

Komal and her daughter Mehrmah, 1, playing at an early learning session at Ashton Central Mosque, Greater Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.



PROJECT CASE STUDY



Smallshaw-Hurst
Children's Community

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS THAT PREVENT
THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY FROM TAKING
UP THE FREE 15 HOURS EDUCATION &
CHILDCARE FOR 2-YEAR-OLDS



BACKGROUND

As part of our ambition to improve our children's readiness to learn, the Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community partnered with Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC) to understand cultural views on early education and childcare.

Families in England can receive 15 hours free education and childcare for any child aged 2-years-old if they meet certain criteria. Across Tameside, one of the 10 Local Authorities which comprises Greater Manchester, the take up rate is relatively high with an average of around 85%. However, there are pockets within the borough where the rate is less than 50%.

Digging deeper into the data, we found particularly low levels of take up amongst families from a South Asian background, and more specifically families who identify as being of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage. We set out to work with the community to address this.

The Children's Community has a long-standing relationship with the Tameside Early Years Service and through this partnership we commissioned a study with research agency Creed & Culture to better understand the factors preventing families from the South Asian community taking up the offer.

The study provided clear insights into the challenges families face but also the steps that could be taken to overcome those obstacles. The recommendations included: the building of trusting relationships in the South Asian community, increased availability of translated information in Urdu and Bengali, as well as hardwiring the learning into the working practices of the newly launched Family Hub service and Early Years Outreach Teams.

To launch the report and share insights, we co-hosted an information session with the Tameside Early Years Team, Ashton Central Mosque and Creed & Culture.

RAISING AWARENESS & PROMOTING ACCESS

The Role of the Mosque: The local mosque played a crucial role in breaking down barriers and encouraging take-up of the free 15 hours within the South Asian community. The Imam, who recognised the significance of education and faith intertwining in Islam, was initially unaware of the free childcare offer and the access process.

Impactful Intervention: Upon learning about the research findings and the free 15 hours offer, the Imam took an active role in promoting it to the community. During Friday prayers, he discussed the initiative and its benefits, reaching a large audience and raising awareness significantly. His influential position and credibility within the community helped break the silence around early years education and childcare issues more broadly.

Creating Pathways: Furthermore, the Imam established a relationship with the Local Authority Early Years Team, enabling him to share accurate and up-to-date information with parents interested in accessing the offer. This collaboration fostered trust among the community members and facilitated a smoother process for parents to enroll their children in nursery or preschool.

Successful Outcome: As a direct result of the awareness campaign and the Imam's involvement, parents gained clarity about the offer, its benefits and how to access it. The Imam's own child was enrolled in an early years setting, demonstrating the success of the campaign.

Kauthar and her children Umayma and Isa, both 4, at Ashton Central Mosque's early learning session. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.





TAMESIDE MBC

EARLY YEARS TEAM

Sarah is an Early Years Team Manager working in Tameside Family Hubs. On the day we speak to Sarah she's attending an event at Ashton Central Mosque to share activities that pre-school children can take part in which, as she puts it, "will help them to be happy and healthy and thrive when they later go to school".

"It's really important that we're here today as we know that different people have varying perspectives on childcare and education," Sarah explains. Sarah and her colleagues are particularly focused on working with the South Asian community in the local area to raise awareness and understanding of the significance of early years education.

"At today's event at the mosque, we've organized a wide array of activities linked to children's learning and development," Sarah tells us. This included engaging storytelling sessions to foster speech and language development, as well as physical development activities to demonstrate to parents how children can handle tools and equipment which, in turn, will strengthen their motor skills for future tasks like writing.

The session also offered opportunities for children to engage in mark making activities, encouraging them to experiment with crayons and felt-tip pens. Alongside this, parents were provided with valuable information on the two-year offer available in Tameside and how they can access it for their children.

“The early years of a child's life are so important as this is where they start building the foundational skills that will serve them well in school. Language and cognitive development are especially crucial to be learned before the age of five because acquiring them later can be more challenging,” Sarah explains. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of children making friends and socialising, equipping them with these essential skills to face school life with confidence, motivation and enthusiasm.

Sarah believes that parents are eager to learn more about the value of preschool education and to participate in activities that support their children's development. Play is a central component of this process - it's an informal but highly effective method for children to learn. Simple interactions with parents play a crucial role in their language development. Play can take place indoors or outdoors and encourages children to use their imagination and express themselves.

