

Steps to Recovery

Support for Community Champions

Ama1 Project Teesside - Impact Report

Report prepared by Civil Society Consulting (CIC)



1. About us

Over the course of the Covid-19 crisis, Amal Project Teesside has been providing culturally-appropriate food hampers in the Teesside area, with the assistance of four local schools who identify families in need.¹ The families who receive our food hampers are predominantly from ethnic minority, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

We sprung up initially to provide emergency food support; and are now seeking additional funding to offer wider community based services as well as a community eco-shop.

Amal Project Teesside is run by eight volunteers and serves around 70 families (approximately 205 children and 126 adults) on a monthly basis. With the support of Middlesbrough-based humanitarian charity, One Ummah, we are currently operating as an unincorporated charity association.

2. Our vision

Amal Project Teesside launched at the beginning of the pandemic after our founder Sahida Ditta recognised the needs of the ethnic minority community was being overlooked when it came to food hampers and emergency food.

Emergency food provided by mainstream food banks meant that hampers did not meet ethnic minority communities' cultural and dietary requirements. Additionally, mainstream emergency food provision intrinsically presented extra barriers for ethnic minority communities, including:

1. **Language barriers:** the recipients of hampers had to go to a 'centre' to collect food, which meant they were not often able to explain to the food bank staff the types of food they require.
2. Recipients also often had to use public transport or walk to make the journey to and from the food bank, which they felt added the **extra stigma** or '**community shame**' that they were struggling to provide for their own families.
3. Furthermore, many families within the ethnic minority community have **underlying chronic health conditions** which adds a further barrier.
4. In the case of many refugee or asylum seeker families, there is **a fear of reaching out for support in case it affects their immigration status**. There is also an ingrained fear of 'authorities', which may link back to negative personal experiences from their previous country of residence.

Our aim is to circumvent the barriers for ethnic minority communities so that they too can access emergency food, and those in the community who are most in need are being supported.

¹ Mill Lane Primary School, Bowesfield Primary School, Abingdon Primary School and Breckon Hill Primary School.

3. Our services

We currently have two modes of delivering culturally-appropriate food support:

Tailored Hampers

Tailored hampers include specialist food items such as chapatti flour, gram flour, lentils, tinned pulses, cooking oil, condiments and spices. The hampers are suitable for all the family, vegetarian-friendly or halal and alcohol-free.

We initially launched by distributing these tailored food hampers once a month, as well as redistributing surplus food items at least once a week. However, due to the Government providing many families with additional support (i.e. an increase in benefits, packed lunches and/or food vouchers for school term-time) and the lifting of lockdown restrictions, we have for now adopted a new programme of support called 'Holiday Hunger' (see below), with any emergency food hampers distributed as and when required.

Holiday Hunger

'Holiday hunger' is the phenomenon where food poverty is intensified during school holidays, during which children are not receiving free school meals.

Holiday hunger was already endemic in the Teesside area, well before it was brought to national attention in 2020 during the pandemic. So far, we have delivered seven batches of food hampers centered around the school year. The latest batch of deliveries [on 22nd March 2021 and 4th May 2021] have involved extra treats for children and families observing Ramadan, Easter and Eid.

Education

Alongside the food support, we also work to raise awareness about local schemes, such as activities for children and 'Affordable Warmth', and provide information resources for families, such as public health information relating to Covid-19.



4. Funding and partnerships

The majority of food items are purchased using funding from grantmakers. The following organisations have helped and supported us: Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation, Catalyst Stockton, UNICEF via Middlesbrough Environment City, and Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland and Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation.

In addition, we work closely with local businesses and organisations to collect and redistribute surplus food items. What's more, we have been fortunate enough to receive monetary and food item donations from members of the public too.

We have developed partnerships with other organisations and local businesses in the area to carry out our work. Partners assist with the redistribution of surplus food, share donations and generally support each other. We have worked closely with some local supermarkets (such as Morrisons, Tesco, Asda, One Stop Shop, Co-Op, Iceland and Boots Pharmacy) as well as independent local businesses (such as K2 Foods Cash and Carry, Magnum Packing and Rental, Tees Valley Taxis, Food City, Regal Foods and Mushtaq Brothers).

