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**Learning from the Barnardo’s Tamkeen Project**

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**1. Introduction**

**1.1. About Tamkeen**

Barnardo’s Tamkeen is a specialist service working with Muslim children, families and the wider community in the Rotherham area. It is an example of Barnardo’s commitment to develop specialist approaches to supporting children and young people who experience abuse or exploitation. Barnardo’s 10-year Child Sexual Abuse Core Priority Programme includes priorities for: understanding what works; finding hidden children and young people and hearing their voices; improving practice and influencing systems/policy change. Within this programme, Barnardo’s is committed to targeting activity with marginalised groups who are under-represented in current support services, and to ensuring that co-design with children, young people, parents, carers, families, communities, and colleagues across the sector forms the bedrock of its Child Sexual Abuse Programme.

Tamkeen is also one of six initiatives to receive funding from the Home Office’s Child Sexual Abuse Support Services Transformation Fund for 2020-22. This Fund has three main objectives:

* To promote and disseminate best practice in the provision of support to help children and young people cope with and, as far as possible, recover from sexual abuse.
* To improve the quality of support available to children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse.
* To build understanding of what works to support children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse.

The Tamkeen project began with a ‘discovery’ phase of work to better understand the impact of child sexual abuse on Muslim families and to find out how to provide more effective support. During this phase, Tamkeen engaged with around 40 children and young people, parents, carers and the wider community to explore the issues involved in supporting Muslim children and parents, including what helps and what prevents families accessing appropriate help. Tamkeen workers also engaged with a range of staff within Barnardo’s and in other Rotherham voluntary and statutory agencies. Building on this discovery phase, Tamkeen has gone on to develop work in schools and to build further collaboration with the Muslim community via work in local mosques and through facilitating groups for Muslim men, women, boys and girls as well as exploring the development of resources to help improve professional practice.

In July 2021, DMSS Research were commissioned to work collaboratively with the project to provide a process evaluation of Tamkeen. The aim was to capture the learning from the Tamkeen project and to consider the extent to which Tamkeen’s approach is supporting the empowerment of children and families, promoting partnership working and influencing systems thinking, and policy and practice.

**1.2. Our approach to the evaluation**

We have taken a qualitative approach to this evaluation and have aimed to work collaboratively with Tamkeen workers in a spirit of appreciative inquiry. We began with a theory of change workshop for workers and managers held on 26th July 2021. The theory of change framework (app 1) sets out the overall intended outcomes of the project, its planned activities, and the milestones it aimed to achieve by March 2022.

Following this initial workshop, we undertook work to gather the story so far from the Tamkeen workers and other relevant managers and staff. This included a review of existing written material relating to the project (reports, plans etc) and interviews with workers to identify the key learning they had acquired to date. During this phase of work, we also reviewed research, policy and practice evidence relating to child sexual abuse and ethnic minority/faith communities which could usefully inform the ongoing development of Tamkeen’s work.

During our evaluation the Tamkeen team underwent some key changes, notably the appointment of a team manager and two additional staff who came into post in September 2021 and whose perspectives have been incorporated. As Tamkeen’s work has developed we have carried out further interviews with workers and other key informants including school leaders and participants in the Tamkeen women’s and men’s groups.

**1.3. Structure of this report**

This report is composed of five sections as follows:

* **Why is Tamkeen needed?** This section summarises the evidence of why specialist services are needed for Muslim communities, what we know about the barriers to accessing support, particularly around CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, and what recent research and practice literature suggest are important features of more effective services for Muslim children, families and communities.
* **What is Tamkeen aiming to achieve?** This sets out some of the specific contextual challenges of supporting Muslim families in Rotherham and Tamkeen’s theory of change.
* **What Tamkeen has done so far and what is being achieved and learned?** In this section we describe what Tamkeen has been doing to achieve its outcomes and draw upon workers’ reflections and the view of key informants to summarise the main achievements of the project and lessons being learned.
* **The Tamkeen model of practice.** This sets out our analysis of what seem to be the core elements of the Tamkeen model.
* **What are the implications for future development?** We conclude with a discussion of the implications both for the development of Tamkeen and for Barnardo’s more generally.

**2. Why is Tamkeen needed?**

There are several reasons why it is important to have a specialist service targeting support to children and families from the Muslim community in Rotherham as well as elsewhere.

 **2.1. Muslims make up a significant section of the population with a higher proportion of children and families.**

The Muslim population in the UK is not a homogeneous community and British Muslims come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. However, the single largest group of Muslims in the UK are of Pakistani descent. Pakistanis make up the second largest ethnic minority in England and Wales - 2% of the population nationally, but in Yorkshire and Humber (as well as the West Midlands) people of Pakistani origin make up over 20% of the population, around 97% of whom identify as Muslim. The age profile of the Pakistani population is younger than other ethnic groups with over 36% aged under 18 at the 2011 census.

In Rotherham, at the last census (2011) Muslims made up 3.7% of the population (around 10,000 people). This number will have increased in the past decade. Although there are other Muslim communities in Rotherham (e.g. from the Yemen), these are relatively small in number so when we consider supporting Muslim families in Rotherham we are predominantly talking about those of Pakistani descent.

