

# The Muslim Fostering Project: Report



The  
Fostering  
Network

**B | C** Better Community  
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 My  
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# 1. Foreword

For many fostered children and young people, their foster family will provide them with their first experience of loving, stable and positive family life. Foster carers are trained and supported to help these children work through the difficulties of their early years, and to help them transform their lives.

The Muslim Fostering Project, led by The Fostering Network and our partners Mercy Mission UK, and My Foster Family set out to explore the experiences of Muslim children in foster care and that of Muslim foster carers. Specifically, we aimed to identify the number of Muslim children being fostered at any one time and to build a picture of the number of Muslim children being placed with non-Muslim foster carers, and the reasons for these decisions. We also sought to identify the barriers as to why more Muslims do not come forward to foster and use our networks to showcase good practice in this area. While a lack of data capture made some of this more difficult than had been anticipated, the final report outlines our findings and makes recommendations for vital change.

We are confident that this report will prove to be an invaluable resource for fostering services, and prove a useful tool to support changes of policy and practice in the care of Muslim children in foster care.

Thank you to the Better Communities Business Network for funding this project, and to our partners Mercy Mission UK and My Foster Family for working with us on this vital Muslim Fostering Project.

**Kevin Williams**

Chief Executive, The Fostering Network

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# 2. Introduction

## 2.1 The Muslim Fostering Project

In 2017, the Better Community Business Network funded The Fostering Network and charity partner, Mercy Mission UK with aims to:

- identify the number of Muslim children being fostered at any one time;
- build a picture of the number of Muslim children being placed with non-Muslim foster carers, and the reasons behind these decisions;
- build a picture of the experiences of Muslim foster carers and those who enquire but do not proceed to become foster carers;
- explore the recruitment and retention of Muslim foster carers, highlighting barriers and identifying good practice; and
- review existing resources, training and support available for non-Muslim foster families who foster Muslim children to identify if they are fit for purpose.

This was a national programme which attempted to highlight areas of challenge in the current system in England and encourage a focus on providing the right support to children and young people from the Muslim community.

As a foundation for the project, a comprehensive literature review of existing research and publications exploring family, cultural identity and fostering within the Muslim community was undertaken, which underpins our findings and forms part of the final suite of documents presented on conclusion of the Muslim Fostering Project.

This report does not aim to be a definitive guide to issues relating to fostering and the Muslim community and indeed the exercise has highlighted the significant lack of research previously conducted in this area. The report shares key research and data on some elements of this complex area where these exist to encourage further discussion and academic exploration. The key themes pertinent to the Muslim Fostering Project which we have identified from existing literature are:

- The experience of the Muslim community in England
- Understanding the Islamic mandate for the care of children
- Childhood and the forming of identity
- Identity and the looked after child
- Religious practice and culture
- Social worker matching
- Cultural competence, confidence and humility of all those involved in fostering

These themes are explored in the following report, alongside data concerning the key practice issues and the findings from the Muslim Fostering Project.

## 2.2 Fostering context

On any given day in England, there are 70,000 children in the care system living away from home. These children are formally looked after by their local authority which acts as their corporate parent, and it is their responsibility to find a placement for each child which is best matched to their individual needs. The majority of these children – over 55,000 – will be looked after by foster families, with assessed and approved foster carers who can meet their emotional and practical needs.

Children can enter the care system for a range of reasons but most commonly this will be due to abuse and neglect. In addition, a small but not insignificant number need care because they are seeking asylum in the UK from countries such as Albania, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Syria. In 2017, 2,206 unaccompanied children applied for asylum, down from a peak of 3,290 in 2016.<sup>1</sup> These children often arrive without basic information relating to their identity, name, background and age and often with very limited English language. Regardless of the reason for entering care, ensuring stability and security for all these children and young people is crucial, as is ensuring that they are placed with a foster family best matched to their needs.

Local authorities maintain records of all children and young people in their care, some of which are part of their statutory requirement. While recording ethnicity forms part of this statutory requirement, faith is not; and therefore, fostering services are not mandated to record or report how many of these children identify as Muslim. The Muslim Fostering Project has highlighted this as a significant barrier to fully understanding the identity and needs of Muslim children in care. This lack of source data is echoed by the scarcity of comprehensive research into the needs of Muslim looked after children in England and the other countries of the UK.

The Fostering Network estimates a further 7,220 new foster families are needed in England in the next 12 months,<sup>2</sup> to ensure there are enough foster families to meet the assessed needs of children and young people and provide sufficient placement options to find the best match for each child. Successful matching relies on a strong understanding of the needs of a child and of the characteristics of the local foster carer population. All fostering services aim to recruit a diverse range of foster carers which reflects their community and the needs of the children in their care. Again, while the ethnicity of foster carers is recorded at local level, this is not always true of faith, and therefore the nationally available data does not capture how many foster carers identify as Muslim.

Finding a good and stable fostering placement for a child is complex and difficult, but an overarching principle is that the child must be at the very centre of the decision as to which fostering household can best meet their needs. This means looking at a particular child's needs and finding the right match for them. These needs include health, education, proximity to family and school, hobbies and interests, cultural background, religion, language and so on.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0004/3376/Asylum\\_Statistics\\_May\\_2018.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0004/3376/Asylum_Statistics_May_2018.pdf), 2018.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/all-about-fostering/recruitment-targets>

There is no set hierarchy of needs that must be met. Instead there is a hierarchy for each individual child which should be decided on a case-by-case basis by social workers who know the child.

Fostering services and foster carers must pay full attention to the child's faith, culture, language and so on, not least in order to be compliant with the Children's Act 1989. But, with the right training and support, this can happen in a fostering household where the faith or culture of the foster carers is different to the child they are caring for. Indeed, this is happening in thousands of fostering households every day.



### 3. Background to the project

Preliminary research prior to commencing the Muslim Fostering Project, which further substantiated the need for investment and focus on this area, identified a lack of publicly available data to accurately identify the number of Muslim looked after children in England.

As part of their formal reporting requirements, all local authorities in England are mandated to complete the Ofsted annual fostering data return. This return is structured into two main categories, fostering households and children. Data collected on children is categorised under three headings: child characteristics, safeguarding and placement endings. The first category, child characteristics should provide sufficient information to identify key characteristics of a child required in the matching process. However, the return requires only:

- the fostering household identifier (household where child is placed)
- the child identifier (a reference number as opposed to the child's name)
- whether the child has a disability
- the child's ethnicity
- the placement type (foster care, special guardianship order and so on)
- the recording requirements do not explore religion, neither does the form require services to identify the faith of the child.

On commencing the Muslim Fostering Project, a survey was produced to send to fostering services in England to identify the number of Muslim children in the care of the service. We were disappointed to find that just 22 were able to reply with this information, identifying a total of 267 Muslim children in the care of their service. Though not statistically sound as the evidence base is too narrow, this snapshot alone suggests around five per cent of children in care identify as Muslim, which is in line with the proportion of Muslims in England.

The lack of statutory recording and reporting of the religion of children in care means that we cannot know for sure how many Muslim children there are in foster care. This suggests that a child's faith, religion or cultural identity is therefore not only not fully investigated during assessment of their needs and then is not systematically utilised to inform the matching process, which could have serious implications for the suitability and success of placements.

Consistent, statutory recording is one of the key recommendations within this report and such recording would ensure future activities can be developed using accurate and reliable statistical data. We believe that a statutory requirement to report on the faith or religion of the child would also enable practitioners to delve deeper into a child's identity, ensuring their full needs are recorded, informing better matching decisions, and hopefully leading to better outcomes for all children and young people in foster care. For example, fostering services could consider and develop strategies to understand how the Muslim faith contributes to a child's identity and how they can train and support the foster carers they are matched with to create home environments in which young looked after Muslims can flourish.

### 4. Methods and procedures

As referenced above, a survey was sent to all fostering services to attempt to identify broadly the number of Muslim children in foster care, and the number of Muslim foster carers approved by the service. Responses were received from 22 fostering services, identifying 267 fostered Muslim children.

A follow up survey was sent to 26 local authorities and six independent fostering providers (IFPs) requesting information on policies relating to identified potential barriers to Muslims in the recruitment and assessment process, such as a language policy. Only nine local authorities and two IFPs responded, again suggesting this data is not readily recorded. Although this small survey does not provide sufficient data to meet rigorous academic research criteria, it does provide a snapshot of local authority and IFP practice.

A survey was sent by Muslim Foster Network by email to over 1,000 Muslims who had shown an initial interest and then did not proceed with an application to foster. Due to an initial poor response, follow up phone calls were made. These provide case studies of individual's experiences evidencing why, according to Muslim Foster Network, 80 per cent of Muslims did not proceed from the initial enquiry to an initial visit.

To identify local practice, The Fostering Network worked with five fostering services, four local authorities and one IFP, geographically split across England in a mix of urban and rural locations.

Telephone interviews were also conducted with Muslim and non-Muslim foster carers, a manager of an IFP and a Muslim care leaver to record their experiences.

A full literature review of existing research into fostering within the Muslim community was conducted underpinning the findings of this report.

## 5. Literature review

A review of the literature on Muslim children in foster care in England, the experience of Muslim foster carers and the importance of faith as part of identity was undertaken to create a foundation on which to build this project. Its research is interwoven into this report.

In addition to the lack of statistical data, it quickly became apparent that little had not only been written about Muslims and foster care in England, but also globally. The review did not identify significant information on which to draw conclusions of fostering in the Muslim community. It suggests that further research is needed to understand the:

- experience of Muslim looked after children
- outcomes for Muslim children in foster care in England
- support needed for non-Muslim foster carers who care for Muslim children and young people rejecting or rebelling against a culture or identity.

In addition, there is a need for research into the impact of cross-cultural/religious/faith placements – Muslim children being placed with non-Muslim carers and vice versa, as well as Muslim children being placed with Muslim foster carers from a different cultural background or branch of Islam. Examining the data on the impact on Muslim children who have been placed with foster carers of a different faith or different branch of Islam, or from a different cultural background to their own would allow us to draw conclusions on any challenges Muslim children are facing, what their experience has been (positive and negative) and how any challenges may be overcome.

The full literature review can be found at [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/mfp](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/mfp)



## 6. Islam and its place in Britain

### 6.1 The Islamic faith

To be a Muslim is to be a follower of the Islamic faith. Originating in the seventh century in south west Asia, Islam translates in the English language to “surrender” (to God). It is estimated that there are over 1.8 billion followers of Islam across the world, approximately a quarter of the global population.

While Muslims believe in only one God, ‘Allah’ in Arabic, there are many different branches of Islam. This can be given as one of the main reasons why there is not a homogenous Muslim community in England, and why Muslim experiences are more diverse than is often assumed<sup>3</sup>. Research in this area, conducted by the Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life, which collected experience of Muslim lives in modern Britain, is pertinent to the fostering community and to the matching process.

The learning from this research supports the view that fostering services need a better understanding of the diversity, the experience and the potential within the Muslim community.

### 6.2 Islam in Britain

Muslims form 4.8 per cent of the population in England and Wales. The population has increased from 1.55 million in 2001 to 2.71 million in 2011. There are 77,000 Muslims in Scotland and 3,800 in Northern Ireland. The Muslim population is larger than all other non-Christian faith groups put together – 47 per cent of Muslims are UK-born.

The majority of Muslims (76 per cent) live in the inner city conurbations of Greater London, West Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside. Muslims form 12.4 per cent of London’s population.

There are 35 local authority districts with a Muslim population of 10 per cent or more. There are around 70 wards with a Muslim population of 40 per cent or more. The Muslim population of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets has increased from 71,000 in 2001 to 88,000 in 2011 (19 per cent). The increase in London as a whole is 35 per cent.

The Muslim population is ethnically diverse – 68 per cent Asian (1.83 million of 2.71 million) and 32 per cent non-Asian. One in 12 is of White ethnicity (8 per cent of the Muslim population). Of the 56.1 million population of England and Wales, 48.2 million are in the ‘White’ ethnic category, and 7.9 million in the rest. If the latter is considered as ‘Black & Minority Ethnic’ groups (BME), then almost one in three are Muslim.

<sup>3</sup> Missing Muslims Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All, Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life, Citizens UK, 2017.

While there is a broad agreement on the core tenets of Islam, Muslims differ vastly in their levels of commitment to practicing the religion and there is a rich diversity when it comes to interpretations of the Islamic faith. Consequently, forms of worship vary from one group to another<sup>4</sup>. Muslims can therefore be adherents to one of several different ideological and theological understandings of Islam.

Muslims are largely divided into two main branches: Sunni Islam and Shia Islam. Both these groups have developed their own methodologies to interpret the Qur’an and other primary texts, which has given rise to a rich and vast understanding of Islam. The Sunnis, who form most of the Muslim world (90 per cent of all Muslims), developed into four main schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali – dating back to 800 CE. The Shia developed into three main schools: Ja’fari, Zaydis and Isma’ilis. The Isma’ilis further branch out to another two schools called the Dawudi Bohra and the Nizaris. There is another practice of Islam that exists in most branches of Islam, the mystic practices known as Sufi or Erfani Islam and they too have their own subdivisions.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past few decades, and contrary to the forecasted ‘secularisation’ of modern Western societies that was expected to lead to a decline in individual religious commitment and in the prominence of religion in social life<sup>6</sup>, religious beliefs, practices and membership are still commonplace in England.

