



# FAITH, BELONGING AND WELLBEING IN MUSLIM SCHOOLS



MUSLIM MIND  
COLLABORATIVE

# **VALUING EVERY MIND: FAITH, BELONGING AND WELLBEING IN MUSLIM SCHOOLS**

**MARCH 2026**

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# VALUE EVERY MIND: A FOUNDER'S NARRATIVE

SABAH GILANI OBE



As the founder of the Value Every Mind programme, I often return to the question of why this work is so necessary, not just for Muslim communities, but for the systems around us trying to make sense of wellbeing, identity, and inclusion in increasingly complex times.

My own journey began in North London, where I was raised with a strong Islamic identity, rooted in discipline, reflection, and service. My early education at an Islamic school gave me a solid grounding in who I was and how faith could be a compass through life's challenges. That confidence, however, was tested by navigating institutions not always equipped to recognise Muslim identity as a visible part of public life, rather than something peripheral or private.

Creating Value Every Mind came from a clear need I saw both professionally and personally. Over a decade working across philanthropy, education, and leadership,

I witnessed the same pattern: young Muslims were either absent from mental health conversations or included in ways that erased their cultural and spiritual realities. The "hard to reach" narrative frustrated me. Systems and policies often lacked the will or understanding to truly engage, or did not know how. This is where the projects I have co-informed and incubated have created access and capacity-building, enabling Muslim communities to design, inform, and shape services that genuinely include them.

The Muslim Mind Collaborative creates a space for service providers, practitioners, and organisations to come together and learn about Muslim communities, what impacts their mental health, how to apply a faith equity model, and how to connect with a national network of providers working toward better outcomes. It is a platform for knowledge exchange, critical dialogue, and shared action.

## WHY SCHOOLS?

This speaks to both my own experience and the wider need to equip young people with tools to understand mental wellbeing, recognise signs and coping strategies, and normalise conversations around mental health. It helps destigmatise these topics and builds safe spaces where identity, emotional wellbeing, and resilience are nurtured.

Bringing these conversations into mainstream schools also fosters mutual understanding, respect, and compassion between students of different backgrounds. It creates environments where difference is valued, and where wellbeing, faith, and identity are not mutually exclusive. In a society grappling with polarisation, this work invites young people to be curious, empathetic, and emotionally literate.

Value Every Mind stands as a model for integrating faith and culturally rooted

therapeutic practices within education. By combining creative expression, Islamic heritage, and therapeutic tools, we challenge the idea that wellbeing must be secular or detached from identity. Faith plays a powerful role in resilience and recovery. We have evidence to back this, including BCBN's Hidden Survivors report, which found that over 90% of Muslim service users want faith- and culturally-sensitive support. Research from the Mental Health Foundation and NHS England further highlights the importance of cultural competence and lived experience in improving outcomes.

When young people explore mental health through Islamic architecture, creative writing, or faith-rooted reflection, they're reclaiming the right to heal in a language that speaks to them. It's not about separating the personal from the educational, but understanding that effective learning environments support the whole child: mind, heart, and soul.

Our facilitators are often recruited from within local communities, building trust and creating sustainable, community-led models. Many have never worked with Muslim-led services before, often because the funding or resources have not existed. This is where Muslim funders and institutions must step up: to invest in infrastructure, knowledge, and the next generation of practitioners and leaders.

Many students we've worked with say they wish they'd had access to these interventions as early as Year 7. That's when anxieties begin to form, through exam pressure, emotional overwhelm, or family stress. We're giving them tools not just to cope, but to understand themselves and each other.

Our techniques explore a wide creative landscape: photography, calligraphy, geometry, spoken word, poetry, writing, sports, and role play. These methods are especially effective for students, particularly

boys, who may find it difficult to talk directly about their feelings. Fictional characters and performance allow for honest conversations in safe, indirect ways. Schools often lack the capacity to embed these tools, but our programmes show what's possible.

I remember a school where a young boy asked for a speaker's autograph, he had never met a male Muslim therapist before and was inspired simply by his presence.

Or the excitement when students met a published Muslim author for the first time. These moments matter. Representation nurtures confidence, pride, and the belief that your story deserves to be told.

For schools, this work offers a powerful opportunity. Education is not just about academic success, it's about building grounded, resilient individuals. If schools want to be truly inclusive, they must reflect the full diversity of their students, including faith. Muslim youth are the largest faith-

identified youth group in the UK. Ignoring this risks deepening marginalisation and disengagement.

The third sector and funders also play a critical role. Value Every Mind shows that innovation doesn't always require disruption, sometimes it means listening. Listening to community wisdom, to young people, and to what families say they need.

Funders who care about inclusion must recognise that faith is not a barrier to progress, but a grounding force and source of meaning. When we invest in faith-literate approaches, we raise the standard for all.

This work is about rootedness. About creating spaces of belonging that build emotionally healthy, spiritually grounded societies, where young people can grow without fragmentation.

As we look ahead, my hope is that Value

Every Mind continues to serve as a beacon for educators, therapists, policymakers, and funders willing to reimagine inclusive mental health support.

This programme is grounded in a simple but radical belief: that every young person deserves to be seen, supported, and celebrated as they are. Because when we honour the full humanity of our children, we build the foundations of a just and compassionate society.

***That is why we must Value Every Mind.***

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Value Every Mind is a creative and dynamic response to support the mental health needs of young Muslims growing up in the UK. It seeks to actively address the need for integrating faith and culturally rooted therapeutic practices within education, as an essential part of community wellbeing. By investing in young people, the project seeks to develop community capacity in the short and long term. Adopting a strengths based approach that draws on internal resources within both human and epistemologies resources, it places valuing community identity at the core of its approach. By combining creative expression, Islamic heritage, and therapeutic tools, the Value Every Mind programme challenges the idea that wellbeing must be secular or detached from personal identity.

Across the delivery period, the programme engaged 1,483 students, 146 staff, and 51 parents through a combination of assemblies, creative wellbeing workshops, and parent/staff sessions. The programme aimed to **enhance mental health awareness, emotional resilience, and self-expression through faith-sensitive psychoeducation and culturally rooted creative arts**, ensuring content was both relevant and accessible to Muslim school communities.



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



**16 whole-school assemblies were delivered, reaching 1,483 students,** introducing foundational understanding of mental health, stress, anxiety, and faith-informed coping strategies.



**22 creative wellbeing workshops** were facilitated, integrating Islamic geometry, storytelling, reflective writing, photography, calligraphy, sports-based wellbeing, henna art, and identity-focused activities.



**5 parent wellbeing sessions engaging 51 parents** through hybrid and in-person formats were held, strengthening home-school approaches to wellbeing.



**Staff engagement across all sites,** including one formal staff session and additional staff involvement through observation, planning meetings, and reflective discussions.



Feedback collected and analysed from students, parents, and staff, showing **strong improvements in emotional literacy, stress awareness, self-expression,** and reduction in stigma.



**Collaboration with award-winning Muslim practitioners and creatives** resulted in strengthening local capacity and embedding culturally attuned wellbeing practices into schools, in an accessible manner.

## SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

### FAITH, IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Cultural identity and subsequent belonging was inherently built into the programme through adopting a culturally grounded epistemological framework from the outset. Through each element of the programme, not only were students empowered with emotional vocabulary identifiable to them personally, but teachers and parents were further enabled with common language and terminology they could draw on to support young people. This facilitated students recognising their identities as something to be proud of.

### ADOPTING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

Value Every Mind drew on engaging leading local Muslim practitioners in the field as core members of the delivery team. Practitioners were specifically chosen for excelling in their field and approach, and further served as relatable role models to the participating young people. Practitioners came from a range of professional backgrounds and brought with them depth and breadth that directly contributed to the programme content. This brought out the richness of epistemic resources available within the Muslim tradition and vast cultures represented within this, ensuring every child and adult could connect in a meaningful way.

### YOUNG PEOPLES' EXPERIENCES

The feedback from young people involved was overwhelmingly positive. They were introduced to a wide range of new resources held within their own traditions and cultures. Some of these were familiar and some were more new. Young people participated in exercising creativity through a number of different means which they may not have previously considered as something they could engage with. Within this it was evident how this became a form of empowerment of personal identities that young people could be proud of, without the pressure to hide their identity.

## FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

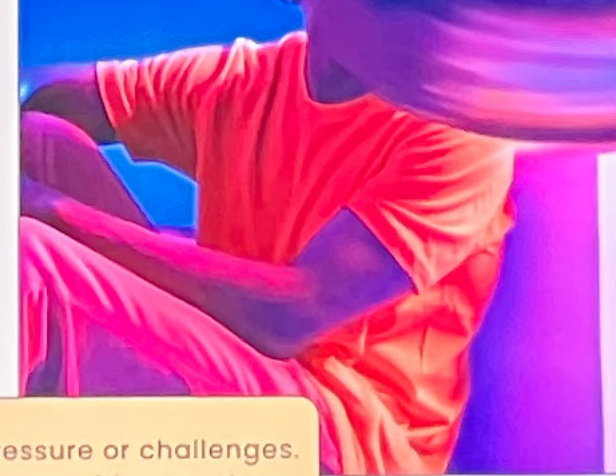
Value Every Mind demonstrates how early investment into the wellbeing of Muslim young people is critical for enhancing the long term potential for young people. Supporting young people to be confident in their identities and learn about meaningful ways they can enhance this, nurtures personal autonomy and the potential for growth. Value Every Mind is about equipping young people with a growth mindset, built on assets and strengths within their heritage, for long term success.

