

Steps to Recovery

Support for Community Champions

#Steps2Recovery

Funded by:



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Bosnian School and Society of Manchester (BSSM) Evaluation

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Report produced in
collaboration with



Steps
to Recovery

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1. About BSSM

The Bosnian School and Society of Manchester (BSSM) was established in 2000 by a group of parents who arrived to the UK in 1992 as Bosnian refugees. We are the only Bosnian society in Manchester created in response to the needs of those who were fleeing the war and genocide against in Bosnia.

Our objectives are to:

1. Advance the academic education of both Bosnian children and children from the wider community in Manchester, through the provision of extracurricular educational support, activities, and projects.
2. Promote relief for people living in Greater Manchester who are in need or under hardship and distress, particularly Bosnians and peoples of Bosnian origin, through providing advice and information and facilitating cultural and social activities. We also provide facilities for recreation to promote enjoyment and better quality of life.
3. Provide education for all ages in Bosnian language, English language, ICT information communication technology, and short courses training for volunteers and members of the public
4. Develop partnerships and projects with cultural, charitable and educational organisations within Bosnia.

Equipped with teaching expertise, BSSM also provides talks, events and training including Qur'an, Islamic studies and Bosnian identity and culture. We work regularly with Manchester Council and Manchester University – as a part of this engagement they also showcase the work of BSSM to foster social cohesion and address the social polarisation within communities. BSSM is a volunteer-led organisation with approximately 10 volunteers and over 130 beneficiaries benefitting from their support. We are an active member of the Manchester Refugee Support Network.

Organised Peace Rally, January 2022



2. About this report

Working in collaboration with Civil Society Consulting CIC in July – August 2021, BSSM conducted a community engagement survey with our members and parents to collect the experiences and views of the community. We received 42 responses, which formed the basis of this report. The survey examined the community's needs to help shape future services and the impact of BSSM on service users. The survey also gauged support for establishing a dedicated building. The building will have a permanent display of Bosnian culture and allow BSSM to launch more projects.



3. BSSM's Services

Bosnian School and Society Manchester supports the Bosnian and wider community to feel a greater sense of belonging as a valued part of British society through its services. These services can be divided into three 'pillars' of work: 1) Practical advice, education and training; 2) fostering social & cultural identity; and 3) advocacy and awareness.

1. Practical advice, education and training

BSSM provides guidance and advice to individuals to help them access public health, housing and other vital services. We also offer interpretation and other assistance necessary to communicate with service providers and schools. As a part of our services, we support service-users to address mental health issues, especially as they relate to the trauma and impact of the conflict experienced through the Bosnian war and genocide in Srebrenica. This service is extended to support other refugees fleeing from war, conflict and trauma. We are experienced in delivering education and schooling to advance attainment in English, Bosnian and ICT. We also offer subjects including art, history, geography, religion, Islamic studies and the Qur'an. These classes are attended by Bosnian children and children from the wider community.

In addition to these classes, we provide academic advisory services including preparation for higher education. We also run interpreting and translation services to help children transition into life in the UK.

Outside of academic support, the School also offers activities involving painting, handicrafts, sports and other activities. We run a number of classes for adults, including English and Arabic lessons, cooking, IT, learning and development, and communications.

2. Fostering community cohesion

BSSM empowers members of the community through activities and social events that build confidence and develop relationships between service-users and the wider community. These also include providing information, opportunities for training, volunteering and employment, for people to integrate and contribute to their communities. Through these services, service-users also gain new skills that increase resilience and their sense of wellbeing.

3. Advocacy and awareness

To complement our work empowering members of the Bosnian community, we work with the wider community to learn about and be inclusive of the Bosnian community. We facilitate expert-led talks on Bosnian culture, history of the conflict, to promote better understanding. We provide training on the Bosnian conflict and Bosnian culture in schools and community settings. We have a partnership with the University of Manchester, showcasing our work annually. We participate at events such as Macfest to showcase Bosnian culture, and we have speakers to support Remembering Srebrenica every year during Srebrenica Memorial Week.