Islam retains a central place in many Muslims lives, which enriches their sense of identity and belonging and ties them into their communities. ‘The importance of religion is even more strongly expressed by Muslim children: 79 per cent of Muslim 13-14-year olds say religion is “very important” to the way they live their life. Moreover, according to the comparisons over time with the Citizenship Survey, the proportion of Muslim people in Britain who practised their religion increased (from 73 per cent in 2005 to 79 per cent in 2009-10), and this rise was particularly evident in the younger (16-29) age group (from 68 per cent to 80 per cent).<sup>7</sup>

While traditional ‘British Christianity’ has been in decline, religion practiced by other communities such as Catholicism within the Polish community and Islam within Muslim communities, are thriving<sup>8</sup>. Becher argues that indeed world events and public debates over the last 50 years indicate that religion remains a strong source of personal and social identity, of political mobilisation or conflict, a resource in times of need and a source of social capital and integration into civil society<sup>9</sup>. In 2001, in recognition of this changing religious picture, the Government reintroduced a specific faith question in the 2001 census. This changing picture of identity makes an ever-stronger case for greater awareness, understanding and targeted activity within public sector services to ensure they are representative of those they support.

<sup>4</sup> J. Bell, *The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity*, Pew Research Center, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> H.P.G bin Muhammad, *A thinking Person’s Guide to Islam*, White Thread Press, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> D.E. Sherkat, C.G. Ellison, *Recent Developments and current controversies in the sociology of religion*, Annual Review of Sociology, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> National Archives, 2012. *Citizenship Survey, Race, Religion and Equalities: A report on the 2009-10 Citizenship Survey*. National Statistics, London.

<sup>8</sup> A. Brown, *Faith no more: how the British are losing their religion*, The Guardian, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> H. Becher, *Family Practices in South Asian Muslim Families: Parenting in a Multi-Faith Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

## 6.3 The Muslim community in Britain

Coverage in the national media can often present a very negative picture of British Muslims and this touched directly on the fostering community in 2017 with two high profile media stories relating to cross-faith placements involving Muslim children and foster carers.

While there was a recorded rise in the references to Islam in the media between 2000 and 2008, 36 per cent of media stories about British Muslims in this period were about terrorism.<sup>10</sup> By 2008, while these types of stories decreased in volume (27 per cent), they were replaced by stories on the difference between Islam and British culture or the west in general.<sup>11</sup> Such narratives can reinforce stereotypes and misconceptions of Muslims. It is against this backdrop that fostering services are undertaking recruitment and training of foster carers.

Family is the central building block for Muslim society, based on a belief that families provide greater stability, continuity, love and support for each other. Islam argues that the family is a divinely inspired institution with marriage at its core.<sup>12</sup> Therefore messaging about the importance of offering stability and love in a family setting for children who are looked after can be a powerful and resonant message for Muslim families.

Due to the strength of relationships and shared responsibility within traditional Muslim families, care of each member is the responsibility of the extended family. Many second-generation Muslim families in Britain have however grown up in smaller nuclear families more akin to western cultural norms.<sup>13</sup> While still adhering to Islamic teaching and retaining membership to the Muslim community or Ummah, these subtle changes are relevant to unlocking potential barriers to fostering.

Family experience, the community's traditional response to family members in need and the reduced likelihood of seeking outside or statutory intervention to provide family support can all create barriers to the understanding and acceptance of more formal or statutory family support services – either in accessing them personally or supporting their delivery through areas such as fostering. With the adaptation and development of the traditional family model within the British Muslim community, these barriers may begin to be removed.

<sup>10</sup> K. Moore, P. Mason, J.M.W. Lewis, Images of Islam in the UK: the representation of British Muslims in the national print news media 2000-2008, Cardiff University, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> S. Dhami, A. Sheikh, The Muslim Family: Predicament and Promise, The Western Journal of Medicine, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

## 6.4 Islamic mandate for the care of children

'Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to your parents. If one of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect... and act humbly to them in mercy.'

Qur'an 17:23-24

Muslim children are born into a state of fitra, meaning purity and awareness of God. Parents have the responsibility of developing their child's spirituality. This may be achieved through teachings and daily life, but also by enrolling a child at a madrasa.

One of the commonly cited reasons for Muslim families being uncertain about their ability to foster is a misunderstanding within their own community that the act of fostering is inconsistent with the Islamic faith. This is a misconception; to the contrary Islamic teachings promotes fostering.

Islamic law mandates protection of children who are deprived of parental care. One of the basic rights that every child must enjoy is the right to live inside a family; a family that provides a child with the necessary parental care, and experiences of love, kindness and safety. This right is the first line of defence in the protection of children from attempts to violate their other rights. Traditionally, many Muslims actively uphold this instruction by sponsoring orphans in the developing world. Despite these developments and the principles enshrined in Islamic law, it is important to understand how misconceptions have developed regarding fostering in the Muslim community as these continue to play a role and fostering services therefore need an understanding of them.

Islam retains a central place in many Muslims lives, which enriches their sense of identity and belonging and ties them into their communities. However, as previously mentioned, there are several barriers concerning the assessment process and Islamic principles which might prevent Muslims from coming forward to foster.

Demographics may also offer some further slant on the problem. Muslims tend to have large families, with many children to care for.<sup>14</sup> The parents may also live within multi-generational settings with elderly parents to care for also. This arguably could create barriers in terms of capacity to care for further children, especially those experiencing trauma from their pasts.

Further, research shows that families of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin tend to live in 'over crowded homes, which lack basic amenities, and obviously this does not favour fostering or adoption in the view of either prospective foster carers or adopters or placing agencies.'<sup>15</sup> Indeed the basic requirement to foster is the need for a spare room. In many Muslim families sharing bedrooms is part of their culture. Muslim Foster Network advised that Somali families think in terms of a spare bed, not a spare bedroom. This is mostly because they, like many Pakistani and Bangladeshi families,

<sup>14</sup> Selwyn JT and Frazer LG, 2005. Why are we waiting? The demography of adoption for children of black, Asian and black mixed parentage in England. Child and Family Social Work, Vol 10(2). P135-147

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

are large in comparison to the average British family. The Runnymede Trust's recent research reported that 'over half of Bangladeshi and Pakistani children live in poverty,<sup>16</sup> and given that the rates of poverty among Muslims generally are much higher than the average, tackling poverty would greatly improve British Muslims' opportunities and outcomes.'<sup>17</sup>

Poverty can often be associated with abuse and neglect, one of the main reasons why children and young people come into care. A study led by Professor Paul Bywaters at Huddersfield University, found that, 'White British' children are more than 10 times more likely than 'Asian Indian' children to be in care. Meanwhile 'Black Caribbean' children are 20 times more likely.'<sup>18</sup> Bywaters added that "the disparities could mask issues – such as in an area where high concentrations of particular ethnic groups could influence how a local authority's spending on care appeared, relative to its level of deprivation."<sup>19</sup> Commenting on Professor Bywaters research findings, Stuart Gallimore, the president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) said, "Overall deprivation is the most pervasive factor in involvement with children's social care, not ethnicity, although some groups seem to be insulated to a degree from the deprivation, perhaps via stronger family or community links."<sup>20</sup>

16 Runnymede, 2015. Measuring Child Poverty: Implications for Black and minority ethnic families. Runnymede. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/measuring-child-poverty-implications-for-black-and-minority-ethnic-families>. (Online: 15/07/2018).

17 Runnymede, 2017 edited by Elahi F & Khan O. Islamophobia - Still a challenge of us all. Runnymede. (Cohen B; Tufail W. Prevent and the normalization of Islamophobia. Chapter 7.)

18 Ibid

19 Ibid

20 Ibid

### 'Table of Comparison' of the 20 Rights of the Muslim Orphan with British law, including fostering regulations. Islamic Principles Fostering Laws/Policy.<sup>21</sup>

Islamic Principles	Fostering Laws/Policy	Adoption Laws/Policy
Care for and maintain. Q2:220	Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011), Care Standards Act 2000. UNCRC 1989. Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-12 and 15. Sufficiency: Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2010)	Children Act 1989 Adoption and Children Act 2002 UNCRC 1989. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 – available. Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-15
Not to spend Orphans wealth outside the purpose for life. Q6:152	The National Minimum Fostering Allowance and Fostering Payment Systems: Good Practice Guidance (2006)	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 10,11,13 and 22
Protect the Orphan Q93:6 and 9	Children Act 1989. UNCRC 1989. Working Together to Safeguard Children : A Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children (March 2015)	Children Act 1989. UNCRC 1989 Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 4 and 22
Provide physically, mentally and emotionally. Q76:8	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-12 and 15	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-16
Act as Trustee's for the Orphan's wealth and return it to them intact as adults. Q18:82		Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 14 (3) and 14 (4)
Ensure the education of the Orphan academically, morally, religiously and socially.	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 2,3 and 8. Promoting the Education of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (July 2014).	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 7
Honour the Orphan. Do not humiliate , degrade, abuse, hit or unjustly rebuke an orphan. Q89:16/17	Children Act 1989. UNRCR 1989. Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 2	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1,2,3,4,5,9 and 13

21 Jones-Cooke, C. 2018. Dissertation (unpublished). Are UK fostering and adoption laws and policies compatible with Islamic principles? Islamic College, London (affiliated with Middlesex University)



Islamic Principles	Fostering Laws/Policy	Adoption Laws/Policy
Nurture good intercommunication with the Orphan so they do not feel isolated or alone and are well socialised. Q4:36	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1, 2, 3 and 15	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-9
Give Sadaqah to Orphans – give charity to them. Q2:215		
Give fair and equal treatment to the Orphan alongside others. Q4:127	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-12	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-16
Teach the Orphan to manage money. Q4 :6	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 12	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011)
Freedom of expression. (HR Tirmidzi)	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 1	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 1
Care for the Orphan's health needs	Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups and NHS England (March 2015)	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 5
Has a role in Islam and country's development		
Play and do activities that they want.	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 7	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 6
The Orphan's status should be the same in the eyes of Islamic and National law		
To be provided for until adulthood and beyond if unable to work.	Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (2010) Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 12	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1-16
Protect themselves and self defense	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 1 (1.5) Getting the Best from Complaints: Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others Voice of the Child in Care.	Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) Standard 22 Child Line
The Orphan should have their own privacy. Q24:27, Q49:12	Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) Standards 1, 6 and 10	



# 7. The importance of identity in the developing child

## 7.1 The forming of an Islamic identity

The Oxford University professor and Islamic intellectual thinker Dr Tariq Ramadan states that a Muslim's essential identity is their religion: 'Above and beyond the diversity of their national cultures (Muslims), the essence of their faith, their identity, their being in the world, is the same; they define themselves on the basis of points of reference that explain their sense of belonging to the same community of faith, and at the same time, more profoundly, root them in the universe of Islam.'<sup>22</sup>

The ideals set out by the prominent preacher Dr Tareq Al-Suwaidan articulate this notion that being Muslim is accepting a particular way of life, a code that dictates how one is to function in the world and this may be the code that allows Muslims in Britain to have a sense of anchor. Without this code, Muslims are confronted with multiple identities; it therefore gives a sense of structure and a reference point to which one can refer when the need arises.

As noted by McPhee, identity means that Muslims practice their faith (how family life is conducted, how they eat, how they engage in a social setting and how they split their day up due to the five prayers) by association with a particular community.<sup>23</sup> This reinforces the need for careful matching of children and young people with families who can help them practice, explore and develop their faith and identity, and keep them rooted within their communities.

Muslim children's identity is an area where there is currently significant investment made, and publicly available media channels and resources are plentiful. Media outlets such as Muslim Kids TV, which cultivates a young people's community celebrating Islamic beliefs, and books such as the Noor Kids series which encourage pride in Islamic identity are rich sources for Muslim and non-Muslim parents and foster carers to draw from.

The complexity of this identity and the support needed, as this forms during childhood and adolescence, is an area that fostering services must consider and develop awareness of to support both Muslim and non-Muslim foster carers to create home environments in which young people can flourish. Social workers tasked with matching Muslim children to Muslim or non-Muslim foster carers need the knowledge and competency to make the right decisions. 'Cultural competence begins with an awareness of one's own cultural beliefs and practices, and the recognition that others believe in different truths or realities than one's own. It also implies that there is more than one way of doing the same thing in a right manner.'<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> S. McPhee, Muslim identity - The European context, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, 2005

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Kohli, H; A,Faul and Huber, R. *Historical and Theoretical Development of Culturally Competent Social Work Practice*. Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 30:252-271. Routledge, 2010

## 7.2 Religious practice

Observing and encouraging religious expression and cultural practices are a central element in ensuring young people can explore their faith fully and freely. Specifically, there is significant existing research showing the important role that food can play in exploring a culture and establishing a relationship with a child.<sup>25</sup> According to a study of South Asian Muslim families in Britain, families' choices related to food and the organisation and performance of meals emerged as important expressions of how they 'placed' themselves culturally and religiously.<sup>26</sup>

For Muslim households food is not only a necessity but there is also a deeply religious element to it that defines an observant Muslim household. Religious eating and, importantly, religious abstinence, involves following the rules for eating halal (permitted) and avoiding haram (forbidden) food.

