



SUPPORTING SISTERS
supporting, inspiring and paving a better future for women

SUPPORTING SISTERS

ANNUAL REPORT

“Amazing things happen when women help other women.”

KASIA GOSPOŚ

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MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTORS



**Co-director
Samina Azra**



**Co-director
Samra Kanwal**

Reflecting on the past five years, we are amazed by the rapid progression and transformable journey our organization has undergone.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all individuals, both past and present, who have generously devoted their time and efforts willingly to help serve our mission.

We want to express sincere appreciation to our dedicated volunteers. Your hard work and unwavering dedication have been instrumental in our collective success. In November, Supporting Sisters was honoured with the Kings Voluntary Service Award, marking a significant milestone that brought immense joy to us all.

While our core services addressing domestic violence, mental health, and isolation persist, the past year witnessed an expansion of our outreach to the broader Bury community. Collaborating with GMP, we have actively supported vulnerable women and community members, fostering positive relations with the police.

Our sincere thanks go out to our funders and local businesses for their invaluable support through donations and funding, enabling us to carry out our vital activities.

Looking ahead, we are eager to sustain and strengthen our efforts to help transform lives for women in the community.

WELCOME

In this year's annual report, we unveil the remarkable story of Supporting Sisters growth over the past 5 years.

Reflecting on the past five years, I am astounded by the rapid progression and transformable journey our organisation has undergone. Extending my heartfelt gratitude to all individuals, both past and present, who have generously devoted their time and efforts willingly.

A special acknowledgment goes to our devoted volunteers. Your unwavering dedication and hard work have played a pivotal role in our collective success. In November, we were honoured to receive the King's Voluntary Service Award, a recognition akin to an MBE, marking a significant milestone that filled us with immense joy.

Behind every achievement is an entire community that enables our work—a community comprising dedicated staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters who believe in a better world for women.

While our core services addressing domestic violence, mental health, and isolation remain steadfast, the past year witnessed an expansion of our outreach to the broader Bury community.

Through collaboration with GMP, we actively supported vulnerable women and community members, cultivating positive relations with the police.

Heartfelt thanks are extended to our funders and local businesses for their invaluable support through donations and funding, enabling us to carry out vital activities.

As we look to the future, we're enthusiastic about sustaining and fortifying our collaborative efforts.

The journey ahead holds promise, and we are committed to furthering our impact in the years to come.



Our Volunteers



Sana



Humera



Nosheen



Jannat



64 HOURS OF VOLUNTEERING TIME



531 PEOPLE USED OUR SERVICE
ATTENDED ACTIVITIES 2023

“I applied to be a volunteer at Supporting Sisters as I have always worked with women and children.. I wanted to use my skills and learn new ones that might help others in need.”

I loved the MHFA training. We have some great ongoing support and training which is always, really helpful and gives us the opportunity to develop ourselves and meet other volunteers.”

“I have learnt so much from volunteering at Supporting Sisters We have a great team of dedicated, passionate women who enjoy helping others. They're lovely to work with, I feel proud to be part of a support group that changes people's lives.”

“I started volunteering with supporting sister because I was very under confident and feeling lonely. Supporting sister have helped me overcome my anxiety and under confidence.”

“Having reached a certain point in my personal life, being married and had children, I wanted to share something of myself which might bring benefit to someone else. I came to use the services at Supporting Sisters wanting to meet new people and make new friends.”

I began with the Chit Chat mornings and the walking on the weekends which was brilliant for my mental health. I was able to take part in training in mental health awareness and domestic violence and lead on the walking group, 3 years on and I'm still here!

“When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.”

MAYA ANGELOU

“Alone we can
do so little;
together we
can do so
much.”

HELEN KELLER

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WHO WE ARE

Supporting Sisters is a women-led organisation dedicated to fostering a positive environment where women can cultivate self-esteem, confidence, and transforms their lives.

Our primary mission is to encourage, enable, and support women in various aspects of life, including learning, employment, life skills, and within the community.

We aim to pave the way for a brighter and more promising future for women, fostering a community where they can thrive and succeed.

WHAT WE DO

In 2023, Supporting Sisters continued its commitment to empowering women through impactful development programs. Our initiatives aimed at fostering social engagement and community cohesion included transformative workshops and training sessions tailored for women in the BAME community.

