

# Golders Green Hippodrome 'chooses love' at interfaith Covid vaccine drive

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Pharmacist Aisha Noor vaccinates Eliahu Lopez at the Golders Green Hippodrome - Credit: Jonathan Goldberg

The Golders Green Hippodrome became a pop-up vaccination centre last week as part of an interfaith drive to promote the Covid-19 jab across communities.

Markaz El Tathgheef (MTE) – the Islamic community centre based at the Hippodrome – worked with Faiths Forum for London and the Barnet Multi-Faith Forum to hold the event, which counted rabbis and a local Buddhist group among its guests.



Faith leaders hold up a sign saying "Barnet Chooses Love" in support of interfaith vaccination drive at Golders Green Hippodrome - Credit:

Jonathan Goldberg

Ali Madani, a project manager at Faiths Forum for London (FFL) who has also previously attended the Markaz, helped to run the event and was vaccinated himself.

He told this newspaper: "The Markaz is in a fantastic location and they themselves really believe . It was a way to show the community what they are about and that's there's absolutely nothing scary about it.

"The centre can be visited by the whole community and they have proven that time and time again. The more people are able to see they can use the place, the better."

MTE is still awaiting news on a planning application to officially change the use of the Hippodrome from a "church" to a "place of worship". It has operated in the venue since 2017.

At the vaccine drive a number of religious leaders from various faiths together held a banner saying "Barnet Chooses Love" to support the centre. Vociferous public campaigns have seen Islamophobic comments made about the centre's management, while concerns over strain on local transport links have also been raised.



Hamdi Moallim, pharmacist, talking to multi-faith leaders Dr May Erskine from Colindale Buddhist Centre, Abu Bakr from the Somali Bravanese Centre, Edwin Shuker Vice-President of the Board of Deputies, and Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence - Credit: Jonathan Goldberg

Ali said the day itself had been a great success.

"We got 60 people vaccinated, more or less," he said. "We had an amazing team of volunteers from all backgrounds."

Leonie Lewis MBE, also from FFL, said: "This event is as much about being vaccinated as it is about inter- and multi-faith collaboration. It truly demonstrates the importance of meaningful partnerships. Where there is a will there's a way."

She thanked Dr Nayeem Azim, Carmellis bakery, the trustees of the Markaz and the volunteers who helped run the event.

Esmond Rosen, president of Barnet Multi-Faith Forum, added: "We stand in solidarity with all those heroes seeking to ensure our safety and security both from the Covid-19 pandemic and the virus of those seeking to divide communities for their own misguided purposes.

"We are delighted to be working with FFL on this initiative."