Ambassador of Bosnian at Remembering Srebrenica, November 2021

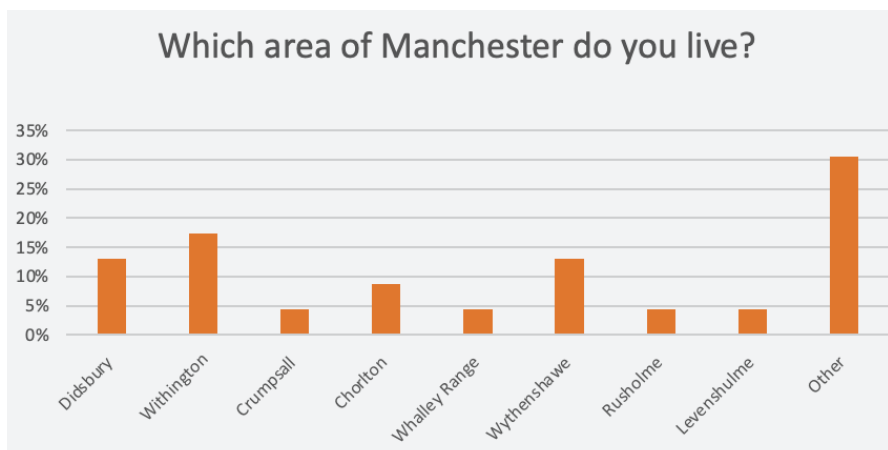
4. Our community

Our community engagement survey collected demographic information about respondents to better understand our community and its needs, as well as to identify gaps in service provision. 31% of BSSM’s respondents from the survey identified as volunteers whilst the remainder were either community members, parents of children engaging with BSSM, or both. We also asked survey respondents which services they engaged with:

Healthy Living	35.71%
Quran	42.86%
Volunteering	64.29%
Courses	7.14%
English courses	14.29%
Arabic language	35.71%
Bosnian course	21.43%
Training and Employment	0.00%
Fitness	21.43%
Remembering Srebrenica	78.57%
Walking/Peace March	50.00%
Other	7.14%

While the majority of service-users identified as Bosnian, survey respondents also included people who are other White European, Mixed, and other.

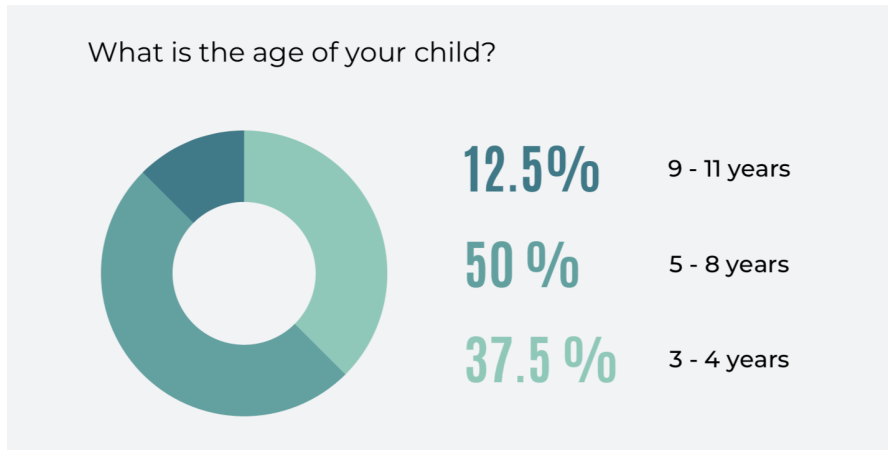
The survey reflected that the majority of BSSM service users live within and across Manchester. Other service users generally live within Greater Manchester, including in Stockport, Salford and Trafford.



