

A bride holds a wedding bouquet

Run by charity, Community on Solid Ground (COSG), the ‘Big Fat Asian Wedding’ project will introduce people all of ages, faiths and backgrounds to South Asian culture by researching the Islamic Nikah, or marriage ceremony, from the 1940s to the present day. The project aims to improve community wellbeing and cohesion in South Manchester.

With the help of £43,300 raised by National Lottery players and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), COSG will carry out oral history and reminiscence workshops to capture women’s memories and preserve important customs for future generations. These intergenerational groups will be crucial in recording traditions that have been lost as Indian and Pakistani migrant communities assimilated into British life and culture, adapting to the availability of materials and practical constraints.

The project will focus on weddings from three different eras: a wedding in Pakistan carried out between the 1940s and 1960s, a wedding from the 1970s to the 1990s, and a modern day wedding in the UK. Their research will look at many of the customs and traditions carried out around the wedding period, including the elaborate dress, traditional foods, decorative Mehndi (henna ceremonies for the bride and groom) and special Dholki (song and dance evenings), which are at the heart of South Asian wedding celebrations.

Research and oral history training will be provided for volunteers. The project team’s findings will be made available online and archived at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Resource Centre, culminating in a showcase event in the form of a presentation and Mehndi ceremony, engaging the whole community with the traditions of a Big Fat Asian Wedding.

COSG have previously received National Lottery funding for the ‘Traditional Best Times of South Asian Women’ project, exploring the hobbies and pastimes of South Asian women before they moved to the UK. The creative embroidery and textiles produced as part of this project can be seen at the Manchester Museum.

Nathan Lee, Head of HLF North West, said: “It’s great that money raised by National Lottery players can help people in Manchester to explore such a rich and joyful part of South Asian heritage. This project will help to improve understanding of the cultural traditions of South Asian weddings and how they’ve evolved over time, whilst also providing valuable opportunities for people to share their stories and develop their skills.”

Nusrat Ahmed, Project Coordinator, said: “We’re delighted to receive this support thanks to National Lottery players. Without this funding, we could not carry out this project. The project will not only give women the opportunity to share their heritage and stories so that others have a better understanding of South Asian heritage, it will also be a platform to create community dialogue and reduce isolation of community members. We hope that through this project women become more active members within their community and personally develop their skills for better well-being overall."

Further information

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