

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

‘HAPPY TO CHAT’ BENCHES TO TACKLE LONELINESS IN BASSETLAW

31 OCTOBER 2024



TOP: Representatives from Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, Muslim Charity and Neighbourhood Policing Team after the unveiling of nine ‘Happy to Chat’ benches at a ceremony held at Eaton Hall, Retford.

BOTTOM (Left to Right): Councillor Lynne Schuller (Harworth, Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing, Bassetlaw District Council), Bakhtyar H. Pirzada (Chairman, Muslim Charity), Jo White MP (Bassetlaw), Shaykh Muhammad Pirzada (Founder, Muslim Charity) and Peter Clark (Head of Neighbourhood Services, Bassetlaw District Council) whilst speaking to the attendees at the ceremony.

Muslim Charity and Bassetlaw District Council are excited to announce the installation of nine ‘Happy to Chat’ benches across Bassetlaw to address the growing concern of loneliness among residents in the district.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF LONELINESS

According to census data, around 24% of adults in Bassetlaw have reported that they feel lonely with a further 7.6% reporting that they often or always feel lonely. Recognising these concerns, Muslim Charity and Bassetlaw District Council has identified the need for community spaces that encourage social interaction.

Bassetlaw has also seen an increase in its elderly population, with 22.33% of its residents aged 65 and over, compared to the England average of 19.43%. This ageing population can also be a contributing factor to loneliness statistics in our district.

‘HAPPY TO CHAT’ BENCHES – A JOINT INITIATIVE

In partnership with Bassetlaw District Council, Muslim Charity has funded nine ‘Happy to Chat’ benches that will be installed at key locations frequented by elderly residents in the district.

These benches will serve as a welcoming space for community members to sit and chat, fostering connections and alleviating feelings of loneliness. They will be found in:

1. Langold Country Park (2 benches)
2. Costhorpe Cricket Ground (Carlton Cricket Club)
3. Costhorpe Sports Field
4. Tom Simpson Field, Harworth
5. Snipe Park, Harworth
6. London Road (near Whinney Moor Lane), Retford
7. Pocket Park, corner of Sandy Lane and Gateford Road, Worksop (2 benches)

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Bakhtyar Pirzada, Chairman of Muslim Charity, said: “The ‘Happy to Chat’ benches project is another testament to Muslim Charity’s commitment to supporting Bassetlaw’s local communities. With this latest partnership, the charity hopes to provide spaces that encourage dialogue, friendship, and social engagement, tackling the problem of loneliness head-on.”

Cllr Lynne Schuller, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing at Bassetlaw District Council, said: “I am pleased to have worked hand in hand with our colleagues of Muslim Charity in the provision of this, a range of Happy to Chat benches. Provision of the benches, sharing that a person is happy to chat or even needs someone to talk to has the potential to actively help people’s mental health and reduce the negative impact of social isolation.

“I look forward to people gaining new networks and hopefully help in the form of connecting with others in their communities. Please take the time to sit and chat, you never know the person you are with may benefit more than you will ever know. Thank you to the Muslim Charity for your compassion in providing our benches, we look forward to continuing to engage with you in caring for our community.”

HANDOVER CEREMONY TO MARK THE OCCASION

To celebrate this initiative, a handover ceremony was held at Muslim Charity’s head office at Eaton Hall, Retford on Friday, 25th October 2024. This was attended by local dignitaries including Councillors from Bassetlaw District Council, representatives of Muslim Charity, Bassetlaw MP Jo White, community members, and other guests who represent or live in the communities where the ‘Happy to Chat Benches’ will be installed.

The benches, designed to 'Tackle loneliness one bench at a time,' are crafted from durable, eco-friendly recycled materials. Built to withstand the elements, they offer a lasting, low-maintenance addition to community spaces.

Attendees were warmly welcomed and inspired by heartfelt speeches, including words from Shaykh Muhammad Pirzada, Founder of Muslim Charity, who highlighted the charity's 'devotion to humanity' and its mission to build 'bridges of kindness through small deeds.' This commitment shines through the charity's efforts to deliver sustainable, accessible support to communities both locally and globally, reflecting a dedication to meaningful, lasting impact.