Some of the local charitable organisations that have supported us in terms of food items and sharing resources are: Little Sprouts Health and Well-Being, The Moses Project, Fare Share North East via Middlesbrough Environment City, Tees Valley Together, Middlesbrough Food Bank and Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency.

As mentioned, we have secured funding from grantmakers and organisations. Locally, this has included £500 worth of shopping vouchers from Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation and a £1,200 grant from local infrastructure organisation Catalyst. We also enjoy a strong working relationship with Middlesbrough Environment City. After joining a webinar on how to make hampers more aligned with the NHS' *The Eat Well Guide* (which was organised by Middlesbrough Environment City), we received a grant from UNICEF.

Despite this success, we have struggled to secure funding from larger public funders. We have taken the decision to not pursue National Lottery (TNL) funding, through which a lot of the government emergency funding was funneled during the pandemic, because of its association with gambling. We have attempted to work closely with funding bodies that complement our ethos and values, but we note that our project can be perceived as 'niche' and therefore can lack appeal with mainstream funders. With less than three months of reserves, we are looking for long-term funding to allow us to continue supporting families as we experience the aftershocks of the pandemic.

On a positive note, most recently we were successful in securing funding and support whilst developing a partnership with Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation. We are proud to have the help and support of such a well-respected local community-focused organisation.

This funding and support will provide a major boost to the growth and development of the work we intend to continue doing to help some of the most underrepresented in the local community.

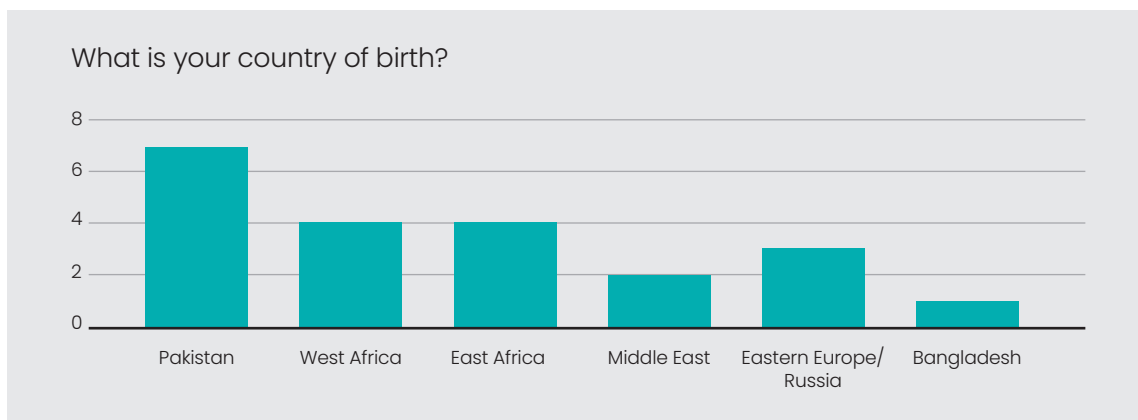
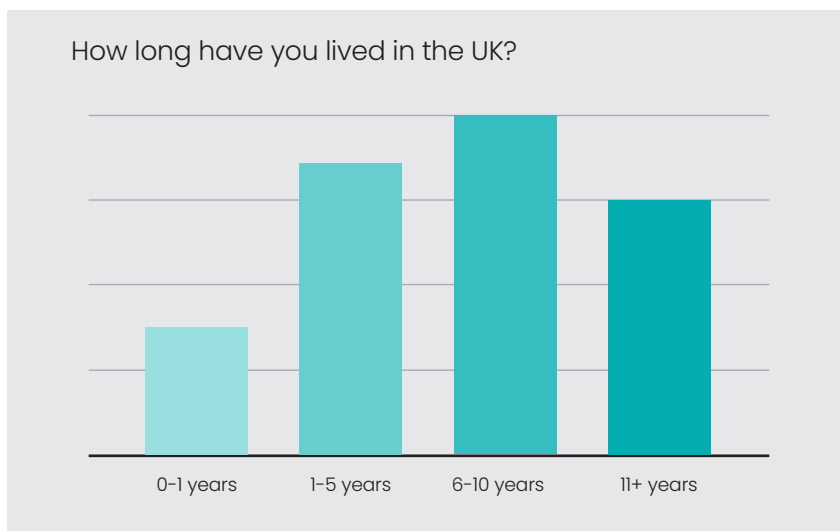


5. Our community

In early 2021, we ran a community engagement survey to provide key information to forward plan support provision and demonstrate to funders who the support is reaching and how it can help families. We collected 35 responses over a two-month period to understand the socio-economic demographic profile of families, including their access to social security and the prevalence of health conditions and disabilities. We have also used the survey to gauge the demand and need for the service (which is elaborated more in the 'Evidencing Need' section).

