

Steps to Recovery

Support for Community Champions

Mother and Child Welfare Organisation Impact Report



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1. About us

Mother and Child Welfare Organisation (MACWO), based in West London, works to support mothers and their families from a range of ethnically diverse backgrounds. As a Somali-led organisation, we specialise in helping the Somali community but we welcome everyone who wants to join us. Our services include accredited training courses, help to access local public services/ government support, health and mental wellbeing support, homework support and tutoring, information sharing meetings and more.

MACWO was established in 2011 by our founder **Khadra Ali Hared**, who recognised that the Somali community is often disconnected, disenfranchised and underrepresented, and therefore in need of direct and practical support.

British-Somalis are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the UK, yet they are often considered to be “hard to reach”, and face significant inequalities in service provision and poorer outcomes in relation to education, employment, housing and health. Our organisation aims to reach this under-served community.

Since our founding, we have branched out to offer support to everyone in our local community, and have reached individuals from 17 nationalities.

Our organisation is Somali-led, run by four paid staff and five long-term volunteers. We have three offices in West and North London: Shepherd’s Bush, Wembley and Roehampton.

We are currently working with around 400 people, however this is a conservative estimate of the numbers who have benefitted from our services. We provide long-term programmes but we also provide ad-hoc and one-off emergency support.

We are a highly flexible and responsive organisation and we help everyone who comes to us, working with each of our beneficiaries to create personalised programmes and responses.

2. About this report

In May 2021, we conducted a **community engagement survey** to measure the impact of our work on the community we support, but also to get their views, experiences and opinions to help us shape the services we offer in the future. We received **150 individual responses**, through a mixture of digital and physical entries. We facilitated those individuals who are digitally excluded and/or experience language barriers to complete the survey.

We also used the survey to gauge the demand and to evidence the need for our proposed service: ‘**a community hub**’, where service-users can access our most popular services under one roof.

The ‘Evidence of Need’ section refers often to the Open Society Foundation’s [‘Somalis in London’](#) study (2014) often, which is the most comprehensive study undertaken on British Somalis to date.

3. Our vision

MACWO's aim is to assist individuals from ethnic minority and migrant communities, who are often disenfranchised and disadvantaged, to develop **capabilities** and **skills** that will lead to fulfilling and productive lives.

We have a **person-centred approach** to equipping our clients with the **skills, experience** and **qualifications** that will enable them to access more opportunities and make valuable contributions to society. Through building trusted relationships, we are able to deliver training, advice and services to the most 'hard-to-reach' members of our community.

As well as providing practical assistance, we also **advocate** for the removal of **barriers** that our beneficiaries experience in accessing equal opportunities in education, employment, healthcare, and statutory support. Through our work we attempt to identify these barriers and challenge them through awareness raising and campaigning on behalf of our beneficiaries.



4. Our services

MACWO offers a range of services to address the complex and interconnected needs of those within our communities. Our focus on developing capabilities and skills as a pathway out of disadvantage is reflected in our programme design.

We particularly engage with and develop services to support **women** and **young men**; who have been identified as the demographics that are in particular need of support. The root of these problems start with the following:

- Women, in particular older women, tend to have less IT skills and a lower proficiency in English.
- Young men, in particular from migrant backgrounds, face specific challenges as they grow into adulthood, including stereotyping in professional and educational settings

Youth work

Black and ethnic minority youths in our community face disproportionate challenges, including serious youth violence, mental health challenges, wellbeing issues, extremism and influence from gangs and drugs.

We facilitate a number of programmes such as **youth clubs, sports and cultural activities, team-building exercises**, and **community safety & online safety training**.

We also run a **networking event** for young people and community role models and mentors to inspire them to think about how they can realise their potential in education, employment, and entrepreneurship.

With frequent contact points and consistent developmental work, we have seen many youths considered 'at risk' begin to develop beneficial habits and behaviours which lead to a balanced and positive lifestyle.

We've supported around 35 young people in the last twelve months.

Anti-extremism and Hate Awareness

At the start of 2019, we worked with young people to raise awareness of extremist grooming, on-line dangers and hate crime. We delivered sessions at our office and also to Madrassas in Hammersmith. We were funded by a grant from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and Google.

Mental health

We're currently running a six month programme called Good for Girls which is funded by London Youth, who provide training and support for us to run youth sessions centering on mental health for girls aged 10-14 years.