**2.2. The Pakistani population faces high levels of socio-economic deprivation, yet they are under-served by mainstream support services**

Pakistani families living in the UK form one of the most disadvantaged sections of society. They are more likely to live in the most deprived areas, to experience poor housing and overcrowding, to have higher levels of poverty[[1]](#footnote-2), unemployment and ill health[[2]](#footnote-3) than the general population. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority communities, who have experienced higher infection and mortality rates than the white population.

Despite these disadvantages, there is extensive evidence of the relatively low level of take-up of support services by people from the Pakistani communities[[3]](#footnote-4). The barriers to accessing support include challenges similar to those faced by a range of minoritized groups such as: language and communication difficulties; a lack of awareness or information about where to go to for help; and concerns that services will not understand or be responsive to the family’s religion and culture. Research specifically with Pakistani families has identified fear of ‘officialdom’, worries about the stigma of being seen to need help, and anxiety about opposition from extended family members or community.

**2.3. The Pakistani Muslim community also faces systemic racism and Islamophobia both in wider society and within services and institutions**

There is increasing recognition of systemic racism[[4]](#footnote-5) within mainstream services and institutions. This ranges across a spectrum from overt and deliberate discrimination at one end through to unintentional acts of ignorance at the other. A common example is professionals confusing equality with similar treatment (as in, ‘we treat all our children the same here’).

Alongside the racism experienced by all non-white people, Pakistani Muslims are living in a wider culture of growing Islamophobia. 88% of hate crimes are racially or religiously motivated and Muslim adults are the group most likely to be victims. This is not improving: in the month after Britain voted to leave the EU, police recorded a 41% increase in racial or religious hate crimes. As with systemic racism, Islamophobia can be viewed on a spectrum with hate crime at one end and unintended ignorance and insensitivity at the other.

Within the Rotherham context, the continuing media coverage, political statements and public debates surrounding the CSE inquiries have brought the issues of racism and Islamophobia into sharp relief. The pervasive and persistent atmosphere of anger, blame, fear and mistrust inevitably heightens the barriers between the Pakistani community and local services.

**2.4. There are even greater barriers to support for Pakistani victims/survivors of child sexual abuse**

Children from South Asian (including Pakistani) backgrounds have particularly low rates of representation in safeguarding services. Despite evidence that abuse, including sexual abuse, occurs in all communities, the number of children identified and supported from the Pakistani community is very low.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Recent research based on interviews with mainly BAME practitioners[[6]](#footnote-7) highlighted the barriers in access to support for victims/survivors of sexual abuse from minoritized groups. These include ‘internal barriers’ such as:

* **Lack of understanding and awareness of the concept of child sexual abuse**: some victims and survivors may be less able to name their experience as abuse because of a lack of knowledge about sex and consent. If sex is a taboo subject, talk of sexual abuse can be prohibited.
* **Pressure to conform to gendered roles**. Gender expectations make it difficult for both female and male victims of sexual abuse in some communities to talk about their experiences. For example, expectations around sexual ‘purity’ prompt some South Asian girls and young women experiencing abuse to feel shame or fear that they will be blamed for the abuse. Boys and young men who are sexually abused by males may feel conflicted or confused about their sexuality, particularly if being gay is considered a sin in their culture. Patriarchal gender roles and the subordination of women and children can lead to disclosures not being taken seriously. Due to this, if a male perpetrator denies the abuse they may be believed over the victim.
* **Fear of being disbelieved or ignored**. Even where a child knows they have been sexually abused, they may not tell anyone because they fear their parents and community will disbelieve or refuse to accept their disclosure. This fear may be greater if the perpetrator holds a position of power in the community.
* **Pressure within families and communities to maintain honour and prevent shame.** While children of all ethnicities may feel individual shame and stigma after experiencing child sexual abuse, these feelings may be amplified by ideas of family/ community honour and shame. Children internalise shame and blame themselves, remaining silent to protect their family’s honour. Disclosure can lead to repercussions from the community, including being threatened, attacked or ostracised. This silences victims and they may withdraw their disclosure. Perpetrators may prey on the importance of maintaining honour to threaten and blackmail victims into silence.[[7]](#footnote-8)

External barriers to disclosure and accessing support services include:

* **Poverty and insecure immigration status** Disclosure of child sexual abuse may be particularly difficult in communities living in extreme poverty, and families with an uncertain immigration status are unlikely to seek help because of fears of deportation
* **Limited awareness of support services and inability to access them** Support services are not always visible and accessible – particularly to people who do not speak English fluently.
* **Lack of trust in services**. Perceptions and experiences of racism, discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion and cultural insensitivity lead to a distrust of statutory agencies. This distrust may also affect people’s willingness to engage with voluntary-sector support services.
* **Lack of cultural understanding in statutory agencies and service providers**. Agencies (including the police, social services and schools) and service providers may display behaviours based on culturally insensitive attitudes. These may be reinforced by a lack of diversity in the workforce.
* **Failure to recognise and take account of cultural issues and experiences**. Appropriate support cannot be provided by services which assume that victims and survivors of abuse from minority ethnic backgrounds face the same issues and pressures as those from white British backgrounds. Services also need to take account of intersecting experiences arising from race, gender and disability which compound the challenges faced by minoritized children and young people.

