

Ayan

Born in Somalia, Ayan has lived in the UK for 15 years, and has been working with the center for eight of them, having met Zahra long before she opened the centre. Ayan has benefitted chiefly from the language support at the centre. She learnt about personal care, which has been particularly critical because she has a disabled son, who is Autistic; it also helps her in.

When she arrived from Somalia she was 22 years old, with a three year old son – she describes how shockingly different it was to arrive at immigration, undergo interviews, experience the climate, discern the people, and travel by train. After three months of reporting to the Home Office, she was granted the right to stay indefinitely, and shortly after she found out her new doctor that her son had Autism. Now, her son is 19 and she is feeling like her life is ok. Until recently she had some serious problems with housing and the centre solved these for her. She has little contact with her family and friends in Somalia, but it remains difficult even with the technological improvements.

Ayan bravely arrived with no English, but having come to the centre almost every day, she now speaks fluently – with her doctor, her housing association and her children’s teachers. She praises the schools for communicating with her a lot and feels enriched by this. The centre are currently helping her to get the care package she needs for her son; the social worker used to come 15 hours a week to take him out to the centre, a specialist centre, day care, something like that in order to free-up Ayan’s time for various tasks associated with running a large household.

Ayan’s son is now on his way to university to study drama. Her advice to others in the position she was in 15 years ago is to be careful at night, and educate yourself! She says, *“you have a safe country, you have opportunity here, it's not similar in our country, our country really have a money problem, but here is a safe country so I would tell younger people to focus on getting a good education”*.

She says she is lucky to have well-behaved children who work hard and communicate well with her; when times are tough she reminds herself of this. Other people’s home lives are not so easy and for this reason she identifies the social aspect of the centre as being the most important. People find it difficult to talk about their private problems – such as domestic violence and common problems that carry shame. As a social person, Ayan especially enjoys being in a position where she can offer valuable help and advice to others in her role volunteering at BDSWA. For this reason, Ayan has a great deal of faith in the community café that will open soon; she thinks this is the ideal environment to elicit problem-sharing and enhance the valuable sense of community that comes with volunteering or benefiting from the centre.

Ayan was the youngest of eight sisters. When she left Somalia, she left the friends she had spent her whole childhood with, her mother, sisters and family. She got married at 17. She explains that in Somalia women stay at home to be a housewife – *“cleaning the house, making food, tidying the beds, everything like*

that. Whatever you do in higher education, you come back to do these things when you get married.” At that time when she left, she was in the home and really didn't like it.

When asked to imagine life without the centre, Ayan is stumped – she says it makes so much difference to find somewhere she can access Internet, receive help and support, learn and make friends. Ayan has created a support network of five or six mothers in similar situations, they maintain contact and give each other a great deal of support.

She finishes by saying that there is always a helpful smile welcoming you at the centre and subtle things like this can really make the most difference to mental wellbeing.