

## **Driving Change: Muslim Charity's Pakistan Rickshaw Challenge 2023 Transforms Lives in Rural Punjab**

In a remarkable display of unity, compassion, and determination, Muslim Charity recently completed its much-anticipated "Pakistan Rickshaw Challenge." From 30<sup>th</sup> September to 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023, 31 participants hailing from various corners of the UK, Pakistan, and even Vienna, Austria, embarked on a transformative journey across rural Punjab.

Their mission? To drive 15 brand new rickshaws over 400+ kilometres, ultimately handing them over to 15 pre-selected vulnerable families in Multan. The event was not just a unique adventure; it was a testament to the power of collective effort and the desire to make a meaningful impact.

### **A Journey of Unity and Purpose**

The participants of the Pakistan Rickshaw Challenge came from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. From cities like Glasgow, Stockport, London, Rochdale, and many others across the UK, they converged to provide income-generation opportunities for needy families while immersing themselves in the rich culture of Pakistan. As they traversed rural Punjab, the bonds of friendship grew stronger, forming connections that will undoubtedly last a lifetime.

The journey commenced in Lahore, where participants received invaluable training on how to navigate rickshaws, especially for those who had never driven a rickshaw or a motorcycle before. After this orientation session, the adventurers explored Lahore's historical treasures, including the iconic Badshahi Mosque, Walled City, and Wazir Khan Mosque, taking time to savour traditional ice cream (kulfi) on a particularly scorching day.

Their path continued westward to Nankana Sahib, where they visited a Government Secondary High School. Here, Muslim Charity's impactful "Adopt a School" project was in full swing, with the renovation of a complete Science Laboratory funded by the charity. It was here that one of the rickshaw challenge participants, Mr Greg Herdman hailing from Retford, Nottinghamshire, received a Shield of Appreciation from the school's headteacher on behalf of Muslim Charity and all our generous donors.

The participants even contributed to the environment by planting new trees on the school grounds, acknowledging the pressing issue of global warming and its impact on Pakistan.

### **Empowering Vulnerable Families**

From Nankana Sahib, the journey continued through Faisalabad, Sahiwal, Khanewal, and culminated in Multan, where the rickshaws were handed over to 15 pre-selected vulnerable families who had been selected following Muslim Charity's comprehensive due diligence and needs assessment processes. What sets this initiative apart is its potential for profound transformation. Munawwar, one of the beneficiaries, shared his story. Currently driving a rented rickshaw, he spends a significant portion of his earnings paying the owner. With the new rickshaw, he anticipates tripling his profits, enabling him to provide a better life for his family and invest in his children's education—a heart-warming testament to the ripple effect of charity.

Furthermore, Muslim Charity's rickshaw project has a condition: families must send their children to school and cannot sell the rickshaws for two years, ensuring a sustained positive impact on both the families and their children.

### **The Heart-warming Teams**

The 31 participants were divided into 11 teams, each with its own unique name, adding an element of camaraderie and competition:

Brave Dils, Rickshaw Ranis, 2 Fast 1 Furious, The 3 Rickshawteers, Road Runnerz, Road ke Malika, Team Parveen, Tuk Tuk Titans, The Retford Rickshaw, 2 Basanti 1 Hero, The Peace Makers.

## **Exploring Local Life and Culture**

The journey was not just about the rickshaws; it was also about experiencing the authenticity of rural Pakistan. Along the way, participants stopped at a cattle farm, witnessed village life, visited a brick kiln to observe the art of brickmaking, and even tasted organic sugarcane fresh from the fields.

## **A Remarkable Closing Ceremony**

At the closing ceremony in Multan, participants experienced the true essence of their efforts. They physically handed over the keys and paperwork of the rickshaws to the beneficiaries, allowing them to witness the profound impact of their mission. It was a moment of intense emotion and joy.

At the closing ceremony, Muslim Charity's Vice Chairman, Bakhtyar Pirzada, underlined the importance of creating independence and self-reliance among beneficiaries. He shared the profound wisdom of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), emphasising the value of self-sufficiency over dependency on aid. This wisdom guides Muslim Charity's "Zakat for Business Startups" projects, aimed at lifting people out of poverty for good.

## **A Glimpse into Multan's Projects and Heritage**

In Multan, the participants visited projects aimed at educating street children and empowering them with valuable skills. Pakistan has an estimated 25 million children of school-going age who don't attend school, and these initiatives aim to change that narrative. They also visited a Madrassah where students were learning not only about the Qur'an and the Arabic language but thanks to Muslim Charity's investment in a computer lab, they are also now gaining skills in graphics design, video editing and other computer-related areas, opening doors to digital livelihoods.

The participants also explored Multan's rich heritage, visiting the grand shrine and mausoleum of Shah Rukn-e-Alam, an awe-inspiring site that attracts pilgrims from all over Asia.

Moreover, they witnessed the art of blue pottery at the Institute Of Blue Pottery Development, highlighting the preservation of ancient craftsmanship.

The "Pakistan Rickshaw Challenge" by Muslim Charity was more than just a journey; it was a transformative experience that brought people together from different corners of the world to make a tangible difference in the lives of vulnerable families. It showcased the power of unity, compassion, and faith in creating a world of hope, tolerance, and social justice.

Muslim Charity has already started planning 2024's Pakistan Tuk-Tuk Challenge to take place in the second half of September, in Pakistan's Kashmir. If you're interested you can register your interest here and you'll be the first to know when details are announced, sign up here:

<https://forms.gle/4hqNKgJ6XyScD4qKA> Furthermore, you can learn about our other upcoming events and activities by visiting [www.muslimcharity.org.uk/events](http://www.muslimcharity.org.uk/events)