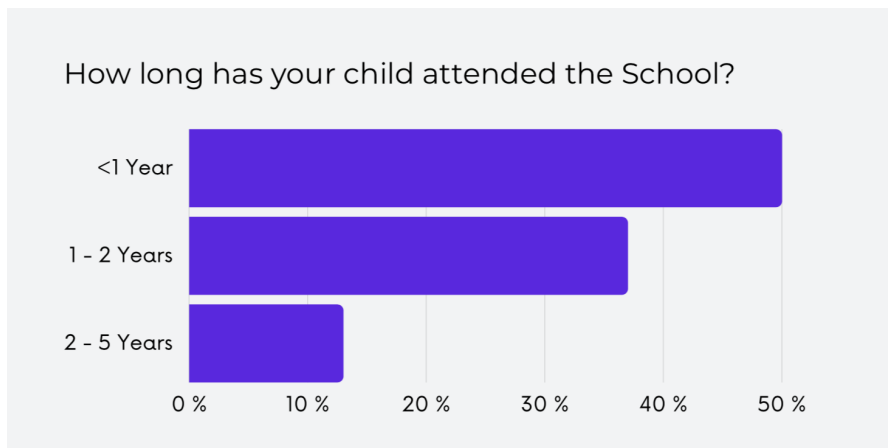
The majority of BSSM service user’s have lived locally for more than five years (77%). 14% of user’s have lived locally for less than one year and 9% have lived locally between two to five years. The most common age group of survey respondents was 36-45 years (35%), followed by 56-65 years (26%), 26-35 years (22%), 46-55 years (13%) and 66-75 years (4%).

Children who access BSSM services

The majority of children who access BSSM services are aged between 5 - 8 years.



Most of the survey respondents' children have engaged with BSSM's school for less than one year (50%). 37% have attended BSSM for one to two years, while the remaining 13% for two to five years.



5. Evidence of need

Migration

Manchester has a long history of international migration. This has been accelerated since the 20th century due to factors such as the industrial revolution, war, civil unrest, poverty and discrimination. From the 1970s, conflict has played a large part in driving migration to Manchester, and this includes Bosnian migrants who immigrated to find safety from religious discrimination and ethnic cleansing since 1991. The Srebrenica genocide in July 1995 saw to the deaths of over 8,000 men and boys perpetrated by Serbian forces.

Educational Attainment

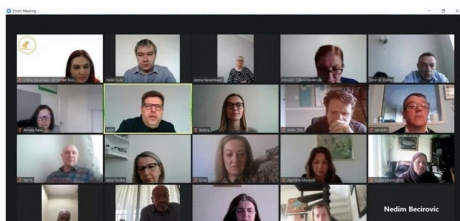
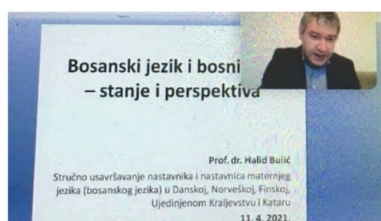
Multicultural education plays an important role in breaking down stereotypes, challenging intolerance and bullying within schools, and ensuring that newcomers feel welcome and included in their new communities. Multicultural education is particularly important to children from migrant families, so their identity and cultural background can be recognised and celebrated. Learning about their own cultural history can help build a sense of familial and community belonging.

For students of the majority culture, learning about the celebrations, values and cultures of their peers fosters inclusiveness and promotes intercultural understanding. It is also an opportunity for students from different cultural backgrounds to share and build understanding across differences.

Children born outside the UK and children of immigrant families may also need extra support in schooling, especially if they face language barriers when they start school. BSSM offers supplementary schools to help children strengthen their literacy and computer skills so they don't fall behind.

Preserving Bosnian Identity

The genocide to ethnically cleanse Bosnians took place in 1992-1995. It was a direct attack on Bosnian identity and existence. Meanwhile, in the UK, Islamophobia is widespread, and not only does it affect the mental and physical health and wellbeing of Muslims, but it also damages community unity and cohesion. In 2019, nearly half of religious hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales targeted Muslims. Islamophobia may make migrants feel unsafe to practise their religion, and some may hesitate to pass religious traditions to their children, fearing that it will isolate them from community integration.



International Teachers Day, April 2021

6. Our Impact

Impact on children

While the survey did not engage with children directly, we asked parents to reflect on the impact of our services on their children's educational attainment and growth, as well as the quality of our school.