Specializing in support for vulnerable women aged 18 and above, offering advice and assistance on various critical subjects, such as domestic abuse, housing, government-related matters, mental health, and language services like translating and interpreting.

Throughout the year, our diverse projects successfully empowered vulnerable women, reinforcing our dedication to building resilient and thriving communities.

Awards for All

OUR PROJECT

Supporting Sisters emerged in response to the urgent need for a sanctuary catering to women who had endured domestic violence, offering them solace and support.

The devoted volunteers at Supporting Sisters, recognizing the paramount importance of a secure space, acknowledged the value of providing an outlet for individuals in our community to share their mental health concerns. Collaborating with community members, we successfully established a hate crime hub, bolstered by regular visits from Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

Going beyond its initial purpose, the hub evolved into a versatile venue for projects and meetings. It served as an ideal environment for community gatherings with local council representatives and Members of Parliament.

This multifaceted approach solidified the hub as a central point for various initiatives, magnifying its impact within the community.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback showed the impact the service had on the community. It became clear that this haven had provided numerous individuals with the opportunity to seek and receive crucial assistance and support in delicate and personal matters.

Furthermore, under the guidance of the committed volunteers at Supporting Sisters, many victims of hate crimes and domestic violence found empowerment on their journey toward justice and healing. This profound impact served as motivation to persist in our efforts.

Looking ahead, Supporting Sisters remains steadfast in expanding its support network and strengthening outreach. By nurturing an environment of empathy, trust, and confidentiality, we aspire to empower survivors and equip them with the tools needed to rebuild their lives. Through ongoing collaboration with both community members and authorities, we strive to enhance the effectiveness of our hate crime and mental health initiatives, ensuring that no one faces these challenges alone.

Supporting Sisters firmly upholds the belief in the transformative power of collective action and solidarity. By advocating for those affected by domestic violence and hate crimes, we aspire to build a community where everyone feels safe, valued, and empowered. Through our unwavering commitment to support, we aim to instil hope and inspire positive change, fostering a society that rejects violence, discrimination, and stigma.

Hate Crime Awareness Week

WHAT IS HATE CRIME

The Hate Crime event, held on February 8, 2023, at the Polish Social Centre, marked a pivotal moment for Supporting Sisters in its mission to combat hate crime and foster community awareness. With over 75 attendees, the event discussed the core topics relating to hate crime and the implications it has on the younger generation, including: how to support yourself and other victims of hate crime, laws surrounding hate crime, and forms of hate crime and how to spot them.

Central to the event's success was diversity. It was our aim to actively encourage individuals from all faiths, ethnicities, and backgrounds to engage. The event included different representatives from Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and Christian backgrounds, spanning British, Pakistani, Nepali, Black, African Caribbean, and Arab ethnicities.

We had distinguished guest speakers, including faith ambassadors, Holy Cross College students, and representatives from VCFA, Infinity, and The Polish Social Club, share their compelling personal stories related to hate crime. Their insights proved invaluable, offering attendees an in-depth understanding of hate crime and the legal procedures to deal with it.

Participants were also encouraged to take part in activities, such as creating posters and also engaged in discussions on reporting procedures, providing a secure space for sharing personal experiences.



This collaborative approach fostered a sense of unity, breaking down barriers between diverse groups to help combat hate crime.

The event also opened doors for Supporting Sisters to create a Hate Crime Hub, where individuals can safely report hate crimes witnessed in the community. Supporting Sisters is also in the process of electing hate crime ambassadors from Holy Cross College to help tackle hate crime amongst the younger generation.

The ongoing support from Bury Council, Polish Social Club, Infinity, and Holy Cross College's 4C ambassadors will allow us to hold more events in the future to build a lasting positive change within our communities.

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Funded by VCFA with £1000, Supporting Sisters envisions a future marked by strengthened partnerships with Greater Manchester Police and Bury FaithForum.



International Women's Day

“The world needs strong women. Women who will lift and build others, who will love and be loved, women who live bravely, both tender and fierce, women of indomitable will.”

