



THE RAMADAN EXPERIENCE @ BTHFT

**A RAMADAN FRIENDLY EMPLOYER**

Spiritual, Pastoral and Religious Care

The SPaRC team at Bradford Teaching Hospitals have taken a proactive approach to supporting their Muslim colleagues during the period of Ramadan by providing managers with resources to ensure that their teams embrace the month of Ramadan in full understanding of the requirements to fast and pray. With some minor adjustments to the working environment, it is possible to accommodate these needs hereby normalising this annual event in the workplace. With 21% of staff describing themselves as Muslim at Bradford Teaching Hospitals, a proactive and inclusive approach was needed that promoted Ramadan in a positive experience for everyone, and one that could be managed within the normal working day.

Ramadan is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It falls at a different time each year and is determined by the lunar cycle. From dawn until sunset, Muslims fast (some exemptions) and their focus is shifted to the spiritual dimension of life. They connect with Allah through prayers at five points in the day: before dawn, early afternoon, late afternoon, at sunset and in the evening. These prayers are ideally, but not necessarily congregational and generally take 5-10 minutes.

In 2022 the idea of a FAST pack was introduced to allow Muslim colleagues to break their fast without needing to leave the ward. The Trust supplied dates, water and disposable prayer mats for colleagues on demand. One thousand FAST PACKS were issued by the then PPP Hub and distributed widely around the hospitals. A query from a manager in the Radiology department asking for advice around how to manage requests for prayer in his predominately Muslim team during Ramadan was the catalyst for the second phase of

the project. As a result in 2023 this initiative was further enhanced by adding PROP PACKS (Pop-up Prayer Room Operational Pack) for managers, adopting a supportive approach by designating a location on their ward/department for a temporary pop-up prayer space for the 30 days of Ramadan. Managers were given the opportunity to pledge to become a Ramadan Ally (with a badge) and to be committed to creating a Ramadan inclusive workplace.

#### **RAMADAN ALLY PLEDGE:**

- **to be committed to positive action to create the “Ramadan Experience”**
- **to create a Ramadan inclusive ethos in the workplace**
- **to take a pro-active approach around Ramadan dialogue**
- **to champion the right for all to bring themselves to work fully and unconditionally**
- **to create a culture of acceptance and support**

The initiative was presented to and endorsed by the Executive team and promoted using internal comms, but also Ramadan Awareness stands on the main concourse to recruit Ramadan Allies and to raise awareness across the Trust. The Ramadan initiative links with other agendas and services across the trust such as EDI, Thrive and community engagement, etc. By looking after its Muslim staff during Ramadan, the Trust is not only attending to its equality goals, but it is ensuring that services continue to operate at optimum levels.

Funding for the FAST packs and PROP packs was obtained through the Hospital Charities. Donations of prayer mats were made from the community. Ramadan is a time when the Muslim community can be mobilised to support staff.

The SPaRC team works to a cross-belief ethos so the preparation of packs and support of the scheme was shared across the team; it was not just for the Muslim colleagues to see it implemented. The workload is not insignificant but one where volunteers can be drawn in and pre-planning makes all the difference.

In the past, the Ramadan period has been a time of regular enquiries to SPaRC from Muslim staff not feeling supported in their religious observance. This may be about inflexibility to take time to pray, difficulty in getting to the prayer room or colleagues' reluctance to make allowances. The evaluation of the 2023 scheme hopes to demonstrate that these difficulties are less frequently reported. Evidence shows (Muslim Census Survey 2021) that where employees feel supported in their observance of Ramadan, they are twice as likely to stay for another 5 years.

It is also important to be transparent and efficient in managing Ramadan for non-Muslim colleagues to minimise any adverse reactions and promote good working relations. Managers need to know, for example, how long prayers are likely to take and whether staff need to leave the ward to do them. It should be noted that in 2022, the dates from our FAST packs were often shared on wards as breaking the fast could also provide sustenance to non-Muslim colleagues who had been unable to find time to eat.

## Contents of the FAST pack

(Fasting At BTHFT's Supportive Trust)

(for staff)

- Disposable prayer mat
- Prayer counter
- Prayer and Fast timetable
- Water bottle
- Packet of dates
- Cool bag to store packed lunch
- Branded drawstring bag

## Contents of the PROP pack

Pop-up Prayer Room Operational Pack)

(for managers)

- Woven prayer mat
- Prayer counter
- Qibla (direction of Mecca) and instructions as to how to use
- Prayer and Fast timetable
- Pop-up Prayer facility poster
- Branded drawstring bag
- List of contents in the Prop-pack

Managing Ramadan proactively not only shows respect to Muslim colleagues, it also reduces unnecessary strains and tensions on the service by:

- minimising time needed to go for prayers by allocating appropriate temporary spaces in the work environment
- recognising the importance of handy snacks to break the fast at sunset when busy-ness in the workplace could conspire against proper nourishment
- anticipating and normalising this annual event into schedules and practices

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