**2.5. Despite these barriers, evidence suggests that support can be provided through targeted, culturally appropriate services**

Evidence suggests that key features of a more effective and responsive system of support include:

* **Having workers from the community**. In order to raise awareness of child sexual abuse in communities, workers need to first understand the whole lived experience of those communities: how it feels to be Black, or Asian or Muslim and the discrimination and oppression and trauma that can be experienced by just existing, as well as the impact of abuse. It is vital that staff reflect the community the service wants to reach and speak the languages those communities speak.
* **Working with the community to build trust.** Even with staff from the same community, it takes time to develop trust and often involves demonstrating that workers can be relied on to provide support and advocacy across a range of issues, not just child sexual abuse. Trust is built through relationships with individual workers and by those workers building reputations for being safe, trustworthy and helpful. Becoming well known in a community means that engagement is built incrementally through word of mouth.
* **Addressing unconscious bias and assumptions.** Professionals need to be aware of cultural nuances in the communities they serve and the priorities for the children and families affected by abuse. The concept of ‘cultural competence’ is a contested one with some arguing that it is impossible for any single practitioner to be fully conversant with the culture of all those they may find themselves working with. However, it is reasonable to expect practitioners to be aware of the main cultural issues to consider when working within their patch and to exercise ‘professional curiosity’ with the people they work with.
* **Providing safe accessible spaces.** Victims/survivors from the Pakistani community are likely to be reluctant to be seen accessing support from services associated with child abuse. Gender, as well as ethnicity, needs to be considered, with access to same sex workers likely to be important. It should also be considered that not all victims/survivors will feel comfortable talking to workers from their own community.
* **Developing preventive work including outreach into the Muslim community** which includes awareness-raising with families and the wider community, support for parents in communicating with their children about difficult and ‘taboo’ topics. It is essential for men as well as women to be ‘part of the conversation’ around safeguarding children and people hearing about child sexual abuse from those in their own cultures and communities who have lived experience can be very powerful. Through this it becomes possible to challenge attitudes which are victim-blaming, question gendered expectations and ideas about honour and shame. However, to do this requires considerable experience and ‘cultural expertise’. Understanding Islamic terms and concepts is essential for working in Muslim communities and building relationships through local Mosques is useful in reaching a large section of the community. Faith leaders can have an important role to play. Having a shared faith is often critical to engaging leaders and this can cut across ethnic and national boundaries.
* **Working with schools** to help them support their Muslim students effectively. Given their access to children and young people, schools play a key role in talking to children and young people about healthy and unhealthy relationships and providing appropriate information and support to young people. However, they can only do this effectively for their Muslim students if they have sufficient awareness of their culture and religion and are sensitive to the challenges faced by young people today.

**3. What is Tamkeen aiming to achieve?**

Reflecting the evidence summarised above, Tamkeen developed a ‘theory of change’ to articulate their priority outcomes and actions within the Rotherham context. The ToC summarises the **challenges** Tamkeen is aiming to address as follows:

* Within a social context which includes racism and anti-Muslim prejudice, professionals often overlook or under-estimate the needs of Muslim children and stereotype their families. This results in inadequate support around child sexual abuse.
* Muslim children are less likely than other children to have the kind of relationships with professionals that can sometimes facilitate disclosure and ensure appropriate support. Schools don’t always provide opportunities for this to occur.
* Muslim families don’t always know enough about child sexual abuse and services and/or don’t trust what is available. The long-term stigma which sometimes affects victims in Muslim communities can be a further barrier to disclosure.
* Services/professionals have not collaborated well with Muslim families affected by child sexual abuse.
* Specialist services do not always provide well for Muslim children who have been abused and their families.

The ultimate **outcomes** Tamkeen aims to achieve are that:

* Muslim communities and services work collaboratively to protect and support children and families affected by child sexual abuse.
* Services, schools and professionals understand, and challenge, racism and anti-Muslim prejudice and their practice is culturally sensitive and religiously appropriate.
* Muslim children have safe spaces and more trusting relationships with professionals to enable them to disclose/share concerns/access support re sexual abuse.

Tamkeen’s **activities** to work towards the above outcomes fall into three main strands:

**Strand 1 – Schools focussed work:** In-reach activities (to include drop-in sessions for students, support to parents, consultation to staff) in priority schools, along with support to other Rotherham Muslim parents and students where there is an identified need.

**Strand 2 – Community focussed:** Groupwork with girls, boys, women and men in the Muslim community in order to:

a) Identify evidence of need for safeguarding information and support

b) Raise awareness and challenge taboos, myths and behaviours

c) Develop a network of ‘champions’ to cascade safe conversations about child sexual abuse.

**Strand 3 – Service and systems focussed:** Share the learning about how to effectively engage with Muslim communities and provide well for Muslim children and families. Identify and pilot high quality training for professionals on these issues.

**4. What has Tamkeen done so far and what is being learned?**

Although Tamkeen has been working in the community for some time, it was not until Autumn 2021 that the project had established its full complement of workers along with a team manager. Despite this, Tamkeen has been successful in many of the milestones set to be achieved by March 2022.

**4.1. Work in schools**

**Intended milestone by March 2022: A visible presence has been established in three schools and Rotherham college and students/parents/staff are engaged with the project, and, a clear core message, strategy and offer for other schools has been developed and 6 potential partner schools have been identified.**

Tamkeen has developed work in three schools and Rotherham college. The most established relationship has been achieved with **St Bernard’s High School**. This is a Catholic faith school with a significant proportion of Muslim students – around 20% of the total school population but higher in the younger age groups. The school was receptive to the approach from Tamkeen from the start. Perhaps because of its faith base, there was a recognition of the importance of the religious lives of their students and the school was keen to offer their students positive role models (particularly a Muslim man).

