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BLACKBURN
MAGAZINE

**OUR STORY,
OUR ROOTS**

The evolution
of Blackburn's
mosques

**BLACKBURN
IN DEMAND**

What rising
house prices
mean for
our town

**A Daughter's
Gift of Life**

One family's organ
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**From Asylum Seeker
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FUNNY GUY

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with Tez Ilyas!

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1V AWARDS 2026

Finalists Reception

A special evening celebrating the everyday heroes who make Blackburn proud - Page 6

IN CONVERSATION

Tez Ilyas: From local roots to the national stage - Page 10

Meet Dr. Chowdhury: The changing face of medicine - Page 20

Zee Jogi: Determination, ambition, and rising to new heights - Page 28

HERITAGE & REFLECTION

Blackburn's Mosque Story

From humble beginnings to a proud part of our town's identity - Page 14

REAL STORIES, REAL PEOPLE

A Daughter's Sacrifice: Sofia's powerful act of love for her mum - Page 18

Tinta Ali: A journey from hardship to becoming a valued member of our town - Page 41

Ainsworth's Jewellers: Celebrating craftsmanship and community tradition - Page 44

OUR TOWN

Youth Centre Transformed: Brighter future for Audley & Queens Park community - Page 26

Blackburn in Demand: How rising house prices are shaping our town - Page 38

GROWING TOGETHER

Madrassah Project: A youth zone vision comes to fruition - Page 46

STEM Club: Inspiring curiosity, creativity, and future innovators - Page 48

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Cyber Fest: A buzzing event connecting people through technology - Page 50

Fast Challenge: Neighbours coming together to share in the Ramadan experience - Page 54

1V Scouts Iftar: Bringing young people together in the spirit of Ramadan - Page 63

FEATURES & EVERYDAY LIFE

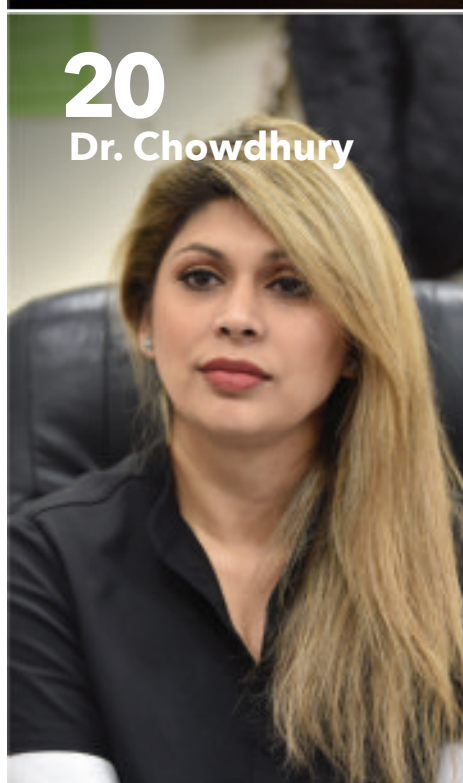
You're Weird: A light-hearted look at some unusual phobias - Page 58

They Are Electric: Meet the people who keep the North West switched on - Page 60

Contents



14 Masjid E Vali



20 Dr. Chowdhury



41 Tinta Ali

I Was Wrong... Mobile Phones Should Be Banned for Under 16s

Not long ago, I was firmly in the pro-smartphone camp. Like many parents and community voices, I believed giving children access to technology early would prepare them for the modern world. "They'll learn responsibility," I said. "It's the future," I argued.

Well, I was wrong.

Over the past year I've done something many of us rarely have the time, or perhaps the courage, to do. I've listened to the research and, more importantly, to the stories. Some of those stories have been deeply troubling. Children bullied relentlessly through group chats. Young teenagers losing sleep, confidence and peace of mind to the endless scroll. One particularly heartbreaking account I heard recently made it impossible to shrug this off as just "kids being kids."

Social media isn't simply a digital playground. It's a marketplace for attention, built by companies whose business model depends on keeping users, especially young ones, hooked for as long as possible. Expecting a 12-year-old to navigate that environment safely is a bit like handing them the keys to a car and hoping they'll instinctively understand motorway rules.

Let's be clear I'm not arguing that children shouldn't have phones. In a busy town like Blackburn, phones are useful for safety and coordination. Calls and texts? Absolutely sensible. But TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and the rest? That's a different matter entirely.

Sixteen feels like a reasonable line. By then, most young people have a stronger sense of identity, a thicker skin and, hopefully, the guidance to use these platforms wisely.

They say sometimes changing your mind isn't weakness. It's growth. On this issue, for the sake of our children's wellbeing, I believe it's time we drew the line.

Zaffer Khan,
Editor, 1V Magazine
CEO, One Voice Blackburn



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FROM CAFFEE IMPRESSO ON KING WILLIAM ST, BLACKBURN

We are One Voice Blackburn

One Voice Blackburn is a charity that aspires to create cohesive, aspirational and confident communities in Blackburn with Darwen. We aim to be a warm, compassionate, and engaging organisation which is valued and respected in all communities. We are registered in the UK as a charity.

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Clive Lawrence

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Every Finalist is Already a Winner



Young Person of the Year Finalist Ayna Manahil with Blackburn College's Nicola Clayton



1V Man of the Year Finalist Tabassam Zabier with Dr Alistair Murdoch

Community Champions Celebrated at 1V Awards 2026 Finalists Event

One Voice Blackburn proudly welcomed finalists, sponsors and community leaders to a celebratory evening at the Industry Collaboration Zone at Blackburn College, marking the official unveiling of finalists for the 1V Awards 2026.

Hosted by 16-year-old Safiyyah Hassan, the event recognised 23 finalists across six flagship award categories, honouring individuals and organisations whose dedication continues to strengthen communities across Blackburn with Darwen.

The evening opened with a warm welcome to guests and a tribute to the extraordinary impact finalists have made across the borough. CEO Zaffer Khan spoke about the continued growth of the 1V Awards and their role in spotlighting the town's unsung heroes.

"Tonight is about celebrating the spirit of Blackburn," he said. "These finalists represent compassion, resilience and service. The values that make our town proud."

A deeply moving moment of the evening came during the presentation of the Aya Hachem Young Person of the Year category. The award, renamed in 2021 in Aya's memory, continues to honour her legacy by recognising exceptional young people who inspire hope and unity. Guests joined in a standing ovation for the finalists, acknowledging the emotional significance of the tribute.

together
housing

Certificates were presented across the following categories:

Aya Hachem Young Person of the Year

Group of the Year

Health Award

Apprentice of the Year

Man of the Year

Woman of the Year

Each category showcased powerful stories of volunteerism, leadership and innovation that continue to uplift the borough.

The charity recognised the long-standing support of headline sponsors Together Housing and Newground Together, who have backed the awards since 2021. Representatives praised the finalists and reaffirmed their commitment to community development.

Kasira Ahmed, speaking on behalf of headline sponsors Together Housing and Newground Together, said: "Tonight we celebrate the people and groups who help Blackburn and Darwen thrive. While we provide homes across the North, our true purpose is building strong, connected communities, something we're proud to do alongside One Voice Blackburn. The finalists represent dedication, creativity and compassion, and their work makes this town brighter every day. We are proud to stand beside them and congratulate every one of them."

Additional category sponsors included: Blackburn and Darwen Youth Zone, Spring North, SP Electricity Northwest, Exchange Blackburn, McM Accounting.

Together Housing's Neil Townsend with the Awards trophies which will be given out in late spring which will be presented in June 2026



16 year old host Safiyyah Hassan



Kasira Ahmed from Together Housing, the headline sponsor

Spring North was welcomed as a new awards partner and announced it will present three awards at the main dinner, including an overall winner who will receive a £2,500 prize. They also celebrated their finalists for three main categories.

Guests also heard from Phil Riley, Leader of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, who praised the scale and impact of the awards, describing them as the borough's largest celebration of community volunteering. He confirmed the forthcoming announcement of the Leader's Award.

The John Roberts Outstanding Achievement Award would also be revealed ahead of the main ceremony.

The celebration concluded with excitement building for the 12th 1V Awards Dinner, themed movie night, where winners will be crowned on 13th June. 14 year old Malaak Muhammad will co-host the Awards Dinner, themed Movie Night, where winners will be crowned later this spring. Safiyyah Hassan will return as host alongside 14-year-old co-host Malaak Muhammad, continuing the tradition of young community voices leading the event.

Closing the evening, Safiyyah thanked finalists, sponsors and guests.

"Every finalist is already a winner. Tonight proves how much heart exists in our town. We cannot wait to celebrate with you all again at the awards dinner."

One of the finalists at the reception spoke highly of the organisation.

"It was lovely to meet and chat to people and it was so inspiring to hear about all the good work which is taking place in the Borough and to learn more about the initiatives which One Voice arranges in liaison with other partners," said Mary Painter.



1V Aya Hachem Young Person of the Year 2026 Finalists
Motunrayo Ainenehi, Sanaa Dewan, Zainab Shah

Sponsored by **Blackburn College**



1V Group of the Year 2026 Finalists
BAGS for Strife, Idle Women, Shelter Lancashire, Z's Defence Academy

Sponsored by **YOUTHZONE**



1V Health of the Year 2026 Finalists
Blackburn Birth Centre, Sunita Asal-Chander, Zaynab (Zee) Jogi

Sponsored by **SPRING NORTH**



1V Apprentice of the Year 2026 Finalists

Chloe Booth, Caitlin Boyle, Aaminah Karolia, Nico Novello

Sponsored by 



1V Man of the Year 2026 Finalists

Jamie Holman, Shiraz Hussain, Anthony Meara

Sponsored by 



1V Woman of the Year 2026 Finalists

Shahiesta Iqbal, Shigufta Khan, Mary Painter, Farzana (Faz) Sidat

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**How Tez Ilyas Built a
Career by Accident**

I Just Paid £130 for a Course

On a Friday night in Blackburn later this year, the atmosphere will be different. Not because the theatre will be bigger. Not because the lights will be any brighter. But because this will be home.

In an exclusive interview with One Voice Blackburn magazine, Tez Ilyas opens up about his journey, his career, and his upcoming third national tour.



"You can't blag your way through Blackburn," Tez Ilyas says, smiling. "They know you. They know your cousins. They probably know stories about you that you don't even remember."

For a comedian who now tours nationally, appears on prime-time television and headlines major venues, it's striking that geography still matters so much. But for Tez, Blackburn isn't just a hometown. It's the foundation of everything he talks about on stage. Identity, belonging, class, race, ambition and contradiction.

"People talk about authenticity like it's a branding exercise," he says. "For me, it's just survival. I can't pretend to be anything other than what I am. Northern. Working class. British Muslim. All of it."

Tehzeeb "Tez" Ilyas grew up in a British-Pakistani household in Lancashire, navigating life in a predominantly working-class town. The intersection of race, religion and region would later become the spine of his comedy.

"I was a mouthy straight-A student," he says. "Not the loudest kid in the room, but I always had something to say. I think teachers weren't quite sure whether to encourage me or send me outside."

At school, an English teacher entered him into a public speaking competition. It went well, surprisingly well. He progressed to regional rounds. But the real lesson came when he had to

recreate his speech in a school assembly.

"At the competition, everyone's there to listen," he explains. "In assembly? No one cares. People are whispering. Messing about. And I remember panicking halfway through. Then I said, 'Yeah, and all of that is good... if you're paying attention.' And they laughed. That was the moment. I realised you could take back control."

Still, stand-up comedy didn't seem like a realistic career path.

"Becoming a comedian felt as far-fetched as becoming an astronaut," he says. "There wasn't a blueprint. I didn't see anyone from Blackburn doing it. Definitely not someone with my background."

Instead, he followed a more conventional route. After Witton Park, Blackburn College and Lancaster University, he joined the Civil Service Fast Stream and worked at the Home Office.

"It's one of the most competitive graduate schemes in the country," he says. "I didn't quite get the Foreign Office, that was the dream, but I was proud of myself."

And yet.

"I almost failed probation because I couldn't get to work on time," he laughs. "You had to be there by 10. Flexible hours! And even then I struggled. I've

never been a morning person. It's tragic."

At his new career it wasn't laziness, it was restlessness.

"I remember sitting at my desk thinking, 'Is this it? Is this what I'm doing for the next 40 years?' That thought terrified me."

In 2010, after returning to London after a short stint in Liverpool and determined not to feel isolated, he searched online for a writing workshop. What he found instead was a six-week stand-up comedy course at City Lit in Covent Garden.

"It was £130," he says. "At the time, that was a lot of money for me. I had overdrafts. I had loans. I absolutely shouldn't have been spending that on what was essentially a hobby."

But he did. On the first evening, the tutor was late.

"So I went to the front and pretended I was the course leader. I said, 'I just wanted to observe how you all behave naturally before I introduce myself.' It was nonsense. Completely made up. But it got laughs. And I thought 'oh'. That's interesting."

Six weeks later, he performed his first five-minute set above a pub near Piccadilly Circus.

"I was more nervous because my friends were there," he says. "Strangers don't scare me. Your mates? They'll never let you forget it if you bomb."

He didn't bomb.

"It wasn't clever. It wasn't sophisticated. But it worked. And once you feel that. Once you feel a room laugh exactly where you hoped they would - it's addictive. It's like, 'Right. I need more of that.'"

For the next three years, he gigged relentlessly. Basements. Attics. Pub backrooms. Anywhere that would give him five minutes and a microphone.

"No money," he says. "Sometimes no audience. And if they don't laugh, it ruins your day. That's not normal behaviour. It takes a particular type of person to keep signing up for that."

In 2015, he reached the final of the BBC New Comedy Award. Soon came television appearances, including Live at the Apollo, and successful runs at the Edinburgh Fringe.

"Edinburgh changed everything," he says. "Suddenly industry people were in the room. Suddenly you're not just 'that

guy from the open mic.' You're a contender."

In 2018, he fronted his own Channel 4 series, *The Tez O'Clock Show*, blending stand-up with political satire and sketches tackling media narratives, Islamophobia and British identity.

"It was surreal," he says. "You go from gigging in pubs to having your name on a show. But TV's strange. It feels massive and fragile at the same time." And then came *Man like Mobeen*.

When the pandemic halted television production, the momentum shifted.