Looking after a child from another faith therefore requires foster carers to be aware of these rules and help the child adhere to the relevant practices of religious eating. Of course, there are circumstances where both the birth parents and the child are not concerned with the practice of eating in accordance with religious rules. However, where biological parents and the child prescribe to religious eating, this would be a key factor to take into consideration for both the child and wider family (and, therefore, foster carers).

Many children in care feel a general loss of individuality, and religious and cultural practices can be a powerful way of rebuilding this. This sense of loss, of course, can be heightened for those lone unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England. Food anthropologists have shown that carers and the children they care for can co-construct environments that make it friendlier and more welcoming through familiar food. This experience not only triggered pleasant memories by the sensory experience of cooking and eating, but it was an important component in the construction and management of identity.<sup>27</sup> However, Kohli et al also warn that conversely, if these children have no choice with regard to food, and culturally or socially permissible foods are not provided for them, it can reinforce their previous experience of trauma.

Food is, of course, just one factor of living and developing Muslim identity. Other aspects of Muslim daily life and the experience of looked after children would be worthy of additional research.

McPhee already identifies the powerful sense of belonging for Muslim children that arise from 'how family life is conducted', with prayer, religious discourse, shared values and meal times playing a significant role in creating meaning.<sup>28</sup> Foster carers can obviously play a significant role in creating or recreating this environment, whether they themselves identify as Muslim or not.

<sup>25</sup> R. K., Kohli, H. Connolly, A. Warman, Food and its meaning for asylum seeking children and young people in foster care. *Children's Geographies*, Volume 8, 2010

<sup>26</sup> Op.Cit. Becher.

<sup>27</sup> Op. Cit. Kohli et al

<sup>28</sup> Op. Cit. McPhee.

Scourfield et al identified that a significant difference in religious practice for young Muslims compared to non-Muslim peers was the amount of 'out-of-school' learning Muslim children are involved in as part of their religious and spiritual development.<sup>29</sup> This is significant for foster families as it relates not only to formal learning, prayer and worship but also story-telling, creative activities and reading, with elements of faith and culture running as a theme through family and individual activities that a child experiences.

What can be drawn from these studies is the potential significance of food, faith-based activities and religious observance for looked after Muslim children and the importance of this in the preparation, planning and training for foster carers with young people whose faith requirements differ from their own. Diet and nutrition are, for this reason, a specific section within The Skills to Foster™ pre-approval training and should be a topic discussed with all foster carers when supporting them in planning for a new placement.

### 7.3 Identity and the looked after child

It is essential in any foster placement that the foster carer can develop and sustain relationships with the children they look after and, as appropriate, enable the child to maintain contact with their birth family, friends and community. As part of this, foster carers need to understand a child's identity, culture and faith and help them to explore and understand these, taking the lead from the child or young person where possible. Where this does not happen, it can put a placement under strain and compound the trauma already experienced by the child, as well as affecting the longer-term cultural development and formation of the child's identity.

As previously mentioned, a child's identity should be one of many factors considered in the matching process. In the case of a Muslim child in care, there are a variety of factors that will need to be considered, not least the branch of the Muslim faith with which they identify. By not exploring a child's identity to its fullest, services risk placing children together who may share the Muslim faith but from different perspectives, or with a Muslim foster carer who comes from a different cultural background or branch of Islam; not every Muslim family in England will have a common thread in culture and tradition.<sup>30</sup> This may place significant strain on the placement and pressure on a foster carer to manage potentially significant conflict.

Appreciating the complexity of the Muslim identity of a child can be a key element that determines the success or failure of a placement. Issues of race and culture play a vital role in self-esteem, competency and resilience and Daniel suggests that children experience childhood very differently depending on their experience of issues relating specifically to their culture and race.<sup>31</sup> It is crucial for the foster carer to be able to support the needs of a Muslim child should the child identify as Muslim, or support them if they wish to explore their Islamic identity.

29 J. Scourfield, S. Gilliat-Ray, A. Khan, Oti, S, Muslim Childhood: Religious Nurture in a European Context, Oxford University Press, 2013.

30 Ibid.

31 Op. Cit. Daniel

## 8. Barriers facing potential Muslim foster carers

### 8.1 Over-crowding and bedroom sharing

Studies by The Fostering Network and Coventry University are the first of their kind to focus on Muslims in England; either of Muslim children in foster care and the families or individuals caring, or proposing to care, for them. Discussions with Muslim Foster Network revealed some areas that they have identified regarding Muslim and ethnic fostering, in particular a lack of training of non-Muslim carers, which Muslim Foster Network is trying to meet through training opportunities and providing relevant information to prospective Muslim families coming forward wishing to foster.<sup>32</sup>

As previously mentioned, Muslim families also tend to be larger, with many generations living together often sharing bedrooms. It is a requirement of fostering in England that all but the very youngest fostered child have a room of their own, with a 'spare bedroom' often being a key practical requirement to be able to foster.

The research identified discrepancies in practice regarding bedroom sharing policies. Some local authorities allow siblings to share until the age of five years, others insisting on separate bedrooms after nine or 10 years, and others allowing bedroom sharing throughout a childhood.<sup>33</sup>

As can be seen in Chart 2 below, there is a lack of consistency in the policies around bedroom sharing by the birth children of the fostering family, with one in 10 local authorities in the survey saying that they would not consider potential foster carers whose own children shared a bedroom. Almost two-thirds of organisations were willing to consider the children of the fostering family to share a room up to a certain age – this was understandably dependant on factors such as gender and the needs of the birth children as their own developmental needs changed. However, if the children were being asked to share to make room for a fostered child this would not be acceptable. It would be usual as part of the assessment for the assessing social worker to speak to the birth children and look at their long-term needs, discussing this with the parents.

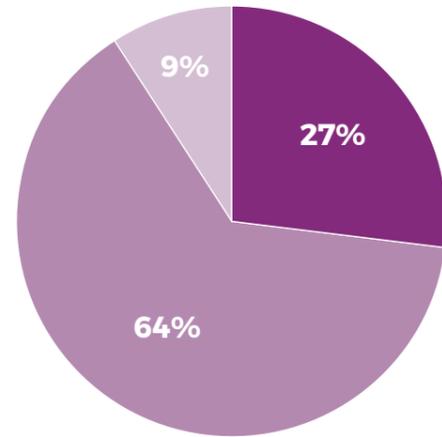
Social workers sometimes discount potential foster families' homes for being over-crowded. However, when considering Muslim families the question of cultural sensitivity would also need to be factored in especially if Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Somali children might be placed there. If the individual needs of a fostered child could be met by the foster family, the jostle of large or multi-generational family life could be comforting for a child coming from a similar background.

32 <https://www.muslimfosternetwork.org.uk/> (Online: 28/07/2018)

33 Telephone discussion with Muslim Foster Network concerning barriers to fostering. (31/07/2018)

**Chart 2 – What is your policy for children of a fostering family sharing bedroom space?<sup>34</sup>**

- Same sex siblings habitually sharing a bedroom is acceptable from 0 – 18
- Same sex siblings habitually sharing a bedroom is acceptable to a certain age
- Same sex siblings cannot share a bedroom



Indeed, with modern homes becoming smaller, housing becoming more and more expensive for the average family, and a cap on housing benefit<sup>35</sup> relatively few families, particularly in cities, can afford to maintain a ‘spare bedroom’. The difficulty of lower income foster carers being able to afford a spare room may soon prove to be a serious recruitment barrier.

In 2014 to 2017, around 679,000 (three per cent) of the estimated 23 million households in England were overcrowded (that is, they had fewer bedrooms than they needed to avoid undesirable sharing). Thirty per cent of these were Bangladeshi households (the highest percentage). While culturally many Muslim families live together in multi-generational households, the addition of ‘undesirable’ when describing bedroom sharing identifies that poverty is a factor.

Addressing poverty is beyond the scope of this research, however creative solutions may need to be identified if more Muslim foster carers are to be recruited.

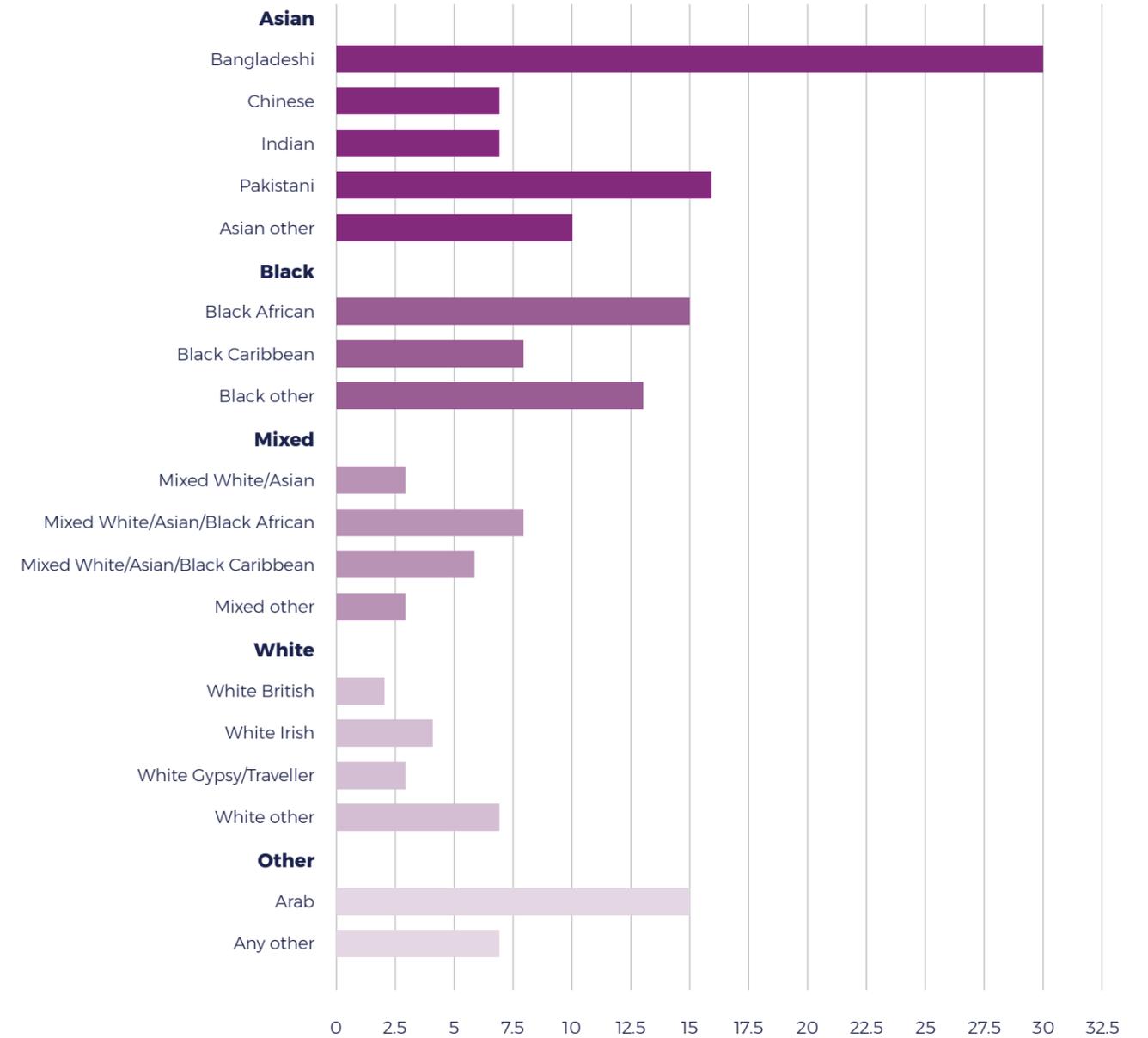
Research carried out by Oxford University stated, ‘Fostering service providers should adopt more flexible and open approaches to selection in order to reduce bias against specific groups. The use of standardised selection instruments may have a role within the process in doing this. In applying instruments, use should be made of local community knowledge to address cultural issues. For example, poverty should not be conflated with lack of capacity to provide good quality care.’<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Muslim Foster Network Survey 2019.

<sup>35</sup> 2018. Shelter. How to deal with the bedroom tax. Online: [<https://England.shelter.org.uk>]

<sup>36</sup> Luke N; Sebba J. 2013. How are foster carers selected? An international literature review of instruments used within foster carer selection. Rees Centre, University of Oxford.

**Chart 3 – Percentage of households that were overcrowded, by ethnicity<sup>37</sup>**



<sup>37</sup> Gov UK 2018. Online: [<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/housing-conditions/overcrowded-households/latest>]. 10/02/2019.

