



Journeys of faith, strength and persistence: *Stories of new arrival Afghan mothers*

by Fariba Drokhsan Ahmadi



Fariba Ahmadi (née Fariba Drokhsan) was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and migrated to Australia in 1995. Prior to studying Narrative Therapy, she worked as a Medical Practitioner in Afghanistan. In 2020 she worked alongside Afghan women to gather stories similar to her own to shed light on the different experiences of Afghans taking refuge in Australia. These stories were collated in a collective document titled: 'Journeys of faith, strength and persistence: Stories of new arrival Afghan mothers'. Fariba can be contacted by email: riba.a67@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper describes the development of a collective document: 'Journeys of faith, strength and persistence: Stories of new arrival Afghan mothers'. Over six meetings, the migration stories of a group of newly arrived Afghan mothers were recorded in the Dari language and translated into English. The collective document we produced from these stories was presented to the staff of the school the women's children attended. The presentation included not only the document, but treasured expressions of culture that had sustained the women and that they were proud to share, including music, food and embroidery. After the presentation, outsider-witness responses were gathered from the staff members. These responses were recorded and became part of the evolving collective document, which will become a resource for other families making a new home in Australia.

Key words: *school; playgroup; refugee; migrant; Afghanistan; collective document; narrative practice*

This paper describes the documentation of the insider skills and knowledges of Afghan women who had recently arrived in Australia, and whose children attended the school where I work. The collective document we produced from the women's stories was presented to members of the school staff by the women and their families. After the presentation, I invited outsider-witness responses from the staff members (see Denborough, 2008). These responses were recorded and became part of the collective document. The collective document was also audio recorded to make it accessible to community members and others with limited English or Dari literacy.

The work described in this paper was carried out while I was working as the bilingual school services officer (BSSO) at Elizabeth Downs Primary School in South Australia. In this role, I worked to support newly arrived families during their transition from their country of origin into Australian society. The school has newly arrived students from Afghanistan, Africa (Sudan and Kenya), Cambodia, India, Iran, Iraq, Nepal, Spain, Syria, Palestine and elsewhere. The BSSO acts as a bridge to facilitate successful integration into the school system, and the Australian community more generally, while seeking to preserve people's cultural legacies and respecting cultural diversity. BSSOs support students in the 'English as an additional language and dialect' program, as well as supporting teachers and cultural communities by:

- working with teachers in the classroom
- providing support on excursions
- encouraging parents' engagement with their children's education
- trying to establish three-way partnerships between student, school and family.

I hoped that by bringing the women together to share their stories, they might feel less isolated and less likely to think that the collective problems they faced were specific to their family, or the result of some failing. I hoped that sharing collective stories of the faith, strength and persistence of new arrival Afghan mothers might improve the mental health and wellbeing of this group of women and their families, and that the document might become a resource for the wider community.

Inviting participants

One way in which Elizabeth Downs Primary School tries to involve parents in the school is by holding a playgroup on Wednesday mornings. It was part of my job as BSSO to attend this playgroup. I noticed that because the playgroup was conducted in English, many Afghan mothers could not participate. After talking with my line manager, I invited the Afghan mothers and their children to meet with me separately in a Dari/Hazaragi-speaking¹ group, which would have a specific project of documenting their knowledge and skills.

I invited potential participants individually, either by phone or in person, to explain the project of gathering our stories of hardship, determination, bravery, patience and persistence. I answered their questions and assured them they were welcome and their stories were important. I explained to the women that I was there to offer them help and support without any bias or prejudice. I reassured them that the stories they shared during our meetings would remain confidential and that our document would use a collective voice that would not identify any individual. Ten women took up my invitation and became regular participants in the group.

Meeting 1: Collective timeline of journeys

Aunty Barbara Wingard's (2013) teachings about narrative 'practices of welcome' resonate with Afghan traditional culture. On our first meeting, I welcomed the women to the group with a smile, providing them with a safe environment that would allow them to feel comfortable and relaxed.

As I had already made contact with each woman individually, they knew what to expect when we came together. However, because this might have been strange or new for some of the participants, I reiterated the hopes and purpose for this project: to create a document that we could share with other people in the community and with future new arrivals to give them the sense that they are not the only ones facing difficulties, and that others have been through similar experiences and have survived and adjusted to a new life in Australia.

I showed the women some examples of collective documents. We could all relate to the words from

'Lifesaving tips' about 'not taking hate into our hearts' (Dulwich Centre Foundation, 2011). We decided to explore how we had overcome the hardships of family separation, financial difficulties and people's judgements by not taking others' words deeply into our hearts (see Denborough, 2012).

