



**HIMAYA HAVEN**  
Empowering Communities



# **BAME FAMILIES OF PRISONERS**

Evaluation Report

**Drs Nathan Kerrigan and Eveleigh Buck-Matthews**

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In partnership with



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## Research Team

Dr Nathan Kerrigan  
*Department of Criminology and Sociology, School of Law & Social Sciences,  
Birmingham City University.*

Dr Eveleigh Buck-Matthews  
*Department of Criminology and Sociology, School of Law & Social Sciences,  
Birmingham City University.*

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# INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, Himaya Haven have been supporting families of prisoners from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds by delivering a range of services (e.g., providing guidance and information, one-to-one support, organising community events to develop a support group amongst families experiencing similar issues etc.) aimed at helping families to navigate having a loved one currently in prison and/or custody.

Towards the end of 2023, Himaya Haven approached a research team at Birmingham City University to evaluate their BAME Families of Prisoners project that had been officially ongoing since 2020 and funded by a Reaching Communities grant. The evaluation period started in April 2024 and lasted until May 2025. This evaluation serves several purposes, including an independent examination of the scope and scale of impact from Himaya Haven's work with BAME families of prisoners, and offering an opportunity for Himaya Haven to further assess the evidence on their support activities, consolidating learning and reflecting on what is effective and what is less effective about the support provided. The evaluation is guided by the following research aims and objectives:

- (i) Measure the scope, scale and extent of the impact of the BAME Families of Prisoners programme
- (ii) Examine what is working and what is not working as well in supporting BAME families of prisoners and the wider community
- (iii) Investigate the relationship between HH outreach activities and support given to the wider BAME community; and,
- (iv) Capture the 'lived experience' of BAME families of prisoners supported by Himaya Haven.

In the following report, we present key findings from the evaluation of Himaya Haven's BAME families of prisoners' programme. The report firstly outlines the background context to the evaluation, presenting a review of the academic and grey literature on some of the key concepts important to the evaluation. The report then details the approach taken to the evaluation, including its methodology and an overview of the participants and data collected. The main body of the report centres on the following key sections: -

- Section 1: Measuring the scope, scale and extent of the impact of the BAME Families of Prisoners programme
- Section 2: Perspectives from Himaya Haven staff/volunteers and professional stakeholders.
- Section 3: Lived experiences of BAME families of prisoners supported by Himaya Haven

Finally, the report concludes by providing a summary of key learnings taken from the evaluation, as well as some final reflections on project delivery of the BAME families of prisoners' programme over the past five years.

# BACKGROUND CONTEXT OF SUPPORTING BAME FAMILIES OF PRISONERS

## **What is known about the experiences of Families of Prisoners**

Academic research on the experiences of families of prisoners has increased within the fields of criminology and sociology over the past two decades (Abass et al., 2016; Clewitt and Glover 2009; Codd, 2007; Daniel and Taylor, 2001; Jones et al., 2013; Lockwood and Raikes, 2016; Raikes, 2014). The earliest piece of research that examined the impact of having a loved one within the criminal justice system had on families or a family member was Morris' (1965) study on the experiences of women who were affected by the imprisonment of their partners. Morris observed issues around income, stigma and social exclusion and an increase in overall household duties and responsibilities with little, if any, support available. As research on the experiences of families of prisoners has increased, subsequent studies have shown that the issues identified by Morris' initial study have remained the same and extend to other family members as well. For instance, within the wider family unit imprisonment can impact on family income, which not only results in greater financial hardship for partners and children but often pushes them and other family members into taking on new and additional familial, gender and social roles to manage the loss of income (Codd, 2007). Imprisonment of a family member may also lead to isolation from wider familial networks or external social relationships because of not wishing to disclose family secrets and/or difficulties (Jones et al., 2013). Families have also been found to commonly face varying degrees of stigma and exclusion by their peers, social networks and local communities, and are sometimes regarded as guilty by association to the individual imprisoned (Murray, 2007; Raikes, 2014)

These experiences produce a variety of different practical, emotional and social challenges in the everyday lives of families who have a loved one currently imprisoned (Gan-Rankin et al., 2010). There are many disadvantages from being the family of a prisoner as such experiences tend to compound the social disadvantage already experienced by many of the families. Imprisonment of a family member is more likely to occur in families who already face social deprivation and come from low-income backgrounds (MoJ, 2012). The loss of income and additional financial and social costs associated with the imprisonment of a family member can, therefore, be detrimental to a family's wellbeing and amplify pre-existing disadvantages (Christian, 2005; Gan-Rankin et al., 2010; Glover, 2009; Raikes 2014).



## What is known about the experiences of BAME Families of Prisoners

While there is now a significant, albeit relatively small, body of research exploring the experiences of families of prisoners, there is even scantly research exploring the experiences of family members of prisoners from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. This is despite the fact that over a quarter (27%) of the prison population of England and Wales are from groups of racialised backgrounds and classified as BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic), compared to 18% of the general population (Prison Reform Trust, 2024). Out of the groups classified as BAME, Black and Black British groups represent 11.9% of the total prison population, while Asian groups represent 7.9% and those identified as 'Ethnic Other' represent 1.6% (MoJ, 2024). However, the issue is that the Ministry of Justice (2024) does not breakdown the categories of ethnicity within the BAME distinction no finer than that. It is difficult, therefore, to provide an accurate representation of the cultural specificities and nuances of each group as official statistics tends to homogenise these groups and communities.

Irrespective of ethnic or cultural backgrounds, though, there are similarities in the experiences of BAME families who are impacted by imprisonment. For example, in his study on BAME families' experiences of imprisonment, Light (1995) found that some of the experiences of Black and Asian families mirrored those of the wider white population such as stigma, anxiety and financial difficulties. Likewise, Abass and colleagues (2016) denoted that British Asian communities – especially those who self-identified as British Pakistani – are amongst the most socially deprived in the UK, with members of this community more likely to be un/underemployed in comparison to the wider general population, and in cases of employment are likely to be on significantly lower pay. Subsequently, the financial loss experienced by British Asian families impacted by imprisonment can be severe and add to pre-existing financial disadvantages, intensifying feelings of stress, worry and anxiety (see also, Hellyer, 2007).

Furthermore, Light's (1995) study also elucidated that BAME families of prisoners face additional challenges, such as: language barriers; a lack of sensitivity displayed by public sector organisations concerning support provision; and a sense of exclusion. In extreme circumstances there are accounts of mistreatment, and both overt and structural racism reported by some families. Light (1995) also highlighted families' concerns about how BAME offenders were treated, noting that: 'conditions in prisons were seen to discriminate against Asian prisoners in particular, with regard to their dietary needs and religious customs' (Light, 1995: 217).

BAME families of prisoners, therefore, while sharing similarities in experiences of having a loved one inside the criminal justice system with their white family counterparts, also face specific cultural issues which exacerbate their experience, as well as the challenges of being a family of a prisoner. These issues and challenges will now be discussed further.

## **Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME): problems with categorising and labelling**

Over the past two decades, the UK has witnessed a significant growth in equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) agendas, marked by legislative advancements, institutional reforms, and shifting policy attitudes towards the protection of marginalised groups (Kirton and Greene, 2021). This has led to the creation and transformation of racial categories and signifiers to highlight the different multiple marginalised groups that are structurally disadvantaged by institutional policies and processes (Lawrence et al., 2024). The most recent manifestation of this has been the rise of the use of the BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) acronym. This acronym is now ubiquitous amongst a myriad of organisations concerned with addressing racialised inequalities and has arguably provided some visibility to Black and Asian minority ethnic groups in the UK public sphere through its inclusion within government and public bodies policy frameworks (Gill, 2024).

The BAME acronym, however, is only one label in a long list of previous labels that have attempted to promote racial equality and inclusion (Aspinall, 2021). Before BAME became the established terminology in government policy in 2004, there was BME (Black and Minority Ethnic). BME, according to Aspinall (2021), debuts earlier, mostly amongst local authorities (LAs) serving racially diverse communities, in the early 1980s. Between them, both BAME and BME, have functioned as umbrella terms used to refer to all people who are not racialised as White. They have been used in policy and strategy documents across multiple sectors (Lawrence et al., 2024), often with good intentions; however, as Khunti and colleagues (2020: 1) have highlighted, BAME is a label that ‘indiscriminately combine[s] people from different geographical, behavioural, social, and cultural backgrounds’.

Within this context, there has been multiple calls recently to do away with the label altogether (Parry et al., 2023; Gill, 2024). The main reason for the jettisoning of the BAME label has been associated with its many problems with both its construction of categories and its application (DaCosta et al., 2021). It has been employed in policy discourses as a catch-all term to signify multiple groups’ shared experiences of racialised inequalities, oppression, disadvantage and exclusion without acknowledgment of the cultural specificities, distinct histories and nuanced forms of structural and interpersonal exclusion that affect different communities in distinct ways.

Lawrence and colleagues (2024) highlight that racialised catch-all terminology in the realm of policy has a long history. In the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, the term ‘Black’ was commonly used to refer to any racialised minority group suffering from oppression, disadvantage and exclusion, and was used as a word that signified a sense of shared experience (Sudbury, 2001). Because of this, there is now – by and large – an agreement amongst ‘race’ scholars that the BAME label is doing the same thing (Alexander, 2018; DaCosta et al., 2021; Parry et al., 2023; Gill, 2024) and therefore is never appropriate as it homogenises distinct individual and group-based experiences by emblematically erasing the cultural nuances of all racialised groups (Narayan, 2019: 946).

Following on from these scholarly debates of the appropriateness of the BAME label, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) published a report recommending BAME be disaggregated into its individual, constitutive parts. The principal reasons underlying this recommendation are summarised in the following paragraph taken from their report: -



*It is demeaning to be categorized in relation to what we are not, rather than what we are: British Indian, British Caribbean, and so on. The BAME acronym also disguises huge differences in outcomes between ethnic groups. This reductionist idea forces us to think that the principal cause of all disparities must be majority versus minority discrimination. It also allows our institutions and businesses to point to the success of some BAME people in their organization and absolve themselves of responsibility for people from those minority groups that are doing less well. Like the UK's White population, ethnic minority groups are far from monolithic in their attitudes towards British social norms and their inclusion in different walks of life. (CRED, 2021: 32).*

## **Services for BAME Families of Prisoners**

Raikes (2014) notes there are many services and provisions that support families of prisoners. National charities such as Action for Prisoners Families and Families Outside offer information, guidance and support. There are also websites and helplines offering pathways to accessing information and support such as Barnardo's iHop website and the National Offenders' Families' Helpline (see Raikes, 2014). Glover's report for Barnardo's (2009) on supporting families of prisoners also highlights how statutory organisations such as the HM Prison and Probation Service (formerly known as the National Offender Management Service, or NOMs) have established initiatives such as the Children and Families Pathway which primarily focuses on children who have a parent in prison (see also, Clewitt and Glover, 2009).

Despite the establishment of support provision targeted at families of prisoners, there are often barriers around accessibility and awareness which impacts families' ability to access such support provision in the first place. For instance, Gan-Rankin and colleagues (2010) found that other than support services associated with the prison itself, many families remain unaware of other, more informal family support groups in their local areas. Similarly, Gan-Rankin and colleagues also found that families often had limited knowledge of both the criminal justice system and the services which were available for the imprisoned family member post-release, as well as a lack of awareness of Assisted Prison Visit Schemes, which aim to support families of prisoners in making travel arrangements to visit the imprisoned family member. This lack of awareness and understanding of support services amongst families is still prevalent today.

While there are existing barriers around access and awareness of support provision for all families of prisoners, these barriers are exacerbated when considering the support needs of BAME families of prisoners. Light's (1995) study, for instance, highlighted that out of the twenty-six support providers surveyed, only 73% stated that Black and Asian families had used their services. Likewise, Gan-Rankin and colleagues (2010) observed how the number of services in place to specifically support BAME groups is not reflective of their over representation in the criminal justice system, denoting 'it is commonly accepted that members of the BAME community are often less likely to access mainstream services and are often classed as 'hard to reach'' (Gan-Rankin et al., 2010: 12). Abass (2015) found similar evidence when examining access to support provision amongst British Pakistani families.

He maintained that this group were less likely to seek support. This was attributed to the influence of cultural values and beliefs, which acted as a restraining factor in families' willingness to seek external support, most often due to the associated stigma, fear of judgment, and the emphasis on maintaining familial honour and/or privacy (see also, Sheikh and Furnham, 2000).

BAME families who have a loved one in the criminal justice system, therefore, face multiple structural disadvantages in addition to the already existing layers of disadvantage, exclusion, and oppression of being a family of a prisoner. Current service provision in place is either inadequate or non-existent for BAME families. The lack of, or limited support provided to BAME families with a family member in prison can be detrimental to their overall wellbeing and is something therefore that needs to be addressed in wider policy and academic discourse (Abass, 2015).

## **Cultural insensitivity and institutional exclusion**

Cultural insensitivity towards and experienced BAME families of prisoners is a persistent and systemic issue within the UK's criminal justice system (Abass, 2015). Dixey and Woodall's (2012) qualitative study on prison visitation in an English Category-B prison highlights how cultural insensitivity emerged as a significant issue within the visitation process for BAME families of prisoners. Visitation processes, though integral to maintaining familial bonds and reducing recidivism (Bales and Mears, 2008; Niven and Stewart, 2005), are often experienced as emotionally fraught and institutionally alienating. For many BAME families, then, the prison visit is not only an emotionally taxing experience but one shaped by unfamiliar and culturally discordant institutional norms. Visitors unfamiliar with carceral culture—especially first-timers—often express stress, fear, and alienation, comparing their expectations to media depictions of incarceration (see Dixey and Woodall, 2012). These responses reflect a broader issue identified by Codd (2007) that prison regimes frequently operate without sufficient cultural sensitivity, often ignoring the specific socio-cultural expectations and experiences of BAME families.

Moreover, the lack of culturally competent staff and the often-dehumanising visitor experience—characterised by invasive security checks, inflexible procedures, and a punitive institutional ethos—mirror concerns raised by Action for Prisoners' Families (2007), who advocate for staff training on the impact of incarceration on families, particularly from minoritised groups. Prison staff, as the public face of the prison, often reinforce the 'us versus them' dynamic (Garland and Young, 1979), inadvertently reproducing racialised assumptions and systemic exclusion. This is highlighted in the wider research which notes BAME families frequently perceive prison environments as culturally alienating and structurally discriminatory (Crewe, 2009; Liebling, 2000).

Experiences of discrimination and exclusion for BAME groups in the criminal justice system is well-documented in the criminology and social policy literature (Bridges, 1999; Dummett, 1973; John and Humphrey, 1971; MacPherson, 1999; Mason, 1982; Moss, 2006; Sveinsson, 2012). Abass' (2015) study, in particular, found that the experiences of racially minoritised prisoners could shape the fears and perceptions of their families, highlighting families of prisoners may experience discrimination and exclusionary practices prior to, during, and even post sentencing.

A report by Jacobson and colleagues (2010) argued that discrimination towards, and exclusion of, BAME communities was not only disproportionate within the criminal justice system but also visible elsewhere in other social institutions such as education, employment, housing and health services. The discrimination and exclusion in which many BAME families of prisoners' experience is not overtly targeted, but rather deeply embedded within the social structures of society, resulting in the disadvantage, exclusion, oppression and discrimination that many face while navigating having a family member in prison (Dummett, 1973, John and Humphrey, 1971; Mason, 1982).

## Shame and stigma

Another important challenge to address in the lives of BAME families of prisoners is the stigma they face, particularly families from certain racially minoritised backgrounds who may experience further obstacles due to cultural issues. Sociologist, Erving Goffman (1963: 3), defined stigma as 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction'. Goffman described how stigmas could be divided and described as either personal deviation, physical deformations and tribal stigmas. Personal deviations were associated with behaviours such as criminality, physical deformations were linked to physical disabilities, and tribal stigmas were associated with 'race', national or religious identities. Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, therefore, could imply BAME families of prisoners' may face multiple stigmas, and be at further risk of the perpetuation of stigmatisation, as they would have to contend with the criminality of their family member in relation to both their racial and cultural identities.

Literature on families of prisoners and stigma describes the perceptions and impact of stigmatisation on families who have a member who, according to Goffman's (1963: 3) definition, 'possesses an attribute discredited within a particular social interaction'. Wahl and Harman (1989), for instance, found that feelings of stigma and shame experienced by parents of prisoners was connected to perceptions of parental responsibility for their child's criminality. Gilbert and colleagues (2006) conceptualised this produced a reflected form of shame whereby an individual's actions can bring shame onto close family members. This reflected shame was highlighted in Toor's (2009) study where he describes how the implications of shame were felt much more severely by mothers who have a child in prison as they had perceived they had failed their motherly duty.

It is, however, not at all surprising that shame works in such ways, especially considering the long-standing tradition within the field of criminology of linking the family with criminal behaviour. Control theory (see e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969), for instance, places the blame for criminal behaviour at the feet of the family. According to control theory, parents play an important role in instilling pro-social values within children, and if the child's social ties are inadequate, he or she is more likely to become delinquent. The stereotype of the 'criminal family', therefore becomes a powerful cultural and political trope. It is no surprise, then, that the wider literature on families of prisoners such as Condry (2007) found families being stigmatised on the grounds that they were of the same 'bad stock' as their imprisoned relative, and for 'failing' to control their offending relative was a common narrative amongst their communities.

This process of stigmatisation can be highlighted further in May's (2000: 204) study where one relative said that society feels families 'come out of the same mould', and thus the participant saw the family as bad by association. Likewise, Toor (2009) identified how because of the deep embeddedness of shame and honour within South Asian communities, one family were ostracised by the local Asian community because of the criminal status of one of the family members. Moreover, both Gan-Rankin et al.'s study (2010), and Raikes's (2014) study captured how family members tended to withhold information regarding the imprisonment of their loved one from wider family and friends, with participants in Raikes's (2014) study, specifically, describing how they would avoid telling specific individuals from who they expected more severe reactions.

## **Community-informed, independent (issue-based) advocacy**

Community-informed, independent (issue-based) advocacy is a targeted form of support in which community organisations work to tackle a specific need, guided directly by the priorities and experiences of those individuals affected. Such advocacy work involves structured activities undertaken by a community organisation to represent, support and amplify the voices of the individuals or groups they support (IVAR, 2008).

This model of advocacy is rooted in both community advocacy – working with vulnerable groups to have their voices heard and make their needs known, particularly when they feel they are unable to do so by themselves— and independent (issue-based) advocacy, operating without influence from statutory, government bodies (Atkinson and Boulton, 1995) models. By focusing on a specific issue, community-informed, independent (issue-based) advocacy can deploy specialised knowledge of the individuals, groups and communities being supported to secure the best outcomes possible for those represented to gain access to the support and services they require. This blend of independent (issue-based) and community advocacy not only ensures that support provided remain reflective of the needs of individuals, groups and communities supported but also enhances the relationship and trust between community organisations and those they represent (Independent Age, 2016).

Community-informed, independent (issue-based) advocacy places community members at the heart of decision-making, ensuring that actions respond to real-world needs and cultural contexts rather than external agendas and criteria (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine., 2017). In practice, this means working with individuals, groups and communities impacted to identify areas of need and priorities.