## 8.2 Literacy

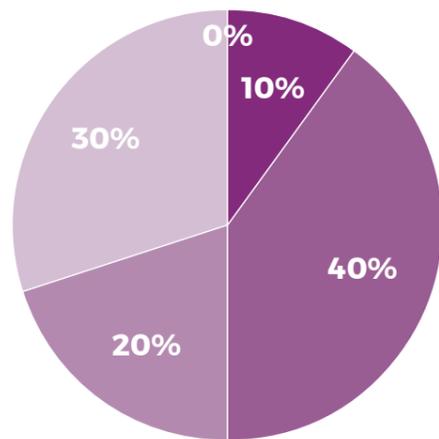
Literacy in the English language can also be a significant barrier for prospective Muslim foster carers. The Government estimated around 190,000 Muslim women in England in 2016 spoke little or no English<sup>38</sup>.

There is a reality that fostering in the 21st century in Britain is a professional occupation.<sup>39</sup> It involves a high level of literacy in order to comply with the safe care of both children and carers. The Fostering Network maintains that communication is key to the fostering role and the ability to work in a multi-disciplinary environment is vital.

During the assessment process an applicant's poor English could be supported via the assessing social worker writing down verbal accounts from the prospective foster carers. However, the reality is that good written and spoken English are a requirement for the role and it will not be enough to get through the assessment if the foster carer fails to undertake the training, written and verbal tasks thereafter to help them develop the English literacy skills which will enable them to fulfil the fostering role.

**Chart 4 – Policy on level of fluency of English language<sup>40</sup>**

- Must be fluent in spoken and written English
- Must be reasonably fluent in spoken and written English
- Must be reasonably fluent in spoken and written English and able to access technological assistance in written English
- Must be reasonably fluent in spoken and written English and able to access family assistance in written English
- Poor fluency in English



<sup>38</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33715473>

<sup>39</sup> Wilson K, Evetts J. 2006. The Professionalisation of Foster Care. Journal of Adoption & Fostering, Volume 30 Number 1 p 39.

<sup>40</sup> Muslim Foster Network Survey 2019.

Overall, from the response from fostering services in the survey carried out in 2019 by Muslim Foster Network, half of organisations were willing to consider prospective foster carers where English was not their first language and support might be necessary to fulfil the communicative requirement to undertake the fostering role.

Government guidance may be required to bring about greater consistency and provide indicators on the basic level of literacy that fostering services can work with, and funding to elevate language skills through courses or innovative IT solutions to enable services to recruit more foster carers from Muslim communities.

## 8.3 Mahram and hijab

The adherence to mahram and hijab could be potential obstacles for prospective Muslim foster carers, but this would depend on the level of religiosity of either the family or the child.

Mahram is one with whom marriage is permanently unlawful. This is the reason why Mahram is usually translated in English as unmarriageable kin. This (permanent prohibition of marriage) is established in three ways: by kinship (qarabah), foster relationship (radha'a) and relationship through marriage (sihriyya).

The observance of wearing the headscarf or *Hijab* is something that varies from family to family, culture to culture and individual to individual. 'Hijab is a sign of modesty and submission to Allah (God) and may be observed in different ways as religious observance or cultural practice.

The Islamic rulings in these areas are clear: until the age of puberty boys and girls not related to the family can live without any restrictions within the family. The women of the household and the female girls do not have to wear hijab around the male members of their family whether adult or child. After girls reach puberty there is a requirement for them to adopt the hijab around any male *not closely related* to them (non-mahram). In the company of all other 'non-mahram' males, which would include foster carers, male birth children or other non-related male fostered children past puberty, the girl would have to wear hijab. Within the family non-blood related males and females should not be alone in a room. As mentioned earlier, depending on the religiosity of the family this may or may not be an issue within the individual family, but it is important to understand the Qur'anic teaching and Shariah law. For families that follow this teaching, fostering teenagers could be problematic. Moreover, fostering services need to give extra consideration when placing teenagers from observant families where there is an expectation that they will not ever be alone with a non-related adult of the opposite gender.

Ultimately, like all religions, families practise their faith to a greater or lesser degree, with some families very relaxed about the wearing of hijab. It is important that social workers have knowledge of the variations in practice. Muslim foster carers spoken to during this project find the safer caring policy very useful to protect themselves and their own families from allegations and keep the fostered child safe from risk, but also to support Muslim families regarding male and female privacy issues.

The principle here is that the wishes and feelings of the fostered children in their own religious and cultural practices must be matched and/or agreed with the fostering family, be they Muslim or non-Muslim. There are examples within this report whereby Muslim young people are happier in non-Muslim families because their personal practice of their faith clashed with Muslim foster families in previous placements. Engaging with children, and birth parents where possible, to understand the child's religious and cultural identity can enable discussions with fostering families identified as possible matches.

## 8.4 Mistrust of state intervention

A further barrier identified within the project was the Muslim community's perception of local authorities and social service provision. As reported in the literature review, traditional Muslim families exist as an extended family. Families are at the heart of every Muslim community and, as such, children are often cared for as part of the wider community. State intervention for caring for children is therefore not aligned to the fabric of the traditional family. The structure of the community is more akin to private fostering, as acknowledged by a foster carer: 'I know private fostering goes on within my community. We help each other out and that's how we do it between family and friends. We would see no point in telling social services after 28 days and besides they might then take the child into care, away from their family'.

Educating the Muslim community as to the purpose of state intervention and working collaboratively on a local basis is highly important, and is work routinely undertaken by Olive Branch Fostering, a partner within the project: 'When explaining the process of removing a child from their home, one of the key points that Ziafat discusses is that a great deal of work is done to try and keep a child in their birth home by way of preventative measures and local authorities have a legal obligation to explore all options before taking a child into care, as well as having a legal obligation to protect children from harm.

'I explain that it is not one person's decision or judgement to remove a child, rather a number of qualified professionals from social work, legal, health and educational backgrounds. All people involved in the decision making know and understand that the best place for any child is with their birth family if it is safe and appropriate. It is also emphasised to the prospective applicants that once a child is taken into care, the state is always considering options to move back with family.

'After explaining the process of how a child is taken into care and their care plan, I go on to explain the role of a foster carer and the agency. As a fostering service, it is our duty to provide the best possible care to the child.'

## 8.5 Fostering practice

While not a religious issue per se, the need to obtain references for a Muslim foster carer may be a potential barrier to those who have not lived in England for all their adult lives. Obtaining references is a crucial part of the assessment process to become a foster carer to determine an individual's suitability to safeguard looked after children in their care.<sup>41</sup> The verification of individual and family's characters will be more difficult to achieve outside the country, especially if the country of origin is in a state of upheaval due to war or internal conflict.<sup>42</sup> Further research is required to identify the scale of this issue.

Some Muslim potential foster carers may also find the home visits, which take place as part of the assessment process, overly intrusive. The home visit may also be the first time that some potential foster carers gain a full understanding of the needs of the children that they would be caring for, and whether those needs are perceived to be compatible with family life. Indeed, one foster carer interviewed within the project shared the following: 'Some of my friends who I have referred to the fostering service have been really keen to become assessed as foster carers. However, when their husbands have discussed the children who they may look after, there has been concern about the problems that these children may bring to the family home. This might be sexualised behaviour or drinking and drugs. For some this would not fit well within a typical Muslim family and therefore many males say no to becoming foster carers.'

In addition, some families may be reluctant to come forward and foster because they do not want to embarrass another family within the community by looking after their children who have been taken into care.

41 DfE 2011. National Fostering Standards; DfE 2011. National Adoption Standards, London. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/281111/NMS\\_Fostering\\_Services.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281111/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf). (Online: 24/07/2018)

42 Gov., UK. 2013. Criminal records checks for overseas applicants. London. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-records-checks-for-overseas-applicants](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-records-checks-for-overseas-applicants). (Online: 15/07/2018.)



## 9. The importance of matching

Finding the right foster carer for each child is of paramount importance for local authorities. And this is no easy task – a child comes into care in need of a foster family every 20 minutes in the UK, and fostering services are always looking to recruit more foster carers to provide these children with a home.

The aim is for each child to be placed with a foster family that can meet all their individual needs, including education, health, being near to family and school, hobbies and interests, and that matches them in terms of their identity – ethnicity, religion, language, culture and so on.

Unfortunately, it is often not possible for the local authority to match all these needs, and they will make the best decision they can for each individual child. The wider the pool of carers, the more likely it is that the more of these needs can be met – and so fostering services will seek to recruit foster carers from the same communities as the children in their care.

There is no legal requirement in fostering to match children's ethnicity, culture, language and faith with that of their carers. However, there are principles set out in the Children Act 1989, which says: 'Foster carers and fostering services should ensure that full attention is paid to the individual child's gender, faith, ethnic origin, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation and any disability they might have' and foster carers must be 'informed, trained and confident' at dealing with these issues. This doesn't mean foster carers must necessarily be of the same ethnic or faith background as the children they care for, but they must be equipped to meet that child's cultural and religious needs.<sup>43</sup>

The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 stipulate in regulation 17 the requirements for support, training and information for foster carers as follows:

- The fostering service provider shall provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.
- The fostering service provider shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12 (1) and 13 (1) and (3).
- The fostering service provider shall ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, that person is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and that each foster parent is provided with appropriate information regarding:
- The state of health and health needs of any child placed or to be placed with him; and the arrangements for giving consent to the child's medical or dental examination or treatment.

<sup>43</sup> BBC, 2017. Fostering, The Rules and The Reality. Online:[ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41094254> ] 14/02/2019.

This requirement is supported by the National Minimum Fostering Standards, Standard 23, which requires the fostering service to ensure that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child or young person placed in their care. All training must fit within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice and must be organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by foster carers.

There is however not a set pathway or post-approval training framework in place for foster carers. This point is an ongoing recommendation of The Fostering Network's and features in the Fostering Stocktake report (2018) commissioned by the Government.

## 9.1 Matching faith, language, culture and ethnicity

All fostering services will assess the needs of a fostered child and attempt to match them with a foster carer best placed to meet them. For many, schools, health, contact with family and their cultural identity will all factor into the decision-making process. As such it may not always be possible or an assessed priority in the needs of the child to make a cultural, faith or religious match for the child. However, the importance of a child's cultural identity should not be underestimated.

A study published in 2018 found that; 'Cultural confusion is a common experience among children in foster care. But it can be especially severe for Muslims when their faith, traditional values and way of life are disrespected and when this is exacerbated by removal from familiar home environments.'<sup>44</sup>

Pitcher and Jaffar found that four issues emerged:

- the child's confusion surrounding separation and moving to somewhere strange
- identifying the right placement
- intervening in a way that offers children future choices
- the ever-present risk of discrimination.

The article highlights the need to support Muslim adolescents entering care; it also criticises the lack of therapeutic services and supports the need for systemic training in cultural awareness.

In addition, the need to clarify Islamic teaching on fostering for Muslim families to combat the shortage of Muslim families coming forward was only published in 2018<sup>45</sup>. It appears, from the limited survey undertaken for this report, that local authorities' training of foster carers and their staff is inconsistent, and in some organisations is covered only by the 'diversity' element of The Skills to Foster™ pre-approval training.

44 Pitcher, D; Jaffar S. 2018. 'To another's house': the experiences of Muslim young people in foster care. Volume: 42 issue: 3, page(s): 219-233 Article first published online: September 3, 2018; Issue published: October 1, 2018. [Online: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0308575918790437>]

45 Karim, S. 2018. Islamic Guidance on the Contemporary Practice of Adoption and Fostering in the UK. Penny Appeal, Wakefield. [www.pennyappeal.org](http://www.pennyappeal.org). (Online: 15/07/2018)

As is referenced within this report, the need for specific cultural awareness for the many differences in the care of Muslim children requires a more focused and sincere commitment from the recruiting and placing organisations.<sup>46</sup>

### **Please explain how your fostering service trains non-Muslim foster carers to look after Muslim children.<sup>47</sup>**

- The Skills to Foster™
- Cultural competency training provided, other training resources also provided e.g. books, DVDs, links to appropriate e-learning, local contacts.
- We have provided training on Muslim children, we have reading materials available and we can use the support of experienced carers to provide buddy support.
- We have a Muslim working party who are looking at developing training for all foster carers. This will be rolled out later this year
- We offer constant support to all our carers via monthly supervision to ensure our carers are meeting the needs of the children within their care. The supervising social worker will identify the cultural and religious needs of the young people and ensure the carers are meeting these. We have a large percentage of Muslim carers and staff, so have ample resources to support non-Muslim foster carers to look after Muslim foster children.
- We do not have any such situations.
- As above through training and supervision. It would be good to have specific training as carers have asked for training in relation to supporting children and young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers and Muslim. This is being looked at.
- Training courses have been available which we have outsourced to other agencies. However, I am aware that an unaccompanied asylum seeking children foster carer support group is being planned to begin in 2019.
- On an individual basis
- It is done on case by case. they make it very clear that they not be given non-halal food. They link them with Madrassa, and they pay for it; and they link them with other Muslim foster carers to give them advise.
- There is no training provided