“We don’t know enough about Islam, so we saw Tamkeen as a bit of a bridge between our Muslim students and us.” (School manager)

Tamkeen’s work in the school started with lunchtime drop-in sessions for groups of young people. One of the early lessons was that single sex groups work better. The girls requested this, but workers had observed that both girls and boys talk in a more relaxed and meaningful way in single sex groups. The discussions are facilitated by the Tamkeen workers following the topics raised by young people themselves. Many of their concerns have focused on the experience of being Muslim in the school, including a sense that they are treated differently by some teachers. An example is of a teacher contacting parents to address an issue rather than discussing it directly with the student. One instance involved a boy who had told a member of school staff that he had been sent an inappropriate image on his phone. The school raised it with his parents who confiscated the student’s phone – thereby punishing him for raising a concern. Tamkeen workers intervened to explain that the boy’s disclosure was a good thing.

As the trust between young people and Tamkeen workers has developed it has been possible for some young people to drop their ‘cool exterior’ and to talk about things that worry them. Discussions have covered a whole range of topics: parental/school expectations, crises of faith, family problems, discipline at home, teachers’ attitudes, British values, bereavement and loss and boundaries in relationships. Young people have talked about the challenges of growing up as a young Muslim – wanting to comply with the expectations of their faith whilst wanting a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship ‘like everyone else’; wanting to maintain the approval of their parents whilst wanting to distance themselves from their parents’ culture when at school. They have also been able to discuss issues of racism and how to address them. For example, young people were upset about the negative portrayal of Islam in school and that whenever Muslims were mentioned it was in the context of terrorism (e.g. a school assembly focused on 9/11). Tamkeen has been able to talk about this with the school and help them plan to share positive stories about Muslims and their faith.

“We have a Respect programme in school which covers issues like bullying, internet safety etc. We try to keep it very general and inclusive, but it may not always feel like that if you in a minority group.” (School manager)

Discussions with students have also enabled them to challenge each other. An example is of a girl who was told to take her scarf off in class – she was wearing it round her neck. She placed it on her head and told the teacher that it was for religious reasons, and she shouldn’t be asked to remove it. Later, when the student was outside, she was wearing the scarf round her neck again and the teacher challenged her about it. In the group session the girl began by claiming the teacher was being racist but when challenged by other young people she admitted that she was ‘just winding the teacher up’.

Another lesson being learned is that it takes time to build up sufficient trust with young people for them to disclose deeper concerns. For example, students will often talk about issues of mental health, drugs and even sexual abuse but only in relation to other young people not themselves. Tamkeen is making one to one support available to young people who want to talk, but the school has concerns about the extent to which students should be allowed to come out of class to do this and at lunch time students are unlikely to want to be seen seeking help.

St Bernard’s school are very positive about the work of Tamkeen and have taken a number of lessons on board – for example, they have recruited more ethnic minority tutors and have staff willing to attend training by Barnardo’s. They are keen to retain Tamkeen’s input and would like to be able to refer individual young people for support.

“Our contact with Tamkeen has been fabulous. Mohammed has been a great facilitator of student voice… The strongest message was that students wanted more recognition of their identity as Muslim young people.” (School manager)

A primary school approached by Tamkeen is **Thornhill**, a very diverse school with a large proportion of minority ethnic children.

“We have 311 children on our roll with 36 different languages spoken”. (School manager)

It is also a school whose pupils were impacted by the CSE cases, with families of both victims and perpetrators connected to the school. Despite this, the progress of Tamkeen’s work has been described as more difficult, with the school initially expressing the view that issues of faith and race are not relevant to children of their age. They were also concerned about Muslim children being singled out for extra support and the view was expressed that Muslims ‘look after their own’:

“The Muslim families are very supportive with each other, and they have really close networks in the community. We have children here that are much for isolated than them”. (School manager)

The school has been reluctant for Tamkeen to support children on a one to one basis but has allowed them to have a drop-in at the end of the day when parents come to collect their children. This has not been ideal, although it has enabled Tamkeen workers to hear some concerns from parents as well as children. This has included parents who feel that they are treated differently for socio-economic reasons – a feeling that school staff have negative attitudes towards families receiving free school meals, for example. Tamkeen is taking a ‘softly softly’ approach to the work in this school and making positive interventions that are valued by school staff. For example, Tamkeen workers noticed that there were few reading books in school which reflected ethnic and cultural diversity, so they donated 50 such books to the school library. They have also worked with the school and its student council on their new bullying policy.

Despite the challenges, the school is positive about the input of Tamkeen.

“I know the community well and chat to parents at the gate every day so there have not been many surprises (from Tamkeen) but it has been reassuring…We have two Muslim teachers and six teaching assistants but they are all female so it’s been good to have a Muslim man around”. (School manager)

The third school that Tamkeen has worked in is **Clifton**. Again, drop-in sessions have been offered in school, but so far there has been only limited take-up so Tamkeen is considering what other approaches may work.

More recently, Tamkeen has begun working in **Rotherham college**. This started with a survey of students to identify their needs, with sessions held for young men and women in the canteen. It is early days but already Tamkeen have identified and raised some issues with the college, notably the provision of prayer space which is currently very inadequate.