Vulnerable, and often marginalised communities, often face multiple barriers—language, cultural, economic or structural—that can prevent them from navigating certain institutional systems or making their voices heard. A community-informed, independent (issue-based) advocacy model, therefore, builds capacity and confidence amongst individuals supported (Dalrymple and Boylan, 2013). Research shows that advocacy initiatives which recognise the need of specific communities, alongside their cultural norms and values and nuances not only improve outcomes for these groups, but also foster longer-term engagement and trust, critical for addressing deeply entrenched inequities amongst vulnerable and marginalised groups (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000).

Moreover, the community-informed approach of such independent (issue-based) work safeguards against the tokenistic or performative efforts that can occur when advocacy is tied to service delivery or policy-maker agendas (Beresford, 2013). Similarly, the issue-based focus of such advocacy also means that interventions can be swift and pragmatic, addressing immediate priorities and need while laying groundwork for broader policy change. Collectively, these features make community-informed, independent, issue-based advocacy a powerful tool for advancing social justice and protecting the rights of those most at risk of exclusion.

## Policy context

Community organisations delivering support provision to different individuals, groups and communities often operate within an increasingly complex and competitive policy environment. Although government strategies often promote the value of community-led initiatives – the creating and championing of active communities addressing the needs of their residents all by themselves and with little or no statutory support – the practical conditions under which these community organisations deliver services is shaped by neoliberal policy that prioritise competition, market efficiency, and measurable outputs (Brackmann, 2015). Funding and tendering regimes typically require community organisations to compete against one another for scarce resources, undermining opportunities for collaboration and creating instability within the sector (Milbourne, 2009: 280). Smaller, community-embedded organisations are particularly vulnerable, as they often lack the administrative infrastructure to meet increasingly demanding commissioning requirements.

Neoliberal approaches have also imposed a narrow focus on short-term, quantifiable outcomes (Beresford, 2013). While accountability is vital, an overemphasis on numerical targets risks marginalising the deep, trust-based work necessary to engage vulnerable and marginalised communities meaningfully. These communities often face complex structural disadvantages that cannot be addressed through quick interventions or standardised service models. However, funding and policy frameworks rarely accommodate the long-term, relational and embedded nature of effective community support (Taylor and Leonard, 2002).

Moreover, the commissioning climate increasingly favours larger providers with the capacity to absorb bureaucratic demands, even when they lack deep cultural competence or local embeddedness (Rumbul, 2013). In this environment, smaller community organisations—often the most trusted and effective with supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups—risk being monopolised out of the market.

Against this backdrop, supporting BAME families of prisoners requires recognising and addressing the structural pressures placed upon community organisations. Strengthening independent, culturally competent advocacy and service delivery must involve not only resourcing these organisations adequately but also protecting them within an increasingly marketised social welfare landscape.

# WHY DO BAME FAMILIES OF PRISONERS NEED ADVOCACY SUPPORT?

BAME families of prisoners need advocacy support for a diverse range of circumstances. For example:

## **Disproportionate Impact of Criminal Justice Policies:**

BAME families are more likely to experience harsher policing, sentencing, and detention practices, creating greater emotional, financial, and social strain (Prison Reform Trust, 2024).

## **Systemic Exclusion and Discrimination:**

BAME families often face discrimination when accessing support services, requiring advocacy to challenge inequitable treatment (Lammy, 2017).

## **Cultural and Language Barriers:**

Mainstream support services may not be culturally sensitive or linguistically accessible, leaving BAME families isolated without tailored assistance (Jones et al., 2013).

## **Stigma and Shame:**

Having a family member in prison can carry stigmatisation, particularly in some cultural communities, making it harder to seek help without advocacy that ensures respectful, non-judgemental support.

## **Navigating Complex Systems:**

The criminal justice system is difficult to navigate, especially for those unfamiliar with its bureaucratic processes or lacking understanding and knowledge — advocacy ensures families' rights and needs are understood and met.

## **Emotional Strain:**

Families experience significant emotional distress, often compounded by lack of culturally competent support.



## The role of community organisations in providing advocacy support

Community organisations play a pivotal role in advocacy by bridging the gap between marginalised communities and the services they are trying to access or are currently navigating. Community organisations leverage their embedded presence to both identify and address systemic inequities (IVAR, 2008). Through a combination of direct support and capacity-building, these organisations ensure that advocacy efforts reflect the collective priorities and cultural contexts of the communities they serve (LGA, 2023). Unlike individual advocates, community organisations often weave advocacy into their broader service delivery, enabling multi-layered interventions that span individual casework and strategic partnerships with other public and community organisations to help meet the needs of its clients (IVAR, 2008).

Community organisations' advocacy work is underpinned by a set of guiding principles that ensure it remains effective, inclusive and accountable:

**Capacity Building and Empowerment:** Provide support, resources and guidance to enable individuals and groups to articulate their own concerns and participate directly in their own support provision, leading to feelings of independence and empowerment over time.

**Collective Representation:** Champion the collective issues and concerns of clients through forums, networks and consortia, ensuring that marginalised voices are amplified and heard in policy arenas (IVAR, 2008).

**Accessibility and Inclusion:** Offer free or low-cost services, ensure information and venues are physically, linguistically and culturally accessible, and proactively reach out to hard-to-reach populations.

**Sustained Engagement:** Develop ongoing, trust-based relationships with community members—both one-to-one and collective—regardless of whether advocacy needs persist.

**Strategic Partnership and Networking:** Collaborate with other community organisations and statutory agencies to leverage resources, share knowledge and learnings, influence policy, and avoid duplication of effort.

**Cultural Competence and Contextual Adaptation:** Tailor advocacy methods to local cultural norms and values—recognising, for example, the importance of specific cultural and religious needs in supporting BAME families of prisoners.

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning:** Implement evaluation frameworks to assess outcomes, capture lessons learned and refine advocacy strategies over time (LGA, 2023).

Collectively, these functions enable community organisations to act as both catalysts for immediate change—such as improving service delivery—and architects of longer-term policy reforms, thereby safeguarding the rights and well-being of the groups and communities they support.

## Culturally sensitive approach

A culturally sensitive approach to advocacy recognises and integrates the cultural values, beliefs and linguistic styles of individuals and communities, ensuring that advocacy efforts are respectful, relevant and equitable (Salla et al., 2023). By attending to cultural norms and traditions, community organisations can build the trust necessary for support provision (Danso, 2018). Such sensitivity not only enhances engagement and uptake of services but also helps reduce disparities in outcomes by tailoring interventions to the lived realities of marginalised groups (Salla et al., 2023).

Moreover, culturally competent practices are fundamentally tied to principles of social justice, requiring community organisations to continually challenge systemic oppression for the individuals and groups they support (Danso, 2018). Ultimately, a culturally sensitive approach is essential for delivering advocacy that promotes true equity and empowers communities to claim their rights to access the support they need (Salla et al., 2023).

## Himaya Haven and the BAME Families of Prisoners programme

Himaya Haven CIC is a Birmingham-based community organisation that focuses on supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families with a loved one currently in custody and/or prison.

Himaya Haven provide a range of culturally sensitive services to meet individuals' and family members' needs whilst they progress through the criminal justice system by offering holistic support, advice, guidance, information, coping strategies and access to mainstream service provision. Their overall aim is to advocate on the behalf of families of prisoners from racially minoritised backgrounds by offering a variety of services to support families who have a link with someone in custody and/or prison. Himaya Haven champion their needs and problems, assisting these groups to cope with the anxieties of arrest, sentencing, imprisonment and release; alongside tackling culturally taboo subjects which carry with them stigma, shame and dishonour.

Himaya Haven support families in a few different ways. These include:

- Support with emotional & practical issues
- Provide guidance and information to family members of those in custody and/or prison
- Encourage them to continue functioning as a family, reclaiming a sense of normalcy
- Develop support groups of those in similar circumstances
- Where needed, signpost them to other, relevant organisations
- Mentoring, advocacy and befriending
- One to one support
- Court support and advice
- Information on travel costs

# METHODOLOGY

## Research design

This evaluation utilised a mixed-methods design based on an interrogation of monitoring data collected by Himaya Haven, semi-structured interviews with HH staff and volunteers and wider professional stakeholders, video interviews with Himaya Haven clients, and structured observations of community/engagement events hosted by Himaya Haven.

A mixed-methods design was chosen as it allowed the research team to not only quantitatively measure the scope and scale of impact of Himaya Haven's support provided to BAME families of prisoners but also make sense of the impact of Himaya Haven's work by interviewing HH staff and volunteers, professional stakeholders, and HH clients.

The evaluation was delivered through a multi-stadial research process. It began with a project inception meeting with Himaya Haven to set the foundations. Next, evaluation tools were developed alongside conducting a literature review, which involved a detailed review of the existing academic and additional grey literature on the issues families of prisoners' experience as well as the importance of advocacy support from community organisations. Ethical approval was obtained from Birmingham City University in June 2024. Data collection then took place over six months, involving interviews and observations. Following this, the team analysed both the primary data and monitoring information, as well as sharing preliminary findings at mid-evaluation meetings. A draft report and client videos were produced, culminating in the final report and videos being presented at a dissemination event in May 2025.

**Figure 1 – Evaluation research process**



# METHODOLOGY

## Semi-structured and video interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with HH staff and volunteers, and wider professional stakeholders. A total of 13 interviews were conducted, 6 interviews were with HH staff and volunteers, and 7 interviews were with professional stakeholders who have worked in partnership with Himaya Haven. Semi-structured interviews were used as they allowed for the research team to combine the rigor of a standardised question framework with the flexibility to pursue unexpected, yet meaningful, lines of enquiry, making them ideal for the level of depth needed for the evaluation (Bryman, 2012; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

Furthermore, video interviews were also employed in this evaluation to capture the lived experiences of clients who had received support from Himaya Haven. Eight clients were video interviewed in total, with three more conducted post-data collection and thus not included into the final analysis. Video interviews allowed for the research team to capture non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures, thus enhancing the depth and authenticity of responses (Sullivan, 2012; Salmons, 2015) of their circumstances and appreciation of Himaya Haven's support. Innovatively, the video interviews were not only used as a source of qualitative data but were also produced into YouTube videos, providing a dynamic resource for Himaya Haven to disseminate findings and promote their work. This dual use of video interviews enabled both the collection of rigorous evaluation data and real-world impact (Salmons, 2015).

## Analysis of the semi-structured/video interview data

Semi-structured and video interviews facilitated the collection of rich, personal narratives, allowing HH staff and volunteers, professional stakeholders and clients to articulate their perspectives of the BAME families of prisoners' programme in their own way. Because personal narratives were central to the evaluation of Himaya Haven's families of prisoners' programme, an interpretivist framework was chosen as personal narratives provide deep insight into individuals' subjective meanings and lived experiences (Riessman, 2008: 8).

Thematic analysis was chosen as the method for analysing the semi-structured and video interview data because it offered a flexible yet rigorous approach for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the emergent data collected (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for research aiming to explore marginalised voices, as it allows for detailed examination of participants' experiences while remaining grounded in their own terms (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis aligned with the interpretivist framework chosen by focusing on the meanings participants assign to their experiences (Braun et al., 2016). Its systematic yet adaptable nature made it an appropriate choice for working with diverse narratives

from families of prisoners, as well as HH staff and volunteers, and wider professional stakeholders, ensuring there was depth and coherence in the analytic process.

Both the interview transcripts and video content were subjected to an abductive coding process (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012), whereby thematic patterns in the data were identified by working up from the data collected and working down from existing theories and knowledge around experiences of families of prisoners drawn from the wider academic and grey literatures.

## **Analysis of the monitoring data**

Alongside the semi-structured and video interviews, the evaluation is also informed by a descriptive statistical analysis of 7 years of monitoring data (2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25) collected by Himaya Haven. By employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies this approach allowed for a clear and systematic presentation of the monitoring data, making it easier to understand the experiences and needs of affected families and overall impact of Himaya Haven's service provision. This type of analysis focuses on summarising and categorising the data in a way that highlights central tendencies, variations, and relationships among key variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). A descriptive statistical analysis was particularly useful in identifying common reasons for using Himaya Haven services by clients, most common impacts resultant from service provision, and areas where further support may be most needed. By focusing on the 'what' rather than the 'why,' a descriptive analysis provided valuable insights that informed the evaluation process and the development of recommendations.

# SECTION 1: MEASURING THE SCOPE, SCALE AND EXTENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE BAME FAMILIES OF PRISONERS PROGRAMME

## Social demography and characteristics of need for clients supported

### **Gender**

Support is provided to both males and females, but the majority of those which Himaya Haven have supported have been females. This is demonstrated in Table 1. The overall number of female clients supported has risen from 6 in year one of delivery (2017/18) to 50 in its final year of delivery (2024/25), evidencing a 733% growth in female clients supported. As the programme progressed Himaya Haven has seen a steady increase in the number of male clients needing support. The overall number of men accessing Himaya Haven has risen from 1 in its first year of delivery (2017/18) to 14 in its final year (2024/25), demonstrating a 1300% increase in the number of men now reaching out to Himaya Haven for support.

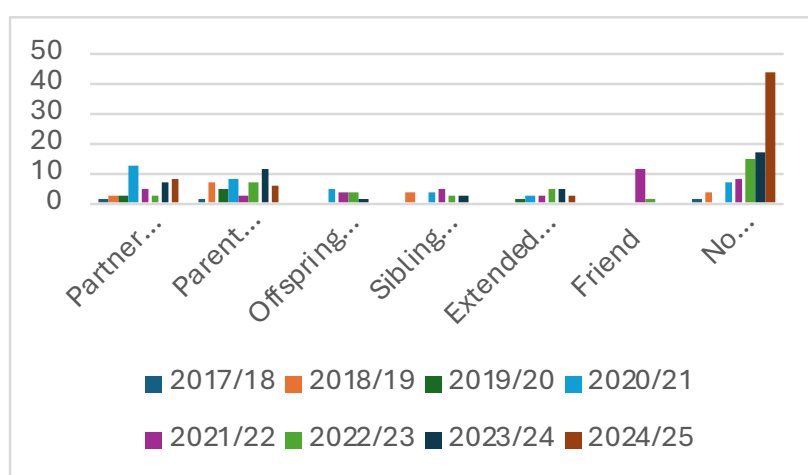


Year/Gender	Male	Female
2017/18	1	6
2018/19	9	23
2019/20	1	22
2020/21	6	39
2021/22	6	30
2022/23	9	39
2023/24	14	33
2024/25	14	50

**Table 1: Breakdown of clients by gender**

#### Client relationship to offender/person at risk of offending

Figure 2 shows the client relationship to the offender/person at risk of offending. The data indicates the individuals most likely to access Himaya Haven's services tended to be a parent or partner of the offender. Parents and partners made up most of the total number of people accessing Himaya Haven between 2017/18 to 2024/25. Out of the number of parents or partners who accessed the service, most of them tended to be female (79.76% of the total number of individuals within this category).



**Figure 2 – Client relationship to offender/person at risk of offending**

This data around client's relationship to the offender/person at risk of offending is supported through the discussions had with Himaya Haven staff. During the interviews with Himaya Haven staff, staff spoke about how women were their main client base, with many being partners or mothers of their loved one currently in the criminal justice system:

*...But from what I've seen, it is mainly mothers that are the main group (HH apprentice)*

*A lot of our clients are female because it's the male that's been imprisoned, whether it's the husband, it's their brother, (HH co-director/website and social media manager).*

Himaya Haven staff acknowledged that the reason why most of their clients were women was due to 'traditional' family dynamics and gender roles upheld by members of the community in which Himaya Haven mostly served: -

*We find in these communities the male is mainly the breadwinner. They still uphold the traditional family dynamics but a lot in that case they either were not working, or they're not educated as certain higher level, if you like, so they are lacking confidence and sometimes the knowledge of what to do to now survive (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager).*

The support given to this group of clients, therefore, could be considered a gateway to building confidence and capabilities, empowering them to have greater control and understanding of their experience and reduce the emotional and practical burden of having a loved one imprisoned: -

*I think one of the things is anyone who might have support, the emphasis is on helping them gain confidence in their own abilities and flourish because, for example, where we've had women come to us, whether it's a mother or wife for example, and they are doing so much, they're carrying so much responsibility and helping ensure the entire family for how many years and go through quite a lot, it can be traumatic experience (ex-HH employee)*

These discussions concerning the practical and emotional burden faced by female clients are echoed in the wider academic literature (e., see Enos, 2001; Gurusami, 2019; Campos, 2016; Thomas, 2023) around motherwork and imprisonment. Ruddick (1980) describes motherwork as the provision of care, preservative love, the protection of children and all the physical and emotional responsibilities which go into doing such tasks. Barg (2001) argues that motherwork is largely carried out by women and indicates that the reason women do motherwork is because they have been assigned to do it by dominating social and cultural factors.

The concept of motherwork can help explain the practical and emotional burden that clients have expressed to Himaya Haven staff and how this has fallen heavily onto female members of the family. Not only this, but because a large proportion of female clients came from BAME backgrounds, their experiences of motherwork were perhaps expressed more strongly. This is because experiences of mothering have been shown to be heavily connected to the concerns and needs of racial ethnic communities (Hill Collins, 2016).

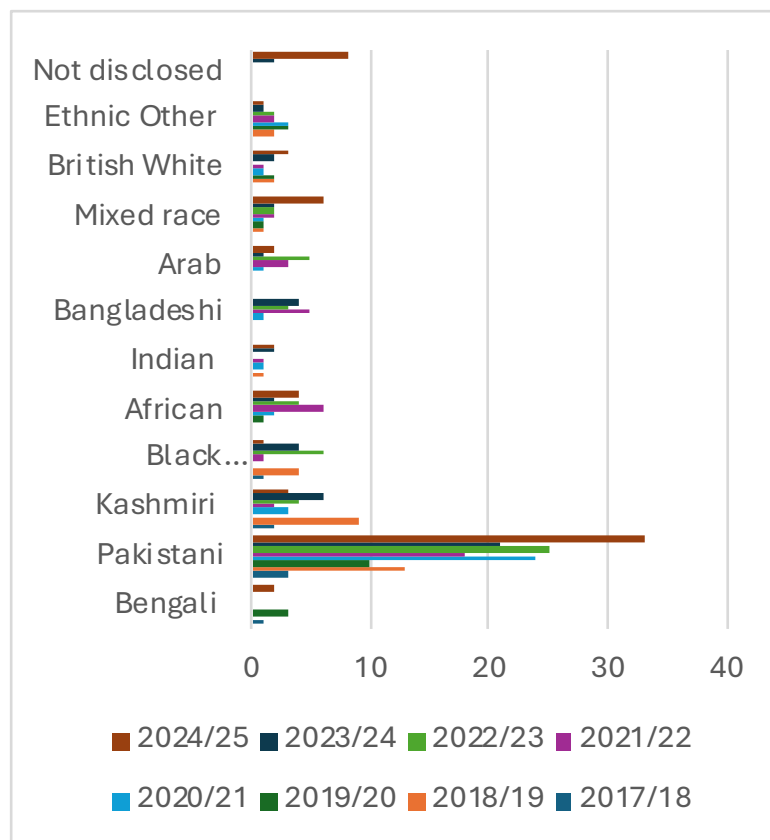
## Ethnicity

Whilst Himaya Haven provides support to all families with a loved one currently within the criminal justice system, most of the families they support come from diverse, BAME backgrounds and communities: -

*We're saying supporting BAME families, but we do say we don't exclude anyone. So, we've had one, which was a Brazilian. We picked up [who were] Egyptian, Filipino, and Senegalese, that was the Africa side. So, we've had a few one-off clients of that community (HH Co-Director).*

*We're mainly working with the BAME community, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities, and that is our main focus, most of our clients from this last year I would say are Pakistani, Indian, and Caribbean-African heritage, but we do occasionally get clients that are...I remember we had a Russian one, a Kurdish one, they all need someone to talk to and someone who will understand the way their community works, and I think that's what Himaya Haven is about, we'll help anybody that needs it but I feel like for the BAME community they don't have many services that will understand how they feel on a personal level. I think we kind of do that with them. (HH Administrator)*

Figure 2 shows the largest ethnic group to access support were from Pakistani heritage. When compared to clients from other ethnic backgrounds, the data clearly demonstrates that the majority of clients that Himaya Haven supports are predominately South Asian, with 18 identifying as Kashmiri, 5 Bengali, 6 Indian, and 13 as Bangladeshi.



### Figure 3 – Ethnicity of clients

Himaya Haven staff and volunteers confirmed the BAME Families of Prisoners programme's monitoring data on ethnicity, outlining the bulk of clients they supported came from Pakistani and Kashmiri backgrounds: -

*[T]he majority [of Himaya Haven's client's] are from the South Asian and particularly the Pakistani and Kashmiri community (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager)*

*[Himaya Haven's clients] can vary year to year, primarily is Pakistani Kashmiri. (Former HH employee)*

Himaya Haven staff also identified the main reason for supporting predominately South Asian families was because of where the organisation was located in Birmingham: -

*A lot of our families are from a Kashmiri-Pakistani background, and I think it's because where we sit as well, in Birmingham, in the area that we are, it's predominantly Asian. (HH Co-Director)*

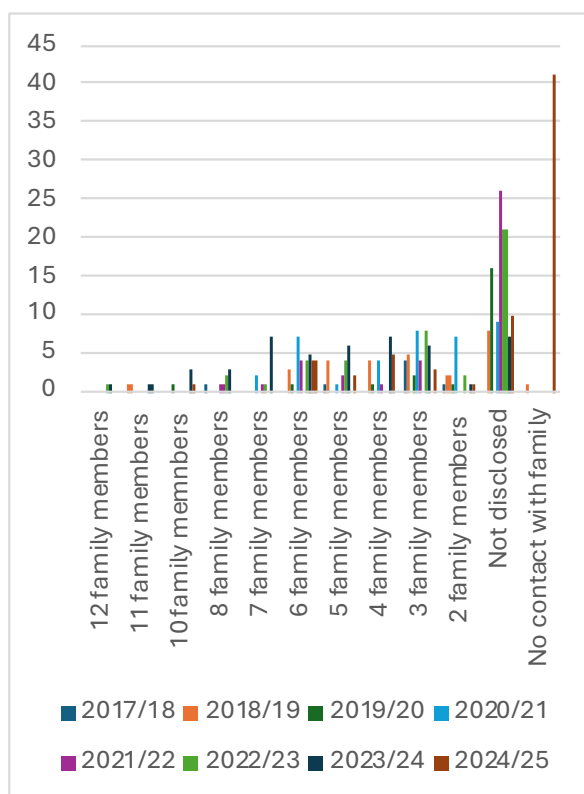
*So in the surrounding areas, also, they tend to be [from] Pakistani backgrounds and some are you know from Kashmiri backgrounds and so on... (HH Director Treasurer).*

Importance of geographical area was also something which was picked up during the interviews with professional stakeholders. Because Himaya Haven is located within a culturally diverse area of Birmingham, this meant having a large population of a range of different communities to support: -

*So, where we're situated in Birmingham, it's a huge diverse community - particularly communities from South Asian communities, from the Somali communities, people from different parts of Africa, we've got people from Northern Ethiopia. So we've got Sparkbrook, where Himaya Haven is based - also around the same area, Balsall Heath, Sparkbrook, Sparkhill - that area is very culturally diverse in terms of different communities. So yeah, it's a huge population of different communities. (Professional stakeholder)*

### Impact on family members

Figure 4 indicates the extent and far-reaching impact of a person being arrested and imprisoned has on the wider family. The monitoring data demonstrates that each offender has on average impacted 3-6 family members. The highest number of family members impacted as reported by clients (3) is 10, which was during the 2023/24 year of programme delivery.



### Referrals

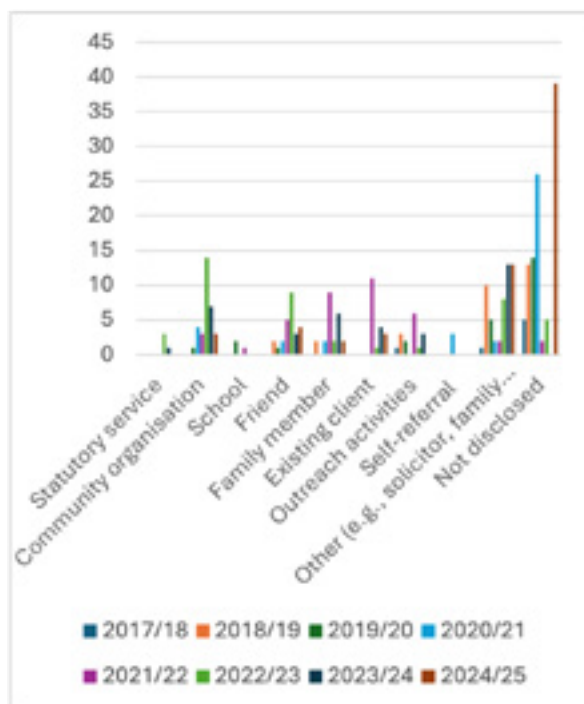
The monitoring data showed that clients accessing Himaya Haven's service were commonly referred by nine pathways. These were: statutory services, community organisations, school, friend, family member, by existing clients, through outreach events and activities, and other (e.g., solicitor, family support worker etc.).

Interestingly, at the inception of service delivery and support, clients were referred to Himaya Haven through either their family support worker or because of being given a leaflet or attending an event or workshop hosted by Himaya Haven as part of their outreach work.

As the BAME Families of Prisoners programme grew, many of the clients were referred to Himaya Haven through either a friend, family member or existing clients. This demonstrates the ability of Himaya Haven to provide impactful and meaningful support to individuals and families within their local community and its influence on information sharing about the organisation and the support services they provide from and between residents in the local community.

Spencer (1993) reveals a connection between the delivery of meaningful service provision by community organisations and its implications on creating active information sharing among clients to the wider community. He maintains such process leads to the spontaneous flow of information about the organisation and its services between residents in a social context, facilitating an informal community-based information network and referral system between clients, residents and the community organisation which offers support. Based on the monitoring data analysed this is what Himaya Haven have done exceptionally well.

What was striking also in the monitoring data was the growth of referrals from wider community organisations and the limited support from statutory services to refer clients to Himaya Haven.



**Figure 5 – Referral Pathways**

Himaya Haven staff have tried to facilitate referral partnerships with statutory services such as the police, but this has not been as successful as their partnerships with other community organisations: -

*Occasionally with the police, but we do attend meetings, but our work has not really benefited either the police or us, because they have the first point of contact with the person they arrest or do any warrants or anything, probably we've asked them to do a referral, but that's not got anywhere – we tried everything for the last three years and kind of gave up now with that one. It's not worked...But we've tried, we've sat down, we've come up with an idea that this is the way we'd like them to support, and maybe it's paperwork and the time that they're constrained to, so we just left it at that. (HH Co-Director)*

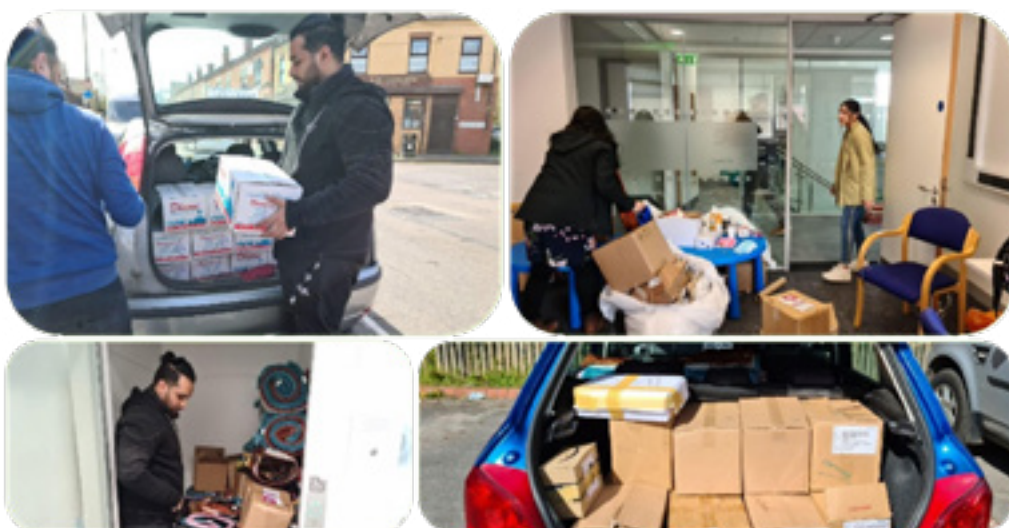


One professional stakeholder interviewed maintained the reason why they have supported, and continued to support, Himaya Haven is that they had a shared understanding around the needs of her client's and theirs: -

*We find that with Himaya Haven, they've got a really good understanding of DV as well as working with prisoners, which is absolutely essential because if you had a generic organisation, who's got no understanding, they are gonna say, "OK, they're going to treat that person like somebody who's going through... [like] a criminal." Whereas with Himaya Haven, they have a good understanding that a lot of the perpetrators will deliberately label people. For example, we had a case where a woman was ringing us to report domestic abuse to us. The husband, unknown to her, had a camera in the house, so he found out she was about to leave so he rings up the police and said she's abusing the children. She was initially taken in for questioning. We worked with Himaya Haven to explain to the police, that we think that this was done deliberately. We presented the evidence, jointly working.... There was a lot of challenges, and we found that working with Himaya Haven, we were able to work with the police and challenge that. And she wasn't charged in the end, so again... and then we've had referrals from Himaya Haven where they've referred women where we've managed to get them into a refuge. (Professional stakeholder)*

Another highlighted the recognition in complexity of need for clients and the necessity to partner with similar community organisations to share knowledge and resources: -

*There is collaboration because a lot of our service users do have, as you know, lots of complex issues going on in their life, particularly around drugs. And the families are going to have to cope with how to deal with these matters. So that's one element - providing education, awareness of where people can get help. Families suffered from trauma as a result of having a drug addict in the house. They need additional support. Also, when their loved ones go into prison, particularly people from diverse communities - if their parents can't speak English - they don't know how to arrange simple things, like visits or how to send them money so that they can phone their loved ones. Just registering with the prison to send in their ID to arrange visits and things like that. So all that paperwork and that process is really complex for some of our diverse communities, and that's where Himaya Haven come into play. They basically do that element of that work for us. (Professional stakeholder)*



Similarly, having a mutual, community-based approach to working with BAME clients was another important aspect to developing a partnership between organisations: -

*We've always crossed-over on community-based models. I know we were very fortunate where [HH Co-Director] and some of our other colleagues came to - not just the report that we launched when I was working for [professional stakeholder organisation], but they also came over to our 2019 report - which documented our model of re-entry here in [northern English town] and what were the nuances of that - Why did we set up in a mainstream community centre rather than, say, an exclusive women's centre? It was a mainstream community centre [and that] cushioned many of the women to access the services. I think some of the concerns at the time were if women were to exclusively go into a women's centre, it may call out the fact that either they're a prison lever or, if it's a mainstream centre, women were saying "well, we don't have the agency to go from a largely South Asian or black community to then go to a white, mainstream women's centre." (Professional stakeholder)*

## Area of need

Table 2 demonstrates that the areas of need for clients accessing Himaya Haven. The areas of need in which Himaya Haven has supported clients can be broken down into three distinct categories. These are: general support (involving, guidance, one-to-one support and signposting of information and external services), CJS support (involving support to access prison, court and probation services) and social support (involving, emotional support, support around housing, and support in applying for benefits and other forms of welfare). Early on the most common need that clients came to Himaya Haven to seek support and assistance for was access CJS services and general support. However, in recent years more and more clients have come to Himaya Haven in search of social support.

Area of need	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25
General support (e.g., guidance, signposting etc.)	3	10	6	14	15	17	15	14
CJS support (e.g., access to prisons, courts and probation services)	4	20	15	10	10	5	13	2
Social support (e.g., emotional support, housing, benefits)	0	0	0	8	16	20	11	47

## One-off/ongoing client status

Table 3 shows the nature of clients support needs by duration. This monitoring data indicates whether the client needed either short-term, one-off support or longer-term ongoing support. As evidenced in the table below, most clients had complex needs which required ongoing support in comparison to those with shorter-term needs.

Client status	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25
One-off	0	3	1	3	47	22	5	0
Ongoing	7	15	18	37	2	9	45	16

## The role of independent (issue-based) advocacy and its importance

The central role of the support offered by Himaya Haven is to advocate for, and provide advocacy to, different individuals and families who currently have a loved one within the criminal justice system. What is common amongst the data presented below is the recognition that the type of advocacy Himaya Haven provides was independent (issue-based) advocacy. Independent (issue-based) advocacy is short- or long-term support whereby an individual advocate or community organisation supports an individual or group to represent their own interests or represents the views of an individual or group if the person is unable to do so. Independent (issue-based) advocacy does this by working with the individual or group impacted to help address specific issues and provide information concerning their current circumstances (Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, 2024). The following extracts taken from interviews with both Co-Directors of Himaya Haven identify independent (issue-based) advocacy as playing a key role in the work they do in assisting families of prisoners to navigate the criminal justice system and everyday needs of being a family member of having a loved one in prison: -

*We support families and individuals who have got either someone that's been arrested, in custody or in prison. We provide them with emotional and practical support, advice and guidance. It could be someone who has had someone in prison before or it could be a totally new experience, and they've come to us [because] they need support. If [their loved one] has just been arrested, if they don't know of a solicitor, we can help provide them with one and recommend ones that we've worked with before. We can tell them the process of the criminal justice system. For example, if it's an arrest now what's going to happen next, is there police-sentencing, report, trial? There will be a court date. There might be a trial if they not plead guilty... (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager)*

*Himaya Haven work with families of loved ones in prisons. We offer them emotional and practical support. It could be anything, depending on when they call, and when we speak to them, and we help them to navigate the criminal justice system, and what their needs are. We do bespoke service to whatever their needs are. It could be simply just filling in a form for them, it could be making a phone call to find out*

*which prison, if we know where it is, and we have the prison number, we can locate the prisoner and find out about his health and wellbeing. [We can] then relate the information back to the families. It could be they want to send clothes, money, they want to visit, [or know] how to book a visit. So, all those kinds of things we try to help and support them with. (HH Co-Director).*

One of the most important roles of independent (issue-based) advocacy identified by Himaya Haven staff was to help provide clients with an understanding of the process of accessing the criminal justice system, to maintain contact with their loved one, and providing support where need is identified, to help ensure they are able to deal with the burden of having a loved one in prison: -

*Depending on their understanding and what they need to know, we can explain the criminal justice system. For example, going to court, if they don't have anyone around them to go with them, we offer that service when it's needed. We also provide information on travel costs. A lot of people don't know if they're on benefits and they go to visit a prison and it's quite far for them, they can get money and the money that they've spent, there's potential that they can get back to help them and alleviate the financial pressures. A lot of people don't know that. That's one of the big things that we always make sure we mention. (HH Co-Director)*

A former Himaya Haven employee also identified another important aspect of independent (issue-based) advocacy was to act as an intermediary for clients when they are not supported by the criminal justice system in the way they had expected or need help in contacting a specific department within a prison: -

*And also sometimes being an intermediary because sometimes when families don't get the response that they want from a prison that they're trying to contact, or if they don't know where to go and they're going from, you know, the general helpline to department to department, and then back to the general helpline of the prison, we try and get them through. (Former HH employee).*

The data extract below by one of Himaya Haven's Co-Directors draws attention to examples of the ways independent (issue-based) advocacy has been used to successfully support individuals and families: -

*For example, a lot of our clients are in the same boat where their husband was working so now their household income has disappeared. She didn't know how to apply for benefits, so we helped her [...] we referred her to another organisation in Birmingham that's actually not too far from us and they're amazing at benefit forms and housing forms and all that stuff [...] we may have referred her to that organisation. She had no issues with her child in that sense, but kind of...what's that word? Like communicating with the school to let them know what's going on. Any issue that she had in that sense we were able to communicate for her. Also, I remember we provided her with food hampers as well [...] our family engagement worker may have helped her with a CV. I'm not too sure on that one, but we have done that for other clients. If they do decide they want to work and they don't have a CV, we'll help them with that as well.*

It was also recognised that clients valued being listened to and having someone they could vent to about their situation: -

*Some of them just need to vent, this is happening, who do I need to speak to, support for their family... (HH Apprentice).*

Listening was considered crucial to Himaya Haven's wider approach to supporting clients:

*I think mostly a listening ear [...] We do get clients who tell us about what their brother's going through. We listen out for clues where we can step in and help. So if they say, oh, I've got problems paying the bills...we step in and guide them. You know, let's write them this letter on your behalf, or let's do this on your behalf. (HH Director Treasurer)*

The wider academic literature (see e.g., Back, 2007) observes that through the act and art of listening, community organisations can learn the histories and narratives of the individuals they support, leading to the co-construction of ideas that could aid how they support clients and deepen their own understanding of which approaches work best when supporting marginalised and vulnerable groups and communities (Stanley and Gilzene, 2023).

Overall, the main purpose of supporting clients through independent (issue-based) advocacy was to foster empowerment and encourage independence in clients so they can take control over their current situation by learning how to navigate the criminal justice system independently and help them return their lives back to some sort of normalcy: -

*Her husband was imprisoned and it's a similar scenario that I mentioned of how he was the breadwinner. [He was] the driver [and] he'd take her shopping. He was doing everything, providing and all that stuff, and now he was in prison, and she didn't know what to do. Throughout support across the years - before she didn't even know how to use the bus, how to get from one area to another - [n]ow she can navigate all across Birmingham. She works so she provides for herself and her son. She's very confident. She can speak English as well. When they come to us, she still prefers to speak Mirpuri, but she's not unable to speak English and you can see that she's a whole different woman now. She's so independent. It's impressive that all the work that she's put in herself, where she was, how she was and how she was kind of scared to do things, she's now a completely different woman and it's just amazing to see. That's what we kind of strive for. When our clients come to us, whether they're new or long-[term] clients, we want them to be at that position. (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager).*

However, while independent (issue-based) advocacy was useful in facilitating empowerment, independence and overall improvement in the everyday lives of clients within their new lived realities, it was considered practically and emotionally intensive for Himaya Haven staff. This was because clients often lacked the understanding of what Himaya Haven could and could not do as a community organisation: -

*Generally, we find that clients are pleased. But we have had instances where clients can get really frustrated and angry with us that we don't deal with everything. So when we sign post them on, they're not always happy about that, but then we haven't got the skills and expertise that another organisation might have. Just give you an example, the benefit forms, they're about a quarter of an inch thick, very tedious. We haven't got the time, but we know there's organisations*



*out there who do this as a full-time job. So, we say, go there and get your form filled in there. I think we have had a couple of unhappy clients as well, and we can't fix every problem. That's what clients also need to understand. We're here to support you and signpost you and guide you, but we can't do everything (HH Director Treasurer).*

*Based on the one of that family that I'm supporting, with her it was a lot of emotional support. So, she'd phone, and she'd be crying and saying that they're not listening because she would ring the prison service because she was quite articulate. So, she didn't have language issues, but she kept on ringing and obviously it was too stressful. Then the prison service, they don't really take any notice of you if you keep on ringing. They feel like it's badgering. So, I would have to constantly say to her that, look, we'll deal with it. Sometimes they'll ask you things that you can't do, but they don't understand that we're not a legal organisation. We're just offering support and guidance, advocacy work for them. There are only certain limits that we can do, but sometimes she used to feel that we can ring the prison and demand things for her, but you can't do that. So, we have to be really careful. We have to tell them straight what we can do and what we can't do. We have to make that clear to them. (HH Co-Director).*

## **Food hampers and Ramadan prisoner welfare packs**

As part of Himaya Haven's wider advocacy work, they have worked in partnership with different community and religious stakeholders to provide both Ramadan welfare packs to prisoners and food hampers to the families of prisoners in the community. The delivery of food hampers and the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs allowed Himaya Haven to increase their reach to families affected by having a loved one in prison as well as widen the knowledge of the support they offer to local communities through direct engagement.



The data identified that the delivery of food hampers was necessitated by the wider political climate of reduced state support for local communities and rising social and food-based inequalities: -



*[I]n 2024, the amount of food aid that's needed and the amount of food banks have had that have had to come back into circulation is extremely problematic. And it raises fundamental questions about what is happening structurally in regards to policy, the economy and what the government and local Council are doing, people from all walks of life are finding themselves needing food aid. (Former HH employee)*

Food hampers, therefore, were considered something of an ethical duty, which sat outside the remit of the organisation's approach to advocacy work, but something staff and volunteers wanted to do to support local communities in times of rising inequality and limited local authority funding. The Co-Directors shared their experience of the delivery of the food hampers, its overall practical and emotional cost to staff and volunteers and the reasons why they felt they needed to keep providing such support: -

*[W]e also did food hampers. It's not in our remit to do, but if I can get funding in and I know it's there and it's available, I will bring the funding to give the food hampers. But it's hard work for us. We don't benefit anything. They don't give you any costing for the running of it, for the office costs or anything. They just give you the money to deliver the food hampers to the family. So, if you'll be delivering, it'll be our petrol, it'll be our cars. We don't get any of that. (HH Co-Director)*

*[W]e do it because we know our families are going to benefit. So, we had a family who said that she only had two potatoes left in her cupboard. If we didn't provide that food hamper, she didn't know where her next meal was going to come from. She's a working family. She works. But as we were talking about it in one of the trainings, that we're working, our salaries are staying the same. But the cost of living has gone up, mortgages have gone up, rents have gone up, everything. So, people who are working are struggling as well. It doesn't mean you have to be on benefits to struggle. Generally, people are struggling. So, for me, like the other day, the council sent us an email that we got – they're doing the last budget before – they're going to spend this last bit of money and they're giving out £4,000 to people because we've already done it, they're offering it to us again. We know it's short notice. We've got to spend the money by September, and (unclear 39.23) wasn't in that day. I said to [HH administrator], we said, we're not going to do it again. Should we do it? Should we not? Should we wait for Zobia, shall we do it? We were thinking about £4,000, should we or should we not do it? But then these kinds of things do put you off sometimes because it's basically hard labour for nothing. But nothing for the organisation, but it is for the families. So, I do it for the families. For their benefit. They're probably praying for us and given us blessings, so that's probably worth it. (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager)*

The delivery of the food hampers was coordinated through establishing informal social networks consisting of different community and religious stakeholders. Such informal social networks between Himaya Haven and partner organisations actively working within the local community created opportunities for sharing the organisational burden of delivery as well as allowing for the referral of clients between organisations dependent on the availability of food hampers: -

*[W]e will get everything, we'll pack it and give it to them and then if any further ones will come up, like the local Mosques, whatever their local Mosque is, [and] call them. [Name] does know a lot of people in the community so she'll give them a call and they can help them out. I think like the ones that provide foodbanks, once our foodbank is over and even if our clients or just someone comes who needs help, we will refer them to them, so they can get that support that they need regarding to food (HH Director Treasurer).*

*[T]his is the magical collaboration because of the issues going on, such as in Birmingham. Networks have been created like the food justice network. If we have an emergency services and they say they need an urgent food pack, once we've used the funding for that month or we don't have funding, we can reach out to another organization. (Former HH employee).*

The data suggests for clients who had received a food hamper, they had an overwhelmingly positive impact (see Appendix B for client comments regarding food hampers): -

*I remember the last feedback we did was a couple of months ago and we had a client, she rang and she was really upset and crying and she said that since it was the school holidays her kids hadn't eaten properly because she gets free meals from school and she hadn't been feeding her kids properly because she had nothing to offer and her cupboards were empty and everything. [T]he positive impact [of the food hampers] there was that we were able to give her, it was one box per family, but we had enough funding and we bought a lot of food and we were able to give her two boxes of everything, so she'd be able to feed her family and I think that really did help her out. (HH Administrator).*

Despite such positive work and impact around the food hampers, a volunteer at Himaya Haven maintained that the organisation could push them out to more families across the city, beyond existing clients, if there were more temporary staff and volunteers: -

*I think what could be improved is the food bank. We help a lot of people but it's a small team and there's four of us and I think the last [time], the second to last [time] there was a lot of volunteers, some who are able to push it out to further families and not just our clientele which we usually do every year. I think we did forty plus and we usually only do around thirty-ish, so we were able to push it out a lot more. I think with the foodbank we just need more temporary or seasonal staff, just for the foodbank itself so we can push it out to more families.*

Overall, Himaya Haven received £13,000 from Birmingham City Council and managed to distribute **66 essential food packs** to families in need. In 2020, they also were able to provide **30 Christmas hampers** to families most in need. While funding enabled Himaya Haven to provide food hampers to families, HH staff were often expected to do this out of their own time, with no money given for administration.

The Ramadan Prisoner Welfare Packs provided similar support to the food hampers, but for those currently serving prison sentences. The Ramadan prisoner welfare packs started during the Covid-19 lockdown and have since become an independent project under the wider remit of the BAME families of prisoners' programme. The idea behind the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs was to support Muslim prisoners, many of whom had family within the local community which Himaya Haven were supporting, by offering religious resources that could maintain contact with their community and family as well as facilitate a positive influence on desistance. As of 2024, Himaya Haven have distributed Ramadan prisoner welfare packs to 11 prisons across the West Midlands: -

*In our early days we were doing a lot of workshops and coffee mornings for the community, both raising awareness and for those who wanted to attend who were impacted by imprisonment. I think that's a lot of what we do. The past four years now since COVID we've introduced...I'd say it's an independent project; it's not funded by anyone, it's public donations. It's called the Ramadan Prisoner Welfare Packs project, so it's where we provide Muslim prisoners in the West Midlands with some literature, prayer mats, Qurans all for the month of Ramadan. That's been doing really well. At first, we thought it would just be one prison, but as of this April in 2024 we have supported I think it's 11 prisons. I think one was included in a mental health unit (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager).*

Table 4 below demonstrates the delivery of the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs by Himaya Haven has grown significantly in both scope and impact since its inception 2021, supporting Muslim prisoners during the holy month of Ramadan to ensure they could observe Ramadan with dignity and spiritual connection. Between 2021 and 2025, Himaya Haven has delivered five years of Ramadan prisoner welfare packs and the initiative has expanded from 8 prisons to 12, reaching across the West Midlands (including, HMP Birmingham, Oakwood, Brinsford, Featherstone, Hewell, Stafford, Stoke Heath, Swinfen Hall, Dovegate, Sudbury, Rye Hill, Long Lartin, Drake Hall and one secure unit) and into South Yorkshire (HMP Moorland). Over this period, 7,944 male prisoners received essential religious items such as prayer mats and dates, and other essentials. In addition, 78 female prisoners were supported with tailored packs including abayas, prayer mats, and other necessary items. This sustained and expanding outreach highlights Himaya Haven’s deep commitment to prisoner welfare and culturally appropriate support.

Year of delivery	Number of prisons	Male prisoners supports	Female prisoner supports
2021	8 across the West Midlands	1298	15
2022	3 prisons across the West Midlands	600	15
2023	7 across the West Midlands	1435	0
2024	11 across the West Midlands	2183	15
2025	12 across the West Midlands and South Yorkshire	2428	33

**Table 4 - Ramadan prisoner welfare packs**

For two years, Himaya Haven also provided Eid Packs to three prisons across the West Midlands (HMP Stoke Heath, Swinfen Hall, and Birmingham). Like the food hampers, the distribution and coordination of the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs was maintained through informal social networks. This was highlighted in the interview with a Chaplain Imam who denoted links between prison and the community were crucial to facilitating pathways for successful desistance for Muslim prisoners.



Former Himaya Haven employee provided high praise towards the informal networks between the chaplaincy team in a local Birmingham prison and Himaya Haven, noting: -

*The Ramadan project is so successful because of the engagement and support of the chaplaincy teams as well within the prisons we work with.*

An example of how informal social networks were used to distribute the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs is highlighted by one professional stakeholder: -

*[I]t simply a case that I'd heard of what they were doing. And they'd mentioned that from time to time they needed help with transport. At the time I happened to have an old Land Rover, so I just said to Razia one day "would you like some help?" And she said "yes, please." And so, I went round, and we filled [three] vehicle up. And I remember there were three vehicles full that day - mine and another. And there were probably about six of us all together, 3 in mine and 3 in theirs, and we took the Ramadan parcels, packed them from the place in Sparkhill and took them up to....[prison].*

Another professional stakeholder spoke about witnessing the impact the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs had on prisoners: -

*You know, so I've obviously been engaged in the Ramadan parcel delivery, and I've seen the impact that has on prisoners - just at one level, people care about them, right? At another level, what they're supplied with, the tools to enable them to practise their faith whilst in prison.*

**The overall cost** of delivery for the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs was **£6,000 per year**, with the two years of Eid packs being **£2,500 per year**. All prisoner welfare packs were made by donations from family, friends, sponsors, and communities, and have provided a total **£35,000** worth of resources to Muslim prisoners across the West Midlands and one South Yorkshire prison. The reception to the delivery of the Ramadan prisoner welfare packs and Eid packs has been positive, with Chaplaincy teams and prisoners across all prisons supported writing to Himaya Haven expressing their gratitude (see Appendix B).

## Household Support Fund

Another aspect of the support Himaya Haven provides to clients is helping them complete applications for the Household Support Fund (HSF). HSF is a central government programme which started in 2021 and is due to end in 2026. HSF allocates funding to local authorities in England to help vulnerable households struggling with the rising cost of living. Each successful applicant is awarded £200 to help with essential costs (e.g., housing, food and water, energy costs and so on). Overall, Himaya Haven supported **472** households, helping them access a total of **£94,400** through the HSF.

In addition to supporting applications for the HSF, Himaya Haven have also helped families by: -

- Supporting **212 residents** across Birmingham to receive **£36,166.00** in energy credit vouchers via the HACT Fuel Fund, helping them stay warm and safe during challenging times.
- Distributing Winter Warm Packs to over **200 families** receive, providing essential items to help them through the colder months, **totalling £5000.00**

Through the HSF, HACT Fuel Fund and Winter Warm Packs, Himaya Haven has managed bring a **total of £135,419** into Birmingham to support BAME families facing hardship and difficult situations. However, The HACT Fuel Fund became too overwhelming and so Himaya Haven had to stop as it was impacting their core service delivery, with at least 80 calls daily and then vouchers to be downloaded and sent to the clients and the wider community. There was no cost for HH staffing. Funding schemes such as the HACT Fuel Fund, therefore, need to take into consideration the cost it puts on small community organisations.

Community events and wider outreach activities were core to Himaya Haven's advocacy strategy as part of the BAME Families of Prisoners programme. It was acknowledged that the purpose of the was to facilitate a space which brought families together and associate with other families going through similar situations. A volunteer working at Himaya Haven indicated this was important for BAME groups as there does not tend to be a lot of services that understand BAME families' experiences of shame, stigma and isolation from the wider community that comes from having a loved one in prison. played a crucial role, therefore, in reducing stigma and isolation by bringing families together: -

*[M]ost of our clients are from the BAME community and I feel like they know that there's not a lot of services out there for them that can understand how they feel and how it is for the community, because some people do feel ashamed, especially the Pakistani community. I do know they'll shame you...and people won't speak about stuff, a lot of our clients they don't...their son in law is going to prison and they won't tell the rest of their family members at all. So, no one knows what's going on and once they find out (unclear 06:23), that's why we hold these like events and stuff so they can come, and they can be surrounded by people who think and have been through the same things as them.*



The role of bringing families together and fostering positive connections, away from the often-negative routine(s) of daily life, and sense of community was also mentioned by Himaya Haven's apprentice: -

*We host these events for the community, so before it's family and friends, the clients overall, just to, like, get people to connect and kind of like, forget about negativity. I know in August especially since it's school holidays, a lot of families, for example, that are struggling, or they can't afford stuff, or they're going through their own, like mental or physical health battles. So it's kind of like a thing to just get everyone outside, get everyone with their kids. That's why we let adults get involved too. It's a community thing.*

Speaking to one of Himaya Haven's Co-Directors, they maintained the were welcoming and open to the wider community. Establishing friendships and creating a supportive atmosphere were cited as the main reasons for opening up the community events: -

*We've always done it. We tell our clients you're more than welcome and it's not specific to prisoner families. I think now that's something that potentially we could do and do it openly. I feel like why should they lose out on potential friendships and having that experience of encouraging one another.*

Feelings of shame and stigma were highlighted as key motives in apprehension in engaging with . However, as an apprentice from Himaya Haven articulates below, once families acknowledge the organisation is not here to judge them, they tend to open up more and begin engaging with wider activities: -

*I think when it comes to clients engaging and not engaging, I think some of them, it's a fear thing. It can be hard to come out and say, I have someone in prison, and this is how I feel, and this is what they've done. Sometimes it can be like a really deep thing. Obviously, as a mother or wife, even if it's a deep thing, you still going to feel that hurt that they've been taken away from you. So I think some of them, they need a push at first, they don't just come out right away and say everything, they kind of like ease into it, because they never know how you might react. Even though we are an organisation that helps prisoners, it could be the case they feel like we judge them. So I think it's like a fear thing. They never know because some of them have been neglected by family. For example, their family doesn't want to associate with them anymore, because in their eyes, they've done something bad. And I've heard, obviously, it's mainly south Asian families. And I do know the South Asian community can be kind of like straight to those kind of things, like, reputation, it's kind of like pushing on your family or something like that. So they don't have anyone to turn to, and it might be as easy, okay, like, why don't you talk to your friends and family that sometimes you might hear last resort, so we do our best to make sure that we're not here to judge. We're not here to tell them what to do. We're here for them to tell us how they feel and give them advice on what to do, and I think after that, that's what makes them actually want to co-operate and communicate more.*

Over 2024/25 Himaya Haven hosted a range of . Table 5 gives an overview of the number and types of community events that Himaya Haven delivered throughout the year: -

**Table 5 – List of community events and outreach activities.**

Date	Event
7th August 2024	Go Ape
14th August 2024	Horse Riding Day 1
15th August 2024	Horse Riding Day 2
20th August 2024	Ackers Event Day 1
22nd August 2024	Ackers Event Day 2
29th October 2024	Rush Event
27th December 2024	Ice Skating Event

All these were funded through multiple schemes. The Go Ape and Ackers event in July were funded through Cash4Clubs, and the horse riding events, Ackers events in August and the Rush event in October were funded through Sports England, **totalling £17,000**. The monitoring data collected through the evaluation indicated a total of 147 parents and young people participated in these events. The social demography of participants who attended these events revealed: 91 U18s attended the most in comparison to 14 (18-24yos), 34 (25-49yos), and 2 (50-64yos). Most participants came from South Asian backgrounds (103 participants out of 187) and most participants tended to be female (133) compared to males (44).



They were overall positively well received, with many participants indicating appreciation for Himaya Haven delivering events: -

*Afterwards, they just want to get involved, you realise the small things can help people and they appreciate it. They want to have fun. Some people have that luxury to go and do stuff, so it makes us realise that holding these small events, you're doing it for them, people are like thank you so much. (HH Apprentice)*

The positive effects that these events and activities had on women in providing a safe space where they can engage with other women experiencing similar situations and learn new skills and capabilities was emphasised by one professional stakeholder:

*Now I share it with the women and then they put their name towards horse riding, and they do various activities and it's really good. It's really good for our women*

to really engage in a community because otherwise our women will feel isolated. There's only limited areas that they can go to and feel safe. Himaya Haven has opened the door to them, and I feel that they're better mental health, because they're now engaging with other members who are coming to activities in a safe place. And they're able to gain those new skills, whether that is horse riding, whether there is cooking or whatever sessions that they're doing, I feel that it's upskilling the women as well.

The not only benefitted families directly, but also helped Himaya Haven to raise awareness of their service within the wider local community: -

*I think having these activities with families outside of all of that, I think it is a reminder that everyone can get together. That's why it's not a specific kind of like criteria to fit into these activities, it's like whoever you are, you want to get involved. Get involved because it's for the people. It's not just for the people who need support because they've had someone taken away from them, because that's what a lot of clients ask me when they do activities. You do not need to be a client to be able to join activities. And it kind of shows them they are for everyone, not just those specific clients. There were strong connections outside, because we've had clients who have just come to activities and I've heard three months later, they actually did end up in a situation where their father has gone to prison, but because they've already engaged in activities and everything, and seen how we work and everything, they're comfortable enough to come back and get help. And that's like a good thing, because even though you didn't need that help before, and you need it now, you're comfortable enough to come back. I think that's the biggest thing, building connection with people, even if it has like nothing to do with prison. (HH Apprentice).*





A former Himaya Haven employee highlighted that the community events and outreach activities led to direct referrals to the organisation for support: -

*It's made the community more aware. [Through the community events] we were able to meet community members who hadn't heard about us, who then learned about what we do, and either took a flyer because they needed it or referred someone they knew to us.*

## Assessment of impact

In 2021, Himaya Haven adopted a Theory of Change model (see Figure 6) to observe, capture and measure the impact of work undertaken with clients. The Theory of Change was used to assess the BAME Families of Prisoners programme's short and long-term effects in a structured way. Utilisation of the Theory of Change is an ongoing reflective review of progress and work, meaning it is revised on a routinely, annual basis based on the review of work and key learnings/next steps for the year ahead. Thus, demonstrating Himaya Haven as a community organisation that is constantly learning from the work they do as to identify ways to better deliver support services to clients. From the Theory of Change, Himaya Haven have identified six key impact priority areas. Five are directly connected to the support work they do, while the sixth is concerned with addressing the structural needs of disadvantage faced by BAME families of prisoners by ensuring wider service providers are responsive to the needs of BAME families. These impact areas are categorised as follows: -

Outcomes Himaya Haven will see if Successful

Impact A	Impact B	Impact C	Impact D	Impact E	Impact F
<p>Reducing feelings of isolation &amp; stigma.</p> <p>Increasing social activities for clients.</p> <p>Improving client self-esteem &amp; positive self-talk.</p> <p>Support visits taking place (digital / face to face).</p> <p>Identifying mental health needs and locating relevant support.</p> <p>Help clients care for their mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Clients become confident to undertake practical processes themselves.</p> <p>Clients undertake more activities outside the home with their children.</p>	<p>Help clients access/develop funds to replace income lost due to arrest/imprisonment.</p> <p>Increase knowledge of benefit system/job market.</p> <p>Increase financial competency.</p> <p>Heighten clients' confidence in ability to deal with financial matters such as saving, accessing advice.</p> <p>Clients become more confident with digital technology.</p>	<p>Reducing feelings of isolation &amp; stigma.</p> <p>Increase sense of trust in people outside the family.</p> <p>Clients engages in more community activity.</p> <p>Identifying mental health needs and locating relevant support.</p> <p>Change in behaviours to make the situation at home easier for all family members.</p>	<p>Reducing feelings of isolation &amp; disenfranchisement.</p> <p>Other service providers are made more aware of the specific needs of BAME families in the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Clearer about the needs of families of imprisoned people in the BAME community, to help other agencies and funders identify what is needed (needs assessment).</p>	<p>Clients understand the procedures of release and where necessary being on license.</p> <p>Help clients adjust emotionally to the change in circumstances, with loved one released.</p> <p>Support family and person released to strengthen bonds and navigate their new reality.</p> <p>Change in behaviours to make the situation at home easier for all family members.</p>	<p>Families and young person develop resilience.</p> <p>Helping clients understand court procedures.</p> <p>Families comprehend and support youth referral orders.</p> <p>Young people at risk actively engage in programme(s) to support them.</p> <p>Help clients adjust emotionally to the change in circumstances.</p> <p>Support family and young person to maintain and/or strengthen bonds and navigate their new reality.</p> <p>Successful interventions to prevent offending.</p>

- **Impact A** - Maintain links with the family member(s) and within their wider family.
- **Impact B** - Keep income coming into the family so bills can be paid, and housing can be maintained.
- **Impact C** - Maintain links with people in their community (overcoming the shame and stigma associated with having a loved one arrested and in prison and avoid becoming socially isolated/disenfranchised).
- **Impact D** - Service providers involved in the CJS are responsive to the needs of BAME families.
- **Impact E** - Help build and strengthen social bonds with the loved one(s) released while helping families adjust to new family and social dynamics (focus is on both adults and children).
- **Impact F** - Support families and young people where there is a risk of offending and imprisonment.

Figure 7 sets out the indicators for each impact category and shows the various markers of impact which Himaya Haven use to measure the success of their support against each client: -

## Figure 7 – Impact Indicators

Table 6 demonstrates most of the impact, between 2020/21-2024/25, has come from category A, with 57 clients experiencing reduced isolation and stigma and greater confidence, empowerment and overall better mental health and wellbeing. 28 clients are located within impact category B, needing support with the financial burden of the cost of living and developing confidence and digital literacy, and 12 clients are situated in impact category C. Those in category C exhibited greater trust amongst the wider community and were more likely to participate in community related activities.

Furthermore, many of Himaya Haven's clients are located in category D, with 40 clients receiving support from wider service providers. Impact

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<b>Impact A</b>	20	7	9	18	3
<b>Impact B</b>	6	3	8	11	0
<b>Impact C</b>	4	4	3	1	0
<b>Impact D</b>	1	8	14	11	6
<b>Impact E</b>	0	0	0	3	0
<b>Impact F</b>	0	0	0	7	0

category D is a crucial marker of success as one of the central organisational aims of Himaya Haven is to tackle the institutional exclusion of BAME families within the criminal justice system to receive the support they need in a culturally sensitive, inclusive and unprejudicial way. To make sure BAME families received the required support they need, the referral process between Himaya Haven and other public (e.g., police and probation services) and community sector (e.g., Children's Trust, KickIt, Roshni etc.) organisations has been important.

Three clients (during the 2023/24 year of delivery) benefited from Himaya Haven's work to support rehabilitation and the strengthening of social bonds for families and loved ones returning from prison (Impact E), highlighting the 'whole families' approach Himaya Haven takes to the support offered. Likewise, seven clients (during the 2023/24 year of delivery) were supported where the family had young people are at risk of offending and imprisonment (Impact F), demonstrating Himaya Haven's ability to provide preventative support to families which need it the most, thus avoiding entry into the criminal justice system. The seven individuals that Himaya Haven has prevented from entering the criminal justice system represents a substantial financial saving to public expenditure. With the average annual cost of imprisonment in the UK estimated at approximately **£56,987** annually (UK Government, 2024), Himaya Haven have potentially saved around **£398,909 per year (£56,987 x 7 individuals)**.

# SECTION 2: PERSPECTIVES FROM HIMAYA HAVEN STAFF/VOLUNTEERS AND PROFESSIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

One of the aims of the BAME Families of Prisoners programme evaluation was to examine what is working and what is not working as well in Himaya Haven's provision of support to BAME families of prisoners and the wider community. This section highlights areas of success and areas that need improving or require further reflection in terms of service delivery.

During the interviews with Himaya Haven staff and wider professional stakeholders, supporting BAME families of prisoners in a culturally sensitive way was identified as a unique selling point: -

*What makes Himaya Haven unique is the emphasis on awareness of cultural nuances. They integrate this into the practice and how they engage and support service users. They specialise in providing specialist, culturally nuanced and holistic support to specific groups such as those from Pakistani/Kashmiri backgrounds. (Former HH employee).*

HH staff viewed having a shared cultural background with clients positioned them to have a better understanding of their experiences in a way that predominately white organisations do not: -

*One thing that sets us apart from other organisations is the fact that we can understand. Because of our background and obviously living in Birmingham and knowing all the different type of cultures and mixes that we've got in our city, we can provide a cultural [nuanced] approach and understanding which sometimes other organisations, particularly if they are from a white background, may not be able to offer. (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager)*

HH staff also identified the ability of the team to speak multiple languages as something which clients appreciated in terms of being able to share their experiences in a way which was familiar to them and made them feel confident and comfortable: -

*I think what they really appreciate is the fact that we can speak the language that they're mostly familiar with and more confident in speaking it. That also provides a sense of familiarity. Also, a sense of not necessarily safety but you feel comfortable*

*that you can speak about whatever issues you have because you know we're kind of similar, if that makes sense, and they understand all of my issues of what may be going on in my family dynamic and stuff like that. (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager).*

Himaya Haven staff reflect the rich diversity of the communities they support, offering multilingual support in Punjabi, Mirpuri, Urdu, Bengali, and English to better support those individuals and families they serve. The ability to provide support in multiple languages meant Himaya Haven were able to refer clients to other support services based on their needs: -

*We once a very long time ago had someone call and luckily there was someone else in the building who spoke French so we were able to help get them support to translate and then we realised they needed another service and referred them to them. (Former HH employee).*

A professional stakeholder spoke about the importance of embeddedness and how shared cultural backgrounds between community organisations and their service users is vital for delivering support in an empathetic way. They described the embeddedness of HH meant the support provided to clients was delivered with staff's 'hearts and souls', bringing with it a deep level of understanding and sensitivities to address the needs of clients: -

*It's not just about what is being done, but it's about who is doing it - and this has been found, for example, in research with family workers in prisons. It's not just what they do in terms of the job description, but it's who they are, it's what they embody, it's how they bring their heart and soul, their culture, their understanding, their empathy and sensitivities into that role. And how that plays out then for the support that they can offer. I definitely think that's something that I've noticed in the team and with [Co-Director] herself, with regards to how she operates.*

For one professional stakeholder, the gendered dimension of HH's embeddedness – being a female-led organisation of women from Pakistani/Kashmiri backgrounds - was especially important. This was because HH staff could understand the specific cultural needs and barriers of their female clients, many of whom also came from south Asian backgrounds: -

*There is nobody else that has that kind of understanding which Himaya Haven do in terms of language. Particularly the women's side of things - particularly people's mothers, wives, women in the house that need another woman (or women) to support them and understand what their cultural barriers are, the religious barriers and language.*

Speaking to the positive outcomes of the advocacy work Himaya Haven have delivered, the data shows that it has had impact on building clients' confidence in their ability to advocate for themselves and their families, allowing them to find their own voice: -

*[W]e had one service user, mother whose son was at risk of being charged. She could speak English and understand it. She was very articulate. But she found herself worried and would question her ability to communicate with those from*

*within the criminal justice system. She wanted Himaya Haven to act as an intermediary to help her translate to make sure information wasn't and accidentally misinterpreted because she kept second guessing herself. [W]e would follow up with the youth worker or the officer and just say she wanted us to follow up and make sure it was understood. [W]e would also translate letters that may have come to her. She understood them but, as we worked on supporting her, we would also encourage her to recognize her skills and gain confidence in her ability, to use her own voice with those outside Himaya Haven because she was very comfortable with us (Former HH employee).*

HH staff recognised the main barrier for families not seeking support was due to the cultural stigma and shame from the wider family and community around having a loved one in the criminal justice system: -

*[I]f you're on a road where there's a majority of [people with] Asian backgrounds and the police come and raid your house; everyone sees it and everyone's going to talk about it. [T]hat person in that [situation], whether it's the husband or son or whoever's got arrested, they find it very hard to come out because they know if they're walking down the street, someone's talking about them, that they're being labelled [...]* Then because they want to avoid all those challenges, they start staying indoors. They hardly come out. [W]e had one mother talking to us, it was a year before she even came out of the house. [T]hey might go out for a quick shop here and there, but to go out and mix with other people, the depression and all that kicks in, and then it gets harder and harder to come out. We've got one mom, obviously her son was done for a severe crime, and she struggled, really, really struggled to come out of the house. One of the other clients that we had, her two sons got done for a very serious crime and it literally destroyed the family. So, for her, it destroyed her relationship with her daughter-in-laws. She lost contact with her grandchildren and literally it broke her because it's not just that. She had to face the shame and the stigma within the family, but you lose your relationships on the way. [H]er husband's [stepfather] family, they didn't really want to associate with them because they've got criminals in the family. There could be a wedding, and you're not invited to it. There could be a party, and you're not invited to it. But they're not going to tell you directly, but they know that we really don't want to associate with you. Those kinds of things happen as well (HH Co-Director).

One professional stakeholder commented that the cultural shame and stigma came from the wider community perceiving them as a 'dodgy family'. This limited access to support within the community and so they were appreciative of HH in providing the support they needed: -

*[T]hey really appreciate the help Himaya Haven gave them. Because there isn't anyone - they can't get access through any other support, even through the local mosques or the community. They can't go to their local mosques or community centres because there's shame associated with it. "Oh you've got someone in the family who's a criminal." You're basically a dodgy family and all these names get called out, and other family members get affected by it.*

What was highlighted as best practice in delivering the BAME Families of Prisoners programme was the community organisational partnership between Himaya Haven and other organisations. When asked about collaborative working during the interviews with professional stakeholders, one participant mentioned how her relationship with Himaya Haven felt like an extension of each other's service provision likening their partnership as different departments within the same organisation: -

*I call Himaya Haven our sister project, and it does feel like we're part of the same organisation because we feel we can ring each other and really work with each other, like you would in the same organisation. I feel like it's a different department of [stakeholder CIC]. That's how it feels like. Which is nice.*

Another professional stakeholder emphasised that although each organisation worked within two different cities, there was an importance of community organisational partnership due to the shared cultural dynamics of their clients and the complexity of need. These collaborations allowed each organisation to provide the other with reassurances around the work they were doing and demonstrated the breath of active network(s) that enhanced both the depth and reach of Himaya Haven's support infrastructure: -

*They're very similar communities in terms of their makeup. There's a large South Asian community out there in Birmingham. Bradford is obviously much smaller in its size, but we experience very similar challenges in terms of our communities; the dynamics of cultural dynamics and things that play out. I think we've had to give each other a lot of reassurance because we were pushing the boat out here with Muslim women and trying to make it acceptable to do the work and say "look, we're not sensationalising any of this."*

Recognition of how valuable Himaya Haven's work was was highlighted as a key driving factor in building the networks of support between Himaya Haven and other community organisations:

*[T]he network of people that she would attract to help her, reflected in my eyes how valuable [Himaya Haven's] work was. [Co-Director] is very good at getting good people around her to help with her mission. [Professional stakeholder].*

An important aspect to community organisational partnerships which was highlighted by a former Himaya Haven employee was the role of information sharing amongst some organisations within the community sector:

*What I like about the third sector is that there is a lot of knowledge sharing [...] there's more collaboration, more awareness on what everyone's doing.*

The way in which information sharing and wider forms of collaborative work was achieved between Himaya Haven and other stakeholder community organisations was through the creation of networks of knowledge capital. Based on the academic and policy literature on capitals (see e.g., Bourdieu, 1979; Putnam, 1991; Portes and Mooney, 2002; Stoker et al., 2004; Halpern, 2005) knowledge capital can be defined as an accumulation of different kinds of knowledge-based 'assets' (e.g., development of skills, awareness of opportunities, and learnings around



organisational governance) by which community organisations share between each other as part of a relational network in order to let each other grow. When discussing the role of knowledge sharing, one professional stakeholder clearly evidenced how important it was to the overall collective development, growth and wider sustainability of each other's organisations:

*Himaya Haven is a small organisation, so is [stakeholder CIC]. We haven't got the money to pay consultants and so it's sharing resources. I know Himaya Haven, when they've done funding application [Co-Director] will say "can you look over this for me?" Equally, I may have something and I'll say "can you look over this for me then?" We feel that working in partnership, we can both go forward.*

Himaya Haven staff also mentioned they have been developing their social media presence to raise awareness about their service provision and the work they do to broader audiences. Himaya Haven currently have a X (formerly known as Twitter) account, as well as being present on Instagram and LinkedIn. One of the Co-Directors mentioned how they had expanded onto TikTok as means to diversify their client base: -

*...[S]ocial media like Twitter, also known as X now, and Instagram and I would say LinkedIn [...] We find that the people that interact with us are on a professional level, whether it's other organisations or people who work in the community. Last year we created a TikTok page. Initially we're like we don't know if it's professional enough to be on TikTok, but I discovered a hashtag called prison wives and prison wives' life. It's about prison wives, their partners, posting advice to other partners, other women affected by imprisonment. I thought, you know what, we can actually tap into this and reach the clientele that we need to reach that we're not even getting through our Instagram and Twitter page. It's been going really well.*

Himaya Haven's presence on TikTok has provided them with an opportunity to reach potential clients. Their TikTok account has led to multiple self-referrals by individuals and families who have engaged with their content and reach out to the organisation for support:

*We're finding that TikTok is the best way. We've had a few client referrals through TikTok. People who have seen our TikTok video and then had a look at what we do and be like I need help with my son who's in prison. We've had quite a few self-referrals through TikTok. For us that's the best platform to access clients. (HH Co-Director/ website and social media manager)*

Across their social media platforms, Himaya Haven have connected with so many individuals. Based on engagement data, their highest number of views was over **677,000 people in 2024/2025**, with people interacting with them around cultural and community issues. However, the increased presence of Himaya Haven on social media meant that whilst they were able to support more individuals and families, they were also susceptible to negative comments and engagement: -

*It came from years of mainstreaming narratives of Islamophobia, anti-immigration and racism, politically. Both by the government and politicians, and mainstream media. With the Ramadan packs, there was this and it manifested in some of the negative comments we had. There was one I think this year or early last year that we did report because it was extremely Islamophobic [...] [I]t's not just Islamophobic and racist comments. It's also common for people to say they're in prison and they've done something wrong and should be punished. (Former HH employee)*



For community organisations like Himaya Haven, the challenges of support delivery are impacted by the broader political and policy climate. Neoliberal restructuring within the community sector has meant that organisations are now competing for funding and resources. Organisations who can deliver the most support to the greatest number of individuals, and within the most economically cost-effective way, are more likely to successfully compete for funding and resources. Based on conversations with professional stakeholders, such political and policy climate has impact on smaller community organisations, with larger charities being able to monopolise funding and resources: -

*A lot of the funding that is there, it's a competition and it is survival of the fittest. Unfortunately, there's many mainstream organisations and consortiums much bigger than mine and much bigger than [HH Co-Director]. We sometimes settle for the crumbs of what may be leftover. But we are, unfortunately, having to deliver 3-4 times as much for that very small amount of money. I think the value for money is not there in terms of the amount of funding that we are given and the work that we have to deliver. That means that much of the energy of people like [Himaya Haven] is really sapped. It's constantly having to search for different streams of funding. (Professional stakeholder)*

The retrenchment of public support provision has led to a systematic neglect of the role community organisations now play in effectively substituting for these services. As public support provision has been rolled back, community organisations have increasingly been expected to fill the gap, often without adequate recognition or support. Yet, this reality is frequently overlooked in the commissioning process, which tend to favour larger, external charities over local groups with deep roots and proven track records. Despite their embeddedness and often long-standing service, these local organisations are often sidelined, while larger charities—driven by market logics—compete for tenders without recognising the value of existing community infrastructure: -

*Commissioners need to start thinking about organisations that have always been here. That have got the track record to deliver. To include us in your tender spec. These are the organisations we have here in the city, whoever comes in, we need you to work with them. Basically, include them in your tender and that's it. It's as simple as that. What happens is, the large charities, because they're competing for the tender, they are competing with each other, they don't see us. (Professional stakeholder).*

Furthermore, the neoliberal restructuring of the community sector has meant short-term and fragmented funding cycles, which place pressure on small community organisations. These organisations are often forced to juggle multiple funding streams just to stay operational, leaving little time or capacity for collaborative planning or partnership development. Rather than fostering stability and cooperation, this precarious funding environment creates administrative burdens that restrict opportunities for joint working. As a result, the potential for collective impact is undermined by the need to prioritise survival over strategy: -

*We're both small providers and one of the biggest barriers we find is that our funding is very short term. For example, some of the funds may be annual. We are getting funding from probably 11 different providers to keep us afloat and I'm sure that Himaya Haven are in the same boat. With them, it's a new service, they're setting things up, they're quite busy. With us, while we've been around for many years, we're getting pockets of funding from everywhere. It's like, I do one quarterly return*

*and the next one comes up and then the next one. I think the biggest challenge for small organisations, especially Black and minoritised ones, because the majority of them are small, we find it's this short term funding - it presents challenges where we could do a lot more together, but we never get the chance to sit down and have a proper chat. One of the things I really would love to see [HH Co-Director] and I doing is doing joint applications. But we can never get around to it. We are doing funding applications until midnight sometimes because in the daytime we're delivering services. It is a big challenge. We can achieve more but being a small organisation and the way funding is given to small organisations; it's a big challenge. It stops us from working with organisations like Himaya Haven. (Professional stakeholder).*

The short-term nature of funding has meant that small community organisations like Himaya Haven are forced to juggle multiple funding streams, each with its own expectations and monitoring requirements and have to also be on the constant look out for further funding—diverting time and resources away from delivering vital support within the community and limiting their capacity to develop and scale their work: -

*With every different stream there's a huge expectation because they're all very different in ways of evaluation, of monitoring of us. Sometimes you can go for a very small fund, but yet the work that's required is absolutely intense [...] The constant search [...] I think that's why, people like myself and [HH Co-Director] are very tired. We have to be that constant. And that constant sometimes means seven-days-a-week, because we don't know whether we'll have funding for our staff for the next year. It restricts our ability to be able to deliver more work. (Professional stakeholder).*

Despite the name of the programme being 'BAME Families of Prisoners', one thing that was acknowledged by HH staff is the problematisation around the use of the BAME label. One of the Co-Director's detailed the label has a tendency to flatten complex, distinct identities into a single, overly broad label. By grouping together a vast array of cultural, ethnic, and racial communities under one umbrella, the term risks erasing the specific experiences and struggles of individual groups: -

*When you're broadly categorising everyone, you're missing out a lot of communities. I don't know what it should be changed to, but I think we should change that terminology slightly just to acknowledge that it's too broad of a category.*

There was a concern that the BAME label may unintentionally exclude or alienate marginalised white families from seeking support by implying that Himaya Haven's support provision is only available to racial minorities. As the quote below notes, this misperception may have discouraged white clients from seeking support, underscoring the need to balance providing support for racially minoritised families who are often ignored and/or locked out of receiving support after experiencing a loved one entering the criminal justice system, while simultaneously not turning away white families who may also need support: -

*I think when people did see the BAME word, which they must have thought we don't support white people. We did have [white client] at the very beginning, and asked that question, and we kind of realised that actually that might put the white community not contacting us because we work with the BAME community. (HH Co-Director/website and social media manager).*

The quote below captures the ambivalence surrounding the use of the BAME label—revealing it as both a problematic construct and a strategic necessity. On one hand, the term is critiqued for its lack of resonance with the communities it seeks to represent, as clients are more likely to self-identify in culturally specific terms such as British, Pakistani, or Kashmiri, rather than under a homogenising acronym. Yet, on the other hand, the label remains instrumental when seeking funding, where recognised terminology often dictates eligibility and support. This reflects a wider dilemma: while the label may not reflect the lived identities of clients exactly, it still functions as a necessary shorthand within policy and funding frameworks, pointing to the ongoing challenge of balancing representation and identification with the pragmatism in doing community-based work: -

*That is something we deeply discussed and the need for review. The last two evaluations included a discussion about it cause I find it highly problematic, but it's one of the challenges. None of our service users would identify themselves as BAME. They may say British, Pakistani or Kashmiri. But then when it comes to a funder. These labels help you gain the funding. (Former HH employee).*

Sustainability of service provision was one area which participants perceived as important to Himaya Haven's future success. One key strategy to achieving this is through diversifying income streams, reducing overreliance on a single source of funding. Professional stakeholders noted the importance of expanding relationships with local authorities and targeting statutory service funding grants to help them meet the needs of their clients while being funded directly through central or local government by providing an essential statutory service: -

*I'm not sure how well networked [Himaya Haven] are to some of the adjacent councils. I know they do a lot with - or they have been doing a lot with - Birmingham City Council. But of course, given the financial state of Birmingham City Council, they might be well advised to try and build relationships, for example in Sandwell [or] Walsall, you know, places on the edge of Birmingham that have got their own councils and potentially their own source of funding.*

*That's something I've spoken to [HH Co-Director] about a couple of times. I've said "maybe now you should make a plan within your business to look at statutory service funding grants".*

Another vital avenue for diversifying income is the development and delivery of training programmes or CPD courses grounded in the lived experiences of families of prisoners. These offerings would not only provide a potential revenue stream but also extend Himaya Haven's impact by translating experiential knowledge into structured learning for criminal justice professionals and other people working in the community sector. As highlighted by the quote below, there has long been encouragement for Himaya Haven to develop and "sell products or services" as a core part of their CIC model, recognising that survival cannot rely solely on grant funding: -

*I've been saying for years "you need to develop products". She's doing that now. I thought she should have been doing a lot sooner, but now she's doing it. The model of a CIC is that you're not a charity, so you're not going to survive on income and funding alone. You've got to sell products or sell services to start bringing money in. That's the model of the CIC. (Professional stakeholder).*

Limited office space also presents a significant sustainability challenge, particularly in relation to client confidentiality and service quality. With only one office available, clients who seek private conversations often find themselves without an appropriate space, having to sit in communal areas such as the kitchen or hallway. As HH Director Treasurer notes below, the current setup is far from ideal, and the absence of a second room undermines the organisation's capacity to deliver its services with the level of confidentiality that clients may need. The issue highlights an urgent need for additional space or resources to secure a more suitable environment: -

*We've only got one office. If somebody wanted to have a conversation, we don't have anywhere for them to sit. There's no privacy, they either have to sit in the kitchen or downstairs. I don't think we have enough funding to hire another room, but that's what I've said to [HH Co-Director], Himaya Haven must have two rooms. It's not the ideal environment for us to be dealing with clients the way we are, purely because of confidentiality. I know if I was a client, I wouldn't come and discuss my problems. (HH Director Treasurer).*

Visibility of the office was also understood as crucial for increasing community engagement. A volunteer working at Himaya Haven noted, being located in a more accessible, street-level space with clear signage and promotional materials could significantly boost the organisation's foot traffic, attracting individuals who might otherwise never hear about Himaya Haven's services: -

*If we were downstairs in a more open office we'd probably have more foot traffic, people would see posters and banners and who's just heard about us and seen us, our office, and walked in. (HH Administrator).*

A professional stakeholder emphasised the critical importance of a strong governance structure for the effective functioning and long-term sustainability of Himaya Haven. This includes ensuring that there are active board members and that these members possess the appropriate skills and receive ongoing training to carry out their roles effectively. Clear structural processes must be in place to support consistent and transparent reporting to these board members. Regular board meetings should be conducted in a format that is not only informative but also encourages active engagement, where board members feel confident to ask challenging questions and provide strategic oversight. Establishing this kind of governance infrastructure ensures that decision-making is both informed and robust, strengthening the organisation's foundations: -

*[G]overnance structure is very important. Make sure you've got the right skills on the board, you have the right training for them. And the structure to make sure that you are reporting to the board as well. And there's no breakages in terms of what's going up to the board, making sure that you know what you are doing. Regular meetings, reporting to the board - and it's done in a format that is informative, and*

*they are challenging, asking questions. I think all that comes with making sure that there is training and the right structure at each level.*

Finally, the importance of preserving the legacy of Himaya Haven's work – alongside that of other minority-led community organisations' work – is recognised as vital. This is because they are often the only organisations that step in to support BAME communities where statutory services have fallen short. Their culturally competent, community-based approach fills a critical gap in service provision, offering support that is both accessible and responsive to the lived experiences of marginalised families of prisoners. Without organisations like Himaya Haven, many individuals—particularly those affected by the criminal justice system—would be left without adequate support or advocacy. Documenting and sustaining their legacy ensure that this essential work is not only recognised but continues to evolve in response to community needs: -

*They have to keep serving the communities that they were created to. Not to say they can't be developed or moved on, but actually, we do what we do because we know that we are the minority and that statutory services don't meet our needs that well. It's really important that we are funded to create these programmes, to create these services, to protect that legacy and to protect communities.*  
(Professional stakeholder)

## Views from professional stakeholders

Professional stakeholders recognise the significant potential for Himaya Haven to expand its impact nationally by sharing its unique insights and best practices with other organisations supporting BAME communities. Given the scarcity of similar initiatives working closely with these specific groups around experiences of imprisonment there is a clear opportunity for Himaya Haven to lead on knowledge exchange and community-driven models of support across the UK. Stakeholders also emphasise the importance of increasing national visibility and clearly articulating their unique selling point. As exhibited in the data extract below, many academic and community sector professionals remain unaware of Himaya Haven's work. Amplifying their profile at a national level could not only elevate their influence but also position them as a key voice in the field of criminal justice, BAME groups, and family support.

*It could be expanded. [I]t's quite geographically localised and for obvious reasons. But I don't see other organisations working as closely with this particular clientele. And so, I think there perhaps are lessons to be learned or good practise that could be shared to other communities where we might see larger representation of people for, for example from BAME backgrounds. Because my understanding is that there's not really any other organisation out there doing that. So I suppose that there's that element where there could be an expansion. They could perhaps also shout a little bit louder. I know [HH Co-Director] does a lot of publicity and does really try but, I think from the networks I have more widely across academics and organisation supporting those in prison and those supporting those in prison, I'm not sure that Himaya Haven is a well-known organisation. So perhaps nationally there's a bit of work to be done there to become more centre stage.*

While national expansion presents opportunities, it risks disrupting the deeply rooted relationships Himaya Haven has cultivated within its local community—relationships that are a core strength of the organisation. Their close, embedded presence allows them to provide culturally sensitive and trust-based support that may be difficult to replicate at scale. As such, the same professional stakeholder suggests a more sustainable approach could involve Himaya Haven feeding their specialist knowledge and insights into national organisations. By doing so, they could influence wider practice and policy around working with diverse families affected by imprisonment—particularly those from BAME backgrounds—without compromising their local work. This would enable a broader dissemination of their expertise while preserving their community-based strengths: -

*It could definitely disrupt the relationship that they do have. And because they are so embedded within their community and in the local area. And that's definitely a strength. Becoming national would take away from those strengths or redirect focus and finances and things. Perhaps the key learning is that Hamaya Haven could feed into some of these more national organisations around the specific cultural, religious needs and challenges faced by loved ones supporting those in prison. Say, for example, of BAME families, so that there's that more nuanced understanding being shared.*

Finally, professional stakeholders consistently spoke of Himaya Haven's work in highly positive terms, recognising the organisation as vital in addressing a crucial gap in support for families affected by imprisonment—particularly those from marginalised communities. They describe the organisation's work as “phenomenal,” driven by clear passion, commitment, and a genuine understanding of unmet needs. Himaya Haven is seen not only as a compassionate and culturally sensitive service provider, but also as a necessary one, offering something few others do. There is strong hope among professional stakeholders that the organisation will continue to grow and receive the financial support needed to sustain and expand its work, ensuring its essential services reach even more BAME families in need: -

*It's all very positive. I think they've found an important gap in the market, an important service need that's not been fulfilled by others. They've got a passion for fulfilling it and I wish them every success with it because they clearly are very committed people.*

*I just think it's phenomenal that I've managed to see [Himaya Haven grow] on my watch, you know from it just being an idea, a conversation, and then running with it [...] It's absolutely wonderful what they're doing*

*There's a lot of scope for the services that they are providing, and I do hope that they do continue to expand and have the right resources - from a financial point of view, to be able to grow [...].*



# SECTION 3: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BAME FAMILIES OF PRISONERS SUPPORTED BY HIMAYA HAVEN

This section presents findings relating to aim 4 of the evaluation: to explore and understand the lived experiences of BAME families of prisoners who have been supported by Himaya Haven. Drawing on video interviews conducted with nine clients (see methodology for more details), this section highlights the personal and emotional realities faced by these families, and the ways in which Himaya Haven's services have impacted their journeys for the better. The aim is to foreground the voices of clients, offering insight into the forms of support that have proved most meaningful in their lives.

A core aspect of Himaya Haven's service delivery which clients perceived as overwhelmingly positive was the advocacy support the organisation provided to them. For families facing emotionally taxing situations, the advocacy not only provided practical assistance in clients everyday lives and realities of having a loved one in the criminal justice system, but also a sense of reassurance and agency in navigating its systems which often felt impenetrable. Participants emphasised that Himaya Haven's advocacy extended far beyond general emotional support; it involved direct, active intervention on behalf of families to resolve issues. This can be seen in the quote below regarding how Himaya Haven stepped in to liaise with other key professionals and public organisations such as solicitors and the police, clarifying misunderstandings and formally raising concerns about missing property following police raids. This form of advocacy gave voice to individuals who felt otherwise silenced or overwhelmed by institutional processes: -

*They did help a lot. They get you in contact with other organisations. They provide you with information, that "I need this and I need that" [...] I am so grateful, I feel relieved. Because I can't get the information. This company can. They explain to my solicitors "this is what he meant, this is what he needs to do". [Himaya Haven also help] write to the police...you know, when they raid your house and take your stuff off you. They [Himaya Haven] say "this has gone missing, and this has gone missing". So, we are under pressure, explain to them our issues and they tell us "this is the best way to go for it".*

## Case Study Support for Samira

N:B, Names and identifying factors have been changed for educational & data protection purposes.

Samira arrived in the UK six months ago after marrying her husband and obtaining a spousal visa. Since her arrival, she has been subjected to verbal abuse and coercive control by her spouse and in-laws. An example of this control includes her father-in-law shutting off the heating and power in her part of the home, only turning it on when he returned home. Consequently, Samira had limited access to hot water and heating. Her situation was further complicated by her lack of access to public funds due to her visa status.

Samira urgently required emotional support, assistance in finding accommodation, and financial support. The threats and harassment from her in-laws made it impossible for her to stay indefinitely with her aunt Aniya, who also felt unsafe due to the secrecy and continuous threats of deportation from Samira's in-laws.

Emotional and practical support were consistently provided by Razia to both Samira and her aunt Aniya. Razia referred Samira to WAITS (Women Action in Today's Society) for further support and followed up on the referral multiple times. Unfortunately, housing was denied due to Samira's lack of funds, and despite the urgency, there was a delay in response, prompting Razia to explore other avenues for assistance.

Several organisations were contacted to find emergency accommodation for Samira. Efforts were made to reach Roshni, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid, Cranston, St Basil, and the Refugee and Migrant Centre. Unfortunately, many of these organisations could not provide help due to Samira's lack of access to public funds.

Samira was temporarily moved to her aunt's niece's house in Nelson due to safety concerns. However, it was emphasised that she needed to visit the Refugee and Migrant Centre in Birmingham for advice and support. Despite the logistical challenges, efforts continued to secure a safe and stable environment for Samira.

Samira's case involved numerous follow-ups with various support services. Communication with Samira's cousin, Aisha, was crucial in coordinating her situation. Under pressure of being deported, Samira returned to her husband's house multiple times.

The involvement of Roshni was pivotal in securing legal aid and exploring accommodation options. Discussions about the possibility of Samira applying for a migrant victims of domestic abuse concession visa took place. This visa would provide temporary access to public funds and housing benefits. It was critical for Samira to commit to not returning to her abusive husband and in-laws, (due to threats of being deported) as doing so would nullify the visa. Ultimately, Samira received temporary accommodation through the support of Roshni and other organisations. She was granted a temporary visa, which allowed her to access benefits and apply for permanent accommodation. With the successful intervention of Roshni, Samira's immediate needs were met, and accommodation was provided. Himaya Haven, now knowing Samira is safe and supported by Roshni, agreed to close her case.



One dimension of this support was facilitating communication with external organisations, ensuring that clients were linked to the right services and that their concerns were articulated clearly and taken seriously. In the case of one mother and son, Himaya Haven's intervention proved crucial when they were threatened with eviction due to a bureaucratic error. Unable to represent himself from custody, the family relied on Himaya Haven to communicate with the local council and solicitors, working toward a resolution while providing the family with face-to-face support. These examples demonstrate that Himaya Haven's advocacy functioned as a bridge—connecting families to vital resources, amplifying their voices, and empowering them to pursue fair outcomes amidst deeply challenging circumstances: -

*At the time, I was in a serious matter concerning housing. I was told I was being evicted. That me and my mother would be evicted because of an error the council made, sorry the benefits service made, regarding rent, so it meant we were in arrears. There were some proceedings and I wasn't able to represent myself from custody so I needed some advice so [we found Himaya Haven] who could work with us [...] They contacted the council, they contacted the solicitor to find out the exact arrears and how we could come to some sort of agreement [...] the support I received from Himaya Haven was very good and very friendly. My mother was able to come in and deal with them [Himaya Haven] directly.*

Another significant aspect of Himaya Haven's advocacy work was their hands-on, in-person assistance, which combined emotional support with the provision of tangible aid. For many clients, simply having someone physically present during high-stress moments—such as attending court—was profoundly reassuring. As one participant shared, attending her son's court hearing was a frightening experience, but having a Himaya Haven staff member accompanying her provided both emotional strength and practical guidance. This presence not only eased the immediate anxiety but also reinforced a sense of not being alone in navigating the stresses of the criminal justice system. Alongside this, Himaya Haven provided the client with crucial support in meeting basic material needs. For this client, they were experiencing financial hardship, so the organisation offered food hampers and facilitated access to emergency provisions such as assisting the client with their application to Household Support Fund. These provisions helped clients bridge urgent gaps while navigating longer-term instability. This combination of practical and emotional support reflects Himaya Haven's wider approach and ethos of recognising that justice-related issues are deeply entangled with broader experiences of poverty, marginalisation, and vulnerability: -

*My son was in court and being inside was particularly scary and [Himaya Haven] came with me to court. I am also struggling financially as well and [Himaya Haven] helped me with getting Household Support Funds, and when I had no house or accommodation, they helped me as well. They gave me [food hampers], everything. They helped me.*

## Case Study Sophia

N:B, Names and identifying factors have been changed for educational & data protection purposes.

Sophia, a single mother, faced an unimaginable ordeal when all three of her sons were convicted and sent to prison on the same day. This devastating blow shattered her world, leaving her grappling with overwhelming grief and despair. Recognising the urgent need for support, Razia and Somia from the Himaya Haven (HH) team stepped in to provide Sophia with the emotional and culturally competent lifeline she desperately needed.

From the outset, Sophia found herself navigating the complex maze of prison protocols, struggling to communicate with the chaplaincy to arrange vital phone calls and visits to her sons, due to the language barrier. The process was fraught with bureaucratic hurdles, emotional strain and compounded by the isolation of managing such profound challenges alone.

Somia, with her cultural competence and knowledge of the systems provided support in a trauma informed way, acknowledging Sophia's issues and committing to support, taking swift action.

On contacting HMP Dovegate chaplaincy and also HMP Oakwood prison as two of the sons were separated and transferred there, all the necessary permissions were taken for data protection compliance to enable Somia to carry out enquiries on Sophia's behalf.

Working in collaboration with these institutions, they coordinated efforts to secure visitation rights and ensure Sophia could maintain crucial family contact with her incarcerated sons. Research shows that connecting with social relationships can improve mental health. (Five Ways to Wellbeing, 2008) Each step forward was a testament to the resilience and determination of Sophia, continued by the unwavering support of the HH team.

During the logistical demands: travelling to two different prisons, financial: cost of travel, reduction in household income when 2 sons imprisoned. The family separation from one son meant that Sophia lost contact with 3 of her grandchildren, increasing her loneliness.

Razia of HH provided a consistent anchor of emotional support for Sophia, listening compassionately as Sophia poured out her fears, frustrations with the systems, processes, and hopes, while offering reassurance and practical guidance through every turbulent turn.

Phone calls became lifelines as the HH team tirelessly advocated on Sophia's behalf, navigating administrative complexities and persistently following up with Dovegate/Oakwood through emails and calls. Something Sophia was unable to do due to the language barrier.

These efforts were crucial in bridging the gap between Sophia and her sons, providing a vital connection that transcended prison walls, providing a protective factor of 'family support' for herself and her son's mental health while they remained in prison. (National council for Mental Health First Aid, 2022) When two of Sophia's sons were eventually released, the challenges persisted.

Sophia faced the heart-wrenching reality that they could not reside together due to legal restrictions which meant that the family home was still not able to start being rebuilt. The emotional toll was immense, yet our team remained steadfast in their support, exploring every avenue to ease Sophia's burden.

Beyond practical assistance, we engaged with the chaplaincy leveraging their networks to gather essential contact information and facilitate ongoing communication channels for Sophia and her family.

In conclusion, Sophia's journey is a poignant reminder of the profound impact and need for community support in times of crisis. Through collaborative efforts and unwavering dedication, we continue to stand by Sophia, offering hope, resilience, and the assurance that she is not navigating this harrowing path alone.

A defining strength of Himaya Haven's approach lies in its community-informed style of advocacy, which clients described as grounded in a sense of genuine care. Rather than adopting a distant or bureaucratic posture, the support provided was often described as "neighbourly" and informal—reflecting deep cultural and emotional resonance with the communities Himaya Haven serves. For one family, the experience of engaging with Himaya Haven felt more like being welcomed into a familiar space than interacting with a formal service provider. The ability to sit down over tea/coffee and engage in open, conversations created a sense of belonging and trust that conventional support systems often fail to offer. This informal, community-rooted ethos made clients feel truly seen and valued—not just as service users, but as individuals navigating difficult circumstances with dignity. Such affective connection was not peripheral but central to their experience of being supported, reinforcing the idea of Himaya Haven's approach as one based on empathy: -

*[Support provided] was more of a neighbourly, community and sometimes informal. We felt that someone cares, and we really felt at home here. Just because this interview, we sat down and had a coffee and a tea and a chat for a good twenty minutes about Himaya Haven, about us, about community.*

An example of Himaya Haven's community-informed approach is found in the informal spaces it creates—such as coffee and breakfast clubs—which foster mutual support among clients. As one client explains below, initial anxieties about meeting others quickly gave way to a sense of shared understanding and belonging, with the environment gradually "feeling like a community" where comfort and shared understanding of each other's experiences could naturally develop: -

*There's coffee clubs, there's breakfast clubs. I was worried about meeting the [other] ladies and stuff, but they've been so lovely, because we're in the same shoes. like with respect to lack of comfortability or whatever. They feel comfortable with Himaya Haven, so do I feel comfortable with Himaya Haven. It becomes to feels like a community.*

Himaya Haven's community-informed approach also meant recognising when clients were unable to engage in conventional ways, such as attending the office to receive in-person support. For one client, who was dealing with trauma and social anxiety, Himaya Haven responded with compassion—personally delivering

food hampers to her home and offering emotional support through informal, everyday chat: -

*I got very stigmatised by the community. I was going through my own trauma of realising I had been set up, and then I lost the money [...] so I was going through a lot. I suffered from social anxiety, I didn't want to go out so when I couldn't come and collect [food hamper] [Himaya Haven] was very understanding and went out their way to drop off the [food hamper]. [...] They gave me their time to sit down and chat with me, gave me that emotional support I needed.*

Many clients also deeply valued the simple act of having someone to talk to on a regular basis—something often overlooked in formal support systems. For one client, the weekly phone calls from Himaya Haven became a meaningful source of connection and reassurance. These calls, which combined practical check-ins with moments of light-hearted conversation, offered a consistent thread of support during an otherwise isolating and stressful time. Knowing that someone would reach out just to ask how she and her son were doing, to offer help with contacting other organisations and services, and share a laugh, provided both emotional relief and a sense of being genuinely cared for. This regular, personal contact highlighted how even small gestures of attentiveness could significantly impact clients' wellbeing when needing wider support:-

*It was nice to have somebody to talk to. Every week I would get my little phone call, saying "Hey [mother's name], how's [son's name]. Do you need me to phone anybody for you? Is he being treated, okay? We're have a little laugh on the phone as well. It was nice.*

A distinctive feature of Himaya Haven's advocacy model is its commitment to a 'whole family' approach, which recognises that the impact of imprisonment extends beyond the individual incarcerated to affect the entire family unit. This approach involves providing tailored support not only to the family members on the outside but also to the incarcerated individual, facilitating communication and addressing needs within the prison system. As one client recounted, Himaya Haven supported her as a parent, acknowledged her son's need for rehabilitation, and actively liaised with the prison to ensure he received necessary support during his incarceration. This holistic method aligns with wider scholarly research (see, e.g. Brookes and Frankham, 2021; Clancy, 2022; and Harrison et al. 2022) emphasising the importance of addressing the support needs of the whole family. By bridging the gap between the incarcerated individual and their family, Himaya Haven's model fosters resilience and supports the reintegration process, underscoring the value of comprehensive, family-centred advocacy in the context of imprisonment: -

*[Himaya Haven] was an organisation that supported not only the families but supported the parent, individually, away from the family. That [approach] included my son, who went to prison, and they recognised he needed rehabilitation and support. So, they [Himaya Haven] worked inside and out. It is hard for us on the outside because we can't reach our loved one. That connection we have with them [Himaya Haven] where you can say "can you reach out to the prisons because he's caught Covid, or he needs support and he's not getting that. They [Himaya Haven] have reached out to the prion and have offered that support inside as well.*

Himaya Haven's advocacy work also embodied a nurturing and holistic support system for families affected by incarceration. One client likened the

organisation's support to that of a comforting parent. Such an approach aligns with the concept of 'motherwork' as articulated by Patricia Hill Collins (2016), which maintains the survival, empowerment, and identity of entire communities, particularly within marginalised groups, is hinged on specific individuals and organisations taking onboard mothering duties to nurture and care for vulnerable groups and individuals (Campos, 2016). In the context of criminal justice, this form of support challenges the stigmatisation and outsider status often imposed on families of prisoners, advocating for compassionate and inclusive practices. By embodying these principles, Himaya Haven not only addresses the immediate needs of families but also contributes to a broader framework of social justice and systemic change: -

*Himaya Haven, I know them very well, and they are very helpful. I will give you an example. When a baby's crying, the mother goes and comforts the baby. This is [Himaya Haven]. They're like parents. Even though I'm 56, but I've had so much comfort since they've helped me. The [burden] goes from 100 percent to 25 percent. The pressure I had thinking about the case and the kid, [Himaya Haven] took most of it on.*

Clients consistently highlighted Himaya Haven's people-centred approach as central to their positive experiences of support. As one client describes, it was not just the practical assistance that mattered, but the genuine emotional investment shown by staff. The feeling that 'they really cared about me' extended beyond material provision to a sustained, genuine connection: 'we are here for you, whenever you need a chat, whenever you need anything'. This ethos of open communication and ongoing availability meant clients felt truly seen and valued—not as cases to be managed, but as individuals deserving of empathy, dignity, and long-term care: -

*It felt like they wanted to communicate with me. It felt like they cared about how I was feeling. They always said, "we are here for you, whenever you need a chat, whenever you need anything we're here, the doors are open". So I felt like they really cared about me. Not only about what they brought to the table, but how much they were there for me as well.*

## Case Study Young Person Support from the Criminal Justice System

N:B, Names and identifying factors have been changed for educational & data protection purposes.

Aaneseh, a mother of three, faced a challenging period when her son, Aadam, became involved with drugs and encountered numerous issues with both school and legal authorities. Over several months, Himaya Haven, a community support organisation, stepped in to provide vital assistance. This account highlights the emotional and practical support the organisation offered and the transformative effect it had on the family.

When Razia from Himaya Haven first met with Aaneseh, they listened to her Issues and provided a safe space for her to express her concerns. The emotional toll of her son's difficulties was evident, and after ensuring that Aaneseh felt heard, Himaya Haven offered immediate support, mentoring sessions and invited her to attend wellbeing sessions. This meeting marked the start of a holistic support plan that aimed to address both the immediate and long-term challenges the family faced.

As Aadam's issues escalated, including a suspension and eventual exclusion from school, Aaneseh turned to Razia for emotional support. Himaya Haven played a crucial role in helping her navigate the school system by coordinating meetings, translating official letters, and assisting in the search for a new school. Aadam was excluded for ten days, and during this time, the team remained actively involved, ensuring that communication with the school continued and appeals against the exclusion were filed.

The family's legal troubles also required significant support. Razia helped Aaneseh understand a court summons that arrived with no explanation from her solicitor. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, no one was allowed in the courtroom, but Himaya Haven staff were permitted to accompany her for translation and emotional support. During Aadam's court appearance, where he received a nine-month referral order, the presence of the Himaya Haven team provided Aaneseh with reassurance and a clear understanding of the legal proceedings. Aadam was informed that failure to comply with the referral order could lead to a detention order, making this a critical point in his journey.

Following the court appearance, the team continued their efforts to resolve Aadam's school exclusion. Despite delays from the school's side, Razia kept up communication with the relevant authorities and advocated for alternative educational opportunities for Aadam, which eventually resulted in him being offered a place at a new school.

Throughout these difficulties, Himaya Haven's continuous emotional support and practical assistance were critical. They helped Aaneseh apply for school uniform grants, dealt with fraudulent messages, and provided administrative help. Regular check-ins and prompt responses ensured that Aaneseh never felt alone in managing her family's challenges.

The impact of the support provided by Himaya Haven was profound. Emotionally, the ongoing support helped Aaneseh manage her anxiety and depression, providing her with a much-needed outlet and reducing her stress. On the legal

and educational fronts, Himaya Haven's advocacy ensured that Aadam received fair treatment, and that Aaneseh was well-informed of her rights and options. The family's safety and health were also protected through guidance on Covid-19 protocols, and financial relief came in the form of grants for school uniforms and utility bills. Perhaps most importantly, Himaya Haven empowered Aaneseh by translating documents, explaining procedures, and advocating on her behalf, enabling her to take informed actions to improve her family's situation.

The journey that Aadam went through—from a troubled youth to someone who found strength in his spirituality and faith—underscores the impact of the support he received. His eventual employment and positive outlook are testaments to both his personal determination and the comprehensive support provided by Himaya Haven.

This case highlights the essential role that community support organisations play in the lives of vulnerable families. Through empathy, practical assistance, and continuous advocacy, Himaya Haven helped Aaneseh, and her family move from crisis to stability, demonstrating the lasting difference such support can make.

The friendly and professional attitude of Himaya Haven staff played a vital role in building trust and giving families the confidence to return for support. As one family shared, during an extremely stressful period marked by negative impacts on their lives, the mother felt reassured by the welcoming and warm response she received. This approach not only helped ease immediate hardships—such as through the provision of food hampers—but also encouraged longer-term engagement. The mother's continued visits and the friendships she formed through Himaya Haven's community events are testament to the environment of welcome, respect, and dignity that the organisation fosters: -

*My mother explained that it was a very stressful time for us. There was a lot of negative impact on our lives and she approached Himaya Haven after I wrote to them, and they were very friendly and professional and eager to help. They also provided us some support with the food [hampers] [...] My mother has continued to come and go from here [Himaya Haven] and She's made friends here as well and she really appreciates the support they've provided.*

The support one client received from Himaya Haven was marked by a refreshing absence of judgment—an approach that stood in stark contrast to other services that often exclude families based on income thresholds in order to receive support. Despite being a long-term working mother, she found herself ineligible for many forms of financial assistance due to narrowly exceeding income thresholds for support. While other organisations turned her away, Himaya Haven recognised the hidden struggles of families in her situation and offered support without gatekeeping or stigma. By looking beyond financial thresholds and acknowledging the real pressures families of prisoners' face, Himaya Haven provided a safe and compassionate space where she felt seen and supported—without ever having to justify her need: -

*I am a working mum, and I have been a working mum for, next week will be my twenty-first year, within the organisation I work. You don't get that support from, for example, because of my income I won't get that extra £200 from the household support fund because I am on the cusp of the border. I don't get free school meals because my income outweighs the amount you're entitled to. There are organisations that you go to for support and they will say "because your income is such and*



*such, you don't qualify for the support that they offer. Whereas I've come to Himaya [Haven] and they never looked at that. They looked beyond that and understood there were working families out there who are just as needy and need that support from organisations. They [Himaya Haven] offered that, no judgement.*

Himaya Haven's culturally competent understanding in meeting the needs of BAME families of prisoners was recognised by clients. In particular, clients expressed their deep appreciation for the tailored support the organisation provides, recognising that Himaya Haven takes the time to understand and respond to cultural and religious needs. For example, the act of sending prayer mats to prisoners was seen as a thoughtful engagement with the spiritual practices important to many BAME families they support: -

*In the West Midlands, because we are a mixed [diverse] community, we need these kinds of people [...] They help a lot. They send prayer mats to the prison. They make so much time for us [BAME families of prisoners].*

One aspect of Himaya Haven's culturally sensitive approach to service delivery that clients had a great appreciation for was their ability to deliver support in their first language, ensuring that individuals like the client's sister in the data extract below, who does not speak English, receive the necessary assistance. This language support has been crucial in breaking down barriers, allowing clients to access the services they need without feeling excluded or misunderstood: -

*My sister doesn't speak English [...] no reading, writing or speaking in English. For her, she needed a lot of support. They [Himaya Haven] have been really good in that field [delivering support in first language], speaking to my sister, getting the support [she needed].*

## Case Study: Navigating Post-Incarceration Life – A Mother’s Perspective on Her Son’s Struggles and Resilience

N:B, Names and identifying factors have been changed for educational & data protection purposes.

The case study focuses on the challenges faced by a young man recently released from prison, as told from his mother’s perspective. After serving his time, he is finding it difficult to reintegrate into society, especially in terms of employment, mental health, and maintaining a sense of purpose. The mother’s words offer an intimate look at the emotional and practical barriers he faces, highlighting the broader issues young men with criminal records encounter after release.

The mother begins by noting a significant cultural and emotional challenge: the pressure on young men to “man up.” This phrase reflects the societal expectation for men to suppress their emotions and maintain a facade of strength, even when struggling internally. She believes her son, like many others, does not openly discuss his feelings, which she finds heartbreaking. She attributes this emotional silence to her son’s difficult background, observing that most of the young men in similar situations come from broken homes and are suffering from unresolved childhood trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These underlying emotional issues often go unaddressed, both at home and within the prison system. The mother emphasises that there is a critical need for prisons to do more in terms of offering mental health support. She advocates for programs that teach young men how to regulate and express their emotions in a healthy way, rather than bottling them up.

Since his release, the young man has been attending his probation appointments regularly and is actively searching for employment. However, his mother highlights the difficulty he faces due to his criminal record. Despite his efforts, finding work has proven to be a significant barrier to his re-entry into society. She stresses the importance of prisons offering vocational training, such as learning a trade or apprenticeship, which could help improve post-incarceration employment prospects. Without practical skills, many young men struggle to find a pathway to stability after release.

Despite the challenges, her son continues to support his family, helping with daily tasks like taking her to medical appointments and handling household duties such as doing laundry. The mother expresses her gratitude, recognising that he has “too much on his plate” but is still doing his best to stay on the right path. The mother also reflects on how her son’s life was derailed by the pandemic (Lockdown). Before his incarceration, he was a university student studying criminal law, a career path that showed great promise. However, the switch to online learning during the pandemic was difficult for him; he preferred being in a classroom environment. He took a year off from university, and unfortunately, he never returned. This setback, combined with negative influences from friends, led him down a path that eventually resulted in imprisonment.

The mother notes that her son’s trouble was, in part, a result of associating with the wrong crowd. She doesn’t go into specifics, but it’s clear that external pressures and poor influences played a role in his incarceration. She believes that had he been able to stay in university and pursue his career in law, his life

might have taken a very different course.

While he has not yet shared a clear vision for his career, the mother remains hopeful. The key challenge, in her eyes, is finding opportunities for him to rebuild his life, emotionally and professionally, after the many disruptions he has faced. This mother's account paints a poignant picture of the hurdles faced by young men post-incarceration. The emotional toll of childhood trauma, compounded by societal expectations to suppress feelings, creates significant barriers to rehabilitation. Additionally, the struggle to secure employment with a criminal record only deepens the challenges of reintegration.

Her story emphasises the need for prison reforms that focus on mental health support, emotional regulation, and vocational training. These changes could provide young men like her son with the tools they need to not only survive but thrive after release. The case study serves as a reminder that addressing emotional well-being and providing practical job skills are essential for successful re-entry into society.

Specifically, Himaya Haven's deep understanding and awareness of the cultural dynamics within South Asian communities allowed them to offer one client the support she needed in a culturally nuanced way. Recognising the stigma and challenges often faced by members of these communities, the staff approached this client's situation with empathy, providing a safe space for her to be heard and understood without judgment: -

*So, because of being stigmatised as a bad person, just been seen for the good person I am and it was the situation I was in that got me into that situation. [Himaya Haven] knew that; the barriers, the challenges of the Asian community and how they can coerce you, so it was nice to be able to sit with someone who was wise enough to be emphatic and just listen*

The overall impact of Himaya Haven's services on clients has been profoundly positive, supporting them through a challenging period of emotional, financial, and social uncertainties. With assistance ranging from physical support (e.g., food hampers) to guidance on accessing social funds and grants and providing informal care via friendly chats and conversations, Himaya Haven have provided crucial resources that eased the difficulties of rebuilding the lives of families of prisoners. For instance, in the quote below, the client references how the ongoing support with housing matters has been particularly invaluable, helping the client stay out of trouble and fostering a sense of stability and hope for the future. If it was not for Himaya Haven's intervention the mother and son would have lost their house and would have been made homeless. It was because of Himaya Haven's support that their house was saved. The client's appreciation of this support is reflected in their desire to give back, expressing a wish to volunteer at Himaya Haven once they are in a better position, driven by a deep understanding of the struggles faced by both BAME prisoners and their families: -

*Last month it was my anniversary of my release. I am living in my home now. That's one of the best things that could happen. While it has been a struggle to resettle, emotionally, financially, socially, the assistance we've received from Himaya Haven – as in food [hamper] help, advising us of any social funds, grants, and helping us with the application process. The continuing support regarding my housing matter, it's*

*been brilliant! I've stayed outta trouble. Things are looking positive, and I have even thought about, when I'm in a better position, helping out and volunteering at Himaya Haven as I know what it's like to be a prisoner and we know what it's like to be a family of a prisoner, the stigma.*

Finally, Himaya Haven's support has been transformational in the lives of clients, from merely them surviving to get by to truly thriving and feeling empowered. In the example of the client below, for a long time, they had been in survival mode, focused solely on getting by. However, the recognition and validation they received from Himaya Haven shifted their perspective. By showing that they truly valued the client for who they are and respecting their experiences, Himaya Haven empowered them to find confidence and strength. This newfound sense of worth enabled the client to reach out, ask for help, and engage more fully in their own healing and growth, fostering a sense of thriving rather than just enduring: -

*They [Himaya Haven] have helped me to thrive, not just survive. I've been in survival mode for so long. The thriving comes from the realisation that someone does value me and someone does appreciate me for who I am and for my experience. That's given me the confidence to speak and ask for help.*

## Key learnings and reflections

The evaluation of Himaya Haven's BAME Families of Prisoners programme has produced crucial insights into the lived realities of racially minoritised families impacted by the criminal justice system and the distinctive role that culturally competent, community organisations can play in addressing these challenges. Central to Himaya Haven's impact is its model of community-informed, independent (issue-based) advocacy grounded in cultural understanding, emotional attentiveness, and a deep awareness of systemic barriers. Families accessing support often faced complex challenges—legal, social, emotional, and financial—which mainstream statutory services are not always equipped to address sensitively or holistically. Himaya Haven's approach, rooted in trust, local embeddedness and cultural specificity, enabled BAME families to receive support that felt safe, non-judgemental and empowering.

A defining feature of the programme has been its emphasis on community engagement through structured events and outreach activities. These initiatives not only provided much needed spaces to bring families together, sharing experiences and building social connections, but also served as a key method for raising awareness about Himaya Haven themselves and how they can support the needs of BAME families affected by imprisonment. Community events played a dual role: they reduced isolation and stigma for affected families and acted as powerful tools for extending the organisation's visibility within the local community.