In 2015-16, 84 per cent of long-term foster carers were of white ethnicity compared with about 77 per cent of fostered children.<sup>48</sup> In 2017 the number of white children in care had dropped by one per cent, whereas the number of ethnic children had risen. Since 2014, the proportion of looked after children of white ethnicity has decreased steadily from 78 to 75 per cent, while the proportions of 'Asian or Asian British' and 'Other' have increased slightly.<sup>49</sup>

Recently published figures from Ofsted do suggest that there is an increase, particularly

46 Jones-Cooke, C. 2018. Dissertation (unpublished). Are UK fostering and adoption laws and policies compatible with Islamic principles? Islamic College, London (affiliated with Middlesex University)

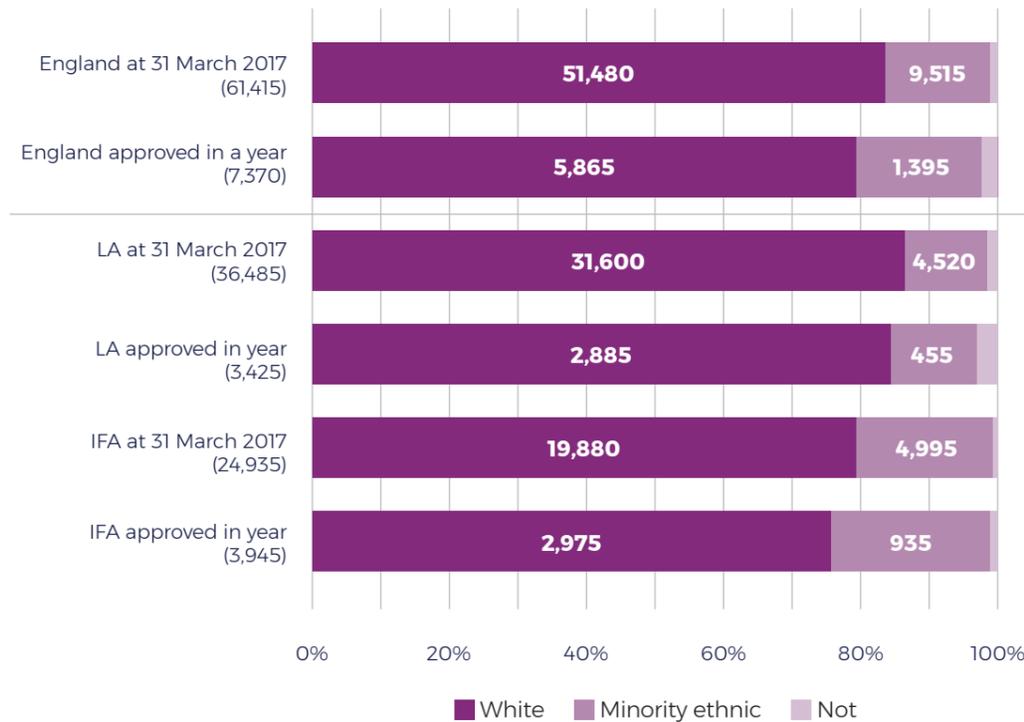
47 Muslim Foster Network Survey 2018.

48 Fostering: The rules and the reality. BBC August 2017. [Online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41094254-26/01/2019>].

49 DoE, 2018. Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2018. [Online: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/757922/Children\\_looked\\_after\\_in\\_England\\_2018\\_Text\\_revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757922/Children_looked_after_in_England_2018_Text_revised.pdf)]

in independent fostering providers, in the recruitment of foster carers from ethnic backgrounds, although ethnicity is still a catch-all term and does not identify faith or religion. See chart below:

**Ethnicity of mainstream foster carers by sector, as at 31 March 2017 and approved during 2016 to 2017<sup>50</sup>**



Ofsted collected the ethnicity of all foster carers, including family and friends, and short break carers, and fostered children. As at 31 March 2017, 24 per cent of fostered children were from minority ethnic groups, compared with 14 per cent of all foster carers. This perhaps highlights the challenges the sector might sometimes face in finding cultural matches.<sup>51</sup>

While these figures are useful, more accurate representation for faith and religious groups would enable more thorough research, understanding and challenge to Government.

**9.2 Cross-cultural placements and support**

<sup>50</sup> Ofsted, 2018. Fostering in England 2016 to 2017: Main Findings. [Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-in-england-1-april-2016-to-31-march-2017/fostering-in-england-2016-to-2017-main-findings> 27/01/2019], 2017

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 'It may sometimes be suitable or desirable to match placements along ethnic, religious or cultural lines. Fostering, Commons Education Select Committee, (Fostering, Valuing Care, Recruitment, paragraph 109), 2017.'

A review of the fostering landscape identified a range of commercially available training courses available on culture and identity, addressing such issues as 'what does different ethnicity mean?' and 'how can children be supported to understand their cultural heritage?'. Bristol City Council, a partner within the project, produced a guide entitled *Caring for a Child of a Different Ethnicity*. While this guide focuses on ethnicity there are many examples providing a helpful introduction to topics such as attachment and self-esteem and faith, as well as considerations for food and diet. Mercy Mission UK's *Guide for Foster Carers Caring for a Muslim Child* (2012) is an example of a specific resource available to non-Muslim carers looking after Muslim children. Detailing the specific needs of practising Muslim children and signposting to further information, the guide is a valuable resource.

Except for having access to the guides developed by Bristol City Council and Mercy Mission UK, local authority fostering services appear to lack basic information about different faiths and religions of children and young people. Reviewing the guidance developed by Bristol City Council and assessing its relevance to a wider audience is a recommendation of this report, as is disseminating more widely Mercy Mission UK's guide.

**Case study: Arise Mentorship programme**

During the project My Foster Family, working with The Refugee Council, Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Sunbeam Fostering, Active Care Solutions and Accenture, developed Arise – a bespoke mentor programme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children living in care.

Recognising that children in care can struggle to settle and truly benefit from their educational opportunities, especially if the children are new to the country and coming to terms with loss and trauma, the programme works with refugee children in care and connects them with quality professional mentors who can help the young person believe in themselves and also be comfortable with their faith identity.

The focus is to help provide stability and build aspirations for young people who lack strong social networks and often access to their faith community.

A pilot was launched in London, Birmingham and Bradford in January 2018, with mentors recruited and trained from 19 different professions, and 32 young people from Syria, Afghanistan, Albania, Pakistan, Eritrea, Sudan and Iraq have benefiting from being mentored.

In 2019, the programme has been further developed and is now working in partnership with schools to support young people in their education setting.

Peer support featured prevalently within partner services. One-to-one discussions, small group meetings and informal or formal peer support groups between foster carers were all cited as techniques services used to support Muslim foster carers looking after a child of a different faith to their own. Several carers however felt a general absence of information and support available to them and so had opted for self-education via searching the internet.

Discussions with both service staff and foster carers suggest some of the positive outcomes they have observed from the establishment of a strong peer support and information network have been:

- Young people receiving support from their carers to attend Home Office meetings and legal appointments culminating in positive outcomes for their application and subsequent leave to remain.
- Accessing education, English for speakers of other languages, and other training mediums to help build competency and self-esteem and integrate into their new life.
- Excellent use of third sector organisations providing additional layers of support for foster carers and those they care for.
- Young people feeling supported and part of their new family and building relationships within their community.
- Foster carers supporting unaccompanied minors to access health services and mental health provisions which, as research suggests, can be difficult to access for black and minority ethnic groups.
- Accessing financial aid in the form of grants to further assist young people in achieving positive outcomes.

### Case study: Mockingbird programme

A prime example of the benefits of formal peer support can be found in The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme based on the Mockingbird Family Model, which aligns to the previously discussed principle of the impact of extended family networks.

Developed in Seattle, Washington by the Mockingbird Society and delivered under licence in the UK by The Fostering Network, the Mockingbird Family Model introduces the concept of 'constellations' of foster carers. Constellations consist of a 'hub' foster carer at the heart, surrounded by six to 10 'satellite' foster carers. The constellation performs as a community, with the hub carer providing sleepovers (respite) to foster carers within the constellation by accommodating their fostered child for a period of time, as well as providing activities and support where required. Increasingly satellite fostering households are providing additional support for one another in the form of advice or after school care. As the fostered children develop relationships with their peers, they achieve greater competency and build positive attachments, issues that may have been pertinent to their development. As a result, the model is suggesting fewer placements are breaking down, foster carer retention is higher and, crucially, outcomes for looked after children in foster care are improving.

The relevance of the Mockingbird programme for this project is its resemblance to how the Muslim community operates – the concept of an extended family. This notion was confirmed by the hub carer of a constellation in Leeds, herself a Muslim. Through her role, she has supported a Muslim fostered child in exploring their identity in a non-Muslim fostering placement, empowering the child but also strengthening the stability of the placement. However, this model would need to be further supported through the provision of specific ethnic, religious and cultural training to reflect the children cared for within the constellation, to ensure consistency of care for children of Muslim or ethnically diverse children.

The dynamic and learning achieved through the Mockingbird programme is a model of support that can be replicated across the country and used to benefit all fostered children. The similarities between the model and how the Muslim community is structured can be used as a tool to both recruit and retain Muslim carers, and its development across fostering services formed one of the recommendations from the recent Fostering Stocktake report.

### Case study: Supporting Muslim placements

Recognising the need for additional support to empower foster carers to better understand the needs of the Muslim child, Muslim Foster Network developed the Ramadan and Eid gift box.

The gift box includes a fostering guide, information for carers on how best to support young people who want to fast, a gift for the fostered child and foster carer and an invitation to Ramadan and Eid events. Over the last two years, 1,000 gift boxes have been distributed to non-Muslim foster families caring for Muslim children in 30 local authorities. These were very well received by foster carers.

'The information in the box was really useful and the book was very well written. It's such a good idea that helps children understand their heritage. We shared the information in the box with the child's school and they were really impressed too and used it to help the other children in class understand what being a Muslim means and what Ramadan is about.'

foster carer

Foster carers acknowledge that when fostering a child of a different faith to their own, there are several requirements that will need careful consideration. For the Muslim child in foster care, observing their faith and participating in religious festivals, such as Ramadan, may be of critical importance to preserving their identity.

Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and therefore of critical importance to practicing Muslims. It is a month of prayer and fasting commemorating the first revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammed. For one foster carer this was identified as one of the most challenging times for supporting their Muslim foster child, for Ramadan in England co-exists alongside school, homework, extra-curricular activities, exams and some of the longest days in the year.

'It is a time when the loss and trauma (of coming into foster care) are intensified through hunger and tiredness and the isolation of fulfilling this important pillar in a Christian household. And yet there is a beauty in his devoutness.'

foster carer

Fasting though is also a practice within the Christian faith, for example as a means of worship and prayer, through periods such as Lent. Using her personal experience and knowledge, this Christian foster carer was able to embrace and support the faith of her Muslim fostered child and provide for him.

The foster carer in the above example, and others like her, are assessed and equipped with basic skills and training to deliver foster care to those children a fostering service place with them. Although she was not a recipient of the gift box she, and others like her, will grow their knowledge and skills to overcome the “steep learning curve” through self-directed research and making wider community connections, such as through peer support, aligned to the needs of the child they are caring for. While this is explored in the following section, there is clearly greater requirement for fostering services to provide as complete information as possible and provide additional tools, such as the Ramadan giftbox, to support this process. Matching and children’s outcomes will also be improved by the better collection of data determining a child’s identity in order to holistically assess their needs and identify the best foster carer to meet them.

While it is not always possible to place a Muslim child with culturally and faithfully matched carers, it is vital fostering services put support in place to allow the Muslim fostered child to maintain ties with their community if their care plan permits. The following excerpt is taken from a transcript by Sam Zekkeria about his experiences being brought up as an Ethiopian Muslim child in care:

‘I didn’t know any Muslims personally, none of my friends were Muslims, none of the people I was close to was Muslim.

‘The only interaction I had with Muslims was watching the news or reading what was in the newspaper.’

‘It was only after I left my foster parents and started living independently then I started to question who I am, and where I belong. Living in care, you get used to not exactly fitting in anywhere and get used to moving.’

Now a teacher, he reverted to Islam, and he feels he has discovered an identity he was disconnected from. Though he doesn’t resent his carers, he feels it wasn’t right that he wasn’t given any exposure to his family background.<sup>52</sup>

52 Gani, A. 2017. This is What the Foster Care System is like for Muslims. Online: [https://www.buzzfeed.com/aishagani/muslim-foster-groups-discrimination] 14/02/2019.