There were poem recitals by four very brave, outspoken children, delivered to a room full of adults. The children echoed the importance of connection, and community.

The guests enjoyed a traditional 'Desi' meal, which brought everyone together in conversation and connection. The gathering facilitated all those who attended, to feel a deeper sense of a wider community, irrespective of different faith, and beliefs. This message was reflected in Maroof Pirzada's speech, UK Director of Muslim Charity, Retford. A powerful reminder that we are all one family; the collective human family, with far more in common that unites us, than divides us.

The ceremony was attended by local leaders and dignitaries, highlighting strong community support for the initiative. Present were Jo White MP, Councillor Lynne Schuller (Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing, Bassetlaw District Council), Councillor Mike Quigley MBE, Councillor Josie Potts, and Councillor Julie Leigh, Leader of Bassetlaw District Council. The event also welcomed Wendy Quigley, Peter Clark (Head of Neighbourhood Services, Bassetlaw District Council), Councillor David Pidwell, Councillor Steve Scotthorne, Councillor Dan Henderson, Councillor Susan Shaw (Chair of Bassetlaw District Council), Councillor Lynn Dixon, Councillor Neil Sanders and Councillor Deborah Merryweather. Joining them were, Lord John Mann and Councillor David Naylor, Town Mayor of Retford. Their collective presence underscored a shared commitment to fostering community wellbeing and tackling issues of loneliness through the installation of the 'Happy to Chat' benches.

MUSLIM CHARITY'S COMMITMENT TO LOCAL SUPPORT

This project is the latest in Muslim Charity's series of initiatives aimed at fostering community spirit and supporting local wellbeing in Bassetlaw.

They have a long history of contributing to the Bassetlaw District and in 2022 organised several impactful projects, such as donating life-saving defibrillators to communities in Ranby and Sutton-cum-Lound and providing benches to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, installed across Tuxford, Ranksill, Ranby, Mattersey, Rampton and Woodbeck and Headon cum Upton. They have also partnered with the Bassetlaw Food Bank to support struggling individuals and families by providing food parcels. Additionally, Muslim Charity funded a Resuscitaire Unit for Bassetlaw Hospital to aid new-borns requiring resuscitation, further underscoring their commitment to the community's health.

Muslim Charity's impact spans both local and global communities, funding projects that bring transformative support to those in need. In the past few years, the charity has funded the installation of 5,812 water hand pumps, 1,090 water wells, and delivered 33 ambulances to remote regions, all made possible through generous donations. In the past year alone, 621 street children have been rescued, highlighting the charity's dedication to vulnerable individuals worldwide.

The charity also has a local initiative of selling pure, UK-produced honey, supporting British bees and their keepers with each purchase. Every jar sold helps fund the Feed a Child programme, which provides essential school meals to vulnerable children, enabling them to focus, learn, and stay in school. This initiative combines high-quality honey with the power to make a meaningful difference. Learn more about Muslim Charity by visiting www.muslimcharity.org.uk

[ENDS]

PHOTOS FROM THE UNVEILING CEREMONY:





NOTES TO EDITORS:

ABOUT MUSLIM CHARITY

Muslim Charity is a UK-registered charity with headquarters in Retford, Nottinghamshire. Founded in 1999, we have been helping to save lives of people during emergencies along with helping needy and vulnerable communities by adopting practical ways to root out poverty through the provision of education and livelihoods. Our mission is carried out by developing health and educational infrastructures along with providing access to safe water and creating opportunities for livelihoods.

A selection of HQ photos from the handover ceremony can be viewed/downloaded from here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/69lt2b8qekojai43f83j2/AL7DPKJOo3uE0j09Uu3Q3Rw?rlkey=h5tbxpeq3nfs2mkivwdsr6gfg&st=38wxmy3n&dl=0>

Muslim Charity website: www.muslimcharity.org.uk

For further information or media enquiries please email info@muslimcharity.org.uk or call 0207 100 4930.