- **100%** of parents said they would **strongly recommend** the school to a friend or another parent.
- **87.5%** of parents said that their child's **educational attainment** has increased **'a great deal'** since attending BSSM; the remaining 12.5% said that it has increased 'a lot'.
- **75%** of parents said that their child's **enjoyment of learning** has increased **'a great deal'**, while the remaining 25% said that it has increased 'a lot'.

Parents commented on the improvements of their child's educational attainment and enjoyment since attending BSSM.

"She learnt so much about my country and my mother tongue"

"Happy kids ,which means [BSSM] school is the best"

"It is [an] educational setting that provides specific education which I want for my children as I am Bosnian and like them learning about Bosnia"

"Our children who went to Bosnian school are now involved whether it be teaching or supporting"

Safety & quality of teaching

- **100%** of parents of children involved with BSSM's activities rated the quality of our Bosnian, history, geography and Bosnian culture classes as **excellent**. Our religion, art and Quran classes were also rated by 100% of parents as either 'excellent' or 'very good'.
- **62.5%** of parents feel their child is extremely safe and 37.5% feel their child is very safe at BSSM.
- **100%** of parents are **confident** or **very confident** that their child is being well cared for at BSSM.

"We [are] so happy for opportunity for [our child to] be part of Bosnian school in Manchester, it's safe"

"Thank you teachers ,thank you all volunteers"

Improving children's confidence & sense of belonging

- **62.5%** of parents felt that **their child's confidence** has increased **'a great deal'** and the remaining 37.5% said it has increased 'a lot' since attending BSSM.
- **75%** of parents said that their child felt **a tremendous amount of belonging** and 25% said they felt quite a bit of belonging at BSSM.
- **87.5%** of parents said that since attending BSSM, their child has felt **'a tremendous amount'** or **'quite a bit' of belonging to the local Manchester community** and gained **a better understanding of what it means to be a part of UK society**.

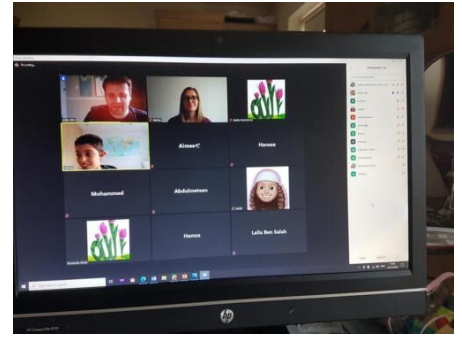
Parents were very vocal about the positive impact BSSM has made in their children's lives.

"[BSSM has made a] positive impact"

"It reinforces my desire that my children should be comfortable with their Bosnian heritage and should be comfortable with their Bosnia"

"[BSSM] Gives our children/grandchildren their Bosnian heritage and culture"

"My children are half Bosnian [and] half Black Caribbean so it is very important that they learn and socialise with other Bosnian children for their heritage and Bosnian culture- BSSM provides that opportunity"



Impact on community members

When asked to rate BSSM's services and positive impacts, 95% of survey respondents gave a score of 8 out of 10 or higher.

We also measured some specific dimensions of impact on service-users:

- Employment and skills enhancement;
- Improved personal life and wellbeing;
- Supportive and welcoming community.

Employment and skills enhancement

- **93%** have been able to access voluntary or work experience opportunities since engaging with BSSM.
- **89%** have been able to improve their English language skills.
- **86%** have developed new skills and help to secure further training or education opportunities through BSSM.
- **61%** said their skills increased as well as the opportunity for paid employment through attending activities and programmes through BSSM.

"The teachers are very informative and effective"

"People learnt how to read Quran, we are learning Arabic and having exercise class"

"My life [is] easier with BSSM because I came from Palestine and [found it] difficult to learn English myself without [a] community"

Improved personal life and wellbeing

- **100%** of survey respondents feel less socially isolated after engaging with BSSM.
- **91%** said that BSSM has given them a better sense of their mental health wellbeing.
- **90%** have improved their physical health through engaging with BSSM.
- **83%** are able to access other services through BSSM.