## 10. Recruiting Muslim foster carers

### 10.1 Considering fostering

There are many reasons for people of any religion or none to wish to foster a child. The Fostering Network’s research demonstrates that individuals may be motivated because it’s the right time in their life, they miss having children in their household, or they have a more intrinsic need to make a difference to the life of a looked after child.<sup>53</sup>

Islam encourages and spiritually rewards Muslims who take in orphans and care for them with kindness and love.<sup>54</sup> ‘Abū ad-Dardā narrates that a man came to the Prophet complaining about the harshness of his heart. The Prophet asked him, “Do you like that your heart softens and that your need is fulfilled? Then show affection to an orphan, stroke their head and feed them from your food, then your heart will soften, and your need will be fulfilled.”<sup>55</sup> The Holy Prophet was himself an orphan and later in life took in and cared for Zayd bin Ḥārithah and brought up his cousin ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, to ease hardship on his uncle.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, from an Islamic perspective there is a religious obligation to care for orphans (or Muslim children unable to be cared for by their parents). “As the third pillar of Islam, Zakat is a form of worship (Ibadah) whose spiritual impact on purification and sanctification is its most important function”. Muslims give zakat (tax) which is a proportion of their wealth each year to help support work done by Muslims for Muslims. This obligation is third to that of Shahadah and prayer in the Qur’anic ranking and one of the Five Pillars of Islam. ‘It is intended to place Mercy between the hearts of those who are wealthy and those in need.’<sup>57</sup> The care of the orphan is embedded in Islamic teaching and made exemplary in the life of the prophet Muhammed. As discussed within the literature review fostering is permitted within the Muslim faith, indeed the Prophet Muhammed was fostered during childhood and in turn, he cared for other orphans during his lifetime. However, it is a commonly held misconception that it is not a permitted activity. Muslim Foster Network are an example of addressing this and tailoring additional information for prospective Muslim foster carers. These services

53 The Fostering Network, 2013. Why Foster Carers Care, London <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/why-foster-carers-care-report-v5.pdf>

54 Karim, S. 2018. Islamic Guidance on the Contemporary Practice of Adoption and Fostering in the UK. Penny Appeal. [www.pennyappeal.org](http://www.pennyappeal.org). (Online: 19/07/2018. The definition of orphan in Islam: - The Qur’ān and the Sunnah (Prophetic tradition) use the Arabic word Yatīm to denote the word ‘orphan’ and encourages taking care of them. Linguistically, the word Yatīm describes a child who has lost his or her father.

55 Karim, S. 2018. Islamic Guidance on the Contemporary Practice of Adoption and Fostering in the UK. Penny Appeal. Both Aṭ-Ṭabrānī and Ahmad albeit with a different chain of narration have reported this Hadith.

56 Al-Islam, 2018. A Shi’ite Encyclopedia. Ghadir Part 1. [www.al-islam.org/shiite-encyclopedia-ahlul-bayt-dilpteam/ghadir-khum-part-1](http://www.al-islam.org/shiite-encyclopedia-ahlul-bayt-dilpteam/ghadir-khum-part-1). (Online: 16/07/2018)

57 Online:[www.muslimaid.org/zakat-charity](http://www.muslimaid.org/zakat-charity).

specifically address foster care in the context of Islam, providing information to help inform the decision to foster and the relationship with faith.

The care of parents, widows, the poor and orphans is taught in mosque so from a young age Muslims will be brought up to regard these as obligations of their faith. Many Muslims, finding their own situation to be a content one, will give to the poor, or support work done by charities. Given this backdrop of responsibility towards orphans some families have a desire to offer a Muslim child a home within a Muslim household through concern that the child might otherwise not be brought up in the faith. However this does not meet the needs of most fostering services, which on the whole require foster carers who are prepared to accept children from diverse backgrounds, races and religions.

Foster carers are trained, assessed and approved to care for children from any background, including faith or religion. However, research within the project identified that some fostering services would be open to discuss alternative practice in order to overcome religious barriers. Some fostering services do show a more flexible approach and if the prospective family meets the criteria to become a foster carer, they would not discourage the family over this issue but over time, would develop and increase the family's confidence to understand the needs of non-Muslim children.

## 10.2 Engaging the prospective Muslim foster carer: Marketing materials

One of the main reasons identified during the project why more Muslims do not come forward to foster is the apparent lack of targeted materials – marketing information designed to resonate with a Muslim audience.

### Engagement Realisation Approach (ERA)

In 2017, the Muslim Foster Network launched the Engagement Realisation Approach (ERA). The ERA model enables the specialist recruitment of particular profiles of required foster carers, offering a uniquely professional and methodical approach.

Design is a significant element when producing recruitment material, often being the first engagement with a new product or service. Yet there were few examples of where services had targeted the marketing to attract different audiences. Producing collateral that visually resonates with a particular Muslim audience, rather than general recruitment will allow a Muslim family new to the concept of fostering, how it operates and why it is required, to better connect with the ask, removing any potential barriers. Creating a working party with existing Muslim foster carers within fostering services may also help to produce visuals that will resonate with the target audience.

ERA focuses on outcomes by directly linking investment in communication channels with desired behaviours. The investment is made in social media, which allows a better return through directly targeting the personas required for campaign. This ensures tailored messages reaches the desired personas and helps secure fostering leads by aligning to stated likes and dislikes.

As the model expands, the ERA is more able to refine the personas, further increasing the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the model.

Working in partnership with fostering services over an 18 month period the Muslim Foster Network was able to reach 225,000 people online, with 2049 registering an interest. For example, 405 referrals were made to independent fostering providers, resulting in 28 approved foster carers and further 43 in assessment (at time of writing this report) reflecting a conversion rate of 17.5per cent – well above the national average.

Representing diversity visually is highly important when attempting to recruit a diverse cohort of foster carers. There is though a significant bias towards female representation in visual collateral. Females are often the primary carer, however there are several fostering households where the male is the main carer, and indeed there are many examples of single male foster carers. Services should avoid placing or reinforcing unnecessary barriers when considering visual marketing.

Not depicting more men in foster carer recruitment imagery could result in many thinking that it is not a role for them or that they are not required to participate in a fostering family. This may be even more of a barrier for practising Muslim families where a male is often the 'head' of the family.

Although, Muslim families will have concerns about the impact on their family, it is not specific to this group. All families wishing to foster must face up to the reality of the task, and images of happy smiling children often found in marketing materials are attractive but not always grounded in truth.

## 10.3 Engaging the prospective Muslim foster carer: Recruitment message

Tailored visuals have to be complemented by messaging which connects with the target audience. As referenced above, many foster carers are motivated to "make a difference to a child's life". This reflects the general messaging included in marketing materials generated by fostering services, alongside the benefits of becoming a foster carer such as the emotional reward.

As described above, these attributes reflect the needs of specific audiences, the group to which the majority of foster carers align. The research demonstrated that these attributes, and therefore this messaging, cut across all groups so the core message to recruit Muslim foster carers does not need to change. Services need to do more though to address perceived barriers to fostering that may prevent more Muslims coming forward.

A lack of awareness about fostering within the wider community has also been identified as a potential barrier. Mosques are central to Muslims as a place of worship. The imam is the religious leader of the mosque and the person who leads the prayers. Sharing recruitment messaging through imams to convey the need for more foster carers is a positive step in removing any barriers due to a lack of awareness and can have a significant impact.

## Case study: Foster Friday

Established in 2017 by Muslim Foster Network, Foster Friday is the UK's biggest day for raising awareness about fostering within the Muslim community. Foster Friday 2018 took place during Foster Care Fortnight™, which is the UK's largest fostering awareness campaign, run by The Fostering Network. Foster Friday 2019 was followed by a two-week roadshow with 16 fostering workshops taking place generating many hundreds of enquiries.

Working in partnership with The Muslim Council of Britain, a national umbrella body with over 500 mosques, educational and charitable associations affiliated to it, campaign toolkits were sent to over 200 mosques across the UK, including marketing materials and a guide on delivering a lecture on fostering to the Muslim community. This empowered and encouraged imams to discuss fostering during the Friday sermon, the biggest weekly gathering of Muslims across the UK.

Harun Khan, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, said: 'Sadly, there is a huge number of Muslim children in foster care, many of whom are from war-torn countries and who have suffered a great deal. They have come without their parents or family into unfamiliar territory. Muslim Foster Network provides an exceptional service of catering to the needs of these children and working to help build that stability for children so they can have a brighter future. The Muslim Council of Britain is proud to support Foster Friday to increase awareness and hopefully garner greater interest and support from Muslim communities to work together to help these children excel in life and build the future we want to see.'

A number of services have approached local community groups and mosques to agree presentations from the service to the community or have a presence around the time of prayers or other religious festivals to promote fostering.

Bristol City Council is one example of a service having worked with local imams to convey the message of fostering in the context of Islam. This approach has been successful in generating enquiries and interest in fostering, one such activity by the service gaining 32 enquiries as a result. Regrettably for the service however, none of these individuals followed up their interest and went through to the initial stages of the recruitment process. When asked to reflect on this the service raised a number of dilemmas – it was suggested that some of the interest shown was due to the setting and the initial enthusiasm to undertake an activity to benefit the community. For many, however, this may have been their first insight into fostering and therefore not the comprehensive understanding of the fostering task. A toolkit, such as that provided by Muslim Foster Network, could have made the difference in this example.

Research shows that many consider fostering for up to three years before making an enquiry to a service. Fostering services should therefore consider the objectives of these sessions – to provide information or to signpost to a follow up information session, rather than explicitly recruiting, and identify more comprehensive ways of nurturing and following up interest.

## Case study: STAR Parties – Rotherham Metropolitan Council

STAR – Start Thinking About Recruitment – parties are an initiative developed by Rotherham Council's fostering team. STAR parties build on the evidence that many foster carers come into fostering through word of mouth recommendations from existing foster carers, and 'recommend a friend' schemes deployed by many fostering services.

A STAR party is hosted by an approved Rotherham Council foster carer in their own home. They are paid a fee of £100 to host a party, which will involve at least five prospective foster carers, and is supported by the service's recruitment team. The host foster carer will receive a fee of £500 for any who attend the party who go on to be approved as foster carers for the council.

The service has identified several advantages to the STAR party model. As well as engaging and utilising the existing foster carer resource who can champion the service and speak of their own experiences, it provides a less intimidating process for the prospective foster carers, particularly if English is a second language. A further benefit is the promotion of future peer support networks for the prospective foster carer should they go on to be approved to foster.

Rotherham's fostering team has already seen the impact of STAR parties with several foster carers registering interest. They recognise that if STAR parties are to develop as a positive form of foster carer recruitment, a whole service approach to promoting and developing this model is required. This includes recruitment and supervision teams working collaboratively to promote the service and engage more foster carers and implementing a plan of monitoring and reviewing impact. This model could also work well with Muslim foster carers holding STAR parties to support their fostering service to recruit to meet the needs of local children in foster care.

Through targeted recruitment, the message and additional information can be clearly delivered to a Muslim individual or family considering making an enquiry to foster. While the main message of making a difference to a child's life will resonate across all audiences, it is important for services to provide additional information pertinent to the Muslim audience to address any concerns aligned to their faith which may present as a barrier. Engaging the local mosque to share the messaging for the need for more foster carers and the commitment required to foster is also a positive activity.

Ultimately, services need to support Muslim individuals and families to make an informed and qualified decision, addressing any perceived barriers, as to whether fostering is for them.



## 10.4 Initial contact with a fostering service

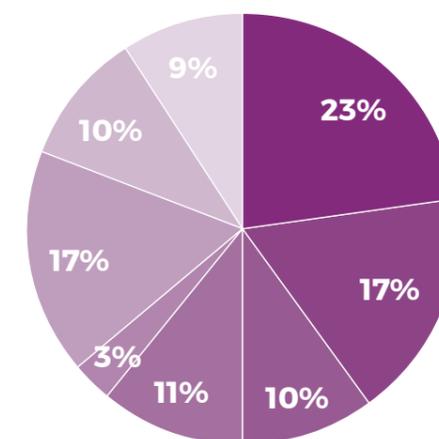
The purpose of the initial enquiry is for the individual to register their interest in becoming a foster carer and ask questions of the fostering task. The service will seek to gather basic information about the enquirer and form an initial picture of their suitability to foster. The outcome of an initial enquiry is often an invitation to an information session or for the fostering service to visit the foster carer in their own home, or for no further action to be taken.

Many fostering services are not equipped to support initial enquiries from those who have little or no English. This is particularly significant when considering the nature of the telephone call. Both the sensitivity and the specialist vocabulary used, mean that even those with sufficient command of the English language to foster, may find this initial call challenging.

While it is important that all foster carers are able to communicate with the children they care for and other professionals, and fulfil their duties for maintaining records, there is an opportunity to provide additional support for these individuals. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is an example of positive practice in this respect, providing opportunities for the enquirer to speak with a member of staff in their own language, for example Urdu or Arabic, to discuss foster care. Many of these people may not be suitable to become foster carers, however the positive experience with the fostering service may encourage them to recommend another within their community who may be better suited to the task.

**Chart 5 - After the initial enquiry, did you meet the requirements to become a foster carer?<sup>58</sup>**

- No spare bedroom
- Other
- Incorrect contact information
- Not a British citizen
- No longer interested in fostering
- Inadequate level of English
- Referred on
- On hold



<sup>58</sup> Muslim Foster Network Survey 2018.

