

Caring Through Confusion: Shared Voices, Shared Strength Regarding Dementia

MWC Tea & Chat

Overview

This is a collection of stories from the women that attended our various Ammi's Circle (Mum's Circle) Tea and Chat events regarding dementia. These events brought together mothers, daughters, granddaughters, and grandmothers together to share their experience of dementia and caring for those with dementia.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors who attended the session and generously shared their experiences. Your openness and insight not only enriched our discussions but also made it possible for us to create meaningful collection of stories that will inform and inspire others. Your willingness to be part of this work helps bring greater understanding, compassion, and depth to the ongoing conversation around dementia.

Foreward

Dementia is not a single story, it is many.

It is the quiet shifts in personality, the forgotten names, the repeated questions, and the aching realisation that something once so steady is slowly changing. But alongside loss, there is also deep love, resilience, and community. The Ammi's Circle Tea and Chat events offered an opportunity to connect.

This collection is a testament to lived experience of individuals navigating dementia, and of those walking beside them. Through the narratives shared here, you will find the emotional truths that statistics cannot capture.

These are stories of strength, of quiet moments and courageous decisions, of connection found even when memory fades.

Introduction

Dementia is a condition that affects individuals and families across all communities, yet the experiences of Muslim women in Bradford have often been overlooked or underrepresented in mainstream discourse.

Bradford's vibrant Muslim community embodies rich cultural traditions, close-knit family structures, and deep faith, all shape how dementia is understood, experienced, and managed. However, stigma and silence around cognitive decline persist, often preventing open dialogue and access to tailored support. By centring Muslim women's voices, we aim to break down barriers of stigma, challenge misconceptions, and foster greater understanding within and beyond the community.

The stories are grounded in four key intentions:

- **Visibility:** To shine a light on Muslim women's experiences with dementia, making the invisible visible.
- **Breaking Stigma:** To challenge harmful stereotypes and open spaces for honest conversations about dementia within faith and cultural contexts.
- **Empowering Women:** To celebrate the strength, agency, and vital role Muslim women play in caregiving and advocacy.
- **Faith and Healing:** To explore how spirituality and religious practices provide comfort, meaning, and resilience throughout the dementia journey.

Through these stories, we hope to foster empathy, inspire community support, and encourage culturally sensitive approaches to dementia care. This is a call to action, to listen, to learn, and to stand together in support of those affected by dementia in Bradford.

Fozia and Rehana's Personal Reflection

I never imagined that something as simple as a weekly group could make such a difference to our lives. My name is Fozia. I work full-time and care for my mother, Rehana, who's now 75 and living with early-stage dementia.

Mum has always been full of life, a gifted seamstress, a lively storyteller, the one who'd never sit still. But in recent years, I watched her withdraw. Even with carers popping in daily, something was missing. She felt it too, that hunger for connection, for purpose, for simply being herself again.

I was exhausted trying to balance everything – work, caring, the emotional toll of seeing Mum fade from the woman I'd always known. I'd put on a brave face, but inside, I was fraying.

Then I heard about Ammi's Circle Tea and Chat, a weekly group run by the Muslim Women's Council. A space for women to come together, share, learn, and support one another. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I arranged my work hours and took Mum along one Tuesday morning.

From that first session, something shifted.

Mum lit up as soon as she saw the craft table, threads, needles, buttons, wool. She gravitated to it like she'd come home. She started crocheting tiny hats for newborns. Her fingers remembered before her mind caught up. There was purpose in her hands again.

She laughed with the other aunties, swapped stories from "back home", and began to look forward to our Tuesday outings more than anything else in the week. I could see her spirit gently coming back to the surface. She wasn't just being looked after – she was living again.

For me, those few hours became a lifeline. I found other women juggling similar responsibilities. We'd sit, chat, cry sometimes, but mostly just breathe. There's something powerful about being in a room where you don't have to explain yourself, where people just get it. No judgment, no pressure.

I used to feel like I was holding everything together on my own. Now, I feel like I'm part of a wider circle of sisters, of daughters, of mothers, all supporting one another.

With my employer's understanding, I've been able to keep up with work while still carving out this time with Mum. That time, just us, laughing over tea, stitching side by side, has brought us closer than we've been in years.

Mum's mind is still on a journey, and we don't know where it will lead. But thanks to Ammi's Circle, she's not walking it alone. And neither am I.

