



# Project Sälääm

**Evaluation Report**

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May 2023

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## Citation:

Cassim, S., Khan-Janif, J., Ali, M., Ali, N., Drew, S. S., Slaimankhel, J., Shaban, N., Hodgetts, D., & Hopner, V. (2023). *Project Salaam: Evaluation Report*. Auckland, New Zealand: Massey University.



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# Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely acknowledge the late Ann Dysart who led the E Tū Whānau team and took the opportunity to fund Project Salaam in its early years. We acknowledge Project Tamkin and the Aotearoa Latin American Community for their ongoing support towards Project Salaam.

Thank you also to the Design Studio team at The Printery, Te Whare Tā, Massey University for helping us with the cover and design for the report, and to the Read Fund (supported by the School of Psychology and the College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Massey University) for funding the design and printing of this report.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the Project Salaam team and all the stakeholders of the Project, especially the students and parents, for kindly giving their time to support both the Project and this evaluation.

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# Executive Summary

Project Salaam is a community-driven initiative which supports Muslim youth with a refugee background grappling with experiences of discrimination, trauma and associated grief and anger. The Project which was facilitated in two Auckland schools supports these Muslim youth to strengthen leadership abilities, self-confidence and academic achievement alongside skills in conflict resolution and interpersonal relationship management through a series of experiential workshops. Project Salaam is underpinned by Islamic values which further works to promote cultural and faith identities.

This report takes an in-depth look at Project Salaam, how it works and the value and importance of the initiative to refugee background Muslim youth and families. Information for this evaluation was gathered from multiple sources including historic records, such as written feedback from workshop attendees and facilitator observations, and through qualitative interviews with facilitators and past participants.


The evaluation indicates that Project Salaam has met its objective of providing Muslim refugee background youth with opportunities to develop skills in leadership and conflict resolution. The Project achieved all its key goals by helping students to grow leadership skills, self-esteem and effective communication alongside considering and applying mediation for conflict resolution. The evaluation suggests that overall, Project Salaam was positively received by participants, and youth provided positive feedback. While the evaluation highlighted the importance of sustaining Project Salaam for Muslim

youth with refugee backgrounds, challenges to sustaining the delivery of the Project workshops were also identified. The report outlines eight key areas for which the findings of this evaluation have direct implications:

- tools for youth success,
- enablers to support and mentor students,
- tailored approach,
- diversity and inclusion in positive and proactive ways,
- bringing faith-based approaches into Aotearoa New Zealand schools,
- creating opportunities for conversations about diversity,
- collaborative strategy for youth development, and
- promoting social cohesion and preventing/countering violent extremism.

More specific recommendations include scaling up this initiative and securing more funding to support it.



A decorative geometric pattern in the top left corner, featuring overlapping circles and star-like shapes in a light beige color.

*'Today's world is travelling in a strange direction. You see that the world is going towards destruction and violence. The speciality of violence is to create hatred among people and to create fear. I am a believer in nonviolence, and I say that no peace of tranquillity will descend upon the people of the world until non-violence is practiced, because non-violence is love and it stirs courage in people'*

*- Abdul Ghaffar Khan*

# Background

Recent reports from both the Aotearoa New Zealand Youth19 survey (Peiris-John, et al., 2021) and the Education Review Office (2023) highlight that youth (including Muslim young people) from minoritized communities (e.g. East Asian, South Asian, Chinese and Indian) experience racism, particularly in schools. Experiences of discrimination were conveyed as hierarchical and intersectional with those reporting more adverse experiences as predicated on ethnicity and, darkness of skin colour (Simon-Kumar et al, 2022). Alongside racialisation of ethnicity, Muslim students in Aotearoa New Zealand can also be vulnerable to religious prejudice, and unique challenges of belonging to an often stigmatised, and misrepresented group associated with terrorism and gender inequalities (Stuart, 2014). Muslim students can further grapple with everyday challenges around issues of inclusion which plays out in practical considerations such as availability of prayer rooms, *halal* food, and options around dress in schools (Ward et al, 2019).

Project Salaam<sup>1</sup> was conceived in 2018, in response to experiences of racism and discrimination at school for Muslim youth from refugee backgrounds in Mt Roskill, Auckland (Collins, 2001). At the time, Muslim youth were feeling significant pressure from experiences of race-based surveillance from government agencies, and wider community-based discrimination in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ward et al, 2019; Yogeeswaran et al, 2019). Such experiences can be further intensified by ongoing effects of trauma, grief and anger that forced migration brings (Haffejee, 2015). Research from the United States carried out with Muslim refugee youth highlights the varying compounding effects of trauma, including grief and anger, alongside carryover effects of racism and Islamophobia, particularly in schools (Haffejee, 2015). Negotiating daily experiences of Islamophobia, surveillance, racism and marginalisation alongside grief and trauma exacerbates conflict situations within school environments, and this was found to be the case for young Muslims from refugee backgrounds in some Auckland high schools.

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<sup>1</sup> In its most basic sense, the Arabic term salaam means peace.

Project Salaam was developed by highly skilled and experienced practitioners in conflict resolution, and from 2018 onwards, the team have worked with Muslim refugee background youth to grow leadership and skills in conflict resolution through a series of experiential workshops. Previously, conflict resolution programmes have been implemented with communities as a form of peace building and violence prevention, and a key underlying aim of such programmes has been trauma recovery and healing for refugee groups (e.g. John, 2021). Such programmes have also been shown to promote self-esteem, self-efficacy, empathy and trust, and to reduce anger and stress.

There is a long history of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Islam which offers “compassionate solutions to human problems”, and mediation is at the heart of these solutions (Reham, 2011, p. 63). Islamic perspectives to conflict resolution consider the concept of *takhīm* (or political arbitration) and draw on historical Islamic contexts as well as sources such as the *Qur’an*<sup>2</sup> and *Hadīth*<sup>3</sup> (Reham, 2011). Accordingly, Islamic values that underpin such faith-based conflict resolution and peace-building strategies include, a pursuit of justice, human dignity, equality, valuing human life, knowledge and reason, creativity and innovation, forgiveness, responsibility, choice, patience, unity, collaborative action and solidarity, inclusiveness and participation, compassion, self-purification, non-violence, spiritual and human development (Abu-Nimer, 2003; Reham, 2011).

Project Salaam was designed to reflect and build on the previous work noted above, and additionally aims to address bullying, discrimination and Islamophobia, whilst also focusing on enhancing participants' academic achievement and strengthening students' cultural and faith-based identities. This project builds on the inherent resilience of Muslim families and is underpinned by Islamic values of humanity (*insania*), patience (*sabr*), peace and non-violence (*salaam*), forgiveness (*maghfira*) and reconciliation (*musālahā*). Participants engage in faith-informed activities that increase skills in effective communication and to gain practical strategies to manage conflict situations positively and non-violently.

Following the events of 15 March 2019 in Christchurch, Project Salaam has taken on greater importance to address the wellbeing of Muslim refugee background youth in a culturally responsive manner. A report by the Office of Ethnic Communities

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<sup>2</sup> The Qur’an is the primary religious text, and sacred scripture of Islam.

<sup>3</sup> Hadith refers to records of the words, teachings, actions and examples set by the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and are transmitted through narratives.

(2019) released after the Christchurch attacks showed the serious impacts that the attacks had on the mental and emotional wellbeing of Muslim youth in Aotearoa New Zealand. The report acknowledged that Muslims appreciated the support extended by wider communities towards them following the attacks, but it also highlighted that the racist, hateful and Islamophobic comments continued, and had become more overt both face-to-face and through social media. Specifically, the report noted that the education system, including continuing education and professional development, needs to address these issues, and called for action from all educators, especially senior leadership (Office of Ethnic Communities, 2019). At an institutional level, discriminatory perceptions, curricular and policies have been found to create unwelcoming or harmful environments for Muslim students (Abu Khalaf, et al., 2022). Discrimination and Islamophobia enacted by both educators and peers at school can have a significant impact on Muslim students' confidence (Education Review Office, 2023). These serious and negative impacts relate to the ability to study, participate in class, advocate for themselves with school leadership, their sense of identity and overall experiences of education. Project Salaam comprises one initiative that can further respond to these issues, and support Muslim refugee youth from within an Islamic framework.



# Project Salaam:

## Core objective and associated goals

The objective of Project Salaam is to provide Muslim school-aged students, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds, with opportunities to develop skills in leadership and conflict resolution, alongside managing and addressing issues of bullying and discrimination.

