

Embracing Change and Mental Health Advocacy: My Journey as a Muslim

I am Amir and moving from Afghanistan to Australia in 2016 was both challenging and transformative. At 12 years old, moving to a new country meant more than just a change in location. It was also a shift in my cultural and religious identity. Here's how I adjusted to my new life, faced mental health challenges, and learned the importance of advocating for mental health while staying true to my faith. When we arrived in Australia, everything felt different. The city was huge, with tall buildings, and the cold weather was a big change from the warm temperatures we were used to. I was excited about starting fresh, but I also felt uncertain. As a young Muslim, moving meant finding my place in a new and diverse environment.



Starting school was one of the hardest parts. I was in a class where everyone spoke English, but I only knew a little. The teachers talked fast, and I often didn't understand what was going on. I had trouble talking with other students and felt alone. The school, which should have been a place to learn and make friends, felt confusing. At home, my parents worked long hours to support us. My father worked in a factory, and my mother cleaned houses.

In Australia, I felt different because of my language and religion. My faith is very important to me, and adjusting to a new country meant finding a way to practice Islam where it wasn't common. I missed praying at our local mosque and celebrating Ramadan with our community. Everything was new and unfamiliar, which made me feel even more alone. Sometimes, kids at school asked about my religion or made comments that made me uncomfortable. They didn't understand my traditional clothes or religious practices, which made me feel like an outsider.

As months went by, my sadness grew stronger. I didn't know why I was so unhappy and was too shy to talk about it. I tried to act okay, but inside, I felt hopeless. The sadness felt overwhelming, making it hard to focus or find joy. I felt stuck, and the stress of adjusting to a new culture and feeling misunderstood was heavy on me. I wanted help but didn't know how to explain my feelings. One day, my teacher noticed I was very quiet. She kindly suggested I talk to the school counsellor. Even though I was nervous, I agreed. Meeting the counsellor was a big step. She listened to me and explained that I was dealing with depression, which means feeling very sad and hopeless for a long time. The counsellor taught me ways to handle my feelings, like deep breathing and writing in a diary. Writing helped me understand my emotions better.

When my parents learned about my depression, they were very concerned. They realized they needed to be more involved in my emotional well-being and started spending more time with me. We began having regular family dinners where we talked openly about our feelings. This new routine helped me feel more connected and supported. As I began to feel better, I also found ways to reconnect with my faith. I joined a local mosque, where I met other Muslims with similar experiences. This connection made me feel more at home and gave me a sense of community. Practicing my faith and participating in religious activities was comforting. Ramadan, a special

time for Muslims, became a period of reflection and growth for me. Celebrating Ramadan in Australia was different, but it gave me a chance to make new connections and start new traditions. This experience showed me that even in a new place, I could keep my faith and find ways to include it in my life.

By sharing my story, I hope to raise awareness about mental health issues and the effects of cultural and religious changes. It's important to talk openly about mental health and seek help when needed. I also want to help others understand and respect different cultures and religions. Promoting kindness and understanding can create a welcoming environment where everyone feels valued. As I continue to adjust to life in Australia, I am thankful for the support I've received and the lessons I've learned. My journey hasn't been easy, but it has been crucial for my growth. I am learning to handle change and face new challenges with hope and confidence. Even when things are tough, I know there's always a way forward. My story shows that with patience, support, and determination, we can overcome difficulties and find happiness.

In the future, I hope to keep raising awareness about mental health and support others who are struggling. My journey has shown me that while change can be difficult, it can also help us grow and open new opportunities. My move from Afghanistan to Australia has been a journey of learning and strength. Each step has taught me about strength, hope, and the importance of support. As I move ahead, I know that even though change is hard, it can lead to growth and new chances. The support from my family, teachers, and counsellor has been incredibly helpful. I want to use what I've learned to assist others facing similar challenges. By sharing my story and advocating for mental health, I hope to make a positive difference and encourage those who need it.

My journey is ongoing, and I am learning to face each new chapter with hope and determination. With every challenge, I gain more confidence and a better understanding of myself. My story shows that with support, we can overcome difficulties and find happiness. I stay hopeful and ready to face whatever comes next with a strong spirit and a commitment to making a positive impact.