

SADEK HAMID

6. MAPPING YOUTH WORK WITH MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN

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In recent times the ‘identity’, loyalty and affiliations of young British Muslims have come under relentless scrutiny, whereby as a group they have been inadvertently homogenised and pathologised for the very real challenges and problems they deal with. As young individuals, many young British Muslims report a sense that mainstream civic and community engagement with them only occurs in the context of their being viewed as a problem, demanding unprecedented remedial measures and interventions, or as a ‘high risk’ group that requires constant management – not as respected individual stakeholders who have much to contribute and offer to wider society.

Akeela Ahmed, Chief Executive, Muslim Youth Helpline (2010)

INTRODUCTION

Currently, young people from the British Muslim communities are subjected to an array of corrosive stereotypes. Young males are often demonised as being either sociopaths, engaged in criminality or ripe for religious extremism, while young women are frequently portrayed as victims of religious patriarchy. These well rehearsed tropes, given episodic currency among certain media outlets, mask the more complex lived realities of British Muslim communities at the receiving end of grinding social disadvantage. The excessive focus on issue of violent radicalisation obscures the more mundane challenges Muslim youth share with their non-Muslim peers. In addition to struggling against social exclusion and

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religious discrimination, most Muslim youth are actually preoccupied with very adolescent concerns about 'fitting in', relationships (Younis, 2010), identity exploration and generally trying to succeed in life. This is made more difficult by the ongoing attacks on multiculturalism, a proxy for the rejection of the visible Muslim presence (Fekete, 2009) stigmatised for their alleged inability to integrate into secular British life. This chapter provides an overview of the types of youth work carried out with Muslim youth in the midst of these challenges. It begins by contextualising youth religiosity, then proceeds to map some of the main approaches to engaging young people in their communities over the last thirty years and evaluates the conceptual frameworks and methodologies used. It goes on to argue the need for faith sensitive youth work, provides a delineation of the contours of a professional Muslim youth work model and concludes with a summary of the anticipated challenges ahead for this nascent field.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND RELIGIOUS REFORMISM

From the end of the 1980s to the early 21st Century, British Muslims have become much more of a visible minority, most notably in the aftermath of international crises such as the Rushdie Affair, aftermath of the Gulf War, conflict in Bosnia, terrorist attacks in New York, London and the ongoing rise in Islamophobic sentiment in Western societies. Changing demographics, social marginalisation and the work of religious revivalist groups have all contributed to increasing religiosity among British Muslim youth (Samad, 2004, Mondal, 2009, Gilliant-Ray, 2010). However, it is important to note the vast majority remain 'cultural Muslims,' that is to say people who describe themselves as not practising their faith in a regular, committed way. This group represents between 75 to 80 percent of Muslim communities in Western societies (Ramadan, 2010). The remaining 20 percent or so maybe involved in some form of structured religious activism and within that a smaller percentage, dedicated to religious activism. This diversity of Muslims attitudes towards their faith cannot be overstated as it is possible to observe the emergence of various Muslim youth subcultural trends in the 'non-practising Muslim' segments of communities. Youth who identify themselves as 'Rude Boys' members of the 'Asian Gang', 'Gay Muslims' (<http://gaymuslims.org/>), fashion conscious 'Muhajababes' (Allegra, 2006), 'Heavy Metal Muslims' (Levine, 2007) and even ex-Muslims (<http://www.ex-muslim.org.uk/indexEvents.html>), negotiate their identities in creative ways.

Preceding these developments, most Muslim children, acquire their religious identities in their formative years when,

...the teachings of Islam are narrated, remembered and practised...consciously and consciously learn traditions and observances, thereby developing a Muslim 'moral habitus' (Winchester, 2008).