Homework support & tutoring

Since 2017, we've been running a homework club, providing mentoring and support for teenagers at risk of exclusion. We started this programme after receiving many requests from mothers to help their teenage children, who were either in trouble with the police and/or at risk of being permanently excluded. 25 young people have benefited from this service over the last 12 months.

Before the pandemic, the homework club was run on Friday evenings, and included an evening meal and sometimes outings to the cinema or bowling. We had very good feedback from mothers that their children were much happier and more positive about going to school. We will continue with this programme when the pandemic is finally over.

Opportunities for work placement and volunteering

We work with local secondary schools to arrange for students to undertake work experience at MACWO in areas such as communications and social media. We have also developed three youth volunteers over the pandemic, who have helped run IT classes for other young people and helped to deliver our emergency food programme. We've helped 50 young people to access places on training programmes run by other organisations and businesses.

We have created four volunteering places for young people within MACWO. Each volunteer has a specific area of responsibility – youth work, IT support, social media support and help to apply for Universal Credit/ KickStarter jobs. They work with other staff members in our organisation and receive support and training as well as advice on developing their CV and help with applying for permanent jobs.

Sports

We took a group of teenagers for ten days to a football tournament in Finland in August last year, when the pandemic was at a low point. Our group was made up of four volunteers and 14 teenagers from Shepherd's Bush. The young people were suffering from mental stress and low mood and the trip was a very important experience for them. We lived in a community centre where the young people cooked and did chores each day. They returned to the UK filled with self-belief and positive thoughts about their futures.

Earlier this year, we received funding from London Youth to run football training which we are delivering at the moment.

A 'hybrid approach'

In 2019 and 2020, we delivered three ten week programmes of mentoring, boxing exercise and talks about youth issues. Our target group was aged 15–18 years. We were funded by the Community and Youth Engagement Prevent Team at Hammersmith and Fulham Council. We are planning a similar programme for Prevent in Brent at the moment, subject to Home Office funding.

Ex-offenders and prison support

We work with people of all ages and backgrounds to help reduce the number of people who reoffend after leaving prison. We've supported around 60 ex-offenders in the last twelve months.

Many prisoners leave prison without any support to apply for benefits or find somewhere to live. They are often alienated from their families and at risk of homelessness. We provide immediate practical help and long term support and mentoring.

We implement a **prison visiting programme** ensuring we identify people who need rehabilitation support.

We also provide ex-offenders with employment, housing, benefits (namely applying for Universal Credit), and lifestyle support through various contact approaches including mentoring, workshops, personal development initiatives and volunteering opportunities. We also signpost beneficiaries to the pro-bono and low-cost legal advice and representation.

We also provide **1-to-1 support** in a focused setting with ex-offenders who require more intensive guidance. We help ex-prisoners and their parents/relatives to reconcile together and we help their younger siblings who are often deeply affected to see an older sibling in prison.



Our work focuses on establishing and facilitating an enriching connection between offenders, their families and our teams.

Skills training programmes

We provide high-quality employment and education-focused skills training. These include:

- Accredited IT training Level 1-3 (City & Guilds)
- Accredited Social Care training Level 3
- LearnMyWay online training
- Accredited First Aid training (Safe Cert)

All our courses, workshops and training sessions are run by accredited professionals who are either MACWO volunteers or from our partner organisations, and delivered with cultural awareness and inclusion in mind. Over the past twelve months, 60 individuals have participated in accredited training programmes supported by MACWO.

Support to access public services

We offer support to individuals to access local public services for example GP, NHS, and education services, as well as government support including benefits and apprenticeships. During the pandemic we've supported individuals to receive vaccines by providing information and signposting. We were also a support centre during the recent Census enabling 399 people to complete the census form and understand the value of participation.

We've also handled referrals to the Met Police, NHS, Adult Social Services, Domestic Violence units and Addiction services. We have several referral pathways including: via teachers and schools; via contact made by MACWO staff joining multi agency meetings; word of mouth. Mothers will often refer their children to us.

We also organise events to enable statutory agencies to meet with our beneficiaries. Our reputation as a trusted source enables us to 'broker' referrals. Our strong relationships with our beneficiaries is an essential part of the equation.

As well as supporting individuals practically, we hold information sessions to ensure individuals know their rights and entitlements.

We've helped around 40 individuals access public services over the last twelve months.

Mental health advice and support

We work across our community to **advocate for mental health awareness**, run **mental health peer-support groups**, and offer practical support and referrals for people who need mental health care.

