



Our Patch Report

Farzana's workshops, as they explored the shapes, sounds, and angles of Arabic calligraphy, also became an exploration of the daily lives, challenges and stories of the women who joined in.

While learning the angles of the 'Nuqta', two participants opened up about their experience with fostering children, discussing about their faith, choices and beliefs. In that little exchange, they found connection, so much so that they decided to meet later for further discussion.

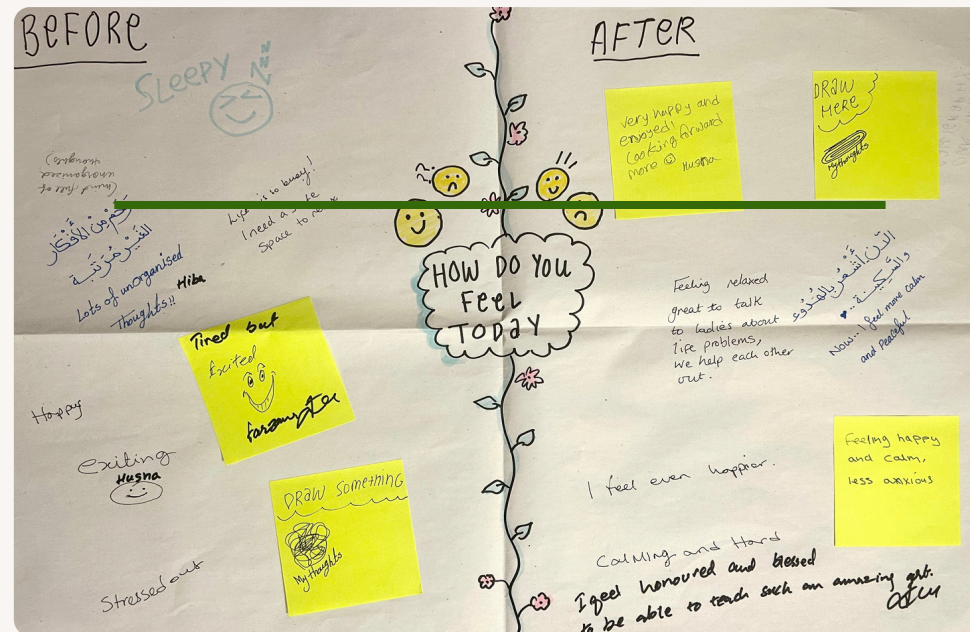
Each session began with a detailed tutorial by Farzana, and went on to become a safe place for exchange of daily stories and ended in warm hugs, until the next meet.

The 'How Do You Feel Today' sheet helped grasp the Before and After session moods of participants. Most of the 'Before' moods indicated stress, unorganized thoughts, need for a safe space to relax along with some excitement.

'After' moods were happy, calm, less anxious and hopeful. The participants used doodles, and notes in Arabic and English to express themselves.

My 1:1 interviews with Nagina (Group Lead) and Farzana (Tutor) gave further insights to the group dynamics and backgrounds.

Nagina shared how some of the participants struggle in areas of family relations and face restrictions on what they can and cannot do.



Most participants come from orthodox families, therefore, it helps if the sessions are held in public spaces like schools, libraries etc. This helps the women get permissions from their families, said Nagina.

The group encourages checking in on each other, offering support wherever required.

CALLIGRAPHY WITH FARZANA Carlton Bolling, Bradford 12:00-2:00PM, Thursdays

"They find these groups like safe spaces without the tags of support group or counselling."

Participant



Nagina also mentioned how these courses have helped build positive-self image and self-worth for the women.

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Farzana's efforts to make every session useful, warm and better than the last were commendable. She would organize her notes, study material, tools meticulously and effectively incorporate the feedback she got into her teaching each session. She strived to be a better teacher, she kept reminders in her sheets for herself that said, for example, "ask how they are doing", or "be confident". She would make sure to hug every participant before they left.

During my interview with her, Farzana talked about how she initially got into calligraphy, 12 years ago, inspired by Istanbul, its history and culture. After practicing for a while, she went on to teach and share her art with surrounding communities. With respect to her mental health, she shared how she had struggled with depression and accumulated constant stress. She feels that her practice of Arabic Calligraphy had a positive effect on these challenges, as she found peace and relaxation in it. Her practice is also connected to her religion, she said, as the original script of Holy Quran is in Arabic language.



Many of her customers, request her to write verses from the Holy Book, for their spiritual satisfaction, and she feels honoured to write the sacred words. Some of her relatives even wanted to kiss her hands, because of her sacred practice.

About her experience with this particular group of women that she's teaching, 'it's been excellent' she said. She feels that she received a lot of love and respect from them, and that they trust her teaching.

"It gives the same feeling as meditation"

Participant

She has found a family and a special bond with the group. She always asks them for honest feedback, and was excited to share the sticky notes with me. She uses the 'EBI (Even Better If)' technique to ask the participants about what could be better and customizes her lessons according to these notes.

Talking about her personal feelings and experiences during these workshops, she said that the workshops gave her a lot of courage to meet new people, and overcome her anxiety and depression. She feels more connected to people and less lonely. Her students keep in touch with her through whatsapp and other social media platforms even after the sessions end. There are people from diverse backgrounds, all looking for a place to connect and have meaningful conversations.

Towards the end, Farzana talked about her goal to empower communities to revive and preserve Calligraphy art, to spread its beauty and pass it on to future generations.

