



Resource Project for LGBTQ Muslim women



# Annual Report & Accounts

1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006

(Phase II - year 2)

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## **Contents:**

<i>Introduction &amp; Aims of the Organisation</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Phase II - year 1: 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006</i> .....	<i>2</i>
<b>1. Raising Awareness and Providing Information</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Capacity Building</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Conducting Research &amp; 4. Law and Policy Work</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<i>Legal and Administrative Details</i> .....	<i>7</i>

# Introduction & Aims of the Organisation

**The Safra Project is a UK based resource project working on issues relating to lesbian, bisexual transgender, queer & questioning women who identify as Muslim religiously and/or culturally (Muslim LGBTQ women).**

The organisation was set up in October 2001 by and for Muslim LBT women and their supporters. The word Safra is related to the words for journey and discovery in languages such as Arabic, Farsi and Urdu. This name and the compass in our logo symbolise our aim to be a resource and tool for Muslim LGBTQ women on our journeys and discoveries in life.

The Safra Project is not a faith group and we recognise the role of religion and culture in shaping our identities. Our ethos is one of inclusiveness and diversity and we welcome input from all who seek to combat prejudices.

**The aims of the Safra Project are:**

- 1. To empower Muslim LGBTQ women to deal with the issues they face resulting from their sexual orientation and/or gender (identity) within the context of their ethnic, cultural and/or religious background.**
- 2. To raise awareness on the needs and issues relating to Muslim LGBTQ women in order to make service provision accessible and appropriate.**
- 3. To eliminate (interrelated) prejudice and (multiple) discrimination experienced by Muslim LGBTQ women and promote diversity.**

## **Background**

In the first phase of the Safra Project (October 2001 – March 2003), we identified (some of the) key needs and issues relating to Muslim LGBTQ women in the UK, with a particular focus on access to appropriate social and legal services. The findings of the research were published in a report entitled 'Initial Findings - Identifying the difficulties experienced by Muslim LGBTQ women in accessing social and legal services'. As there was a strong need for access to information and social contacts, the Safra Project also set up an online network of Muslim LGBTQ women in the form of a 'Yahoo group' and launched her website.

This first phase was followed by an interim phase (April 2003 – February 2004) in which the Safra Project continued the core function of acting as a resource and information point and raising awareness on issues relating to Muslim LGBTQ women, including expanding the information on the website (please see annual reports for previous years for further details of activities – available [www.safraproject.org](http://www.safraproject.org)). During the interim phase we also worked on strengthening the capacity and structure of the organisation, including planning and fundraising for a Phase II so that the Safra Project could continue.

In March 2004 we received funding from Comic Relief and Trust for London to run Safra Project core activities for a three year period (Phase II). Phase II officially started on 1 March 2004, building on its success from the first year of Phase II, we have just completed the second year (1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006) and planning to consolidate the last two years as we enter the final and third year of Phase II.

## **Phase II - year 2: 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006**

The Safra Project's Management Committee presents its annual report and independently examined annual accounts for the year ended 31 March 2006 (Phase II - year 2).

Safra Project phase II - year 2 has been exciting for the organisation. With a new project coordinator coming into post, Tamsila has been able to build on the previous year and a-half of work done by Suhraiya and all the Board members and volunteers.

We have had many successes with the national consultation meetings that took part in the early part of 2005. It allowed for the expansion of information and resources on the website, producing flyers and setting up of the Birmingham Safra social group along the now one year old London Safra social group. We have also been facing a lot of challenges including: the continuing and expanding of the organisation's work with limited funds. As well as highlighting the multiple issues facing Muslim LGBT women in Britain to BME, LGBT and Muslim groups and organisations.

The political and social climate in the UK has continued to demonise Muslim communities and attempted to cause divisions amongst Muslims, not only along lines of sexuality but denomination and even race. This has resulted in further challenges for the Safra Project as we negotiate and educate others about our rights within our Muslim communities. Alongside which we find the ever-increasing challenge of Islamophobia and racism in wider society that is also rampant amongst many mainstream LGBT organisations. This has meant having to be very vocal in demanding our right to set the agenda for ourselves as LGBT Muslims rather than having our agendas set by those not directly affected by our issues.

