

Name of Project: Ascent Ending Harmful Practices Partnership
Lead partner: Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)
Delivery partner: Al-Aman
Borough: Camden

"I am 28 years old. My family performed Female genital mutilation (FGM) on me when I was age 7. When displaced by war in my home country, my family forced me to marry my cousin Ali, 15 years my senior, and he is a refugee in the UK. I was made to stay at his parents' house when he travelled back to the UK. When I had my daughter, she was born with Autism, ADHD, learning and physical disabilities. My husband blamed me for that.

When I came to the UK with my daughter on a Family Reunion visa, he started to be very controlling, physically, emotionally, sexually, and financially abusive towards me. He refused to let me go to college to study English or share parental responsibilities with me in looking after our daughter. He threatened to report me to Children's Services and that our daughter must undergo FGM.

I heard about Al-aman from a friend of a friend on social media. When I contacted them, the woman from Al-Aman supported me and conducted a risk assessment. I was encouraged to report him to the police. I have been informed that my case will be referred to MARAC and to Solace Women's Aid for IDVA support. We were moved to a safer accommodation, and I was referred to solicitors for injunctions, including FGMPO*, to protect my daughter. I was referred to an FGM Clinic for a de-infibulation procedure. However, I received a letter from the Home Office asking me to submit a separate application because my husband has curtailed my visa. I have become very fearful that we will be deported and that my daughter's medications and regular appointments will be impacted by his action. Al-Aman immediately referred me to a refugee charity where an immigration caseworker supported me with a new application and for Indefinite Leave to Remain afterwards. Al-Aman provided me with a support letter, and I have now received a positive result. As I have been struggling with money, Al-Aman has supported me in applying for financial support from the National Zakat Foundation (NZF), which helps people like me.

Recently, I have started to receive benefits and begun to feel more in control of my life and my daughter's. Having some financial stability also gave me more space to concentrate on my emotional well-being and education. I started to go to Al-Aman's ESOL class and workshops run by professionals from the Citizens Advice Bureau on money management and from mental health trusts on dealing with worry and building self-esteem. In addition, Al-Aman helped me to find more English, Maths & IT classes at a local college. I'm planning to continue my further education and possibly go to university. I have come such a long way, and I feel more stable and safer than ever before."

* Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders offer a legal means to protect and safeguard victims and potential victims of FGM.