My plan for our first meeting was to do a collective narrative timeline (Denborough, 2018, p. 122) tracing the years in which the women had left their country and when they had arrived in Australia. When I asked about these dates, the women started to laugh. I asked them about their laughter and they replied that dates had never been important to them. Most Afghan people don't know the exact date or even year of their birth, and to make it easy, most of us choose 31 December or 1 January as our birthday. Sometimes we think it's funny that European culture is so concerned about dates.

A collective timeline documenting departure and arrival dates clearly would not work for this group and cultural context, so I shifted to a different way of inviting journey stories. I invited the women to share some of the events that made us decide to leave our home country and come to the other side of the world. I asked:

- When did you first come up with the idea of having to leave your country?
- What were your hopes and dreams when you thought about needing to find a new home?

We all took turns to share our experiences. By way of example, I shared the story of my own migration journey first. This seemed to help the other participants to feel comfortable and ready to share their own stories (see Denborough, 2008). Most of us spent many years on our journey, sometimes in danger, sometimes in refugee camps. Many of us had to wait in places where we were not welcome, trying to take care of our children by ourselves while our husbands travelled on to try to find a country that would open its doors to us. It was a long and difficult time (see Denborough, 2008).

When one person was talking, the rest of us listened. I took notes to begin developing our collective document. I wrote in Dari so that I could read the notes back to the women at the beginning of the next meeting. Later I translated the notes into English.

Meeting 2: Externalising conversations

At the beginning of our second meeting, I read out the notes I had made from our previous conversation to check that the women were happy with the way that I had written them.

To preface the externalising conversation I had planned, I began, again, by sharing my own story. This increased the trust between the mothers and myself. Even though some of us come from quite different backgrounds and levels of education, we were all mothers and had in common the experience of being a refugee and a new arrival in Australia. I could share that these conversations were important to me personally and that sharing my story was also healing for me too (see White, 2007).

After sharing my story, I interviewed one of the women who had agreed to share her story. The rest of the group listened. Afterwards, others were invited to add to the story and share similar experiences of their own.

Naz (not her real name) was a 23-year-old mother of two who had recently migrated to Australia to join her husband, who was suffering from the effects of hopelessness. She had finished primary school in Kabul, Afghanistan, but hadn't been able to continue studying because she got married at the age of 16, and because of the uncertainty of war. After she got married, Naz's husband left Kabul in the hope of establishing a good future for his family. Naz had to move in with her in-laws. She indicated that she didn't have many good memories of that time because of the many restrictions imposed by her father- and mother-in-law. She lived with them for six years until her sponsorship was approved and she came to Australia with her six- and two-year-old sons.

A week after she arrived, someone broke into Naz's house and stole all her jewellery and valuables. When she got back home and saw the mess she started crying. She had lived in fear since then. Naz said:

I am so scared of the fear, and I feel hopeless. I am continuously thinking of someone breaking into my house especially during the night. I am so upset, and I feel very weak as a mother when I cry. I feel so lonely and miserable. I feel so sad about being alone. The fear is nagging in my mind all the time and I do not enjoy the precious time of my life. I don't have anyone to trust and share my story with. I think my need to have my family and relatives made me vulnerable to

aloneness, and most of the time I feel unhappy when I am by myself. When I am alone, I just feel tightness in my chest and feel like crying, but I don't want to cry in front of my sons as I don't want them to suffer seeing me crying. I had never thought of robbery existing in Australia. When I was in Kabul, I felt much stronger despite the ongoing civil war. I wasn't afraid. I came to Australia with big hopes to join my husband and have a peaceful life. But instead, I have been suffering.

After listening to Naz's story I asked the following externalising questions:

Fariba: If you were to give a name to the problem, what would you name it?

Naz: Black Terror.

Fariba: What does it look like?

Naz: It looks like a big black gigantic creature with spiky fingers.

Fariba: Have you shared your feeling with someone else?

Naz: Only my husband and you.

Fariba: Does the fear affect your family life?

Naz: For sure. I feel grumpy and I don't want to interact with my husband. I don't want to go anywhere and just want to be home, especially when my son is at school and my husband is at work. I just want to be at home.

After listening to Naz's story, the other women offered the following responses:

- We are so scared when we go outside the house with our traditional clothes and scarf – people look down on us.
- Neighbours are not friendly in the same way – they don't say hello and goodbye like people in Kabul.
- The neighbours just stare at us.
- They throw things like a splash of fluid on us.
- They tell us, 'go back to your country', 'go back to where you came from'.