“What drives me in my work is witnessing the powerful connections that develop between parents and their children,” Sarah says. “It's inspiring to see parents actively engaging with their children's development and seeking ways to support them.”



Early Years Team manager Sarah Heywood outside Ashton Central Mosque. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Nabeela is a volunteer at Ashton Central Mosque and is involved in early years activities. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.



ASHTON CENTRAL MOSQUE

Nabeela is proud to volunteer at Ashton Central Mosque. "I facilitate various activities such as fun days and community events, much like the amazing day [promoting early years education] we've had today," she says.

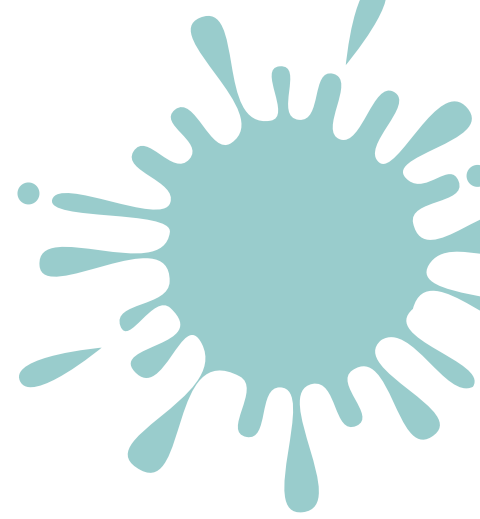
For Nabeela, education holds a special place and she believes it's a crucial foundation for personal development. "In fact, the first word that was revealed in the Quran was 'read' in order to show the importance of education - not just religious teachings but science and maths and even manners. Any type of education, you know," she explains.

Nabeela thinks it's vital to stress the importance of education, especially within the context of the early years provision open to families. "I think we're very lucky to have the opportunity for children to be educated in this country," says Nabeela. "Other countries, unfortunately, don't have the facilities for children to learn from a young age."

The event at the mosque, Nabeela explains, is serving as a means to raise awareness. Volunteers are promoting courses for parents and carers, and shedding light on the benefits of preschool or nursery for children.



Isa, 4, having fun at one of Ashton Central Mosque's summer early learning sessions. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.



Throughout the day, learning through play is highlighted as a key concept. It's explained to parents that this is not limited to reading and writing; it involves understanding how children play and how parents can integrate educational moments into everyday life, whether during cooking or counting tomatoes and eggs while preparing a meal. It is stressed that education truly begins at home, and parents play a pivotal role in this process.

Nabeela goes on to explain how poverty can impact the education of young children. In her view, limited exposure and lack of access to resources can hinder a child's ability to explore new areas of knowledge - and this can have a knock on effect on their future prospects.

For Nabeela and everyone at the mosque, it's essential to continue to create awareness and ensure that every child has the opportunity to access the education and resources available to them.

SMALLSHAW-HURST

CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY


Clover is a board member of the Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community and a retired Early Years professional. "Together, we provide support to families and young children, helping them access education from an early age," she tells us.

Clover, and her fellow volunteers, have been raising awareness and promoting uptake, alongside Children's Community staff, to ensure that local families and children have the opportunity to access preschool provision.

Recognising the crucial importance of early childhood education, Clover is passionate about enabling children to begin their educational journey from the earliest stages of life. Even simple activities and interactions with babies can be significant in their development, she explains. These foundational experiences are key as children progress through their formative years, helping them develop a range of skills.



Clover Selby, a board member of the Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community, pictured at Ashton Central Mosque. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.



“Today's event [at the mosque] was organized in partnership with the Children's Community team to reach out to more families,” Clover explains. The facilitators were able to provide families with accessible information about early years education and its importance. Various activities were designed to engage children and the team explained the reasons behind their choices, illustrating how each activity supports different aspects of a child's development.

Clover stresses that activities are not only for group events like that at the mosque; parents can easily replicate them at home using everyday materials, without the need for expensive resources. The message is clear: education should be accessible to all, and it starts with the simplest of interactions and activities in a child's life.



Sumaira plays with her niece Fatima, 3, at an early learning session Ashton Central Mosque. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.



Smallshaw-Hurst
Children's Community

**Published October 2023 by Save the Children UK.
Interviews conducted in August 2023.**

Save the Children Fund is a charity registered in England & Wales (213890), Scotland (SC039570) and Isle of Man (199).