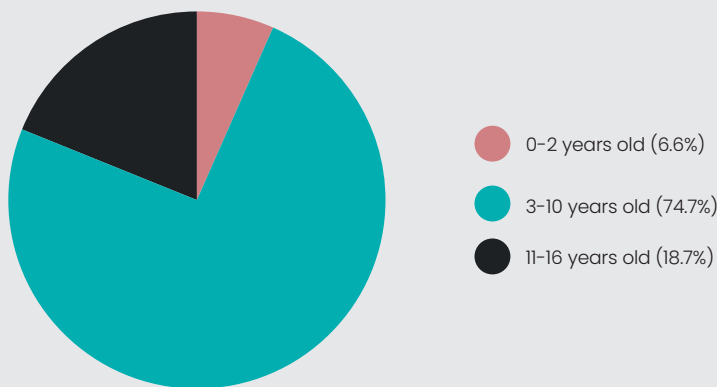
Nationally, ethnic minority communities have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19; in keeping with these macro trends, **55%** of our service users have experienced a drop in their household income in the last year due to: loss of employment, pay cuts, reduction in hours and reduction in benefits payments. **26% of users have No Recourse to Public Funds** (for example, because of immigration status).

About **one third** of the parents who receive our support were born in the UK. The majority of service users, having lived in the area for a variety of timescales, having come to the UK from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe/Russia, see bar charts below.



Of the families receiving support, many of them are using the food hampers to feed small children, the vast majority of whom are aged 3-10 years old. On average there are 2-3 children under 16 years old per household. For 10% of the children reached by Amal Project Teesside, their main caregiver is not their parent. Of these, 60% are under the care of the local authority (i.e. living with foster carers). 12% of the hamper recipients have a disability.

Age of children receiving Amal Project's food support



6. Evidence of need

Amal Project Teesside was created due to the lack of provision of culturally-appropriate food for ethnic minorities and newly arrived communities in mainstream emergency food provision, and as a direct response to the endemic nature of child poverty and food insecurity in the Teesside area. As well as garnering a better understanding of the community the organisation supports, our survey findings evidence the need for our support in our community specifically:

Over 80% of our service users have at least one child in the house who is eligible for free school meals. **Over 70%** reported finding it difficult or impossible to get to shops where they can buy healthy food; **just under 70%** reported not being able to access the internet to do online shopping. **Only 40%** have accessed another food bank service in Teesside; of those who did, **almost half** of them mentioned transporting the food as being an issue when they were asked about the barriers they'd faced.

To support the evidence of need produced by our community engagement exercise, we have identified some of the macro-level factors that lead to the high level of need among our service users:

- **The impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minority communities:** It is widely recognised that ethnic minority communities are being disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Research by The Runnymede Trust, and the Wealth Assets Survey, indicate that ethnic minority groups are almost twice as likely to be living in poverty, when compared with White British individuals, with typical Bangladeshi household incomes being £8,900 a year lower than the White British median; Pakistani households £8,700 less and typical Black African households £5,600 less.

There are various factors that make ethnic minority individuals more likely to contract Covid-19, which include, deprivation, underlying health conditions, and working in more exposed occupations. These communities are also more vulnerable to the economic shocks: they are more likely to be self-employed or on zero-hour contracts and are overrepresented in 'shutdown industries'. The enormous impact the pandemic has had on ethnic minorities provides the case for emergency food provision. Moreover, the emotional toll, including grief and stress is a reason why tailoring the food hampers is so important.

In keeping with this, and as mentioned already, 55% of our service users have experienced a drop in their household income in the last year due to: loss of employment, pay cuts, reduction in hours and reduction in benefits payments.

- **Asylum seekers and refugees:** international migration to Teesside has been happening since after the war; more recently this has accelerated due to Teesside being designated as a dispersal area for asylum seekers in 2012. In 2015, the BBC wrote:

“No more than one in every 200 of the local population should be an asylum seeker, government guidance says. Middlesbrough is the only place in the UK that approaches that limit with one in 186.”