Religious identities are inculcated with varying degrees of success at an early age through familial space, peer group contact and by attendance of after school

mosques classes. It is an unfortunate fact that the majority of younger Muslims struggle to receive meaningful religious education in mosque provision, and that generally mosques management committees are indifferent or hostile to the suggestion that young people should be involved in any decision making capacity. Another fundamental problem lies in the teaching methods used; learning takes place by rote, most often in mother tongue languages, which young people may not always understand. The Qur'an is taught to be read rather than to be understood and the failure to do so can result in humiliation and sometimes corporal punishment. These negative experiences in part contribute to young people not wanting to practice their faith in adult life. This is an unfortunate irony as historically, mosques served as a multi-function space, catering for both the sacred and secular. They were places of prayer as well education, socialising, spiritual retreat, and importantly a place where all as sections of the community were welcomed. Young people seeking religious guidance or practical support are increasingly accessing the internet or the services of Islamic organisations. My own experience and research would lead me to suggest that presently in the UK, there are broadly three types of youth work with Muslims – Islamist reformism, secular and service based approaches.

The Islamist reformist approach to individual and social change is rooted in revivalist movements, which originated in Muslim lands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These pan-Islamic groups combined anti-colonialist rhetoric, religious revivalism, and opposition to secular governments. The most influential of these in the Middle East is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and The Jamaati-Islami (JI) in the Indian sub continent. They established representative organisations among the first generation of settlers in the 1960s, such as the JI inspired UK Islamic Mission (UKIM). The UKIM influenced the work of the Young Muslims UK (YM), the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO) and the youth wing of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Reformist styles of youth work were primarily about reconnecting young people to their religious heritage and were predicated on the assumption that they required a moral compass and alternative development. The UKIM pioneered youth reformism by working with children who attended their after-school religious education classes. This expanded into local schools, wherein individuals were encouraged to form the Islamic Youth Movement (IYM). The IYM held regular weekly meetings and organised other activities, including camping trips and created a magazine called *The Movement*. Declining in the late 1970s, its remnants were repackaged and launched as YM UK in 1984 (www.ymuk.net/) to create of dynamic elite that would lead Muslim youth in Britain. It caters for the 13 to 21 age bracket and has a 'sisters' section in many British cities and towns. It attempts to engage Muslim children and youth by hosting religious study circles, seminars, sporting competitions and camps. They look to provide a counter-culture for Muslim youth by producing a range of activities, media and alternatives to popular secular youth pastimes. YM has produced its own magazine as well as leaflets, audio-video materials explaining

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aspects of Islam. In the past, members have run 'Radio Ramadan' in cities where they have a significant membership, such as Glasgow, Bradford and London. It also has a Muslim Scouts Group, which is intended as a feeder into YM, after the age of 25. Older YM members are expected to join the adult counterpart the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB).

Another significant proponent of 'Islamic youth work' in Britain is the Islamist Young Muslim Organisation (YMO) (www.ymouk.com). Established in 1979, it caters for and is run by young people of Bangladeshi origin and offers similar activities to its competitor YM. The differences between them are minimal, although the YMO has a more conservative interpretation of Islamic law. They also have a parallel young women's organisation, Muslimat. While having branches across the UK, YMO are strongest in East London. They have paid more attention to youth work and have qualified youth workers within their movement. The YMO youth work approach includes religious education, recreation and the tackling of specific social problems within their communities. In Tower Hamlets, their highly disciplined workers have made significant inroads into raising educational attainment and religious consciousness by working with high schools, colleges and universities and have rewarded academic excellence through its School and College Link Projects.

The MAB Youth (www.mabonline.info/youth) wing is modelled on MB pedagogies and has similar ideological and methodological objectives to YM and YMO. It was created in 1997, as a response to what it says was a failure in 'youth mobilisation' in the other Islamic youth movements. Its activities again lay emphasis on reforming youngsters and providing education and recreational opportunities. Like YM and YMO, it has systematic procedures for training and channelling young people into its adult section of MAB. All of the three above are closely connected, well organised organisations. There are also similar active reformist organisations such as the Dawatul-Islam youth group (www.dawatul-islam.org.uk). Also based in East London, they run a successful school, magazines and run regular seminars and conferences.