"You can't rely on being the shiny new toy forever," he says. "New toys come in. If you sit back waiting for the phone to ring, you'll be waiting a long time."

Instead, he returned to touring and leaned into digital platforms.

"No one's rushing to buy tickets because they saw you at 9pm on BBC Two," he says. "They see a clip on Instagram at 9am. That's the world now. You have to adapt or you disappear."

Political commentary remains central to his work. He has spoken out on issues from media bias to international conflicts, knowing full well it may cost him professionally.

"No one rings you and says, 'You've lost this job because of your views,'" he says. "It just doesn't get offered. That's how it works. But if something genuinely matters to me, I'll speak. I just try not to carry the whole world on my shoulders."

The question of representation inevitably follows him.

"I never set out to be a spokesperson," he says. "I just wanted a hobby. But I understand that when you're one of the few visible Muslim comics on mainstream TV, people project things onto you."

Does he feel pressure?

"Sometimes," he admits. "But I also remind myself I'm a comedian. My job is to make people laugh. If I start thinking I'm the ambassador for 1.8 billion people, that's too much."





In recent years, another creative outlet has emerged: a podcast with his wife 'Making a Husband'.

"It's chaos," he laughs. "That's the best way to describe it."

The show, which is informal, conversational, often self-deprecating, gives audiences a glimpse of domestic life away from the stage lights.

"It's nice because it's not me on a pedestal," he says. "It's just us. Bickering. Talking about marriage. Culture. Family expectations. The ridiculousness of everyday life."

Working with his partner Shy adds a new dynamic.

"She keeps me honest," he says. "If I start getting too self-important, she'll shut it down immediately. Which is healthy."

The podcast has allowed him to explore vulnerability in a different way.

"On stage, everything's heightened. It's punchline driven. On the podcast, we can sit in a story for longer. We can disagree. It feels more human."

He believes audiences increasingly value that transparency.

"People don't just want polished anymore," he says. "They want real. They want to feel like they know you. That's why podcasts work."

In 2017, Tez made the decision to move back to Blackburn, from the capital.

"Financially, it made sense," he says. "I couldn't afford to do comedy full-time and pay London rent. But it was more than that. I was 33. I didn't want to live like a 25-year-old anymore."

The move also reconnected him to the community that shaped him.

"Blackburn gets a bad rap," he says. "Yes, there are challenges. But show me a town that doesn't have them. It's like family. You can acknowledge the flaws. You still love it."

He remains a committed Blackburn Rovers supporter.

"I remember when they got promoted to the Premier League in the '90s," he says. "I didn't even know we had a team before that. Suddenly it was like, 'Wait, that's ours?' And that was it. I was locked in."

The sense of rootedness informs his current tour.

"By the time we reach the Blackburn date, the show's the best version of itself," he says. "You iron it out over weeks. But that home crowd they'll let you know if something's not working."

What keeps him hungry after more than a decade in the industry?

"Fear," he says bluntly. "Healthy fear. Comedy doesn't owe you anything. The audience doesn't owe you anything. You have to earn it every night. But also gratitude. I still can't quite believe this is my job. I get to talk for an hour, and people choose to listen. That's wild."

If there's a message to younger comedians from towns like Blackburn, it's simple.

"You don't need permission," he says. "I didn't know anyone in the industry. I just paid £130 for a course and gave it a go. That's it."

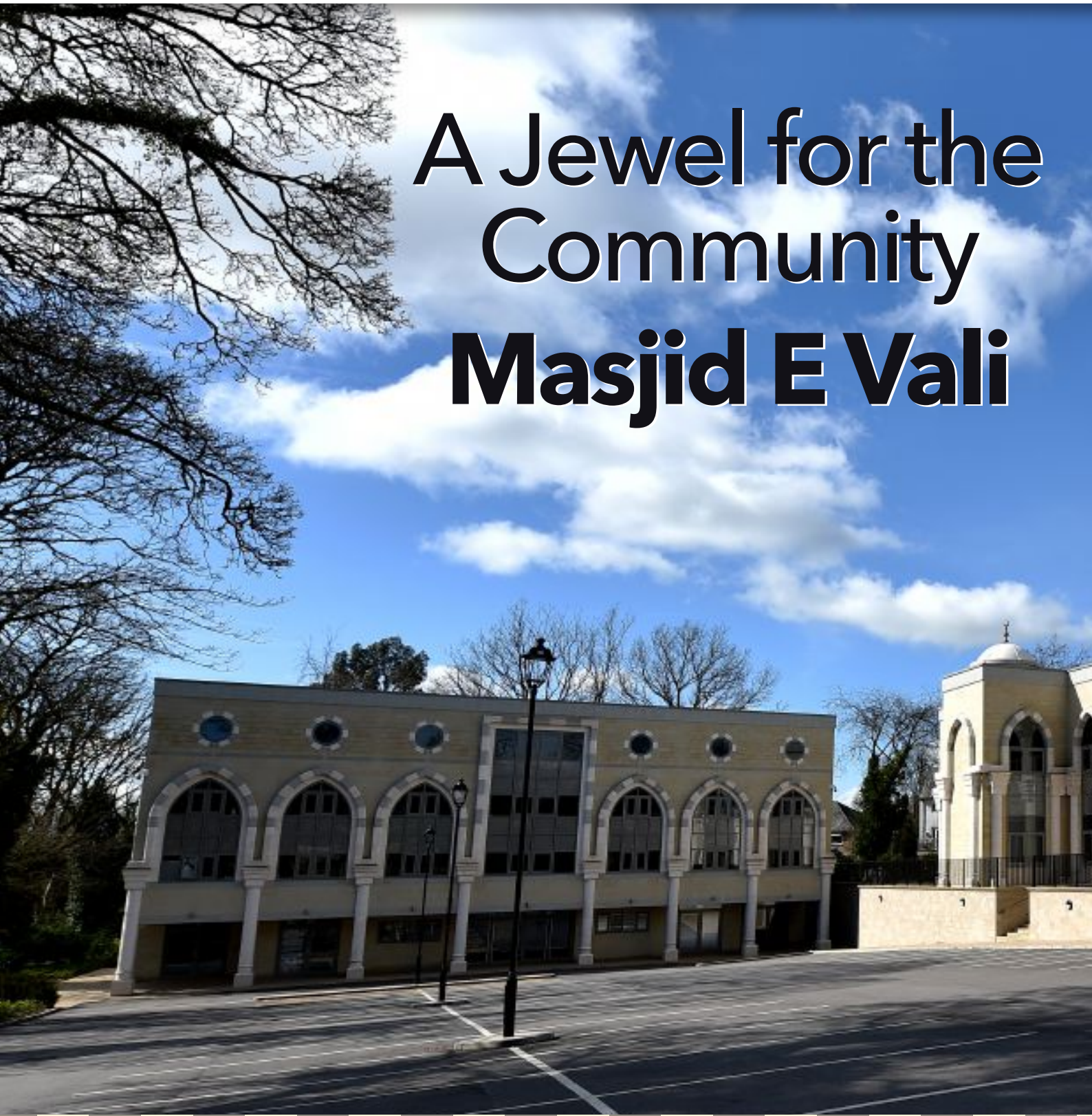
Tez is also massively proud of AJ Odudu and Shabaz Ali, who have made it big in TV and social media. He has collaborated with Shabaz. And as for the future?

"Stand-up is home," he says. "TV's great. Podcasts are great. But being on stage, hearing that first laugh nothing beats it. As long as people want to see me, I'll keep going."

When Tez Ilyas begins his new tour, Tez Things I Hate About You, in September 2026, one date will matter more than most: 13 November, at Blackburn's King George's Hall. It's home, and the audience that knows him best.

For tickets, visit: tezilyas.com or King George's Hall website.

A Jewel for the Community **Masjid E Vali**





Rising from the former grounds of Westholme Junior School, Masjid E Vali stands as one of the North West's most striking new landmarks and a symbol of the Muslim community's lasting contribution to Blackburn. Opened in January after more than five years of development, it transforms a former school site into a space of architectural beauty and shared purpose. Funded by the Issa Foundation and named in memory of Vali Issa, the mosque

reflects values of community, compassion and inclusivity.

Blending Middle Eastern inspiration with contemporary design, visitors are welcomed by marble pillars and a tranquil fountain leading into a prayer hall for over 1,000 worshippers, alongside spaces for women, childcare and community use. A place designed to bring people together across backgrounds and generations.





Photo courtesy of Lancashire Telegraph

From Terraced Houses to Glittering Landmark

Blackburn's Mosque Journey to Masjid Vali

The opening of Masjid Vali marks a defining moment in Blackburn's religious and civic landscape. With a reported multi million pound investment and a striking contemporary design, it represents confidence, permanence and vision. Yet its story did not begin with architects' drawings or fundraising dinners. It began in a single terraced house off Audley Range, writes Zaffer Khan.

The first known mosque in Blackburn was Jamia Masjid, established around 1962 in a single terrace property just off Audley Range, on Billinge St. At the time, Blackburn's Muslim population was small but steadily growing, largely made up of men from Gujarat, Punjab and Azad Kashmir who had arrived to work in Lancashire's textile mills. Prayer took place in modest conditions. Living rooms were cleared, carpets laid, and worshippers stood shoulder to shoulder in spaces never designed to



Masjid e Raza in Balaclava St opened around 1968

hold congregations. But those walls carried something powerful, the determination to preserve faith far from home.

As the community grew, the need for additional space quickly became apparent. In 1965, the second mosque was established at 29 Bicknell Street. Like Jamia Masjid, it was based in a terraced house. It marked an important step forward. A sign that the Muslim presence in Blackburn was becoming more organised and permanent. What began as scattered prayer gatherings was slowly forming into structured institutions with regular congregational prayers and Qur'anic teaching for children.

Three years later, in 1968, another significant milestone followed with the establishment of Masjid-e-Raza on Balaclava Street. This development reflected the expanding size and diversity of the community. As with the earlier mosques, the building was modest, but its impact was substantial. It provided religious education, a meeting place for elders, and a social anchor at a time when many migrants were still navigating unfamiliar surroundings and, at times, social hostility.

Alongside these early developments, Masjid-e-Noorul Islam in Audley Range emerged from similarly humble beginnings. Formal activity began in the late 1960s when the Islamic Educational Society of Blackburn was formed by around 50 members. Teaching and prayer initially took place in a spare room within a member's house before a terraced property on Lambeth Street was purchased and converted into a mosque and madrasa. As numbers increased, neighbouring houses were acquired to expand classroom provision and accommodate the imam.

In 1972, came Masjid-e-Raza on Randal Street. The building had previously been a dance hall. A reminder of Blackburn's changing social fabric. Its conversion into a mosque symbolised both adaptation and rootedness.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, other mosque projects followed similar patterns. Terraced houses were purchased one by one; walls were opened up; partitions were removed. Former schools and community buildings were repurposed. What began as necessity gradually evolved into permanence. Mosques became more than prayer halls. They became centres of education, dispute

resolution, youth engagement and social support.

Those early decades were not without challenge. Economic decline, mill closures and episodes of racial tension shaped daily life. In that environment, the mosque provided stability. It was a sanctuary in every sense. A place where elders found familiarity, children learned Qur'an after school, and families gathered in Ramadan to break their fast together.

Ramadan in those years carried a distinct atmosphere. Streets around Brookhouse and Audley Range filled with families walking to evening prayers. Inside modest halls, dates and water were shared before congregants lined up for Taraweeh. There were no grand domes or expansive car parks but there was unity, discipline and devotion.

As the children of mill workers grew into professionals, business owners and community leaders, aspirations expanded. The idea of the mosque shifted from converted housing stock to purpose-built architecture. Facilities were designed with women's sections, classrooms, disabled access and community halls. The mosque evolved into a multifunctional centre serving religious and civic life alike.

Last year saw the iconic Al Buraq masjid which brought history, culture, architecture and community under one roof.

It is within this historical arc that Masjid Vali now stands. Its £5 million investment reflects not only financial capacity but generational progress. From a single terrace house off Audley Range to a modern, purpose-built



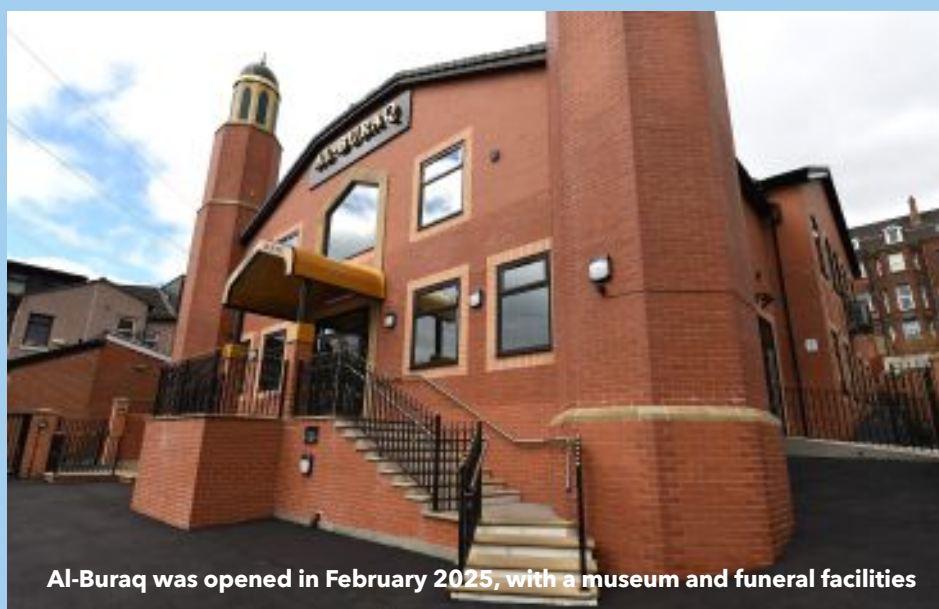
The very first mosque in Blackburn around 1962

landmark, the journey spans more than six decades of sacrifice and steady growth.

Masjid Vali does not erase the past. It honours it. It stands on foundations laid by Jamia Masjid, 29 Bicknell Street, Masjid-e-Raza, and the early pioneers of Noorul Islam. Each terrace house purchased, each classroom partition built, each volunteer hour contributed has led to this moment.