We discovered that none of us expected the different forms of abuse, disparagement and humiliation we had experienced in what we had imagined to be a civilised country. The effects of these negative experiences were reduced when we shared them with each other. The women said they felt relieved to know that they had not done anything wrong – that they were not the problem, and they were not alone. Just sharing the problem with each other took some of the burden away. This also reduced the feeling of needing to hide or feel embarrassed about being a new arrival. They knew that their experiences didn't make them any less human, and that they were still valued (see Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture & Dulwich Centre Foundation International, 2019).

Meeting 3: Re-authoring conversations

Throughout our sessions, I tried to use the skills of attentive listening, being patient and not interrupting. I tried to provide a calm and peaceful environment to allow the women to focus, gather their thoughts and find the stories that hadn't been told before but had been kept inside. As refugees, we had all been traumatised repeatedly in different ways, and it was important to connect to our stories of bravery and beauty and our hopes and dreams for a better life (see White, 2007).

I interviewed Naz again using double-storied questions while the other women listened:

Fariba: Can you tell me more about the times when the fear is not there?

Naz: Yes. When my husband is home, and when I come to the school to drop off and pick up my son. Also when I come and join the playgroup.

Fariba: What are your hopes in bringing your son to school and joining the playgroup?

Naz: I want my son to have the best education. I wanted him to have higher education and have the best future in Australia. I didn't have the opportunity to continue to study in Kabul, so I try to provide the best opportunities for my son to study. I believe when you have a good education, it's like you have two wings like an aeroplane – you can fly anywhere that you want to.

I love attending the playgroup. This is the time that I can find myself happy as I can talk with other Afghan ladies in Dari and we can share our stories.

Fariba: How do you keep the fear away during the time at home before you come to pick your son up from school?

Naz: I keep myself busy with embroidery, singing traditional songs while I'm cooking and sometimes talking with my friends.

After listening to this conversation, the other participants were invited to respond to the following questions:

- Can you please tell me more about your journey?
- What were your hopes for living in a new place?
- What helped you to survive the difficult journey to safety?
- Who showed you how to be brave and have hope?

I joined in the conversation, and took notes as we talked. Later, I wrote down what I remembered from the conversation. This became part of the collective document.

Meeting 4: Multi-storied lives

At our next meeting, I checked with the women about my notes from our previous conversation. I could see that remembering our elders and loved ones and the brave and beautiful culture which we all shared, and remembering our own bravery, had increased the feeling of confidence and happiness among us all. This reminded me of how important it is to remember that our lives are multi-storied (Adichie, 2015). Adichie noted the importance of valuing and respecting people equally. Each person has dignity, talent and knowledge. Each is skilful and creative in their own way, which should not be ignored. Stories have a significant meaning for each individual. Adichie spoke about the different ways an individual can be affected by a story. Stories can build someone up or crush someone's dreams. They can even help to heal broken dignity and make a person feel whole again (Adichie, 2015).

During this meeting, we shared stories about the traditional schools at mosques in Afghanistan, and about formal education and the differences between

Australia and Afghanistan. At the playgroup, the women were encouraged to attend classes to learn English. In the beginning, we were scared of making mistakes or not being able to learn English because most of us did not have literacy even in our first language. As soon as we started, however, we realised that we were not alone, and that migrants from other countries had the same problems. This reassured us that it was not too late to begin learning a new language. Not long after starting English classes, some of us had been able to pass the driving test and get our driver's licences. Then we could go shopping, drop off and pick up the children from school, take the children to their appointments and after school sports, and visit our family and friends. As we looked back, we could see that we had achieved a lot, and felt very happy to be independent and to have our self-confidence back.

In this meeting, instead of just talking together, I invited the mothers to contribute to a collective drawing.

During this meeting, we also discussed the idea that sometimes when a woman feels she is useless and hopeless, and is not being a good mother or wife, this is not because of herself, but because of domestic violence. Domestic violence is not talked about openly in our community, and it is a hidden problem that many women experience in different ways.

By asking double-storied questions I tried to bring forward the multiple stories of the women's lives, stories of their positive qualities and their skills and abilities. We discussed the many skills and abilities involved in the household jobs of cooking, cleaning, shopping, looking after the younger children and being responsible, very caring and supportive for the whole family. We also learnt about skills some of the women had in embroidery and sewing clothes. Others shared skills in cooking and preparing special foods for celebrations, such as after Ramadan or at Nawrooz, the Afghan New year. Others shared special songs and dances they were able to perform.

As usual, I took brief notes. After this meeting, I reflected on our conversation about the women's hopes and wishes for a good education, and how these had been interrupted by the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan. I was drawn to the idea of capturing their words in a poem. I wrote it in Dari first, using their words, and read it out for the group at our next meeting, asking if it reflected their experiences. They were all excited and agreed that captured their experiences. Later, I translated the poem into English (see White, 2007).