To this inventory could be added Salafi, organisations like JIMAS, the MIT youth project created by the Brixton Mosque and the youth engagement work inspired by a form of neo-Sufism. The term 'Salafi' refers to the Muslim theological tendencies that look towards the *Salaf-us Salih* - the first pious three generations of early Muslim history. Though a strict, textual based trend, in recent years they have adopted a more tolerant approach to working with other Muslim and non-Muslim organisations. Ipswich based JIMAS, is now a registered third sector charity, holding regular youth activities, seminars, camps and liaises with local authority youth services and large annual conferences (www.jimas.org). The MIT project (www.brixtonmasjid.co.uk) works with 14 to 21 year olds and utilises a range outdoor activities such as indoor skiing, abseiling and sporting tournaments to attract Muslim young people. Work with Muslim youth has also been inspired by a form of Sufism, better known as the 'Traditional Islam' network. This trend

emerged in the mid 1990s after being popularised by charismatic American convert scholars Hamza Yusuf, Nuh Keller and the British academic Abdal Hakim Murad. Rather than being contained in a single organisational entity, it is a system of networks, which encompasses learning institutions, publishing houses, websites, magazines and regular events which share the same scholars and speakers. Among the most influential of these are the website and discussion group Deenport.com, Masud Khan's site (<http://www.masud.co.uk/>) and the Radical Middle Way (<http://www.radicalmiddleway.co.uk/>). They have been at the forefront of supporting a number of artistic, cultural and educational projects that promote an 'Islamic Cool' among Muslim young people (Boubekeur, 2005, Tarlo, 2010).

The Right Start Foundation, (RSF - www.rightstart.org.uk) is also another significant project. Based in Birmingham and created by the popular Egyptian Televangelist Amer Khaled, this organisation represents a shift in traditional reformist stance, Khaled having chosen to tackle socially destabilising issues in Muslim societies. In Britain he focuses his work predominantly on drugs awareness and substance abuse prevention, sports, and supporting families with children, using a multidisciplinary team of youth workers, sociologist, scientists, and religious scholars. This method integrates work with Muslim youth into a wider strategy of 'renewing' Muslim families and communities. A subtle approach is adopted and there is no reference to religion on RSF's website. RSF have won recognition for its partnership work with non-Muslim agencies.

Another category within Islamic youth work is individual reformist inspired organisations that are city based. Often set up as youth centres, their mission and methods mirror Islamic movement methodology. Examples include the Muslim Youth Foundation (<http://myf.org.uk/welcome-to-muslim-youth-foundation.html>) and Al-Islah Youth Centre in Manchester. They offer support with schoolwork and provide alternative 'halal' spaces for young people to play sports, relax and where they are encouraged to attend religious study circles and events.

Reformist Islamic youth organisations form the largest number of voluntary organisations that work with young people in Muslim communities. These organisations possess a number of commendable features, which have helped many young people to learn about and practise their faith. But they also have counter productive features; principal among them is young people's needs becoming an appendage to achieving the aims of these various organisations, some of which display political vanguard movement characteristics and are quite often out of touch with the day-to-day problems of the young people they wish to attract. There is also a tendency towards elitism as they tend to recruit young people from middle class backgrounds and are reluctant to work with Muslim young people with more challenging behaviour. They usually promote themselves by distributing publicity about their work at public events, mosques and colleges. If individuals show interest they are encouraged to attend activities where they are observed. The screening process continues as experienced members get to know the young person and find out about their background, level of education,

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future aspirations and any skills they have. If the person demonstrates enough potential they then become targets that are seen as possible future members. At this point a person will be assigned to socialise with them and over a period of time. This individual will try to persuade the young person of the benefits of working with the organisation. Throughout this process-the interests of the group override the needs of the young person.