AMY TENNEY

OUR EVENT

Supporting Sisters organised a successful event this year, celebrating International Women’s Day and drawing 59 attendees. The dedicated team of 8 volunteers planned every detail, from venue selection to entertainment and group activities. The event aimed to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of women in the community over the past year.

Upon arrival, attendees were warmly welcomed and treated to refreshments before being guided to their seats. The event commenced with a line-up of guest speakers delivering inspiring speeches focused on International Women’s Day including crucial themes of women’s empowerment, self-esteem, and confidence.

Drawing from personal experiences, speakers offered valuable advice to help attendees overcome obstacles and flourish in both personal and professional spheres. The speeches encouraged women to navigate challenges with resilience and self-assurance.

Volunteers curated a series of interactive group activities and games aligned with the event’s theme. These tailored activities not only cultivated a sense of friendship among attendees but also served as a platform for sharing personal stories and experiences as women. Witnessing open discussions and a supportive environment, women connected, exchanging valuable insights.

The event left attendees feeling motivated and empowered. The carefully planned activities successfully facilitated meaningful connections, contributing to a memorable and impactful celebration of International Women’s Day.

Attendees overwhelmingly praised the event as a resounding success, expressing gratitude for the impactful experience. Fuelled by this positive feedback, Supporting Sisters is committed to building on this event.

The aim is to expand, inviting more guest speakers to share wisdom and expertise, offering valuable lessons and inspiring stories to a wider audience.

Supporting Sisters foresees future events not just as celebrations but as educational opportunities. These gatherings aim to be platforms for learning, personal growth, and empowerment by uniting women from diverse backgrounds. Through sustained collaboration, Supporting Sisters is committed to uplifting and empowering women for success in all facets of life.

In summary, Supporting Sisters’ International Women’s Day event was a pivotal moment, honouring the achievements of women in the community. The volunteers’ dedication, impactful speeches, engaging activities, and positive feedback marked this as a resounding success. Committed to empowering women, Supporting Sisters eagerly anticipates organising more inspiring events, fostering a community of learning and growth.





Action Together – Walking for Families

OUR JOURNEY

Supporting Sisters started the The "Action Together: Walking for Families" project to help improve the mental health and physical well-being of people living in the community.

Starting in 2022, the project sought to promote physical activity, fitness, and the cultivation of positive mental health and well-being.

Led by a ten-member team, each detail of this project was carefully considered during the planning phase, including travel arrangements, fuel, parking, and meeting points.

Weekly Sunday morning walks were strategically organized at diverse locations to maintain an enjoyable experience. Utilising a WhatsApp broadcast group, participants received timely notifications detailing the walks time and venue, with an option to confirm attendance.

A specified meeting point was established, enabling volunteers to brief participants before each walk. They provided clear guidelines and instructions regarding procedures in the event of someone getting injured or lost.

We welcomed families with children to help foster rare bonding moments and make it easier for parents who couldn't arrange childcare to attend.

Around 27 participants took part in the walks including asylum seekers, allowing them to create stronger bonds within the community. Various scenic spots like Peel Tower, Entwistle Reservoir, Green Booth Reservoir, Elton Reservoir, Heaton Park, Darwen Tower, Dove Stone, and Bolton Abbey served as excellent locations for the ongoing success of this project.

The walks have left a lasting impact on each attendee. Many reported reduced physical discomfort, improved mental health, and decreased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. These weekly walks also forged new friendships!

Despite funding completion, donations aim to sustain this impactful project, fuelled by continued community interest and involvement.

We look forward to continuing to transform lives through this initiative!



Well, I can't thank you enough as I do go for walks on my own and I enjoy my own personal space, but it's been nice having met these women from all different walks of life as it's given me the ability to understand no one is alone. We are all experiencing our own highs and lows but it's good to talk and share our experiences, this has helped me mentally build on myself trust and confidence that anything is possible.

Being able to walk and join this group has given me the physical strength and mental capacity to do more for me without holding myself back, thank you!



Honestly speaking since covid came in I gave up on any form of exercise, I became lazy and eating all the time, watching Netflix. I think it didn't help because we were couped up all the time in the house.

