



Creating HERstory through sports
to challenge inequalities in
physical and mental health

IMPACT REPORT

2021-22

WE INSPIRE | WE DEVELOP | WE EMPOWER

“

When joining MSA, I found it really easy to click with the women there straight away and I have been able to form valuable friendships over time.

It has been an amazing journey with MSA. I feel I have been achieving things continuously each time and this is something I felt was missing in my life. Even the small competitions MSA holds never fails to excite me. All these things that have been missing from my life for the past years of marriage and kids have finally found its way to me and it's all for myself this time.

Amazing ”

is the best word to describe the people at MSA.

Shafia Begum
Participant and Volunteer



MSA'S EVENING OF CELEBRATION



Attended by over 350 people, including the Mayor of Redbridge, Khadija Mellah (jockey) and Athena Bashar (amateur boxer)



The Rowing Team

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WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

We know the playing field is not always level. MSA believes having more positive representation of Muslim and ethnically diverse women will lead to an increase in participation at all levels.

By removing existing barriers to sports and activities, we can be part of a bigger picture of work that helps to address many of society's biggest challenges. MSA has seen the impact of what sports and physical activity has on its community: making people happier and healthier.

The highlights

- **Our first MSA Celebration Event**
Recognising and celebrating our remarkable work with our participants, volunteers, coaches and supporters. The evening, attended by over 350 people, saw special messages from the FA Chair Debbie Hewitt MBE, and General Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) Zara Mohammed, as well as special guests Jockey Khadija Mellah & Boxer Athena Bashar.
- **Annual Dragonboat Race and Charity Walk**
Raising over £10k for both Al-Noor Foundation and Read Foundation
- **Youth Social Action**
Collaboration with Frenford Youth Club, Shpresa and BDYD. Engaging over 90 young people to develop a social action project whilst developing skills such as communication and leadership.

INTRODUCTION

from Yashmin



Yashmin Harun BEM
Chair and Founder

Thank you for reading the MSA's 2021-2022 Impact Report. This highlights our successes and impacts from the last year, through the funding we have received and invested into our charity, which aims to engage ethnically diverse females through the power of sport and physical activity. In the face of the continued challenges presented by COVID-19, I am extremely proud of what we were able to achieve. The impact of the pandemic and successive lockdowns was clear. Existing inequalities had widened, and it was evident physical activity levels and the general well-being of women from diverse backgrounds had suffered.

In the following pages, we share a summary of how we developed and supported programmes in response to the pandemic; how we pivoted existing programmes; and

also how we have catalysed change and innovation in the sector through insight and bold new thinking.

Over the course of the year, we adapted to support our participants and community whose access to physical activity and the broader benefits of sport participation was impacted by the pandemic and its lasting effect.

Our model has greatly shown robust success even in times such as the pandemic where we were able to adapt and take our existing offering online such as yoga, football, fitness, and fencing fitness to help keep the community engaged, using the network of coaches we have established. Projects during this time included Laureus Sports for Good, MSA Couch to 5k, and MSA Go

Cycle, as well as successful Positive Minds sessions, which provided much needed support and escapism for the women in our community. We also worked with the Royal Navy to deliver online fitness sessions for young girls to keep fit and active.

It was fantastic to see the return of face-to-face sports and along with the further growth of our programmes in rowing and archery, where we were helping to build-back healthier and more confident females in sports.

MSA are industry leaders in engaging with ethnically diverse females in a variety of sports, a group which has the highest level of inactivity rates as reported in the Sport England Active Lives Survey (May 2021-22). MSA has not only increased participation

levels but supported the increase in a diverse workforce through our partnership with Frenford Clubs. Frenford & MSA Women's FC has seen over 64 qualified football coaches, and over 90 across all sports, all from ethnically diverse backgrounds. We have also up-skilled our participants to become coaches in other sports such as Fencing, and Archery, where we have continued to address challenges the sector faces by creating tailored courses, working with National Governing Bodies (NGB) and stakeholders.

As the immediate impact of the pandemic hopefully recedes, the mission we are on and the work we do is more important than ever. We hope this report serves to not only update you on our work but also provoke thought, action, and further collaboration in

helping ethnically diverse females to go, not only beyond the challenges that face them, but thrive despite of them.