We also run 'Shah iyo Sheeko' or 'storytelling at teatime' groups, building on the Somali tradition of storytelling. The sessions aim to build trust within the community, and therefore a network for discussing more serious issues.

Family and parenting support

MACWO works with families and children to create a stable and nurturing environment for them to enrich their lives. We are equipped to support families at all stages of a child's development, including pregnancy and issues at school. We run **parenting classes**, and when necessary we work with schools and teachers where there may be cultural and communication barriers. For external issues that impact families, we also provide help with accessing public services and government support.

We run a 'Parents Champion' – an 8-week programme of mentoring and workshops run by our partners at [ASÉ CIC](#). The programme gives people parenting skills and understanding of best practices in parenting. Over the past twelve months, we've supported 55 individuals with family and parenting issues.

Family advice and mediation

We provide **counselling, advice and support, peer-support groups, and mediation services**, and we also signpost families and individuals to appropriate services, including legal advice, to resolve their issues.

We also write letters and make telephone calls on behalf of service users to schools, council services, landlords, debt collection agencies and utility companies.

Over the past twelve months, we've supported 25 individuals with family advice and mediation.

Information sharing meetings

We've run a series of community information sharing meetings, joined by outside speakers and council representatives, on a range of issues including mental health issues, addiction, obesity, and immigration issues. Recently we have also covered vaccinations and Covid-19 in response to the pandemic.

120 individuals have attended our information sharing meetings, which have mainly taken place virtually, over the past twelve months.

Census support: Advocacy and support

We received £9,000 from the digital inclusion charity Good Things Foundation to provide one-to-one assistance to help individuals in Hammersmith, Brent and Wandsworth to fill in the online census form. We also held online information sessions explaining why the census is important.

We supported 399 individuals to either complete their census and/or attend an information session. We received a certificate acknowledging our contribution to the Census as one of the highest performing community centres in the UK.

Our WhatsApp group

We run and moderate a WhatsApp group which 250 of our beneficiaries participate in. The WhatsApp group enables the exchange of information, sharing of ideas and the promotion of services.

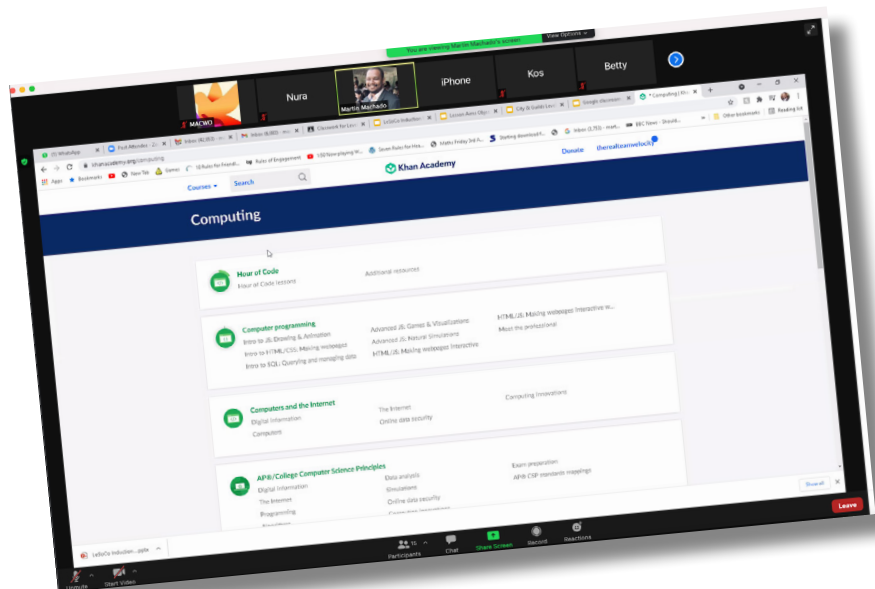


5. Our Covid-19 Emergency response

The pandemic has impacted in many ways on the health and wellbeing of our community, many of whom are already vulnerable due to their living, employment, and immigration circumstances. MACWO has responded to the pandemic in several ways:

- Delivering and distributing **food supplies** and **medicine** to those in need
- Running a **telephone-based community connect service** to spread government advice and guidelines, as well as to reduce social isolation
- Working with **bereaved families** who have experienced the loss of loved ones from the pandemic, including support for bereaved prisoners in HMP Wormwood Scrubs.
- Organising online **peer support** groups
- Running online exercise classes as well as orchestrating peer support networks to support individuals to attend existing exercise classes in the local area
- Providing **debt relief** by supporting families to pay utility bills
- Running homework support clubs, responding to young peoples' concerns about their GCSEs and A Levels
- **Signposting** individuals' to mental health support
- **Loaning laptops** to individuals experiencing digital exclusion and providing entry-level training

During the pandemic we have provided 120 individuals (and their families) with emergency support and relief.