In order to build on this, we recommend the following:

1. Embed Faith and Cultural Competency in School Mental Health Provision
2. Invest in Community-Led, School-Linked Provision
3. Strengthen Strategic Coordination Across Education and Mental Health Sectors
4. Support Practice Sharing and Sector Growth
5. Embed Cultural Identity as Core to Emotional Resilience



## What is Stress and Anxiety?



Stress is the body's response to pressure or challenges. Anxiety is ongoing worry or fear, even without a clear cause. While both are normal at times, chronic stress or anxiety can harm mental and physical health.



# MUSLIM YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Understanding the current climate for young Muslims in terms of mental health requires examining a holistic picture of the UK Muslim population. Such a lens facilitates a more enhanced understanding of future trajectories and thereby current implications.

The 2021 census identifies **46%** of the Muslim population as being **under the age of 24 years**. This is significantly higher than the 29% for the overall population. Whilst Muslims constitute 6% of the population overall, **10% of all school-age children** (5–15 years) are Muslim, almost double that of the overall population (MCB, 2025). This is indicative of a significant resource pool for the UK collectively.

Equi identify that within attainment across **Muslim Faith schools, students performed 36% better** across eight subjects than the national average (Shah and Hunter, 2026). This is usually at a fraction of the cost. Muslim Faith schools embed a value driven ethos

which results in producing British citizens who are proud of their identity and feel a deep sense of civic engagement and desire to make positive contributions to society. There has been an overall improvement in educational attainment with 33% of Muslims holding a degree or above. Academic attainment creates pathways for increased social mobility and potential access to higher income jobs, directly correlating to improved health outcomes (Thomson et al, 2022). However, for positive individual and collective benefits, there remains an acute need for increased representation in many workforce domains, and dedicated careers guidance and mentoring within Muslim communities. This is further highlighted through discrepancies within higher professional occupancies where it stands at 6.5% for Muslims as compared to Hindu (17.8%) and Jewish (16.7%) communities (MCB, 2025), indicative of potential systemic barriers.

When considering the challenges for Muslim

women, these are multi-faceted. Archer (2010) concludes that for Muslim females in particular, their post-16 choices are inherently woven into their identities, cultural change and existing inequities. The number of Muslim women entering the labour market has continued to increase since 2001 (from 39% to 42.3% in 2021 in England and Wales), yet still remains significantly below the national average (42.3% in 2011 compared to 56.2% in 2021). Simultaneously, 27% of Muslim women (aged 16+) in the UK are considered economically inactive due to family and caring responsibilities (MCB, 2025). Muslim women wearing hijab have been found to have a 40% reduction in employment opportunities compared to their non-hijab wearing Muslim counterparts (Ahmed and Gorey, 2021).

Meanwhile, **40% of Muslim communities continue to live in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK**, whilst the 6% living in the most affluent areas

remains unchanged since 2001 (MCB, 2025). When cross-referenced to the social determinants of health framework, this indicates towards poorer long-term health and economic outcomes for significant sections of Muslim communities.

Muslim communities across the UK also continue to face a unique set of challenges in the form of marginalisation and anti-Muslim hatred, with successive negative impacts on health and access to health provision. British Muslim students reported increased perceived discrimination where they carried visible signs of their Muslim faith, with subsequent negative wellbeing consequences (Uddin et al, 2022). **Tell MAMA reports receiving the highest number of anti-Muslim hate reports during 2024**, since its inception (Tell MAMA, 2025). Mental health support and access is governed by experiences of Islamophobia, anti-Muslim hatred, prejudice, and inadequacy within current provision.

It is therefore no surprise that a lack of knowledge pertaining to mental health continues to exist within Muslim communities, further exacerbated by stigma and incorrect advice given by some religious leaders (Ahmed and Hashem, 2016). Tanhan and Young (2022) demonstrate that in order for Muslim communities to access and make use of mental health service provision, they must first be equipped with knowledge regarding service provision and such services must be contextualised to their cultural background.

Furthermore, they emphasise the acute need to adopt a socio-ecological framework which takes into account biopsychosocial, spiritual and economic contexts. Whilst this is generally advocated for within the social determinants of health framework, the **lived reality of accessing mental health provision, due to a lack of understanding needs by service providers for under-served**

**communities, remains.**

Equally, there is growing evidence that Muslims would access and have a preference for **service provision that centres their faith and cultural needs** (Ahmed and Hashem, 2016, The Lantern Initiative et al, 2021). In doing so, this provides avenues for enabling and uplifting both mental health and additional determinants of health and wellbeing.

Lacking within this is data surrounding Muslim males, raising the question of what happens to young Muslim boys as they grow up. Alam (2023) presents similar concerns in terms of the need to understand mental health within culturally appropriate frameworks, eradication of stigma and the need for creating trust in services for British-Bangladeshi Muslim men in London.

The need for representative knowledge of Muslim males and wellbeing across the

diversity held within Muslim communities, remains. It is however known that the **over-representation of Muslim males within prison (18.2% of the prison population)** (MoJ, 2024) significantly adds to the layered concerns.

There has never been a more pressing need to invest in the future generation. In centering the wellbeing of young Muslims, the projected trajectory of those young people will change the shape of their communities going forward. In individual growth lies collective growth. In supporting the next generation of hard working young Muslims who seek to positively contribute to British society, the outcomes stand to benefit the UK as a whole (Shah and Hunter, 2026)



How to Maintain Good Mental Health?

- Regular physical activity
- Healthy diet
- Adequate sleep
- Mindfulness & relaxation techniques

Mental Health  
**Latifah**  
A Time for Reflection  
www.darulhuda.org

# VALUE EVERY MIND - PROGRAMME OVERVIEW



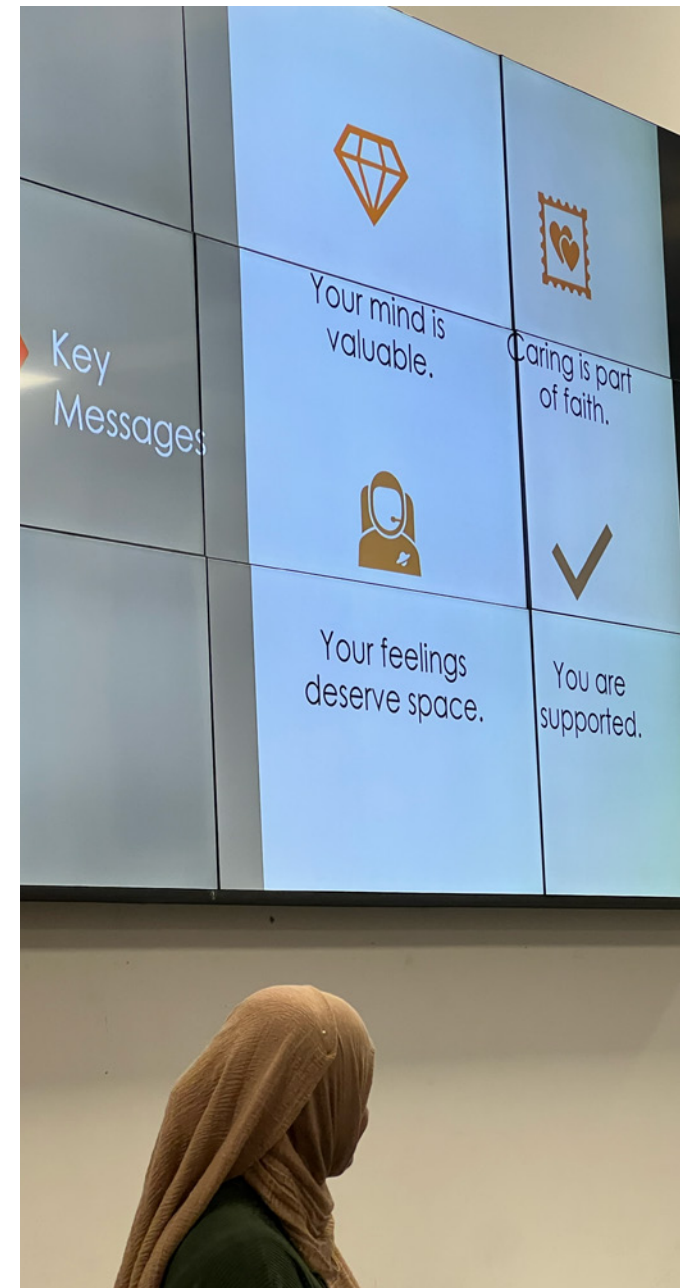
The programme was tailored for each school around the following elements:

## 1. WHOLE-SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES

Schools were consulted prior to delivery in order to ensure specific needs of each school could be incorporated. **The whole school approach facilitated the normalisation of conversations regarding mental health among young Muslims.** Some of the key contents covered included:

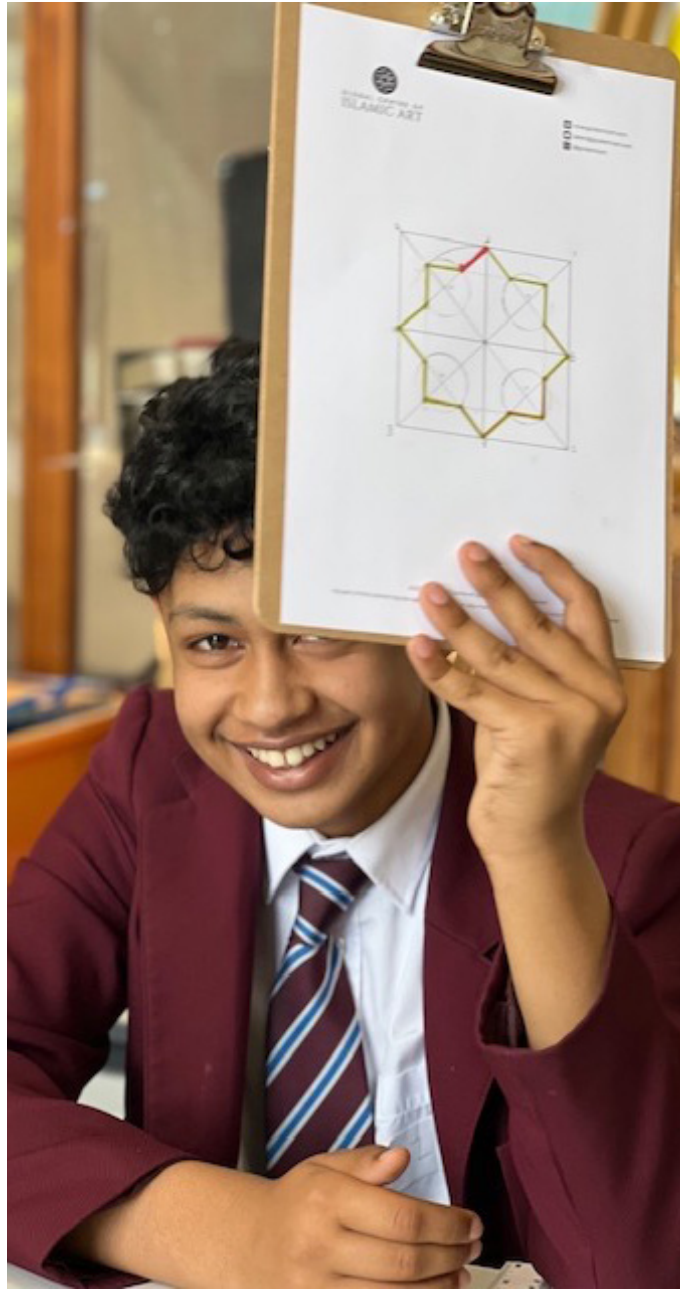
- **Understanding mental health** from both psychological and Islamic epistemological frameworks. This included considering lived experience, faith and cultural sensitivities.
- **Recognising signs of stress and anxiety** thereby normalising conversations pertaining to mental health and wellbeing.
- Learning practical, faith-informed **copng strategies** such as dhikr, breathing exercises, sensory grounding, and gratitude, with a view to reducing stress and anxiety levels.

- **Challenging stigma** by reframing emotional struggle as part of the human experience and as recognised within the Islamic tradition.



## 2. CREATIVE WELLBEING WORKSHOPS

Workshops were delivered within small group settings in order to facilitate increased engagement. Sessions were designed to **bridge emotional wellbeing with cultural identity and creative expression**. The workshops created **safe, reflective spaces** where students could **explore feelings**, process stress, and **build confidence** through a range of culturally familiar creative pathways. Workshop themes included:



**Islamic Geometry and Mindfulness** - promoted concentration, reduced physiological arousal through rhythmic drawing, and provided a culturally resonant route to self-expression and emotional regulation.

**Henna Mandala Art and Emotional Regulation** - art-based wellbeing workshop positioned creativity as a pathway to healing and self-connection. Students explored how art can be used as a practical wellbeing tool while celebrating heritage, identity, and belonging, creating a safe space for expression, pride, and reflection rooted in culture and faith.



**Art and Identity** - supported exploring names and personal identity through therapeutic art techniques (paint, collage, textures). Reflections on heritage, values, and strengths, enabled students to externalise feelings and build positive self-concept through art. This fostered emotional expression and increased self-awareness

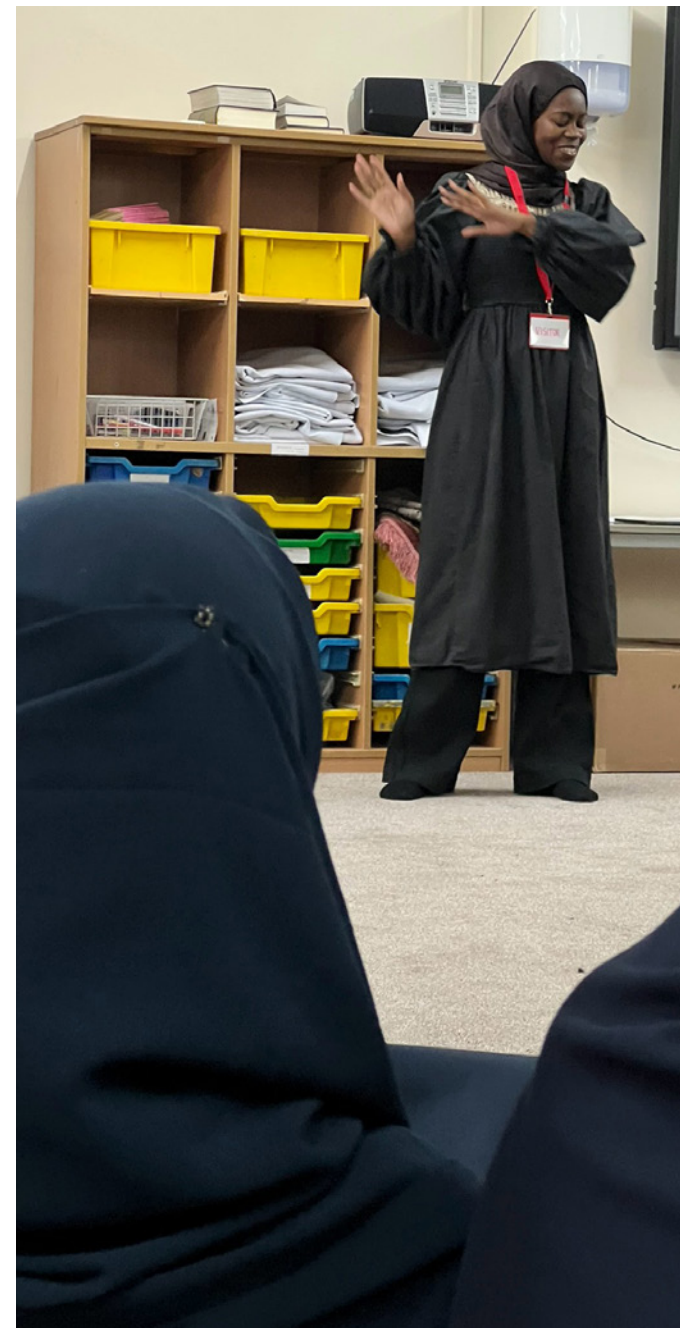
**Storytelling and Creative Writing** - linked leadership development with mental health, showing how narrative, values and creative practice can boost confidence and provide practical tools for emotional regulation. Staff engagement during sessions strengthened school interest in sustained creative-wellbeing provision.





**Photography and Visual Self-Expression** - invited students to explore self-expression through image-making, using storytelling, composition, and visual identity as tools for reflection. Students learned how photography can support emotional processing, deepen mindful observation of their surroundings, and build confidence through creative ownership of their narratives.

**Arabic Calligraphy** - students were guided through mindful mark-making rooted in Islamic artistic heritage. The rhythmic nature of calligraphy supported calm focus, patience, and connection to cultural identity – reinforcing wellbeing through creativity.



**Poetry and Spoken Word** - supporting improvisation and creative writing. Through role play and guided poetry prompts, pupils explored emotions, identity, and expressive communication - drawing on an artform deeply rooted in Islamic civilisation.

**Sports-Based Wellbeing Activities** - these were designed to be inclusive for all children whilst taking into account the school facilities. Activities included (bottle flip relay race, circuit activity with cones and batons) and supported government-led drives of two hours of physical activity per week, alongside engaging young people in active lifestyles as part of strategic wellbeing initiatives within schools.



### 3. STAFF WELLBEING WORKSHOPS

These complimented the student and parents wellbeing workshops and served to further enhance the collective learning. These accounted for the opportunities schools had available to them in relation to engaging with the wider topic of

mental health and wellbeing. They further considered factors relating to staff support, access to resources, discussing policies, alongside gaining an understanding of the broader school culture and its relevance to wellbeing.