MSA is proud to engage females in sports and also to challenge the sector in how they engage with our community. In finishing, I would like to take this opportunity to formally and sincerely thank all the amazing funders, supporters and partners who share our vision, to make all of this possible. I hope you will enjoy reading about the impact we have made so far and see the potential MSA has to impact even more females from diverse backgrounds in sport, to build more welcoming safe spaces, and giving every ethnically diverse female a place to belong and achieve.

Research commissioned by MSA

Executive summary

1/3 British Muslim women describe their current fitness activity level as **'inactive'**

97% British Muslim Women said they **want to increase** their current **participation** in sports

82% British Muslim women **want to increase** their sports participation for **health and fitness**

43% British Muslim Women said that **current sports** facilities are **not appropriate for them**

1/3 British Muslim women said that **past experiences** have **negatively impacted** their participation in sports

80% British Muslim women said they would be **likely** to attend **women's only sports sessions** if they were available to them

A **predominant barrier** that appears throughout this study is the **lack of women only spaces/facilities** that prevent participation in sports

Commissioned in 2022
For full report contact info@muslimahsports.org.uk

Changing the game

MSA has received recognition throughout the industry, engaging with the House of Lords Sports & Recreation Select Committee to talk about the challenges facing ethnically diverse communities, especially females.

As well as winning multiple-awards, MSA has also supported numerous Local Authority Sports and Leisure teams and sports clubs to help them engage with ethnically diverse females in sports, sharing best practices throughout the country. MSA has also helped local mosques who have historically found it challenging to engage females in sports.

MSA have also led the way in changing and developing the workforce, offering tailored coaching course working closely with the Football Association, British Fencing, GB

Archery, London Sport, Sport England, Badminton England and Basketball England.

MSA continues to check and challenge the industry, providing insight and lived experiences, shaping policy and strategy.

We have regularly engaged in the placed based approach of connecting to local organisations and entering partnership-based working. In the past year this has included working with Vision Redbridge, London FA, Sported, London Sport, Essex FA including an award-winning tailored FA Level one coaching course, award winning rowing project to increase diversity and award-winning archery project with Barking Rugby Club.

The MSA Chair, Yashmin sits on the National Game Board at the FA, London FA, iNED at British Fencing. Hafiza is a iNED at Essex FA and Inclusion Advisory Group Chair; and Reha as British Fencing Project Officer for Muslim Girls Fence. Lipa is the Chair of the Youth Sports Trust Council. Ibtisam is currently working on a project for the Department for Education.

Multiple awards for our work with others – including Winners of British Rowing & 'Social Inclusion' Project of the Year 2022, Archery GB Participation Project 2021, Outstanding Volunteer, & 'Spirit of Britain' 2020, Faith & Belief Awards, FA Grassroots Football Award, FA 'For All' Award , & She Awards 2019, London Sports Workforce Award 2018 and The Muslim News Award 2017.



Zaina - Let Girls Play Ambassador
First Appearance on ITV Sports

SISTERHOOD | COMMUNITY | IDENTITY

We are 625 Muslimahs



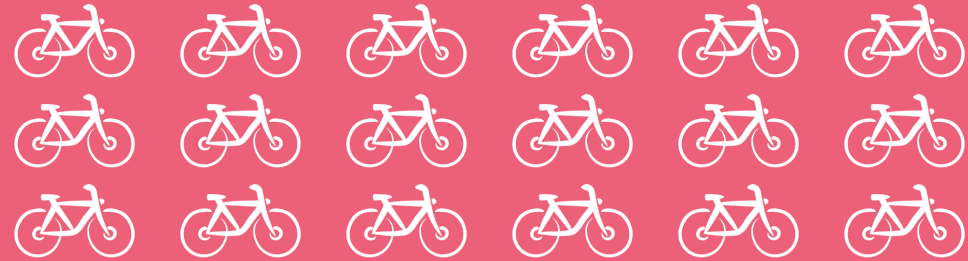
Over
4000
Contact
Hours

WE ARE



MSA

Free bikes distributed...



40

Positive Mind Sessions
Delivered



Supported and
facilitated the journeys
of

90

participants into
Coaching, including
Football, Archery and
Fencing

MSA has been extremely successful in changing the landscape of sports, though there is a lot more to be done.

We have engaged with over 1000 females, since we began recording data.