The Safra Project would like to thank its stakeholders for participating in the last year's activities. We hope that more people will become involved as members, volunteers, supporters and friends in the coming year.

The Safra Project has worked towards its aims through the following activities:

1. Raising Awareness and Providing Information
2. Capacity Building
3. Conducting Research
4. Law and Policy Work

## **1. Raising Awareness and Providing Information**

### **Continuous point of information**

The Safra Project has continued to act as an information point for all stakeholders and others on issues relating to Muslim LGBTQ women. We have received and replied to 93 requests for information and support from Muslim LGBTQ women and many other enquiries from other individuals such as Muslim LGBTQ men as well as from service providers, policymakers, media, academics, activists etc. These requests included questions about where to find suitable social and legal services, information on sexuality and Islam, accessing social support groups, information on the issues that Muslim LBT women face etc.

Quote from an email we received:

*"I'm a muslim woman living in the East midlands.*

*Known about my sexuality since the age of 11 but as you well know the family pressure makes us all scarafice so i'm now about to end this terrible arranged marriage.*

*I would like to attend your get together in Birmingham and please could you send me details of further activities."*

### **Website**

The Safra Project website has been a key tool in raising awareness and providing information. It acts as an on-line resource for Muslim LBT women, service providers and other interested parties. We have worked on expanding the information and resources in existing sections particularly the sections on Asylum, Publications and signposting to social and legal services. We also have new sections with information on relevant **news and events in local regions** such as the **South of the UK, Midlands, North-East, North West and East** and are continuing to develop the section for 'Telling our Stories'. This has been a vital new area of the website which we hope to further expand over the next year. The aim of this section is to work towards breaking the isolation of Muslim LBT women. It was directly requested by stakeholders of the Safra Project at the June 2004 conference as well as by women who do not have the freedom of movement to attend social groups or conferences in the UK and internationally.

This past year we have received 93849 visits to our website which is an average of 7820 visits per month, this up by nearly **5000 more visits per month**, than the previous 12 months. Many additional national and international organisations included links to our website thereby promoting the visibility of the Safra Project and her work.

### **Flyers and Publicity**

The Safra Project produced a general flyer on who and what we do as well as one specifically for Asylum and refugees. These aim to provide general information about the organisation to a variety of audiences (for copies please contact the Safra Project) and can be easily distributed at centres and events. We hope to translate these flyers in to community languages to widen the accessibility of our work. Many of our materials are now also available in a number of county and borough libraries.

We have also taken part in television programmes by writing on the **Channel 4 website about the documentary in January 2006 on 'Gay Muslims'**, the project worker was also featured in a February programme of **BBC1- Heaven and Earth Show on being gay and Muslim**. Articles on the Safra Project have been written on numerous websites as well as in local and community papers such **Birmingham Mail, Eastern Eye and Asian Leader**. All of which have lead to a greater public profile and therefore numerous more contacts from Muslim LBQT women and service providers.

## Events

The Safra Project continues to aim to raise awareness on some of the specific issues that Muslim LGBTQ women face (as identified in the Report of Initial Findings). We also continue to aim to highlight issues tackling multiple and interrelated discrimination and prejudice. We have done this by participating in workshops and speaking on panels at various events. This year we were invited to, and participated in, the following events:

- Interfaith Alliance UK- regular
- Muslim Women's' Network- regular
- Education for All- regular
- Birmingham LGB Network (frequent)
- Rehana Khan-Director of day-care centre for elderly Asians Birmingham (September 2005)
- SPICE- Leicester's social and support group for the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Ethnic Minority community. (October 2005)
- Regional Action West Midlands (October 2005)
- Catalan Islamic Board (Spain) (October 2005)
- Home Office- Faith Communities Cohesion Unit (November 2005)
- LGB Peoples Forum Northampton (November 2005)
- Bradford Youth Services (December 2005)
- Rotherham's Domestic Violence support (February & March 2006)
- Confederation of Indian Organisations (March 2006)