Although numbers have subsequently fallen, there were 510 asylum seekers in dispersed accommodations (i.e. longer-term temporary accommodation funded by the Home Office) in Middlesbrough as of June 2020, with 20 additional asylum seekers receiving support but not accommodation. Asylum seekers are prevented from working, and are provided with only £37.75 a week for essentials, which makes them vulnerable to severe food insecurity. **26%** of our users have No Recourse to Public Funds.

Even when asylum seekers are granted refugee status or indefinite leave to remain, they continue to face huge barriers to social and economic inclusion and remain marred by the often traumatic experience of asylum seeking. As soon as the pandemic hit, it was immediately clear to us that this vulnerable group, who were already experiencing immense deprivation before the pandemic, would be in worsened circumstances and would hugely benefit from this support.

- **Regional deprivation and child poverty:** In general, the Teesside area experiences high levels of deprivation and inequalities. Middlesbrough, the main metropolitan area which we serve, is the most deprived local authority in England (Middlesbrough has a disproportionately high share of the most deprived 10% neighbourhoods in the country). Middlesbrough also has some of the highest proportion of income and employment deprivation in England. Stockton-on-Tees, where we are based, is among the 20% most income-deprived areas in the country. We have a focus on young people and, as such, identified the families via partner schools. This model is in direct response to the scale of child poverty in the North East, which has seen the biggest rise in child poverty rates in the country. Middlesbrough is the local authority in England with the highest income deprivation affecting children index: 33% of children live in income deprived households.
- **Food insecurity:** The total number of primary age children receiving free school meals (FSM) in Middlesbrough is 5,217 (September 2018 figures). This represents 39% of primary age children across all wards. However, food insecurity tends to be concentrated in particular areas, and in some schools FSM levels are over 70% - particularly schools in East Middlesbrough. FSM numbers in Special schools are also very high.
- **Ethnic minority communities facing barriers to accessing food banks:** We recognise there are additional barriers for ethnic minority communities accessing food banks out of shame and poor knowledge about their existence.



7. Outcomes

To date, 438 families have been supported (through 467 hampers) – this is approximately 1,292 children and approximately 794 adults. These estimations are conservative: as the survey shows, many households are inter-generational and may also have older children who are supported by the hampers, and the primary schools figures do not take these extra service users into account.

Below is some feedback from families we have supported:

- *“Just want to say thank you so much.... it has been a huge help for my family of six.*
- *“Kind service, support useful. Lucky to have support.”*
- *“Helped me when I needed it the most”*
- *“Thank you very much for helping my family.”*

8. Lessons Learned

Despite our overall success, we still find – based on our observations, and feedback from teachers and volunteers – there are barriers to supporting those in the community most in need because of:

- **Language barriers:** teachers who we work with closely to identify the families have mentioned frequently it is difficult to engage with some parents and pass on important information – some families have not been reached as a result.
- **Issues around confidence and trust:** language barriers are compounded by lack of trust from refugees and asylum seekers who are new to the area and are relocated frequently, which makes it difficult to build relationships.

We are looking at working with interpreters to improve communication and trust with parents and families, as well as alleviating the burden on schools and teachers. We are looking to recruit volunteers who speak community languages which, depending on funding, we hope will turn into paid roles. We expect many of our recruits will be service users.

From the survey, we have also learnt that recipients find that the bags are too heavy to carry home. We will incorporate this into the design of our programme by ensuring that services are located centrally/ will look into allocating resources into deliveries for families with no transport, and/or underlying health conditions.



9. Our future: our proposed community eco-shop

As an organisation, we're looking for large scale grants, to establish ourselves as local infrastructure alleviating food insecurity for young people and their families, particularly in the ethnic minority community. Holiday hunger is a long-term phenomenon that existed before and will continue to exist beyond the pandemic. Our plans for future development are to progress to becoming an established community eco-shop

In particular, we also want to develop sustainably as an organisation. To do this, we are looking at establishing an ethnic minority-focused community eco-shop which would provide heavily subsidised food, household items, and other essentials such as toiletries.