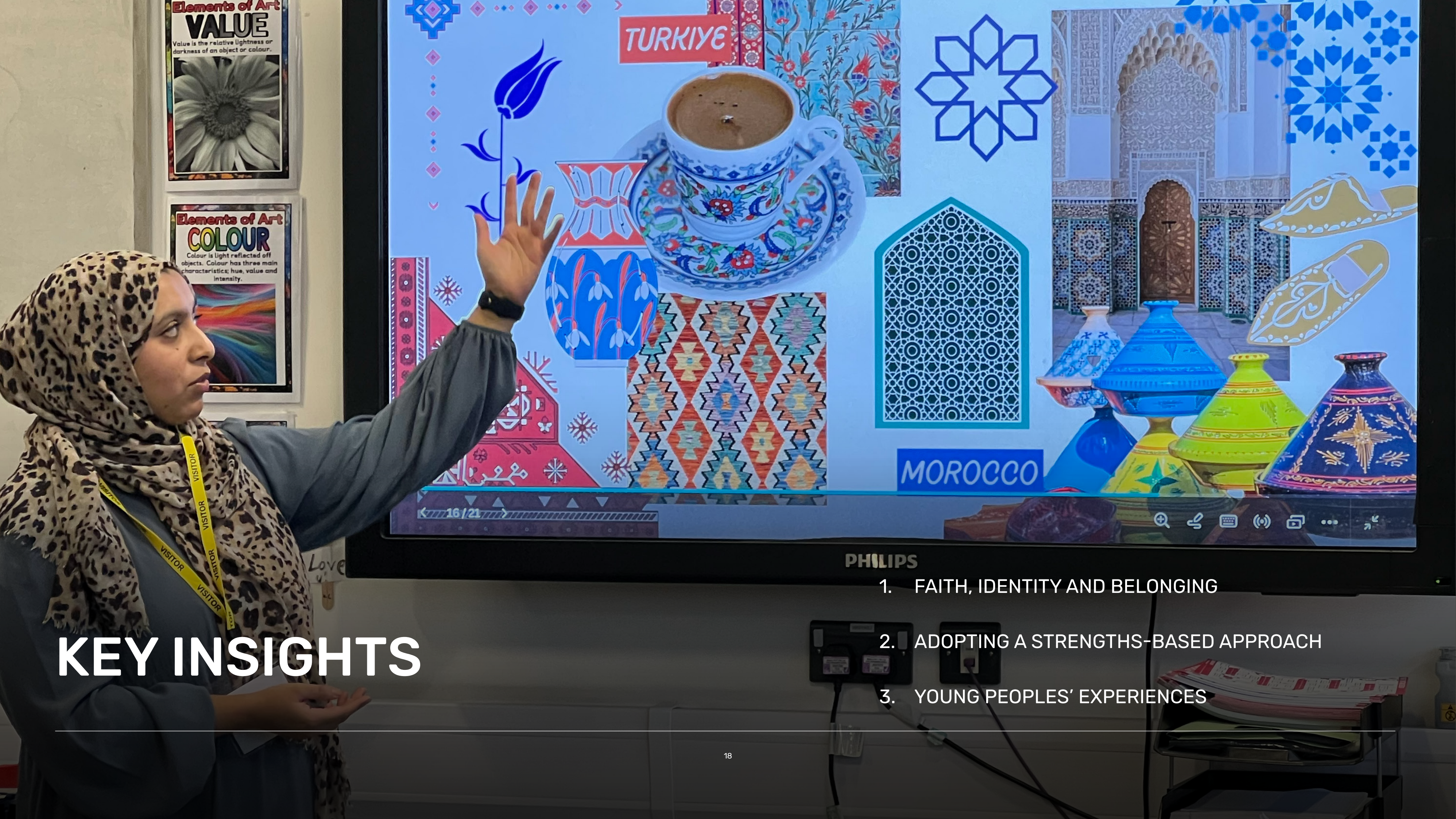


### 4. PARENTS WORKSHOP

These focussed on supporting young peoples' wellbeing and parents own misconceptions surrounding mental health and wellbeing. They further opened important dialogue around supporting adolescents, stress within Muslim families, and practical strategies for strengthening emotional resilience at home. Deliberate care was taken to ensure spaces were non-judgmental, allowing for parents to raise current and future concerns, inclusive of

progression beyond secondary school. The independent delivery ensured parents could speak openly in relation to broader societal concerns, trends in youth mental health, and specific challenges and concerns within Muslim communities. Whilst these sessions facilitated initial contact between schools and parents in relation to wellbeing initiatives, schools have been actively encouraged to maintain and build on this engagement.





**Elements of Art**  
**VALUE**  
Value is the relative lightness or darkness of an object or colour.

**Elements of Art**  
**COLOUR**  
Colour is light reflected off objects. Colour has three main characteristics; hue, value and intensity.

**TURKIYE**

**MOROCCO**

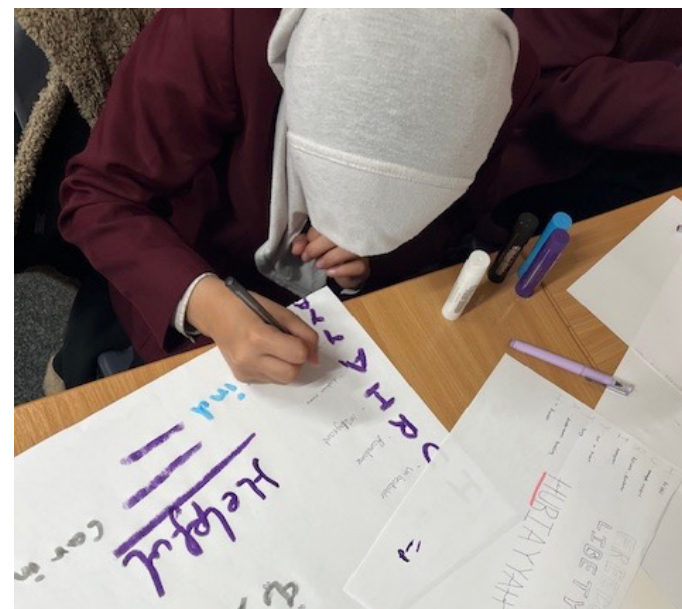
# KEY INSIGHTS

**PHILIPS**

1. FAITH, IDENTITY AND BELONGING
2. ADOPTING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH
3. YOUNG PEOPLES' EXPERIENCES

# FAITH, IDENTITY AND BELONGING

In adopting a culturally grounded epistemological framework from the outset, this facilitated centering the faith, cultural identity and subsequent belonging felt by students, teachers and parents alike. Through each element of the programme, not only were students empowered with emotional vocabulary identifiable to them personally, but teachers and parents were further enabled with common language and terminology they could draw on to support young people. In centering the identity of the students at the forefront of the programme, this was true inclusivity that felt real to those who partook.



*I wanted to express my sincere appreciation for the wellbeing programme. It had a truly positive impact on both parents and students, and the feedback has been excellent. The importance of offering this kind of support cannot be overstated, and the outcomes have clearly shown how valuable and meaningful the session was for our school community.*

## TEACHER FEEDBACK

A whole school approach which further involved parents allowed for a holistic approach which enhanced collective understanding of mental health and wellbeing. Not only did this facilitate a whole-school understanding allowing students and teachers to connect, it further increased parental confidence in supporting their children through meaningful approaches.

# 80%

**of parents** at London East Academy reported **improved understanding of stress and anxiety** in young people,

# 100%

said they would recommend the session to other parents

*These types of programmes are important because, in a community with many different cultures where mental health is often seen as a taboo topic, it's essential to help them understand that everyone has mental health. It's crucial to recognise this, and there is nothing to feel embarrassed about.*

## TEACHER FEEDBACK

The multi-faceted nature of the programme provided compassionate and accessible spaces in which real challenges could be openly discussed. Just some of the topics included identifying and addressing early signs of distress, dealing with Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, digital pressures and academic expectations. Such topics grounded the lived reality of young Muslims within wellbeing considerations.

The Equi report demonstrates how Muslim young people growing up in supportive environments which centre their identities have the potential to achieve excellent outcomes (Shah and Hunter, 2026). Drawing on data from the Gallup World Poll between 2005-2011, Brown and Crown (2014) conclude the positive role religion plays across different faith groups. These range from social purpose, to social insurance, to social time. The benefits of increase in social connections are reflected within the global move towards social prescribing as a means of improving wellbeing (Morse et al, 2022). Mossakowski (2003) posits that not only does religious identity provide a positive social identity, it additionally serves to promote a positive sense of self, further resulting in increased wellbeing and self-esteem.

The positive and protective role of religion in Muslim communities is seen in studies focussing on coping during the Covid-19 pandemic. By directly drawing on faith-

centric resources such as prayers, du'a, Qur'an recitation, and seeking forgiveness, Muslims around the globe reported better mental health and wellbeing outcomes (Awaad et al, 2021). Critical to this is that these resources were meaningful to their identities and could be adopted flexibly across any given context. Wellbeing and positive mental health are inherent to the Muslim tradition itself, with the famous text of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, Sustenance of the Soul, traced back to the 9th century, demonstrating how attaining wellbeing could and should be embedded in the everyday (Awaad and Ali, 2023).