From spare rooms to domes and minarets, Blackburn's mosques tell a story of resilience, adaptation and faith carried across continents. As worshippers gather in the splendour of Masjid Vali's new prayer hall let's not forget the founding fathers of the community.

The skyline may have changed. The devotion has not.



Al-Buraq was opened in February 2025, with a museum and funeral facilities



Faith, Family, and the Power of Organ Donation

"When my mother told me she had kidney failure, I could hear fear and hopelessness in her voice. And without thinking, I said, 'I will.'"

For Sofia Kamran, that instinctive reply would set in motion a journey that spanned continents, tested her resilience, and ultimately gave her mother a second chance at life. Living in Preston, while her mother was in Pakistan, Sofia faced not just physical distance but the vast differences in healthcare systems.

"In the UK, we have regular health checks and early intervention. In Pakistan, it's very different. My mother's illness went undiagnosed for years."

Her mother had suffered from persistent vomiting, fevers, and

exhaustion for almost two years. Multiple doctors, numerous medications, yet nothing worked. Then, in 2009, the devastating truth: "Her kidneys were functioning at just 25 percent. She would eventually need a transplant, with dialysis as a temporary measure."

Sofia recalls her mother's quiet, fearful question: "'Who would ever give me a kidney?' Without hesitation, I said, 'I will.'"

"It wasn't about heroism or sacrifice; it felt like something I had been quietly prepared for," she explains. Years

earlier, her uncle had donated a kidney to a cousin. Seeing him live a healthy life with one kidney left a lasting impression. "I remember thinking, if I'm ever given the chance, I would do it. And when the moment came, my mind was already made up."

"At first, people were shocked," she continues. "Some said, 'You're acting emotionally,' especially because I had just had a baby. But I knew this was something I had to do."

At the time, Sofia was pregnant with her second child. "After my son was born, I had no choice but to wait. Recovery

takes time. Meanwhile, my mother's condition worsened daily. By October, doctors warned that dialysis would only give her a short window—perhaps six weeks."

Her determination never wavered. "I called her from Heathrow Airport. It was her birthday. I told her, 'I'm coming. Insh'Allah (God willing), everything will be fine.'"

Planning the surgery was intense. Sofia's husband, an anaesthetist, coordinated with colleagues in Pakistan. "Healthcare there is largely private. Every test, consultation, and surgery had to be meticulously arranged. My family stepped in to care for my baby and support my mother. Their help was essential."

Arriving in Pakistan, Sofia was confronted with the harsh reality of her mother's condition. "She was too unwell to even sit up or hug me. That moment confirmed there was no turning back."

The surgery went smoothly. "Within 24 hours, her blood results had normalized. Her body accepted the kidney immediately. Years of illness and suffering transformed almost overnight."

The small everyday moments became extraordinary. "Seeing her eat properly again, after years of avoiding food, was incredible. She smiled and said she had forgotten how to chew. Sitting up comfortably, speaking without nausea, enjoying a meal... these were gifts beyond words."

Even with the joy, Sofia faced questions from family and community. "'Is it permissible in Islam? What about your health?' Some comments were deeply unsettling at such a vulnerable time. I researched scholarly opinions and spoke with knowledgeable individuals. I found immense relief. Saving a life is among the greatest acts in Islam."

Her experience inspired advocacy. "There's a serious lack of awareness about organ donation; medically, culturally, and religiously. Too many people make decisions based on fear or myths. We need safe spaces to ask questions, seek knowledge, and have honest conversations." She has since worked with organisations and the NHS to raise awareness, particularly within Muslim communities.

Sofia shares one of the most meaningful lessons: "Faith was my anchor. Praying gave me strength when I felt fear. Every decision, every step, I placed in Allah's hands."

Despite the extraordinary nature of her actions, Sofia does not see herself as remarkable. "I rarely speak publicly, not because I regret it, I don't at all, but because I don't want praise or labels. I was simply someone in a position to help when help was needed. Sincerity matters more than recognition."

Her advice is grounded in wisdom and compassion: "Seek knowledge. Whether you choose to become a donor or not, make that decision based on understanding, not myths or pressure. Speak to medical professionals. Speak to scholars you trust. Speak to people who have lived the experience. That is how families, faith, and communities are strengthened."

Reflecting on the long journey, she adds, "Watching my mother recover,

seeing her regain life's simple joys, made everything worth it. It's a reminder that the most ordinary moments can become extraordinary."

Looking back, Sofia reflects with clarity and gratitude. "I don't think I could have done anything more meaningful with my life. The experience humbled me, brought me closer to Allah, and showed me the true power of faith, courage, and family."

For more information on living donation please visit:



In the heart of Blackburn, where deprivation, cultural barriers and rising demand collide, one GP is carving out a different kind of legacy. It is a career built not on headlines or heroics, but on listening, advocacy and an unshakeable belief that women deserve better healthcare.

Listening as Medicine

Dr Madiha Chowdhury's Quiet evolution in Blackburn

Dr Madiha Chowdhury may have grown up surrounded by medicine, but her mission stretches far beyond the surgery walls. At Roman Road Surgery, she is quietly working to transform not just how healthcare is delivered, but how her community, particularly its women, are heard.

"I grew up with medicine. My father was a consultant psychiatrist. He would come home visibly uplifted by the people he had helped that day. He'd come home genuinely happy. That stayed with me."

Healthcare wasn't just her father's profession; it was the family environment. Her parents owned a nursing home, and much of her childhood was spent there.





“ Listening matters. Talking matters. Being present matters. Sometimes conversation is more powerful than tablets ”

In 2000, she moved to Newcastle to study medicine, a bigger leap than she had anticipated.

“I’m a homebird. I went back to Lancashire every weekend until I passed my driving test in my third year. But eventually Newcastle won me over. It felt warm, manageable and respectful. Even with the boundaries I set for myself, no one ever pressured me to do anything I wasn’t supposed to.”

After graduating, she moved to Manchester for postgraduate training, rotating through paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, and A&E. She enjoyed the breadth, but the intensity of

hospital life raised difficult questions.

“The rotas were relentless. I started thinking: how would I balance work with being a mother, a wife, a person?”

“Around the same time, I met my husband, who was also training to become a GP. Together, we began to picture a life that allowed space for family alongside medicine. General practice, with its continuity of care and relative flexibility, felt like the right fit.”

Returning to East Lancashire meant returning to her roots. She trained at Roman Road Surgery in Blackburn and immediately felt at home.

“I loved the mix of patients. Apart from a four-year spell as a partner in Burnley, I’ve stayed here ever since. We’re a small team, which means we can shape the practice in a way that feels right.”

Yet general practice today is very different from the one she first entered.

“It’s not that doctors want to rush people. But now we deal with everything that comes in that day. Primary care handles far more than it used to. Patients expect immediacy. Results, appointments, reassurance, everything is instant now. And then there’s Dr Google,” she adds with a knowing smile.

With growing awareness around conditions such as ADHD, autism, endometriosis, menopause and fibromyalgia, consultations have become more complex.

“People are more informed, which is a good thing. But it challenges us to think deeper and look harder.”

Working in an area of significant deprivation has also sharpened her understanding of how poverty shapes health outcomes.

“Fresh food is expensive. Families rely on processed or frozen food to manage costs. Obesity remains one of the greatest risk factors for long-term illness. It affects everything, cardiovascular health, diabetes, mortality.”

Cultural factors add another layer: stigma around mental health, domestic violence and addiction.

“Some things stay hidden. People feel they can’t talk about them. Women’s health, in particular, has become a focus of our practice. Some women feel they aren’t listened to. Bringing women’s health to the forefront really matters.”

Blackburn’s geography and close-knit community dynamics can also create barriers.

“People stay in their pockets. Some won’t even travel from Blackburn to Burnley. Cultural misconceptions stop communities from connecting. Some Asian patients choose practices outside their neighbourhoods because they feel they can speak more openly. Even though confidentiality is absolute, perception matters.”

She is proud of what her team has achieved, from expanded women’s health services to stronger mental health support, and a culture where conversation is often as important as medication.

“I want to be a voice for women, especially in our South Asian communities, to make sure their concerns are heard and their needs shape the services they receive.”



“Talking can be more powerful than tablets.”

Work-life balance is another achievement she refuses to underplay.

“I don’t neglect my family, and I don’t neglect my career. That balance means a lot.” Being married to another GP, she adds, brings its own advantages. “If I’ve had a difficult case, having his perspective really helps.”

Looking ahead, her ambitions are firmly rooted in advocacy.

“I want to be a voice for women, especially in our South Asian communities. I want to relay their concerns, create awareness and help shape the services they actually need. If I can make a difference, that would be a big achievement.”

Her parents, she says, are immensely proud. All three daughters have chosen caring professions: her elder sister is a GP working in cosmetic medicine, her younger sister a veterinary surgeon.

“My kids, though, are more drawn to the arts, and that’s absolutely fine. I want them to make their own choices.”

She is frank about Blackburn’s challenges.

“We don’t get a fair share of funding for the level of demand we face. Deprivation is high, but services don’t match the need. Drug and alcohol issues, safeguarding, mental health and domestic violence stretch already limited resources. Until funding reflects

“I still feel like an old-school doctor. How a patient presents, their tone, their body language, those things can never be replaced by technology.”

reality, areas like ours will always be catching up.”

Despite this, her love for medicine has not dimmed.

“I still feel like an old-school doctor. Listening matters. Being present matters. Supporting communities to better health outcomes is key.”

Even officially working part-time, medicine is never far away.

“I’ll often log in at home. I train other GPs, so the work is always there, in the foreground and the background.”

Community engagement remains central to her vision.

“I want to know what people feel they need. I want to engage with them, advocate for them. I love going to community events and recognising the challenges firsthand. Knowing what isn’t working helps me feed that back into practice. It’s about being a voice for the community.”

Technology, she believes, will support rather than replace that human connection. AI-driven consultation



recording is already being rolled out internationally.

“It’ll help us focus more on patients. AI won’t take over my role. How a patient presents, their tone, their body language, those things matter. Robotic surgery is already here, but general practice is about people.”

Her hopes for Roman Road Surgery are simple. “To continue delivering the high standard of care it has become known for.”

After fifteen years in practice, and many more ahead, Dr Madiha Chowdhury’s quiet revolution continues, one conversation at a time.



A lifesaving partnership

Thanks to our partnership work with **One Voice Blackburn**, Anthony Nolan is able to share trusted guidance on stem cell donation throughout the community while also growing and diversifying the stem cell register.

Is stem cell donation permissible in Islam?

Scan the QR code to hear an Imam share Islamic guidance, including Qur'anic references, advising that **donation is allowed and encouraged in Islam**.

Shared with thanks to One Voice Blackburn.



**ANTHONY
NOLAN**

Saving lives through stem cells



Reg Charity no 803716/SC038827 4369RD12/25



Nazia Khan (left) has been leading the way at stem cell registration events

From Schools to Cafés

How One Voice Blackburn is Changing Stem Cell Donation

One Voice Blackburn has once again demonstrated its vital role in supporting stem cell donor recruitment within communities underrepresented on the national register. Over the past year, the team has achieved remarkable success, exceeding key targets and engaging young people, schools, and local communities in life-saving work.

A core goal for One Voice in 2025/26 was to deliver at least six recruitment events each year, incorporating a mix of educational settings and all-day community café events. The team not only achieved this target but went further by leveraging personal networks and introducing innovative initiatives, including the Letterbox Lifesaver kits, which recruited an

additional 41 donors. Across the year, One Voice recruited 296 new donors, placing them at the forefront of efforts to increase equity on the stem cell register and giving every patient the best possible chance of finding a life-saving match.

Collaboration with Anthony Nolan has been a cornerstone of the programme.

In 2025, Partnership Officer at Anthony Nolan Gemma Hay-Bryant visited the filming of 1VB's latest video. These partnerships continue into 2026, with plans for the Anthony Nolan team to attend the 1VB Awards evening, where they will be interviewed by one of the programme's young volunteers. Such engagement highlights the value of combining local expertise with national reach to amplify impact.

A key focus this year was addressing religious barriers to stem cell donation. One Voice worked closely with local faith leaders, including imams and priests, to co-create video content that educates communities, dispels myths, and reassures individuals about the permissibility of donation in Islam and other faiths. The video has already been shared widely by Anthony Nolan staff, volunteers, and partner organisations, reaching over 46,000 views and helping to build confidence and trust in the donation process.

Alongside this, 1VB continued to co-design merchandise and marketing materials with Anthony Nolan. Their most recent innovation, a takeaway card, provides clear guidance for those considering donation, supporting volunteers and staff in creating informed and confident conversations with potential donors. These materials, alongside educational resources and videos, have strengthened relationships with local communities, addressing questions, busting myths, and promoting stem cell donation as both accessible and life-saving.

One Voice's approach goes beyond recruitment numbers. By actively engaging young people aged 16-19, the programme nurtures the next generation of advocates for stem cell donation. Young volunteers are empowered to lead conversations, share experiences, and support recruitment initiatives, ensuring the programme is inclusive, relatable, and sustainable.

Through school and college events, community outreach, and accessible educational resources, One Voice Blackburn continues to inspire, reassure, and mobilise communities. Their work exemplifies the power of partnership, creativity, and local knowledge in achieving national impact. With plans already in place for 2026, 1VB is set to continue breaking barriers, fostering trust, and saving lives. One donor at a time.

Figures correct at 31st March 2026



**“There is
no greater way to do
something good”**

ANIE, STEM CELL RECIPIENT

**Stem cells save lives. And yours might
be the answer someone's looking for.**

We need you.

Yes, YOU.

**One Voice Blackburn has registered
297 new people onto the stem cell
register in the last 12 months**

**You can find
out more and
apply at:**



**Watch our in
depth interview
with
Anie Hussain**



**Stem Cell
Transplants
are Permissible
in Islam**



Photo: Darren Robinson Photography



Youth Benefit from Revamped Centre

A new youth provision at Audley & Queen's Park Children's Centre is near completion - part of almost £10m of new investment in facilities for young people across the borough.

Once completed, the children's centre will be able to offer a universal youth provision for the very first time. The centre already hosts a nursery and adult learning centre, and this addition makes it an impressive and valuable service for residents of all ages.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council secured the funding through the Government's Youth Investment Fund and received £1.1m for the project. The Youth Investment Fund (YIF) is funded by the UK Government and is delivered by Social Investment Business in partnership with Resonance, Key Fund and National Youth Agency.