Post covid I realised I was so unfit just walking up the stairs! I'm too embarrassed to go to the gym as I feel paranoid about my weight. When you sent the poster for the walks, I said to myself this is something I would love to do this away from here and in the greenery. I struggled at first but got there and still need to take breaks during the walk, you and the girls keep me going! I feel much better within myself and my mental health.

After the few years I've been through you better than anyone else knows how hard it has been and how my self esteem was at its lowest. Feel all emotional writing this because I feel I've achieved something and my children see the change in me, sorry I'm waffling on.

Thank you for all you do for me and many other women who much need a boost and need encouraging to get fit and feel good.



Asda Cost of Living

THE PROJECT

In Partnership with Asda, this project provided essential aid to 10 vulnerable families struggling with the cost of living crisis.

The project's aim was to support community members facing financial challenges in procuring essential food and household items. Coordinated by a dedicated team of five volunteers, each responsible for two families, the initiative facilitated fortnightly trips to Asda.

Thanks to Asda's backing and committed volunteers, families in need were identified and brought into the Supporting Sisters office for further information.

This project allowed families struggling with the cost of living crisis to purchase nourishing food and household necessities, easing their financial burden.

Families chose food items and other essentials they needed, while volunteers shared money-saving tips, encouraging cost-effective alternatives. This not only enhanced their shopping skills but also maximized the impact of financial aid. The initiative's success lay in empowering families to make informed and affordable choices.

Thanks to the incredible impact of this project on vulnerable families, we're committed to continuing this project in partnership with other companies and organisations to reach more families affected by the cost of living crisis.

Prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 7.0% in the year to January 2024. This was the tenth consecutive month of falls in food inflation, down from 8.0% in December and a recent high of 19.2% in March 2023, which was the highest annual rate seen for over 45 years



4 in 10 (44%) adults said they were buying less food when shopping in the last two weeks.



1 in 25 adults (4%) have reported that their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the past two weeks.

ASDA
Foundation,

Zeal Advocacy

OUR PROJECT

Thanks to our incredible team of volunteers, the Zeal Advocacy project was set up to help individuals improve their mental health and well-being of women within the community.

Organised by a team of 4 dedicated volunteers, we conducted seminars, workshops, and events to help raise awareness around mental health and provide tips to help participants to improve their well-being.

Volunteers from Supporting Sisters played a pivotal role in preparing for the seminar. Leading up to the event, tasks included securing event speakers, promoting the seminar on social media platforms, and utilising word of mouth for wider outreach. Additionally, assessing the number of participants was crucial to choose and reserve a suitable venue for the event.

Women were motivated to engage in diverse skill sessions including poetry, arts and crafts, music, painting, and writing letters to their past selves. Specific time slots were dedicated to group discussions on religion, culture, and individual values.

Given the sensitive nature of the sessions, creating a secure and supportive environment was important. This ensured that participants felt safe to open up about their mental health struggles and well-being during these sessions.

The project's result was empowering women to utilise creative outlets and express their feelings comfortably. The creative sessions helped women develop their confidence and verbalise their thoughts.

Participants in the project, consisting of Pakistani and Arab backgrounds, discovered a shared theme of helping others despite religious and cultural differences. Group discussions not only revealed common beliefs but also allowed individuals to share effective self-care practices for managing stress, anxiety, or depression. Overall, the Supporting Sisters-led project succeeded in positively impacting mental health and well-being.

In the future Supporting Sisters aim to hold more mental health and well-being sessions with the objective of providing help to more of the community in an effort to help improve lives both in the short term and long term.



Supporting Sisters plans to host additional mental health and well-being sessions in the future, with the goal of extending assistance to a broader community. The objective is to enhance lives both in the short term and the long term through continued efforts in mental health support.

Forever Manchester

OUR PROJECT

Supporting Sisters established a central hub to aid individuals struggling with the cost of living crisis. This hub served as a refuge for those facing financial difficulties, particularly those struggling to cover their home heating bills, offering a secure environment during daytime hours. It provided a vital sanctuary, allowing people to spend their time in comfort and warmth, mitigating the stress associated with exorbitant heating costs.

Beyond merely offering a respite from the harsh weather, the hub exceeded expectations by providing refreshments to those in need. Recognising that financial strain often extends beyond utility bills, we sought to address various aspects of the crisis. By supplying refreshments alongside a warm shelter, the organization aimed to alleviate the burdens faced by the community members it served.