## Networking

The Safra Project has continued to make links with other organisations in a variety of fields. The Safra Project has been consulted on equalities & diversities issues and anti-discrimination laws by a number of organisations with whom we already had links. Below is a list of some of the new ones from the past year:

- Zindagi- Manchester's social and support online-group for the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Ethnic Minority community. (March 2005)
- NUS Black and Minority Ethnic office (April 05)
- DfE- Thomas Coram Research Unit review homophobia, sexual orientation and schools (June 2005)
- Commission for Equality and Human Rights (July/August 2005)
- Refugee Action (August 2005)
- Learning and Teaching Scotland (September 2005)
- National Children's Bureau (September 2005)
- Oxford Brookes (September 2005)
- Birmingham City Council (October 2005)
- Learning and Teaching Scotland (October 2005)
- London Metropolitan University (November 2005)
- Derbyshire Friend LGBT Support Service (December 2005)
- Discrimination Law Association (December 2005)
- Liberal Democrats- Fiaz Mughal on minority groups and policies. (January 2006)
- Salford Youth Service (January 2006)
- Sheikh Mumisa and the Al-Mahdi Institute in Birmingham (January 2006)
- Birmingham Pride Trust- Faith and sexuality think tank (February 2006)
- London Borough of Brent (February 2005)
- Respect party- Salma Yaqoob on policy matters (March 2006)

## Publications & Research

The 'Telling our Stories' section of the website is being expanded through conducting research into the her-stories of Muslim LBT women. This project has been planned to be ongoing during year three. Initially we had planned to do additional fundraising for this project, but we have now decided that it would be a better allocation of time and resources to incorporate the stories into the core work plan.

A number of **Schemes of Work** are being updated after feedback from youths and pedagogues. These are to be used by students and teachers within secondary schools in a number of subjects such as **Religious Education, PSHE, Citizenship, etc.**

### **Learning and Teaching Scotland e-mail to the Safra Project in September 2005:**

*"We wish to include an extract of text from the Safra Project website in our National Qualifications support materials for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies - Morality in the Modern World: Islam. These support materials will be available to schools to view and/or download (in pdf or Word) from our National Qualifications Online website (<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq/>).*

## 2. Capacity Building

### **National Consultation Meetings**

The Safra Project held a series of meetings across England in London, Birmingham and Manchester. These meetings focused on networking, strategies and methods to deal with important questions facing Muslim LBT women including ways to empower ourselves as individual Muslim LBT women; gaining knowledge that would enable us to accept ourselves and our multitude of identities and building our capacity to create social and support groups and networks. The meetings gave the Safra Project the opportunity to consult some of our stakeholders on its future work. We hosted the events with a total of 52 participants from across the country. The participants came from the cities in which the meetings took place as well as from the surrounding areas that covered most of the regions we now reference on our website. More Safra Project members have become actively involved as volunteers in the organisation as a result of the local meetings.

### **Quote from an email by a new member to the online group and referring to one of the 2005 national consultation meetings:**

*"Salam to everyone.*

*I am writing from Australia. I have recently found this group but have not got the time perhaps also the courage to introduce myself or contribute to the group discussions.*

*From what I have managed to read off the group posts, there seems to be an active participations of members in UK. I have not known any groups such as this one in Au.*

*The coming meeting is something I would love to attend but it is not a minibus ride for me.*

*Therefore I look forward to the report and the sharing from the group members. I hope that it is a fruitful meeting for all".*

### **Social Groups and Networking**

In order to increase accessibility to the Safra Project and its events we have decided to hold regular social groups in London and Birmingham, rather than concentrating on one larger annual event. This allows for a continual period of consultation rather than a one-off annual event. The London group has been successfully running for the past year with not only Muslim LGBT women attending but also their siblings, children and parents. The first of the regular social meetings for Birmingham took place in January 2006 and has been held every month since with a gradual increase in numbers. Both groups are open to people who share the values and ethos of the Safra Project and are supportive of Muslim LBTQ women. It is therefore not exclusive to men or non-Muslims.