The key goals are to:

**Grow leadership skills among students** that develops and strengthens their confidence, communication abilities, integrity, and an ability to relate well to others (Pidgeon, 2017). Leadership skills in conflict resolution processes can help to manage cultural and religious diversity, promote tolerance, respect human rights, and facilitate peaceful and non-violent outcomes (Alfoqahaa & Jones, 2020). Leadership skills are resources which support educational achievement, effective communication and managing difficult situations. Schools are ecosystems of society, and previous research with refugee communities in Auckland has shown the significant role that schools play in wider processes of social cohesion (Kate et al, 2019). Growing youth leaders then becomes an important part of supporting harmony and well-being in both educational and other community settings.

Strengthen self-esteem: Feeling good about oneself and the groups a person belongs to can impact positively on social relationships, school experiences and performance as well as psychological and physical health. Positive self-evaluations of personal, cultural and religious worth are associated with the development of cognitive, psychological, emotional and relational resources that enable students to successfully navigate everyday life and deal with challenging and traumatic situations (Benninger & Savahl, 2017). Refugees who make their home in Aotearoa New Zealand generally come from landscapes of violence, war, and loss (NZ Parliament, 2020). Strengthening self and group esteem helps to cultivate the means to cope with related experiences of trauma, stress and complex grief that evolve from experiences of war and conflict (Agbaria et al, 2021; Neria & Litz, 2004).

**Develop effective communication skills**, including active listening skills, an ability to engage in constructive feedback, and awareness of non-verbal cues (Sekerci & Yilmaz, 2021). These communication skills enable people to positively manage interpersonal relationships, develop empathy, respect and compassion for others, increase self-awareness, and support personal growth (Lodi et al, 2022). The personal and social skills gained through developing good communication skills have been shown to decrease stress levels and mood disorders such as depression as well as act as a mechanism to prevent resentment and increase abilities to manage anger and conflict constructively and in a non-harmful way (Lodi et al, 2022). Communication skills are not only crucial for managing conflict situations but also provide a pathway for former refugee youth to talk about, and process grief and trauma in safe and appropriate environments.

**Cultivate awareness about mediation as a means of resolving conflict:**

Effective mediation can help students to reframe perceptions, motivations, emotions, actions, and interactions to build more peaceful outcomes for everyone. Mediation is based on principles of self-determination, justice, equity, co-operation, respect, empathy, flexibility, and empowerment. All of these principles are the basis for life-long skills-building to resolve conflict both at school and outside of school. Developing awareness of mediation as a way of managing conflict enables productive communication, emotional regulation, problem solving, goal setting, tolerance, satisfaction, and agreement about both personal and shared interests (Moore, 2014).

## The Project Salaam Team

The overall team includes a total of 20 members, of whom, key players include:

**Shireen Shah Drew** (Fellow, Resolution Institute)

**Jennifer Khan-Janif** (E Tū Whānau, Ministry of Social Development)

**Nazreen Shaban** (Community Partnerships, Ministry of Education)

**Naima Ali** (Former Refugee Coordinator, Mt Roskill Grammar School)

**Jamila Slaimankhel** (Community Health Worker, Starship Community)

## Stakeholders

Project Salaam is supported by several organisations and groups, who also form the stakeholder-base for the project. These include:

- E Tū Whānau in the Ministry of Social Development
- Ministry of Education
- Starship Community, Te Whatu Ora Te Toka Tumai Auckland
- 'Refugee as Survivors'
- Staff at participating secondary schools
- Students/participants
- Parents and communities

Therein, Project Salaam is a collaboration between personnel from key government ministries and aligned community organisations and members.

# How Project Salaam Works

Project Salaam involves a series of workshops with Muslim youth from refugee backgrounds. The key facilitator's professional experience as a mediator and theatrical actor informs the design and interactive conduct of these workshops. The workshops aim to grow leadership and potential for refugee background youth by building and maintaining self-esteem, alongside developing effective communication skills and knowledge about the role that mediation plays in resolving conflict. Additional workshop topics also include self-care, healthy eating, benefits of physical activity and good sleeping habits, online safety, and students knowing their rights. Overall, workshops were designed to help enhance self-confidence and to support their commitment to getting the most from education at school.

Project Salaam was initially facilitated with youth aged 11-17 years, through a series of up to eight workshops delivered by the key facilitator and community leaders with whom students can identify, trust, and feel safe. The number of workshops varied between different groups depending on the context, issues raised by students, and the needs of particular cohorts. It is also based on the degree of support from host schools. These workshops began in August 2018 in two localities in Auckland. The schools have been anonymised, to protect the privacy of students and staff involved. The end of August 2022 marked the 4th anniversary of Project Salaam, with over 40 sessions run, and over 150 attendees.

More specifically, in terms of content the workshops encompass practical activities, role-playing, class and small group discussions, shared critical reflections, and written feedback. An image of a tree is used at the beginning of the workshop, to visually represent the work in which the group engages (see Figure 1). The roots are presented as being vital for grounding the tree in the earth, and representing heritage, culture, customs, faith, beliefs, and family networks. Despite the fact the students were not living in their countries of origin, it is acknowledged that they could still derive strength from their roots wherever these reside.

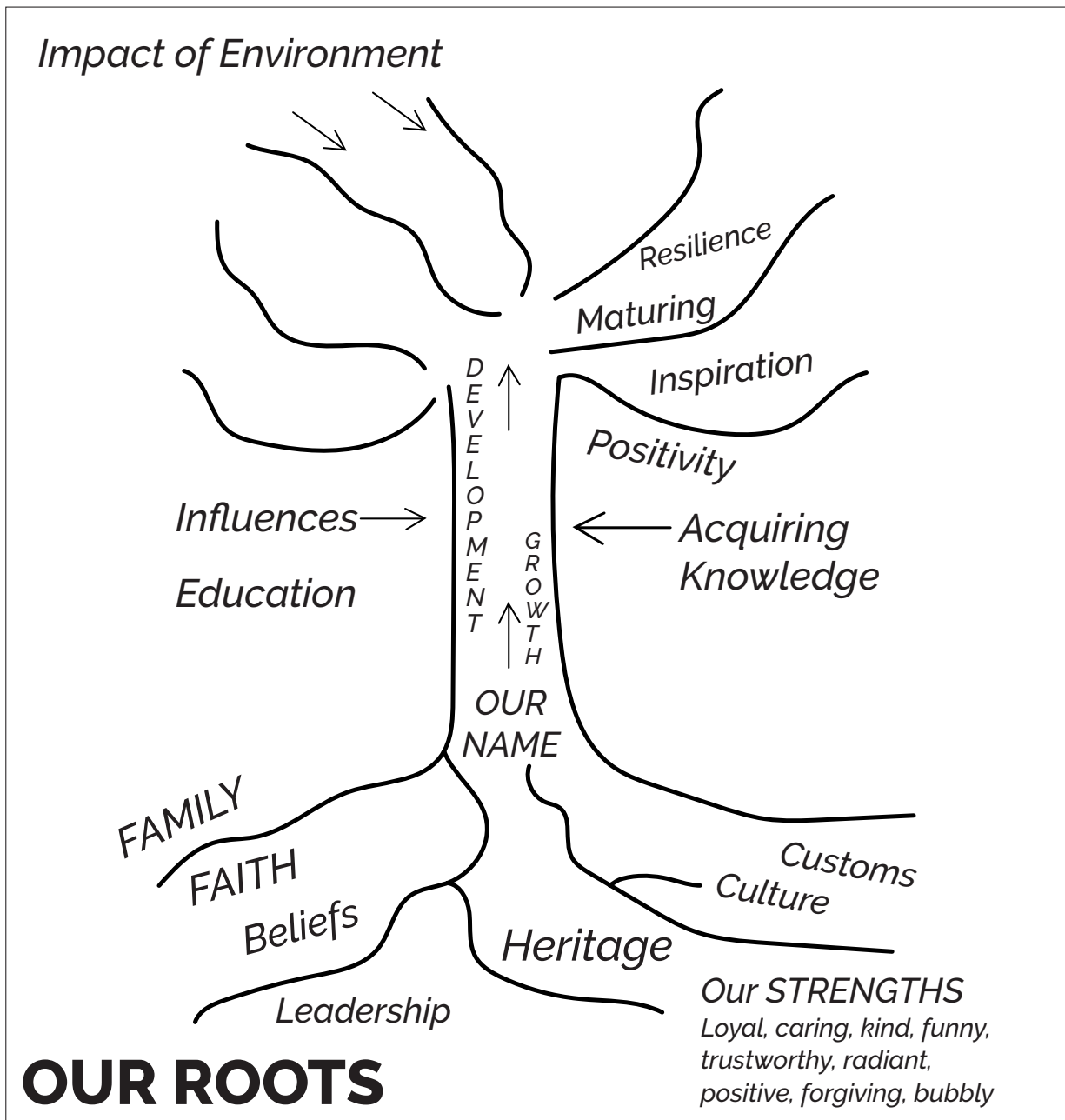


Figure 1. Image of the tree used in Project Salaam workshops

The team tailors their approach to the workshops to meet the needs of the specific attendees based on the requirements of the locality or specific context. The work often extends to coaching sessions for older students, education sessions for staff at the schools, and sessions with parents and community members. This tailored approach is highlighted in the following sections by showcasing the two case exemplar localities within which workshops were facilitated. These two cases demonstrate how the project works and is experienced by the relevant stakeholders. The case exemplars are also useful in contrasting similarities and differences dependent on location and tailored applications of the workshops.