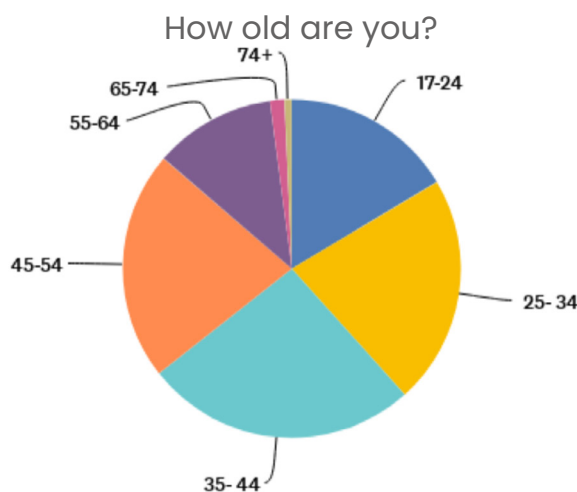
6. Our community

As a Somali-led organisation, we have lived experience of what life is like for new and also second/ third, even fourth generation Somali migrants in the UK. As a result, we have specialist skills in helping Somali families and individuals. However we are an inclusive organisation and aim to help individuals from ethnic minorities and newly arrived communities. We welcome and provide support to a wide range of people from diverse communities and backgrounds.

In our community engagement survey we asked service-users what their cultural heritage was, instead of the standard 'ethnicity' question. This is because cultural nuances are central to how we perceive the world, and we wanted to take stock of this.

The vast majority of respondents described themselves as being Somali (71%) but we also had respondents of Algerian, Congolese, Ethiopian, English, Eritrean, French, Kenyan, Pakistani, and Sudanese heritage. Other respondents also reported their heritage to be Arab, Nigerian, Moroccan, East African Asian, Portuguese, and Mauritian.

Through our range of services including youth work, skills development and parenting support we engage with a wide range of ages. The biggest age group we work with is 35-44, however there is a fairly even spread across all ages.



Our organisation has a history of helping women with the challenges of bringing up children and finding employment in a new country. This is reflected in the survey responses which shows the makeup of our beneficiaries is slightly skewed females (57%). This could be a conservative estimate, as several survey drives took place during football sessions, which skewed towards male respondents.

7. Evidence of need

Newly arrived communities are disadvantaged in the UK

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers experience layers of disadvantage due to precarious immigration status; the challenge of being new to a country and having to learn language/ new systems; socio-economic deprivation, and having predisposed disadvantage from their country of origin (unique health challenges such as PTSD/ FGM; and more gaps in education). They face particular barriers in accessing important public services and are often locked out of opportunities.

Discrimination and stereotyping

Somalis have been portrayed negatively in the UK media. The media focus is often on issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM). One study by Bristol University into FGM safeguarding found that safeguarding officers [‘treated Somalis like criminals’](#), and another study found that [Somalis felt victimised by media representations linking gang violence and terrorism to Somali men](#). There is a pervasive idea that the Somali community is too entrenched in its customs to integrate into British society.

In the 2014 study, ‘Somalis in London’, it was felt that young British Somali men experienced discrimination by the Metropolitan Police and a high rate of ‘stop and search’ encounters with police officers. These negative experiences serve to alienate young people and we recognise the need to bring police officers together with groups of young people to exchange perspectives in a supportive and safe space.

Lack of employment

In our community engagement survey, we asked survey respondents what best described their occupation; 22% of respondents said they were not employed and not in any form of education or training.

Older women often need support in accessing employment - they face disadvantages in terms of language barriers, educational attainment, qualifications and work experience; young men can have difficulties due to stereotyping and difficulty joining professional networks that could lead to employment.

Immigration advice is in demand

Somalis’ migration to the UK stretches back to at least the nineteenth century, and the Somali-British relationship is complex. There are many settled second/ third generation Somalis; however due to ongoing civil unrest in the country, there is ongoing immigration to the UK. Additionally, secondary immigration is common (Somali refugees will often settle in the Netherlands, Sweden or Norway, before they settle in the UK). Brexit and the EU resettlement scheme has caused complications for many Somalis who have settled in the UK through this secondary migration.