Young people have said they mainly need help in communicating with their parents. They have expressed worries about their parents not understanding how different it is to grow up as a Muslim young person today, and talked about feelings of conflict between their identity as Muslims and their identity as young people who want to the same things as other young people. At 16/17 they are very aware of drugs and alcohol which their parents believe only become issues once they are at university.

“Young women have talked about feeling pressured into relationships, not knowing how to say ‘no’, being ‘blackmailed’ because photos have been shared… One young man has talked about being worried about his mental health but feels that his parents would view it as less stigmatising for him to be exorcised by the Imam than to go to a counsellor.” (Tamkeen worker)

These are all conversations that young people really need to have but can’t have with parents or at the Mosque. However, they need a safe space for long enough to build trust. For now, young people are talking more about issues in the third person or raising hypothetical worries to check out what Tamkeen staff say. They are also starting to turn up at the Barnardo’s office so it seems likely that more issues will be raised.

**4.2. Work with the Muslim community**

**Intended milestones by March 2022: A strategy for awareness raising in Muslim communities has been developed and piloted; Muslim parents are contacting Tamkeen for support and advice**

Good progress is being made in developing awareness raising within the Muslim community and with both parents and children. Tamkeen has been offering a women’s group for some time and now also provides a group for men. These have both proved to be extremely popular, indicating that Pakistani parents will respond if offered culturally appropriate opportunities.

**The women’s group** has been running for longer and offers some important lessons about engagement. The workers deliberately run activity sessions (crafts, baking etc) as a safe vehicle for conversations.

“When I was first involved in a project to raise awareness in the Muslim community, we developed an information pack. It was based on a generic pack for ‘parents’ and we added in Muslim case studies. It looked great and I was rather pleased with it until we showed it to some Muslim parents, and they ran a mile. It was way too much for them. It scared them to death. So, we packed it away and ran an arts and crafts class instead because we recognized that what was needed was a way to have safe, non-threatening conversations and that meant first establishing relationships of trust.

Craft activities are non-threatening. They provide an easy, relaxed way to be alongside others and to join in conversations or just listen without being under pressure to express an opinion or talk about yourself. People get to check each other out and as a group becomes more comfortable, and confidence in the worker increases, it becomes possible to talk about more challenging topics or more personal experiences. You don’t start off with an agenda, but by session six the crafts are ignored, and everyone wants to know ‘what are we talking about today?’” (Tamkeen worker)

Most people find it easier to relate to specific, human stories than to abstract concepts such as ‘safeguarding’ or ‘gender-based violence’ so examples and case studies are great starting points for discussions. It matters that these are about other people like them: that they can relate to the feelings and the dilemmas of a grandmother who doesn’t speak much English, or a teenager who is struggling with racism at school.

Trusted relationships and appreciating people’s cultures and beliefs are key to engaging with any group of people about sensitive issues. However, it’s also important to understand the particular sensitivities and anxieties that are aroused when talking about child sexual abuse in Muslim communities. There are issues such as the ‘shame’ that can attach to victims and their families which makes disclosure such a frightening prospect. There are numerous ways in which trust and engagement is also built when people feel their culture and the importance of their faith is recognized.

“During lockdown we sent out Muslim board games that families could play together and designed a Ramadan fasting calendar for Suhoor and Iftar (opening and closing times). These were small gestures that were hugely appreciated by people already involved and which also serve to build the reputation and profile of the project in the wider community so that Tamkeen is seen as being ‘for us’.” (Tamkeen worker)

We interviewed a participant in the women’s group whose perspective provides some important insights. Nazia (not her real name) is both a longstanding member of Rotherham’s Muslim community and someone with a professional background in children’s social care. So, for her, the safeguarding issues being discussed were very familiar, but she was able to describe how special it was that these were being discussed in the context of a group of Muslim women:

**The perspective of a women’s group participant**

“*I found out about the women’s group meetings from someone I knew and thought it sounded interesting. I’d never been in a group of Asian women talking about such things before… Mariam was great and the activities enabled the women to relax and get comfortable: it took the fear out of it and helped people open up and ask questions that they’d never have done in a more formal context.*

*I particularly liked how Mariam began with what was familiar to a group of Muslim women. She started off with Islam and what the Koran teaches Muslims about caring for children and being good parents and how children need to be kept safe - in other words, how safeguarding relates to faith. She let them know that this is familiar territory, just the language around it is different. She also encourages them to talk about their own experiences. For example, one woman said her daughter had her headscarf pulled off by a boy in her class and the teacher took no notice. She didn’t know how to deal with it or how to advise her daughter. The group talked about how violated such an incident would make them feel, how it was humiliating and that it was a kind of assault – and that a teacher should understand what it meant to the girl and not ignore it. Starting off from such things was helpful because it established understanding and that led to being able to talk about more sensitive issues. Mariam emphasized that the same was true in families and the importance of talking to your children about little, everyday things because that would make it easier for them to come to you naturally with bigger concerns.*

*Being in a group with Muslim women from different cultures was really interesting. There were Arabic speakers from Yemen and Somalia as well as Pakistani women. There were language issues but the women ‘translated’ for each other and found there were often similar words for the same things in different languages and that there were no words in Urdu or Punjabi for some concepts like ‘grooming’ but they could find a common language for talking about it.*