## Case exemplar 1: School #1

**Project duration:** 2018-to date

**Participants:** Boys and girls,  
age 11-14 years

**Total participants:** Approximately 80

**Total number of workshops:** 28

**Project make-up:** Youth workshops

School #1 is located in central Auckland and became part of Project Salaam in August 2018, with ongoing workshops continuing up to the present. Workshops began with 2 sessions for students with 2 community leaders attending and these were extended to 7 sessions that covered topics such as role modelling, effective communication,

peer pressure, and technology and cyber bullying (see Appendix 1 for details). To date 80 students, comprising both boys and girls, all former refugees, and aged 11-14 years have participated in these workshops (See Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Project Salaam workshop with girls at School #1



Figure 3. Project Salaam workshop with students at School #1

## Case exemplar 2: School #2

**Project duration: 2018-2021**

**Participants: Girls, age 11-18 years**

**Total participants: Approximately 47**

**Total number of workshops:18**

**Project make-up: Youth workshops, coaching sessions, Personal development session**

School #2 is located in south Auckland and participated in Project Salaam from 2018 to 2021. At School #2, Project Salaam facilitated a broad range of workshops including workshops focused on coaching sessions for older girls, building self-esteem, role modelling, effective communication, mediation processes, stress management, social media

awareness (see Appendix 2 for details). The project also ran development sessions with staff. In this locality, the particular request was for the Project Salaam team to work with Afghan students who were former refugees aged 11-17 years. Eight workshops were held over the four years, with a total of 42 student participants.

As noted above, in this school a small group of five Year 12 students also participated in four coaching sessions in 2021 to support particular aspects of their studies as they approached final exams and applied for places in tertiary education. These students were identified by teachers and the principal as being 'at risk of not achieving potential'. The smaller groups enabled the facilitator to work more closely with each of these girls. The focus on role modelling and coaching enabled participating students to see and interact with Muslim women similar to them who were high-achievers and who had become successful in their own fields. The coaching sessions covered core skills related to time management, motivation, and confidence building, and focussed on ways to overcome obstacles to study at home with techniques that were tailored to the students' individual learning style. The sessions were also designed to strengthen the students' cultural identities as Muslim women, highlighting that there is a place in Islam and society more broadly for female leadership and achievement. The coaching sessions were held with Muslim students from varying ethnic backgrounds, and not only those who identified as Afghan (as was the focus of the more general youth workshops noted above), or as former refugees.

Project Salaam also facilitated a Personal Development session for staff at School #2 in 2019. The session comprised information about the Afghanistan context and

associated issues of trauma. It provided a forum for developing an understanding among staff of the context from which some of their most vulnerable students originated. The session extended knowledge about the various elements of the refugee journey, and key challenges Afghan refugees often face on route to Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **Additional initiatives**

### **Workshop: 5-year-olds.**

Project Salaam has also planned to facilitate a workshop for a group of 5-year-olds at a school in Wellington. However, this workshop was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and is yet to be rescheduled. See Appendix 3 for a detailed plan for this workshop. The aim of this additional workshop is to explore the concept of difference and to normalise how looking, sounding, and living differently to others is ok and something to be proud of. The workshop is titled 'we are all OK'.

### **Workshop: Parents and community members**

The Project Salaam team also facilitated a workshop with parents of the students who participated in the youth workshops, and other interested community members. This workshop is occurred in April 2021, at a community centre in south Auckland. Approximately 20 people attended this workshop.

This workshop was conducted in response to requests to the team from parents-who emphasised the importance of a liaison person who would work with parents to raise any concerns about the school their children attend. The aim of the workshop was to establish a clear link or liaison between parents and the school, while also providing opportunities to discuss the various challenges students (as Muslim refugee youth) face within their everyday lives, including at school. The workshop also reflected the Project team's acknowledgement of the importance of parental input into their children's resettlement and educational journeys. Discussions also covered digital technology, healthy eating, peer pressure, poverty, awareness of children's 'communication needs at school, the utility of parent teacher interviews, and how they can go about making appointments with schools.

# Evaluation Design and Data Collection

## Objectives of the current evaluation

This evaluation assessed the value of Project Salaam by reviewing the stakeholders' responses and observations from being involved in the Project-workshops. Thereby the core objectives are to:

1. Identify the strengths of Project Salaam, and areas that could be improved.
2. Determine whether the Project Salaam workshops achieved the intended objective and goals.
3. Identify the challenges faced by the team in facilitating and sustaining Project Salaam.

## Research team

The evaluation research team comprised five key members. Jennifer Khan-Janif is a key stakeholder on Project Salaam, who initiated and led the evaluation and assembled the research team. Dr Shemana Cassim, Dr Veronica Hopner and Professor Darrin Hodgetts are community psychologists from Massey University with significant experience in participative and evaluative research. Mariam Ali is a community researcher who carried out the field work for the evaluation and was also a past-participant of Project Salaam. The team also worked alongside the facilitators and other Project Salaam team members throughout the evaluation process.

## Process

This evaluation follows the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), where we centralised the experiences of the Project stakeholders, including past-participants and facilitators (Cornish et al., 2023). The centralising of participant experiences was enhanced by the community researcher being a past-participant of Project Salaam herself, the evaluation being driven by Project Salaam team members, and this report being produced through a genuine collaboration with the team and university-based researchers.

Information for this evaluation was gathered from multiple sources. These sources include historic records comprising written feedback from workshop attendees and facilitators, and interviews with facilitators and past participants of Project Salaam. This evaluation also documents the various supplementary developments that grew out of the conduct of Project Salaam workshops across various schools.

**Written feedback** was obtained from Project Salaam participants at both schools immediately following the first two workshops in August 2018, and the most recent workshops in May 2021 and October 2022 (see Appendix 4 for a template for the feedback sheet).

**Observations and reflections:** The key facilitator documented her 'observations' immediately following the first and second workshops in August 2018 at both schools. The observations were simply documented as notes on a Word document, and comprised approximately four pages of written material for analysis. As part of the evaluation, we also asked two of the workshop facilitators to further reflect upon and elaborate on these written observations. These reflections occurred as conversations between Mariam (community researcher) and two of the facilitators in February 2023, and comprised 80 minutes of additional recorded material for analysis. These later elaborations have been included in the following 'findings' chapter as 'reflections', whereas the written observations are included as 'facilitator observations'.

**Interviews** were carried out with past participants of Project Salaam, who have since become key stakeholders of the Project. The Project Salaam facilitators reached out to these past participants with an information sheet inviting each person to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating in this evaluation. If they responded, a time and place for an interview was arranged. Interviews were carried out in December 2022, with three people who had

attended Project Salaam workshops. The participants opted to take part in a two-hour group discussion regarding their experiences of the project. All three of these participants were women, from School #1, and aged between 20 to 25 years. They were of Middle Eastern, Asian and African descent, and had participated in Project Salaam workshops 3 to 4 years prior to the evaluation.

**Ethical considerations:** This is a community lead and conducted evaluation that has been peer reviewed by independent community researchers and deemed low risk. The ethical issues considered by the researchers include carrying out culturally safe, community engaged research with care and respect towards participants. Therein, this evaluation was underpinned by relational ethics, which also aligns closely with PAR (Cornish et al., 2023; Hodgetts et al. 2022). Particular attention was paid to protecting the welfare and dignity of research participants, informed consent and ensuring that research methods minimise the risk of harm to participants. Given the background of its academic members, the team also worked in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the New Zealand Psychological Society in supporting the community with this initiative. The code focuses particularly on the safety of individual and group participants as well as emphasising the importance of cultural responsiveness in knowledge production processes. The evaluation process was co-designed and led by the community as we sort to identify possible areas to further strengthen Project Salaam.

