage their weight to Bollyfit sessions & they have gained confidence about being able to actually do something to manage their weight & achieve results where they may have struggled before. They're so proud & positive about what they've achieved."

Naomi Woodcock, 422 Community Hub

Impact Case studies

L has been attending Bollyfit active for over a year (a bit about her heritage/background/situation prior to joining sessions). She is a housewife and Mum to 2 boys and always kept busy, but felt that something was missing in her life. Spiraling into a depression, having poor health, in need of pain management and having poor confidence levels when she joined the group, L has found the classes and support to be “life changing” and has seen a transformation in her body weight, size and shape with weight loss of over 4 stone over a 6 -12 month period.

“I have been sharing my new found knowledge on healthy eating and fitness with others – my husband and children now have better eating habits and I have event been sending information to help boost the health of my family in Pakistan!” L has really valued the new found friends from the group who she can “really trust and rely on” plus is thrilled that she can fit back in her clothes from 9 years ago she never thought she’d wear again. L was also on a waiting list for a year NHS weight management support, by the time they were able to start the consultations she no longer needed medical intervention or the physiotherapy anticipated.



A has attended Bollyfit for over a year. She was struggling with some aspects of her life, parenting and her weight and came across the group through local contacts. The Bollyfit weight management program has helped A reduced her weight, body fat and changed her eating habits; *“It’s helped me learn about food selection and body compositions. I committed to myself to improve my health issues and significantly reduce my Body Mass Index. That was my biggest achievement my GP was very happy about this”* A has also gained support to manage parenting challenges and support for her children as well as gain information about financial support. She feel she has a sense of purpose and identity now and feels uplifted by her newfound skills and the opportunities that facilitating activities and supporting the wider organisation has brought her. *“I participated as a volunteer and as a sessional worker at Chai and Chat, it is a great place to share knowledge from different professionals with lots of fun. this increases the awareness of well-being and reduces stress too. I learned about event management and leadership skills through this experience.”*

A has also volunteered at the Community Lunch events and learnt different skills like organising, time management, communicating with others ad public speaking: *“These events are a great place to meet the local community and help make them more aware about health issues in a friendly way with lots of entertainments. It has boosted my skills and I’ve also made new friends.”* To date Anusha has carried out over 50 volunteer hours at the Community Lunch, Chai and Chat and helping with the Community Fridge.





M first came across Bollyfit over 7 years ago whilst at a low point in her life. She was experiencing social anxiety and had no friends or social circle. M was pleased to find herself and regain her sense of identity after going through a divorce and a series of setbacks;

“Bollyfit has changed my life and way of thinking completely. it has helped me to improve my physical and mental health, my depression and anxiety has gone a lot better I feel less tired, and I've got more energy to do my day-to-day chores, I feel motivated towards life. I can now socialise and make new friends. it's a non-judgmental place where I can enjoy dancing and move my body the way I want without being anxious of being judged by someone.”

She has always found sessions to be a very positive environment and a group of lovely ladies who support and lift each other to achieve their goals relating to their mental and physical health. She feels the community and culture of Bollyfit has helped her become strong and achieve things in her life *“It gave us wings.”* M has now trained as a Bollyfit Active Coach and has been supporting sessions, activities and building the community in South Manchester.



S feels Bollyfit is a place to come where there is no negativity and it is a place to come and feel positive. *“Shamime nurtures us, makes us feel values and then we then support others.”* She looks forward to the dance and exercise in a women only safe space. *“I really enjoy the sessions, as we are provided with a safe fun place to watch and learn how to improve our fitness. I love how I have strengthened my body and how I now push myself to achieve more. All who coach us are great, dedicated and caring who are always ready to encourage you regardless of your ability.”*

Sophia also regularly attends other sessions including the Chai and Chat events *“I enjoy joining these sessions as they provide a fun, non-judgemental environment for women every week. We come when we can and enjoy meeting new people and making friends. The professionals who come to give talks on various topics are always beneficial,”* plus she is now helping out at the Community Lunch events and building her confidence and organisational skills. *“I help to do the registration, so I can welcome everyone which I enjoy it gives me a sense of belonging and we all work well as a team. I love the diverse cultural music, dancing and talks we have by professionals, there's great food and lots of pictures and we all look forward to the end of each month, knowing another community lunch is coming around.”*





Further information

For further information, visit [Bollyfit Active](#) or contact Shamime Jan on ShamimeJan@yahoo.co.uk or call 07867854778

About the authors of this report

This report was undertaken by Nickala Torkington, Social Business Development Consultant and Social Value Specialist with 22 years' experience of working in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.

Nickala is a co-founder of Flourish Together CIC a pay it forward consultancy and network of support for social entrepreneurs which invests its surplus resources in supporting women changemakers to create the change they see needed, whilst increase their economic independence.

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