Some of the reasons given why some families interested in fostering could not take forward their application included:

- bedroom sharing by foster carers' own children
- need to maintain current employment alongside fostering role
- citizenship status.<sup>59</sup>

Of the 2049 enquirers, 405 (20 percent of enquirers) were referred on during Muslim Foster Network's activities, 28 have been approved and a further 43 are going through assessment. Data is still coming through to account for the remaining 334 who were referred to fostering services.<sup>60</sup> This represents a figure of 80 per cent who are not referred on which is significantly higher than the average 70 per cent who do not progress from an enquiry as found in The Fostering Network's fostering benchmark report<sup>61</sup> and again points to insufficient information about and understanding of the fostering task received at the point of enquiry tailored to a Muslim audience.

## 10.5 Initial visit

If the enquirer is keen to progress and the fostering service is supportive, they will proceed to an 'initial visit'. An initial visit is an opportunity for the fostering service and foster carer to continue the questions and for the service to form an impression of the home environment. Many services encourage a foster carer to accompany the social worker on an initial visit to provide the enquirer with an opportunity to ask questions of an individual performing the fostering task. This is particularly beneficial if the foster carer is Muslim as they can also address any questions and help the enquirer to overcome any further barriers presented.

Good practice was demonstrated at this stage by Muslim Foster Network's partnership with Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC), where a representative from both organisations do a joint initial home visit. This has allowed potential foster cares and assessing social workers to feel more relaxed with discussing faith or culturally sensitive questions. Over a six-month period Muslim Foster Network has made 20 referrals to RMBC of which eight have gone onto assessment.

There are clear opportunities for fostering services to refine their initial enquiry and initial visit process to greater enable prospective Muslim foster carers to participate.

59 The Fostering Network. EU Nationals: Foster Carers and Fostered Children – 2018. Online: [https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/eunationalreport.pdf] 08/02/2019.

60 Research carried out by Muslim Foster Network 2018.

61 Online: https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/uploads/benchmark\_2016\_final.pdf

## 10.6 Approval and placement planning

On completion of an assessment, a report will be presented to a fostering panel making recommendations of a candidate's suitability to foster or otherwise. The panel will then consider the report, in turn making recommendations to a fostering service's agency decision maker to decide whether the applicant is approved as a foster carer.

Supporting and nurturing a child's identity is a critical part of foster care. Following approval, foster carers have a 12-month period to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS). The TSDS include:

- Standard 1: Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people
- Standard 2: Understand your role as a foster carer
- Standard 3: Understand health and safety, and healthy care
- Standard 4: Know how to communicate effectively
- Standard 5: Understand the development of children and young people
- Standard 6: Keep children and young people safe from harm
- Standard 7: Develop yourself

Standard 3, healthy care, refers to: 'what children and young people should expect and what they are entitled to in a healthy care environment. The National Children's Bureau has developed the National Healthy Care Standard, on behalf of the Department for Education: A child or young person living in a healthy care environment is entitled to... feel respected and supported in his/her cultural beliefs and personal identity.'<sup>62</sup>

Information given to foster carers about children prior to placement with them is often cited as inadequate. The Fostering Network's State of the Nation survey identified a third of foster carers rarely or never received enough information about a child prior to them being placed in their care.<sup>63</sup>

As explained throughout this report, matching a child to a foster carer able to provide the best possible care against their assessed needs is crucial in ensuring the child is safe and secure, nurtured and given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. For a Muslim child who becomes the responsibility of the local authority, placing them within a practising Muslim family aligned to their own branch of Islam may be a key priority for that child.

Cross-cultural/religious/faith placements are common in foster care, often leading to positive outcomes for the looked after child. Complete information about these children is even more important in these scenarios to ensure the foster carer can attend to and support the child's faith. Being Muslim has many different meanings but some services can tend to group Muslims together and culturally match the child in good faith.

62 DoE, 2012. TSD standards workbook for foster carers. [Online: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/training-support-and-development-standards-for-foster-care-evidence-workbook-26/01/2019.]

63 2018, State of The Nation Report. The Fostering Network. Online: [https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/research/state-nations-foster-care-2019] 07/02/2019

Partner services to this research struggled to consistently provide data to substantiate recent child placement activity. This can lead to significant safeguarding and placement stability issues as evidenced in the following example of a non-Muslim carer caring for two Albanian unaccompanied asylum-seeking children:

‘The two lads who I am currently looking after were previously placed with a Pakistani Muslim family. They found this placement very difficult and would often go missing for periods of time and would cause the family a lot of hassle. This would often lead to arguments and squabbles within the home and social workers becoming involved in order to maintain the stability of the placement. Eventually the placement broke down and I was approached to look after these young men. Once they arrived with me, they seemed to settle down and after a while they were able to explain they did not enjoy living with the previous family because they practised their faiths differently. The placement has been very stable and fulfilling for me as a foster carer and I would now like to only do this type of fostering.’

While this approach may not have been appropriate in another situation, it demonstrates how exploring a child’s identity to the fullest, including discussions with the child where appropriate, can ensure the right foster carer can be identified and to contribute to the stability of a placement and the child’s outcomes.

There are however positive examples of where peer support and a foster carer’s resilience have enabled a placement to thrive, including examples of non-Muslim carers caring for Muslim children:

‘I was approached by the fostering team to care for an unaccompanied girl. I was told she was very traumatised due to things that happened to her on her journey to this country. I was inclined to say no due to her not speaking English and I knew nothing about the Muslim faith. I didn’t feel I could support this child very well.

‘I was offered the opportunity to speak to an experienced foster carer who was a practising Muslim which was really helpful, and she agreed to keep in touch with me. The child’s social worker was also Muslim, so it meant there was a lot of information about the child to help me prepare. I took the placement and found that helping this young lady to practise her faith by buying faith-related items online helped her so much with the trauma she was dealing with. Her faith was a very important part of her life and was something she held onto dearly. If I had not been given support, I would not have the knowledge to support this young person but now I feel more culturally aware and able to help her.’

As in the above example, support and information is crucial in ensuring the success of a placement, particularly when caring for a child of a different faith. The child’s faith can be vital as a coping mechanism to help process the trauma they may have experienced before coming into foster care. As well as having the competency to identify a child’s faith, a foster carer will also need to be empowered with the skills to help them express their faith. The shared faith of the child’s social worker to the child enabled a more thorough explanation of the child’s identity. However, this was very much an exception to what was more commonly found during the research, and partner services have reflected that this is an area to improve.

‘Coming from a similar ethnic/religious background helps the child to acclimatise more quickly. Having a welcoming environment, religious symbols all helps. Familiar food and cooking smells and an Islamic pattern to the day are also beneficial to many children. Children need confidence to state their needs in non-Muslim foster placements.’

#### Daughter of a South Asian Muslim fostering family

In the case of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, Muslim Foster Network has developed the Refugee Mentoring Programme to support young Muslims in this group to cope with coming to a new country and acclimatising to a completely different language and way of life. Further research is required to identify how this project could be extended to mentor any Muslim young person placed in cross-cultural placements.

### Case study: Caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children: Leeds

Since 2018, Leeds Council has created a fostering team specifically for teenage children in recognition of the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and the difficulties attracting foster carers willing and able to care for them. Social workers on the team carry slightly smaller caseloads due to the needs of the placements and are trained in trauma informed practice, attachment and teenage development.

The council is part of the Government’s National Transfer Scheme and has around 20 young people in supported lodgings mostly from Somalia, Eritrea and Iraqi Kurds aged 16-plus. Any children younger than 16 are placed with foster carers. Supported lodgings are offered with Level 1 foster carers, which is the initial level of skills and training in foster care, and they must provide a minimum of 15 hours of support per week to the children. There are some cultural difficulties with this type of placement and it can be challenging for boys with single female carers. There is a reluctance to take on roles not seen as male roles (cooking, cleaning, and so on) as this is culturally not the norm for many of these young people, but is a necessary part of the role to support them to move forward into independence. Language is also often an issue, but many utilise online translation tools in order to communicate.

Leeds Council has also developed the ‘rent a room’ scheme for young people who are still too vulnerable to move out completely into the community but whose assessed need is lower than those in supported accommodation. The individuals offering accommodation are assessed but are not approved foster carers. This scheme often attracts people from faith backgrounds and those with concern for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Participants in the scheme are often in full-time employment, enabling them to fulfil their need to help young people without such a big commitment. They are paid £122 per week and must be motivated to provide basic support and company predominantly during the evening and at weekends. The service described the ‘rent a room’ scheme as very positive as the young people are not alone, isolated in the community but within a household supportive of their situation. Further analysis is required to understand the long-term outcomes for these young people compared to their peers.



Leeds Council has also introduced specific unaccompanied asylum seeking children workers who have connections with local ethnic communities and resources. These workers will support the placements whether they are foster carers, supported lodgings or part of the 'rent a room' scheme. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children often need support during the Home Office process to secure permanent leave to remain as it can be a very stressful period for the young people. Training is available in supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children, age assessments, leave to remain applications and the legal process. The council acknowledged however that there was limited training around religious needs outside of the mandatory 'cultural awareness and diversity' and 'equality and diversity' courses and not specifically at any depth.

The council advised that there are a significant number of Muslim unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Leeds and their needs are considered at the placement planning stage. Foster carers would be expected to support a child to find a mosque and appropriate community groups, and those in supported lodgings would be connected to a local mosque and relevant community. The service manager considered how the provision of consistent emotional and physical safety and security may help encourage repairing broken relationships in the absence of being able to match with foster carers religiously and ethnically.



# 11. Training

## 11.1 Cultural competence, humility and confidence

This report puts forward three inter-related concepts that social workers require to successfully work alongside individuals of faiths and religions other than their own: cultural competence, confidence and humility.

The ability to understand and interpret the diverse cultures that exist in England can be described as being “culturally competent”. It can be argued that this skill has significant importance in a social work context when matching and placing children in foster care.

Research undertaken in Australia and published in the British Journal of Social Work, ascertained that, ‘in principle, participants in the study agreed it is possible to learn to be culturally competent.’<sup>64</sup>

Kent County Council has published a comprehensive policy and guidance in Cultural Competence (2013), which acts as a benchmark for both foster carers and other professionals, involved with children from a diverse range of countries, cultures and religions.<sup>65</sup> The British Association of Social Workers’ (BASW) Code of Ethics, asserts that ‘social workers should recognise and respect ethnic and cultural diversity and the further diversity within ethnic and cultural groups, and promote policies, procedures and practices that are consistent with this.’<sup>66</sup>

The notion of cultural humility, a concept being developed in America, is arguably closely linked to the development of cultural confidence when working with Muslim children and families. From this perspective working alongside the Muslim child or family and respecting them as the specialist of their religion and cultural norms, creates a learning space between the individual and the social worker. This space has the potential to build a relationship of trust and respect between the individual and the social worker, leading to more successful outcomes.

Where possible, social work is an increasingly collaborative task, with the child or family given the opportunity to share with their social worker their faith, religion and cultural practices. For a social worker not familiar with the intricacies of the child or family’s faith, this practice enables the worker to develop their skills and experience, in the process becoming more culturally competent and confident working with children and families from these backgrounds. Further research needs to be carried out via a pilot study to provide evidence for how this approach could be adapted under regulations and standards within England.

64 Harrison G; Turner R. 2011. Being a ‘Culturally Competent’ Social Worker. The British Journal of Social Work. 2011 Vol.41, No. 2. Oxford University Press. P 343.

65 Kent County Council, 2013. Cultural Competence in Kent. Policy and Guidance. [http://kentchildcare.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/culture\\_comp\\_policy.pdf](http://kentchildcare.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/culture_comp_policy.pdf). (Online: 01/08/2018)

66 BASW 2012. (online: [www.BASW.org.uk](http://www.BASW.org.uk). 29/07/2018)

Matching children to foster carers requires skill, knowledge and sensitivity. Culturally competent social workers need to nurture cultural humility to gain cultural confidence and require the respect and support from a management team which is committed to providing their social workers and foster carers, and ultimately their looked after children, with the best possible outcomes.

### Case study: Learning together

M is an African Caribbean foster carer of 27 years’ experience, she is the mother of four adult children and describes her outlook on life as humanitarian, she ascribes to no religion. Many years ago, M fostered an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child from Afghanistan, who, when he arrived, did not speak English. M’s journey as a foster carer is arguably a beacon for cultural humility in her working practice. This Muslim Afghan boy taught M a lot about his culture and religion. ‘We learned together,’ M said. She learned about halal cooking and researched different culture’s foods. Her fostering service offered workshops and M was a willing attendee. M said, ‘When I take in Muslim children, or children of any other ethnicity, I take them shopping with me to buy their food to help develop trust and to show them that I buy good quality food for them. They could also tell me what their preferences are.’

She also understands that Islam is made up of various schools of thought and knows where the Sunni and Shia mosques are and makes sure she takes the children to the right mosque. She also does the same with Christianity or any other religion a child may follow. M had three Muslim girls at one point, two Pakistani sisters and a Bangladeshi girl, she made sure their prayer needs were met. ‘During Ramadan, I would cook for them to break their fast and get up in the middle of the night to prepare their meal before the start of the next day.’ M did her best to reassure Muslim parents that she will care for their children as Islamically as possible. ‘The two Pakistani girls went home every weekend,’ M said, ‘which was really important to keep their connections with their family and community.’