2021-2022 in numbers

Case Study: Nasima

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your team for providing me with the opportunity to gain a skill for life and tick one more thing off my bucket list.

I grew up at a time where the local community would raise an eyebrow (or two) if they saw a woman cycling and because of this I wasn't allowed to have a bike as a child. I grew up always wanting to ride a bike in nature and in the city, but the dream was lost in the process of learning to drive. But since having my son, the desire to be able to cycle was reignited and I wanted to be able to teach him. But how could I if I didn't know how?

I was going to start learning with my son during the Easter holidays but then we got hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and everything was cancelled.

I started as a complete beginner and in 6 sessions I am now able to ride on the road. I didn't think this was possible. I had such a

great teacher Anna Bagi as she explained everything so well. She would test me each lesson too, which I needed, as it's so easy to forget from one session to the next. It is very important to have a good teacher you connect with as I believe you learn better that way and I thank Anna for my progress.

I thank MSA so much for making a change in society and to prove that cycling is for everyone, and it is not limited to your gender, race, age, religion etc.

Cycling is a way of life that everyone should experience otherwise you have not lived! Stay well, keep smiling and continue to do what you do, it matters!



Nasima receiving her certificate after completing the six week beginners course

Case Study: Yasmin

MSA has given me so much confidence. Yashmin Harun, the founder of MSA has especially been a huge part of this all. She has found so many opportunities for me. I was able to apply for FA council member and also FA leadership mentor because of her. She has always shown confidence in me and sometimes all you need is someone to believe in you and give you that push.

I would never have come so far without the major support I've found at MSA and the continuous opportunities they've provided me with during my time with them.

The support has been tremendous.

My kids are definitely proud of me. I feel happier and even my husband notices that

every time I come back from a game I'm always so happy. We know that it's good to have a round of football because it makes all the difference. It has definitely reflected in my family life. I genuinely feel happier and when you do something you enjoy; you find yourself in a good mood when you come home. It spreads that positivity in your life. It's also been a big stress outlet.

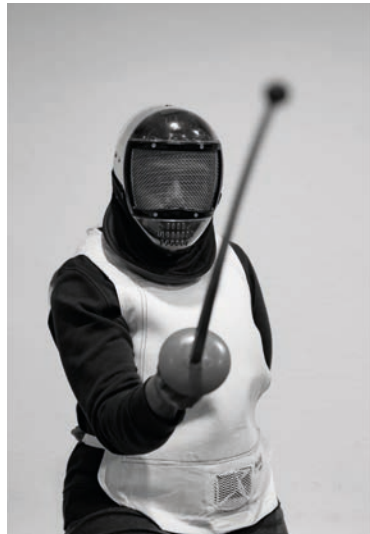
At the time there was only MSA. It was first recommended on my Facebook and I had been looking for something like this for a long time. Finding something for Muslim women was tough and MSA has such a variety of activities and courses to choose from. I was surprised because in all my years of living here, I had never come across something like this. I was surprised to see just how much they actually offered. At the time when I first began coaching (around 4 years ago) there were no other football opportunities present, especially for BAME women.



Yasmin at the Commonwealth Games as the Queen's Baton Bearer in Birmingham

GOAL 1

increase physical activity levels amongst ethnically diverse females



Fencing



Golf Lessons

Despite the challenges and national data, MSA has proven that Muslim and ethnically diverse do want to participant in sports and physical

activity. If safe spaces are provided at the right venue, right time and right cost, women are willing to participant.

MSA have actively increased the number of female participants from Muslim and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Year on year, the number of participants has grown. By retaining a high standard of coaching staff, participants have built lasting relationships and created new friendship groups.

The positive impact of participating in sports and physical activities has also impacted their mental health. Participants feel happier, which in turn has led to a more positive holistic outlook with a knock on affect with their families.

MSA has inspired and supported other organisations to enter the industry to start their own sessions to engage their local community which has been positive to see.

As an organisation we take pride in being able to sustain projects beyond the funding period either by being self-sufficient or by successfully applying for further funding to continue sessions. This has set MSA apart from other organisations, being able to offer as many as 15 different activities a week to provide as many opportunities in a diverse range of sports as possible to ensure exposure and accessibility to increase participation.