Young people will now have access to a gaming area and a STEM suite with a focus on cyber skills. Life skills will be improved via a new teaching kitchen

and the café area has also been refurbished.

IMO charity will run the youth centre and have worked in the Audley & Queen's Park area for the last twenty years.

IMO Chief Executive Mohammed Tayyab Sidat MBE said:

"First and foremost, I would like to thank the council for understanding the needs of our community and helping to secure this vital funding and delivering this new youth facility, which is much needed and will be invaluable in supporting our youngsters.

"This youth facility will be open seven days a week and will help support young people and their parents and carers at the heart of the community.

"There will be a huge range of sessions

- from educational support to employability and more.

"It will be a safe place for young people to come, but it is more than just a youth centre, it is a beacon of light."

IMO has already been undertaking outreach work and will continue to build on this. The feedback received so far has influenced the new space and the sessions and support on offer.

These will include educational support, mental health support, employability and targeted support for young people not in education, employment or training. There will also be support for parents and guardians.

Councillor Julie Gunn, Deputy Leader of Blackburn with Darwen Council and executive lead for Children and Education said:

“This youth facility will be open seven days a week and will help support young people and their parents and carers at the heart of the community. There will be a huge range of sessions – from educational support to employability and more.”

Mohammed Tayyab Sidat, CEO, IMO Charity

“This is a shining example of what we do so well in Blackburn with Darwen – strong partnership working to improve the lives of our residents and our communities.

“This project at Audley & Queen’s Park Children’s Centre will bring youth provision right to the very heart of this community.

“It is great that we managed to secure the funding, but what is much more important is what we can deliver now with IMO. Already they have done so much for this community and now they can build on those foundations.

“As a council we can only do so much, but together projects like this can help make a real difference. We are on a mission to ensure every child and young person has the opportunities to fulfil their potential – this is an important part of that.”

The Audley & Queen’s Park Children’s Centre work has delivered by Seddon, which recently completed the YIF redevelopment at Darwen Youth Centre.



Matthew Sargeson, Operations Director at Seddon said:

“We are proud to have delivered this important project at Audley & Queen’s Park Children’s Centre, creating a high-quality, modern space that will benefit young people across the community.

“The new facilities have been designed to support learning, skills development and wellbeing.

We look forward to seeing the centre become a vibrant hub that supports young people to grow, learn and reach their full potential.”



Breaking Barriers *the Zee Jogi Way*

Zaynab “Zee” Jogi stands out as a woman of resilience, strength, and purpose. Someone who has stepped confidently into spaces where few women, and even fewer Muslim women, have gone before. In her interview with One Voice Blackburn, Zee speaks not just as a martial artist, self-defence instructor, mountain adventurer, and charity founder, but as someone shaped by adversity and driven by a desire to help others. Her achievements are impressive, but what truly defines her is the determination and heart that carried her from a challenging childhood in Blackburn to becoming a role model for her community and beyond.

Zee’s journey began in Blackburn, in a household defined by both love and challenge. Raised by a single mother, she quickly became aware of what she lacked: a traditional two-parent support system.

“It was always just my mum,” she recalls. “I’d look around at school meetings or mosque gatherings and wonder why it was only her and everybody else had two parents. I never really understood it.”

That absence, coupled with the pressures of adolescence, left her feeling isolated and misunderstood.

“Being younger, I was a bit of a rebel,” she says. “I didn’t fit into society properly, and I carried a lot of questions. ‘Why me?’ being one of them. My mental health was really affected by it.”

It was during these formative years that a friend introduced her to a local Muay Thai gym, a suggestion that would become a turning point.



"I was fifteen. It was scary. Imagine being a fifteen-year-old girl walking into a big gym full of people training with pads and gloves. But stepping through those doors changed everything.

"The gym offered more than just physical training; it provided a sanctuary where I could channel my energy, confront, emotions, and discover discipline. It gave me mental focus. It allowed me to release all the negative energy I had built up from my childhood. That gym shaped me into the woman I am today."

Her commitment was immediate and unwavering. She moved from being a student to volunteering and eventually became a trainer. Even when she was the only girl attending the weekly sessions, she showed up without fail.

"They'd tell me, 'You're so consistent, so disciplined.' And they were right. For years, I turned up every Tuesday without fail."

As her confidence grew, so did her purpose. Teaching became a way to give back, to help other women experience the empowerment she had found in the gym. "Giving back to the community has always been in me," she says. "Teaching gave me a sense of belonging I had long searched for."

After fifteen years of dedication to martial arts, Zee's path took another unexpected turn into the world of self-defence. One day, walking home, a thought struck her. If she were attacked, her extensive training could cause serious harm, but she didn't yet understand how the law would view it.

"That's when I started thinking: What does the law actually say about self-defence? What is reasonable force?"

Her curiosity led to formal training and certifications, culminating in a startling revelation: she was the only female civilian self-defence instructor in the Northwest. Recognising both the responsibility and opportunity before her, she founded Z's Defence Academy in 2018, a charity dedicated to teaching practical, legally informed self-defence skills. Yet starting a new venture came with challenges. "People weren't taking me seriously," she admits. "Being an Asian Muslim woman from Blackburn, it was a massive struggle to get the name out there."

Persistence paid off. Following COVID, the University of Central Lancashire conducted research validating her self-defence programme.

"Now people understand what we do. The course is both theory and practical;



"I was drained and frightened, but I remembered my mum's voice telling me to be strong. What's the worst that could happen? If I die, at least I'll die breaking a world record."

it teaches basic, essential skills. You don't need seventeen years of experience like me. You just need the right knowledge. And that's what we give people."

Zee's reach extends far beyond self-defence. Her dedication to coaching spans boxing and wrestling. After British Wrestling discovered her portfolio, she became the only Muslim female wrestling coach in the Northwest. Yet even with these achievements, her work remained rooted in community impact. When the pandemic shut down her charity's usual activities, she asked the community what it truly needed. The answer surprised her.

"Not everyone wanted self-defence. People wanted day trips, walking groups, coffee mornings, menopause support activities that helped with well-being, connection, and routine."

This feedback transformed Z's Defence Academy into a multi-faceted organisation. Today, it runs ten community-led projects supporting people aged 10 to 70, ranging from outdoor adventures to health programmes, volunteer networks,

well-being sessions, and, of course, self-defence.

Her passion for the outdoors, too, began during her martial arts training, when stamina-building runs became a routine. She mapped out local reservoirs and parks, determined to conquer them all. That discipline soon



led her to the UK's most iconic climbs: Scafell Pike, Snowdon, Ben Nevis, the Yorkshire Three Peaks, and the National Three Peaks, all before the age of 30. But when COVID struck and gyms closed, her mental health faltered.

"I was crying for three days straight," she remembers. "My mum told me, 'It's because you haven't been to the gym, you haven't punched a bag, you haven't climbed a hill.' And she was right. Something so basic had been taken away, and it severely affected me."

In response, Zee found a challenge unlike any she had undertaken before: the World's Highest Obstacle Course Race on Mount Kilimanjaro. It involved climbing the highest free-standing mountain in the world, completing an obstacle course in its crater, and attempting a second world record: the highest fitness class on Earth. She trained tirelessly for three months, balancing nutrition, physical conditioning, emotional well-being, and a full-time job. "I trained twice a day, six days a week," she says. "It took everything, discipline, focus, and perseverance."

When she arrived in Africa, Zee joined 42 athletes from 36 countries, many Olympians and elite competitors. She immediately faced her greatest challenge: altitude sickness, extreme exhaustion, and hallucinations during the summit climb. "

I was saying things I don't remember. I told my guide I wanted to go back down. That I couldn't do it."

Her guide's unwavering support, however, pushed her forward. Step by step, she reached the summit, becoming the only British Muslim woman to achieve this feat. Exhausted but undeterred, she faced the final part of the challenge, the world records. Half of the athletes did not even reach the



crater in time.

"I was drained and frightened, but I remembered my mum's voice telling me to be strong. What's the worst that could happen? If I die, at least I'll die breaking a world record."

Drawing on every ounce of mental and physical strength, she completed both challenges, earning two Guinness World Records and a moment of triumph she describes as transformative.

Today, her passion for adventure continues. As a trainee mountain

leader, Zee leads expeditions for groups of women, teaching them endurance, resilience, and the joy of pushing beyond perceived limits. Last year, she guided a group to Mount Toubkal in Morocco, Morocco's highest peak, motivating participants through exhaustion and doubt. "The moment four of us summited, that feeling stays with you forever," she says. Her outdoor work has inspired countless people to take up hiking and adventure challenges, many for the first time.

Zee's life is a testament to discipline, purpose, and service. She runs Z's Defence Academy, coaches multiple sports, cares for her mother, and still trains herself.

"Everyone gets 24 hours. If someone says they don't have time, they're lying. I utilise every minute. My philosophy is rooted in embracing discomfort to grow. You have to do things that make you uncomfortable if you want to grow into an unstoppable person."

Her ultimate goal is simple yet profound. To transform lives.

"To help as many people as I can. To give people opportunities they never had. To show them that yes, things happen, life will challenge you, people will doubt you, and you will doubt yourself. But it's up to you to make the change."



Zee Jogi has been nominated for numerous 1V Awards Dinner accolades.

There's an easier way
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a power cut.

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Female empowerment starts here.



For girls aged
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Registration and
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Get ready to vote on Thursday 7 May!

Elections to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council are taking place in all wards this May. This is when you can elect local councillors to represent you and your area. ***Here is what you can do to get ready.***

Register to vote

If you aren't registered to vote, you won't be able to have your say in these elections. The deadline to register is Monday 20 April 2026. You can register online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote.

Voting by post

You can apply for a postal vote online now. It's quick and easy to do at www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote.

For anyone who prefers paper forms, you can print one out through the Gov.uk website. Once you've filled it in, return it to our Electoral Registration Office at Blackburn Town Hall.

The deadline for applying for a postal vote is 5pm on Tuesday 21 April 2026.

If you already have a postal vote arrangement in place and your details have not changed, then you don't need to do anything.

However, if you originally applied for a postal vote before 31 October 2023, you must apply for a new postal vote application. This is because postal vote requests are valid for a maximum of three years, after which time a new application is needed.

If you're unsure if you are registered for a postal vote, or can't remember when you originally applied, you can check with us by emailing voting@blackburn.gov.uk.

Here's a reminder of the rules for the return of completed postal votes:

- **Anyone handing in, rather than posting back, their postal votes must complete a declaration form**
- **There is a limit to the number of postal votes that any one person can hand in at a polling station - this is limited to their own postal vote plus a maximum of five others (for each election being held)**
- **Political campaigners are not allowed to handle postal packs from anyone outside their immediate family.**

Postal votes must be sent back or handed in at Town Halls in good time so that they can be counted - don't leave it to the last minute.

Voting at polling stations

Remember to take an accepted form of ID with your photograph on to be able to vote in a polling station.

Passports, some travel passes, biometric immigration documents, or photo driving licences are all accepted, along with many more. Even if your ID has expired, you can still use it - as long as the photo still looks like you.

Anyone who doesn't have any of these forms of ID can apply online for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) by 5pm on Tuesday 28 April.

Voting by proxy

If you can't get to the polling station on election day, you can apply for a proxy vote - that means nominating a 'proxy', someone you trust who can cast your vote on your behalf.

The deadline for applying for a proxy vote is 5pm on Tuesday 28 April 2026.

Support at polling stations

To help remove any barriers to voting for people with disabilities, polling station staff can offer help to anyone who needs it to be able to vote independently, as well as providing suitable equipment, such as tactile voting devices and large print ballot papers.

Every polling station also has a private or screened area to check the identity of anyone who wears a face covering for religious, medical or any other reasons, and we always try to have at least one female member of staff.

You can find lots more information about voting in local elections on Thursday 7 May at www.blackburn.gov.uk/elections-and-voting

Alive with culture: What's on in Blackburn with Darwen in 2026



There's always something to do in our borough - whether it be a visit to our fabulous museum, the packed programme of events at our many libraries, the hugely popular Making Rooms, free half-term activities in our markets, our busy leisure centres or enjoying the great outdoors, including our many parks.

There's also bowling, cinemas, ice skating and fabulous places to eat out - we are a borough brimming with creativity, community spirit and culture.

And if you think that's plenty, just wait!

This year's events calendar is bursting at the seams ready to get the whole borough buzzing.

Cathedral centenary to remember

Blackburn Cathedral is celebrating 100 years - and it's doing it in style. Think exhibitions, talks, recitals and concerts that turn the whole year into one big cultural celebration - including Taylor Swift and Oasis by candlelight.

It's history, music and atmosphere all rolled into one unforgettable programme.

Get the details at www.blackburncathedral.com

Darwen Live takes over

The May bank holiday means one thing: Darwen Live is back.

On Saturday 23 May, Dayz Gone By will blast through pop-punk favourites, joined by The X Factor's Janet Devlin.

Sunday brings Amnesia, high energy 90s club classics revival, plus the legendary Lancashire Hotpots. So many more brilliant acts are being announced so keep your eyes on the Darwen Live Facebook page.

Five years of Blackburn Pride

Blackburn Pride celebrates its fifth anniversary on Saturday 20 June, and the town centre will be bursting with colour, joy and community spirit.

Expect arts, crafts, live entertainment and the much loved parade, a celebration of love and inclusion that grows bigger and brighter every year.



The National Festival of Making

On 4 and 5 July the Festival of Making returns, one of the north west's most distinctive cultural events.

Workshops, installations, performances and demonstrations will spill into streets, venues and public spaces celebrating Blackburn's heritage of craftsmanship and its bold creative future.

It's hands-on, imaginative and perfect for all ages.



Christmas lights that spark magic

Blackburn and Darwen's Christmas light switch-on events mark the start of the festive season with sparkle, excitement and plenty of cheer - and they never disappoint!

Darwen's event draws in thousands of people for more than nine hours of festive fun, while Blackburn's switch-on dazzles with an equally packed line-up of live music, performances and community spirit right in the heart of town,

King George's Hall Christmas pantomime

And it's not Christmas without a family pantomime!