*Women with less than ‘perfect’ English often struggle when there are language difficulties, especially with authority figures, and find it really hard to say what they want - to teachers, for example. They are easily made to feel lesser, embarrassed and insignificant. I myself remember going to a parents evening and asking for extra help for my son as he was struggling with writing essays. The teacher responded: “What do you know about writing essays?’ It takes a lot of preparation to empower women to deal with schools.”*

Nazia thinks it’s important to support both parents and young people, but she points out that their needs are different:

*“They are starting in such different places. The young person’s first language is usually English – they often want to talk to their parents but don’t know how – sometimes they want to protect them too. Having a place they can discuss things with adults like Mariam who ‘bridge the gap’ is really helpful especially because there is usually no-one they can talk to in school either. Then they can talk more easily with their parents. Also, there are issues of loss for girls (and women) if a father or brother/son is accused or prosecuted. There is still some denial of guilt, but I hear a lot of people in the community say they are glad those men got caught because it has changed things. They say ‘it’s enough’. Men cannot do whatever they want any more and we need to take responsibility for our boys and what kind of men they should become. They want to know how to prevent abuse and how they should report things. So, it’s a good time for a project like this in Rotherham and empowering women and girls to speak about abuse and to know their rights is really important.”*

It's also important to consider the different needs of men and women, of boys and girls:

*“It's an issue for men too. Not just Muslim men of course but across the world for hundreds of years. Many of the men in this community were never taught except that they are men, and men can do what they want, so they don’t know how to teach their sons. But they know there are dangers for their sons of being in serious trouble and wrecking their lives as well as others – and that it’s not just their daughters they need to protect. If the project can help men too that’s even better.”*

**The men’s group**

There is heightened sensitivity to discussing child sexual abuse in many Muslim communities because of racist responses to highly publicized cases of child sexual exploitation involving some Muslim men as perpetrators. These have left communities feeling demonised and defensive. This has been very apparent in the work of the men’s groupwhere the workers have had to overcome considerable suspicion.

“They think the mic is on on our laptop or phone so we now leave these outside. They even checked out the smoke detector – making a joke of it but still quite serious. We keep explaining our confidentiality policy and we write the notes and lay them on the table so they can review and delete. We provide constant reassurance about the motive of why we are there”. (Tamkeen worker)

At first the men seemed to feel like they were ambassadors for the community and wanted to show it in the best possible light. It has taken a lot of trust building before it was possible to talk about Muslim children being exploited and how as parents they might know that something was going on.

“We get them to reflect on their own actions as parents and how they would deal with it if abuse was an issue. Many have never thought about it before. We used research on sexual harassment in schools (girls called slut/touched/photos shared etc) and they were really shocked”. (Tamkeen worker)

Many of the men started out being defensive about their relationships with their children saying things like ‘my child is so close they’d tell me straight away.’ Tamkeen workers got them to think about how their parental expectations affect how open children feel they can be.

“It got their attention and they wanted to learn how to make it easier. They have learned more about what children are going through and how little they understand their lives”. (Tamkeen worker)

Concerns raised by fathers include drugs, though they frequently talk about it in terms of it affecting ‘other people’s children’. They remain somewhat more cautious in discussions about sexual abuse/exploitation.

“Will talk about a relative but not own family/household: pride, dignity, privacy – will need 1 to 1 space for that in their own time”. (Tamkeen worker)

Interestingly, despite the challenging content of the discussions, more men are getting in touch with Tamkeen and want to get involved.

“Parents are now saying to us ‘You’ve highlighted the issues – don’t leave us alone now to find our own way. We’d be lost. Stay with us.” (Tamkeen worker)

We interviewed a group of five men who are part of the men’s group. Their ages range from 28 to 50 and all are dads. We started by asking them why they wanted to come to a men’s group. All agreed that they wanted to gain more knowledge about how to safeguard their children:

**Views from the men’s group**

*“I wanted to gain more knowledge, how to keep children safe - on-line for example, especially with technologies advancing. I also wanted to play a part in raising more general awareness in the community.”*

*“How to spot issues. How to pick up the signs.”*

They also commented on how important it was that the group was being run by people they trusted and this this was vital to overcoming their initial doubts:

*“Initially I was very reserved about the whole idea – not entirely trusting of anyone in authority. Hadn’t really heard of Barnardo’s. After the first session I realized it was going to be good – I learned something straightaway.”*

*“I already knew Mohammed – he’s well known in the community – that’s been important – we knew we could trust him. Also, we’ve built up the trust in the group as well as with him. We started off cautious with each other but now we can talk about anything. We’ve told other men about the group and that’s brought others along”*

Asked if they thought they had gained more knowledge through the group, the men were clear that they definitely had, and gave several examples, not just of safeguarding but of wider wellbeing issues such as mental health:

*“I was shocked at how many kids have mental health issues. I want to learn more and how to support them.”*

*“I was not at all aware of these things. I thought mental health problems mainly affected older people – I had no clue how much children suffered from it. Also, I’m interested in getting a better understanding of how to help – not just medication…. If I hadn’t come to this group I wouldn‘t have thought twice about it.”*

Child sexual exploitation and other forms of exploitation have been extensively discussed in the group and the men felt they were much more aware of the signs:

*“We’ve talked about the signs of exploitation – things to look out for. It makes you pay more attention to things. County lines and grooming for crime. And these things do happen in our area. It’s made me spot kids wearing designer clothes, smoking dope – I wouldn’t have even noticed these things before.”*

*“I used to think that if a young person was being exploited they’d show it by being upset and down – I hadn’t realized that it could be the opposite – they could seem to be really happy cos they’ve got money etc but still be being exploited.”*

*“Previously I’d be inclined to blame my child if they got into trouble – why were you there, what have you been doing – but now I realize they may be being exploited. They are subject to such a lot of peer pressure – we’re now more aware of supporting our young people and what to look out for.”*

The group has not shied away from some difficult topics, including what it might be like to grow up as a gay young person in the Muslim community:

*“I’m more aware of issues about the LGBT community. I didn’t have any knowledge of this before. We need to understand - we need to support. As a Muslim I wouldn’t be happy if my child was gay, but we do need to think about it and be supportive. We have to take what they say to us seriously. They may be even more vulnerable. Being angry would make it worse.”*

*“Gay young people have it tough – they get prejudice from both side of the community”.*

The men talked to us about some of the issues Muslim young people face today, and how these have changed since they were growing up:

*“We thought it was worse for us when we were young – we were really outsiders – but it feels as if this feeling is coming back for our kids…*

*It’s a hard situation cos they really want to fit in – but they also want to comply with the religion – it can cause such a lot of anxiety even when they’re really young – 7 or 8.”*

*“Use of mobile phones – really young children have the phones and they’ve got apps which we wouldn’t have a clue about. We’ve learned about privacy settings. They sit with their headphones on they could be talking to anyone! What sort of pictures are they posting and receiving? In our days bullying was face to face and physical – today it’s more on-line and it’s worse.”*

The men we spoke to were particularly concerned about how their children were supported/treated at school.

*“When my nephews and nieces have an issue at school– they tend to get blamed. So that makes them not say anything”.*

*“A school recently brought a dog in and [our children] were petrified. Dogs are not appropriate pets – there are religious barriers[[8]](#footnote-9). The school just said they’re living in England now and should get on with it. One parent is having to withdraw their child. It’s an academy as well so you can’t even go to the councillor. There are lots of Muslim children in that school, but the views of parents are not being respected. I thought we were way past the ‘this is England’ response.”*

We asked the men what they thought had been the most useful thing about coming to the group. The two main things were gaining the awareness and confidence to talk about issues within their families and community, and finding out about other sources of support:

*“It means I can go out there and support my family and friends to help them spot issues before it gets too late. I go home and talk to my wife and she talks to others so we get the messages to the community”.*

*“For me the most important thing has been to ensure that my kids have someone to talk to as they’re growing up- building relationships so they can talk to me as they grow up. My parents never talked to me about these things.”*

*“It’s helped to open up conversations at the mosque – letting young people know that they can talk to us if they have issues”.*

*“Who to go to for help including Barnardo’s – who to speak to.”*

*“Now I feel I can use Barnardo’s if I became aware of an issue. I wouldn’t want to get involved myself because of it being my own community.”*

*“Our community don’t trust the police. It’s safer for our child to go to Barnardo’s. The important thing is to get the child out of the situation.”*

*“It’s important for this work to carry on – the issues are ongoing. We know in this group that we can be comfortable about talking. Our voices are heard.”*

Another key element of Tamkeen’s strategy to reach the community is to develop work in some of the Rotherham Mosques. There are 13 Mosques in Rotherham with attendance by 150-200 children per Mosque, so they have huge potential in support of safeguarding. However, not all Imams are supportive – they believe that children get enough safeguarding information at school and that their role is to educate children on the Quran.

“We are getting into the Mosques with boys and girls but also need to do more education of Mosque teachers and committees because the basic safeguarding they get is not enough. Mosque teachers also don’t understand the life young people are leading and the pressures they are under.” (Tamkeen worker)

However, some Mosques have been receptive and enabled Tamkeen to offer both boys and girls groups. This has been helpful, not least because the Barnardo’s base is not necessarily the ideal place to run groups because parents associate it with ‘problem families’.

**4.3. Work with services and systems**

**Intended milestone by March 2022: Training has been piloted with Barnardo’s staff and other specialist services in Rotherham.**

The development of a training resource for professionals has been under discussion since the start of our evaluation, with one of the planned activities being the development and delivery of a ‘train the trainer’ approach whereby staff from other teams and agencies would receive training and then cascade the learning to their colleagues. Given the range of other priorities for the project and the fact that Tamkeen did not have a full complement of staff until the Autumn of 2021, it is not surprising that the development of this resource has yet to reach fruition (although drafts of a training workshop have been produced).

From what parents and workers from the Muslim community have told us, it seems that it may be very helpful if Tamkeen could play a role in raising the awareness of other services – particularly schools. However, this is not a straightforward task. The evidence for changing people’s attitudes and behaviours through training is weak – even when the training materials and delivery are excellent. If the training materials/delivery are not so great they can do more harm than good. It may be that within the limited resources of Tamkeen, the most effective way of influencing systems and practice is by providing support and assistance to other services on a case by case basis – for example, by continuing to do what Tamkeen does already in supporting schools on specific issues as they arise. In this way, trust and respect are built up and practice is changed gradually.

