



Muslim Women's Network UK

*"We connect through our differences"*

## ANNUAL REPORT

December 2010

**Address and Registered Office:**

MWNUK  
Arena View  
4 Edward Street  
Birmingham  
B1 2RX

**Email:** [Info@mwnuk.co.uk](mailto:Info@mwnuk.co.uk)

**Tel:** 0121 236 9000

**Website:** [www.mwnuk.co.uk](http://www.mwnuk.co.uk)

Registered Company Number: 6597997

# CONTENTS

	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>1. Management Structure</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. About MWNUK</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Overview of Achievements and Performance</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Activities supporting Aim 1</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. Activities supporting Aim 2</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6. Activities supporting Aim 3</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>7. Future Planned Activities</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>8. Financial Statement and Accounts</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>9. Income and Expenditure Account</b>	<b>14</b>

## **MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

### **Honorary President (and founder)**

Baroness and Professor Haleh Afshar OBE

### **Current Board Members**

Cassandra Balchin (Chair)

Robina Iqbal (Vice Chair)

Dr Iram Sattar (Treasurer)

Fariha Thomas

Gemma Dua Ibrahim

Mussarat Zia

Hakmah Ibrahim

Souad Talsi (resigned January 2010)

Naz Koser (resigned June 2010)

Batool Al Toma (resigned July 2010)

Parveen Hassan (resigned November 2010)

### **Executive Director**

Shaista Gohir MBE (no voting powers)

### **Muslim Women's Co-ordinator**

Faeza Vaid (no voting powers)

## ABOUT MWNUK

Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) is a UK network of women to share knowledge, connect the voices, and promote the needs of diverse Muslim women. MWNUK registered as a community interest company in 2008 (company number 6597997). Our vision is a society where Muslim women have an effective voice and opportunity to contribute equally to society.

In the last 12 months, membership has doubled and the MWNUK now has almost 300 members; most are part of other organisations and networks ensuring far greater actual reach. Members include academics and students; workers in voluntary sector support services; health professionals; experts in women's rights, diversity policy, disability, and refugees; businesswomen; local government and law enforcement officers; and artists etc. Membership is also diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and location.

Our aims are:

- To share knowledge, experience, best practice and opinions among Muslim women and those working with them in order to strengthen Muslim women's ability to bring about effective changes in their lives.
- To bring Muslim women's diverse voices to Government, and to gather information relevant to Muslim women's lives in order to ensure local and national policy meets varied needs.
- To raise the profile of individual Muslim women and support organisations by highlighting their achievements and showcasing diverse role models.

## OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Although MWNUK is a national network, it only has two part time members of staff. We have to rely on volunteers to help to support our work and paid staff. Despite having limited resources, MWNUK punches well above its weight.

The last 12 months to November 2010 have been very successful for MWNUK. We have continued to build a critical mass of Muslim women's voices. Since the last AGM (November 2009), we have doubled our membership from 150 to almost 300 full members. In addition, we have increased our Facebook and mailing list members. The majority of members have found us through our website. However, some have registered with us as they have seen our leaflets, attended an event which a representative from MWNUK was speaking at or have seen us in the media.

In the last 12 months our national profile has also increased considerably which is important to continue increasing membership and being able to influence policymakers. We have increased our profile by:

- Producing a new and updated leaflet which was sent out to statutory bodies and women's groups across the UK.
- Regularly commenting in the ethnic and mainstream media – both nationally and internationally. Some media examples include: Islam Channel, Alhulbayt TV, Ummah TV, BBC News, ITV, various BBC stations, Al Jazeera, Evening Standard, The Daily Mail, The Independent etc. This has driven more traffic to our website. For example, when Faeza Vaid, the Muslim Women's Co-ordinator appeared on ITV This Morning, the daily hit rate on that day went up from 50 to 1600 hits. For list of media appearances, visit: <http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/media.php>.
- Strengthening linkages with other Muslim women's organisations. We have advised women who have wanted to set up forums or networks as well attending and speaking at events held by women's groups.
- Strengthening links with mainstream organisations. For example, we have been working with various local authorities, schools, the police, fire service, with the University of Warwick and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).

## ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING AIM 1

***Aim 1: To share knowledge, experience, best practice and opinions among Muslim women and those working with them in order to strengthen Muslim women's ability to bring about effective changes in their lives.***

The following activities have been carried out to support the above aim:

**MWNUK website** – Our website is an important tool for sharing knowledge and information quickly. We are making it as current and interactive as resources permit and upgraded our website to include a photo gallery, videos, publications section, directory and my story section where women can share their personal stories and experiences. We will continue to add information to the various sections with the help of volunteers and to make the website a significant resource for Muslim women.

