

# Katherine Low Settlement's Somali Women's Group Final Report 09Dec20



*The first time out for 4 months: a family picnic at the end of Lockdown 1*

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Katherine Low Settlement' Somali Women's Group was kindly supported by Mo Mark and supporters of KLS throughout 2020. This is a final report about the work of the group.

## 1. Aims

KLS' Somali Women's Group aimed to:

- Improve mental health for 20 Somali Women who currently have low level mental health issues and low self-esteem.
- Increase confidence for the women to seek support from other services for their mental health (e.g. GP or Talk Wandsworth) if needed.
- Empower the group to lead themselves after the project ends so it becomes a peer-led and sustainable group.

## 2. About KLS

Katherine Low Settlement is a charity that has been serving Battersea and the wider Wandsworth community since 1924. We are dedicated to building stronger communities and enable people to challenge and find ways out of poverty and isolation.

We run a range of our own community projects to support children, young people and their families, older people and refugee communities. We recognise there are many other expert local charities and community groups working with, for example, disabled people and mental health users. We invite them to operate from our premises – so together as partners we can meet the diverse needs of the local communities of Wandsworth. Each week we work with 45+ charities and community groups supporting more than 1,100 people. Visit: [www.klsettlement.org.uk](http://www.klsettlement.org.uk)

## 3. About KLS' Somali Women's Group

*"I'm a young mum with three children. I met Faaduma through my children's school. I feel very supported especially with mental health as it is such a taboo in our community and helped us normalise mental health in the group. She helped us to establish a community where we can share our feelings. Thanks for changing our lives!!"*

We ran a weekly (term-time only) Somali Women's Wellbeing Group for 24 Somali women over 2020 (Jan-Nov'20). On average 18 women attended each session. We invited more women (about 35 in total, who are on our waiting lists and through word of mouth to invite 'friends of friends') to attend our summer picnics and accessing one-to-one support, which increases the numbers of women supported. Inevitably the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions impacted on our ability to run our face-to-face sessions. We moved our support online and over the telephone during these challenging times.

The Somali community in Battersea is the third largest BAME community locally, and identified as 'hard to reach'. Somali women face multiple issues of poverty, trauma, discrimination, language barriers, a high incidence of special educational needs and domestic violence. Mental health is seen as taboo and they often do not discuss their low mood or depression with family or friends. Many of their children attend our Love to Learn education programme of homework, GCSE and youth clubs.

Muna, a local parent, describes her time with us, *"I wanted to get out of the house so I went to the Somali Women's Group. I had post-natal depression after my baby was born but I never talked about it, even though I went to hospital. In my culture we are told that to go to the Koran if you're not feeling well. My family just said, 'it's just a baby, its normal, a Muslim woman shouldn't be stressed'. I came to the Group because I didn't want to be at home being stressed and I want to help other*

women too. For example, in the last session it got emotional and I was crying and I think other women were able to cry because of that, and crying is good.

*Now I feel able to talk about issues and ask for help. Somali women are supposed to be strong, but I don't have family here or the support we have at home, so I need to ask for help. I used to get very angry with my children but now I can manage better because of the advice we got in the group. My marriage was also very difficult but I got good advice and we are still together."*

There is substantial evidence to suggest that BAME populations in the UK experience higher rates of mental illness (DH, 2002) dealing with issues of migration, dislocation, displacement and trauma (Bhugra et al, 2010). This is further compounded with living in poverty, which is associated with worse mental health outcomes, particularly among women (UK CEDAW, 2013; PHE, 2017). For example, women are more likely than men to handle family budgets and manage debt, have caring responsibilities (stress, anxiety and depression associated with raising children and caring for elderly parents) and are often the 'shock absorbers' of reduced family incomes, meaning that they 'go without' to protect their children from the worst effects of poverty.

Many Somali women see mental health difficulties as a taboo subject. They found a safe space in the group to develop their understanding about mental health, and what they can do to improve their mental health and that of their family members too. Although the project was set up with the aim of improving mental health, the link between physical and mental health has been important to the group and they have had sessions on empowerment, visiting the GP, art, Zumba, parenting and healthy cooking and eating.



*Creating together*

#### **4. The Practicalities**

*"I have met Faaduma at Soutfield Primary School and she told few of us about KLS' Love2Learn work. Because of Faaduma's friendly demeanour combined with her professionalism that's what attracted me to attend Love2Learn At first I was nervous and hesitated before coming to the sessions, but all in all it was lovely. I had the best time. I had the opportunity to meet some lovely mothers who had shared the same culture and background as me and shared same amazing life experiences. I loved the cooking sessions in particular."*

We had initially planned to run 30 weekly sessions (3 hours each), on a Friday morning, term-time only (when their older children are in school). We offered a creche to enable the women with younger children to attend the sessions. However, when the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown hit

on 20<sup>th</sup> March we decided to continue the support the women throughout this period (including the holidays, not just term time). In those first few weeks of lockdown the women were meeting on WhatsApp on a Friday evening, once their children had gone to bed. Our staff provided additional 1-2-1 telephone support for those that needed it each week. Zoom and FaceTime were used more as the group became more proficient with technology.

