

Reaching out to communities - Aksa Homes

Aksa Homes is part of the New Charter Group and manages housing stock in a highly deprived area of Oldham. The majority of our tenants are from BME communities and face many barriers to participation. These include financial constraints, lack of transport, language, and lack of knowledge or confidence in how to take that first step to becoming more physically active. GreaterSport has a dedicated officer to help overcome these barriers and together, we devised a project focussing on how to engage the women in the area.

We have identified that our female Muslim residents are most at risk of social isolation and limited opportunities. Some have large family and commitments and find it hard to get time for themselves. Others do not speak English and so don't feel confident accessing mainstream activity. All of the Muslim women expressed their concerns about the lack of facility appropriate to their culture. Although many sports gyms and clubs offer ladies classes, it would not be possible for the ladies to remove scarves etc. if they could be seen by males at any time. The ladies also feel intimidated in some of the more mainstream fitness centres as they like to take part in classes in traditional Asian dress.

All the ladies we spoke to, wanted to do something together and so we negotiated a space in the Islamic Centre. Here, the facility is able to provide blinds to fully privatise the room and have agreed to make some adjustments so eventually there will be a ladies only entrance.

We sourced a fitness instructor who could speak Urdu who the ladies are comfortable with, and who understands how to build their confidence through a fitness project.

We made the sessions free by utilising a This Girl Can Grant and match funding from ASKA Homes to deploy staff to coordinate the project.

The centre is very close to our properties and the ladies are able to walk down which is also increasing their amount of exercise the ladies are undertaking but also alleviating the time the cost of public transport.

There has been a huge social impact as many of the ladies dedicate all their days to their family with no time for themselves. This project has facilitated an environment where they get to meet like-minded women, share experiences and create a support network. We have a real cross section of ages but everyone is progressing at a rate which suits them and the class is building links in their community with residents supporting and encouraging each other during the session and meeting up separately in their neighbourhoods.

Janet Hall who is a Community Development Officer at New Charter Group said "The project is really inspiring. We have given the ladies a new lease of life. Numbers increase every week and the ladies tell us every week how much they enjoy it and how grateful they are"





Greater Manchester Sports Partnership

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