We therefore ascertain key fundamentals which must be embedded within addressing wellbeing for Muslim young people:

- **Draw on epistemological sources that are central to the identity of the young person.** This means centering their faith, culture and how that relates to belonging, in a manner

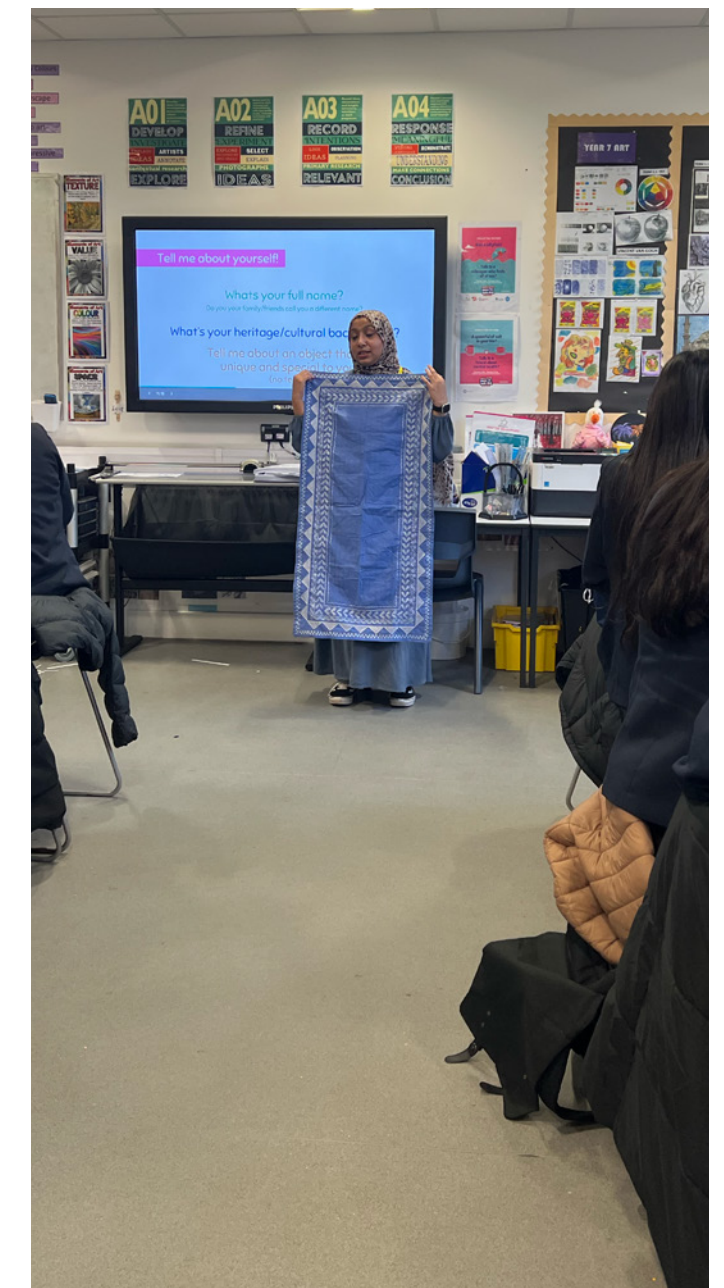
meaningful to them. A young Muslim person should be able to feel proud of their identity and heritage, whilst also being proud of their potential contribution to British society. Inclusivity needs to be embedded naturally and fully, supporting young people to then carry this forward wherever they may go in life.

- **Support the building of a strong sense of identity.** This requires wellbeing initiatives to account for the unique circumstances facing Muslim communities such as Islamophobia, anti-Muslim hate, prejudice and discrimination. Whilst these are not acceptable, they are likely to be the lived reality of many young Muslims growing up in the UK, particularly as they continue into higher education or enter employment. Therefore, wellbeing initiatives must not only recognise and name those experiences, but furthermore must enable young people with the self-confidence and personal

growth which helps them to assertively navigate such experiences.

- **Normalisation of conversations pertaining to wellbeing** is essential. This must be implemented within a framework and utilising terminology that is relatable and identifiable by the young people in question. This avoids superimposing onto young people what they should or might be feeling and instead draws on their lived reality and lived identities.
- **Adopt a holistic approach** which does not result in compartmentalisation and spaces that remain off-limit in relation to wellbeing. This means adopting a collaborative approach between schools, parents, young people and their communities, where everyone is able to collectively share in the conversations and subsequent benefits. Such an approach not only works to address current concerns, but also serves as a preventative strategy for the future.

- **A multi-faceted approach** which intertwines different forms of engagement. This facilitates drawing on a greater range of resources which normalise conversations around wellbeing, within different contexts.



# ADOPTING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

A central feature of the Value Every Mind programme consists of embedding the richness of resources existing within Muslim communities. This pertained to both epistemic and human resources. The current mainstream wellbeing provision centres on utilising mainstream, often secular models, across all population groups without significant individualisation. Given the pivotal role of the Muslim identity in everyday life, it was essential to centre knowledge and resources identifiable by Muslim young people.

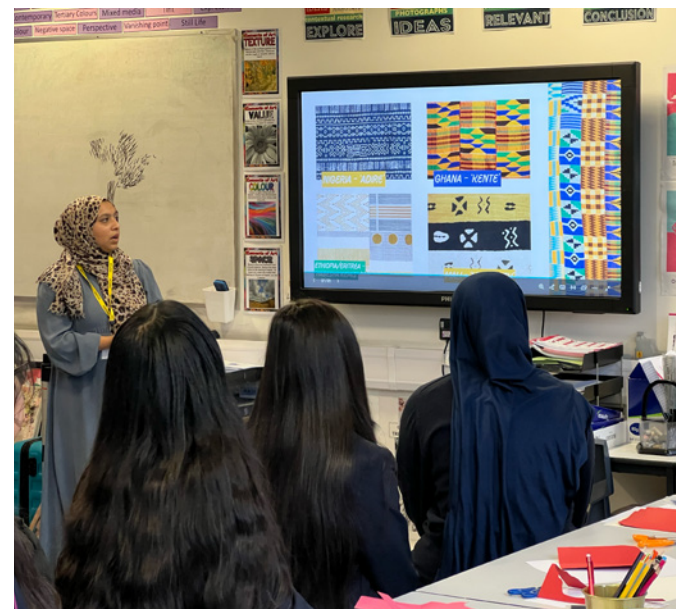
From a human resources perspective, Value Every Mind drew on engaging leading Muslim practitioners in the field as core members of the delivery team. These individuals were specifically chosen for excelling in their field and approach, and further served as relatable role models to the participating young people. Practitioners came from a range of professional backgrounds and brought with them depth and breadth that directly



contributed to the programme content. This brought out the richness of epistemic resources available within the Muslim tradition and vast cultures represented within this, ensuring every child and adult could connect in a meaningful way.

*It was a very rewarding and fulfilling experience to see our young people engaging with creative, mindful and artistic expression that is rooted in our Islamic faith, culture and heritage*

**PRACTITIONER**



*Speaking with parents in multiple languages added a deeper level of connection and made space for vital conversations that are often left unspoken. I found this to be a powerful bridge between generations, cultures, and mental wellbeing.*

**PRACTITIONER**

*It was incredibly rewarding to engage with students in a way that was not only informative but also meaningful and culturally relevant.*

**PRACTITIONER**

evident, as did their real concern for supporting the wider families of their students.

*Staff requested ways in which they could engage their students better in events that would be beneficial for the boys' mental health. They also wanted to know ways in which the parents could be involved more in improving the boys' mental health, especially those undergoing challenging and potentially stigmatised lifestyles.*

**PRACTITIONER**

The transformative significance of the Value Every Mind programme was expressed as being significant to identity development, particularly given the current wider hostilities being faced by Muslim communities:

Collaboration was at the heart of the programme, providing avenues through which staff could reach out for further support. Staff buy-in through this became

*I have delivered workshops on this and other writing-related topics to Muslim and non Muslim schools alike. There is a marked difference in how under-served and under-resourced many of the Muslim school settings are, and it seems Muslim students do not have the same access to inspirational local role models to allow them to aim for more. Muslim students are often under a double-load of issues where as well as all the regular teenage challenges, they often too have problems relating to identity, the impact of Islamophobia and awareness of global crises like Gaza and Sudan. They require additional support to help them navigate these challenges and understand how to manage an increasingly uncertain and often hostile world.*

**PRACTITIONER**

*I think it's incredibly important to help diminish the taboo of speaking about mental health amongst Muslims, especially considering the social and political climate in the UK today and the current rise in Islamophobia.*

**PRACTITIONER**

In this sense, Value Every Mind considered the whole young person within their given context, thereby ensuring it was current and relevant. The holistic nature of the programme and the collaborative efforts between schools and the organisers were essential for ensuring good practice could be built upon:

*It was inspiring to witness the investment the school has already made into student mental wellbeing. Our workshop and assembly session offered a meaningful way to build on these foundations and continue the important conversation around emotional wellbeing and identity. The students were an absolute pleasure to work with—engaged, well-behaved, and open in their participation. I particularly valued the opportunity to share my own experiences of attending an Islamic school, my leadership journey, and why mental health, a positive mindset, and emotional resilience are so vital. The staff were incredibly accommodating and helped ensure a smooth and welcoming process from start to finish.*