**Analysis and development of recommendations:** All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were discussed and relevant amendments were made with participants prior to the final transcripts being combined with the other empirical materials for analysis. Participant names and other specific identifying information were removed from all empirical materials to provide anonymity and pseudonyms were used where necessary. The interview transcripts, facilitator observations, reflections and written feedback were then subjected to a content analysis for the purpose of identifying key trends and issues from across these materials. Participant responses were pooled together according to the key objectives of this evaluation and organised into content groups. These content groups were discussed extensively by the research team, and the analysis was deepened through the application of key concepts and findings from related research, and to generate recommendations that were also anchored in existing knowledge.

# Findings

This evaluation suggests that overall, Project Salaam was positively received by participants and achieved its intended goals (Objective 1 of the evaluation). This is evident through all the subsections of the findings below. Youth provided positive feedback following the workshops and also identified the strengths of the Project (Objective 2). While the evaluation highlighted the importance of sustaining Project Salaam for Muslim youth with refugee backgrounds, challenges to sustaining the delivery of the Project workshops were also identified (Objective 3). The analysis also explores the empirical materials in terms of how Project Salaam is currently evolving.

## Positive feedback

Youth who engaged with the workshops in both locales found it positive with the written feedback from School #1 indicating that 64% of participants (14 out of 22) found the workshops 'most enjoyable', and the other 36% finding it 'enjoyable'. According to the facilitator observations, participants from School #2 consistently marked the workshops as enjoyable: 'enjoyed very much' or 'enjoyed a lot'.

Youth from both schools also provided positive feedback following the workshops. Feedback statements from the written feedback included:

- *Great workshop felt welcome as soon as I walked in*
- *Well structured and friendly*
- *When is the next one - I am excited*
- *It was an awesome workshop that reflects and teaches some qualities that Islam teaches*
- *Wonderful*

Based on the written feedback, the participants at both locales valued gaining skills in communication (particularly relating to ways of speaking, tone and listening), rapport building, mediation (respectful mediation), self-confidence, and self-respect. These thoughts were echoed in the facilitator observations following these workshops at School #2:

*It was noticeable that their self-confidence has increased, this is evident in their general demeanour, increased enthusiasm and energy levels. Hopefully this can continue to be fostered once the sessions are completed.*

*The students have been receptive to new ideas and grasped the mediation process very speedily after working on the essential elements that support a mediator's role, e.g. effective listening, speaking clearly, summarising, use of non-blaming languages together with techniques to manage potentially challenging behaviours.*

(Facilitator observation, School #2)

Such statements reflect a positive learning environment within which students respond proactively to the skill development process.

## The strengths

Interviews with past participants of Project Salaam, and facilitator observations and reflections highlighted further the varying strengths of the project. These included how the workshops provided youth with 'tools' to process and come to terms with their feelings, particularly following the Christchurch attacks, how the Project provided youth with a safe space in the school environment, and the Islamic values that underpinned the Project. The facilitators additionally highlighted the importance and relevance of a tailored approach based on the students and locales.

### 'Tools' for their everyday lives

Interview participants discussed how Project Salaam provided a set of tools and skills to negotiate conflict and issues of bullying and discrimination. According to these participants, this was particularly important following the Christchurch events, where the Project helped students understand and articulate their feelings regarding the situation:

**Aasiya:** *...How they [the facilitators] gave us time on that day.*

**Badrea:** *...It [Project Salaam workshops] kinda gave us a template we could use so that we could benefit from it and talk to people better and process our emotions better.*

**Aasiya:** *I also think it helped those that aren't used to expressing their feelings.*

**Badrea:** *I wasn't the only one feeling the way I was feeling. We all came together, supported each other. It just gave us the opportunity to be there for each other... Project Salaam gives students and provides them ways they can cope better. Not even just trauma but just life like stress with studying or stress with school.*

Significantly, Project Salaam supported participants to cope, not only following traumatic events such as the Christchurch shootings, but also with day-to-day stresses such as studying and school.

In particular, students discussed how the Project taught them communication, leadership and mediation skills, which they then applied within their broader life-worlds. Such conflict resolution skills became particularly important to the context of these youth and their parents who carry histories of trauma:

**Badrea:** *...Especially for people who don't know how to cope and they [Project Salaam] give different ways on how to cope and you just pick what resonates with you better and it could benefit you.*

**Mila:** *Those who don't have that support at home..*

**Badrea:** *I feel like especially in the Muslim communities and families, and families who go through trauma because our parents weren't taught to cope with trauma, they can kind of just project it through yelling or stuff like that. It kind of turns into generational trauma that gets passed onto us. For me for example, when I get angry, I result in becoming super overwhelmed and yelling when it's not that serious. It just triggers me. Even if one session, learning I don't have to scream, I can just say I'm feeling like this, I need a break and I am going to walk away from this situation, be calm and come back and we can talk about it in a more healthier way. I feel like also by us learning, we can teach our parents and help them deal with their trauma that they've experienced. I can go to my parents and be like, this is what I learnt in school and it's beneficial.*

**Mariam:** *Like passing on your knowledge, in a way we are all learning..*

**Badrea:** *They never had these opportunities or projects in their schools and they were just told that if something traumatic happens to just suck it up and get over it..*

**Mila:** *..Getting over that stigma..*

**Badrea:** *I am not going to go to my parents and say you guys have been doing it all wrong, this isn't how you deal with trauma you're supposed to do it like this. I feel like you slowly integrate it. I feel like you can't just jump one day and change your whole outlook in life. For example, dealing with being sad, angry or overwhelmed, [you use] "I" statements. If my siblings see when I'm stressed and overwhelmed and I react in a more calm and healthier way, they would say maybe I should do that as well. For me, I know I get influenced by my siblings and parents a lot.*

Also evident from this discussion is how, as a result of their participation in Project Salaam, students have developed a keen sense of self-awareness and self-esteem. Students clearly articulated their triggers and responses, and how they choose to negotiate these, alongside how they tactically and respectfully pass those learnings on to their siblings and parents in dignifying ways.

## Safe space

Participants also discussed how the Project Salaam workshops provided them with a safe space within the school environment and a place to share experience and gain support and connection:

**Mila:** *...if this is happening in their homeland like it is for mine, then they are hearing it at home and feeling at school. If you are hearing it at home, obviously it's going to stick to you, you will not be focused in school. I was feeling that way as well. If you talk about it with people outside of your bubble...I think it's beneficial because there's a way you can talk about it with people your own age and kind of hear their thoughts and in a way you can cope and connect.*

**Badrea:** *100%. Like going to Project Salaam [workshops] is refreshing. You are surrounded with people who are like you, from the same background as you, same religion as you, it's like a small little family that we had. We only had each other..*

A key factor in this connection and support that the Project enabled was relatability. Participants specifically and repeatedly highlighted the importance of having people they could talk to who were 'insiders' that looked like them and knew what they were going through:

**Aasiya:** *Yeah, definitely because they have an understanding as well and they*

can relate. You don't have to tell them the whole story and why it's like this and explaining it..

**Badrea:** *Even if it was somebody that did know what was happening, they will never truly understand what it was like. They can have an idea but they will never know what it was truly like. Having someone who knows what it was like, you kind of just connect in a deeper level...For example, if it was someone I knew who was from the same culture, same religion same background, I wouldn't need to explain anything, they would just console me better instead of giving me options like you should've done this or that.*

**Mila:** *...How do you know what I am feeling? How do you know what our people are going through? When your family is safe here and you guys are living the life.*

**Badrea:** *You've never felt like that and they would never understand that...I never felt a power imbalance with them [Project Salaam team]. With a teacher, I would be nervous and I wouldn't know what their reaction would be like. But with them, it was always just support, supportive. We felt like we had a family. You just connect with them. It's like when you walk on the street and you see lots of people that don't like you but that one time you see someone who does, you just feel safer. Or like you smile at somebody that wears the hijab and you connect but you don't even know each other. But having somebody in school you do know and talks with you was even 10 times better.*

**Aasiya:** *We could also go to [the Project Salaam team] for anything and [they] wouldn't make us feel inferior.*

**Mariam:** *With the teachers, I know I felt, I just wanted to leave the classroom.*

**Aasiya:** *...You felt small...*

The 'safety' of the space that Project Salaam provided was articulated as being vital and relatable for these youth. More crucial were their references to power imbalances between themselves and their teachers ("you felt small"), and despite being well-meaning, many 'outsiders' were not aware of what these youth have gone through. Significant here is how students felt that they had to censor their genuine and instinctual responses to the Christchurch attacks with everyone else, except those within the Project Salaam workshop. Project Salaam provided these young people with an affective space within which they could genuinely be and express themselves.