**Signposting and responding to information requests** – We regularly receive enquiries on a wide range of issue and signpost people either to our members or to other organisations or to individuals outside the network. We receive the most enquiries on issues linked to marriage and divorce. Although this is not an exhaustive list, examples of other enquiries include: support for new Muslim converts; forced marriage; discrimination at work; child abuse; charitable organisations, and statutory bodies wanting to reach Muslim women and have them represented on advisory groups; sexuality; immigration; academic research requests; advice on setting up local and regional Muslim women's networks; requests to speak at events by police, local authorities, women's groups, universities and schools.

**Online Factsheets** – We have added a 'factsheet' section to the resources section of our website. We are working on producing a series of factsheets called 'Know Your Rights' and topics could include: right to marrying with consent (forced marriage); your right to divorce; right to be safe (e.g. domestic violence, honour crimes, race hate attacks, child abuse); right to sexual health (e.g. contraception, teenage pregnancies, female genital mutilation) right to be healthy (e.g. mental health) etc. We will be consulting appropriate members on these factsheets. The first factsheet on discrimination in the workplace was added to this new section recently. The rest will be added throughout next year.

**Newsletters** – Quarterly electronic newsletters are produced and sent to update members on opportunities, events, best practice, other Muslim women’s organisations, news, articles of interest, policies and invites contribute.

**Online Directory** – We have recently added a ‘directory’ section to our website. Following discussions, we have designed the priority directory fields. With the help of volunteers we have already started adding information on organisations across the UK that are involved in various women's issues, particularly those that are relevant to Muslim women. Users will be able to search for an organization by geographical area or type of issue. Each entry contains the institution’s name, postal, internet and e-mail addresses, telephone number and details of its function and activities. We welcome suggestions of groups that can be added.

**Advising Muslim women’s organisations** - We have advised women who have wanted to set up forums or networks in their areas. Examples include: Wolverhampton Muslim Forum, Birchills Women’s Group (Walsall), Bradford Muslim Women’s Council and Bristol Women’s Forum etc.

**Speaking at events** - We have spoken at a number of events in the UK. Some have included: launch of North London Muslim Women’s Network; Launch of Eiman (a women’s network in Northamptonshire); Global Islamic Marketing and Branding Conference (Oxford University); Women from Muslim communities and politics (University of Warwick); Women Making a Difference (West Midlands Police); Panel discussion on Sisters Play (Crucible Theatre, Sheffield); Salaam Arts Festival (Walsall); Empowering Women (Wolverhampton); Women’s Information Day (Park View School, Birmingham); Role Models Road Show (Dudley).

**Networking / Partnership Working** – We are continuing to build linkages nationally with other organizations. Some have included: being a member of the Women’s Peace Federation who conduct a series of dialogue sessions to increase dialogue with women of different faiths and no faith; working in collaboration with the West Midlands Fire Service and Practical Solutions to organize a forced marriage training workshop; Faeza Vaid sits on the advisory board for Dying Matters which advises the National Council for Palliative Care from a faith perspective on issues related to health; Shaista Gohir sits on the NSPCC Advisory Group for child abuse in Muslim communities; working with Faith Matters to organize an event which forms a part of the Living Islam out Loud Tour showcasing American Muslim female role models; building links with schools and delivering faith awareness training for teachers in schools with high numbers of Muslim pupils; engaging with other organisations (who work within the equalities and human rights framework) through an event hosted by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

**Engaging with international initiatives** – It is important to share knowledge, experience, best practice and opinions with Muslim women from different contexts. MWNUK has therefore been involved in a number of international initiatives and any travel expenses have been covered by the host organization:

- **Hosted a delegation of Egyptian journalists** – Seven journalists from various media outlets in Egypt visited the MWNUK offices accompanied by representatives from the government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). A discussion was held on issues concerning Muslim women in Britain and other contexts as well as activities carried out by MWNUK.
- **International Symposium of Female Calligraphers (Turkey)** - The Executive Director, Shaista Gohir was invited to speak at the 1st International Symposium of Female Calligraphers which was held in Istanbul, Turkey on June 5-6, 2010. Female calligraphers from Turkey, Iran, Spain, England, Syria and the UAE exhibited their works and received their diplomas (ijazah). The Prime Minister of Turkey also attended the event and made a speech on the importance of celebrating the achievements of Muslim women.
- **Musawah Global Outreach meeting (Indonesia)** - MWNUK are a part of the Musawah global movement. Cassandra Balchin (Chair) and Shaista Gohir (Executive Director) were therefore both invited to the Musawah global outreach meeting which took place in Indonesia between 3-6 August 2010. Cassandra Balchin is also the global Communication Officer for Musawah ([www.musawah.org](http://www.musawah.org)). During the meeting, the advocates from around the world discussed how they could contribute to building the movement further. MWNUK have volunteered (subject to securing funding) that they can act as co-ordinators between Muslim women's organisations that are based in Western countries as they have similar contexts.
- **Annual International Conference on impact of religious extremism on women's rights (Italy)** - Faeza Vaid, Muslim Women's Coordinator attended the conference that was held at the Agape Ecumenical Centre in Prali, Italy where she presented on Muslim women's specific oppression and Muslim women's rights in the context of religious fundamentalisms. The conference gave Faeza an opportunity to deal with the many stereotypes of Muslim women, and to understand better both the oppression and the liberation potential of Islam, specifically for women. She also addressed issues which were particular to an European context.



## ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING AIM 2

***AIM 2: To bring Muslim women's diverse voices to Government, and to gather information relevant to Muslim women's lives in order to ensure local and national policy meets varied needs.***

The following activities have been carried out to support the above aim:

**Engagement with Policy makers** – We have responded to and participated in government consultations which have included written feedback and roundtable discussions. Issues that MWNUK have responded included forced marriages, preventing violent extremism, female genital mutilation, and civic engagement. Government Departments that MWNUK have engaged with include the Home Office, Foreign Commonwealth Office, Communities and Local Government, Ministry of Justice and Government Equalities Office.

**Roundtable discussion with Government Equality Office** - the Women's National Commission (WNC) will be closed by government on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010 to cut costs. As a result, some of the functions currently undertaken by the WNC will be delivered centrally through the Government Equalities Office (GEO) and the Department is preparing a consultation exercise to engage with women across the UK over the coming months. Rather than wait to be consulted, MWNUK in partnership with the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick contacted GEO to arrange a national roundtable discussion with Muslim women. This was held on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2010 and 14 Muslim women from around the UK from diverse ethnic backgrounds and diverse fields of work participated. The discussions involved how women from Muslim communities across the UK can be encouraged and supported to increase their civic engagement and influence policies and decisions affecting their lives and their communities. This event formed a part of an ongoing project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and was undertaken by the University of Warwick. MWNUK organised the event, and worked closely with Dr. Khursheed Wadia at the University of Warwick to coordinate and deliver all aspects of the event.

**Roundtable discussion with Home Office** – MWNUK hosted a meeting in Birmingham and facilitated a discussion between Muslim women and representatives from the Home Office where women could raise concerns about the preventing violent extremism agenda. This meeting gave Muslim women an opportunity to input their views directly to government to influence and shape new policies in this area of work.

**Annual General Meeting** – The theme of this year’s annual general meeting has been ‘civic engagement.’ A range of speakers have been invited to encourage the civic participation of Muslim women such as representatives from the Government Equality Office, Public Appointments Commission, politicians and other partners.

**Member of Advisory Group for NSPCC** – MWNUK has been invited to become a member of their advisory group for safeguarding Muslim children. We have been involved in providing advice for NSPCC’s first annual conference to improve the safeguarding of Muslim children which will be held in March 2011. Shaista Gohir, Executive Director will be facilitating one of the workshops at the conference.

**Model Muslim Marriage Contract Initiative** – For several years, MWNUK has been collaborating with the Muslim Institute and progressive scholars to develop and promote a model Muslim Marriage Contract for those entering religious marriages in the UK, while also taking part in a campaign to promote civil marriage among British Muslims. In 2010, the MWNUK Chair has taken the lead role in developing a website dedicated to promoting the model contract and civil marriage, to be launched at the end of the year. The website contains information about Muslim family laws and women’s rights in other countries; classical Muslim jurisprudence and Sharia; and civil marriage. The MWNUK Chair is also part of a high-level discussion group organised by Stephen Hockman QC seeking to develop consensus recommendations from within the Muslim community to Government regarding Muslim marriages.

## ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING AIM 3

***AIM 3: To raise the profile of individual Muslim women and support organisations by highlighting their achievements and showcasing diverse role models***

The following activities have been carried out to support the above aim:

**Profiling Members** - All of our members do very important work and it is important that their contributions are recognised whether they are individuals or organisations. It is also useful for other women to know about their work.