**SABAH GILANI,  
DIRECTOR**

A strengths-based model thereby encompasses and integrates the following:

- **Drawing on epistemic resources inherent to the identities of the communities in question.** This enables relatability, pride at one's identity and heritage, and a deep sense of ownership over meaningful approaches to wellbeing.
- **Embedding expertise from within communities themselves.** Not only does this maximise drawing on resources within communities, but further provides visible role models for young people to engage with and hold as future examples.
- **Collaborative approaches with schools.** These are built on meaningful relationships developed with the young people, parents and the schools, embodying what a whole school approach means in working practice. As a result, there is greater buy-in, investment and commitment from all involved,

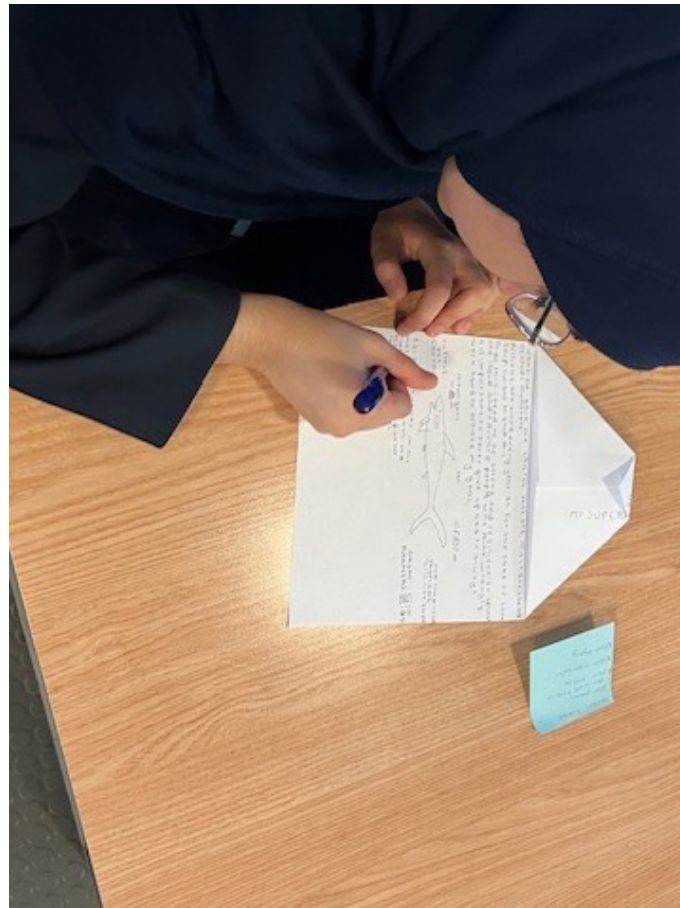
helping to address some of the common barriers existing within communities.

- **Sustainable practices** demonstrating that wellbeing does not have to be costly and inaccessible. By drawing on local expertise and the heritage of the communities being worked with, options for low cost yet scalable long term solutions arise.



# YOUNG PEOPLES' EXPERIENCES

Young people were introduced to a wide range of new resources held within their own traditions and cultures. Some of these were familiar and some were more new. Young people participated in exercising creativity through a number of different means which they may not have previously considered as something they could engage with. Within this it was evident how this became a form of empowerment of personal identities that young people could be proud of, without the pressure to hide their identity.



*This session made me explore how art can be tied to Allah and I found another way to express my faith.*

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

*I learnt to speak up when I'm feeling down and I learnt about different outlets for when overwhelmed.*

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

Increasing the wellbeing toolkit young people have access to, allows for greater autonomy and individualised approaches to wellbeing and addressing mental health concerns. Students were enabled to try new experiences and gain new skills. In aligning this to their identities and core values, students gained valuable learning. A vital aspect of this was students learning to accept themselves for who they are.

*It made me calmer and love myself more. I would use the techniques again if I have anxiety.*

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

*I learnt the beauty of Arabic calligraphy.*

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

*The session really helped me as ... I would always bottle up my feelings, ... I am still learning and trusting certain people.*

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

*I found more ways to relax, to unapologetically feel myself (and I hope to follow on with that more) and it reminded me of my love for theatrics and poetry.*

## STUDENT FEEDBACK



Most significantly, conversations around mental health become normalised and understood across young people and the adults frequently present in their lives.

**78%**  
**of students** at Baytul Ilm reported learning **new ways to care** for their mental health.

**90%**  
**of students** at Afifah felt they were equipped with new ideas to **reduce stress** or help with **feeling calmer**.

**100%**  
**of students** at Darul Hadis reported learning **what mental health** means

**86%**  
**of students** at London East Academy said they **felt more positive** after participating in the creative wellbeing workshop

The whole school approach was a substantial element in this, ensuring that young people were not left alone in the conversations and that teachers and parents/caregivers were included from the outset. Across the board, staff reported increased confidence in using creative, identity-affirming methods to support students, demonstrating the added strengths to a whole school, holistic approach. Practitioners also reported the critical insight it provided for them, when engaging with young people.

*It was incredibly rewarding to engage with students in a way that was not only informative but also meaningful and culturally relevant. The creative henna art activity gave students a hands-on experience of mindfulness through a cultural art form, and it was amazing to see how therapeutic, calming, and engaging it was for them. Everyone took part enthusiastically and connected beautifully with the session and created an artwork that they could take home with them.*

**PRACTITIONER**

*(Most valuable thing from today was) learning about how I may be able to understand my child's struggles more and offer them the space to be more open.*

**PARENT FEEDBACK**

*I believe the assembly helped broaden students' understanding of mental health, the importance of recognising the signs, and the different methods they can use to maintain their wellbeing.*

**TEACHER FEEDBACK**

The Social Mobility Commission (Stevenson et al, 2017) reported key findings in relation to the limited upward progression available to young Muslims. Despite excellent academic outcomes, this did not always translate into employment gains, further exacerbated by either parental expectations or low expectations presented within academic environments. Self-agency was found to be particularly low due to a lack of prerequisite skills such as capital, knowledge or networks which often open up opportunities. As young Muslims progress up to Higher Education, these barriers and diminishing opportunities only intensify.

Turner and Khan (2025) report on the significant challenges facing young Muslims in the face of rising anti-Muslim sentiments. Muslim young people were found to often grow up with a strong sense of personal faith identity, only to then have to suppress that identity the older they got. This intertwined with young Muslims exhibiting a strong

sense of civic pride and desire to contribute to society, only to be held back by societal structures.

Collectively this points towards the need for collaborative, sustained support structures which embed faith-centric holistic approaches as a core feature. Young people are given the opportunity to thrive when programmes consider the following:

- **Provide accessible and meaningful vocabulary** to express mental health and wellbeing, both for identification purposes as well as expressive purposes. When young people know what terms can help them to understand how they are and how they feel, they are better enabled to then share this knowledge with others.
- **Identity-based relatable resources** add cultural richness and foster pride in one's heritage. allowing young people to feel and exercise self-autonomy confidently. It further provides a sense

of ownership and thereby meaningful engagement with subsequent wellbeing outcomes.

- **Interactive and engaging practical tools** support to unify and solidify the above. What previously was shrouded in taboo and silencing, evolves into tangible, accessible and relevant wellbeing resources. Young people are thereby enabled to explore wellbeing initiatives for themselves, whether individually or with their peers and adults.





الله أكبر  
محمد رسول الله

الله أكبر  
محمد رسول الله

KD Grammar School  
for Boys  
Educating Tomorrow's Leaders  
**Fardh Salaah**

MASJID  
AL-  
WALIDAYN

# CONCLUSION

Whilst Value Every Mind brought individual based benefits to students, their schools, and parents, its key focus is on capacity building within communities as a whole. In investing in young people, the potential reach of future generations is cultivated. We recognise this as requiring strategic planning and implementation in key areas, mental health and wellbeing being one of these.

The project centred school capacity building in its approach:

## **SCHOOL CAPACITY-BUILDING OUTCOMES**

- Staff gained deeper understanding of student wellbeing needs
- Schools received toolkits, posters, and mental health booklets for ongoing use
- Content aligned with PSHE, RSE, art, and pastoral curricula
- Implementation models encouraged schools to embed faith-sensitive wellbeing across departments, not as a standalone intervention

## **INCLUSIVITY AND SAFEGUARDING**

Inherent to this was the consideration of inclusivity and ensuring safeguarding, given the potential sensitive nature of mental health and wellbeing. Prior to each delivery, MMC met with school leads to:

- Assess any SEND, neurodiversity, or additional support needs
- Adapt sessions to ensure accessibility and sensory-friendly approaches
- Conduct risk assessments and ensure school staff were present during all sessions
- Make sure workshops were trauma-informed, culturally grounded, and psychologically safe

This approach ensured each session was inclusive by grounding the identity of students within their given context, whilst also meeting the needs of diverse learners.

A key strength of the programme has been its ability to connect students with award-winning local Muslim role models-artists, psychologists, storytellers, photographers, and therapeutic practitioners, who embody both professional expertise and cultural familiarity. This model promotes:

- Positive identity affirmation
- A sense of belonging and representation
- Sustainable community relationships
- Opportunities for continued creative and wellbeing engagement

These connections help schools cultivate an environment where wellbeing, creativity, and cultural confidence can flourish long after the programme ends.