GOAL 2

provide the best opportunity for women to form a positive relationship with physical activity for life

As ethnically diverse females ourselves we are able to understand the barriers our community face and also share those lived experiences and challenges faced when trying to find safe spaces to participate in sports. By understanding the communities, we have been able to understand what was missing, the barriers that exist, and what was required to address their requirements and ensure we are delivering relevant services. We are able to sustain our existing programmes and expand into new communities.

Our model has greatly shown its robust success even in times such as the pandemic where we were able to adapt and take our offering online using the network of coaches we have established.

Our ability to adapt and respond to the changing sports landscape and demands of our community puts MSA in a unique position.

The trust we have built in the community allows MSA to offer sport activities not usually associated with Muslim females. Therefore MSA provides best opportunity, offering a variety of sports to help participants find the right sport for them to continue a healthy relationship with sports.



Shamsia recently qualified as an archery coach

Changing the mindset is one step in the right direction for women to create a positive relationship with physical activity. Positive narratives and roles models are also important. MSA

are creating many role models and working with stakeholders and NGB to change the narratives, however there is still much more to do.

GOAL 3

improve policies and systems to provide a tailored and secure environment for physical activity

MSA has regularly engaged in the placed based approach of connecting to local organisations and entering partnership-based working. We believe this strengthens our position in the industry and allows us to build our network to create more opportunities for our participants, as well as influence policies and systems. Contributing to round-table discussions with the House of Lords Sports and Recreation Committee is one example of how MSA engages with the wider industry.

OUR TRUSTEES ALSO STRIVE TO INCREASE REPRESENTATION ACROSS THE SPORTS INDUSTRY.

Each are initiating and facilitating important conversations within their roles across the industry to improve policies and have more strategic focus on ethnically diverse communities, especially for Muslim females.

Place based collaborations in the past year have included working with The Glass-House, Vision Redbridge, London FA, Sported, London Sport, Essex FA including the award-winning tailored FA Level one coaching course, rowing project to increase diversity, and archery project with Barking Rugby Club.

We already have an understanding of what works and what doesn't, but we want to continue to learn and collaborate with others and share best practices reinforcing MSA's lead in the industry.



Around the table

In MSA's consultancy capacity, we are ensuring conversations are facilitated and moving in the right direction. The industry must recognise the nuances and intersectionality across ethnicities, and to engage the different

communities, strategies must be tailored and adapted. MSA have successfully removed barriers and are changing the narrative to ensure safe spaces are created and sports become community centred.

GOAL 4

support social and community engagement by working with local organisations

MSA's work with the Sports for Development Coalition, Muslim Girls Fence initiative, and Project Rimaya. These are just a few examples of how MSA have engaged with organisations to support social and community engagement. We have also worked with Mind and the Local Authority to co-design community hubs. Our work with Faith and Belief Forum has increased community cohesion, by participating the Inter-Faith Fun Run. We have also done charity walks, boat races and badminton tournaments to raise and support other local charities.

Collaborating with partners in coalition work has supported wider engagement in the community, allowing MSA to change the stereotypical views and biases society may have of Muslim females. Our My London project, funded by the Mayor of London, has provided a much needed safe space for young people to ask questions about the Islam faith, busting myths and preconceived perceptions of Islam.

A recent impact report, conducted by Sports & Recreation Alliance showed the positive impact sports by MSA can have on the Muslim community. As an indication, Project Rimaya can claim to have produced £95,000 of social value, 28 times the cost of running archery sessions.

“ I think it has improved my well-being. It has helped me meet new people, socialise, and network in this community. ”



The Social Action Program

MSA has successfully continued our partnership working. We are proud of our ability to work collaboratively and have built a respectable reputation throughout the industry. As leaders in the industry, we continue to build

upon our consultancy work supporting cross-borough organisations and increasing our cross-border collaborative work through Sports for Development and My London projects.

LEADERS OF TOMORROW

Shmaila, Zoeya and Zaina

Shmaila and her two daughters began their journey with MSA five years ago.

They found Friday night football to be their outlet and a time they could spend together to build their relationship as a family.

Shmaila is now a football level one coach, Zoeya was picked out of 100's of children to become a Visa Ball Kid for the Women's Euro 2022, and what a tournament that was! And Zaina is now the #LetGirlsPlay Ambassador, a huge and important role in increasing visibility and role models for the community and beyond.



