



# Habibah

Photography Participant

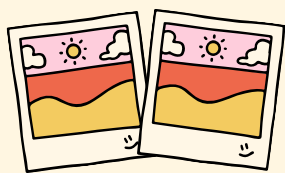


We spoke with Habibah, an MSA participant, about her journey with Muslimah Sports Association, the importance of Black History Month, and how celebrating Somali culture has strengthened her sense of community.

## Tell us a bit about yourself

My background is in education. I started my Level 4, then began working and realized how much I enjoyed being a key stage assistant. Later when I found some funding, I decided to take a different course. I've been working as a teaching assistant in various schools across East London, SEN schools, secondary schools, early years, pretty much every age. Then I started volunteering for a Women's Centre about three years ago when I stopped doing my Level 4. I took on organising roles for the sewing club, boxing club and other activities.

Most recently, I organised a Somali Cultural Night, which featured two poetry performances, including one by a poet who travelled all the way from from Australia. In Somali culture, oral storytelling is important, it's how history is passed down. I love being able to share Somali culture with others because it's such a big part of who I am, from the fabrics to the theatre and poetry. I feel proud when I see people enjoying and learning about it. It inspires me to keep volunteering and teaching others about our traditions.



## How did you first get involved with MSA?

That's a nice, funny story actually. I was going to East Library to study and noticed there was a Newham Heritage Mall. I met Sylvie, fellow niqabi, who was taking photographs there. We chatted about various things in general, and during our conversation, she mentioned that there was a photography group I could join since I've been wanting to do photography for a while. I got added to the group and attended my first session in Barking with my mum. We had such a good time taking pictures and meeting everyone. The atmosphere was really relaxed and welcoming. It felt like a really nice way to be creative and connect with others.

## What has your experience with MSA been like?

Joining the photography exhibition in Barking was the main activity I did with MSA. They're really friendly and well-organised. What really drew me in was the feeling of belonging and the emphasis on community support. Even though I haven't participated in many activities yet, I appreciate that there's a variety of creative workshops and cultural events, so there's something for everyone to explore at their own pace.



## How has your culture or identity shaped your experience with MSA?

It's nice to see people being open and curious about each other's traditions, it creates a real sense of understanding. Most members are South Asian, but I've never felt different. I actually grew up around South Asian communities, so it's always felt familiar and comfortable. I really value spaces like MSA, where different communities can come together, learn from one another, and appreciate what each person brings.

## How do you celebrate Black History Month personally?



It's special because it allows focus on cultural activities. It's also an opportunity for others to learn about Somali culture and the wider African diaspora. I find it educational and inspiring, because it gives people the chance to understand our history, our stories and our contributions to society. It's not just a celebration for us, but also a learning experience for others who may not be familiar with our culture. But for me, Somali culture is celebrated year-round. We buy fabrics, cook traditional foods, and burn incense ("unsi") at home. I love sharing these traditions with family and friends, and it's something that brings people together and keeps our heritage alive.



## How would you describe the women at MSA?

They're very welcoming, empathetic and supportive. I'd also say they're inspiring, strong, and encouraging. Even though I haven't taken part in many activities yet, I've noticed how the women at MSA create a real sense of sisterhood. They make everyone feel seen and included, and there's always this positive energy. You always feel like someone is there to help, uplift, or cheer you on, which makes the whole space feel like a genuine community.