Another problematic feature of this type of missionary instrumentalism is the ideological indoctrination carried out which attempts to shape the young person's worldview into the outlook of the organisation. This mindset encourages the perception of other Muslim youth groups/organisations as competitors who are in some way inadequate or simply wrong. This intolerance frequently has prevented youth organisations with similar goals from co-operating and as such produces an insular mentality. It is also a huge waste of resources as rival youth organisations sometimes host events simultaneously, in the same area, for the same target group, while refusing to co-ordinate work together. In addition most reformist youth groups appear to often be oblivious to wider social trends and changes taking place in mainstream youth culture, British society and government. Their youth leaders seem to be generally ignorant of the scale of the challenges facing British Muslim youth today. Furthermore, few of the members of the reformist youth organisations have any tangible youth work skills beyond the general organising of events. Rather than being able to build broadly developmental relationships with young people, a heavy emphasis is placed upon socialisation into particular interpretations of Islamic norms and behaviour through participation in sports and recreation like football, table tennis, pool and martial arts. They also often tend not to have the ability to use constructive criticism, lacking accountability beyond their own organisational hierarchy. Ultimately this means that young people miss out as these organisations put their own advancement before the well being of those they recruit to their ranks. People associated with these organisations may protest that my description is a crude simplification of their modes of operation, however many ex-members and people who have interacted with the type of agencies referred to above, across the UK, would beg to differ; some even claim to have been harmed by this type of Islamic youth work.

On a positive note some reformist organisations are belatedly recognising the importance of social welfare work and some of their members have gone on to train as youth workers, drug and social workers. However, the challenge for them remains one of relevance and being able to serve young people without hoping that they will become workers in a movement. Islamic youth organisations need to engage the broadest possible constituency of young Muslims and move beyond the narrow ideological and methodological approaches they currently deploy. They can no longer ignore the totality of young peoples' lives. As such they need to start offering this group relevant knowledge, skills and experiences in order to meet the intellectual and social challenges that face young Muslims now and future.

To do this there needs to be a serious cultural shift within Muslim communities in terms of recognising the importance and potential of professional youth work.

WHEN FAITH MEETS PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Young British Muslims experience most of the common, ups and downs that characterise adolescence generally. What distinguishes them is the fact of their 'Muslimness'; the range of religious and cultural differences that inform their outlooks and values. Feedback from young people in a number of recent reports (Malik et. Al., 2007, Forward Thinking, 2008, NCVYS, 2008) suggest that most Muslim young people are not accessing mainstream services due, in part, to the fact that statutory services are not equipped to understand the religion, culture and norms that many young Muslims carry with them. This can potentially result in them experiencing a double social exclusion; they are marginalised from the delivery of mainstream services and, partly as a consequence, are excluded from adequate support structures within their communities.

A common grievance voiced is that most youth centres and youth work staff are unaware or ill equipped to understand these religious and cultural dimensions. In connection with this conclusion every so often I am asked questions such as;

- 'Why have Muslim youth work?'
- 'Isn't this promoting separatism?'
- 'Doesn't it miss the point about community cohesion?'

These are reasonable questions, reflecting anxieties behind the emergence of distinct Muslim faith perspectives in youth work in the last few years. However, given that established professional Christian and Jewish youth work practices recognise the spiritual dimension of young people, the question to be asked is; 'Why not have Muslim youth work?' We already have Muslim Mediation services, 'Islamic Counselling' and Islamic Social Work models (Crabree, 2008: 65). Similarly Muslim faith based approaches to youth work are based upon the need for specialisation, being a recognition of cultural competence skills that come from insider knowledge and training. This not separatism, but fulfilling the duty to promote equality of opportunity in the same way that distinct, focused work is necessary with young women or young black people. The importance of exploring young people's religious beliefs and values is embedded in the professional good practice criteria with the National Occupation Standards for youth work, section 1.1.4, (http://www.lluk.org/documents/whole_suite_of_Professional_and_National_Occupational_Standards_for_Youth_Work.pdf) which encourages the spiritual development of young people. This is understood to ensure that young people's ethical, moral and cultural values and beliefs are discussed as well as the differences between spirituality, religion and faith. It goes as far to recommend that youth workers should,

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...assist young people to develop a sense of their own spiritual beliefs, values, ethics and morals by which they live (NCVYS, 2008)

and importantly

...encourage young people to explore their beliefs in relation to those of other faiths, religions and cultures, and the prevailing social norms (Ahmed, 2009: 27).

