

# Sangini

## Interview with Padma Rao



### The project

**Sangini** is a Black and minority ethnic (BME) led, multicultural women's organisation based in Tyne and Wear and using arts, crafts, heritage and social activities it aims to raise awareness about health and wellbeing issues. This includes mental health, domestic violence so the interpretation of health is very broad. The organisation works with various community groups in Tyne & Wear, for example Srijoni, the Bangladeshi women's group for whom it applied for this grant.

Sangini also runs a women's art group, Sunderland Women's Art Group which has been going for six or seven years. The common factor across its work is the use of arts and crafts for social transformation and to talk to women about the issues that matter to them. Among these groups there are artists/creatives who have been hidden. For example, there is an Islamic artist in the group who makes amazing work, but does not speak English so has become cut off from the arts infrastructure. Last year Sangini developed a business plan and as part of this, the consultant they worked with researched for similar organisations elsewhere, but she could not find any.

Another element to their work is with the women's sector where they are exploring Black feminist leadership, feminism and women's equalities. In addition, they do community development and they are working with Northumbria University on a research project looking at the notion of activism within the BAME-led organisations.

### Side by Side Fund

At the time that Sangini saw this fund, the other Covid-related funding had finished. Sangini saw this small grant as having the potential to keep the Bangladeshi women's group going. It was important for the women to feel that they were not abandoned just because the project funding was finished. So, although it was a small amount of money, it was significant and the group could manage it themselves so it was building their capacity in financial management as well. The money will pay for the engagement worker and for Zoom and for some materials for the group.

The idea of the organisation being user-led was familiar to them; all of their activities are informed by the women: 'I can't start a project unless I speak to them'. The women have ownership of the group and the activities. In this case, one of the women in the group will manage the finances and will get training to help her build her capacity to do this. One of their aims is to increase employment within the group. Another group member, who is really good in arts and crafts, will be the assistant facilitator so building her capacity as well.

## Impact of the Fund

The sessions are a lifeline for the women. The money supported the group and the women, and that 'feeds directly into their wellbeing'. During Covid, they were running groups five days a week in the evenings. Another art project resulted in the women creating drawings and paintings based on Arabic calligraphy, which went into an exhibition. The women were engaged at a deep, psychological level building that relationship with the worker. It is essential that the work continues so that the women don't feel used. As an organisation, they know that this happens - people come to them when they have money and want something, and then forget about them when the money runs out.

Aside from the practicalities and the impacts listed above, the £500 can be used to attract match funding. Sometimes, these grants are 'deeply valuable' in demonstrating that an organisation has faith in you so that others might follow suit.

She said they might be able to share photographs of their work. She found it refreshing that NSUN believed in them and that they did not request much in the way of evidence at the end.

## Ways NSUN could support groups

There is something about skills and capacity building. They are part of a partnership of five organisations. The balance between getting the money, the delivery and reporting back is not easy. Many organisations like themselves are looking for core funding, to pay for workers' time rather than to continually look for projects to attract funding. Small groups simply don't have the structure or mechanisms to deal with this.

Another area is to enable groups to bring their policies up to date; perhaps providing a specialist to look at their policies to check if they are up to date and help them to update them. Small organisations often have needs around social media and raising awareness, and how to sustain the work when there are gaps in between small bits of funding.

NSUN could listen to these gaps and cracks that small organisations can fall into and see what they can do to support them.