M is a very good working example of cultural humility, supported by her fostering service to ensure she understands the child’s religious and cultural needs, but M also is led by the child to really understand their needs and develops very trusting relationships with her foster children.

## 11.2 Training and matching of social workers

The lack of ethnic and cultural diversity in foster carers has been evidenced in this report, but equally important is that the social work profession may also lack diversity.<sup>67</sup>

In fostering, two social workers are involved in each placement; the child’s social worker and the foster carer’s supervising social worker. It is not common practice to ethnically match social workers to children and it is often not feasible due to fluctuating staffing and children coming into and leaving care. And indeed, the need for either

67 Ortega, R. M., & Faller, K.C. (2011). Training child welfare workers from an intersectional cultural humility perspective: A paradigm shift. *Child Welfare*, 90(5), 27-49

good matching of the child to the foster carer through religious, racial and cultural compatibility or thorough training of both social work practitioners and all foster carers in cultural competency, supported by an ethos of cultural humility emanating from the placing organisation, is a far more realistic route to meet the needs of Muslim children.

Whether the social worker is working with a Muslim child or Muslim foster carer the need to understand and be confident around their religious and cultural practices is vitally important, for example even at a very practical level, understanding prayer times and preferences around shaking hands, taking off shoes at the door and so on.

Most of the participants of pilot groups involved in the research by Harrison and Turner had attended training on cultural competence or cross-cultural practice. However, 'fears were expressed that such training is often treated as a tokenistic exercise by the agencies concerned. As one respondent remarked, "you tick it off and then you're done."<sup>68</sup> To expand on this research, interviews were conducted with non-Muslim social workers during the project. A number expressed caution and concern when interacting with Muslim foster carers. When asked to elaborate, a fear of causing offence due to a lack of confidence and awareness of the Muslim faith was expressed, such as how males should greet females and vice versa.

Further research would need to be undertaken to pilot a model incorporating cultural competence, confidence and humility

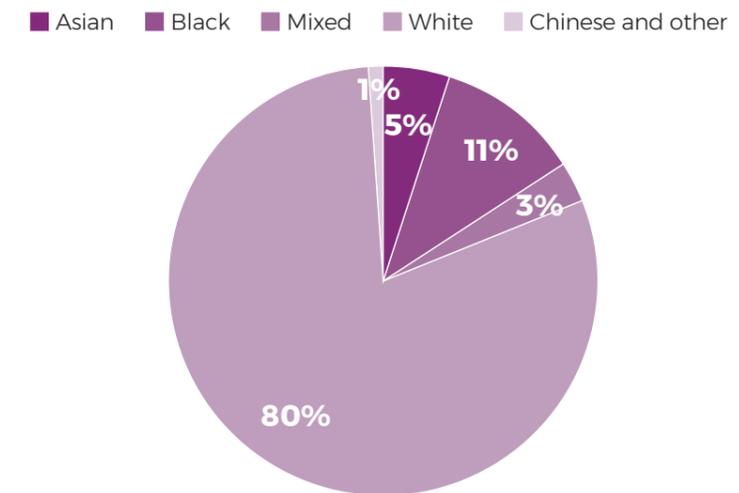
As foster carers are trained and supported to care for children from any religion, faith or cultural background, social workers too may also be expected to support foster carers from diverse backgrounds.

Statistics demonstrate:

- In 2016/17, there were 30,670 children and family social workers employed by local authorities in England, and ethnicity was known for 82 percent of them
- Of those whose ethnicity was known, just under three-quarters (73 per cent) were White British – around 18,420 social workers
- 11 per cent came from the broad Black ethnic group (which includes people from Black Caribbean, Black African and Other Black backgrounds).
- 5 per cent came from the Other White ethnic group, the highest percentage for any specific ethnic group after White British

68 Ibid

**Chart 10 Percentage of children and family social workers in England by ethnicity England during 2016/17<sup>69</sup>**



This data compares relatively consistently with the 2011 Census, where 78.5 per cent of the working age population in England (people aged 16 to 64 years) identified as White British.

69 Source: Department for Education/Ethnicity Facts and Figures GOV.UK



## 12. Conclusion

This project has identified that limited research on the experience of Muslim looked after children and Muslim foster carers has been carried out prior to the commencing of this study.

Extrapolating publicly collected and reported data on ethnicity has not been adequate and perpetuates the stereotyping of the Muslim faith. Muslims reside and practise their faith across the globe and through many different schools and branches. What unites them in this context is the compatibility of foster care within Islamic principles, evidenced throughout this report. Indeed the practice of taking in orphans is recommended by the Islamic faith.

Our research has identified that many fostering services are seeking to recruit foster carers with the Muslim faith to offer the supportive, stable and loving family environment for children unable to live with their families. Many though are struggling to do so and our research has highlighted the following interconnected barriers:

### Poverty

Poverty is frequently cited as one of the primary reasons why children come into care. Many Muslims living in England are considered to be living in poverty, often in overcrowded accommodation. A spare room is often a basic requisite to enable a family to foster, however many south Asian Muslim families live together in multi-generational settings, with children commonly sharing bedrooms.

### Culture

Aligned to the cultural structure of many Muslim families, the desire to live together and to provide care for the family thereby creates a mistrust of social services who locally determine thresholds in order to place children in care. It also poses a barrier to those who may want to come forward from the community but do not want to embarrass a family within their community whose children have been taken into care.

This research has also utilised the ideas of cultural competence, confidence and humility. Non-Muslim social workers interviewed within this project shared feelings of reticence and a lack of confidence to conduct assessments of Muslim families at the risk of causing unintended offence to that family. This report has attempted to address some of these barriers.

## Practice

Arguably the greatest area for further research to address barriers and explore in greater detail is the compatibility of the Muslim faith with English fostering practice. While we have identified that fostering as a concept is compatible with the Muslim faith, local and national policy highlighted within this report demonstrates barriers exist.

We have already touched on the availability of spare rooms within Muslim households, but also the cultural norm for some Muslim children to share bedrooms throughout their childhood. One example found one applicant who was able to provide a 'spare bed' but not a 'spare bedroom'. Herein lies a dichotomy for further research – should local authorities make exemptions to place Muslim children in familiar family settings if the child's plan places primary importance on a cultural match, but then risk eroding the professional nature of the role of the foster carer who should be trained and supported to care for any child from any cultural background or faith?

Of course, as this research has highlighted, a child's faith is just one element of the matching decision and there are many positive examples of where non-Muslim foster carers have enabled a Muslim child in their care to thrive. Training remains inconsistent depending on the location of the foster carer, with many undertaking their own research to identify the needs of the child and attend to them. The research found that information about the child prior to placement is also often incomplete or missing, further impacting a foster carer's ability to meet the needs of the looked after child, an issue for all children but particularly pertinent for Muslim children being cared for by non-Muslim foster carers.

This report has also demonstrated the opportunities to improve the recruitment practice to encourage and support those with the Muslim faith to come forward. While the research generally found an absence of targeted materials, good practice has been identified in the form of Bristol City Council's guide, Rotherham Council's STAR parties and the focused activity of Muslim Foster Network.

The Fostering Network maintains that a foster carer must be competent in the English language in order to safeguard and advocate on the behalf of the looked after child. A consistency in how this is applied nationally and how those for whom English is not a first language can be supported and kept engaged in the recruitment process to a point when their language skills are proficient, will help overcome this additional barrier.

In addition to the barriers facing Muslims from coming forward to foster, the research also demonstrated a significant absence of data on the experience of Muslim children in care. We had anticipated that an absence of national data would be compensated by local collections. Despite surveys and requests for information, however, most services were unable to provide us with the information to even identify how many Muslim children are in the care of fostering services. Chief among the reasons is an absence of a requirement to capture the data on faith or religion. While the Ofsted fostering data return requires a local authority to report on a looked after child's ethnicity, as this report has evidenced, this does not allow us to examine the outcomes from care of Muslim looked after children. Analysing outcomes from care go beyond being an issue for Muslim children – there are no adequate systems to measure for all looked

after children. Traditional performance measures such as education grades and NEET statistics highlight the challenges faced by looked after children as a cohort, but not the incremental gain for children within this group.

Despite the challenges, this report has identified dynamic work being introduced to support Muslim and unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care and efforts being made to recruit more foster carers to care for this group of young people.

## The Fostering Network:

- is expanding its Mockingbird programme as a means of offering support to non-Muslim foster carers caring for Muslim children
- is engaging with Ofsted to make mandatory the recording of 'religion' against all children in care's records
- is engaging all communities via Foster Care Fortnight™
- is campaigning for change for Ofsted to include faith and religious data

## Muslim Foster Network:

- is developing services to meet some of the gaps in unaccompanied asylum seeking children care, such as the mentoring scheme
- is developing cultural competency training for fostering services to improve knowledge and skills of sector professionals and foster carers
- has developed targeted recruitment services for fostering services to support in their efforts to recruit foster carers from Muslim communities
- has developed a Ramadan and Eid 'Gift Box' and information booklet for non-Muslim foster carers, looking after Muslim children
- has implemented 'Foster Friday' events for Muslim communities to encourage them to foster.

## 13. Areas for further research

- Research into the true situation of Muslim children in care needs to be urgently undertaken if and when the recording of race, culture and religion becomes mandatory. This would enable the identification of the actual number of Muslim looked after children in England.
- While the ethnicity of foster carers is recorded at local level, faith is not always and therefore the nationally available data does not capture how many of these carers identify as Muslim. This is an area for more exploration.
- Increased understanding of whether the needs and wellbeing of Muslim children in the care system are being met is required. If they are not, in what way does this impact on the individual Muslim child growing up in care?
- Family experience, the community's traditional response to family members in need and the reduced likelihood of seeking outside or statutory intervention to provide family support can all create barriers to the understanding and acceptance of more formal or statutory family support services – either in accessing them personally or supporting their delivery through areas such as fostering. It is worth considering whether the adaptation and development of the traditional family model within the British Muslim community means that these barriers are beginning to be removed.
- Research is required into care experienced children's experiences of cross-cultural and cross-faith foster placements.
- Research is required into the level of nationwide cultural competence and humility training and its implementation.
- It is important to consider whether the Prevent Agenda has affected the relationship between Muslim children, their families and teaching staff.

## 14. Recommendations

- Ofsted to include mandatory recording of child's faith or religion on the annual fostering statistics return to ensure a comprehensive and standardised approach to capturing and utilising this data across the country.
- All fostering services to fully explore a child's identity, including their faith or religion, and document this information in the child's care plan and data base.
- All fostering services to review their recruitment literature and assess how it responds to the needs of a prospective Muslim foster carer and the wider Muslim community.
- Development of FAQs and factsheets to disseminate to fostering services to support them in processing initial enquiries from Muslim communities.
- All fostering services to consider how fostering service staff are trained and supported to conduct initial visits and assessment of Muslim applicants to fostering.
- Wider dissemination of the Guide for Foster Carers Caring for Muslim Children.
- All fostering services to engage in Foster Friday and disseminate Ramadan gift boxes to their non-Muslim foster carers caring for Muslim children.
- All fostering services to explore the Engagement Realisation Approach (ERA)
- Fostering services to explore the potential to implement the UASC Arise mentor programme as appropriate.
- All fostering services to identify the resources needed for its foster carers caring for a child with a different faith to their own.
- All fostering services to record faith, culture and ethnicity of foster carers.

We would encourage all fostering services to consider the learning and recommendations within this document and assess their local practice.



## The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

[thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

## Mercy Mission UK (MMUK)

Mercy Mission UK is a key incubator that has delivered strong and successful projects over the last decade.

MMUK works to strengthen the role of the Muslim community in British society.

A unique platform that has forged strong partnerships across faith communities, government, private enterprise and the third sector to benefit the most vulnerable people in society.

MMUK has developed My Foster Family to continue and grow the essential work of the Muslim Fostering Project.

[www.mercymission.org.uk](http://www.mercymission.org.uk)

## My Foster Family

My Foster Family (MFF) is a new initiative developed by Mercy Mission UK. Its aims are to support Muslim children in finding exceptional foster carers who can provide stability, support and love to a child.

MFF are committed to support every Muslim child who has faced separation from their families and empower carers to give back to the community and support the growth and development of a foster child.

[www.myfosterfamily.com](http://www.myfosterfamily.com)



## Better Community Business Network (BCBN)

BCBN is a Muslim-led charity, bringing together professionals, politicians across the political spectrum and heads of charities to facilitate community engagement.

Since its inception, BCBN has raised over £1.4million in funds for community causes and has attracted support from respected figures such as HRH The Prince of Wales to the Mayor of London, Rt Hon Sadiq Khan among others.

BCBN provides grants to grassroots voluntary and community groups working with deprived communities in the UK, programme areas range from education and poverty to social cohesion, health and wellbeing. BCBN also works with academic institutions, researchers, think tanks and government departments, seeking to overcome barriers to a more just and equal society.

[www.bcbn.org.uk](http://www.bcbn.org.uk)



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