## Islamic values

Participants indicated that the Islamic values that underpinned Project Salaam were a significant strength of the project. Key values discussed were compassion, patience, peace, respect, and forgiveness. Moreover, the significance of the ways in which the values were taught or delivered was noted:

**Badrea:** *I feel like others who hear the Salaam project would be like "Oh it's a religious thing" but it's so much more than that. I feel people also forget the true teachings of our religion and this kind of goes back to the teachings of Project Muhammad (SAW). I doubt his companions, family and himself would shout, they would talk about it instead...It wasn't in their nature or character. Again, having these conversations teaches you more. Let's be more compassionate with each other, understand each other and love each other. It goes back to Islam because we are following the true principles of it...I felt patience (sabr) and peace. I mean Salaam itself means peace. I feel like everyone listens to each other's point of views and become more patient with one another.*

**Aasiya:** *Respect is an Islamic value we talked about and equality...We learnt about encouragement.*

**Badrea:** *Yes, we encouraged each other, supported each other...Prophet Muhammad (SAW) always talked about treating each other with respect and treating everybody equally and again even though it wasn't specifically talked about like, 'here's a quote'. Everyone just united anyway.... [Another] Islamic teaching is forgiveness. With these conversations you understand that everyone is going through something, many people's intentions are not malicious. Some people's intentions are pure. It gives you insight on people's lives and yours as well. Why do you react the way you do and you learn how to forgive... If somebody reacts in a way I wouldn't and don't like, I can stop and say I don't know what's going on in their lives, but because Islam teaches me to forgive, I will forgive them. Just listening to people talk, I realise, I'm not the only one in this world. I'm not the only one experiencing these things. I'm not alone. You're also more empathetic to everybody.*

The Islamic values that underpinned the Project also extended to how the Project workshops were delivered and facilitated. For instance, when possible, workshops occurred in a dialogical style, where participants (both students and facilitator) sat in a circle, sharing knowledge:

**Mariam:** *The thing I really liked about Project Salaam was that, as a student, or even, as a teenager, you felt that you had something to offer as well. In school, it was always like, I teach you, you learn from me... [It] was never a mutual experience. Yeah. And then [with Project Salaam] we had a chance to share our experience, not only as students but as people, and people who are going to lead different lives. And also...when you spoke about the circle with the [students]...the last time I think that I did that, other than Project Salaam was probably primary school.*

**Facilitator 1:** *Oh yes the reading and story time...*

**Mariam:** *And you remember, in primary school, they had a very big emphasis on connection, making friends or intimacy or like feeling comfortable, just had a different kind of atmosphere.*

**Facilitator 1:** *That's so interesting, because you just feel appreciated...And also the sense of...the word mana is what we would hear here in New Zealand, but the sense of self-respect.*

Such an approach reflects or enacts *halaqah*, which is an Islamic oral pedagogy originally enacted by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). *Halaqah* can create a dialogical space that encourages the participation of all attendees, where in the current context, the student voices are valued and respected, while the facilitator's role remains significant in steering and supporting the dialogue to ensure that it is purposeful (cf. Ahmed, 2019). While *halaqah* is the practice enacted within Project Salaam workshops, the broader environment created by Project Salaam, the team, its participants and even the families and communities involved reflect the formation of a *madrassa* (an Islamic school). The *madrassa* forms through the conduct and style of the workshops, the space this creates, the conversations it facilitates, the contributions of people attending, and the food consumed (e.g. many participants noted the shared lunch as a highlight). The Project reproduced and reinforced pro-social values of the Islamic faith and in doing so created a safe environment within which students could explore a range of issues and skills.

The core values central to the project also resonate with collectivist Māori cultural concepts such as *wānanga* (meeting, gathering, discussion) and the use of *kai* (food) to promote open *kōrero* (conversation). In *wānanga*, *manaakitanga* (care and respect) is also enacted through the sharing of *kai*, which can then facilitate *whakawhanaungatanga* (relationship building) and open up the *kōrero*. These seemingly simple acts manifest core values of familiarity and reciprocity in the

interaction and can open up opportunities to develop further rapport, trust and dialogue (Whaanga, 2012; Ware et al., 2018).

The facilitators of Project Salaam also reflected on the importance and rationale for having Islamic values underpin their engagements with students:

*I suppose the bottom line was also the Islamic faith, because that's the common ingredient. But you know, it's interesting, because...it could be a project for many people. And we can use the word faith when we think about our roots. And we have faith which could cover any religion actually. But knowing what is expected within the faith. That was really important. And also how you can understand your own culture and your family. And yet when you're sort of picked up and taken away and put down somewhere else, it doesn't mean that that's all gone, how you hang on to it, but add on to it... and the things you would like from the place you've come to...*

(Reflection, Facilitator 1)

The importance placed in such accounts of enacting values central to one's cultural identity and being, in this case as Muslim, are also similarly relevant in other religions and cultural worldviews (cf. King et al., 2017). These values and related principles are also central to the emphasis being placed on relational ethics in contemporary frameworks for principled practice and participative approaches to community initiatives (Hodgetts et al., 2022). As the project facilitator highlights, for migrant or refugee communities who have been uprooted from their homes and have been 'put down somewhere else', (Islamic) values can serve as a form of familiar grounding that they bring with them, and being able to recognise these in the new host country can facilitate social inclusion. This re-grounding is what Project Salaam aimed to achieve through the use of Islamic values.

## **The utility of a tailored approach**

The facilitators also talked about how they tailored the workshops and their approach to suit the realities of the students with whom they were working. For instance, they discussed how the workshops with boys involved role play activities for specific peer-pressure situations, whereas workshops with girls involved skills for prioritising and negotiating competing responsibilities:

*...how to keep safe...for the boys in particular, there are situations, practical things. You know, have someone on your phone on speed dial that you can get to if you're in a difficult situation..... sometimes for various reasons, unwise choices are made, like the chap that went out and his mates said, oh let's go and take this car and hotwire it and run off in the night. That's when you need a speed dial and say, "Oh, my uncle's picking me up in a minute... my brothers are coming". "Oh, don't worry, get the car, we'll take you there". "No, no..." not wanting to get in the car, you know, how you resist peer pressure, how you resist getting into things.*

*[For the girls] I think the hardest things are when the clash is because of family. Maybe not understanding the difficulty of actually holding your own when you're in the education world. And teachers are saying this, and you have to do homework, and home is saying you need to do these things. But balance as a young woman is very tough...So many domestic duties and stuff to do. It varies, but we understand those pressures. But again, it's about keeping a sense of value for yourself.*

(Reflection, Facilitator 1)

As is reflected in these interview extracts, the facilitators ensured that workshop content was adjusted to the age of students, their contexts (e.g. the School #2 context where workshops were carried out with teachers, and as coaching sessions for older students), and any needs specific to the cohort.

The facilitators also reflected on the improvements seen in the students who had participated in Project Salaam workshops, and noted the successes in their academic and career journeys:

*And now Ahamdulillah (praise be to God) from data from students we work with, there's one Afghani girl [who] got into medicine in University of Auckland...[And] in [school] assemblies, they were getting the prizes. Before there were hardly any... and even after that they became head girls. Two of our Afghani girls became head girls and before it wasn't like that. So Alhamdulillah, the parents really stepped up and encouraged them to step up.*

Specifically, the facilitators reflect on how the coaching sessions in School #2 benefitted the students that attended:

*The extra attention and interest in each student boosted their morale and confidence in tackling their final terms of school. Later in a meeting with the principal [we found out that] all students who'd attended the sessions were successful in achieving good results.*

(Reflection, Facilitator 1)

These extracts reinforce key points from previous sections as well in terms of how Project Salaam achieved its objective of providing Muslim school-aged students with opportunities to develop leadership and conflict resolution skills, alongside helping them to manage and address bullying and discrimination, and fostering self-esteem as Muslims who belong in Aotearoa New Zealand and can be successful here.

## Importance of continuity

Observations highlighted the value of the continuity of workshops and repeated engagement by participants, rather than having one-off sessions. In particular, following the School #1 workshops, facilitators noted:

*...the desirability of having continuity both in working with the same students and in having regular sessions without long gaps as cancellations had a negative impact on the flow and progression of the sessions, particularly with the boys who were identified as really benefiting from this type of input.*

(Facilitator observation, School #1)

The facilitators foregrounded the importance of continuity in the efficacy of the Project and how regular sessions and repeated engagement built rapport among the participants:

*With the boy's group who attended 4 sessions it was noticeable that as rapport built up they engaged with the topics and participated more fully. This was also reflected in a significant improvement in behaviour during the workshops.*

(Facilitator observation, School #1)

*As rapport built up between the various age groups working together for possibly the first time the sense of enjoyment during the sessions increased with students willing to work with girls they did not know well and to participate more fully in the activities and discussions.*

(Facilitator observation, School #2)

Emphasised here is the importance of building relationships of trust as a foundation for engaging in intergenerational teamwork to help students better understand and address difficult situations that come with navigating processes of migration and settlement in a secular society as a Muslim person.