The evaluation also identified the gendered burden experienced by women, particularly mothers of prisoners. Female clients frequently took on multiple responsibilities under conditions of stress, isolation, and social stigma. Himaya Haven's role in supporting these women—emotionally and practically—emerged as a pathway to empowerment, with many developing increased confidence and independence because of the support provided. However, it is important to acknowledge that this level of support required significant emotional and practical labour from a small and overstretched team of staff and volunteers.

Partnership working between community organisations was another area of notable strength. Himaya Haven has established itself as a local organisation that other community organisations services frequently collaborate with – both locally and further afield – to help deliver support to, and meet the needs of, BAME families of prisoners. These partnerships allowed for knowledge-sharing, cross-referrals, and the co-delivery of support, especially for families experiencing multiple layers of need such as domestic abuse, housing insecurity, or mental health challenges, as well as being a prisoner family. Best practice in this area was characterised by a shared ethos of culturally sensitive support, mutual respect, alignment in values and the sharing of knowledge. However, more could be done to formalise and strengthen these collaborative arrangements, particularly with statutory services, where referral rates remain low.

Looking ahead, several strategic recommendations emerge. First, future planning should prioritise the development of a sustainable income stream(s) for Himaya Haven. One key opportunity is the creation of bespoke training programmes designed around the organisation's specialist knowledge of working with BAME families impacted by the criminal justice system. Training could be delivered to professional stakeholders across various sectors including education, the criminal justice system, housing services, and mental health as well as other community organisations, generating income while also addressing widespread gaps in cultural competence and lived experience informed practice.

Second, community engagement activities should continue to be embedded within Himaya Haven's core delivery model and be resourced as critical components of its advocacy and awareness-raising function. These events not only generate social and cultural capital for families and the wider community but also build the trust and visibility that underpin effective outreach and support. Offering these initiatives to more communities throughout Birmingham—while maintaining cultural specificity—can increase reach and impact.

Third, formal partnership agreements should be pursued and resourced between Himaya Haven and other community organisations to create integrated referral pathways and shared delivery plans. This is highlighted as best practice throughout the interviews with HH staff and volunteers, and wider professional stakeholders. Formal partnership agreements could include delivering co-training, co-referral protocols, and regular forums for strategic coordination. This would be effective as many of the community organisations who collaborated with Himaya Haven shared similar culturally competent values and understanding. This would lead to greater integration of support for BAME families and facilitate shared knowledge and learning, leading to maximising the potential of support provision offered.

Fourth, Himaya Haven should strategically position itself as a knowledge leader on culturally competent support for racially minoritised families affected by imprisonment. The work Himaya Haven do is already recognised by external individuals and institutions, with HH receiving multiple awards and being asked to contribute a chapter in an academic edited collection (see Appendix C), but the organisation could be amplifying their voice and utilising their culturally sensitive knowledge further. The organisation's extensive experience, community trust, and nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics place it in a strong position to inform the practice and policy frameworks of larger regional and national organisations, including prison services, probation, local authorities, and other community organisations and charities. Himaya Haven should be supported to produce guidance, contribute to consultations, and participate in advisory networks that shape how services are delivered to BAME families of prisoners across the UK. This could involve the development of practice briefings, national webinars, and regional learning events that share insight into effective, culturally sensitive service models. By embedding its frontline expertise into broader systems change, Himaya Haven can play a pivotal role in challenging institutional blind spots, improving service accessibility, and embedding equity into criminal justice and welfare responses for BAME families.



In summary, Himaya Haven's BAME Families of Prisoners programme offers a powerful model of how community-led, culturally grounded, independent (issue-based) advocacy can respond to structural inequities many BAME prisoner families face. The lessons learned from this evaluation should inform both policy and the future practice and sustainability of Himaya Haven, ensuring that BAME families affected by imprisonment are met with dignity, understanding, and sustained support.

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## Appendix A – Client comments regarding food hampers

*“The food hamper delivered by Himaya Haven are a lifesaver. The staff are incredibly in their dedication and passion to make the difference by providing a much-needed delivery service for vulnerable and less fortunate members of the community who are struggling with the expense of cost of living and much much more.*

*“The ‘hamper’ consists of all the daily everyday essential, that are well balanced in nutritional value, providing many diverse meals, along with a variety of fresh produce such as fruit, vegetables eggs & halal meat. The halal meat was very much appreciated because I have to walk 2 miles for halal meat. Because of my reduced mobility & chronic pain from Sciatica this walk usually causes me extreme anxiety and dread”.*

*“I think the description of “hamper’ is a lot more aesthetic, giving a more positive spin on the somewhat destitute situation that many vulnerable members of society are finding themselves in”.*

*“The hamper makes me feel like I’m not alone, that I belong to a community that cares about each other and who are working with us to better our life’s & experiences of living through an era of such uncertainty, turbulence, war and confuse”.*

*“The hamper gives me hope for the future, for it represents care, love, and a sense of belonging that is much needed for many like me who are struggling with today’s economic and political climate.”*

# Appendix B – Letters of gratitude from chaplaincy Imams and prisoners

## HMP Birmingham (Ramadan prisoner welfare pack)



## HMP Birmingham (Eid pack)



## HMP Rye Hill

Imam Jalal Musa

Chaplaincy

HMP Rye Hill

Did you know about Himaya Haven before this Eid? If you answered yes, how did you know about Himaya Haven?

I came across via google when searching for charities that help support inmates within prison establishments, upon reading about what they do on their website for inmates I thought I would definitely want HMP Rye Hill to be involved for future projects.

Would you recommend Himaya Haven to families?

I would definitely recommend them, the work that these ladies carry out is very unique and they are the first that I have come across who provide support for inmates within a prison establishment as they are sadly forgotten about. They dealt with us very professionally and they were always on top of communication with us at HMP Rye Hill, which made it very easy to work with them. You can tell the team is full of exceptional individuals, who put others' needs in front of their own and they go out of their way to provide exceptional items and service.

What did you think about the items provided (e.g. Eid cards, Attar, Quran CDs)?

We appreciated all of the items that were provided, Eid cards, attar, the Quran CDs, Khajoor and tasbeehs. I think the addition with the Eid cards added a very personal touch which the inmates were happy with.

How did you feel receiving the items?

We were very happy with all of them, in all honesty we didn't expect to receive so many, but we are very grateful.

What was your favourite item? Why?

All the items provided were excellent and we were happy with all of them. We just wanted to say Jazakumullahu khairan for everything you provided for us for this Eid. May Allah The Most High Accept all of your hard work and efforts and may He increase your whole team in goodness. For anything else in the future please keep HMP Rye Hill in mind.

## HMP Brinsford

Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah,

Trust you all are well with the grace of almighty, most high, most.

I would like to take this opportunity in thanking yourselves, your organisation and all those who have been behind this wonderful initiative 'Ramadan Fast' for those who are in custody. Your organisation has been helping Muslims at Stafford for several years. The gifts you've provided in terms of dates, miswak, and cards, perfumes etc's and much much more were very well received. No doubt, their duas will be with you all.

Please convey our heartfelt thanks to all those who have been behind this. May Allah bless you all, reward you in abundance in dunya and akhirah, aminen ya Rab.

Wa'alaikum,

Thank you,

Arshad

 **Umar Arshad M Shukri**  
Muslim Chaplain  
HM Prison Stafford and HMP Stafford  
[umar.arshad@justice.gov.uk](mailto:umar.arshad@justice.gov.uk)

Working pattern: HMP Stafford 0100-1300 (Tuesday & Thursday)  
HMP Stafford 0100-1700 (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)

## HMP Long Lartin



Umar Shokat, Muslim Chaplain, HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Evesham, Worcestershire. WR11 8TZ  
Tel: 01386 295302 [umar.shokat@justice.gov.uk](mailto:umar.shokat@justice.gov.uk)

10/04/2024

To, **Himaya Haven**

Assalamu Alaykum,

We are writing to express our sincere thanks for the donation of the bakiava and the perfumes that you have provided for the Muslim prisoners. Your kindness and generosity have touched the hearts of many and have made a great difference in the lives of the prisoners. This was received with enormous gratitude by the Muslim community at HMP Long Lartin.

Through your donation, you have provided prisoners with a sign of hope, a gesture that shows that they are valued and that they can still enjoy the simple pleasures of life despite their current situation. The act of kindness that you have extended to the prisoners is immeasurable and will have a lasting impact.

It is recognised that many prisoners come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have experienced social and economic hardships. Your donation has provided them with comfort and a sense of normality that is often missing from their daily lives.

Thank you for the generous donations, and please know that your kindness is greatly appreciated by those who have received your gifts. We pray Allah rewards you and those that helped with the donations immensely in this life and the Hereafter.

Yours sincerely,

Umar Shokat, Ilyas Moola, Muhammad Muhi Uddin, Ismail Isakji, Muslim Chaplains,  
HMP Long Lartin

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service | HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Worcestershire  
WR11 8TZ

## HMP Oakwood



HMP Oakwood  
Custodial and Detention Services,  
G4S Care and Justice Service

Oaks Drive, Featherstone

13/03/2025

Himaya Haven  
249a Ladypool Road  
Sparkbrook  
Birmingham  
B12 8LF

Dear Sister Razia and the Himaya Haven team

As-Salamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh,

I pray that this letter reaches you in the best of health and Imaan. On behalf of the Muslim prisoner community at HMP Oakwood, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to you for your ongoing support and generosity over the years.

Your kindness and selflessness in donating to the men here is truly a reflection of the beautiful spirit of our deen—caring for those in need and reminding them that they are not forgotten. The Prophet ﷺ said, "The most beloved people to Allah are those who are most beneficial to people." By the grace of Allah, your efforts have been a source of immense benefit, comfort, and hope to those who receive them.

For many of the men here, prison can be a place of hardship, loneliness, and reflection. But through your donations and support, you have given them more than just material gifts, you have given them a sense of belonging, a reminder that the Ummah does not abandon its people and that mercy and kindness extend even behind these walls. This is something that truly touches hearts and brings warmth to souls.

Your contributions during Ramadan and Eid have been especially meaningful. These are times when faith is strengthened, and your generosity has allowed the men to experience the blessings of these sacred moments in a way that brings them closer to Allah. The joy and appreciation they feel knowing that their brothers and sisters in faith are thinking of them is something that cannot be measured.

May Allah reward you all abundantly for your sincerity, your efforts, and your commitment to serving others. May He bless your organization, put barakah in all that you do, and grant you all success in this life and the Hereafter.

Jazakum Allahu Khairan once again for your unwavering support. You remain in our du'as, and we pray that Allah allows your work to continue to be a source of goodness and mercy for those in need.

G4S Care and Justice Services (UK) Limited  
Registered Office  
Southwark, 100 Vinland Street  
London, SE16 5JL  
Registered in England No. 1336105



## HMP Swinfen Hall



Preventing victims by changing lives



Jahangir Miah, Managing Chaplain, HMP Swinfen Hall, Lichfield, Staffs, WS14 9QS  
Tel: 01543 484 125

01/04/2025

To: Razia Hadait (Himaya Haven)  
Cc: Lou Binns (Deputy Governor)

Dear Razia,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I hope and pray you and your team at Himaya Haven are well and you all had a blessed Eid.

I'm writing this letter to express our gratitude for the generous donation of Baklava and other religious items for Eid.

We feel blessed to work in partnership with your organisation who have supported our young men for several years. We appreciate the level of effort that you all put in to raise funds and coordinate everything for so many prisons.

Eid can be a difficult period for our young men who are unable to celebrate this joyful occasion with their family and loved ones, so this kind gesture brings a sense of happiness on many faces. Our young men report that they feel the love and care shown by the community and especially your organisation and wanted us to personally thank you all.

Again, thank you and look forward to meeting up soon.

Was Salaam / With peace

*J. Miah*

Jahangir Miah  
Managing Chaplain

## Prisoner comments

1) Did you know about Himaya Haven before this Ramadan? (please tick)  
YES ☐ NO ☒

2) a. Would you tell your family about Himaya Haven?  
YES ☒ NO ☐

b. Why did you select what you have for question 2a?  
They have been very supportive during this Ramadhan even in difficult circumstances and definitely need more recognition for the work they do.

3) What did you think about the items included in your Himaya Haven Ramadan pack?  
They were great and really helped boost morale during Ramadhan and Eid and gave me some home comforts

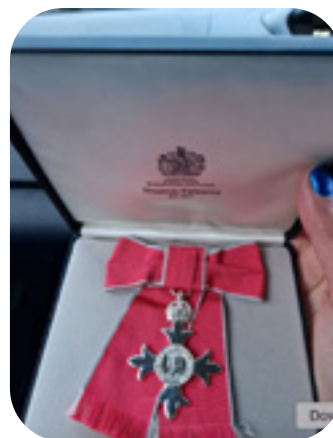
4) How did you feel receiving the Himaya Haven packs?  
I felt good and was good to know that even in prison other Muslims were still thinking about us.

5) What was your favourite item from the packs?  
The kit, was good to put some beautiful kit on and just before visits too. Jazaakallah.

## Appendix C - Awards, Accolades and Invites

### Staff awards

- UK Community Hero Awards 2021 - Zobia Hadait/Somia Bibi
- MBE in the last Queen's honours birthday list (2022) and attended Queen Elizabeth's funeral



- UK Community Hero Awards 2021
- Criminal Justice Alliance Award (2021) - Outstanding Individual Runner Up
- New Leaf Criminal Justice Awards (2021) - Entrepreneur of the Year
- SME News – Legal Awards, Best Culturally-Sensitive Prisoner Relative Support Service in the Midlands (2024)
- Corporate LiveWire Global Awards, Community Empowerment Initiative of the Year 2023/2024
- SME News, Community Support CEO of the Year 2023
- Corporate LiveWire Innovation & Excellence Award, under the category Family Support NPO of the Year 2023
- AI Global Media Female CEO of the Year Award, under the category Offender Family Support CEO of the Year 2023
- Birmingham Award 2023 Finalist Social Enterprise of the Year
- Birmingham Awards 2024 Community Champion of the Year
- Himaya Haven (organisational) Awards
- High Sheriffs of the West Midlands Award 2019
- West Midlands Health Star Awards 2022 Team/Services/organisation/ targets Support For Communities
- National Diversity Awards 2022 Community Organisation Award for Race, Religion and Faith
- Birmingham Awards, Social Enterprise of the Year 2023
- The British Muslim Awards, Charity of the Year 2023
- British Diversity Awards, Charity or Not-For-Profit of the Year 2024
- Social Economy Awards 2024 Excellence in Community Impact
- European Diversity Awards 2024 Charity or Non for Profit of the Year
- Corporate LiveWire Innovation & Excellence Award 2024 Winner, Community Support Nonprofit organisation of the Year
- Birmingham Diversity Awards 2024 Charity Nonprofit of the Year
- The Lords Mayors Award In recognition of her outstanding achievement and exceptional service to the City of Birmingham

## EL U

- K Community Hero Awards 2021
- Criminal Justice Alliance Award (2021) - Outstanding Individual Runner Up
- New Leaf Criminal Justice Awards (2021) - Entrepreneur of the Year
- SME News – Legal Awards, Best Culturally-Sensitive Prisoner Relative Support Service in the Midlands (2024)
- Corporate LiveWire Global Awards, Community Empowerment Initiative of the Year 2023/2024
- SME News, Community Support CEO of the Year 2023
- Corporate LiveWire Innovation & Excellence Award, under the category Family Support NPO of the Year 2023
- AI Global Media Female CEO of the Year Award, under the category Offender Family Support CEO of the Year 2023
- Birmingham Award 2023 Finalist Social Enterprise of the Year
- Birmingham Awards 2024 Community Champion of the Year
- Himaya Haven (organisational) Awards
- High Sheriffs of the West Midlands Award 2019
- West Midlands Health Star Awards 2022 Team/Services/organisation/ targets Support For Communities
- National Diversity Awards 2022 Community Organisation Award for Race, Religion and Faith
- Birmingham Awards, Social Enterprise of the Year 2023
- The British Muslim Awards, Charity of the Year 2023
- British Diversity Awards, Charity or Not-For-Profit of the Year 2024
- Social Economy Awards 2024 Excellence in Community Impact
- European Diversity Awards 2024 Charity or Non for Profit of the Year
- Corporate LiveWire Innovation & Excellence Award 2024 Winner, Community Support Nonprofit organisation of the Year
- Birmingham Diversity Awards 2024 Charity Nonprofit of the Year
- The Lords Mayors Award In recognition of her outstanding achievement and exceptional service to the City of Birmingham

## K Community Hero Awards 2021

- Criminal Justice Alliance Award (2021) - Outstanding Individual Runner Up
- New Leaf Criminal Justice Awards (2021) - Entrepreneur of the Year
- SME News – Legal Awards, Best Culturally-Sensitive Prisoner Relative Support Service in the Midlands (2024)
- Corporate LiveWire Global Awards, Community Empowerment Initiative of the Year 2023/2024
- SME News, Community Support CEO of the Year 2023
- Corporate LiveWire Innovation & Excellence Award, under the category Family Support NPO of the Year 2023
- AI Global Media Female CEO of the Year Award, under the category Offender Family Support CEO of the Year 2023
- Birmingham Award 2023 Finalist Social Enterprise of the Year
- Birmingham Awards 2024 Community Champion of the Year
- Himaya Haven (organisational) Awards
- High Sheriffs of the West Midlands Award 2019
- West Midlands Health Star Awards 2022 Team/Services/organisation/ targets Support For Communities
- National Diversity Awards 2022 Community Organisation Award for Race, Religion and Faith
- Birmingham Awards, Social Enterprise of the Year 2023
- The British Muslim Awards, Charity of the Year 2023
- British Diversity Awards, Charity or Not-For-Profit of the Year 2024
- Social Economy Awards 2024 Excellence in Community Impact
- European Diversity Awards 2024 Charity or Non for Profit of the Year
- Corporate LiveWire Innovation & Excellence Award 2024 Winner, Community Support Nonprofit organisation of the Year
- Birmingham Diversity Awards 2024 Charity Nonprofit of the Year
- The Lords Mayors Award In recognition of her outstanding achievement and exceptional service to the City of Birmingham



Himaya Haven produced a book chapter, entitled 'Silent victims: uncovering the realities of the criminal justice system for families of prisoners' after being invited by Dr Natalie Booth, one of the editors of an academic book looking at women, crime, and justice. The purpose of the chapter was for HH to highlight to different stakeholders and researchers the need for nuanced consideration of the impact of arrest and imprisonment on families along racial and gender lines. Reviewer feedback for the book chapter Himaya Haven' has written reflects this:



*Written from the perspective of a practitioner organisation working with families of prisoners this offers a different perspective. While existing literature has started to consider gendered aspects of the experiences of families of prisoners it does not consider further aspects of race or ethnicity in the same way. Particularly here this consideration of BAME families provides new and interesting insights in terms of the UK prison population, and specifically in terms of Kashmiri and Pakistani families, which is different to much of the work exploring race that comes from the US in this field, and even the focus on "black" prisoners and their families in the UK. The inclusion of service user voices as well as practitioner reflections shows multiple aspects of this intersectionality and the impact it has on families' experiences which is a novel contribution. The chapter also considers children's experiences of a family member's imprisonment, again in terms of BAME families which is a neglected area in existing familial imprisonment research, particularly outside of the US.*