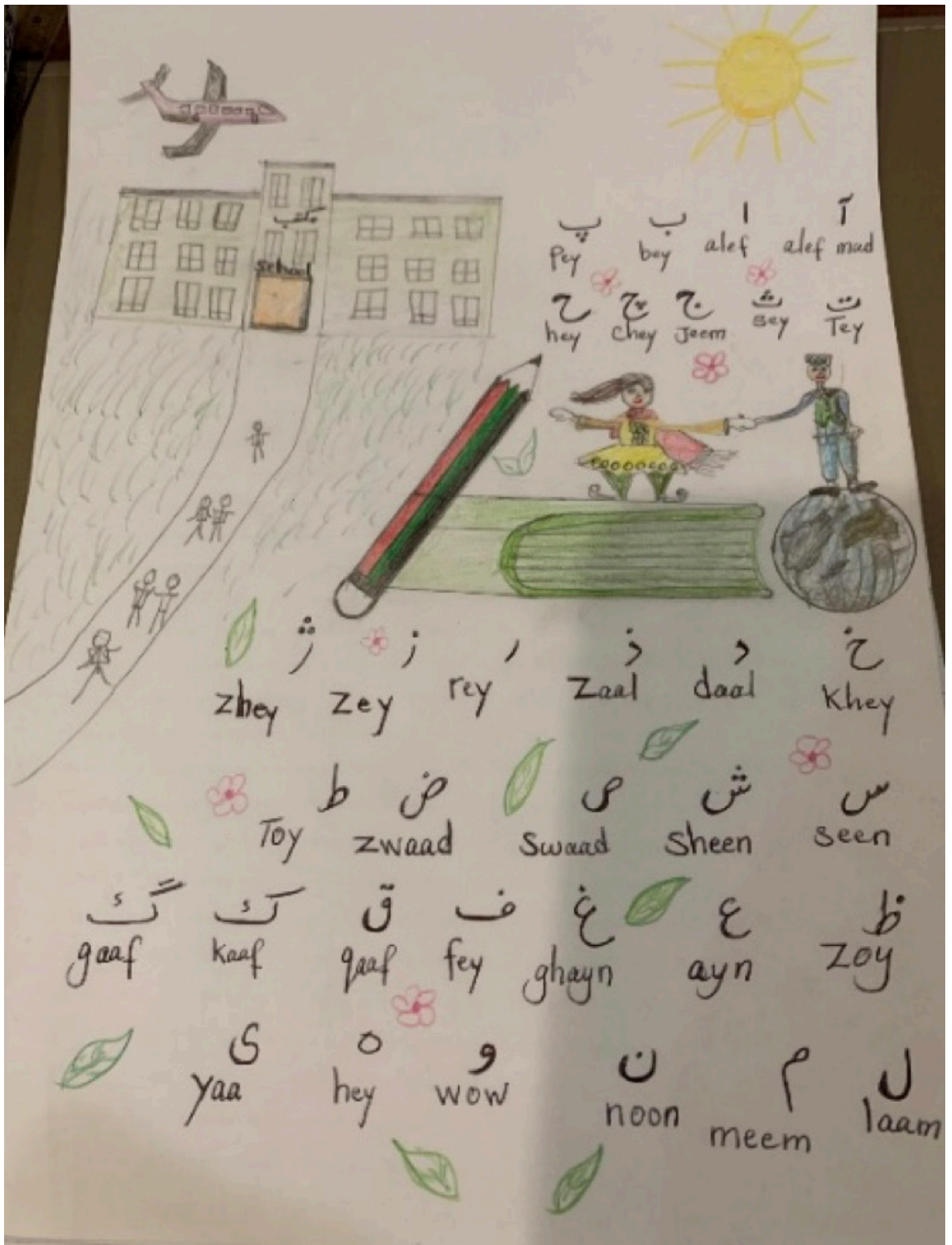


Figure 1. Collective drawing of two Afghan siblings representing the power of education, and how it helps them to feel on top of the world , In the drawing you can see 33 Dari letters with the pronunciation in English

I feel blind without an education

I cannot read

I can't read from right to left

I can't read from left to right

Neither can I read from top to bottom

Nor can I read from bottom to top

I wish I could read from A to Z

I mean that I read alphabet

Don't tell me not to read

I would like to read to understand better

I was not allowed to read or learn due to difficult
life circumstances

Taliban wanted us to remain illiterate

Since I have arrived here

I would like to read and learn

In order to survive and live longer

I tell my children as much as they can

From cradle to grave

From childhood to old age

They must read and learn

I don't want to be told anymore

Not to read

I would like to read to gain knowledge

The Taliban used to prevent us from reading and
learning

To keep us in the dark and uneducated

I would like to read together with my friends

In order to learn and become an educated
person.