However, if a training initiative is what is decided upon, then are several factors which it would be helpful to take into account:

* Who is the audience? If training is aimed at changing practice then it needs to be tightly focused on the issues of relevance to the specific audience e.g. if the training is for school staff it needs to address the issues which arise in schools (rather than broader community engagement etc)
* What are they likely to know already? It can be useful in designing materials to do some work with a sample of potential participants to find out what they do and don’t know already.
* How much time will you have? There’s never enough time to cover everything so it’s important to think about the absolute priority messages you want to get across
* Who will deliver? Workers who are great with parents and children are not necessarily great trainers (though they can be both!). Trainers need to have good facilitation skills, be clear communicators, be able to manage difficult issues which arise in training and have credibility. In terms of credibility they ideally need to be from the Muslim community themselves.

**5. The Tamkeen model of practice**

“There are two fundamental starting points for enabling members of Muslim communities to engage in conversations about child sexual abuse. The first is to build relationships: because this is not a subject you talk about with a stranger. The second is to appreciate where people are coming from: so understanding Muslim perspectives on the world and how people think about the self, the family and honour is crucial.” (Tamkeen worker)

**Tamkeen as a catalyst for communication**



What has emerged from the work of Tamkeen so far is that there is a need for greater communication between parents, young people, schools, other professionals and the wider community. This is likely to be true for all children and young people but for Muslim children, caught between cultures and facing issues that neither their parents nor teachers can fully understand, the need is even greater. And what is evident from the experience of Tamkeen is that there is an appetite for this communication, particularly from young people and parents.

The diagram above illustrates Tamkeen’s role as a catalyst for communication. Because Tamkeen has earned the trust of the Muslim community it is uniquely placed to create channels for dialogue between Muslim students and school staff, between parents and their children and between parents and other professional services.

It is evident from the school staff, workers and parents that we’ve spoken to that Tamkeen is already acting as an important channel of communication, but the size of the task should not be under-estimated and building dialogue is a long-term endeavour. The evidence also suggests that there are several factors that need to be in place for Tamkeen and similar services to be most effective. We discuss these in the final section below.

**6. What are the implications for future development?**

There are several implications of what has been learned so far for the future development of Tamkeen.

**1. Tamkeen has to be seen as a long-term initiative**

Effective support for Muslim children and young people can only be provided on a foundation of trust with the Muslim community as a whole. This takes time to build and needs a long-term commitment to sustain. It is likely that trust between Barnardo’s and the Muslim community would evaporate very quickly if Tamkeen’s work stopped.

**2. Muslim families are only likely to accept support for individual children and young people from Tamkeen in the context of ongoing trust being built and maintained with the community**

If Tamkeen wants to develop its work to provide more individual support to children, it is likely that this will need to run alongside ongoing groupwork for other young people and parents as well as continuing relationship building in the community. The evidence is clear that parents are unlikely to accept support from services they don’t know or trust.

**3. Support for young people and families affected by child sexual abuse needs to be offered as part of a broader range of support and advocacy**

If a central priority for Tamkeen is to increase support to families affected by child sexual abuse, then this is most likely to succeed within a broader ‘offer’ of support and advocacy. Muslim communities face many challenges and are generally not well supported by mainstream services across a whole range of issues. They are more likely to accept support around safeguarding from a service which also shows itself willing to support them with other concerns and to advocate on their behalf with other agencies.

**4. There needs to be an ongoing commitment to staffing the project with workers from the Muslim/Pakistani community**

It is evident that the success of Tamkeen so far has been achieved via the work being carried out by staff from the local community. Direct, personal knowledge and experience is what has enabled the project to get off the ground and without this there would be little chance of further development.

**5. The development of Tamkeen needs to be based on a thorough understanding of intersectional inequalities**

Tamkeen workers are not just dealing with issues of race and culture but also gender and socio-economic inequalities. Growing up as a Muslim boy is different to growing up as a Muslim girl, for example. Being gay, lesbian or disabled; having mental health difficulties or questions about faith intersect with issues of racism and sexism in young people’s lives and workers need to be able to support young people in dealing with these complexities.

**6. Future development needs to include recognition of the particular challenges faced by staff and managers**

There are some special challenges and dilemmas faced by any worker who is providing support to their own community. When they are a minority ethnic worker in a predominantly white organisation, the challenges can be greater: like the young people they are supporting, they too can find themselves caught between two cultures. They can also find themselves at odds with the ‘usual way of doing things’ within an organisation. It is important for Barnardo’s to recognise this and enable workers to access support including from external projects doing similar work. It is also important to support managers responsible for Barnardos’ venturing into lesser known territory as they can find themselves in the position of making decisions about issues on which they themselves do not have extensive knowledge or expertise. This can be challenging for an organisation, especially if the normal way of doing things is fairly hierarchical. However, we suggest that if Barnardo’s (or any other organisation) is committed to reaching minoritized children and families and working in closer partnership with minoritized communities, then there needs to be careful exploration of how decisions and plans are made, who is involved and consulted and how power and authority are exercised. Challenging inequality always begins with ourselves.

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2. The Kings Fund (2021) The health of people from ethnic minority groups in England, <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/health-people-ethnic-minority-groups-england> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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8. The Prophet Mohammed declared dogs to be unclean and many Muslims consider them to be inappropriate pets to keep in the house. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)