

**LEARNING
FOCUS:**

**CHILDREN
& YOUNG
PEOPLE**



**Together
an Active
Future**



**Active
Lancashire**



**Creating positive experiences for
children and young people**

**Active Madrassah:
Pennine Lancashire**

Active Madrassah: Creating positive experiences for children and young people

The challenge

Approximately 92% of children from the Muslim population attend Madrassah, which limits the opportunity for them to participate in sport-themed after-school clubs and engage in sports, or play in the evenings. Within the community there are low levels of physical activity, which has a significant impact on health and increases the chance of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and obesity.

In an attempt to tackle health inequalities, there was a need to increase physical activity, sport and play with madrassah children to support choices as they grow up. It was about providing them with positive experiences of physical activity which will last a lifetime, making activity accessible, meeting their needs and understanding them.

Physical activity, sport and play is seen as a privilege and not a necessity, so it is about helping the parents, practitioners and the older generation to understand its importance to their children, now and in the future, helping to tackle barriers and make it more affordable and sustainable

Madrassah is a very important part of the day for Muslim children because they learn about the basics and fundamentals of Islam and practising the religion. Moreover, it ties in to worldly affairs and how we should be good British citizens too.

For parents, it is a safe place for their children, with a sense of community and prevention from being out on the streets and engaging in anti-social behaviour. Much pressure is applied on academic and madrassah education just to enhance opportunities of success in later life and not become a victim of institutional racism.

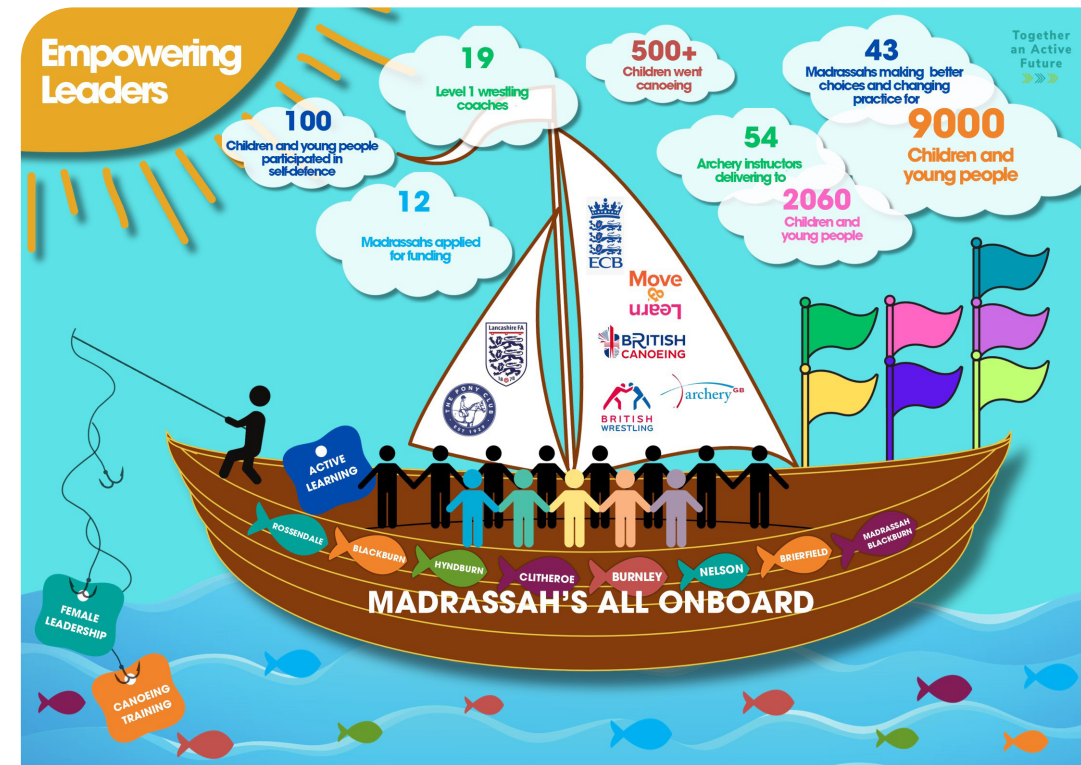
The solution

Our approach was to enable the community to design an approach which would shape the way physical activity, sport and play was embedded at the heart of their settings. This was done through co-design sessions where the principals provided rich information and we created a framework as a guide.

We provided madrassahs with a kitbag and an archery board for them to use at their discretion but they made a commitment to a 15-minute break before or after madrassah. The autonomy was theirs to decide how this would work best for them. Additionally, we provided active learning cards, which complemented the kitbag but then could be used while teaching.

The framework highlighted the need for support in multiple areas and one of those was skills development. Having sustainability at the heart of this work, we trained up madrassah teachers in various sports to be able to deliver them on site and provided them with equipment. The delivery would then be in house, free and sustainable, with increased capacity and skills.

Moreover, we removed the taboo around applying for funding because the National Lottery logo implied that everything is lottery-funded, which is not accessible by Muslims. It was about supporting madrassahs to apply for funding and requesting an alternative fund, as well as the Active Madrassah workstream being funded through alternative means, and ensuring the message was the same across all the national governing bodies (NGBs) and partners.



Stakeholders involved

- **NGBs**, with whom we shared a common purpose, as they wanted representation of the Muslim population in their sports.
- **Sport England** wanted to create more positive experiences for young people.
- **Together an Active Future** (TaAF) had wanted to tackle health inequalities and provide children and young people with positive experiences.
- **Madrassah principals** and their **stakeholders, governance teams** and **parents**.
- **Sunnah sports** because they resonated with the madrassah: archery, horse riding, grappling, swimming and running. Anything encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a sunnah and is encouraged in Islam.
- **Active Lancashire** is the active partnership. Active Madrassahs is a partnership between TaAF and Active Lancashire.
- **Archery GB**: Project Rimaya fund the archery instructor training.
- **British Wrestling**: together we fund tag wrestling training and mats and tags.
- **The Pony Club**: delivering a non-traditional route in to horse riding, the club visits madrassahs and sets out the conditions for horse riding, to be followed by horse riding sessions and time spent at the stables.
- **Lancashire FA**: Soccersize, Wildcats and over-16s support with football.
- **England and Wales Cricket Board**: delivering Dynamos and All Stars, training young volunteers to become cricket coaches.
- **Paddle UK**: giving children, young people and adults the opportunity to canoe and then over-18s to chance to become canoeing instructors for them then to deliver to young people.
- **The place leads** within Pennine Lancs to work across the place.
- **Move and Learn**: to enhance active learning in madrassahs.
- **Community initiatives**: including Beat the Street, and parks and green spaces.
- **Canal and River Trust** for the delivery and getting the project of canoeing off the ground.
- **Sporting NRG/Alternative Adventure** for the delivery of canoeing.

Impact and benefits as a result of these interventions and new ways of working

- Happy, engaged children, a healthier environment, increased physical activity, a reduction in the need for pastoral care and an eagerness to learn and play.
- A change in systems in madrassah policies.
- A change in behaviour in principals and volunteers.
- A motivated group of adults with the vision to provide positive experiences for children and young people.
- Women at the forefront of this work.
- The need for the Female Leadership Academy, which received over 45 applications from beyond the Pennine area.

The learning

- Meet people at their level: ensure we understand them, their norms and their sensitivities.
- Take the time to **build trust** through visits and conversations. Nurture those relationships and maintain them.
- Let them lead the way and play the role of the enabler. **Create the conditions** for them to thrive.
- Be very clear and **transparent**.
- Speak in **simple language** about their fears to put them at ease and rest.
- Find the **gatekeeper**.
- Use their preferred **method of communication**, be it email, phone call or WhatsApp.
- **Know the audience** and what connects well with them and encourage the motivation.
- Sometimes as an enabler we have to work a little harder, so **provide that nudge** or extra phone call if required to get everyone on board.
- **Celebrate everything**, big and small, and create the conditions for people to see the change they are creating.
- Not all physical activity needs to be structured; **allow for flexibility** and pay careful attention to the look, sound and feel.

What's next?

- The continuation of the Female Leadership Academy, as it has been created on the back of learning we have collected over the last two years. It has generated interest nationally and has proven to be very beneficial from its inception.
- The further development of the [Active Learning in Madrassahs Toolkit](#) because it is quite simple to implement, whether the class size is big or small and regardless of the room size. Feedback has shown Active Learning can be adapted to need, size and topic and is impactful in engagement and good behaviour in lessons. It has had a positive impact on mental health too.
- The introduction of sports as careers for young apprentices as that's what we are exploring with the archery, Pony Club and football. Providing guidance and knowledge to children and young people on what the routes could look like and showing they are accessible to all.

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