Most young people from faith backgrounds, as well as those with no particular faith experience, are likely at some points in their lives to ask themselves and/or others the perennial questions about the meaning and purpose of life, perhaps deciding to commit to a religious tradition is of course a matter of personal choice. In relation to these types of issues, Khan (2005) lists why he believes Muslim youth work approaches are important:

- Muslim youth work can enable young people to have a sense of self worth that takes on board the faith dimension of their identity.
- Young men and women need to be taken seriously in the Muslim community; the youth work process can enable this. This is particularly so in the current policy agenda where young people need to be seen to be taking an active part in the projects and initiatives put forward for funding. Muslim organisations can be seen as being put in a situation of disadvantage by policy due to the state of youth work in this community. There is a mismatch between what is required and what exists.
- Youth participation can contribute to addressing the gendered nature of the representational sphere.
- It can provide interventions in a crucial influencing space outside home, mosque and school.
- It can bring into play existing curricula in culturally appropriate ways but also develop new positive curricula that can inform identity and belonging.
- It can introduce new models of understanding work with young people and the purposes that influence it.
- Muslim youth workers can form relationships with young people that are accepting and well informed about the faith dimension of their lives.
- It can assist young Muslims constantly faced with negative images of their faith to challenge this in a constructive way. For example, the arts, creating spaces for their voices to be heard.
- It can develop new relationships with the Muslim world and influence agendas on issues of justice and minorities as members of the European community.
- Youth workers from a Muslim faith perspective in senior positions with local authorities are few and far between and are often stretched and ghettoised. The conference and any emerging organisational entity provide an opportunity to be heard outside the constraints of organisational hierarchies and community representational discourses.

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- A Muslim youth work response can critique investment in the ‘relationships’ being invested in and cultivated with, for example, family, training, environment etc.
- Developments of theoretical frameworks are needed that authenticate a Muslim perspective/approach in work with young people.
- A national response can be more effective in pump priming local action. This is especially so in investing in new voices, ways of working etc. where existing funding is committed.

Though still at an early stage, over the last six years, these ideas have started to permeate work with Muslim youth across the UK and partnerships are now being made across faith communities. Muslim youth work practitioners could also learn much from both the successes and failures of Christian youth work. A large amount of youth work with Muslim youngsters has historically taken place within secular, voluntary youth organisations or local authority youth services. Here the youth work can be delivered in two ways:

- 1) By workers who are ‘non-practising’ Muslims, so their faith does not inform their youth work practice and is derived entirely from secular frameworks.
- 2) Influenced by the passion individual youth workers have for their racial/cultural heritages. This can alternate between hybrid identities or ones that privilege their ethnic/cultural/national heritages.

In both cases religion is deemed irrelevant to youth work practice. The other possibility are situations where ‘practising Muslims’ work in secular services, which in some cases can be difficult if these agencies have aggressively secular work cultures that effectively disallow a role for faith in the delivery of youth services.

Change is slowly but determinedly taking place through the work of the Muslim Youth Work Foundation (www.mywf.org.uk), the undergraduate degree in Muslim Youth Work that was piloted at the University of Chester, Muslim Youth Skills (www.muslimyouthskills.co.uk), and the work of the YMCA College, East London. Given the marginalisation of religious perspectives within secular youth organisations, some Muslim professionals have also started to develop faith sensitive approaches across a range of services. This has led to the development of service-based organisations whose ethos are shaped by Islam, but who provide intervention instead of proselytisation. These agencies have pioneered faith sensitive approaches to mental health, counselling and drug work. Leading the way are organisations such as The Muslim Youth Helpline (www.myh.org.uk), and NAFAS drugs project (www.nafas.org). The Muslim Youth Help Line, developed in 2002, has pioneered valuable counselling services to thousands of young people in desperate need of advice and guidance. Its success led to the launching of a website (www.muslimyouth.net/) in October 2004. In a lively and interactive manner its magazine format addresses contemporary issues like citizenship and identity, discrimination, bullying, mental health, relationships and sexuality.