Several schools have already requested follow-on delivery, demonstrating strong demand for continued partnership. Notably, one school was so inspired by the impact of the creative sessions that they invited the facilitator to explore a full-time calligraphy

programme within their art curriculum, a powerful example of how creative, faith-informed wellbeing can shape long-term institutional change.

This level of interest reflects the programme's broader influence: showing schools what is possible when students are given access to relatable role models, culturally grounded wellbeing practices that students can relate to, and creative mediums that honour their faith, identity, and lived experience.

Value Every Mind demonstrates the power of combining faith-informed psychoeducation with creative, identity-affirming wellbeing practices. The programme has helped shift school culture, build confidence across families, and create safer, more compassionate spaces for young people to express themselves.

Through this work, the programme has:

- Strengthened emotional literacy, self-

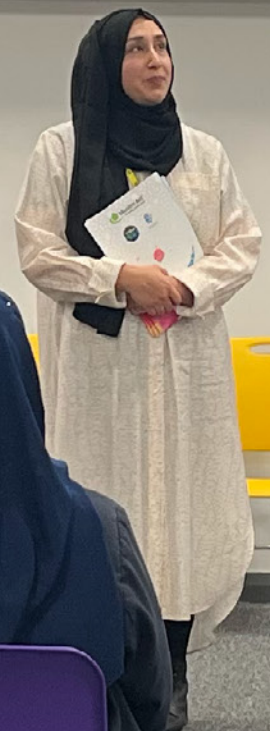
awareness, and resilience among students

- Increased staff and parent confidence in recognising and supporting mental health needs
- Reduced stigma and misconceptions surrounding mental health and help-seeking within Muslim communities
- Embedded culturally and faith-sensitive approaches into school wellbeing systems
- Expanded access to relatable Muslim role models, helping students see their identity as a source of strength, not a barrier

These outcomes demonstrate the programme's capacity to create meaningful, lasting change in how Muslim young people understand, talk about, and navigate their mental health. The trusted relationships built with schools and the growing demand for continued delivery reflect the programme's relevance and credibility. Value Every Mind

enables every student to take forward a strengths-based model that is familiar to their identities, whilst providing room for individualisation.

Value Every Mind demonstrates how early investment into the wellbeing of Muslim young people is critical for enhancing the long term potential for young people. By supporting young people to be confident in their identities and learn about meaningful ways they can enhance this, nurtures personal autonomy and the potential for growth. Value every mind is about equipping young people with a growth mindset, built on assets and strengths within their heritage, for long term success.



# SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

A core aim of Value Every Mind was not only to deliver high-quality sessions, but to leave lasting value within each school. Sustainability was intentionally embedded throughout the programme by strengthening school capacity, local ecosystems, and culturally grounded wellbeing pathways.

Each school received:

- Culturally relevant mental health toolkits, posters and classroom resources to continue embedding wellbeing across the curriculum.
- Clear referral pathways to faith-sensitive mental health support for students requiring additional help.
- Tailored recommendations and insights for each school based on observations, student feedback, and staff reflections.
- Workshop activities that students and staff can replicate or draw on independently.

Connections with award-winning Muslim creatives, educators and wellbeing practitioners, enabling schools to build ongoing partnerships with credible role models who understand students' identities, cultures and lived realities.

Value Every Mind is about being strategic in how young Muslim people can be supported towards future growth and success. As such, this requires a coordinated collective effort



# FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of Value Every Mind signals not just the effectiveness of culturally grounded mental health support for Muslim students—it highlights an urgent sector-wide need to embed these approaches into mainstream education and youth services. As a result, we propose the following future directions and sector learning for children and young peoples' services, education providers, and funders:

## 1. EMBED FAITH AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION

Faith and cultural identity are integral to the mental wellbeing of many young people, particularly Muslim students. Schools must be supported to:

- Integrate identity-affirming and faith-literate resources across PSHE, pastoral care, and wellbeing strategies.
- Partner with diverse practitioners who reflect the student body.
- Access toolkits and training that build staff confidence in supporting faith-based needs without pathologising difference.

## 2. INVEST IN COMMUNITY-LED, SCHOOL-LINKED PROVISION

Local capacity is critical. When practitioners from Muslim communities co-deliver, we strengthen trust, role modelling, and relevance.

- Funders and local authorities should invest in Muslim-led organisations to scale proven models.
- Community practitioners should be part of school mental health ecosystems—not an add-on, but as core collaborators.

## 3. STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC COORDINATION ACROSS EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH SECTORS

- Schools, local health systems, and third sector partners need joined-up pathways for early intervention, faith-sensitive referral options, and family engagement.
- Funders and policy leads should resource collective initiatives that focus on bridging gaps for minoritised children and young people.

#### 4. SUPPORT PRACTICE SHARING AND SECTOR GROWTH

The insights and tools generated by Value Every Mind demonstrate what's possible. However, too often, these learnings remain siloed. We recommend:

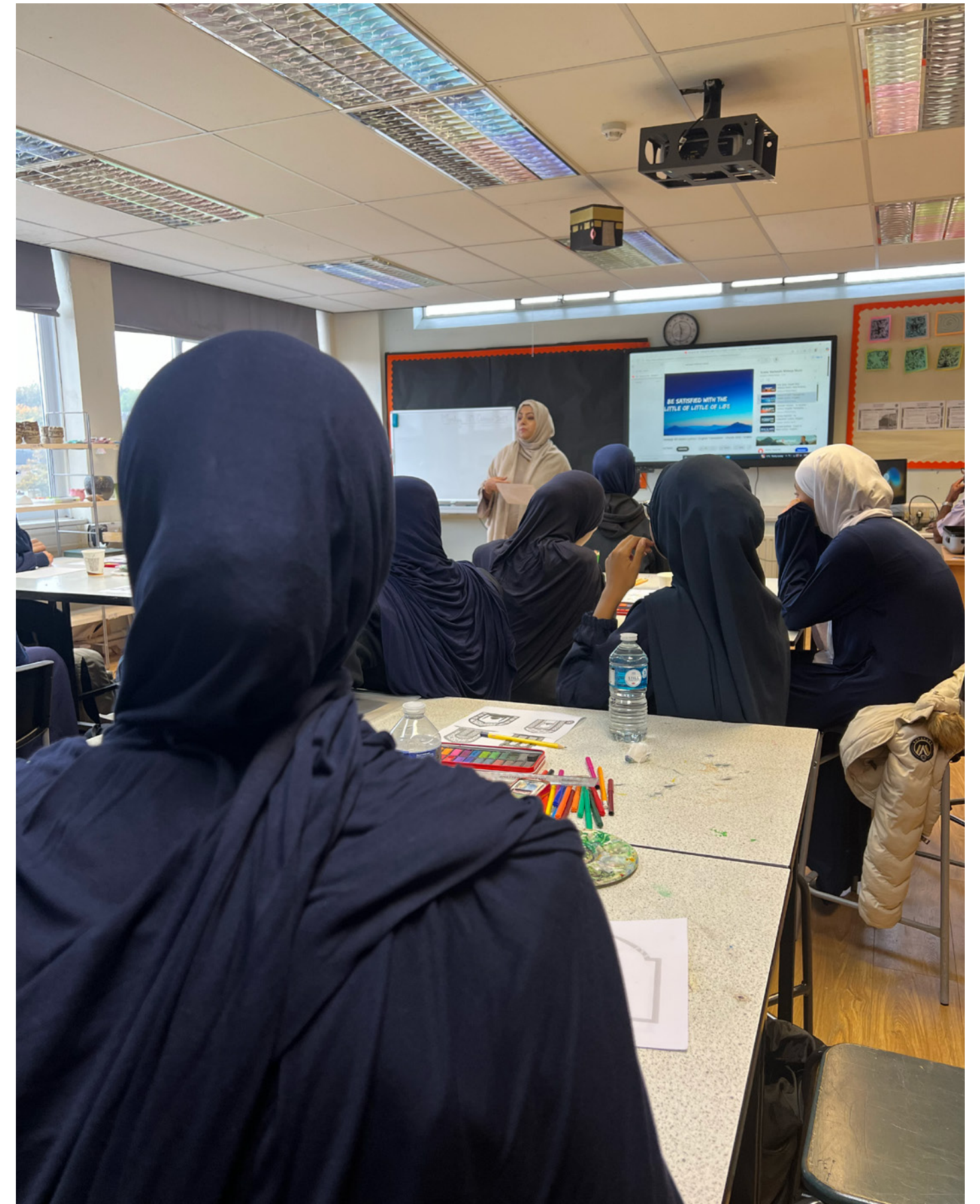
- Creating open-access spaces for practice exchange, peer learning, and collaboration across schools and Muslim-led services.
- Building a community of practice that helps services embed what works—and evolve it further.

#### 5. EMBED CULTURAL IDENTITY AS CORE TO EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

The most powerful outcome of this programme has been young people reconnecting with their faith, culture, and creativity as sources of pride and healing.