Tickets are on sale now for the King George's Hall 2026 pantomime, following its grand re-opening this autumn.

Families can take a trip along the yellow brick road to enjoy The Wizard of Oz, a timeless classic that's been capturing imaginations for decades.

Visit www.bwdvenues.com to book your tickets.

For even more events, check out the what's on guides at:

www.discoverblackburn.co.uk



Go on, read into it!

It's the National Year of Reading - and the very fact that you're reading this article means you're already taking part, perhaps without even realising it!

But could you be tempted to read more, or even encourage others to give it a go?

That's exactly what the friendly team at Blackburn with Darwen Library Service are on hand to help with no matter your age or interests

And with more than 100,000 books on the shelves across the borough's five busy libraries, alongside over 104,000 free e-books, audiobooks, newspapers and magazines available online, getting started has never been easier.

Adele Karwat, library service manager, said: "We know that reading helps expand worlds, sharpens minds and fuels creativity. It lets us escape and is great for our wellbeing.

"For some people, it can be hard to find the time to read, but with so many benefits, we want to be part of helping change that.

"The motto for the National Year of Reading is: 'If you're into it, read into it' - and that can mean a book, a newspaper article, a magazine feature, song lyrics - whatever takes your fancy."

A brand-new Blackburn with Darwen Libraries website is now live, putting a huge amount of reading material right at your fingertips.

BorrowBox is a great example. Accessible via the website, the app lets you read the latest books, daily newspapers and magazines - all for free.

You can also learn a new language using the e-language tools, check opening times for your local library, and explore a full rundown of what's on.

There's a link through to the Cotton Town website too - a fascinating archive celebrating Blackburn with Darwen's rich history, perfect for anyone keen to learn more about where they live.

And if you think libraries are quiet places, think again. There are more than 40 activities every week - from reading groups and digital workshops to LEGO Club, live performances, knit and natter, IT courses and even a community apiary.

Adele added: "The website is a great place to start. We know people are incredibly busy, but online you can browse the latest releases, access free online resources, manage your library account and plan a visit to your nearest library - and it's all really quick and easy to do.

"Libraries are fantastic community hubs, welcoming spaces with so much to see and do, as well as free Wifi and computer access. And if you're lucky, you might even bump into our lovable mascot Wordsworth!"

Blackburn Library also recently celebrated an important milestone: 50 years at its current home on Town Hall Street.

Fascinatingly, when the doors first opened there in 1975, an incredible 400 people a day signed up to become members.

If you're not already a library member, you can join today for free - in-person or online.

You'll find libraries in Blackburn, Darwen, Mill Hill, Cherry Tree and Roman Road.



Check out the brand new library website: www.bwdlibraries.com

Feeding People, Not Bins: Blackburn Foodbank's Vital Work



An external review of the borough's waste has found that 43 per cent of the burgundy bin is food waste. Of that, around two-thirds is 'edible' food, meaning food that could have been eaten is being thrown away.

There are however, people that don't have any food, which Blackburn Foodbank knows all too well. Supporting around 300 people every week, the foodbank's mission is to offer practical, all-round support to those who need it most.

"I think people don't always believe food poverty exists, but we know it does – and for a whole variety of reasons that are not usually the fault of that person," says Gill Fourie, Operations Manager at Blackburn Foodbank.

Food isn't handed out without careful thought. Staff and volunteers take time to talk with people, understanding what food will help them through the next few days. Each person receives a tailored package containing a variety of items that can be turned into nutritious, familiar meals – and, crucially, food they know they will eat.

"People can tell us what they need," Gill explains. "That way, we don't risk any food waste."

While Blackburn Foodbank purchases most of its food to make sure people receive the right items, donations still play a vital role. Charities and supermarkets all help to keep food in circulation and out of bins. Schools also get in touch when they have surplus fruit from projects they're involved in – another way food waste is reduced further along the chain.

"There's enough food for everybody," Gill adds, "but it's just not in the right place at the right time."

Across the UK, the most commonly binned items by weight and volume include potatoes, bread and milk, followed closely by fresh fruit and vegetables such as carrots, apples and salad leaves.

"One thing we do is buy fresh food at the very last minute, once we know exactly how much we need," says Gill. "That way it reaches people the same day and doesn't go to waste."

If you'd like to support Blackburn Foodbank, monetary donations are preferred so funds can be directed where they are needed most. To find out more, visit blackburn.foodbank.org.uk.

From Monday 1 June 2026, all households in the borough will receive food waste collections. You should receive your new food waste bins any time now.

You'll be provided with an indoor kitchen caddy, liners and an outside 23 litre bin.

Line your kitchen caddy and put all food waste including tea bags, coffee granules, leftovers and bones in it. Once it's full, tie the liner up and transfer it to your outside 23 litre bin. Your 23 litre bin will be collected every week from 1 June, on the same day as your existing bins.

When your liners run out, simply tie one to your outside 23 litre bin handle and we'll leave you a new roll of liners.

No excess rubbish left beside or on top of burgundy bins will be collected, including black bags. All non-recyclable waste must fit inside your bin, or you may receive a fine. Clean recycling left beside the correct bin, loose or in clear bags, will still be collected.



Latifa and Maryam are in the food waste pilot area and have been recycling their food waste since March last year.

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Inside Blackburn's Booming Property Market

Rising demand, community spirit and affordability are reshaping Blackburn's housing scene, says local expert Julie Mayet.

Blackburn's housing market has never been more competitive. Whether you're a first-time buyer, investor, or long-time resident, you've probably noticed that homes are selling faster than ever and often for more than the asking price.

According to Julie Mayet (above), director and founder of the award-winning estate and lettings agency Mayets, demand in Blackburn has soared over the past few years. "The demand for property has

massively increased," she says. "With rising interest rates, buying a home has become unaffordable for many, so the rental market has exploded. We've seen around a five per cent year-on-year increase across Blackburn."

Affordability is also one of the main reasons people are moving to the town. "Compared to Manchester or down south, Blackburn's property prices are still really reasonable," Julie explains. "The average house price here is

around £180,000, compared to well over £300,000 in many nearby cities. That's attracting people from across the country."

But it isn't just the price that's appealing. Blackburn's strong sense of community, excellent schools, and growing local amenities have made it a magnet for families. "Education plays a huge role," Julie says. "Schools like Tauheedul and Star Academies are among the best in the country, and

families are relocating here just to get their children into them. Plus, people love the community feel, having mosques, shops and schools all nearby makes life easier and more connected."

Property values have climbed steadily across the town, with certain neighbourhoods proving especially desirable.

"Areas like Beardwood, Lammack, Mellor and Wilpshire are very sought after," she says. "They're popular with young professionals who want larger homes, and we're seeing people go straight in at the £250,000 to £400,000 mark for detached houses."

Meanwhile, traditional community areas such as Audley Range and Whalley Range continue to see strong demand.

"There's something we call the 'Asian premium'," Julie explains. "People are willing to pay extra to live in those neighbourhoods because they want to be close to family, mosques and local shops. It's about lifestyle and convenience as much as location."

In some cases, properties are selling for tens of thousands of pounds above the asking price. "We've sold homes for as much as £40,000 over," she notes. "It's all about supply and demand there simply aren't enough houses available."

Competition among buyers is fierce, with homes often going under offer within days of being listed.

"We've sold homes for as much as £40,000 over. It's all about supply and demand there simply aren't enough houses available."

"It's not unusual for a property to sell within 48 hours," Julie adds. "Buyers have to act quickly. If you wait a couple of days to think about it, someone else will have made an offer."

That sense of urgency is being fuelled by limited supply and a growing number of cash buyers, including investors from London, Birmingham and even overseas.

"Blackburn has become really attractive for investment," Julie explains. "It's affordable, and the rental yields are strong. We manage properties for landlords based as far away as Dubai."

For first-time buyers, Julie's advice is simple but practical. "Save up a good deposit. The more you put down, the lower your monthly mortgage payments will be," she suggests.

She also encourages young buyers to use the government's Lifetime ISA, which offers a 25 per cent bonus on savings towards a first home.

"It's free money, and so many young people don't know about it," she says. "And don't overstretch yourself - life happens, and you want some breathing room financially."

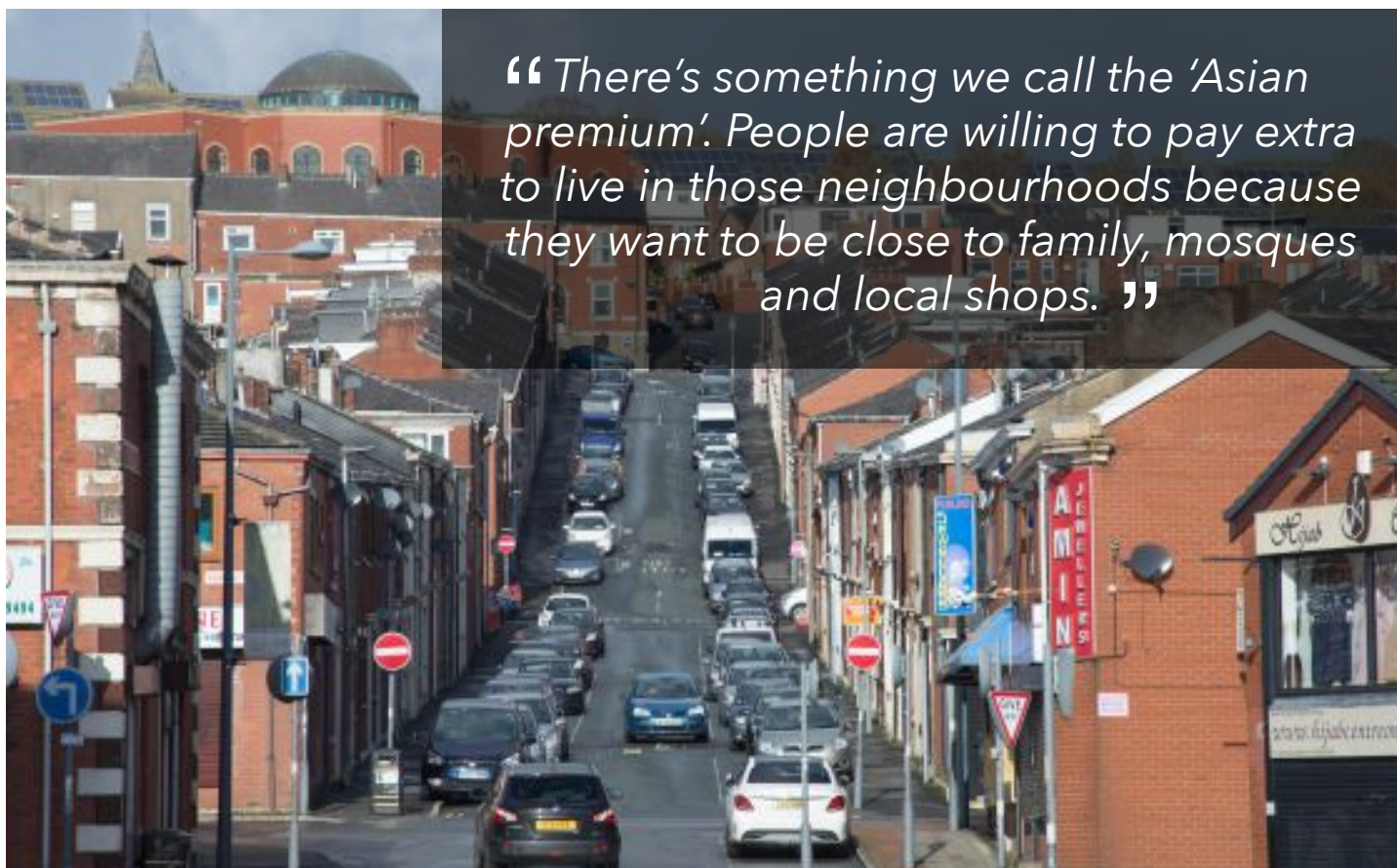
Despite the challenges of rising interest rates and cost of living pressures, Julie remains optimistic about the future of the local market.

She believes property remains one of the safest long-term investments anyone can make.

"With property, you can't go wrong," she says. "It's not just about owning bricks and mortar, it's about building a secure future. Whether you're buying to live in or to rent out, it's an investment that grows in value."

As Blackburn continues to evolve, with new schools, restaurants and developments bringing more life to the town, its housing market shows no sign of slowing down.

"There's something we call the 'Asian premium'. People are willing to pay extra to live in those neighbourhoods because they want to be close to family, mosques and local shops."



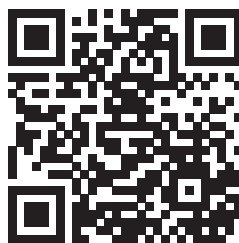


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From Ivory Coast to Blackburn:

The Remarkable Journey of Tinta Ali



Born in the Ivory Coast in West Africa, Tinta Ali's story is one of resilience, loss, and an unwavering commitment to helping others. Raised in a Muslim family during what he describes as one of the country's most stable and prosperous periods in the 1980s, his early life was shaped by his father's influence – a successful businessman trading coffee, cocoa, vehicles, and mechanical goods. His father's international dealings, often with English-speaking partners from China, India, and Taiwan, would later plant the seeds of a dream that changed the course of Tinta's life.

Growing up, Tinta's father often lamented the language barrier that limited his business ventures. "He used to say, 'I wish we had someone who could speak English,'" Tinta recalls. Recognising his eldest son's potential, his father encouraged him to learn English, hoping one day he might study business in London and return to run the family enterprise. For young Tinta, it was an exciting vision. One filled with ambition and promise.

But life, as he would later learn, has a way of rewriting even the best-laid plans. In 2002, civil war erupted in Ivory Coast. The violence tore through communities, families, and livelihoods. Amid the chaos, Tinta's father was targeted by the regime and executed. The loss was devastating. "It broke me," he says quietly. "I lost not only my father but my entire world."

The family's business collapsed, their stability shattered. What had once been

a future filled with opportunity was replaced by grief and uncertainty.

Years later, in 2010, Tinta arrived in the United Kingdom. A student with a dream to honour his father's legacy. He initially came to study English and business, just as his father had envisioned, but the trauma of war and displacement followed him. Eventually, he sought asylum, a process that tested his resilience yet again. "The system was confusing, and I didn't know who to trust," he recalls. "I just wanted to tell my story and prove what had happened."