A large proportion of Somalis who come to the UK are seeking asylum; however, momentous changes to the asylum system (which involves restricting the entitlements of those who enter the UK illegally) are imminent.

As an organisation, we’ve experienced an uptick in demand for legal advice and representation relating to immigration in recent months due to these recent changes in the immigration system, and realise there are challenges ahead for Somali migrants to the UK. The demand for immigration advice was reflected in our community engagement survey: **13%** of respondents to our survey said they needed immigration advice at this moment.

Lack of educational attainment and its relationship to crime

British-Somali children, particularly males, have historically underachieved at school. There are stereotypes within schools that they are “bad” and a high incidence of British-Somali youth being referred to Pupil Referral Units. We work with children who are excluded from schools, or are on the cusp of being excluded.

Exclusion from school, lack of employment, and the areas where they live make young British Somalis vulnerable to crime.

Aspiration and unemployment among young people

Many Somali families spend more money than they can afford on private tutoring for their children in hope of improving their children's life chances and often their children perform well at school. Nevertheless we know that there is a high level of unemployment among British-Somalis. Young people need mentors and practical help to go from school into further education and from there to meaningful employment. We are working to provide apprenticeships, work placements and work experience so that we do not lose a generation to despair and disaffection with society.

Generational issues

Migrant parents' have poor understanding of the UK education system, as they have not been in the system themselves. It is a common occurrence that children interpret school correspondence and at parents evenings on behalf of parents.

The parents we work with experience a unique set of challenges as they bring up children in the UK; children's command of English can weaken parental authority and pre- and post-migration trauma may negatively impact parents' ability to care for children.

Recent research by the The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford found that UK born children of migrants 'feel more discriminated against' than their parents.

Vaccine hesitancy

Although ethnic minority communities have been 'hit hardest' by the pandemic, they are more likely to be reluctant to take the vaccine. A recent survey carried out by the Royal College of General Practitioners demonstrated that people of Black, Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds are 53%, 36% and 67% less likely to have been vaccinated when compared to their white counterparts (British Medical Journal, 2020). On the whole, commentators weighing in on 'vaccine hesitancy' put it down to two main reasons:

- Mistrust of government and authority, which stems from a long history of discrimination and systemic racism. As stated by WHO, recent racist remarks made by French doctors caught on video suggesting Africa should be a testing ground for coronavirus have been damaging.
- Misinformation targeted specifically at ethnic minority communities.

Misleading claims tend to be based on: the notion of ethnic minority communities being used as 'guinea pigs' for the vaccine; suspicion around the vaccine ingredients (for example, claims it contains traces of pork and beef); and past cases of mistreatment of black people by the medical establishment (BBC, 2021).

Migrant communities, including the Somali community, have a general hesitancy to approach the NHS and social services, due to a lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness on the part of medical staff, a lack of representation within the social and healthcare systems, and instances of miscommunication and misdiagnosis.

Ethnic minority youth have a specific set of challenges

Young people in Somali families have identity and belonging issues. The issue of identity can be complex. Young people in conversation often express to us a 'feeling like you have a different identity from your parents' and the problem of 'having several identities and not knowing which you identify with'. It is often said that Somalis are an invisible section of UK society as, being both Black and Muslim, they are doubly marginalised.

8. Our impact

In our community engagement exercise, we surveyed 150 people about how MACWO's support services have impacted their lives. The results are below:

- **98%** of survey respondents said* **'I have gained new skills that I have been able to use in my day-to-day life'**
- **96%** of survey respondents said **'I have gained new skills that make me more employable'**
- **90%** of school-aged respondents said **'I feel more confident at school.'**
- **98%** of respondents said **'I have a greater awareness of the challenges that face my community.'**
- **94%** of respondents said **'I have a better understanding of my rights and where I can go for support and advice.'**

*Respondents answered 'strongly agree' or 'agree'

9. Lessons learned

What works well for us

We are very successfully reaching people who live in entrenched deprivation but do not access mainstream services. We have found over the pandemic just how much mistrust, shame and lack of information has created severe poverty and invisibility. We address these issues through consultation and co-production of services both with service users and with external agencies. We are one of the very few organisations that is able to do this.