The impact of this initiative on Supporting Sisters and the community was nothing short of remarkable. Community feedback was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the difference made by the establishment of an easily accessible, sheltered, and warm space for struggling families and individuals.

The organisation aims to broaden its support to all individuals within the community, including the youth, elderly, disadvantaged, and vulnerable individuals. By providing a secure place to stay during challenging times, we seek to strengthen and uplift the community through this initiative.

Through ongoing efforts, the organization hopes to foster a more resilient and compassionate society where everyone has access to the support and care they deserve, particularly during times of crisis.

King's Award

Receiving the King's award has left us with a profound sense of honour and humility, as we collectively reflect on the recognition bestowed upon our organization.

The acknowledgment of our hard work is truly gratifying and serves as a testament to our commitment.

The nomination itself was a privilege, and winning this prestigious award marks an unforgettable milestone, fuelling our motivation to continue supporting Sisters projects and pursuing our commitment to empowering women.

This achievement has not only inspired our team but has also motivated us to contribute even more to the community.

We offer a diverse range of weekly sessions, including drop-in sessions and arts and crafts activities, fostering social interaction for those who may feel unsupported and isolated in the community.

The recognition bestowed upon Supporting Sisters is attributed to our consistent efforts in addressing hate crime and domestic abuse. Collaborating with Greater Manchester Police, we strive to make a positive impact on both the local community and society at large.

Our organisation serves as a platform for women to engage socially while providing essential support and information on topics such as universal tax credits, housing benefits, council tax, befriending services, domestic abuse, well-being, isolation support, as well as translation and interpretation services.

We are dedicated to creating a meaningful impact and look forward to continuing our work in collaboration with our community and partners.



**The King's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

Community Garden

OUR PROJECT

In collaboration with Bury Council and Greater Manchester Police, we started the garden project to help create a community garden in Bury where different members of the community could come, interact, learn, and integrate in an environment that is safe and climate-friendly.

Our dedicated volunteers and community members helped plan the community garden. We planned regular clean-ups to help keep the garden clean and safe. We also hosted various events at the Community Garden such as weekly workshops for children, tree planting, arts and crafts sessions, and more to help impact the community and increase their knowledge of the outdoors.

In total, 29 adults and 34 children benefited from the weekly sessions that we held at the Community Garden. In these sessions, we got stuck in planting different flowers and made bird feeders and wind chimes to help enhance the garden and its impact on the environment.

We were also able to arrange a day trip to Chesham Woods with parents and children to develop their knowledge of nature and wildlife. We also conducted an activity where children were able to spot and identify birds and insects.

We also held an event to mark the planting of a 'Peace Tree' at our community garden. We welcomed many members of the community and Greater Manchester Police.

In addition to this, we have also been able to receive training via the Wildlife Trust for two of our volunteers on the project.

We also worked alongside different partners to help transform the garden into a space that is enjoyable for different members of the Bury community from all backgrounds. We teamed up with the Schools' team to arrange planters, Bog Garden to arrange picnic benches. We also worked closely with St Joseph's Church and Islamic Centre Mosque, Caritas Red Door charity, and the Bury Council Voluntary Sector, to ensure the elderly, the youth, and the homeless within Bury also benefited from the community garden's space, workshops, and activities.

Thanks to the incredible support of our volunteers and partners, the community garden continues to serve different members of the Bury community.



Five Year Anniversary Celebratory

OUR EVENT

On July 1, 2023, a special gathering took place at Baden-Powell Hall in Bury, commemorating the fifth anniversary of the establishment of Supporting Sisters. A group of 67 women joined the event, coming together to honour the remarkable dedication and contributions of the charity's founders and volunteers throughout the past five years. The occasion served as a heartfelt recognition of the tireless efforts invested in supporting and uplifting women.

Volunteers from Supporting Sisters played a pivotal role in preparing for the seminar. Leading up to the event, tasks included securing event speakers, promoting the seminar on social media platforms, and utilising word of mouth for wider outreach. Additionally, assessing the number of participants was crucial to choose and reserve a suitable venue for the event.

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Our Partners