**Birmingham Big Sisters Project** - MWNUK are currently piloting a role modeling project in Birmingham called Birmingham Big Sisters. This project aims to showcase diverse local Muslim female role models, through booklets, posters and mobile exhibition displays which will be sent out to local schools and libraries to help raise the aspirations of young Muslim women. One exhibition is currently being displayed at the New Art Gallery in Walsall, West Midlands.

**My Story section on website** – A new section has been created on the website called ‘My Story’ where Muslim women can share their experiences and opinions on their lived realities. The first story was added only recently and is by Zahra Khan who shares her views on why she wears the face veil.

**International Role Models** – We seek to highlight international Muslim female role models as their stories and achievements are equally inspiring as many of these women work in difficult and dangerous circumstances. We have highlighted a number of such women under the Inspirational Women section of our website.

From time to time we will also host prominent Muslim females from abroad. Earlier this year we invited Samar Minallah who is an activist and film documentary maker from Pakistan. We held a round table discussion with her and some of our members at our Birmingham offices.

## FUTURE PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Strategic priorities for the next 12 months will include:

**Continuing to build the network** – We will build MWNUK’s membership base by proactively seeking out membership in areas where we need to strengthen our reach, for example Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We will do this by trying to do more outreach work and we endeavour to visit more organisations and events held by Muslim women’s groups.

**Conducting series of roundtable discussions** - We are also planning to conduct a series of roundtable discussions around the country on issues pertinent to Muslim women and feeding views back to central government. We will attempt this through a partnership approach asking members if they can support the meetings by hosting the discussions in their localities.

**Continuing with current activities** - We will continue with the present activities such as adding information to the website; building the online directory; adding factsheets; updating members through newsletters; signposting etc.

**Showcasing Muslim female role models exhibitions** – We have produced a number of exhibitions highlighting Muslim female role models from past to present. We will be promoting these at events to raise aspirations of other women.

**More partnership work with mainstream organisations** – We will endeavour to work more collaboratively with other partners and also promote this approach to other network members.

**Continuing to speak in the media** – We will ensure that we continue getting the voices of Muslim women in the media and will endeavour to play an active role in all forms of social media.

## **FINANCIAL STATEMENT AND ACCOUNTS**

The overall budget available for the financial year June 2009 to May 2010, was £63 677. The funders included Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) and Birmingham City Council. The funding spent amounted to £53 942. A Summary of the accounts are provided on page 14 and a full copy of the accounts are available upon request. The majority of the expenditure was for core costs such as salaries, rent, stationary, telephone, travelling, training, and accountancy fees.

The accountants and auditors are:

RUS Chartered Accountants (Registered Auditors and Tax Advisors)  
1190A-1192 Stratford Road  
Hall Green  
Birmingham  
B28 8AB

With the current recession, like other organisations in the third sector, MWNUK is also feeling the impact. MWNUK is half way through its current financial year and are operating on similar funds as the previous financial year. However, next year MWNUK is expecting to operate on less income.

Currently we are in the process of applying for funding from a range of charitable sources and continuing to examine ways to raise a stable source of income to support core costs while ensuring that we guarantee our political and institutional independence.

**Detailed trading income and expenditure account for year ended 31 May 2010**

	<b>2010</b>		<b>2009</b>	
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Sales</b>				
Fundings		61,704		11,813
		<u>61,704</u>		<u>11,813</u>
<b>Cost of sales</b>				
Subcontract	(1,973)		6,776	
	<u>(1,973)</u>		<u>6,776</u>	
		1,973		(6,776)
<b>Gross profit</b>	103%	<u>63,677</u>	43%	<u>5,037</u>
<b>Charitable expenses</b>				
Wages and salaries	35,707		2,557	
Employer's NI contributions	3,108		205	
Staff Costs	-		32	
Staff training	350		-	
Rent and services	6,000		500	
Insurance	285		-	
Printing, postage and stationery	402		282	
Advertising	596		-	
Telephone	381		334	
Computer costs	615		-	
Travelling and accommodation	2,023		561	
Legal and professional	2,330		670	
Accountancy	843		670	
Audit	636		610	
General expenses	1		-	
Subsistence	421		-	
Depreciation of Computer	244		279	
		<u>53,942</u>		<u>6,700</u>
<b>Operating profit/(loss)</b>	16%	<u>9,735</u>	14%	<u>(1,663)</u>
<b>Other income and expenses</b>				
<b>Interest receivable</b>				
Bank deposit interest	43		7	
		<u>43</u>		<u>7</u>
<b>Net Deficit for the year</b>		<u>9,778</u>		<u>(1,656)</u>