Mo Mark paid for the term-time sessions (thank you), and KLS found additional funding from its emergency Covid-19 fundraising appeal to pay for the addition sessions.

### **Planning together**

*“Afra is a young mum who has 4 children who has been coming to KLS for the past 2 years. She has been suffering from long term mental health issues. These range from panic attacks to anxiety. Her panic attacks made her unwilling to take her kids out to places such as the park. She was also unable to go out in public places and take public transport as her anxiety stopped her from doing this. She then gained confidence with our help to go to the GP and receive help. She now sees a counsellor regularly.”* Afra received one-to-one support from Faaduma, our women’s group facilitator

The group planned the content of their programme together with our staff. The structure of a term’s activities included: an opening session, two series of 3-week themes (including healthy cooking classes, pamper & chat, mindfulness, parenting during lockdown, building better relationships), plus an evaluation and celebration session. We held a (socially distanced) family picnic and activities session at the end of lockdown 1 (4<sup>th</sup> August) to enable the women and their children to get out of their flats (for some this had been the first time in 4 months) and see each other.

The group was led by a Somali facilitator (Faaduma Ali Mahamoud – she also works for our Love to Learn education team). She recruited a group of isolated Somali women, conducted initial assessments, provided translation when required and signposted them to other services. She was responsible for the planning, administration and monitoring. Her line manager (Elaine Sheppard) supported her and contributed to the self-help discussion and training. Faaduma also provided one-to-one advice and casework support outside of the group.

Pre-Covid we worked with local partners to supplement our programme (e.g. Talk Wandsworth, Citizens Advice Wandsworth, a Somali-speaking chef, Zumba instructor etc.), meaning it was a rich, diverse and varied programme - catering for all interests amongst our members.

### **Activities: July-December**

*“I have four children. I came to the woman group because of Faaduma at KLS. I learnt a lot of thinking for my mental health, how to do exercises. They always help me to go out of my house and meet other mum do same activities.”*

We have previously reported back on our work for January-June’20. Here’s a short account of the work that happened from July to December.

We offered on-going group and one-to-one support:

- We continued the WhatsApp support group.
- The group continued to meet once a week online using Zoom and Facetime, and in-person (but outside) when the lockdown restrictions were eased.
- Faaduma (our member of staff) provided 1-2-1 telephone support to those most vulnerable and affected by the lockdown restrictions.

We re-started socially distanced, face-to-face work:

- We held a family picnic in August. We invited the women and their children to meet. It was a nice sunny day in a large outdoor space, the families spread out their blankets and the children ran around madly and enjoyed organised activities. This was attended by 20 parents and 59 children and young people and was first time that some of them had left their flats in 4 months.
- At their request we set up a walking group in September to assist with fitness and socially distanced conversation. These 'Walk and Talk' sessions were held in nearby parks such as Battersea Park and alongside the River Thames.

We increased discussion about the group becoming self-sufficient:

- Talking about practicalities (booking space, programme planning, communication, set up), leadership and organising, ground rules etc. This was with the whole group and with individuals we thought had potential to take more leadership.

In October and November, we provided three training/discussion sessions to help the women plan for moving forward as a self-help group which would continue to meet their needs. We together identified and discussed the practical tasks, the planning and structuring of sessions and the leadership in more detail. We drew up ground rules with the group. We introduced co-listening techniques as another tool alongside group discussion, for thinking and planning for the group and for the individual women to support each other.

The women have expressed different levels of anxiety about the change but have fully engaged with the discussion and are very keen for the group to continue. They have requested more training in safeguarding and confidentiality and we have recognised that they need a bit more support in the new year, so they can become a truly sustainable self-led group. We have another planning session with a small group of potential leaders on 11<sup>th</sup> December.



*Learning to lead*

These autumn sessions were very popular amongst the women and they really got involved and participated. They were communicating with each other and understood the importance of self-love and mindfulness. They were able to apply these strategies into their lives with success. An example was the 'Walk and Talk' sessions, where we advised the ladies to do breathing exercises if they were feeling anxious. This was successful as many of the women commented saying this was beneficial.

Here are some things that the women have said:

*“KLS has helped me with everything including my mental health.”*

*“You’ve changed my life for the better!”*

*“The simple activities have helped me a lot.”*

*“This is the first time I’ve come out since the lockdown. It’s so nice to be out with the children and see the other ladies.”*



*“Finally, we’re free.”*

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

We monitored and evaluated the work of the Group using an initial assessment questionnaire, mid-term discussion and end-questionnaire; as well as staff observations and informal feedback collected over the year. We counted outputs including attendance, and have already shared update reports to Mo Mark during the course of the year.

## **5. Findings**

KLS’ Somali Women’s Group has significantly improved the outcomes for the women involved. It:

- Improved the mental health of 24 local Somali Women. All of the women reported having low level mental health issues and low self-esteem when the group started (see below). By the end they reported having made significant improvements in their feelings about themselves, and acquiring the skills and coping mechanisms to better support themselves and deal with issues in the future.
- Increased the confidence for the women to seek support from other services for their mental health. The women reported accessing their GPs, Talk Wandsworth (a local talking therapy support service), and local community organisations and charities for help and support such as the Foodbank and Citizens Advice.
- Empowered the group to lead themselves after the project ended. The group does need a bit more support to become a peer-led and sustainable group, but they are getting there.