This group has given us both something we didn't even know we'd lost: a sense of belonging, of being seen, of having a place in the world again.

It's more than a circle – it's a lifeline.



Halima's Story

I still remember the first time I took Mum to Ammi's Circle. She was quiet on the way there, staring out of the car window, her hands fidgeting with the edge of her scarf. I was nervous. Mum had always been so full of life, always doing something with her hands, whether it was crochet, embroidery, or just pottering about the house. But since her diagnosis, things had changed. She'd become forgetful, withdrawn, and often frustrated with herself. I just wanted to find something, anything, that would bring her a bit of joy again.

Ammi's Circle was recommended by a friend. It's a women's group run by the Muslim Women's Council, with a mix of crafts, Quran reading, and gentle reminders from the Deen. I thought it might be good for both of us. I'm her main carer, and though I love her dearly, it's not always easy. I needed a space where we could just be together, without the pressure.

That first session was hard. Mum looked lost when we walked in. The room was full of chatter and colour, but she clung to me like a child. During the crochet activity, she couldn't follow the instructions and kept dropping her yarn. I had to guide her hands, and I could feel my own frustration bubbling up. But then, during the reminder, the facilitator spoke about patience, how it's not just about waiting, but about how we carry ourselves while we wait. That struck a chord with me. After the session, one of the sisters came over and gently suggested we try using familiar patterns with Mum, something repetitive and simple. It was such a small thing, but it made a big difference.

By the second and third weeks, I noticed a change. Mum started to smile more during the sessions. The group began working on a crochet quilt together, and Mum was given the task of making simple squares. Her hands remembered what her mind sometimes forgot. She even started humming softly while she worked. During the Quran recitation, she joined in with verses she'd memorised as a girl. Her face lit up, it was like a window had opened.

At home, she began mentioning things from the sessions. "Did you see that lady's scarf?" she'd ask, or "I think I made five squares today." They weren't always accurate, but the fact that she remembered anything at all felt like a small miracle.

By the fourth week, something shifted between us. I wasn't just her carer anymore, we were companions again. We laughed over tangled yarn, shared tea during the breaks, and talked about the reminders. One week, the topic was caring for parents in old age. The facilitator recited the verse from Surah Luqman about honouring one's parents. I had to blink back tears. It reminded me why I was doing all this, not out of duty, but out of love.

Now, six weeks in, Ammi's Circle has become a lifeline. For Mum, it's a place where she feels useful and seen. The rhythm of crochet soothes her, and the Quran brings her peace. For me, it's a space to breathe, to connect with other women who understand, and to remember that I'm not alone.

We've found something precious in that little room full of yarn, tea, and quiet faith. It's not just a group, it's a circle of care, of remembrance, and of hope.



Samaya's Story

I first heard about Ammi's Circle through a neighbour. She mentioned it in passing, saying it was a lovely space for women to come together, do a bit of crafting, and share reminders from our Deen. At the time, I was desperate for something, anything, that might lift my mother's spirits.

Mum is 80 now, and she's been in a wheelchair for a few years. Since her mobility declined, she's spent most of her time indoors. The isolation has taken its toll. She used to be so lively, always chatting away or busy with something. But lately, she'd grown quiet, withdrawn. I could see the sadness in her eyes, even when she tried to hide it.

So, I booked a taxi that could accommodate her wheelchair, and off we went to our first session. I won't lie; it was hard. I felt anxious walking into that room full of strangers. I kept wondering if I'd made a mistake, if Mum would feel out of place, if it would all be too much.

