

## FGM Survivor Case Study

I was seven years of age and lived in Somalia with my grandmother as both my parents had passed away.

I remember very clearly one evening my grandmother said that we were going to a neighbour's house for a celebration. I was excited and asked my grandmother what the celebration was for? I was told that my friend had a circumcision (this was the term used in Somalia) and that now she was a big girl. I didn't know what this meant, just that I also wanted to be a big girl and have a celebration. When we went back home I questioned my grandmother and asked her when was I going to have this done and become a big girl like my friends. I begged my grandmother to get this sorted for me.

My grandmother protested saying that I was too young. I kept on persuading her because the other girls would start to pick on me. One week later it was arranged for the cutter to come to the house. When she arrived we went into another room. I then saw the needles and the razor. I was so scared and said that I didn't want to do it. My grandmother started to reassure me and say that I would become a big girl and that it wouldn't hurt. I continued to say that I didn't want to do it but at that point I was held down by three women who held my legs and my arms. I was terrified. I was given an injection which I believe was a local anaesthetic. I was then sewn up and stitched. I had the worst seven days of my life after the procedure. I was in so much pain and was continuously crying. Four days into the procedure the stiches started to pull and were uncomfortably itchy. When I went to the toilet the urine would sting me.

After seven days the cutter returned to remove some of the stiches. The same day my grandmother did me a celebration party and invited the neighbours and friends. I felt acceptance and that I was now a big girl and would fit in with the rest of the girls.

I came to England when I was ten years old and made a home for myself here. I got a good education but hadn't heard anything about FGM. The first time I came across this was in 2007 when some women were talking about it. The women were concerned that they had heard that girls were being checked when they were coming back from abroad.

I started to hear more about FGM including the impact and health implications of this procedure. I started to question this. Before I got married I went to a local clinic where there was a female Dr who talked to me about opening the stiches. I was happy with what the Dr had said and made an appointment to get this done. I had this done and although I was sore for a few days, I could feel the difference.

I met a worker from Ashiana and we got talking about some of the work that Ashiana does including supporting women survivors of FGM, trafficking and all types of abuse. She asked if I would be interested in joining a support group which supports women affected by FGM. I was intrigued and made arrangements to attend the group.

I enrolled in the volunteer programme because I wanted to help my community and make a difference.

I attend the support groups and have become an FGM community champion. I have been involved in putting together an FGM poster, which was great because it was from a community perspective and from women who understand what FGM is. This will be used alongside the police to raise awareness of FGM and will guide women on where to get support and advice. I work alongside Ashiana workers and have gained valuable experience. I wish to build on this work and to raise awareness and educate people, especially the local community.