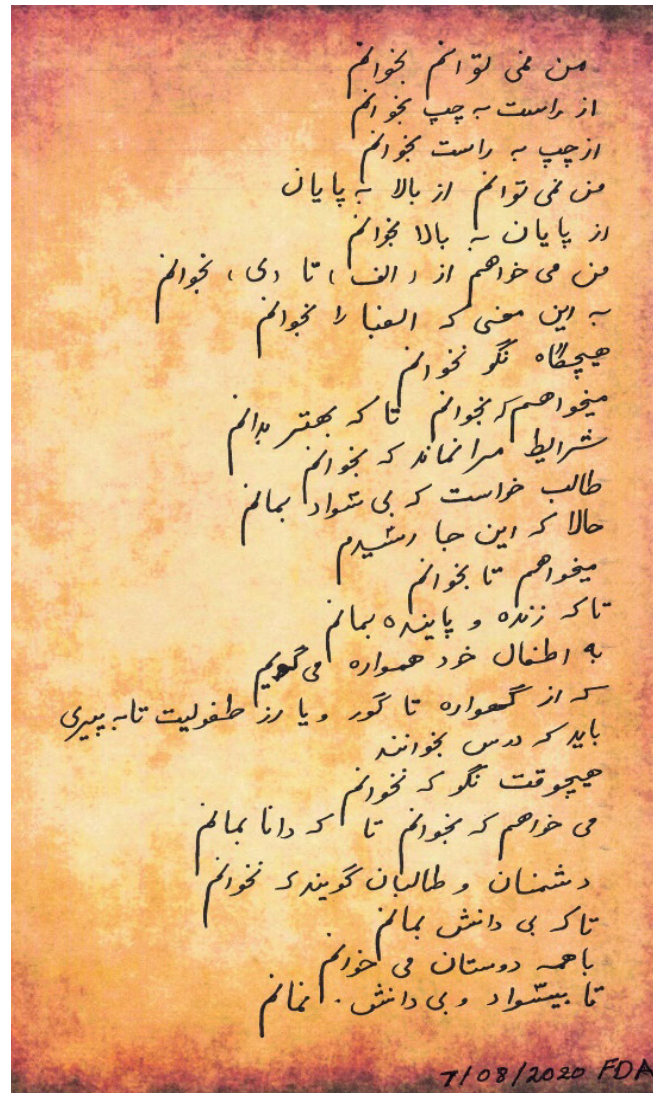


Figure 2. Poem 'I feel blind without an education' in its original Dari

Meeting 5: Multimedia documents: Using pictures, drawings & photographs

After the success in making a collective drawing and poem in the previous meeting, I invited the women to work together to illustrate and write on a tree of life.

We made a collective drawing showing:

The roots of the tree, representing where the women had come from:

- Afghanistan
- Kabul
- Ghazni
- Ghor
- Jaghour
- Bamyan
- Iran
- Tajikistan.

The trunk of the tree, representing valued skills and attributes. These included:

- trust
- honesty
- faithfulness
- kindness
- caring for others.

The branches, representing hopes and dreams:

- to learn the English language
- a bright future for our children
- to adapt to a new environment.

The leaves, representing re-membered lives (see Russell & Carey, 2004):

- parents
- grandparents
- sisters

- brothers
- friends
- aunts
- uncles
- teachers
- neighbours
- colleagues
- classmates.

The flowers, representing legacies we wish to share:

- remaining hopeful
- hard work
- persistence
- resistance
- positivity
- patience
- resilience.