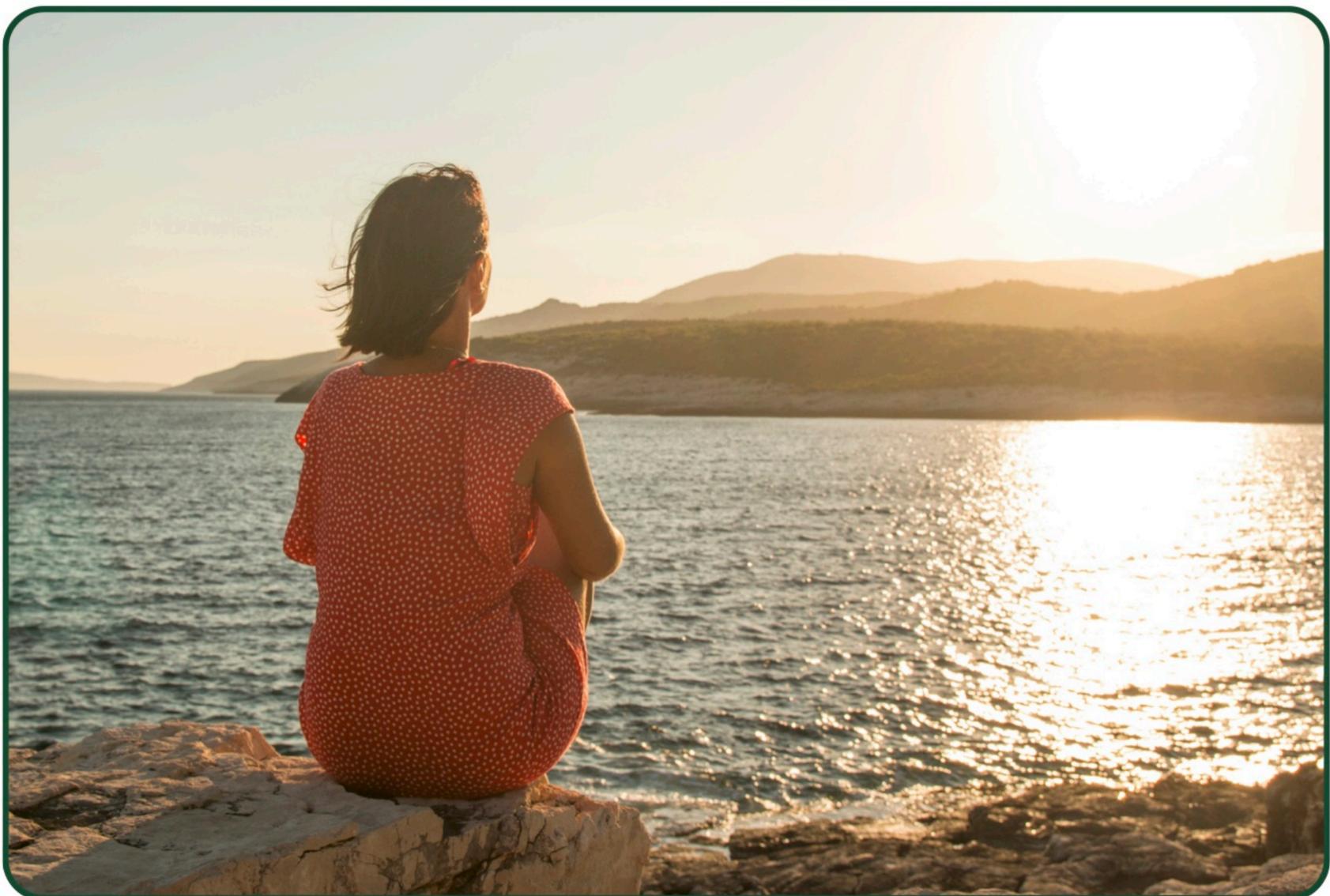
But something shifted as the session went on. The women were warm and welcoming. No one stared or made us feel like we didn't belong. One of the sisters gently encouraged Mum to try her hand at crochet. At first, she was hesitant, but then I saw it, that little spark in her eyes. Her fingers, though slower now, began to move with purpose. She was concentrating, smiling even. It was the first time in ages I'd seen her so engaged.

And it wasn't just the crochet. She started chatting with the other women, laughing at their stories, sharing a few of her own. I sat there watching her, feeling a lump in my throat. It was like seeing a part of her come back to life.

Now, every week, she asks me when we're going again. She looks forward to it. So do I. It's become a highlight in our routine. Her mood has lifted, and she seems more energised, more herself. Even at home, she talks about the women she's met and the squares she's working on.

For me, Ammi's Circle has been a blessing too. Being a full-time carer can be lonely. You carry so much, quietly. But here, I've found other women who understand. We share stories, advice, sometimes just a knowing look. It's a space where I can breathe, where I don't feel so alone.

Looking back, I'm so glad I took that first step. Ammi's Circle has given us more than just a weekly outing. It's given Mum a sense of purpose again. And it's given me strength, comfort, and a reminder that we're part of something bigger, a community that cares.