We have been successful in this work because all our services are developed out of the lived experience of our service users and staff. We do this through culturally meaningful conversation groups which we call Shah iyo Sheeko ('tea and story' in Somali). We have run these sessions over many years and have built up trust so that we are able to discuss sensitive issues which are usually never discussed within our community. All our staff and volunteers have lived experience of poverty and the impact of inequality and deprivation.

What is not working so well

We work with people who are very far from being able to access mainstream or structured services on their own. We must respond to emergencies and crises and devote time to talking with and supporting each service user before introducing mainstream support in the approachable space of our office or an online meeting. This work requires intensive staff time and engagement with emotionally troubling issues. Our staff access training opportunities where possible and we as an organisation are developing policies and quality marks to improve our support for them. However our work is time consuming and demanding on us. We do not always have the resources to provide training for staff or sufficient qualified staff to deliver the intensive work that is required.

10. The future

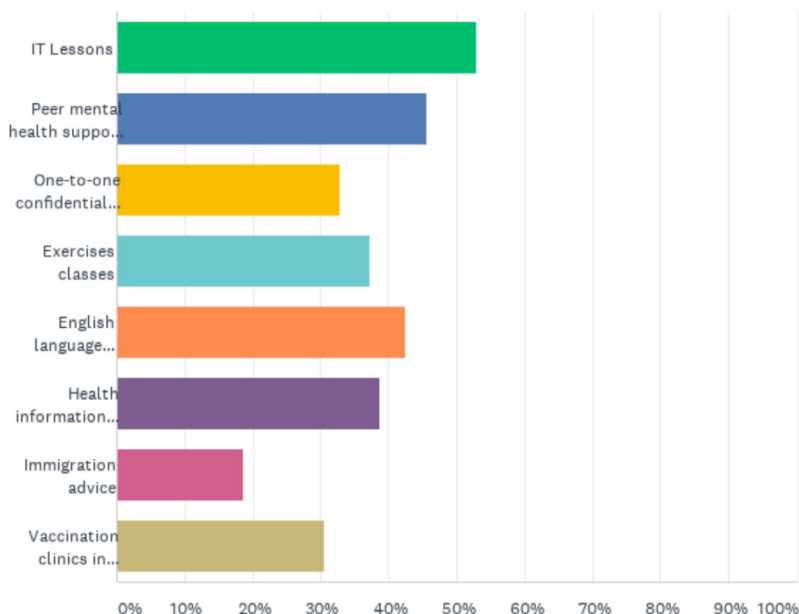
Our proposed idea: 'The Community Hub'

We are planning to establish a 'Community Hub' based at our office in Shepherd's Bush. The hub will make it possible for our beneficiaries to access and stitch together a range of services (including IT lessons, peer mental health groups and English language classes) developed by us and by statutory and external agencies working in partnership with us. We also plan to incorporate a vaccinations centre into the Hub, to encourage uptake in the community for future vaccines.

We used our community engagement survey as an opportunity to establish the demand and need for the Community Hub, and to consult the community about its design. We asked particularly what services they would like to see offered and how we can make it more accessible to our service-users.

We asked the community to pick their top three services they would like to see offered at the hub; the most popular choices were **IT lessons (60%)**, **English language classes (48%)**, **health information sessions (44%)**, and **exercise classes (42%)**.

Which services would you most like to access?



When asked how likely would they be to use a 'Community Hub' that offers the services offered above, **85%** respondents said 'Very likely' or 'Likely.'

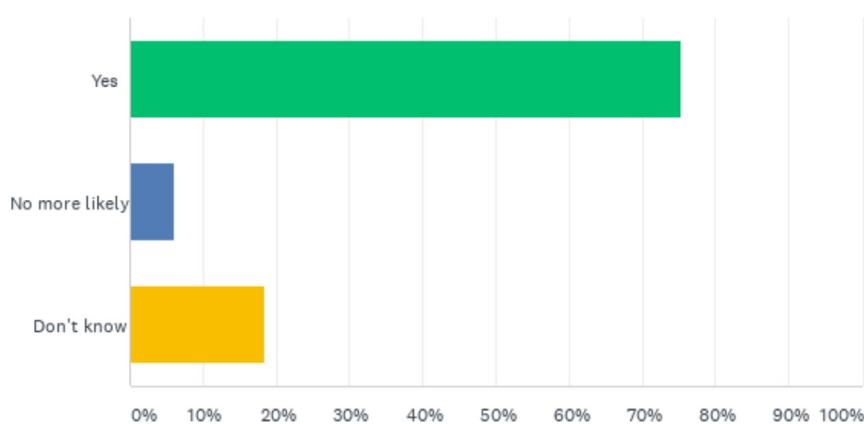
Asking the community what support they would like to see offered at the hub, a very common answer was **'more group sessions and workshops'**. Another common answer was **'mental health'**.



