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News

Bedford becomes home to the country's first Ethnic Food Bank

By Erica Roffe - 31 May 2023



Far left, Fsella Afzal-Pagliari (bpha), back far left, Dr Nadeem Mazi-Kotwal, centre, wearing black headscarf, Dr Minaz Mazi-Kotwal, centre right, wearing blue headscarf, Rumina Begum, Ethnic Food Bank co-founder. Image: Sam Quinton, Impact

Thanks to funding secured by a social housing association, the country's first Ethnic Food Bank has opened in Queen's Park in Bedford.

£10,000 of funding for the new community organisation was secured by bpha. It was granted from the Frank Branston Fund, part of the Bedford Luton Community Foundation (BLCF).

The food bank opened its doors in March this year at Westbourne Community Centre and is now well on its way to being a permanent support system for Bedford's residents.

The funding will buy equipment including office and IT equipment, shelving and dollies for moving crates.

The Ethnic Food Bank was developed by Dr Nadeem Mazi-Kotwal, and Dr Minaz Mazi-Kotwal – a Bedford GP, who had feedback from some patients that there's little diversity in the food available at food banks, making it harder to create appropriate or familiar meals.

The project aims to provide free, nutritionally balanced, and culturally appropriate food to people in hardship or distress, who are referred by a network of partner agencies.

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According to the 2021 Census, Bedford has a multi-ethnic population of 35.87% and a report from the Runnymede Trust suggests that 46% of children from black and ethnic minority families are growing up in poverty.

Food Foundation has stated that ethnic minority families are twice as likely to be suffering from food insecurity – that's having smaller meals or skipping meals due to unaffordability.

"Supporting communities is an important part of what bpha does", says Fsella Afzal-Pagliari, Community Engagement Officer, bpha.

"My team works directly with organisations and customers in and around Bedford to help deliver services that will directly benefit them, including Bedford Food Bank, with whom we've worked for many years.

"Since last autumn, we've been able to help the Ethnic Food Bank team find a suitable base. We've also used our network across the town to raise awareness of the project amongst the organisations in touch with people who may need to use the service.

"When an organisation is in its infancy, it can be hard to access funding – it takes time and a knowledge of how best to approach the process, both of which can be tricky when you're setting up something you've never done before. We guided the team through the process, ultimately securing the £10k grant, and we're delighted for them."

Dr Minaz said: "bpha has been helping Ethnic Food Bank since it was just an idea.

"The team has not only guided us on how to turn it into reality, but have also gone beyond this by helping with promotions, networking and now this huge milestone of getting our first-ever grant.

"We're now able to make a real difference to those in Bedford who need it."

The Ethnic Food Bank is open at Westbourne Community Centre in Bedford, every Wednesday from 5.30 pm – 7.30 pm.

You can find out more about being referred to the food bank [here](#) and you can find a guide on how to donate food to the food bank [here](#).

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