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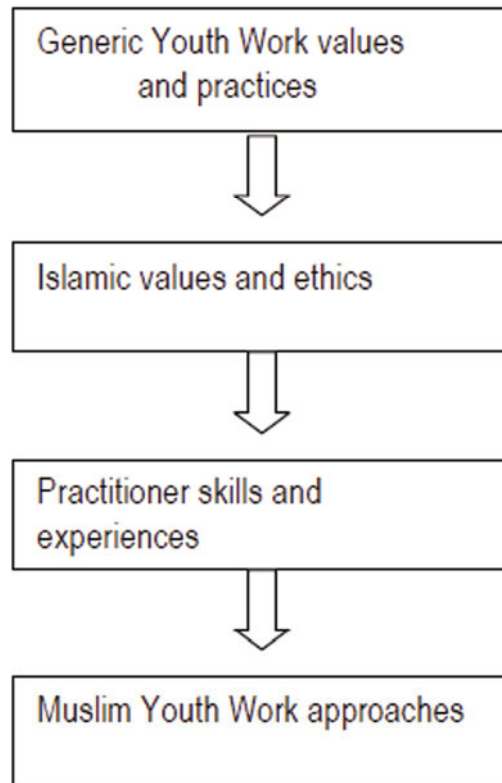
It has also initiated groundbreaking campaigns relating homelessness and supporting young Muslim prisoners. The website also includes a wide variety of articles and referral points. The only organisation of its kind, NAFAS, in East London has been operational from 2000. It targets the growing drug problem among Bangladeshi young people in Tower Hamlets. Its atmosphere is discreetly Islamic and it offers mainstream drug services in addition to specialist features that are adapted for work within Muslim communities. NAFAS also provide training packages for parents and Mosques and deliver therapies and abstinence treatment plans from within Islamic frames of reference.

PROFESSIONAL MUSLIM YOUTH WORK: TOWARD A SYNTHESIS

At the risk of being accused of semantic quibbling, it is useful to make a distinction between a 'Muslim' and 'Islamic youth work'. There is difference between the aims, methods and outcomes produced by each approach. Islamic youth work takes a largely confessional orientation, being motivated by the basic goal looking to help young people learn the values and rituals of Islam. However, emerging Muslim youth work approaches tend to be person centred and start where the young person is at in his or her life. A dialectical method is central as is the focus on facilitating self-discovery and personal development. This approach is undertaken in the awareness that young people are likely to have pressing needs that require immediate attention; ethos, style and delivery of work is informed by the values of Islam. It is insufficient logically (it is irrational/it makes little sense) to define work with young people who happen to be Muslim as 'Muslim Youth Work' if there is no role for religion in the conceptualisation or delivery of its practice. If that were the case, then youth work delivered by non-Muslim youth workers with young Muslims could be called 'Muslim youth work'. Prefixing 'Muslim' before a practice at least raises expectations of (but more probably clearly implies) a faith element. This cannot just be a cosmetic 'add on' if theoretical and actual frameworks are rooted outside of a religious value base. The following might be usefully understood as a basic starting point for the process of developing a professional Muslim youth work approach:

In reality the integration of faith values, youth work principles and individual worker expertise is likely to be organic. The diagram below only sketches the linearity that would need to occur to arrive at a meaningful synthesis that is loyal to both generic youth work values and the ideals of Islam. Put another way, it might be helpful to define the framework of what a Muslim youth work approach should and should not be:

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These characteristics and strategies represent the broad parameters of what professional Muslim youth work might look like but it is in many ways a work in progress. As British Muslim young people are incredibly diverse in terms of their religiosity, ethnicity, cultures and social backgrounds, an effective Muslim youth worker should be able to adapt to these facts as well as be able to work effectively with young people who are not committed to their faith as those who are not Muslim.