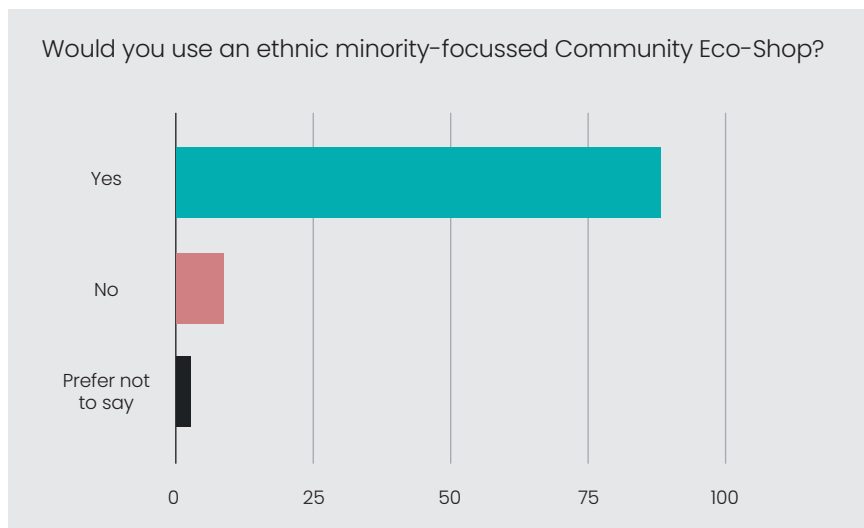
Why a community eco-shop?

A self-sufficient shop would be a more sustainable way of providing culturally-appropriate food items to our users, which are not readily available through the existing local retailers nor from our established sources of surplus food for hampers. A shop could also reduce dependence on the delivery of hampers and give families greater agency. Crucially, a subsidised shop will also get around the issue of stigma and shame around taking 'free food', which we have observed is a barrier accessing food banks. Similar to the items in the hampers, the food on offer at the shop will be groceries, as opposed to prepared meals or hot food.

The community eco-shop will enable us to achieve our aim of providing nutritious, culturally appropriate food to families, while being more financially viable, which will make it possible to continue to support the community in the long-term.

Our 'market research'

Surveyed families were overwhelmingly in favour of the idea of a community eco-shop with heavily subsidised food, household and other essentials such as toiletries (for example 10 for £2)



They commented:

- *"I would like to use a community shop, this would help me."*
- *"Yes that sounds very good to get food for my culture."*
- *"Yes this sounds good I would be happy to also help at the shop and help others."*

Key features of our community eco-shop proposal

1. Funding to cover core costs: As much as our idea for an eco-shop is motivated by sustainability, we have to be realistic and understand that in the current climate and infrastructure of the local area of Teesside it is not feasible to launch a fully sustainable ethnic minority-focused 'eco/community shop'. Hence, we will continue to seek regular funding streams to bridge this shortfall.
2. Supplementary income generation: In spite of the need for basic project funding, we still plan on adopting a more sustainable approach to the new initiative by: making the most of our annual Fare Share subscription; linking in with as many local, independent and national businesses/organisations to redistribute the surplus food items; expanding our partnership working in an attempt to decrease the amount of funds we need to source and spend to purchase culturally-appropriate food items.
3. Means-tested pricing on goods in the shop: in theory, as the service users increase in number, so will the amount of monetary income we receive in terms of the small subsidies contribution, which can then be reinvested to purchase further items. This monetary contribution will however only be applicable to those service users who are in a stable financial position to contribute.
4. We feel by introducing a 'pay forward' scheme we will help to bridge some of the shortfall from our observations. By this we mean those service users who feel they would like to contribute to another family's weekly shop can make an extra monetary donation. This will then be used to support another family who may be struggling.

Other plans for the future

As we develop into an established CIO/CIC, we will look to take on some paid staff members who can further grow the work of Amal Project Teesside. We would also like to set up a more permanent base or office with dedicated premises offering a 'community hub' service.

Looking even further into the future, we would like to offer wider community-based services in addition to the 'shop'. Potential services would include financial/debt advice, housing information, benefits help and also health and well-being related group or individual sessions. We would of course consult the community on what services they would like to access most urgently. We would also like to look at supporting some of the most isolated within the community to seek education/qualifications which may help them into employment. This could involve them volunteering with us and/or attending dedicated educational sessions.

If the launch of our ethnic minority-focused 'eco/community' shop is successful, it is our ambition to take and replicate the model to other geographical areas.