Zara's Story

I'm Zara, a student at Bradford University, and whenever I can, I take my grandmother, Khadija, to Ammi's Circle. She's 78 now, and though she's still sharp in many ways, she doesn't get out much these days. My parents both work full-time, so between us, we try to make sure she's not left feeling lonely or stuck indoors. On the days I've got lectures or deadlines, Mum takes her instead.

We first heard about Ammi's Circle through a family friend. It's run by the Muslim Women's Council and is open to women of all ages. It's especially supportive for those living with dementia, but really, it's for anyone who wants to connect, learn something new, or just be around others in a warm, welcoming space.

From the first session, I could see how much it meant to my grandmother. She's always been sociable, but over the years, her world had shrunk. At Ammi's Circle, she found her voice again. She chats with other women, shares stories from her younger days, and joins in with whatever activity is going on, whether it's crafting, cooking, or just a good old natter over lunch.

For me, it's been just as meaningful. I get to spend proper time with her, not just rushing in and out of the house or helping her with errands. We sit side by side, learning new things together. I've seen a different side to her, her humour, her patience, her quiet strength. And I've met other women too, from all walks of life. There's something really special about seeing grandmothers, mothers, and daughters all in one room, learning from each other.

One of the things I love most is how safe and open the space feels. There's no pressure to be anything other than yourself. Everyone's welcome, and there's a real sense of care and respect. My grandmother looks forward to it every week. It's given her something to be excited about again.

Ammi's Circle has become a big part of our lives. It's not just a weekly outing, it's a place where my grandmother feels valued, where I feel connected, and where we both continue to grow. It's shown me how powerful community can be, especially when it's built on kindness, understanding, and shared experience.



“A Place for Mum” – Tahira’s Story

When I first heard about Ammi’s Circle, I wasn’t sure if it would be right for my mum. She has dementia, and I was worried about how she’d cope in a group setting. I didn’t want her to feel out of place or overwhelmed. So, I got in touch with the organisers to ask a few questions. They were kind and reassuring, explaining that the group was open to all women, including those with dementia. That gave me the confidence to take the next step.

Before bringing Mum along, I decided to attend a session myself. I wanted to see what it was like, to get a feel for the space. From the moment I walked in, I felt at ease. The facilitators were warm and welcoming, and the women in the group were friendly and open. There was a calm, respectful atmosphere, and a real sense of community. I could see straight away that this was a place where Mum would be treated with kindness and patience. I also noticed a crochet activity taking place, and I thought, “She’d love that.”

The following week, I brought Mum with me. At first, she was a bit unsettled, asking where we were, looking around nervously. But the session was gentle and well-paced, and she was given time to settle in. Slowly, she began to take part. She picked up some yarn, started chatting with the women around her, and even smiled a few times. By the end of the session, she seemed more relaxed, more herself.

Seeing her like that was such a relief. It's not easy finding spaces where people with dementia are truly included, not just accommodated. But here, she wasn't just a guest, she was part of the group.

We'll definitely be going back. I'm so grateful to have found a place where Mum can feel safe, engaged, and valued. Ammi's Circle isn't just about crafts or conversation, it's about connection, dignity, and community. And for us, that means everything.



Afterword

The stories gathered in this anthology reveal a profound resilience that runs through the lives of Muslim women affected by dementia. Despite the emotional, physical, and social challenges that dementia presents, these women and their families demonstrate remarkable strength and perseverance. Their resilience is not only a personal quality but a collective force, nurtured through the support of community, family bonds, and cultural traditions. Each narrative highlights how navigating dementia requires continual adaptation, patience, and courage. Qualities that these women embody with grace, even in moments of uncertainty and loss.

Faith plays a central and sustaining role throughout these stories, offering more than solace, it provides a lens through which experiences are understood and embraced. For many, spirituality and religious practice are integral to coping, healing, and finding hope amidst the challenges of dementia. Prayer, community worship, and trust in a higher power give meaning to suffering and inspire ongoing care and compassion. Together, resilience and faith emerge as intertwined pillars that uphold individuals and families, reminding us that while dementia may affect memory, it cannot diminish the enduring strength of the human spirit or the power of belief.

**Report created by the Tea & Chat
participants supported by the MWC Team**