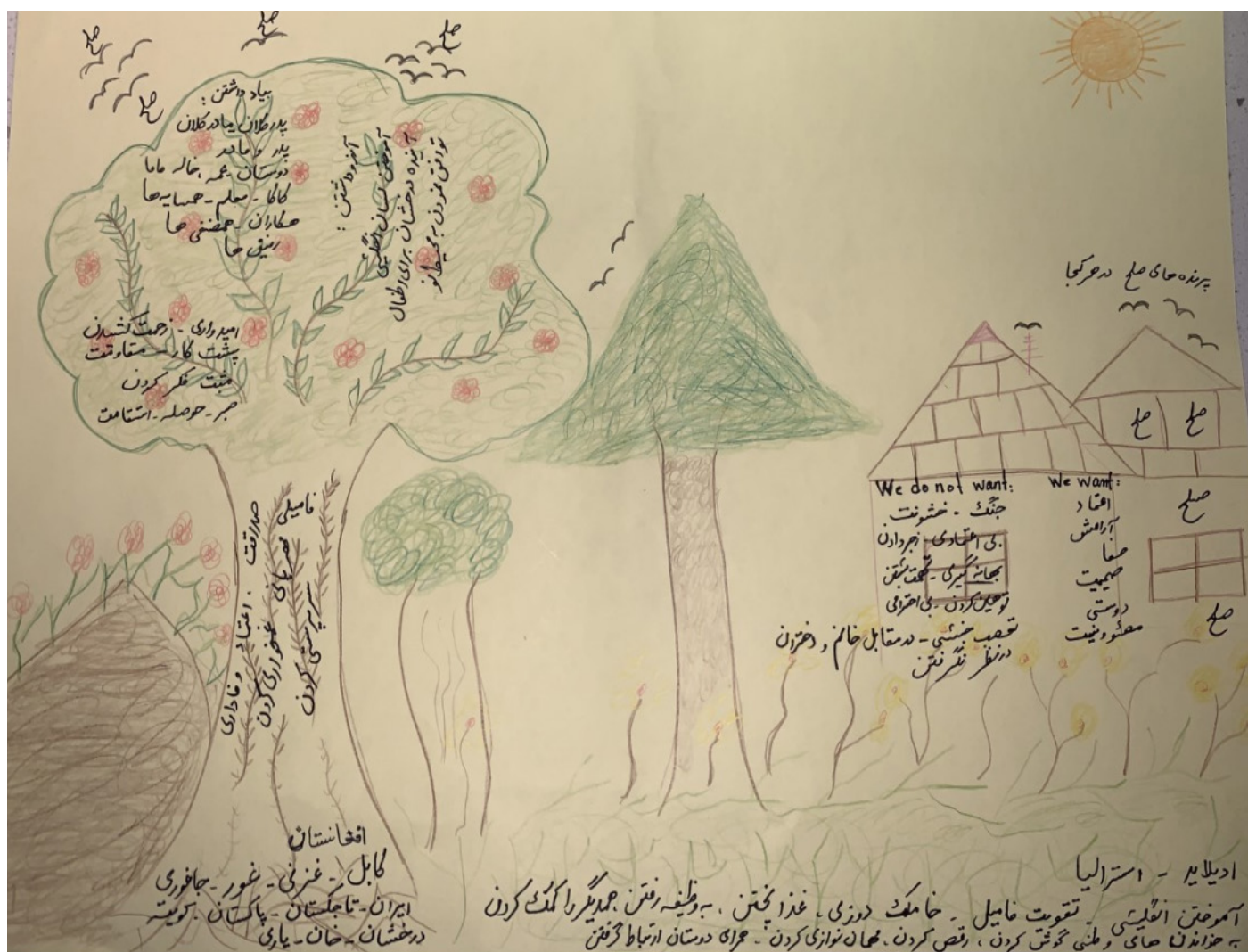


Figure 3. The collective tree of life picture

The ground, representing where we now lived and the daily activities we engaged in:

- learning English
- supporting our families
- going to work
- attending playgroup/women's group
- embroidery
- cooking
- helping each other
- listening to traditional Afghan music
- dancing
- hospitality.

During the Tree of Life drawing and conversation, one of the women said that life is like a house, so we drew a house and birds beside the tree. These represented peace. On the house, the women listed things they did and do not want in their homes:

Not wanted	Wanted
Fighting	Trust
Violence	Peacefulness
Mistrust	Sincerity
Oppression	Love
Accusation	Safety
Ungratefulness	Honesty
Insults	Friendship
Disrespect	Valuing each other
Gender bias	Mutual respect
Lying	Freedom
Injustice	Faithfulness

Meeting 6: Developing the collective document using the themes drawn from the stories and the women's insider skills and knowledges

I gathered together all the material we had produced into nine themes.

- overcoming migration, isolation and family separation
- not allowing the power of people's hate to define us
- remembering the warmth of our loved ones
- adapting, improvising and overcoming the adversities of life
- preserving the richness of cultural values and breaking barriers
- every song has an abundance of memories
- the peaceful art of embroidery
- anything you lose comes around in another form
- finding yourself in the hidden depths of the ocean.

During our sixth meeting, I shared this draft document and asked the women if they thought it was a good reflection of our meetings so far. They agreed and said they liked the themes.

The collective document gathered together many double-storied accounts of our lives as new arrival Afghan mothers. I asked the women if they would like to share our stories with a wider audience by presenting it to the school staff and any of our family members who could attend the school. Everyone became very excited, and we discussed how we would present our collective document to the school leadership team.

The women had many suggestions – that we bring a Dambora, a traditional instrument, to play music; that we bring examples of embroidery; that we bring food; that we wear traditional clothes. Connecting to our cultural traditions and values, and thinking about sharing these with the school staff, made us feel strong and proud.

Presenting the collective document to the school staff

The leadership group of Elizabeth Downs Primary school accepted the invitation to act as an audience to the collective document. When they arrived in the meeting hall, they heard traditional music playing and saw examples of embroidery laid out on the tables. I showed the collective document on a projector.

In the presence of the Afghan mothers, I asked the following questions of the staff members (see Denborough, 2008).

1. What did you hear that stood out for you or struck a chord with you? What were you were drawn to? What were the particular words or expressions that caught your attention?
2. What do you think the story suggests about what might be important to migrant Afghan women, or what they stand for in life?
3. How has hearing this story changed you? Is there something new that you know now and how will this change how you think and act in future?

I translated the responses into Dari for the women who were present, and the staff members' contributions were later added to become part of the evolving collective document. We took photos of the event, which were shared on the Elizabeth Downs Primary School Facebook page. We also recorded the meeting to make it available for future projects, perhaps involving other schools.

Extract of the collective document

Salaam

Salaam means hello in Afghanistan and many Muslim countries. It is used with a gesture of greeting and respect, typically a low bow of the head and body, with the hand or fingers touching the heart/chest area.

This document brings together stories of the special skills of faith, strength and persistence of new arrival Afghan mothers who have made journeys of migration through heartbreak, trauma and struggle.

Overcoming migration, isolation and family separation

We had to make the difficult decision to leave our loved ones and our beloved country for different reasons:

- we felt that we were not safe anymore – we did not feel safe to go to work, we did not feel safe to go out grocery shopping, our children did not feel safe to go to school or university
- we couldn't sleep at night because of fear of invaders
- we were not allowed to wear our normal clothes and could be whipped for wearing high heels.
- we couldn't listen to music

- as women, we were not allowed to go out of the house without a male relative accompanying us, and even then we would be stopped and questioned
- forced marriage, sometimes of a young woman and a much older man
- abuse, persecution and torture
- the Taliban's lack of respect for our Afghan culture.

When we first came to Australia many of us experienced:

- feelings of loneliness
- missing family, friends and colleagues
- having no-one to talk in Dari/Hazaragi and share our feelings with
- thinking about the safety of family members in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and not being able to talk to them on the phone
- worry about getting a job and building a life all over again.

We survived the hardships of migration, isolation and separation from loved ones through holding on to our hopes and dreams for a better life:

- to feel safe
- to have a good night's sleep with no fear
- to have a peaceful life
- to have the opportunity to study and build a good future for ourselves and our families
- to be able to support our extended family back home
- to be free and enjoy our lives like other humans on the planet.

Not allowing the power of people's hate to define us

We were faced with lots of hurdles and difficulties during our migration, everyone in a different way. People would swear at us, call us bad names, torture our children at school, throw stones at us. They even urinated on our children on the way to school. We tried not to take people's hatred inside us by:

- not taking words of hate into our hearts
- keeping the gleam of hope in our eyes
- not thinking about what we have heard

- staying positive and strong and keeping quiet
- getting up every day no matter how hard it is
- showing a brave face to our children
- remembering our cultural values of hospitality.

Instead of taking hate into our hearts, we remembered our cultural values of bravery, beauty and hospitality, and our skills and traditions in cooking, music, dance, song and the art of embroidery. When we were children, our elders passed on to us the importance of hospitality, honesty and respect. These characteristics and values have remained embedded in our hearts. They are stronger than hate.

Remembering the warmth of our loved ones

When we left home, we did not have the opportunity to say goodbye to everyone. Now some of our grandparents and uncles and aunties are no longer alive. We feel so sad and miss them. They contributed so much to our lives and we can learn from their history of overcoming despair and being hopeful.

Respect is of significant value in Afghan culture. We always display respect to our parents, grandparents and all the adults in our community. We value their knowledge and life experiences, even though their lives are different from ours.

If our grandparents were here today, they would have been very proud of us and our strength in overcoming the hardships we have faced. We try to pass the stories and cultural values from our grandparents on to our children.

When we remember the warmth of our loved ones, and that we are special to our family, we can try harder to stay strong for our children and live for them. This gives us a boost of self-confidence.