We can say with confidence that KLS’ Somali Women’s Group has had a significant improvement on the lives of the women that were supported in 2020. All the women answered a questionnaire to test for seven areas of wellbeing. We used the academically-recognised and validated Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, at the beginning and end of the group.

You can observe, in the distribution table below, the significant shift and improvement in their self-reported answers, from black to red over the 11-month period (January- November 2020).

- BLACK represents the women’s wellbeing at the beginning of the Group.
- RED represents their wellbeing at the end of the Group.

	None of the Time	Rarely	Some of the Time	Often	All of the Time
I have been feeling optimistic about the future	III II	IIII	III IIIII	IIIIII	IIII
I have been feeling useful	IIIIIIII	II I	III II	IIIIIIII	IIII
I have been feeling relaxed	IIIIII I	IIII I	I II	IIIIIIII	IIII
I have been dealing with problems well	III III	III I	IIIIII II	IIII	IIII
I have been thinking clearly	IIII	IIII I	III IIIII	IIII	IIIIII
I have been feeling close to other people	IIII I	III I	IIII II	IIIIIIII	IIIIII
I have been able to make up my mind about things	IIIIII	I I	IIII II	IIIIIIII	IIII

Even though the size of the group is too small to report findings to any academic standard or statistical significance. The monitoring and evaluation methods we used clearly demonstrate the difference the Group had on the women involved.

In January most of the women were not feeling optimistic about the future at all. This was before Covid-19 had any effect on their lives. But by the end more than half (53%) were feeling optimistic often or all of the time. This can be attributed to the new skills they acquired, new experiences they had, new friendships and support networks they developed during the course of the group.

By the end of the year most of the women reported that they were able to deal with their problems better (76%), able to think more clearly (94%), and make better decisions in the life (94%).

Three-quarters (75%) of the women were not feeling useful at all at the start of the Group. By the end this had reversed to three-quarters of them feeling useful often or all of the time.

Many of them relaxed over the course of the year (even with the lockdown restrictions increasing the difficulties in their daily lives), with more than 71% of the women feeling relaxed often or all of the time by the end.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, their relationships improved massively during the course of the year, inside and outside the group. 88% were feeling closer to other people by the end of November. The strength and number of relationships (and support networks) is a key indicator of current and future wellbeing and health. We were pleased that the group has had such an impact on the women involved.



*Meeting up again in small groups after Lockdown*

## **6. Life in Lockdown**

Our Somali Women’s Support Group continued to meet throughout the lockdown, as everyone involved felt that it was particularly important to carry on and support one another through this extraordinary time. Here Faaduma, our Women’s Group Coordinator, reflects upon the sessions.

“After a few technical difficulties, we were able to call on Zoom. I had 10 ladies who joined the call. We agreed to join at 9:30pm on Fridays as most of the ladies have young children, so they preferred to meet later on in the day. We decided to do some activities such as book club, cooking sessions and sharing the food they’ve made and self-care. They also do activities together with their children such as arts and crafts and again cooking sessions. I’m also doing one-to-one phone calls to those who are unable to join the sessions.

In our session on 10<sup>th</sup> April, I had a Somali speaking facilitator who kindly volunteered to do a session with them about the lockdown and the mental health issues that come with it. We had 14 ladies who joined us. I was very pleased because they were able to express their views and feelings. They were also able to share ideas in how to cope with the pandemic. Some of us are still continuing to do the book club that we had running before the lockdown.

During Ramadan we’ve continued and the ladies have been sharing recipes for the Iftar, as well as activities for themselves and their families.

I’ve noticed that by having the sessions it helps them talk about their weekly challenges. They call it their ‘me’ time. One of the mothers said *“thank you guys, you’ve changed my life.”* Another mother said *“I look forward to meeting up on Fridays.”* And another told us, *“I really look forward our weekly Zoom meetings. It gives me time to ‘escape’ from everything.”*

## **7. Plans for the future**

We plan to offer lite-touch support to the existing Women’s Group for the next 3 months (Q1 – 2021) as they increasingly find their feet. We are seeking funding for a new cohort of women to join a new Support Group in 2021.



The final word goes to Saida, who joined our Somali Women's Group this year. *“Honestly, I loved the group and I could not believe we were having it in our area. Every session I attended, I learnt some useful skills that improve the quality of life. My confidence is improving every day. I use my time wisely. I started to manage my anger and stress better. I reorganized my household and throw away many things that I did need to have in my house. I also become a great parent as I implemented many of the useful tips.”*

#### **8. Further information**

If you would like further information about our Somali Women’s Group, then please get in touch with Aaron Barbour, KLS’ Director, on 020 7223 2845 and [aaron@klsettlement.org.uk](mailto:aaron@klsettlement.org.uk).

Thank you again for your support.



*Sharing pizza at a family picnic*