**Quote from an email to the online yahoo group regarding the monthly social meetings:**

*"I joined the group not knowing anyone about two years ago. The thing is without the outings, I probably would not have met anyone in person, but I was lucky enough to meet some wonderful women and men who are part of the group. I started out just writing and receiving group emails like this one. Many different discussion topics come up general around Islam and sexuality. The outings on the other hand, have been a lot of fun and all those I met were just lovely people."*

Despite the logistical and structural difficulties in facilitating local user led groups, there is an increase of such groups and networks throughout the UK. The Safra Project social group will also soon be having further meetings in Manchester and Bradford and local links are being made to hold meetings in other cities in the UK possibly hosted by other organisations or groups such as local progressive Muslim networks and BME LGBT groups. The Safra Project has also been making more links with Muslim, LGBT and Asian student groups through the National Union of Students.

**Quote from an email to the Online Forum (Yahoo group):**

*"It [Safra social group] has proven a helpful and supportive group on a political and personal level in a friendly and non-patronising way."*

*"Hi everyone, I am conspicuous by my absence on this group but I enjoy the postings and hope to get up to London from the South Coast to one of the meetings one ( )day. I am a post-op M2F Lawyer specialising in Human Rights."*

There has been an increase in the number of members in the Safra Project yahoo group from 62 to 74. The Coordinator has moderated the group providing a space for discussion on a range of issues and mutual forwarding and exchange of information. The online group also offers a space to follow up issues discussed at the social group and share this with those who are not able or willing to come to a physical meeting.

### **3. Conducting Research & 4. Law and Policy Work**

The Safra Project Co-ordinator has still taken part in government meetings and consultations on proposed legislation on the Terrorism Bill and policies linked to community cohesion with the Home Office for consultation responses. The Safra Project continues to participate in the roundtable sessions on Muslim women hosted by the Minister for Women, Tessa Jowell and the Muslim Women's Network facilitated by the Women's National Council. We have also participated in the research work currently being carried out the National Children's Bureau on the educational welfare of BME LGBT youth in England. Education in all its forms has been a priority of the Safra Project in its second year of phase II an example of which has been more successful with Scotland than England at present.

Although the Safra Project has participated in a limited way in policy developments within government, statutory and other organisations in the last year, we continue to feel that small grass roots organisations such as the Safra Project have not been sufficiently supported in this process. Despite the demand and expectation to participate in the consultation process on policy, government structures and others do not seem to take on board the time and resource cost of this process.

## Legal and Administrative Details

The Safra Project is governed by a Constitution adopted at the AGM of 5<sup>th</sup> June 2004. Subject to all constitutional qualifications, full membership of the organisation is open to Muslim LBTQ women and other women who can identify with the issues the organisation addresses, associate membership is open to any other person or organisation supporting the aims of the Safra Project.

The Safra Project is administered and managed by the Management Committee (MC) in accordance with the Constitution and the Equal Opportunities & Diversity Policy. The MC consists of not less than 3 members and not more than 5 members, elected at the AGM or appointed by the MC with a restriction of not more than 1 co-opted member. Members of the MC shall be women, the majority of the MC shall be Muslim (religiously and/or culturally) and the majority of the MC shall identify as LBTQ.

(Note: for privacy and security reasons the names of the Management Committee have been removed from the web-published annual report. Please contact the Safra Project [info@safraproject.org](mailto:info@safraproject.org) if you require this information)

The MC is required to comply with their obligations under any statutory Act with regard to:

1. the keeping of accounting records
2. the preparation of annual statements of accounts
3. the auditing or independent examination of the statements of account

During this financial year the Safra Project has been advised on financial management matters by the Independent Examiner of the annual accounts.

Suhraiya Jivraj had been employed by the Safra Project appointed in the post of Project Co-ordinator from 1 March 2004 (beginning of phase II) to the end of August 2006. Tamsila Tauqir was appointed to take over as full time Project Co-ordinator from September 2006.

The Safra Project's MC declares that this Annual Report and Annual Accounts give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the organisation.

Signed on behalf of the Management Committee

..... (Chair)

Name & Position:

Date: