

Podcast Transcript for Stories of

Making and Migration with DOSTI

Ravinder:

Embroidery is traditional because they tell us that back in their home countries, they embroidered saris, their own clothes, they embroidered sheets. Nobody bought anything from outside. They used to embroider, they used to knit jumpers. Nobody bought any jumpers.

I mean, the speed that some of these ladies knit at, it's incredible. They can do a jumper probably in a day or two. So that's the talent that they brought back with them. And sometimes they do feel that it's being lost here, but we try to bring it back here and, you know, encourage them to show us and show the younger people.

Hayley:

Alongside our current exhibition, Made in the Middle, Craftspace have been collecting stories of making and migration. Today, I went along to the dusty group in Alum Rock. I met with Ravinder from Go Woman alliance, who introduced me to some of the ladies who go there every week alongside this podcast.

I'd recommend heading to the Craftspace website where you can see photos of the work they've produced with knitting, crochet, embroidery and some incredibly intricate paper flowers, which are all around the room, decorating the space.

[Music]

Ravinder:

My name is Ravinder Tagga and I run the DOSTI group and I have done for a number of years. And the word DOSTI means friendship, so we thought it was a fitting title for this group.

A little bit of background history about DOSTI Group. So there's lots of groups for younger ladies, parents, children, and we found that in the community there wasn't any space for the elderly, and so they were very isolated. So we picked up on that and we thought, hang on a minute, there's a gap here and we need to address it.

So we set up a group which was only a couple of grandmas at first, and they used to come, and then we did a bit of knitting, bit of crocheting with them. They started to teach us what skills they had, and then the group just grew and grew and grew.

And now we have about 35 women that come, and they're not just grandmas, they're young girls as well, who come and learn, who want to socialise, they want to learn how to knit, they want to go back to their roots and see, you know, there's a lot of stuff out there you can buy, but some of them are willing to learn, they want to crochet and stuff. So the group has really benefited, not just socialising, but for the mental health as well.

Previously, we've done a project with Heartland Hospital, where we've made little hats for premature babies and little mittens. So we did a project and they all took part in that.

We've got a lady that makes flowers. Very, very talented lady. You wouldn't even tell that there were paper flowers.

As you can see, we've got flowers. We've got a couple of rooms that, you know, very kindly given her time and said "have these flowers and put them in the table."

Member of DOSTI Group:

I come in this class for four years, yeah. This is my family as well, the class, they all support me. That's why I call family.

I didn't know before. I just came to this class to learn English. But one day I met one of the teacher, Kiran. She just asked me "if you got stress, what did you do?" I told her I make flowers, but she support me. They all support me.

That's why I'm really happy here, to improve my work. I learned from YouTube. I watch every video 10, 15 times. *[Laughter]*

Haleema:

Hi, I'm Haleema. I'm 20 years old. I've been attending this group for like four months. I think it's a nice break from uni. It relaxes me, especially knitting, learning how to knit. There's no judging here. Everyone's welcome. It's really nice because they share the wisdom with me. So it's kind of nice because they understand Urdu as well, so I can interact with them and get to know the culture a bit.

Ravinder:

So we've got Bengali community, we've got the Muslim community, we've got Somali community.

They all come together. They all come together. The local ladies, some come from far. We have English ladies as well. Sometimes Iranian ladies come, and we do have ladies that come outside the area. They catch 2 buses to come here.

And ladies that are new to the country, it's a safe space for them. They can be amongst their own and speak their own language and then know what's available in the community for them. It's a lovely mix because some of the younger girls, they want to learn crocheting and then they're like, wow, you've just done that now? Can we learn as well?

And we do have a lot of young ladies that come and they want to learn as well. And, you know, they not only learning crochet, they learn about the olden days, what used to happen and what's happening now. Some young people are more, you know, willing to know what used to happen in your days, because things have changed now, you know. But, yeah, they love it, they love it, and they do participate in it.

Member of DOSTI Group:

So I'm being doing here courses, and I'm doing here embroidering as well. And teaching other ladies too.

When I was small, one lady lived next door. They always do this, I always look at them and I pick it up from there.

This one I write here, the love between Raya, which one is my granddaughter Raya, and Dado, grandma is forever.

And one pillow I make the for my granddaughter from my son, her dad. He gave me the message, said mom, can you write this for me? So I write this, and I made the cushion for myself for his daughter.

I enjoy when I come here. I get happy. When I teach other people and help other people. I feel really good.

Ravinder:

We've got people that come from far and wide just for this group runs from 9 til 3, every Tuesday. The structure is 9 o'clock, they'll come and if there's some older ladies that want to learn English, we do an English class for an hour and then at 11 o'clock we do a yoga class. We have a community lunch where we all sit together and eat and then they socialise again.

And by 3 o'clock they're all leaving ready for the next session. And it's just a lovely day and we do have some ladies that say, oh, I can't wait till Tuesday comes around.

I myself, since I've been doing this group, I've learnt crocheting, just 10 minutes here, 10 minutes there. I'm not a dab hand but you know, but I've learnt how to do it and they're willing to teach.

[Music]

Hayley:

This podcast was produced by Craftspace, for Stories of Making and Migration, a project sitting alongside our current touring exhibition Made in the Middle, funded by Arts Council England.

We met with makers across the Midlands. They are everyday makers who craft for themselves. This could be making at home in a local studio with a community group as a form of activism for their well being or much more.

You can view more stories from this project on the Craftspace website with podcasts, photos and short films. Visit <https://craftspace.co.uk/mitm-making-stories/>.

We're also on social media so let us know your own making stories and journeys through craft. We'd love to hear from you.