In 2011, the Home Office placed Tinta in Blackburn, a town he admits he hadn't heard of before. "At first, I was disappointed," he says with a laugh. "I thought it was too small. I wanted to be in London or Manchester." But what he found in Blackburn would soon transform his perception of home. The warmth and support of the local community helped him rebuild his life from the ground up.

"I came here alone, but I'm not alone anymore," he says proudly. "I found a new family in Blackburn."

With limited work rights at first, Tinta turned to volunteering – something he had never imagined doing back home. Fluent in French and Arabic, he began interpreting for asylum seekers and refugees who couldn't speak English. His skills quickly made him a valuable asset to local charities, police stations, councils, and hospitals. Over time, his name became known across Blackburn's community networks. "I had always been around business and money," he reflects. "But volunteering taught me the true value of giving back. It changed me completely."

Tinta's work soon expanded to organisations like the British Red Cross and several refugee support groups. His empathy, linguistic skills, and deep understanding of displacement made him an anchor for others navigating the same system he once struggled through.





"Helping people who had stories like mine gave me purpose," he says. "It reminded me that even after tragedy, you can still be useful."

In recognition of his community impact, Tinta received a prestigious scholarship from the Open University to study Politics, Philosophy, and Economics, a course perfectly aligned with his growing interest in governance, justice, and development. "When they asked why I deserved the scholarship, I just listed the charities I'd worked with," he laughs. "They checked every single one, and then called to say I'd got it. I couldn't believe it."

Studying part-time while continuing his community work, Tinta thrives on balancing academic challenge with service. "I study online in the evenings after work," he explains. "It's hard, but I'm doing it for free and that still feels like a miracle."

In 2021, his efforts were formally recognised when he was named Man of the Year at the One Voice Awards, a celebration of community heroes across Blackburn and Lancashire. The moment was both surreal and affirming. "I never did any of this for recognition," he says. "But when people tell me that my story

inspired them, it makes me realise that my pain has produced something positive."

Despite his achievements, Tinta remains humble and grounded. He's quick to credit Blackburn's people for his success.

"From the white English community to the South Asian community – everyone has supported me. I've had moments when I wasn't well, and neighbours would show up with soup or food without me asking. Where else could you find that?"

He acknowledges that occasional racism or ignorance exists everywhere, but he refuses to let it define his experience. "I survived war. So if someone calls me names, it doesn't hurt me," he says with quiet strength. "Blackburn gave me friendship, belonging, and peace, things I value more than anything."

Today, Tinta is channeling his experiences into new creative pursuits. He is writing a book that explores the intersections of migration, identity, and belonging, blending historical insights with fiction. "I've written about 20 to 30 pages," he says, smiling. "It's about people's journeys between Europe and

Africa, about displacement and resilience. It's my way of making sense of everything."

When asked about the future, Tinta hesitates, not out of uncertainty, but gratitude. "I've had chances to move away from Blackburn," he admits. "But every time I think about it, I realise my heart is here. God wanted me to be here."

His family remains scattered. Some in Egypt, others elsewhere – but he stays in touch and visits when he can. While they may never all reunite in England, he hopes one day they'll see what he's built. "They think it's too cold here," he laughs. "But I tell them, the warmth isn't in the weather, it's in the people."

Through war, exile, and rebirth, Tinta Ali's journey from the Ivory Coast to Blackburn stands as a testament to endurance and hope. What began as his father's dream for him to learn English has grown into something far greater: a life dedicated to community, understanding, and compassion.

"I lost everything once," he says softly. "But Blackburn gave me back something even more important – a reason to keep going."

Ainsworth Jewellers EXCLUSIVELY Launches PureJewels' Rosettes Collection

Following the remarkable success of the Lotus collection, Ainsworth Jewellers has teamed up with PureJewels once more with a second, highly anticipated chapter that introduces the Rosettes collection. Launched exclusively at Ainsworth Jewellers, Rosettes represents a natural evolution of the partnership that is one rooted in shared values of craftsmanship, heritage and meaningful design.

Where Lotus explored purity, renewal and spiritual beauty, Rosettes shifts the focus to something equally powerful - personal achievement. Forged in gold, Rosettes is a collection created to honour progress, resilience and the quiet milestones that shape a life.

At its heart, Rosettes is about recognising that achievement is rarely sudden. It is built through discipline, effort and considered choices over time. This philosophy is translated directly into the making of the jewellery itself, where traditional craftsmanship and intentional design mirror the journey of personal success.





The rosette motif draws inspiration from the English rose; a symbol long associated with resilience, continuity, pride and endurance. Reimagined in gold, the rosette becomes a contemporary emblem of achievement that reflects both British cultural heritage and the wearer's evolving personal story. Each piece is designed to function as a personal marker: worn daily, gifted with meaning and retained for life.

Unlike traditional jewellery collections that focus primarily on weddings or singular ceremonial occasions, Rosettes is intentionally designed to mark achievements of all kinds. These may be professional milestones, personal growth, anniversaries of progress, transitions, or moments of self-recognition. This approach makes the collection especially relevant for modern clients, resonating strongly with both self-purchase and thoughtful gifting.

Craftsmanship sits at the core of Rosettes. Each piece is produced using traditional die-stamping techniques that PureJewels has preserved and mastered across generations; and which allows for intricate detail while keeping pieces lightweight, durable and perfectly suited for everyday wear.

Rosettes is predominantly crafted in 22ct gold, chosen for its warmth of colour, intrinsic value and longevity. Over time, the gold develops depth and character, echoing the personal journeys it represents. These are not pieces designed to be worn once, but jewellery intended to evolve alongside its wearer.

The collection is expressed through three distinct design families, each representing a different expression of achievement. Cascades symbolise momentum and progress, with flowing sequences of rosettes that build upon one another; ideal for confident self-purchase and everyday wear. Garlands draw from historic forms of

honour and recognition, making them particularly suited to gifting and significant milestones. The most expressive designs sit within the Bouquet family, where multiple die-stamped rosettes are carefully assembled into richly layered compositions. Each Bouquet represents a gathering of achievements brought together to mark a moment of recognition, celebration and shared joy.

Despite its symbolism and craftsmanship, Rosettes is intentionally designed for everyday life. Balanced proportions, smooth edges and lightweight construction ensure each piece integrates effortlessly into daily wear, while retaining emotional depth and presence.

For Ainsworth Jewellers, the exclusive launch of Rosettes reinforces its commitment to offering jewellery with meaning, integrity and lasting value. The success of the Lotus collection demonstrated a growing desire among clients for pieces that tell a story beyond adornment. Rosettes continues that narrative being one that honours effort, progress and personal success in an understated yet enduring form.

Rosettes is about recognising what has been earned, and wearing that achievement with quiet confidence, not just today but tomorrow and for generations to come.

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Madrasah Club Empowers Youth

From small beginnings to a thriving weekly programme, the Madrasah Engagement Programme is transforming how young people across Blackburn connect, create, and grow.

Delivered by One Voice Blackburn in partnership with Blackburn Youth Zone, the Madrasah Engagement Programme has quickly become a shining example of what can be achieved when local organisations work together with faith settings to support young people in meaningful, positive ways.

The programme was created with a clear purpose: to engage young people in a safe, inclusive, and enjoyable environments while supporting their physical wellbeing, creativity, confidence, and social development. By working directly within madrasah settings, the project meets young people where they are, building trust and strengthening relationships between families, mosques, and youth services.

What truly sets the programme apart is the variety of activities on offer. Each session blends creativity with physical activity, ensuring that every young person can take part and feel included. Creative and tabletop sessions—such as bookmark-making, Lego building, and slime-making workshops—encourage imagination, problem-solving, and teamwork. These hands-on activities provide a relaxed space for conversation and connection, helping young people develop social skills while having fun.

Alongside this, energetic sports sessions bring excitement and movement to the programme. Football, netball, rounders, badminton, and dodgeball have all featured, promoting healthy lifestyles, confidence, and cooperation. For many participants, these sessions offer a chance to try new sports, build resilience,

and experience the joy of teamwork in a supportive setting.

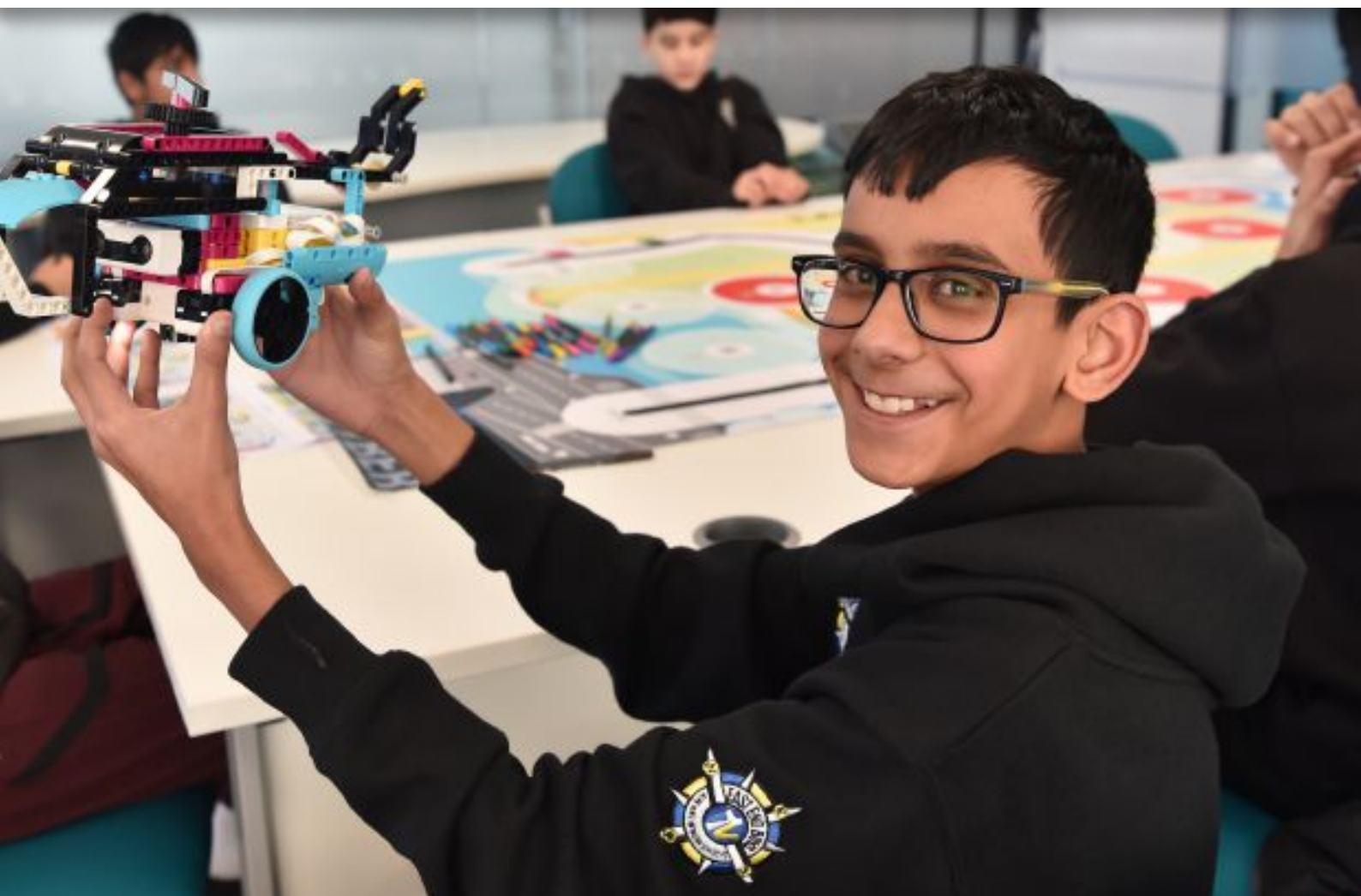
Since launching, the programme has successfully engaged with several madrasahs and mosques across the town, including Masjid-e-Vali, Chester Street Mosque, Ghosia Masjid, Jamia Masjid-e-Raza, and Madina Mosque. Interest continues to grow, with further madrasahs keen to become involved.

The impact of the project is perhaps best reflected in its rapid growth. What began with around 12 young people attending each week has expanded into a thriving programme now welcoming over 90 young people every week. This remarkable increase highlights both the demand for positive youth provision and the trust the programme has built within the community.

Looking ahead, the future is equally promising. Following Ramadan, the programme has expanded further, with Al Buraq Mosque and Balaclava Mosque already on the waiting list, alongside additional mosques in development. This continued interest demonstrates the sustainability of the project and its value to the wider community.

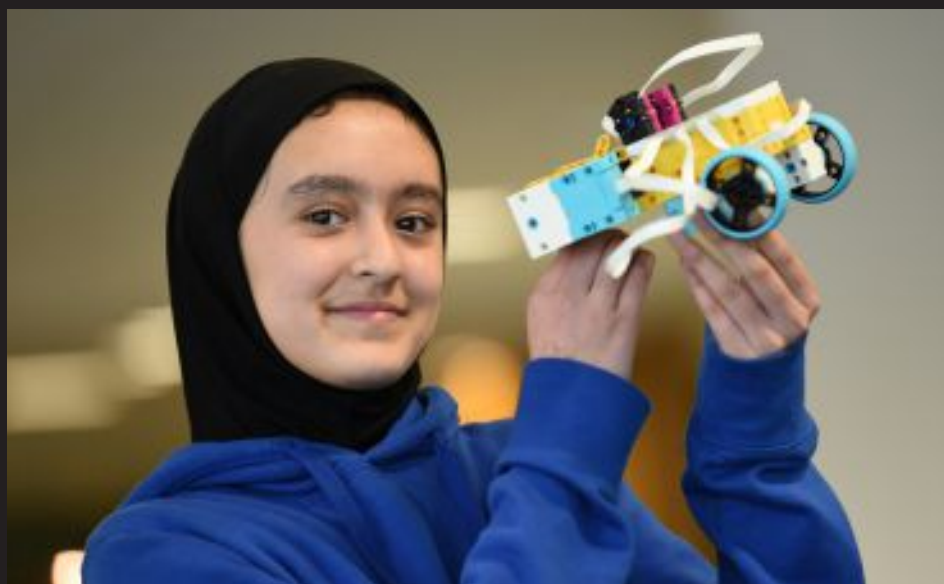
The Madrasah Engagement Programme stands as a powerful example of community-led success. Through strong partnership working, thoughtful engagement, and a commitment to inclusion, One Voice Blackburn and Blackburn Youth Zone are creating lasting opportunities for young people to thrive, strengthening communities today and investing in a brighter future for tomorrow.