What Muslim Youth Work is	What it is not
<p>Conceptually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith sensitive • Values based • Recognises spiritual dimension of peoples lives • Promotes the holistic support and development of Muslim youth • Non-judgemental • Specialist <p>Methodologically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth focused-starts with young peoples needs • Strategic • Systematic and evidence based • Solution orientated • Creative • Taps into the length and breadth of Islamic tradition • Reflective <p>In delivery will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower and educate young people • Able to work with all young people • Provides equal opportunity • Promotes social justice • Encourages integration and social cohesion • Make positive difference in young peoples lives • Provide role models 	<p>Conceptually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overly focussed with religious teaching and identity maintenance • Rules based i.e. only concerned with the what is religiously lawful & unlawful • Limits Islam to ritual performances and visual markers • Value neutral • De-inks faith from identity <p>Methodologically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excludes the positive potential of faith • Selective • Pre-occupied with recreational activities • Adhoc • Mistakes means for ends • Rigid <p>In delivery will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empty youth centres-excluded young people-irrelevant services • Denies the opportunity to utilise their faith heritage positively • Result in psychological/cultural dissonance • Reinforces alienation and prejudice

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CONCLUSION

The British Muslim population is in many places disadvantaged, facing challenges both externally and internally. They are facing many critical issues, ranging from their communities being unwilling or unable to deal with the increase in social problems facing their young, to social disadvantage, marginalisation and Islamophobia. Those concerned with the welfare of young Muslims have a major task in dealing with these internal and external challenges. Unfortunately the leadership in Muslim communities is often out of touch with the daily realities of the lives of young people, while the youth work being carried out is dominated by reformist youth movements, who commonly indoctrinate them into their own particular organisational ideologies and priorities. Aside from the notable exceptions mentioned here, reformist approaches have been ambivalent at best in addressing the multiple challenges facing Muslim youth today. Muslim service based organisations are doing what the reformist organisations should have done a long time ago. Perhaps the greatest challenges facing service-based organisations are to secure sustainable long-term funding and increase their representation nationally. Given that over half of the Britain's Muslim population are under the age of 25 and growing in number, Islamic youth organisations, service based agencies and mainstream services need to work together to meet this anticipated need. Professional Muslim youth workers can work with young people to develop understanding of these issues; they can act as mentors, but also be prepared to learn about young people from young people (be mentored). A professional, faith sensitive approach that is grounded in the principles and practices of generic youth work can assist mainstream service providers to recognise the importance of understanding the faith and cultures of different young people and can act as bridge between the home, school, mosques and the street.

HOW MUSLIM YOUTH WORK APPROACHES CAN BE SUPPORTED

I would suggest the following to help consolidate Muslim youth work practice:

- Encourage the professionalisation of youth work with Muslim young people, synthesising the different aspects of youth work i.e. social education, recreation, personal development and practical support in a cohesive manner
- Develop theoretical frameworks and curricula with the co-operation of practitioners, educators and Muslim scholars
- Develop intervention strategies that integrate work with parents, schools, youth workers and general community capacity building
- Catalogue and share good practice and resources
- Development of national and international practitioner networks
- Increase the number of professionally accredited Muslim Youth Work courses such as the one that ran at the University of Chester

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- Increase co-operation between secular and faith sensitive approaches of working with young Muslims
- Increase inter-faith youth work collaboration

While Muslim youth work may have much to offer there still remains a number of practical challenges in communities where there is still little understanding of the value of youth work as a profession and a preference towards encouraging children into prestigious careers such as medicine, law and science. The recognition of youth work as a valuable and viable career is perhaps one of the biggest challenges facing the long term establishment of professional Muslim Youth work practice. Among parents, there still seems to be a deal of ignorance about what youth work is as a career or anxieties around the availability of employment opportunities. This is understandable given the parental generation within those communities came from countries with no history of professional youth work. For advocates, widening awareness of the potential of youth in Muslim communities and persuading sceptical secular practitioners, remain an ongoing struggle.

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