Youth who were past participants of Project Salaam also echoed these thoughts on the importance of continuity and sustainability of Project Salaam in their interviews. They went further to indicate that other schools could also benefit with initiatives such as Project Salaam:

**Badrea:** *I think the only thing I would recommend is consistency and doing this a lot more.*

**Aasiya:** *I think expanding it to other schools as well.*

**Badrea:** *Especially because there are a lot more multicultural schools that would benefit.*

Participant interviews further highlighted the importance of Project Salaam to these youth during, and immediately after the Christchurch terror attacks, and also for the future:

**Badrea:** *...There shouldn't have been a terrorist attack for people to realise they need to support Muslim students.....It should have happened way before....*

**Mila:** *...I feel like we need more [Project Salaam] sessions to kind of communicate what we're feeling and not bottle it in.*

Likewise, facilitators noted:

*There's a need for it in both schools. And you know, in many other schools, to be honest with you, there's a huge need for it, because now you've got more,*

*especially the Afghan communities, there are more Afghan refugees in New Zealand, and it's quite huge. And in every school it's good to have this kind of support available...*

(Reflection, Facilitator 2)

## The challenges

In addition to the largely positive feedback and uptake of Project Salaam in both locales, the Project Team encountered a number of challenges that impacted on their ability to successfully carry out and sustain Project Salaam. Here, it is important to note that the challenges to Project Salaam were not related to the Project itself; the team, students, or how the Project was run. Rather, the challenges related to various external factors such as inadequate support from the education system and at times the allocation of suitable spaces for the workshops.

### Support and space

This project relied on funding obtained through E Tū Whānau and the Ministry of Social Development. Further, the team often encountered challenges relating to inadequate support for Project workshops, where arranging a time and space for workshops was framed as a 'battle' and a 'fight' with schools that are also trying to juggle multiple priorities. As the facilitators reflected:

*It is always a battle to fight for time.....fighting for time, fighting for the space....not having it valued. And that's a theme. And I think that lack of understanding is completely still there.*

(Reflection, Facilitator 1)

On several occasions the team experienced challenges relating to organising a suitable space or venue for the workshops. For instance, at School #1, the facilitators observed that the computer room in which "Workshop#3 Effective Communication" was held was 'unsuitable for seating [participants] in a circle'. Facilitators also reflected on another space they occupied that was unsuitable for the workshops:

*We were in a space, which was not useful. It had many doors and teachers were coming in to use photocopiers. And I said, I must have a room with a door that shuts. And it's private, you know, the basic things we need when we do the work that you might not think about, and also the fear that we were being looked at, and maybe judged and, you know, one teacher came in and asked all the names of the girls. And I said 'oh' because that wasn't my contact person, you know, and I felt uneasy. And I thought why is this layer of something coming in? Like power and control in a way and I pointed this out to the person I was liaising with. And although that's all right, it wasn't all right.*

(Reflection, Facilitator 1)

The provision of private suitable spaces was important, and worked well when Project Salaam workshops were held the Library and Counselling Room. As stated in the facilitator observations:

*The Library and Counselling Room were the best venues for the sessions- flexible for seating in a circle so participants can see and communicate with each other more easily.*

(Facilitator observations, School #1)

Here, both past-participants and facilitators talked about the importance of a suitable physical space in relation to the dialogue and shared communication that such a space can foster, for instance, by sitting in a circle. Suitable space is also vital in order to create and cultivate a madrasa for these students and facilitators, as discussed previously.

When support was extended from schools to the team, the Project ran more smoothly and students could recognise more readily that their needs were being taken seriously. For instance, at School #1, the Project was sustained and supported with the help of a team member from Project Salaam who was also a staff member at the school. As participants state:

**Badrea:** *I feel like before [team member's name], Muslim people didn't have a person to confide in and connect with and talk with [in school]. Also with teachers there is a power imbalance, when [team member] started she was just like your friend, somebody you...*

**Aasiya:** *...Felt safe with...*

**Badrea:** *...Feel safe with like your sister or somebody you can look up to, you know what I mean?*

**Mila:** *Even with her just being there and you don't have to talk to her you just felt a sense of being safe and you felt...*

**Badrea:** *...Familiarity..*

**Aasiya:** *Yeah, I agree.*

**Mila:** *Like one of us are here for us if anything happens...*

**Badrea:** *I totally believe she's the one that got us through high school. I feel like without her, not just me but I feel like lots of Muslim people in our school wouldn't have been able to be where they are right now without her.*

Here, the Project Salaam team member was seen not only as a role model to these students, but also as a go-to support person with whom they shared a sense of comfort, familiarity, and safety. Such a person, or a role can be likened to the Māori notion of pou whirinaki, which refers to a constant positive presence and pillar of support in the community; a significant person who is dependable and a positive role model (Hodgetts et al., 2022). It is vital to have such enablers in place in schools for the sustenance of initiatives such as Project Salaam.

When such pillars of support were in place the Project ran more smoothly and teachers in the school could also recognise positive changes in the affect and behaviour of participating students. As one facilitator stated:

*...Some teachers and the Deans at that meeting at [School #1], did comment that they had seen behaviours...have been easier for them to manage. They've probably seen some differences with the students coming, which was gratifying... And I think...we need that buy in from them so that they're willing and can see the benefits and what they need to input as well.*

(Reflection, Facilitator 1)

Overall, it is clear that for an initiative such as Project Salaam to be sustainable, support from the host school and key staff is imperative.

## Other supplementary developments and future plans

The extra and unexpected developments that arose were a reflection of, and spoke to, the success and positive responses to Project Salaam. These included:

- Project Salam featuring in a case study in the Child Youth Wellbeing strategy developed by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet: <https://www.childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/community/your-stories/project-salaam-peace> (August 2019).
- A presentation entitled 'Project Salaam Leadership Development for Muslim Youth Living in Aotearoa' delivered at the 9th Asia Pacific Mediation Forum Conference held on Jeju Island, Korea. This conference was attended by 150 mediators from 16 countries, including delegates from Malaysia and Indonesia who were keen to trial the concept of Project Salaam to support youth leadership in their countries (November, 2019 – see figure 4 for image of members of the Project Salaam team at the conference).
- Interest from secondary school teachers from around the country following a presentation about Project Salaam that was done at the Refugee Education Conference, Mangere Refugee Centre (2019).
- A request from the Change Makers Refugee Forum that Project Salaam be extended to include primary schools and to work more closely with refugee parents who were concerned about their children being bullied in primary schools – however this initiative was postponed due to the Covid-19 lockdowns (2020).
- The team was invited to deliver a presentation organised by the Ministry of Education to introduce and discuss this mahi mahi with teachers at Avondale College, Auckland. (August 2022).



Figure 4. Project Salaam team at Asia Pacific Mediation Forum Conference

Finally, the facilitators reflected on the various plans they had for the future of Project Salaam. They highlighted the importance of regular sessions with less gaps in between, building their team, increasing their visibility in schools, and a succession plan that involved training people that may have been past attendees at Project workshops to be facilitators in the future:

*...So it's [Project Salaam is] available. And it's not just a small band, we've got more people, we can say. Yes, we can do this here. And to maybe have a little sample session where you go and talk to a school about it, or a college. But then as it increases, it's going to be strengthening for all the community. I think being clear about what we do need when we go into school.*

*...I think, little sessions with gaps in between are not the ideal. I think maybe a more intense programme that's offered, and actually led now by people...who've been through it, or are interested in doing it. So that's the next thing I'm hoping to do is just...with [the Team] to devise a programme to support and...to pass it on. But we need more funding and resources to support this into the future.*

(Reflection, Facilitator 1)

Overall, there was considerable positive feedback regarding Project Salaam that is informing the teams work towards engaging in supplementary developments and desire to secure a sustainable future for this initiative. However, more adequate resourcing is warranted to ensure that these developments and future plans are rendered sustainable and can benefit many more students and stakeholders.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has taken an in-depth look at Project Salaam, how it works and the value and importance of the initiative to Muslim youth and families with refugee backgrounds. Information for this evaluation was gathered from multiple sources including historic records, such as written feedback from workshop attendees and facilitator observations, and through qualitative interviews with facilitators and past participants.