BLACKBURN'S YOUNG INNOVATORS

One Voice STEM Club Inspires the Next Generation



Since its launch in April 2025, One Voice Blackburn's STEM Club has been sparking curiosity, creativity, and confidence among local young people aged between 6 and 17. Designed to bring science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) to life, the club is all about learning through doing; making abstract concepts tangible, exciting, and fun.

"STEM isn't just about theory, it's about getting hands-on, trying things out, making mistakes, and learning from them," says Mohammed Nabeel Rashid, leader of One Voice Blackburn's Stem Club and an undergraduate at the University of Lancashire. "Our goal is to show young people that they can be problem-solvers and creators, not just consumers of technology."

From egg-drop challenges to crafting bath bombs and launching bottle rockets, younger participants get to experiment with practical activities that they can take home with pride. For older students, the focus shifts to larger-scale projects such as robotics and engineering challenges, allowing them to design, build, and program solutions that mirror real-world technology.

The club has also opened doors to local industry, with visits to BAE Systems' training arm giving students a glimpse into professional engineering environments. These trips not only inspire ambition but also help participants understand how classroom skills translate into real-life careers. Some of the students' projects were recently displayed at the latest Cyber Fest event held at Blackburn College, showcasing their creativity and hard work to the wider community.

For many of the students, the experience has been transformative. Ammarah, 14, shares, "I never thought I could build a robot, but now I've designed one that actually moves. It's so cool to see something I made come to life!" Meanwhile, Aryan, 15, adds, "Visiting BAE Systems showed me that the things we learn at the club can really lead to amazing jobs. It made me want to keep pushing myself."

Parents have also noticed the impact. One parent whose son attends the club, says, "I've seen him gain so much confidence and creativity since joining STEM Club. It's incredible to see him excited about learning and problem-solving every week."



Mohammed Nabeel Rashid reflects on the broader vision: "STEM Club is about more than experiments and projects. It's about confidence, teamwork, and seeing young people realize their potential. When they succeed here, they know they can succeed anywhere."

STEM Club is available for young people aged 6 to 17. For more details, interested families can call 01254 676193.

As One Voice Blackburn's STEM Club continues to grow, it's clear that the seeds of creativity and innovation being planted today will shape the engineers, scientists, and problem-solvers of tomorrow.

Mohammed Nabeel Rashid leads the 1V Stem Club



Cyberfest Inspires Young Minds at Blackburn College

Families from across Lancashire flocked to Blackburn College recently for a unique, interactive festival aimed at demystifying the world of cybersecurity.

Over 1,100 adults and youngsters visited CyberFest Community Fun Day 2.0 held in the University Centre at the top Lancashire College, double the attendance figure for last year.

The event, now in its second year, and bigger than ever, is a collaboration between Blackburn College and a number of groups and businesses, including community organisations One Voice Blackburn, IMO Charity, Blackburn and Darwen Youth Zone, tech company IN4 Group, Blackburn Youth Zone Blackburn, and The Making Rooms.

Visitors were able to experience dozens of fun games and activities, spread across three floors of the state-of-the-art University Centre, aimed at getting children interested in cyber, as well as teaching ways for families to be safe online.

From the chance to fly drones and aircraft on flight simulators, VR head set experiences, code breaking challenges and spectacular Cyber Tron challenges, the festival brought together the very latest in cyber technology.





Visitors took part in a number of cybersecurity-related games and quizzes, as well as learning how to operate giant robots, built like transformers.

Other activities on offer included an escape room, laser tag and CyberOps Trivia, as well as learning how to program robots, and sessions of cybersecurity myth busting.

The many activities were designed to engage with everyone, from the age of six upwards, regardless of abilities, helping to unlock the world of cyber and digital technology world.

An entire floor was packed with fun activities, many with prizes, including the chance to make 3D keyrings, experience laser engraving and an auto bot phishing game.

"After the success of CyberFest last year, we were delighted to host this event again, and to see all the businesses and organisations that

we teamed up with last time returning again, as well as some new partners," said Nicola Clayton, Blackburn College Executive Director of Business Development and External Engagement.

"We had fantastic activities for our younger cohorts this year from our partners. In our immersive suite, two of our students from the STEM Digital Bursary programme were taking visitors through a range of cyber related activities.

Blackburn College welcomed a number of groups for the event, including Youth Action, a local charity that helps young people and their families.

Returning partners One Voice Blackburn and IMO are community charities that work within Blackburn with Darwen and the Pennine Corridor to help underrepresented social groups and uplift marginalised communities.

IN4 Group are a digital skills training and business support

company, who brought a number of robots to the event, as well as a VR escape room.

A young visitor shared, "My favourite part was the robot, because it could respond to us. It felt like something from the future."

Another attendee said, "I loved trying the Morse code, even though I kept getting it wrong. It was fun to learn something new."

The CyberFest also saw the launch of an exclusive interview with Blackburn College Principal, Dr. Fazal Dad CBE, as part of the Aleeza Isa interviews series.

See the interview by scanning on the QR Code.



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Tax Isn't Just a Bill—It's a Missed Opportunity for Most People

For many people, tax is something to dread—a deadline, a deduction, or a bill to be paid and forgotten. At MCM Accounting, we see this mindset every day. But after working closely with individuals and small businesses, one thing is clear: tax is not just a cost. More often than not, it's a missed opportunity.

The issue is not a lack of effort. Most people want to get their tax affairs right. The real problem is awareness. Many simply don't realise how much control they actually have. While the UK tax system can seem complex, it offers a range of allowances and reliefs designed to reduce what you owe. Yet time and again, we see these go unused.

Take the Personal Allowance. Most people understand they don't pay tax on the first portion of their income, but fewer realise how it interacts with additional income or how it can taper for higher earners. We often find clients who could benefit from simple adjustments but have never been shown how.

The same applies to the Marriage Allowance. This is a straightforward way for eligible couples to transfer a portion of unused allowance, yet many who qualify never claim it. It's a small example of a wider issue: money left on the table due to lack of guidance.

ISAs are another clear opportunity. They remain one of the most accessible and effective tax-free savings tools available. Any interest, dividends, or gains earned within an ISA are completely free from tax. Despite this, we regularly meet individuals holding significant savings in taxable accounts, unaware they could be protecting those returns.

Pensions are perhaps the most powerful—and most overlooked—area of tax planning. Contributions benefit from tax relief, effectively giving your savings an immediate boost. Yet many delay contributing or contribute the minimum, missing out not only

on tax advantages but also on long-term growth. From our experience, even modest increases in contributions can make a meaningful difference over time.

For business owners and the self-employed, the challenge is slightly different. While they are often more engaged with their finances, they frequently underclaim expenses. Whether it's home office costs, software, or essential equipment, allowable expenses can significantly reduce taxable profit. However, uncertainty and poor record-keeping often lead to overpaying tax unnecessarily.

Another area we emphasise at MCM Accounting is timing. Tax planning is not just about what you claim, but when you act. Decisions made before the end of the tax year—such as pension contributions or investment planning—can have a direct impact on your liability. Once the deadline passes, those opportunities are often gone for good.

A common misconception is that tax planning is only relevant for high earners. In reality, we see the greatest impact among everyday individuals and small business owners. Small, informed decisions—made consistently—can lead to significant savings over time.

Of course, tax rules evolve, and advice should always be tailored to individual circumstances. But one principle remains constant: doing nothing is often the most expensive option.

At MCM Accounting, our role is not just to ensure compliance, but to help clients make informed decisions and keep more of what they earn. Tax should not be something you simply endure. When approached correctly, it becomes a tool—one that supports your financial goals rather than working against them.

Because ultimately, it's not just about what you earn. It's about what you keep—and too many people are giving away more than they need to.

By Malgorzata McManus

Community and Business Leaders Unite for *'I'm Not A Muslim But I Will Fast For One Day'*

What began in 2016 as a simple yet powerful idea has grown into a defining annual act of solidarity across Blackburn. The #I'm Not A Muslim But I Will Fast For One Day campaign, organised by One Voice Blackburn, once again brought together local professionals, business owners and community leaders during the holy month of Ramadan.

Launched to foster empathy and understanding, the campaign invites people of all faiths and none to fast from dawn until sunset; standing in symbolic unity with Muslim friends, colleagues and neighbours. Since its inception, it has become a powerful example of how shared experiences can break down barriers and build meaningful connections.

This year's campaign welcomed both returning supporters and first-time participants from across the local



Sara Burton



Malgorzata and Katarzyna

business community. Among them was long-time participants such as Malgorzata of MCM Accounting, who has supported the initiative for several years, also Chris Seddon from ARC. Joining them were new participants including the team from Asset Finance Solutions and Katarzyna, owner of a local cleaning company, all embracing the opportunity to better understand the significance of Ramadan.

Beyond the one-day challenge, a number of individuals across the town commit to fasting for the entire month of Ramadan each year. Among them is Kim Tattersall from Youth Action, who has fasted for the full month for the past six years in a remarkable show of solidarity and dedication. Alex Newman from Blackburn Youth Zone is also among those who observe the full month, further demonstrating the depth of commitment that the campaign has inspired within the local community.



By committing to fast, whether for a single day or for the whole month, participants experience, even briefly, the discipline, reflection and gratitude that define Ramadan for millions of Muslims worldwide. More than abstaining from food and drink, the experience encourages reflection, patience and appreciation. The fasts conclude each evening at sunset with moments of reflection, reinforcing the spirit of unity at the heart of the campaign.

For some, taking part has become a yearly commitment. Sara Burton from Children's University, who has supported the campaign alongside her husband for several years, described the experience as both grounding and humbling:

"For several years now, my husband and I have chosen to fast for a day during Ramadan as a small but meaningful way to stand in solidarity with the friends, colleagues, and families we care about. Each year, I am

humbled by the dedication this holy month represents. Fasting gives us the space to pause, to begin and end the day together with intention, and to reflect on how fortunate we truly are. It's a simple act, but it deepens our gratitude and reminds us of the importance of empathy, community, and thankfulness."

Over the past decade, #Im Not A Muslim But I Will Fast For One Day has evolved into a recognised annual tradition that strengthens relationships across sectors and communities. By encouraging individuals to step momentarily into another's lived experience, the campaign continues to promote inclusivity, dialogue and shared humanity.

As the initiative concluded this year, One Voice Blackburn extended heartfelt thanks to everyone who has taken part since its launch. Zaffer Khan, CEO of One Voice Blackburn, reflected on its ongoing significance.

"Since we launched #Im Not A Muslim But I Will Fast For One Day in 2016, we have seen how one simple act can spark deeper understanding and lasting relationships. We are incredibly proud of the organisations and individuals who continue to stand with us each year. Their commitment shows that Blackburn is a community that chooses empathy, embraces diversity and leads with compassion; and together, that makes us stronger."



Chris Seddon





Blackburn Magazine

For advertising opportunities please call:

01254 676193, or email
info@1vblackburn.org

We launched the pilot edition of One Voice Blackburn magazine in June 2022. It was printed on newsprint.

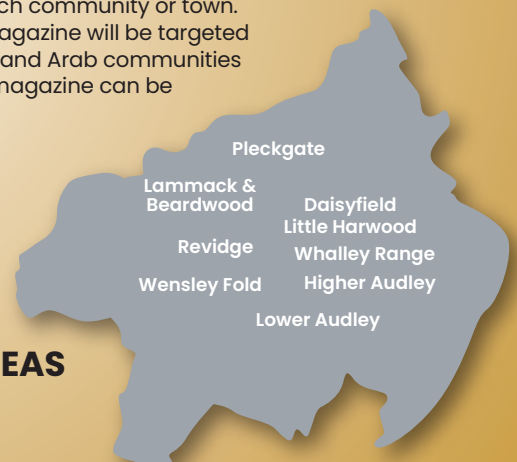
The magazine is now published each quarter in a glossy 68-page version. The next edition will be published in early April 2026.

The magazine creates a space for localised information to be passed around and seen. This is important as mainstream media fails to address positive news specific to each community or town. The One Voice Blackburn magazine will be targeted at the South Asian heritage and Arab communities in Blackburn. However, the magazine can be read by anyone.

The 68-page magazine is hand delivered to 14,000 households in Blackburn (GPS tracked delivery). It is produced on 90gsm silk with a glossy cover in A4 format.

DISTRIBUTION AREAS

14,000 copies covering the following areas:



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Five-Year-Old's Artwork Brings Eid Cheer to Blackburn

A burst of colour, imagination, and youthful creativity swept through Blackburn this past Eid, thanks to the extraordinary talent of just five-year-old Qasim Chaudhry. The young artist's vibrant design was selected as the official Eid card for 2026 by local charity One Voice Blackburn, making him the youngest contributor ever to receive the honour.

Qasim, a pupil at St. Mary's & St. Joseph's, is a member of the charity's Mini East End Boys (EEBs) group. During a design activity organised by One Voice Blackburn, children were invited to create artwork for the charity's annual Eid card. While past designs have typically come from older participants, Qasim's work immediately stood out for its creativity, attention to detail, and sheer joyfulness.

The resulting design is a colourful, storybook-like scene that perfectly captures the spirit of Eid. Against a deep blue night sky sprinkled with stars and crescent moons, a tall, imaginative mosque with a golden dome and intricate patterns takes centre stage. Brightly coloured buildings and playful shapes encircle the mosque, connected by a winding path that guides the

viewer's eye through the scene. The bold colours, whimsical details, and festive motifs make it a card that resonates with both children and adults alike.

Youth workers at One Voice Blackburn, who quickly recognised Qasim's artistic flair, were delighted by his enthusiasm and creativity. "Even at five years old, Qasim shows a remarkable imagination and love for drawing," said one staff member. "Seeing his design chosen as our official Eid card was a proud moment for everyone involved."