We also used the survey to check if the vaccination deployment at the hub is a viable concept, which after consulting the community, we believe it is. Although it is difficult to predict how the 'booster' vaccination programme will operate in coming months and years, (currently it's not certain how long Covid-19 vaccine protection lasts) we are operating on the assumption that there will be seasonal boosters of the Covid-19 vaccine in the future.

- When asked which services they would like to see as part of the hub offering, **31%** of respondents picked 'Vaccination clinics in partnership with local NHS trusts' as their three choices.
- **76%** of respondents reported that they were either 'Very likely' or 'likely' to have their vaccination at the hub.
- **75%** of respondents said they were more likely to receive a vaccination at our community hub rather than at a NHS facility

Are you more likely to receive a vaccine at our community hub than at an NHS facility?



Based on the findings of our community consultation, our plan over the next 12 months is to:

1. Create a dedicated staff post of hub co-ordinator. This member of staff will co-ordinate services and sessions, monitor and evolve services in collaboration with service users, create and maintain partnerships with external agencies, develop and leverage new services through the access point provided by the hub.
2. Develop the resources of our office providing a computer suite, exercise equipment and an outside area for exercise.
3. Develop our social media profile and extend our publicity and promotion, ensuring that the hub is promoted widely in the local area and to potential partners.

The hub will deliver our own volunteer led services, together with sessions delivered in partnership as follows

1. IT training leading to City & Guilds accreditation
2. Adult Social Care training delivered in partnership with London Vocational College
3. ESOL sessions delivered by qualified volunteers
4. Youth mentoring and support sessions delivered in partnership with Prevent Hammersmith & Fulham
5. Shah iyo Sheeko consultation and peer support sessions delivered by our volunteers
6. Court support and prison visiting, delivered by our volunteers in partnership with the Chaplaincy of HMP Wormwood Scrubs and pro bono criminal lawyer.
7. Exercise sessions delivered through partnership with London Youth
8. NHS health information on a range of issues, delivered by NHS health workers, and local GP surgery
9. Vaccine centre and information point working in partnership with NHS services.

All services will be free to all participants.

Developing our advocacy services

As an organisation, we want to develop our advocacy function. Although we already do campaigning within the community, on subjects such as the importance of getting the vaccine and the significance of the census, we want to extend our campaigning to the level of policymaking at regional and national levels, representing the interests of the Somali community in the UK.

We aim to do this by publicising and communicating the experience of Somalis to policy makers focusing on subjects such as the high numbers of Somali prisoners in deportation centres facing deportation to Somalia; stereotyping experienced by Somalis in educational/professional settings; vulnerability of British-Somali youth to knife crime and gang-related violence; FGM and the experience of women; struggles of mothers with mental health issues parenting large families.

We believe that the lived experience of Somali families in the UK is under-represented and little known, and we want to empower our beneficiaries to express that experience creatively and directly. We are planning a range of platforms including a youtube channel and a creative writing/performing project.





About us

Civil Society Consulting (CSC) is an independent, not-for-profit social enterprise – a Community Interest Company (CIC). We aim to enhance community cohesion by enabling and empowering VCSE groups to leverage social impact in the communities they know and love. This includes nurturing individual skills and talents, as much of our support is delivered through expert training and mentoring to members of community groups and charities. We have a particular focus on working in the most socially deprived and diverse neighbourhoods. Properly understanding the needs people have, and then working alongside them to plan, develop and run services and projects has always been at the heart of our people-led approach to consulting.

The team have worked extensively with communities – a wide range of groups, ethnicities, and ages. Our recent work includes working with BAME-led organisations up-and-down the country to secure funding for emergency Covid-19 frontline work, producing an report on the impact of Covid-19 on the social sector in Barking & Dagenham, and engaging with new mums in South East London to provide NHS England and Mind UK with insights into perinatal mental health in Bromley and Southwark.

We are academically-inclined, and keep a focus on the bigger picture: the strive for socio-economic rights and equality; but at the same time, our track record of working 'hands-on' with local grassroots organisations means we're not afraid to get stuck in.

