

PRESS RELEASE*Monday 19 October 2020**For Immediate Release***Equipping and empowering BAME social action leaders to serve their communities: *Civil Society Consulting CIC* partners with national multi-faith organisation *Strengthening Faith Institutions* to take ‘Steps to Sustainability’ to the next level, with the support of the National Lottery’s emergency COVID-19 funding.**

Civil Society Consulting CIC has partnered with [Strengthening Faith Institutions](#) on ‘Steps to Sustainability’ (S2S) - a joint initiative that will outreach to 60 BAME faith social action leaders of ALL of the nine major world faiths in England, guiding and supporting them to sustain and develop their emergency responses to the pandemic, get through the crisis as frontline civil society organisations and provide hyper-local services in the diverse, multi-faith communities they care so much about.

This comes on the back of the [Levelling Up Our Communities report by Danny Kruger MP](#), which advocates for a modernised ‘infrastructure support’ sector and sustainable approaches, like S2S, alongside a stronger engagement with faith communities. The parliamentary report sets out a vision for sustaining the community spirit seen during lockdown by more concerted interventions by ‘modernised CVS-style’ organisations in supporting and empowering people to play active roles in their neighbourhoods.

Mustafa Field OBE, Programme Leader, Strengthening Faith Institutions (and Director, Faiths Forum for London) expressed:

“As a growing national multi-faith organisation we are keen to pro-actively advance leadership, capacity and resilience – and this is needed more than ever in this pandemic crisis.

Working with local faith leaders and their groups, and in partnership with Civil Society Consulting CIC, we now have a real opportunity to strengthen local networks of support by helping them develop and deliver their own vital projects and therefore better engender understanding and engagement between different faith communities.”

Mark Ereira-Guyer, Civil Society Consulting CIC Director commented:

“We need to get out there, especially in the most negatively Covid impacted areas of the country, to see how we can together best help the BAME-led faith and civil society sector keep its head above the water, sustain frontline support and services, and even innovate to help everyone in their communities. We’ll be building on our recent sustainability support work in key areas like the Liverpool city region, West Midlands, West Yorkshire, Middlesbrough, east London and Manchester.”

What is 'Steps to Sustainability'?

BAME communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 - and the same is true for the BAME-led and -focused organisations that support them. Civil Society Consulting CIC is working to address this inequity through one-to-one consultations and follow-up support that builds confidence and capacity. Thanks to [TNL Community Fund](#) funding (via the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport) and Strengthening Faith Institutions partnership, this model for social impact in BAME communities is now being scaled up.

The backstory

Civil Society Consulting CIC is a not-for-profit that serves the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. In the lockdown, the team wanted to support vulnerable communities however they could. For the CIC, this meant sharing expert advice with VCSE organisations which were working hard to serve their community. They reached out to the sector offering hour-long one-to-one surgeries online – free, and open to any struggling charities or faith groups. This went hand-in-hand with a briefing pack to the sector. This was the highest impact solution that Civil Society Consulting felt it could do for the panic-stricken sector and quickly changing environment of a few months ago. And they were right, as Mark Ereira-Guyer, Director, further explained:

"Taking the initiative to offer the Emergency Support earlier this year brought into sharp relief our role in the sector. So many groups lack the tools, confidence and know-how to secure necessary funding, and we are thrilled to have developed a model that makes the most of motivated individuals and groups. And one we know works!"

The team noticed that BAME consultees were struggling the most, making it harder for them to serve their community. This observation was also informed by Civil Society Consulting's comprehensive [evaluation of the impact of Covid-19 on the social sector in Barking and Dagenham](#) - which had been carried out in parallel. Therefore, Civil Society CIC's charity sector experts have been continuing the initiative throughout the summer months with a BAME-only focus. 'Steps to Sustainability' was conceived out of this pilot as a way to empower social action leaders who are Black, Asian or an ethnic minority, helping them to re-configure the social support they currently offer and strengthen their responses.

How will it work?

Strengthening Faith Institutions have a strong network of BAME faith and social action hubs in some of the most ethnically diverse, socially disadvantaged areas where the Coronavirus has wreaked most havoc: Blackburn, Greater Manchester, Bradford, Leeds, Birmingham, Walsall, Leicester, Liverpool/Merseyside, Luton and in east London. Through vigorous outreach, the initiative will target groups with the greatest potential to improve their hyper-local impact and support to their wider communities.

To date, on a voluntary basis, the CIC have delivered free one-to-one consultation surgeries to 40 local faith action and civil society leaders, focusing on maximising and extending

impact based on a checklist to implement the advice provide:

- **Ubuntu Multicultural Centre CIC** (a BAME-led social solidarity group providing emergency food support) in Middlesbrough were helped to embark on a wide ranging community engagement survey to develop their emergency response planning and set up a new community drop-in centre in the town. The team compiled a report on the survey findings, advised on how best to proceed with taking on the responsibilities of a new centre and how best to resource it.
- [The House of Empowerment](#) in Coventry is an African church community who have been providing emergency support to their elderly congregation and wider community during Covid-19. The team at Civil Society provided free one-on-one surgeries and advice to their leader, Kwame. Together they successfully secured emergency National Lottery funding and ensured that the House of Empowerment's vital work serving the community continues.

"It's been an honour to empower, enable and facilitate these vital community organisations and social action leaders to serve the communities they know and love," remarked the Civil Society Consulting Directors.

As well as being more able to deal with the negative impact of the pandemic on their own organisation, groups are also helped to plan for the future in a realistic, resilient and sustainable way - developing simple strategies and plans to grow their support and finding the financial resources to do so.

"Steps to Sustainability is exactly what we stand for as a small, not-for-profit consultancy – both in its end goal and in the means for getting there," Mark added.

The six month initiative will support 60 BAME-led social action groups, beginning in early November 2020.

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