Safiyah and Aasiyah

Co-Chairs of the Sweaty Betty Project

Safiyah and Aasiyah has been appointed as Co-Chairs of the MSAXSweaty Betty Project, an initiative to give home-schooled girls access to a variety of sports which previously was not available to them.

The project will not only increase participation but will also provide an opportunity for the girls to improve their time-management, leadership and organisational skills.



LEADERS OF TOMORROW

More than just sports Positive Minds



The Shining Rays of Sisterhood
For more information, contact info@muslimahsports.org.uk

At MSA, we not only understand the importance of physical health but have adopted a more holistic approach, focussing on mental and spiritual well-being too. We have been running Positive Minds sessions, bringing in experts from a wide range of fields to deliver sessions and enable our participants to feel equipped with skills. These sessions were imperative during the pandemic. We also delivered life skills such as IT skills sessions to cater with the adjustment to online so that they felt more comfortable.

Furthermore, we have worked with the Aafiyah project, health care professionals, and therapists to deliver a wide range of sessions. These include public speaking, mental health training, and art therapy to name a few.

We collated a collaborative book filled with their own poems and short prose to give a sense of identity and belonging. The aim was to share this to benefit as many people as possible and provide the women with something they could look at as an accomplishment.

Case Study: Shamsia

Before MSA, I was a home-maker where my daily routine consisted of being a full time Mum for my kids and taking care of my mother-in-law, who had medical needs. This meant that I rarely found time for myself and whilst I was preoccupied with my household responsibilities, I attended a few swimming lessons to act upon my interest in sports that I've had since a very young age.

However, there were many obstacles present that ultimately meant that I had to stop. Some of these obstacles include feeling uncomfortable as a Muslim woman, as female lifeguards weren't always present and after moving to Redbridge, journey times became too long for me.

As an Asian woman, sports are typically looked down upon and even after marriage, I would do warm up exercises in my own home (i.e. jogging up the stairs) where my family members couldn't see me. This changed when I came across MSA.

I'm more active now and since when I first started MSA I have changed physically and emotionally.

I have not only refined my skills but also gained new ones too. I've recognised the need for self-care, and this is reflected in my home where I feel more happy and energetic, something that I didn't realise was missing before I started to take more care of myself. My kids have also adjusted well and are very supportive of my journey.

Seeing how far I've come, I realise how important self-care is and want other women to do the same by joining communities, like MSA, that cater to their own needs. In our society, people believe that women exercise solely to lose weight but rather exercise should already be a habit in your daily lives and something that is enjoyable to you.



Shamsia telling her MSA story at the Celebration Event

Arsenal stars visit the team



Rachel Yankey & Beth Mead and former footballer Rosie Kmita and Referee JJ Roble visited Frenford & MSA Women's FC

Our stakeholders and partners

Sporting Equals
Laureus
Essex FA
London Sport
Vision Redbridge
England Triathlon
CSM
London FA
Black Arrows BC
Fairlop Rowing Club
Frenford Clubs
The FA

13 Rivers Trust
Super 5
MCB
Archery GB
Barking Rugby Club
British Fencing
Al Noor Foundation
Faith & Belief Group
FORMO (Redbridge)
Sustrans
Royal Navy
Read Foundation

London Marathon Trust
ECB
Sported
The London Mayors Office
Redbridge Arts Council
Redbridge Mayor Office
Badminton England
Basketball England
BDYD
Shpresa

Our awards and recognition

2022 British Rowing
2022 British Muslim Social Inclusion
2021 Archery GB Participation Project
2021 Reha Ullah awarded British Empire Medal
2020 Yashmin Harun awarded British Empire Medal
2020 Spirit of Britain

2019 Faith & Belief Awards
2019 FA Grassroots Football Award
2019 FA 'For All' Award
2019 She Awards
2018 London Sports Workforce Award
2017 The Muslim News Award



Haifa coaching Wildcats at Frenfords & MSA FC

We are MSA. We're here to create safe spaces for ethnically diverse women to engage in sports and physical activity.

If you would like to join, please visit:
www.muslimahsports.org.uk

Email: info@muslimahsports.org.uk
Facebook: [MuslimahSportsAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/MuslimahSportsAssociation)
Twitter: [@MuslimahAsso](https://twitter.com/MuslimahAsso)
Instagram: [muslimah_sports_assoc](https://www.instagram.com/muslimah_sports_assoc)

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