Community members highlighted some of the very best things about BSSM and how it has impacted their lives:

"More confident"

"More integration into other communities"

"Best part has been the involvement and not isolated also I get to put in practice my experience"

"Keeping us connected to our Bosnian heritage"

"I feel less sad and depressed when I am with people from my country"

Supportive and welcoming community

- **100%** of community members said they were able to make new friends and support networks through BSSM.
- **100%** feel a greater sense of belonging in their local community.
- **93%** felt more integrated into their local community.
- **93%** gained local cultural awareness and a greater understanding of how to get the best life in the UK.

Survey respondents commented on the welcoming atmosphere at BSSM and its holistic support with building community cohesion and integration:

"[BSSM has helped with] connecting with wider society, discovering new as well as maintaining our own cultural values, language and heritage."

"Many things: meeting with people and taking your language and remembering our country, helping others, doing things together, sharing food, learning and much more"

"BSSM keeps the Bosnian community and schools going as well as integrating with different communities"

"It is place/ organisation where you can turn to when homesick, when you need a friend and when looking for solution to an issue which has come up"



Case study- Galina, BSSM's beneficiary

"When we moved to the U.K. almost six years ago, we did not know anybody here. After the long and difficult journey to find a place to stay as well as schools for our children, it was time for my husband and I to find schools for ourselves..."

We were waiting in a long queue outside the Withington Learning Centre, when, eventually, we were asked to come inside. There was a smiley, positive lady greeting us at the entrance of the hall. She was wearing a beautiful, green scarf. "Muslims... here in this college?!", I thought. I immediately felt relaxed and happy.

Not having found a place to study an English course, I decided to study whatever else I could. As I entered my ICT classroom for the first time, I recognised the lady with the scarf. Her name was Sadia and she became my first tutor, mentor and a symbol of encouragement and positivity. She was promising us celebrations for every little achievement, making all of us enjoy our time while also teaching us how to navigate computers. This included typing letters, writing CV's, and making presentations.

One day Sadia asked us to Google 'Remember Srebrenica'. This was the first time I learned the truth about the worst genocide in our time which took place in the heart of the European continent.

She told us her own story... how she used to live in her country, what happened next, how she eventually reached the U.K. without knowing a word of English, how she then became a teacher and eventually was in a position to help people like myself to be stronger and happier. She always invited us to different events, one of which was about helping the Syrian people caught in problems because of the war. During that event, I understood that people who go through similar life experiences, because of war, are better understanding towards the pain of others. The BSSM Bosnian community organise the charity event to help Syrian and I remembered they cooked a Bosnian dish as a taster for charity and asked everyone to come and help in College students teachers and wider community and donate whatever you can: clothes, food and money which was collected £1,500 just in a single day. As my husband is also from Syria, and my children are half Syrian and half Ukrainian, we always try to take part in such events. My daughter writes especially poems for Bosnian and Syrian people and first time reading in remembering Srebrenica in 2016.

I successfully finished my studies after sitting my English and Maths GCSEs and completing Teaching Assistant studies Levels 2 and 3. Having studied and volunteered at the same time as checking up on the education of my four children (and even my husband sometimes as he was balancing work and studying too), I look back in disbelief. I currently work as a TA in a primary school in Manchester and my two eldest ones are in university. I could never have imagined starting and finishing this journey of settling into the U.K. There was only Allah, my family and my tutor Sadia, who gave me the confidence and power to achieve this."

7. BSSM's Achievements

BSSM have achieved several awards including:

- The Queen's Award for voluntary services and they have been invited to the Queen's tea party;
- Bronze & Silver Award from Manchester City Council for providing a high quality of teaching to our pupils;
- Award from MACFEST for showcasing and performing Bosnian culture;
- Services for Remembering Srebrenica;
- Certificates from University of Manchester for performing Bosnian dance at annual events.

BSSM are recognised as a resource for authentic information and lived experiences about Bosnia, the culture, war, genocide and the lessons learnt. Organisations and local authorities from Manchester and surrounding areas invite BSSM to deliver presentations. These include Manchester City Council, The Manchester University, Rochdale Council, Oldham Council and faith organisations in Wirral.