We must recognise this as foundational—not peripheral—to wellbeing. This insight should shape future:

- Curriculum development
- Therapeutic interventions
- Safeguarding and pastoral care approaches



## WHAT'S NEXT

### STRENGTHENING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES' MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING

Muslim children now make up 10% of the school-age population in England, yet their lived realities, faith identities, and cultural experiences are too often absent from school wellbeing systems and mental health curricula. They further remain significantly underrepresented in mental health research, service design, and funding strategies. As such, the importance of faith-literate and culturally competent approaches like Value Every Mind cannot be overstated. This programme demonstrates how early, strategic investment in Muslim children and young peoples' wellbeing can contribute to individual resilience, stronger communities, and wider societal benefit. This programme offers a clear model for how we can do better—not just through one-off projects, but through sustained, inclusive reform.[RC5]

Building on this foundation, the Muslim Mind Collaborative is deepening its commitment

to long-term capacity-building for children and young peoples' services. Through its national Children and Young People (CYP) Subcommittee and strategic partnerships with schools, service providers, and funders, MMC is laying the groundwork for a more coordinated and inclusive mental health ecosystem. This includes shared data, co-created solutions, and sector development initiatives.

As a next step, MMC Muslim CYP Capacity Building programme and network is a collaborative infrastructure to support grassroots initiatives, amplify young voices, and ensure culturally grounded care becomes the norm, not the exception. This investment in systems, people, and partnerships is essential to meeting the needs of a growing and dynamic generation of young Muslims across the UK.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Muslim Aid for funding Value Every Mind and recognising the importance of investing in the mental health and wellbeing of Muslim children and young people. This programme has shown why more funding is needed for community-driven initiatives in youth spaces, including schools and wider education settings. If we want faith- and culture-appropriate mental health support to become more accessible, we need sustained investment in work that is rooted in the realities, identities, and experiences of the communities it serves.

We would like to thank Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury, Academic Advisor, for authoring this report and for her important contribution as one of the founding members of the Muslim Mind Collaborative.

We also thank BCBN for its strategic support and for its wider role in developing social and institutional responses to issues affecting Muslim communities.

Our thanks go to all the practitioners, artists, facilitators, and role models who contributed to this programme across schools. Through a range of creative and reflective approaches, including art, storytelling, calligraphy, photography, poetry, wellbeing practices, and personal reflections on mental health and resilience, you helped create meaningful spaces for young people to engage with these conversations in relevant and accessible ways.

We also thank the schools and staff who participated in the programme and embedded it within their wider efforts to normalise conversations around mental health in school settings. We are equally grateful to the parents who engaged with practitioner-led sessions and wanted to strengthen how mental health and emotional support can be understood at home.

Finally, we thank the students who took part in the workshops, asked thoughtful

questions, and engaged with honesty and reflection throughout the programme.

This report reflects a wider truth: meaningful change in faith- and culture-appropriate mental health support will require a collective effort across funders, commissioners, schools, families, practitioners, and community-led organisations.



# APPENDICES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

## APPENDIX 1 – KEY CONTRIBUTORS

A strengths based approach is considered fundamental to the ethos supporting mental health within Muslim communities. A critical component of the Value Every Mind programme was therefore related to capacity building. By drawing on the resources and strengths within Muslim communities, the programme sought to harness and showcase the internal strengths held within Muslim communities. This not only benefitted the programme recipients, but it further enhanced the impact of the programme by providing tangible role models to young Muslims growing up in the UK.

**Afsar Ali** – Positive Psychology Coach and Director of Muted Healing, specialising in safe-space facilitation, personal development, and wellbeing practices.

**Dr Ayiesha Malik** – GP with specialist interest in mental health and chronic pain, trained in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Dr Malik works holistically

across NHS and community settings, emphasising emotional regulation, movement, gratitude, and sleep as foundations for wellbeing.

**Fadhila al Dhahouri** – Founder, Global Centre for Islamic Arts. Fadhila is an expert in Islamic geometric design and teaches how heritage arts can be used for mindfulness and emotional grounding.

**Faizah Nawaz** – Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy trainee with experience in CAMHS, schools, and community mental health settings. Specialises in emotional development, resilience, and wellbeing.

**Hafsah Dabiri** – Award-winning storyteller, author, and founder of Muslim Storytellers, championing creative literacy and expressive writing for young Muslims.

**Dr Hina Dadabhoy** – Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Lead at The Reflection Project,

specialising in depression, anxiety, trauma, identity, and the impact of Islamophobia on young Muslims.

**Khalida Haque** – Psychotherapist, clinical supervisor, and independent chair with extensive experience working across community and culturally responsive mental health settings. Author of *Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy and Domestic Abuse* (Routledge, 2025), she brings a trauma-informed and faith-sensitive approach to her work with children, families, and schools.

**Maryam Huq** – Bangladeshi-British multidisciplinary artist and published illustrator whose work celebrates heritage, identity, and belonging. She regularly delivers wellbeing-focused art workshops for organisations including Southbank Centre, Young V&A, and Muslim Women Connect.

**Negar Bastani** – Child psychotherapy

trainee with extensive experience across therapeutic and early years settings, informed by psychoanalytic and cultural frameworks.

**Razia Shaikh-Patel** – Wellbeing facilitator, educator & community practitioner. Razia brings a decade of teaching and therapeutic practice, with experience designing culturally responsive wellbeing programmes and bilingual delivery for diverse parent communities.

**Rehan Jamil** – Acclaimed British-Pakistani social documentary photographer, exhibited at The Photographers' Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery, and V&A. His work centres British Muslim communities and identity through visual storytelling.

**Rakaya Fetuga** – Internationally awarded poet, writer, and facilitator whose work uses poetry and role play to build emotional accessibility and creative confidence.

**Romana Mubarak** – Mental Health Practitioner, SENCO and Behaviour Consultant, experienced in delivering culturally sensitive workshops for Muslim communities.

**Sabah Gilani OBE** – Sabah Gilani is CEO of BCBN and founder of the Muslim Mind Collaborative, incubating social impact initiatives for UK Muslim communities. She leads work focused on faith equity, youth wellbeing, and systems change.

**Sam Akram** – Muslim Artrepreneur and Therapeutic Artist, specialising in Islamic art for stress reduction and confidence-building. Her work blends mindfulness, cultural heritage, and visual storytelling.

**Samir Malik** – Trainer, mentor, artist, and former osteopathic physician. With two decades of experience supporting vulnerable young people, Samir integrates NLP, hypnotherapy, community experience and

Islamic art into trauma-informed, culturally grounded wellbeing work.

**Shireen Malik** – Art Therapist and Creative Practitioner. Shireen specialises in therapeutic arts practice for young people and uses creative approaches to support emotional regulation and trauma-aware care.

**Shumaila Rashid** – Integrative counsellor and psychotherapist with extensive experience supporting children, families, and neurodivergent young people.

**Zimarina Sarwar** – Writer, editor, and educator. Author with Kube Publishing, contributor to major Muslim platforms, and facilitator specialising in reflective writing for emotional processing and identity exploration.

## APPENDIX 2 - PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

1. **Kassim Darwish Grammar School for Boys** - Manchester  
Sessions: Whole-school assembly, Creative wellbeing workshop - Islamic Geometry, After-school staff wellbeing session
2. **Afifah School** - Manchester  
Sessions: Whole-school assembly, Creative wellbeing workshop - Art & Identity, Creative wellbeing workshop - Islamic Geometry & Mindfulness
3. **Manchester Islamic High School for Girls** - Manchester  
Sessions: Three Creative Wellbeing Workshops - Islamic Geometry & Mindfulness, Year 9 Talk - Mental Health, Identity, and Leadership
4. **Westwood High Islamic School for Girls** - Oldham  
Sessions: Whole-School Assembly on Mental Health Awareness, Parent
5. **Birchfield Independent Girls School** - Birmingham  
Sessions: Whole-School Assembly, Creative Wellbeing Workshops
6. **The Pioneers Academy** - Birmingham  
Sessions: Whole-School Assembly, Creative Wellbeing Workshops - 2 sessions,
7. **Baytul Ilm Secondary School** - Milton Keynes  
Sessions: Whole-School Assembly, Islamic Calligraphy Workshops
8. **Read Academy** - Ilford  
Two Whole-School Assemblies, Creative Wellbeing Workshop
9. **Apex Secondary School** - Ilford  
Sessions: Whole-School Assembly, Hybrid Parent Coffee Morning, Creative Wellbeing Workshops (Sports Activity Workshop, Storytelling Workshop)
10. **Tayyibah Girls' School** - London  
Sessions: Parent Coffee Morning, Whole-School Assembly, Creative Wellbeing Workshop (Poetry)
11. **Al Risalah Secondary School** - London  
Sessions: Two Assemblies, Parent Coffee Morning, 2 Creative Wellbeing Workshops
12. **London East Academy** - London  
Sessions: Whole-School Assembly, Parent Coffee Morning, Creative Wellbeing Workshop (Photography)
13. **Darul Hadis Latifa** - London  
Sessions: Two Whole-School Assemblies:
14. **Eden Girls' Waltham Forest** - London  
Sessions - Whole-School Assembly, Two Creative Wellbeing Workshops

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COLLABORATIVE