

### **Best activity Award**

Muslim Sisters of Éire, is a grassroots non-profit all female organization, established in July 2010. Muslim Sisters of Eire, which initially and still does address issues relating to diversity, race, integration, and women in society through our conferences and events. We aim to contribute towards community cohesion and fight stereotypes most media outlets portray about muslim and migrant women. Our longest and ongoing project is our soup run that we hold outside of the GPO every Friday night, where most of Ireland's vulnerable rely on our services.

We wish to enter this competition under the category of 'Best activity award'. The campaign we wish to nominate is our pandemic poverty outreach project activity.

In early March 2020, we had just celebrated our 10 years of service on international women's day to mark the contribution Muslim women have made to Irish society. Little did we know that only a few days later, our women would be relied upon by many members of the society.

As the COVID-19 pandemic entered Ireland, Our organization has been severely impacted. We realised we could no longer hold our soup run due to social distancing regulations despite trying our hardest to hold a modified pandemic focused soup run. The demographic and projects we normally supported such as providing ongoing support and essential families living in emergency accommodation; providing essentials to families living in family hubs; supporting single mothers though the issues they are facing; intermediary support for women experiencing domestic violence had nowhere else to turn.

Our initial response was to ensure that this service was to continue on a trial run with a socially distant compliant soup run. We strictly followed health guidelines by providing hand sanitisers, face masks and gloves for all our volunteers as well as adhering to social distancing guidelines. This requires individually packing each item. Despite our best efforts, after a few weeks we realised this was no longer applicable as many of our volunteers were in the at risk categories themselves or had family members who could be at risk.

Our team met online via zoom to discuss this further. We needed to still be able to support the vulnerable in some way without breaking government guidelines or putting ourselves at risk. We decided to provide hampers and vouchers for people who have lost their jobs or who are cocooning due to COVID-19. To continue supporting the homeless community, we also decided

to provide bi-weekly nightly outreach to the rough sleepers and provide them with a pandemic hygiene pack, essential items and a hot meal. Hampers we provide include non-perishable food items, toiletries, nappies, cleaning products, toilet paper, fruits, and vegetables. We also include treats such as Easter eggs during the Easter period, chocolates, and crisps for parents to treat their children on occasion. As a result of this decision, the pandemic poverty outreach project was born.

Through the pandemic poverty outreach project, we have supported 60 families and 25 single men on a weekly basis. The demographics of people we received requests from include an increase of requests from people who have been recently laid off families during the COVID-19 crisis; who are struggling to afford basic necessities and some who are in self-isolation and cannot come out to collect what they need, without putting others at risk.

Requests also came from the elderly as well as people suffering with underlying health conditions such as heart problems and cancer, as well as financial hardship. As they are over the age of 70, they are more so at risk and rely on weekly hampers and assistance from us to keep them alive.

The families we are supporting are struggling financially and without our hampers, vouchers, and groceries they will experience periods of hunger. Some of our single mothers cannot shop for themselves without putting their children and the wider public at risk. The pandemic poverty relief project was and unfortunately still is an absolute lifeline for those at risk.

As we advertised the pandemic poverty relief project in all media platforms, weekly requests are growing. We have served and fulfilled requests from outside Dublin, out reaching to other areas such as County Kerry, County Sligo and County Cavan. This includes people in direct provision centres who have been hit with the Coronavirus as well as families living in emergency accommodation and family hubs requiring extra food and necessities that they can't afford at this point in time.

What astonished us and reinforced the need for our service is that we once received a call from a lady who was concerned for her relative residing in Ireland and found us via Facebook. She shared with us that her sister, who was expecting, along with her husband living in Ireland who is suffering with Covid-19 and had nowhere else to turn to for support. The caller resides in the United States and felt we were the only group of people that could help.

Throughout 2020, we had been providing food hampers to families both in the public and private sector, this includes homeless families in family hubs and families living in direct provision centres. Periodically throughout the year we continued with our soup run operating under a pandemic safety plan ensuring social distance is observed, providing every single service user with a face

mask and hand sanitiser and offering pre-packed homemade hot meals. The amount of rough sleepers out on the streets during the pandemic is heartbreaking, we need to do more to protect our vulnerable communities.

In May 2020, our chairperson Lorraine O'Connor received an award from Lord Mayor, Tom Brabazon for her dedication and commitment to serving struggling families during our first lockdown. The weekly hampers and vouchers to made their lives a little easier.

Our organization is uniquely placed to offer this service due to our strong reputation with both the service users and our image in the media. We have been featured in many media programmes and documentaries narrating our organisation and this project. We have also been featured as a part of Tesco's charity advertising campaign. We are very well and widely known across Ireland and international, being featured in news articles and segments broadcasted in Pakistan and Turkey. This spring we were featured in a documentary filmed by and Indonesian film crew.

Our organisation has been a runner up for 'The Wheel's Charity impact awards' in 2019 and our project has been featured in an episode of Ireland's RTE 'Nationwide' programme. The pandemic poverty relief project has been featured on RTE's 'Ramadan Diaries series' in 2020.

On the 5th of December 2020, Muslim Sisters of Eire received the prestigious award from Volunteer Ireland under the category of 'Large Organisations', for their commitment towards the homeless as well as providing poverty relief for cocooning and recently unemployed families during the pandemic. We were honoured to receive the award of which our President, Michael D Higgins is the patron. This is a huge achievement for our organisation and a reflection of all the hard work and selfless commitment from our volunteers.

We wish to thank you for the opportunity to present our activity and for your interest in learning more about our organisation Muslim Sisters of Eire.