Statement of support for BSSM- Belay Kahsay, Manager for Manchester Refugee Support Network

“Manchester Refugee Support Network (MRSN) have had the privilege to work with the Bosnian School Society Manchester (BSSM) since their initiation, in the year 2000. BSSM are an active member of the 21 members that support the development, training and information needs of over 40 Refugee Community Organisations (RCO), and are a valued part of the Management Committee. BSSM have been very much involved with supporting the work we deliver, delivering activities and events to support campaigns, especially during Refugee Week. We have supported BSSM and have witnessed them growing from strength to strength. A much needed organisation which has offered support and guidance to newly arrived refugees and helped them settle and integrate into the communities. Often, finding themselves as the connector between the community and other services, including school and health.

They have run events, cooking and sharing Bosnian cuisine and culture with community members and with children. Some of them take part in football projects aimed at younger boys to engage them and give them opportunities to meet new people and make friends. BSSM have always taken the opportunity to involve themselves in celebrating the diversity, and increase an understanding of their history and culture with the wider society. Always willing to find ways to keep connected. A willingness to fully participate in wider society and their local communities. Often sharing their experience of the recent horrific Bosnian history and the learnings that came from it at many local and national events. They were chosen to be included in a recorded educational resource for students at Manchester Central Library

It has been a pleasure to support BSSM and we hope to continue working with them to empower, educate and enrich the communities they are a valued member of.

BSSM is a trusted organisation by the local and regional councils, organisations and the communities.”

Statement of support for BSSM- Elionr Chohan, Deputy Lieutenant for Greater Manchester

“As a consequence of the horrific campaign of ethnic cleansing that happened in Bosnia, formerly Yugoslavia during the 1990’s around one million people were displaced and had to flee their country to safety. Many arrived here in Manchester and have worked hard to learn our language and customs and have integrated as fully participating members of British society. The Bosnian School Society Manchester provides a safe space where the Bosnian community can come to celebrate their own culture and pass this onto future generations through education, events, celebrations and participation in cultural events across Manchester. The group membership support each other and also use their experiences of persecution, ethnic cleansing and genocide to educate others on the consequences of hate and creating division; members of this group volunteer with the charity Remembering Srebrenica recounting their personal experiences to educate on behaviours and actions that can cause the disintegration of society. The Bosnian community is an important part of the wonderful diversity that we have in Greater Manchester.”



8. BSSM's Future

Through BSSM's community engagement survey, we also wanted to reflect on how we can improve our services to respond to the needs of the growing community.

The majority of responses for future improvements are aligned with BSSM's strategic plans – including having our own premises, increasing administrative support and broadening the scope of support offered.

Permanent premises and administrative support

BSSM are currently working from rented accommodation. Our vision is to have an established building that we can call our own, which will feature a permanent display of Bosnian culture. When the community was consulted about their views of BSSM having access to its own space, 100% of respondents agreed and supported this.

Capacity is often a limitation for small organisations like BSSM – we would like to employ an administrator to relieve some of the pressure from our volunteers. We want to continue to lead the Remembering Srebrenica project and launch future cultural projects with the community, and having an administrator will support us in this work.

Survey respondents echoed this sentiment:

“Improvement can be made if the Bosnian school had their own premises and coordinator to give the children stability.”

“[BSSM] could be improved in various ways and one of them is that the organisation needs a stable membership base and person/s employed to do the administrative work.”

“Better structured and continuous administrative support within the organisation for better management”

Expanding new services

BSSM is in the process of securing grants to expand our services for our community. In particular, we have ambitions to establish a fitness class and a counselling service for members. As a part of our advocacy work, we would also like to establish a school project that can be integrated into the history cultural curriculum in schools. We will also provide resource packs and speakers with lived experience to talks in schools.

Survey respondents offered further suggestions:

“More activities for children!”

“More outdoor activities”

“By paying staff and rewarding volunteers”

“More exercise, cooking classes and trips”

“More hours of teaching would be lovely to see sport activities”



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Funded by:



Support to help faith & civil society organisations from communities in high COVID-19 areas that are engaged in frontline social action projects