Throughout the festive period, One Voice Blackburn has continued its mission of promoting community cohesion through a range of initiatives, including the '12 Acts of Kindness' campaign, which encourages residents to take positive action in their neighbourhoods. Qasim's card was sent to the charity's stakeholders, friends, and members, spreading joy and Eid greetings across Blackburn.

Qasim's mother, Afiya Ali Chaudhry, expressed immense pride in her son.

"I am incredibly proud of my son for having his own Eid card published," she shared. "At just five years old, seeing his



creativity and imagination shine through fills my heart with joy. This moment is truly special for our family, and we hope it marks the beginning of many achievements for him."

For those who received it, Qasim's card wasn't just a festive greeting, it was a little window into the world of a child brimming with curiosity and wonder. His artwork reminded neighbours, friends, and family that the joy of Eid comes alive in the small, heartfelt creations of our youngest community members, leaving a warm, lasting impression long after the celebrations ended.



The Weirdest Phobias You've Probably Never Heard Of

We all have something that makes our skin crawl; spiders, heights, public speaking, your boss saying, "Can I have a quick word?" But for some people, fear takes a truly creative turn. We hit the streets of Blackburn to uncover the weirdest, wackiest, and most wonderfully bizarre phobias out there.

From a fear of crisps to a full-blown panic at the sight of henna, these stories prove one thing: the human brain is basically a chaotic little drama queen.

Cat-astrophe: The Fear of Felines

Not everyone's a cat person, but some people's dislike goes far beyond "I prefer dogs." For the truly cat-phobic, a casual encounter with a tabby is enough to trigger a full spy-level escape mission.

"Once, our front door was left open and I heard a bell jingling upstairs. I thought it was my sister's bangles – nope, it was a ginger cat by my bed! I screamed, jumped onto the bed, and hid behind the curtains like they were some sort of protective forcefield. Mum had to come running to rescue me. I still can't look at a Whiskas advert."

Roadkill and the Existential Crisis

Seeing a dead animal on the road is sad. But for some, it's the gateway to a full-blown spiral of "What if that was me?" existential horror.

"When I see a dead animal, I don't just feel grossed out, I imagine. it's someone I love. My brain immediately swaps the pigeon for my mum. It's weird, I know, but it's automatic. Roadkill = emotional breakdown."

Dead animals: 1. Emotional stability: 0.

Beard Fear: A Close Shave

For some, a well-groomed beard is a symbol of sophistication. For others, it's a walking, hairy hazard zone.

"I know people find beards attractive, but they just freak me out. The texture, the shedding, the way they move. When a bearded uncle leans in for a hug, I go into full panic mode. I can't explain it – it's just beard dread."

Manscaped or not, this is one fear no razor can fix.



Henna Hysteria: When Body Art Turns to Body Alarm

Henna – beautiful, cultural, festive. Unless you're one of the rare few who sees it and immediately feels faint.

"I dread Eid and weddings because I know henna will be everywhere. The smell and colour make me feel physically sick. I can't even eat food made by someone wearing it. My mum and aunt have stopped doing henna altogether, which they're not thrilled about, but neither is my stomach."

For some, mehndi night is the ultimate no-thanks night.

Crisp Chaos: The Crunch that Terrifies

A crisp phobia sounds impossible, until you meet someone who treats a bag of Wotsits like radioactive waste.

"I've thrown away clothes touched by crisp-covered hands. If a child with Quavers comes near me, I'm out. Monster Munch? Instant panic. I once left a friend's house mid-party because someone opened a multipack."

Basically, if it crunches, she's gone.

Yolk Horror: Breakfast's Dark Side

Ah, eggs. The humble breakfast classic. But to a select few, that oozy yellow centre is the stuff of nightmares.

"Watching someone dip toast into a runny yolk is like watching a horror film in slow motion. The texture, the smell, the ooze – no thank you. Even hard-boiled eggs make me gag. Too dry. Too chalky. I'll take cereal forever."

Sunny side up? More like sunny side *nope*.

Jelly Jitters: The Wobble of Doom

Who doesn't love jelly with custard, jelly in a trifle, or jelly all on its own? Well – some people. For a few unlucky souls, that innocent dessert is a full-on fear fest.

"The texture of jelly is all wrong. And the way it wobbles? Horrifying. It actually scares me, I have to leave the room. It's just disgusting and weird."

Forget spooky movies – nothing sends chills down their spine like a bowl of raspberry wobble.



Bowling Ball Panic: The Finger Fear Factor

Bowling. Harmless fun, right? Not if your biggest fear is that your fingers might get stuck... or worse, *go flying* with the ball.

"Every time I go to throw, I imagine my fingers staying in there or launching across the alley. I haven't bowled in years. My friends don't get it. I'll happily sit on the sidelines with chips and moral support."

Sometimes it's best to just *spare* yourself the trauma.

Fear is a Funny Thing

So next time you're embarrassed about being afraid of spiders, remember – someone out there is terrified of Quavers, henna, or a bloke with a beard. The world of phobias is weird, wonderful, and proof that the human brain loves to keep things... interesting.

After all, what's life without a little irrational fear?



The Hidden Heroes Keeping the North West Connected

When we flick the kettle on, stream a series or switch on a lamp late at night, we rarely think about the network quietly working behind the scenes. Across the North West of England, SP Electricity North West ensures electricity reaches over 2.4 million homes and tens of thousands of businesses.

Formerly Electricity North West, the company is now part of the global energy group Iberdrola, which also owns Scottish Power. While the name has changed, its purpose remains: maintaining, upgrading and future-proofing the network across urban and rural communities from the Peak District to North Cumbria.

SP Electricity North West is not your energy supplier. "We provide the overhead lines and underground cables that allows electricity to flow into your home," explains Karen, Customer Inclusion Learning and Development Manager.

The network is becoming more complex. As the UK moves toward net zero with more electric vehicles, solar

“Power cuts can be really tricky for many of us who rely on electricity, it’s about understanding who may struggle and empowering them to access the support they may need.”

panels and low-carbon technologies connecting to the grid, the network faces increased demand. "It's an exciting time to be in the industry," says Paul, Partnership Manager. "There's huge investment to ensure the network is robust and ready for the future."

Paul has worked for the organisation for 16 years, starting within their customer contact centre before specialising in ensuring customers are kept safe before, during and after a power cut. "Power cuts can be really tricky for many of us who rely on electricity, it's about understanding who may struggle and empowering them to access the support they may need," he says. He now builds relationships with

organisations across the North West to raise awareness of the Extra Care register, a free service offering extra support during power cuts.

Karen joined three years ago, bringing charity sector experience. Her role ensures households know about available support and that their contact centre teams are highly skilled in delivering their Extra Care service. "It's not enough to have people on a register. Our agents need to be confident handling any call, whether someone is medically dependent on electricity or simply anxious," she says.

Over 930,000 households are signed up to the Extra Care register, but at

least one million could benefit. The service supports anyone who may struggle in a power cut and includes older people, families with young children, those with medical needs, language barriers, or temporary challenges.

The register is flexible and person-centered. "Every household is unique. That's why we provide a bespoke service specific to the needs of a customer on the day. Our situational approach to Extra Care means we can remove labels and barriers to anyone who may need a little extra support," Karen explains.

Support may include proactive calls ahead of severe weather, practical interventions and timely information. "For many, just knowing how long they may be without power makes a huge difference," says Paul.

Whilst SP Electricity North West invests heavily in both maintaining and upgrading their network, unforeseen events such as bad weather can be a major cause of power cuts. Extreme heat, heavy rainfall or high winds, can all have an impact. Overhead lines are affected by wind and falling trees, underground networks by flooding. SP Electricity North West monitors

“ Extra Care is about making things easier, and removing the barriers to people feeling confident in accessing support. ”

forecasts and contacts Extra Care register customers ahead of named storms. "If people have time to think about what they'd do without power in a non-crisis moment, outcomes are better," Karen says.

During major events, the response is all-hands-on-deck. The organisation employs over 2,400 colleagues, many of whom take secondary roles during incidents to support customers across the region, from answering phones to visiting households.

"It can mean long days, but there's a real camaraderie supporting communities through something challenging," Paul says. Karen adds, "Even a simple phone call to check someone's okay can mean the world to someone who is feeling isolated."

The organisation has also refreshed its communications approach to use more empowering language. "Extra Care is

about making things easier, and removing the barriers to people feeling confident in accessing support," Karen explains. "We're proud to serve the North West through network operations, community partnerships and apprenticeships," she says.

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, SP Electricity North West's work stretches far beyond cables and substations. It is about resilience, inclusion, and quiet reliability, keeping kettles boiling, lights glowing, and communities connected.

If there is a chance you could struggle in a power cut, please sign up to their free Extra Care register by visiting enwl.co.uk/ExtraCare or calling 0800 195 41 41



Paul Morris and Karen Hunter

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Reduces waiting times
Most donors lead healthy lives afterward
Gives hope to loved ones

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In good physical and mental health.
Willing to help a loved one or stranger.
Doctors carefully check your health and safety.

Your Safety Comes First:

Medical teams ensure donation is safe, and you can withdraw at any time.

One donor can change someone's entire future.
Be a lifesaver. Consider living organ donation.





Community, Creativity and Celebration at Scouts Iftar

Last month, the 1V Scouts brought together members, volunteers and local guests for their now-traditional Community Iftar, creating an evening filled with learning, activities and shared celebration.

The four-hour event offered a wide range of activities designed to engage young people of all ages. A strong focus on engineering and creativity ran throughout the programme, with participants enjoying hands-on experiences in robotics and making their own personalised key rings.

One of the highlights of the evening was a live pet snake display, which attracted plenty of curiosity and excitement from attendees. Many young people gathered around to learn more about the reptile and its care, making it an unforgettable experience for those taking part.

Alongside the educational activities, there were also opportunities for physical challenges. Young people were able to test their aim in archery sessions and take part in a variety of sports. Meanwhile, younger members enjoyed a quieter creative activity, making colourful Eid cards to mark the upcoming celebration.

The Community Iftar has become a much-anticipated fixture in the group's calendar. Since the 1V Scouts first launched in 2014, the annual gathering has grown steadily and now attracts a large number of participants from across the community. Today, the group has developed into one of the largest Scout groups in the town and surrounding area, reflecting both its popularity and the dedication of its volunteers.

The event also provided an opportunity

to reflect on the Scouts' busy programme over the winter months. Members recently took part in several residential trips, building friendships and learning new skills outside their usual meeting environment. They also attended an Iftar event in an Raf facility in Wolverhampton. Plans are already underway for a number of exciting residential adventures in the spring and summer.

The fast was opened with food prepared for more than 250 people, ensuring that everyone present could share in the moment together. A call to prayer was also delivered bringing a meaningful conclusion to a vibrant and community-focused event.

The 1V Scouts continue to meet at Brookhouse Primary School on most Saturday mornings. Sessions are currently full to capacity.

1tv SUMS & PALINDROMES

The tuition service with a difference



One Voice Blackburn is a charity that aspires to create cohesive, aspirational and confident communities in Blackburn with Darwen. It is a charity that is respected across the town especially working with marginalised communities.

Sums & Palindromes, is the tuition and learning arm of the charity, launched in Autumn 2023. We have worked with over 70 young people, both primary and secondary school students.





ABOUT US

Who We Are

Sums & Palindromes is the tuition and learning arm of One Voice Blackburn, a charity respected across Blackburn with Darwen for supporting local communities and young people.

Since Autumn 2023, we have worked with over 70 primary and secondary school students, helping them improve academically while building self-confidence.

WHAT WE OFFER

Tuition Tailored to Your Child

- Small Group Learning. 1 fully qualified teacher for a maximum of 5 students (initially starting with 3 students per teacher in some cases)
- Tailored Support. Sessions designed to address individual learning needs and build confidence
- Qualified Educators. All teachers hold a degree, a PGCE or equivalent post-graduate qualification, and at least 2 years' classroom experience
- SATs Preparation. Primary students
- GCSE Support. Secondary students
- Saturday Sessions. Convenient weekend learning

Our mission is simple: to help young people achieve their potential in English, Maths, and Science.

WHY CHOOSE US

The Sums & Palindromes Difference

- ✓ **Trusted community organisation**
- ✓ **Focus on confidence, not just grades**
- ✓ **Inclusive and supportive environment**
- ✓ **Results-focused, encouraging learning**

"Since joining Sums & Palindromes, my child feels more confident in class and enjoys learning again!"

Parent testimonial

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Nina Khan

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nina@1vblackburn.org

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JAVEED HANWARE / COLUMN

Blackburn Rovers fan is a regular traveller for football tournaments. His latest journey was to Morocco in January

AFCON Delivered What Modern Football Often Can't

I'll be honest, missing out on the 2026 FIFA World Cup hurt. Like many fans who follow international tournaments religiously, it's the one you build towards. But between the eye-watering ticket prices and the uncertainty around travelling to the USA, Mexico and Canada, it just wasn't going to happen this time.

So we improvised.

Instead of forcing it, we looked for an alternative and landed on the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco earlier this year. No big expectations, no detailed planning, just a chance to get that international football fix.

We originally tried to get tickets to see Morocco, but that quickly proved unrealistic. The country lives and breathes football, and the demand for home matches was something else. So, we based ourselves in Agadir and decided to take whatever games we could get into.

In hindsight, that was the best decision of the trip.

There's something about going into matches without an agenda. No emotional investment beforehand, no stress about results - just pure football. And AFCON, from what we experienced, delivers that in a way that's hard to describe unless you've been there.

It's not perfect. Let's not pretend it is. Organisation can be patchy,



infrastructure isn't always where you'd want it to be, and at times things feel a bit chaotic. But once you're in the ground, none of that really matters.

Because the atmosphere is something else.

Fans don't just turn up, they bring the whole experience with them. The noise, the colour, the constant movement. It feels less like watching a match and more like being part of something. That's what stood out the most.

Seeing Mohamed Salah live was another highlight. You watch players like that week in, week out on TV, but



international football is different. There's more on it, more pride, more edge. We did end up missing his extra-time goal against Zimbabwe, which still stings a bit, but even so, it didn't take away from the experience.

If anything, the only real mistake we made was not staying longer.

AFCON gave us something that feels like it's slowly disappearing from the modern game, something raw, unpredictable and properly alive. No overthinking, no comparisons. Just football as it should be.

And if you ever get the chance to go, don't hesitate. Just go.





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