

# Voter Registration Project, 2022

## Background:

Governments are less responsive to the concerns of those who do not participate in political processes. This entrenches other inequalities shaping peoples' lives, undermines trust in our political system and makes our democracy profoundly unfair.

A number of community-based groups/organisations across the UK were funded through Joseph Rowntree Foundation's UK Democracy Fund with the aim to register new voters from under-represented groups at the forthcoming local elections in May 2022.

Bangladeshi Women's Association Wales were awarded a grant in February 2022 to work collaboratively with other groups and organisations supporting women from black and minority ethnic groups in order to improve the numbers of people registering to vote and exercising their right to vote on election day.

## Aims

The Bangladeshi Women's Association Wales aimed to map groups and organisations in Wales who are primarily focused on the empowerment of women from ethnic minority communities; to recruit and train a project coordinator and a group of sessional workers; to raise awareness of the importance of voting through community events; to make the registration process simple & accessible for everyone and to improve participation among those with historical trends of underrepresentation.

## What we did:

**Project planning & design** - Regular meetings with funders and other project management teams to agree milestones, develop a project plan, timeline, allocation of resources and project progress updates at different stages of the project lifecycle.

**Developing partnerships** - Organisations supporting BAME communities were approached to introduce and raise the profile of the project

**Recruitment of sessional workers** - Largely through groups and organisations who are known and trusted in local communities

**Training** - Ensuring the coordinator, sessional workers and partners were all aligned to the vision and objectives of the project

**Registration** – Sessional workers utilised their social networks. The project team joined some community events, held stalls at various venues and also planned meetings and events to talk about the project, raise awareness and encourage people to register.

**Improving turnout among under-represented groups** - social media including Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp was used to remind people about polling day. Candidates from BAME communities including advisors to BWAW actively campaigned to improve participation.

**Evaluation** – Opportunities provided to reflect on success, challenges and lessons learnt with different stakeholders to feed into the project report.

## Achievements:

**23 Groups/Organisations were approached:** Women Connect First, India Centre, Hindu Council for Wales, Samaj, Bawso, WSSAG, Sight Life, Greater Sylhet Welfare Council, Women chat, Club 1400, Bangladesh Association, Hyatt women, Henna Foundation, EYST, Diverse Women of Wales,

BME children and families, Networking for World Awareness of Multicultural Integration in N. Wales , Ethnic Minority Welsh Women Achievement Assoc, Aurav Disha, Kiran Cymru, Welsh Puja Committee, Race Equality First, Diverse Cymru,

**7 Active partners:** Hindu Council Wales, India Centre, Samaj, Bawso, Women Seeking Sanctuary Advocacy Group, Sight Life, Greater Sylhet Welfare Council,

**11 trained volunteers with expenses (sessional workers).** 3 training sessions run for volunteers and partners and ongoing 1 to 1 support was provided to volunteers as needed.

**Total number registered to vote:** 1133 and we estimate we spoke to 3210 including 1610 from five community events. **Reminded to vote at election:** 1133

### **Findings from evaluation:**

Eight of the volunteers took part in an evaluation of the project. There were two events, one via zoom and one face to face.

The main reason they got involved in the project was to increase awareness and involvement in the electoral system amongst their communities. Several particularly mentioned getting more women and young people registered to vote. They all felt a sense of achievement at having reached these goals and contributing benefit to their communities and most would choose to get involved in a similar project in the future. There was a strong feeling that this was particularly important for women, as a route into wider social involvement in decisions that affect them.

The main challenge identified was dealing with people's suspicion of the project and cynicism about the electoral system. Some community members didn't understand how the electoral system worked, and some were nervous about providing personal details. Two volunteers mentioned meeting women whose husbands were worried about them being signed up. Also, the project was run on a very tight time scale up to the local council elections, and clashed with exam preparation for the younger volunteers.

Among the suggestions that the volunteers made for making the project work more smoothly were: More training and reflective sessions to help volunteers deal with tricky issues that came up. And with more time it would have been possible to produce a wider range of resources, perhaps in different languages, and run more focus groups to explain the project and the benefits of voting. Also travel expenses to support wider networking.

### **Conclusions**

Everyone involved in the project recognised its importance and understood the extent of underrepresentation. The project raised awareness and also clarified the process of voter registration for those involved. It was a route for BAWW to engage with a wider group of organisations and volunteers and to develop skills, networks and relationships. The organisation is particularly pleased to have engaged a cohort of young women as volunteers who expressed satisfaction at what they were able to achieve and would be willing to do it again. They were clear about the value gained, and their increased understanding of the political system. As this is a group that BAWW has struggled to engage with, this puts the organisation in a stronger position.