The evaluation indicates that Project Salaam has met its objective of providing Muslim refugee background youth with opportunities to develop skills in leadership and conflict resolution. Specifically, the Project appears to be successful in supporting students to grow leadership skills, self-esteem and effective communication alongside considering and applying mediation for conflict resolution, thereby achieving all its intended key goals.

This section outlines eight key areas for which the findings of this evaluation have direct implications. These include: tools for youth success, enablers to support and mentor students, tailored approach, diversity and inclusion in positive and proactive ways, bringing faith-based approaches into Aotearoa New Zealand schools, creating opportunities for conversations about diversity, collaborative strategy for youth development, and promoting social cohesion and preventing/ countering violent extremism.

## Key areas of focus

Tools for youth success: Project Salaam provided the tools for students to resolve conflict and manage and articulate their emotional responses to various situations. This not only helped them personally to navigate the complexities of growing up somewhere new, but also enabled them to enact core Islamic values of care when passing on lessons learned in the workshops to others, including, on occasion, their parents. Skills and tools gained in the workshops also helped participants sustain a sense of belonging and identity, and confidence in enacting key aspects of their faith towards prosocial ends. Skills in cultivating self-esteem, emotional

regulation and leadership are enduring, 21st century attributes that extend beyond conflict resolution and towards pro-social civic and professional contributions and active citizenship.

**Enablers to support and mentor students:** The evaluation indicated that refugee background Muslim youth often feel othered and alienated in mainstream or secular school environments. Therein, initiatives such as Project Salaam can provide enablers that serve as pou whirinaki within such school settings that enhance the ability of Muslim refugee background students to engage meaningfully and respectfully with others. In turn, participating students can model how to support and mentor other students as they also navigate their own secondary education.

**Tailored approach:** The evaluation highlighted that the contexts that refugee background Muslim youth find themselves in are complex. Therefore, to navigate and be relevant to these complex contexts, it is crucial that initiatives such as Project Salaam are flexible, and tailored based on the youth, parents, teachers and/or schools that it aims to serve. The accounts of both the facilitators and past-participants indicate that the Project workshops and additional wrap-around support given to students can improve the educational and professional success of participating young people. Several talked about turning 'at risk', disengaged or problem students around.

**Diversity and inclusion in positive and proactive ways:** Diversity is a growing reality of living in Aotearoa New Zealand, with many realising that 'by 2043, learners from ethnic communities will be one quarter of all students. What they want for education matters' (Education Review Office, 2023, p106). Therefore, schools in Aotearoa New Zealand need to respond to this increase in diversity and Project Salaam shows how different communities can be included as active agents within the education system. Such efforts can be central to ensuring that all students, including Muslims with refugee backgrounds can be supported and gain a strong sense of belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Bringing faith-based approaches into Aotearoa New Zealand schools:** Project Salaam provided an exemplar for the value and importance of bringing faith-based approaches that are relevant to students into schools. The importance is threefold, where first, it can create a legitimised space where refugee background Muslim youth can be a person of faith in a pro-social way. By cultivating a sense of belonging, such spaces can help these youth attend and engage with school – supporting the Ministry of Education’s recent ‘attendance and engagement strategy’ aimed to tackle the decade-long decline in regular attendance and engagement in schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). Second, such an initiative can promote social cohesion through demystifying Islamic teachings, values and Arabic terms for teachers and students from other backgrounds. This is important if we are to challenge and counter Islamophobic stereotypes. Third, Project Salaam provides an example of how schools can respond to three key recommendations by the Education Review Office (2023) on embracing diverse ethnicities in schools:

1. to change what is taught, and ‘increase the visibility of ethnic communities and their histories’ in schools (p104),
2. to change how content is taught, where teaching needs to ‘meet the needs of learners from ethnic communities’ (p105), and
3. to change where content is taught and aid ethnic communities to mobilise existing mechanisms and spaces in the education system to create spaces where children can feel safe and supported.

Here, the *madrasa* approach that Project Salaam takes provides wrap-around support that allows for dialogical and faith-based, culture-centred ways of teaching and learning about what it means to be Muslim and an engaged member of society.

**Creating opportunities for conversations about diversity:** The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Christchurch attacks also highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for conversations about ethnic and religious diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand (The Royal Commission, 2020). Initiatives such as Project Salaam can facilitate such processes, for instance, through their tailored workshops for staff members at schools and awareness sessions for students from all ethnic backgrounds. Schools are central hubs for our increasingly diverse communities.

Therefore, it is important that schools continue to embrace the diversity of students, whilst modelling the normalisation of diversity as a key strength of our society.

Collaborative strategy for youth development: Project Salaam is an initiative that is occurring through collaborations between key central and local government agencies, schools, community, and faith groups. The value, importance and success of this Project lies in these collaborations, where various groups should pool their funding, resources and skill-sets to support refugee background Muslim youth to progress through secondary education towards success and achievement. Additionally, these collaborative initiatives can move a step further to provide clear pathways for these youth to progress into tertiary education or vocational training.

**Promoting social cohesion and preventing/countering violent extremism:**

Initiatives such as Project Salaam facilitate a sense of belonging and cultivate confidence in youth in their own sense of identity and self, overall contributing to their sense of wellbeing. Additionally, such initiatives can represent a joint and long-term effort to directly respond to recommendations by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Christchurch attacks. This involves building increased acceptance of social cohesion, inclusion and diversity in schools (as discussed previously), and broader society, and thereby contributing to the prevention or countering of extremism (The Royal Commission, 2020). For some readers there might be a light contradiction here in the sense that Project Salaam presently focuses on creating enclaves of engagement through workshops for Muslim youth. However, this is a necessary initial step to establish safe spaces in which these youth can be themselves and engage with how they can make pro-social contributions to life in Aotearoa New Zealand. As these spaces take hold, the Project is looking to expand its reach to non-Muslim staff and students and to broker ethical and mutually beneficial relationships between such groups in society. For instance, such initiatives can also support the professional development of teachers in order to be greater advocates for Muslim youth facing discrimination within Aotearoa New Zealand classrooms.

## More specific recommendations

The previous section outlines key practical implications of the small-scale work of Project Salaam and key benefits to students, their families, and host schools.

- It is also important to **consider scaling up** this initiative so that other communities hosting Muslims from refugee backgrounds may also benefit from this initiative. This raises issues around resourcing and capacity that need to expand.
- Project Salaam relies on a lot of good will from the Muslim community and allied stakeholders. However, the sustainability of the Project and perhaps its scaling up relies on **securing further funding**. While the initial funding for Project Salaam has come from the Ministry Social Development, there is an opportunity for other key agencies and ministries to collaborate in funding this initiative.
- Core funding from Government would also enable the Project to be scaled up to work with additional high schools and to develop materials for working with primary schools with significant Muslim students from refugee backgrounds.



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# Appendix 1: Project Salaam at School #1

Workshop #	Topic	Participants
1	Introductions, Building Wall of Strength & appreciating qualities of peers and selves	Mixed girls and boys 11-13 years old <b>Venue:</b> classroom
2	Role Models	Boys only 11-14 (most had attended 1st workshop) <b>Venue:</b> classroom
3	Effective Communication - Listening & Speaking, 'I' Statements their use in managing conflicts particularly in mediation.	Larger group of boys and girls (mainly students who had not attended previously) <b>Venue:</b> computer room
4	Peer Pressure	Boys from previous sessions 12-14 <b>Venue:</b> The Library
5	Technology & Cyber Bullying	Boys group from Session 4 plus 4 others <b>Venue:</b> The Library
6	Peer Pressure	Year 12 Girls <b>Venue:</b> Counselling Room
7	Peer Pressure	Junior Girls <b>Venue:</b> Counselling Room

# Appendix 2: Project Salaam at School #2

Workshop #	Topic
1	Building self-esteem through appreciation of the elements that comprise our roots (heritage, faith, culture, family, values) and the role of education in our development.
2	Identifying role models, their positive qualities that inspire us, our peers qualities and own.
3	Effective communication skills, constructing and using 'I statements', speaking clearly, asking open questions
4	Developing awareness of communication dynamics (rapport & empathy) & developing a range of useful skills (active listening, effective speaking & summarising).
5	Understanding the mediation process & role playing - rotating roles of mediator, & observer parties.
6	Being conscious how we take care of ourselves with techniques of how to manage stress.
7	Peer Pressures the positives, negatives and ways to keep safe
8	Social Media - awareness of potential dangers of cyber bullying & keeping safe

## Coaching at School #2

Four coaching sessions have been held with a small group of Year 12 students identified as benefiting from extra attention to support them in optimising their studies.