Finding yourself in the hidden depths of the ocean

As we are living in an Anglo-dominant community where we are marginalised, we feel that people look down at us. We sometimes get caught by thoughts that others are judging us by our appearance and the way that we dress.

For instance, when we first attended the playgroup, the Anglo mothers would look at us without saying anything. To reduce this pressure and with consideration of our cultural values, we started to greet them with a smile, saying hello or good morning to everyone. After a while, we have noticed that they

started to say hello back to us. Now we feel that we were able to build positive relationships using this simple greeting. We realised that we will not lose anything by being polite and respectful, displaying the values and qualities of our culture. That strategy helped us to change their negative impressions of us.

Afghan Australians are also part of the community. We are not bad people for wearing our traditional clothes. We value our culture and costume and want to pass them on to future generations.

Outsider-witness responses

After listening to the stories of the Afghan women's migration, what stood out to me was the importance of education for women, and women being able to have access to everything that they should have access to.

What particularly caught my attention was the pain and unjust situation that Afghan women, and Afghan people in general, have been exposed to prior coming to Australia, and the bravery and determination to move forward in life and to have success for themselves and their children. I think it suggests that they value fairness and equality and they want the absolute best for their children.

The word that caught my attention was prejudice, and the way that you would not respond in a negative way to other people, and how you turned around with a smile. That means a lot to us too.

I was struck by the idea of hospitality, and the respect that we have all learnt from grandparents and grow with. We need to understand that it may look slightly different, sound different, taste different, but there are basic human needs that we all have to be loved and to have a home.

I would like for all Australian to have an understanding of what people have gone through before they have come to Australia to create a new life. Then they would change their attitudes. They would have some understanding and develop empathy because we have not had to live in this situation that other people have lived in.

I must commend the mums in the playgroup for taking the step to smile and to say hello first when you felt that the others were not able to do that. That is bravery. Taking the action of smiling first breaks the ice. You are all mothers, you are all bringing up children, you are all the same, and you are all human.

Hearing these stories gives more of an insight for us as educators to support our students and families in a better way.

Conclusion

As an Afghan migrant who works with refugees and migrants, I am continuously astonished by the stories of people's journeys: journeys of heartbreak, trauma and struggle, and of faith, strength and persistence. This paper has focused on a group of Afghan mothers. I also work with children, fathers and wider communities. After all the experiences each had endured, the eyes of the mothers I worked with never failed to lose their gleam of hope (see Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture & Dulwich Centre Foundation International, 2019).

In traditional Afghan culture, we didn't have counselling and there was a big stigma if someone was said to have 'mental problems'. I was able to respond to many difficult problems because they were raised in the context of a simple playgroup meeting for mothers and children. Although the playgroup was aimed at increasing the involvement of parents in their local school to ensure their children received the benefits of a good education, many other topics were also raised in the group, and sometimes a mother sought me out for one-to-one help. All manner of difficult topics were raised in our playgroup meetings, including health problems, financial problems, trauma-related anxiety problems and domestic violence. It can be difficult to speak about these topics in the community, but I believe that by using collective documents and inviting outsider-witness responses we can find a way to begin speaking about these things together in a respectful way.

The narrative ideas of co-research, double listening and attending to the 'absent but implicit' allowed me to draw on and prioritise insider knowledge (Meyer, 2015). By positioning the women as co-researchers, they were able to take on an important role in addressing their collective problems.

Understanding the therapist and client as co-researchers who are investigating the effects of problems and the client's solution knowledge was a significant departure from commonly held beliefs about therapy. It is a metaphor for practice that many have found very helpful. (Denborough, 2012)

When I listened to stories of problems and hardships, I was also listening for the women's skills, abilities, cultural values, customs and experiences. I tried to find ways to acknowledge each individual and the abilities she had but may not have been aware of. When interviewing the women, I tried to simplify and individualise the questions so they were appropriate to their level of knowledge and education and provided them with a safe space to share their stories. The effects of negative experiences were reduced when we shared them together. Later when we shared the stories and document with the school staff, they learnt about what we had suffered, and how we had been able to decide not to take this hate into our hearts. The women said that they feel a sense of comfort and pride to know that their collected stories could contribute to reducing suffering for families coming into the school system in future years (see Denborough, 2010).

I would like to plan a future project to invite the men from this community to speak about their experiences, and to invite responses from the women. And to invite young people to share their experiences and inviting responses from their parents, in a similar way to the 'Kite of Life' collective document (Denborough, 2010).

Note

- ¹ Dari is one of the main languages in Afghanistan; Hazaragi is a dialect spoken by specific ethnic group (Hazaras).

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