

Opinion

BSC Multicultural Services: one of our most dynamic and innovative groups

Neil
MacDonald



Ipswich is blessed with many vibrant community groups, and one of the most active and impactful is BSC Multicultural Services (BSCMS), a multi-award-winning organisation whose mission is simple and powerful: to bring communities together.

Originally founded in 1998 as the Bangladesh Support Centre, the charity quickly expanded its work to support a wide range of ethnic minority communities, evolving into BSCMS. Over nearly thirty years, they have planned and delivered countless projects and events, large and small, benefiting tens of thousands of people across Ipswich and Suffolk.

Today, BSCMS supports people from more than 65 nationalities, making a significant and lasting impact at a local level. Their work is a reminder that Ipswich's diversity is one of its greatest strengths — something to be celebrated and nurtured.

BSCMS is perhaps best known for the 1 Big Multicultural Festival, a much-loved annual flagship celebration of diversity in Alexandra Park. With up to 8,000 people attending each year, it has become one of Ipswich's most popular summer events, offering something for all ages — residents and visitors alike. It is a joyful celebration of everything that makes our town such a vibrant and inclusive place.

This year's festival welcomed a very special guest: Sir Terry Waite, who addressed the crowd and launched a white dove of peace. His presence was a powerful reminder of the importance of unity and understanding between communities, and it added a moment of reflection to a day filled with colour, music and celebration.

From their office in Tower



Neil MacDonald, Ipswich Borough Council (Labour)

Street — shared with several other charitable organisations — BSCMS delivers an impressive range of services, projects and activities. These include training programmes, carers' support, health awareness initiatives, rural outreach, drop-in advice, befriending, wellbeing activities, winter wellness support and sports. Their ability to run so many projects with a relatively small team speaks volumes about their commitment and energy.

One of their most important contributions is the Saturday School, held each week at St Helen's Primary School. Running for two hours every

Saturday afternoon, it helps ethnic minority children achieve their full potential through learning and extra-curricular activities. More than 3,500 children and young people have benefited from this programme, which has quietly become one of the most effective educational support initiatives in the town.

Sharing food is one of the best ways to bring people together, and the Global Food & Pita Festival is a perfect example. It is always buzzing with atmosphere — a fantastic day of flavours, cultures and community. What began as a competition for traditional Bangladeshi cakes (pitas) has

grown into a showcase of global cuisine, with independent judges selecting winners across several categories.

The BME Business Awards, launched in 2016, celebrate and champion the creativity and economic contribution of minority-ethnic business owners across Suffolk. Around 120 businesses took part last time, demonstrating the depth and breadth of entrepreneurial talent in our county. This year's awards will be presented on 10 November at the University of Suffolk — and there is still time to apply.

From humble beginnings, BSCMS has grown into one of

the largest and most dynamic community organisations in Suffolk. Their achievements were formally recognised with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2022 — a testament to the dedication of their management committee and the hard work of their volunteers.

I am frequently amazed by how much this small group of committed people can achieve. Of all the community groups in Ipswich, BSCMS stands out as one of the most dynamic and innovative. I look forward to working with them on future projects and continuing to support their vital work in our town.