The first session was to introduce the idea of what coaching was and to find out would be most helpful for each student (any particular concerns or difficulties).

The advantage of working with the students one on one or in a small group enabled the individual requirements of the students to be looked at in detail. It was then possible to encourage them to consider how to tackle the area they wanted support with, and to 'ideas storm' what might work best for them.

Time management is a common issue - so discussing practical solutions eg making a chart of days leading up to the exams and filling in subjects for revision purposes was helpful. In subsequent sessions discussion about how this was going showed that it had been helpful to make revision into 'bite sized' chunks that made it more manageable for the student.

Maintaining motivation can be a challenge - while the students are motivated to apply themselves to study, family demands may derail their good intentions when at home where practical considerations such as the absence of a quiet space to study and do homework are an issue. Understanding about the need to complete homework and spend time on extra study approaching exam time is not always recognised at home where family obligations may be prioritised, causing tension for the student trying to fulfil both.

Another coaching session concentrated on how to get the most out of the different subject lessons and to really engage, concentrate and participate. Sometimes there is reluctance to ask the teacher for help - so in the coaching environment we time spent 'unpacking' why, then building up confidence and understanding that it is fine to ask and preferable to saying nothing.

The focus throughout the sessions has been to encourage the students to search for their own solutions to tackling any challenges and to be pragmatic in ensuring that these can be effective.

I have observed that throughout the coaching the students have progressed from being somewhat reticent at the outset to responding positively and showing appreciation of the opportunity for this extra attention.

# Appendix 3: Project Salaam

## Workshop plan for 5-year-olds

The workshop uses glove puppets; a Crocodile and Elephant, to enact a disagreement, with the students suggesting to how the situation can be resolved so the puppets can retain their friendship.

Students are encouraged to compare Crocodile and Elephants' situation with their own playground experiences, where behaviours can include name calling, arguments with fights which often have a negative impact for the whole class.

The facilitator works with the students to encourage suggestions as to how to help Crocodile and Elephant rebuild their friendship. Facilitated discussions then apply the puppet's situation to the student's playground experiences with options for how to resolve things. There is emphasis on the important to get help from a teacher / adult.

This can be a standalone workshop or can be followed up with others specifically focussing on aspects that teachers identify as being most relevant e.g. understanding the other side of the story, enhancing communication skills, appropriate behaviour, keeping calm, peer pressures to name a few possibilities.

# Appendix 4: Example of historic record – Written feedback

**Subject:**

**Workshop:**

**Level of enjoyment:** (on scale 1-5 where 1= not enjoyable 5= most enjoyable)

**Choose one word to describe what you thought about the session:**

**What will you continue thinking about after the workshop?**

**What was most useful for you in the workshop?**

**Any feedback for the facilitator?**

**Any comments you'd like to make:**

# Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form - Interviews



## Participant Information Sheet

Study title: **An evaluation of Project Salaam**

Evaluation Team: **Jennifer Khan-Janif**  
**Shemana Cassim**  
**Veronica Hopner**  
**Darrin Hodgetts**  
**Mariam Ali**

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
Bismillah hirrahman nirraheem

Salaam/Kia ora,

You are invited to take part in this research and share your experiences of participating in Project Salaam workshops. Your insights will help us identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of Project Salaam, and may help us advocate for more funding to sustain the project in the future, Insha Allah.

Whether or not you take part is your choice. If you don't want to take part, you don't have to give a reason. If you want to take part now, but change your mind later, you can pull out of the study.

This Participant Information Sheet will help you decide if you'd like to take part. It sets out why we are doing the study, what your participation would involve and what will happen after the study ends. We will go through this information with you and answer any questions you may have. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in this study. Before you decide, you may want to talk about the study with other people, such as family or friends. You can also reach

out to the research team with any questions. Feel free to do so. You are welcome to invite a family member or support person to the interview, if you decide to participate.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign the Consent Form on the last page of this document. You will be given a copy of both the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form to keep.

This document is 4 pages long, including the Consent Form. Please make sure you have read and understood all the pages.

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

This study aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Project Salaam.

In particular, we will be looking to understand the following:

- What you've learned from the Project workshops and what was most useful to you.
- Whether the Project provided an opportunity for you to identify and meet role models.
- How important you considered the Islamic values that underpinned Project Salaam.

## **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY INVOLVE?**

We will invite up to 10 past participants of Project Salaam, like yourself, to undertake a face-to-face interview with our community researcher, Mariam. These will be more like informal conversations. We anticipate that this will take about 1 to 2 hours.

Interviews will be carried out in English. The interviews will be recorded using a voice recorder.

The information that you share with us will be kept confidential, if that's what you feel most comfortable with. Unless you say otherwise, we will not share your name or identity with anyone outside of the study team, and any output that we generate from this study will be anonymised. If you'd like to choose your own pseudonym, then please let Mariam know, and she will be happy to discuss this with you further.

## **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF THIS STUDY?**

There will be no direct risks or benefits to you for participating in this research. Insha Allah, we hope that this study will help support funding and sustainability of Project Salaam, for students like yourself to benefit and learn from in the future.

## **WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?**

Once again, your participation is entirely your own choice. You do not have to take part in this study, if you don't want to. If you do sign the consent form but then change your mind and do not want to continue being involved with this study, please let Mariam know at any time.

When we explain the research project we will ask you if you agree to take part. We will ask you to sign a consent form if you agree to take part. At any time, you can use a family support or a friend to help ask questions and understand the study.

During an interview, if you wish to stop and/or take a break at any point, please let Mariam know and we will be happy to do so. We are here to hear about your experiences, and we want to ensure that you are comfortable talking to us and sharing your story with us.

Please be assured that the information that you give us will be kept confidential. All aspects of the project, including the results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers involved in the study will have access to your information. However, considering that we are working with a small group of refugee background Muslim youth in Auckland, you should be aware that participants may be identifiable in the study results. Nonetheless, we will do our best to maintain the confidentiality of you and your family, by giving you the opportunity to review your interview transcript if you wish. If you would like to review a copy of your transcript, please tick the box on the consent form.

You have the right to see, review and, if necessary, correct any information we hold about you.

## **WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE STUDY OR IF I CHANGE MY MIND?**

If you agree to take part in the study, you can stop at any time and you don't have to explain why. You have the right to withdraw from participating in the research project at any time and have your interview data removed and deleted from the research up to two weeks after completing the interview – If you do want us to remove your interview data, please let us know.

On completion of the study we can provide all participants with a summary report to outline the findings of this study. If you would like to receive a copy, please tick the box on the consent form.

## **WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION OR IF I HAVE CONCERNS?**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the study at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact Shemana, who is the project lead, and will be happy to talk to you. Her details are below:

**Dr Shemana Cassim** (Lecturer at Massey University)

**Phone:** +64 6-951 7966 ext. 84966

**Email:** S.Cassim@massey.ac.nz

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of Massey University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, (Director, Research Ethics), email: [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)

*Ngā mihi nui! Thank you for your time*

## CONSENT FORM

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation, and that I can withdraw my participation at any time [up to two weeks] after the interview.

During the interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the interview at any time, and I can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet.

[I understand that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings]

<b>Please complete the following checklist. Tick [X] the appropriate box for each point.</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I wish to view the transcript of the interview.		
I wish to receive a summary of the findings.		

### Declaration by participant:

I hereby consent to take part in this study.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Details: \_\_\_\_\_

### Declaration by member of research team:

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

I will maintain the confidentiality of the participant and any related family or support members.

Researcher's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 6: Interview Guide

## Interview Guide: Past Students

### Introduction – **Building the relationship and trust**

- Thank participant for their time and agreeing to participate
- Introduce self/background including where you're from
- Respond to participant's own introduction
- Answer questions about yourself
- Ask if it's OK to start the interview
- Explain aims of research and interview
- Verbally go through participant information sheet, and answer any questions/clarify any doubts
- Give participant information sheet and sign consent form
- Ask if it's ok to turn voice recorder on

### **Questions:**

1. Tell us about your involvement/experiences with Project Salaam?
  - How did it go?
  - What did you learn?
  - positive aspects that stood out to you?
  
2. From what you've learned from the Project workshops, what would be most useful?
  - In your life now?
  - How?/ examples?

3. What are your thoughts on the facilitators as role models?

- Why was this important to you?

4. What are your thoughts on the Islamic values that underpinned Project Salaam?

- Did you find these important?

- Why?

### **Wrap up**

- Is there anything you would like to bring up or think should have been discussed?

- Do you have any questions for me?

*Thank you so much for your time*

