

Clinic is life-changing for survivors of cruel act

For female genital mutilation (FGM) survivor Basma Medhat, accessing help at the Midlands' only clinic for non-pregnant women was a life-changing experience. The student, originally from Egypt, had struggled to find a service to help her in her homeland. But that changed when she moved to the UK and was put in touch with specialist FGM Midwife Alison Byrne, who works for the Trust.

Alison heads up two clinics – one for non-pregnant woman based at Summerfield Primary Care Centre in Heath Street, Winson Green, whilst the other is for pregnant woman who are referred by their community midwife and is based at City Hospital. Basma was able to self-refer to the non-pregnant clinic for treatment.

Speaking ahead of International Day of Zero Tolerance Against FGM on February 6, she explained: "I had no experience before coming in the UK with seeking help and support for FGM. I always felt stigmatised and services were not available. Once I moved to the UK, I was so motivated to start helping myself after learning that FGM was affecting my periods which is something I always suffered from.

"Finding the clinic in Birmingham and arranging an appointment with Alison to get her advice was life changing for me. Since starting to explore and understand FGM more, I became more accepting of my body and stopped feeling guilty about something I've never chosen for myself.

"Now I'm doing a MA in women and child abuse at London Metropolitan University and I hope to be able to help and support other women in the future to use these services and share their experiences."

Speaking of the service Alison added: "It's important that women who may be survivors of this practice know how they can seek help.

"The Trust offers the only Midlands-based clinic for non-pregnant women. It is in the heart of the community and will help many women who sometimes are unsure about how to access care or treatment after undergoing this procedure.

"Figures recording the number of women who have had FGM are high. But there are many more out there who haven't come forward or do not realise that they are a survivor of FGM, as it is the norm within their culture.

"We want to really push out the message that this clinic is there for them to access and can be done so discreetly and in the strictest of confidence."

The clinic is one of eight across the UK, as previously announced by NHS England as part of its long-term plan.

Anyone can refer to the clinic, be it the survivor, their GP, or other clinicians.

“If someone comes across a person they think needs help, they are able to refer as it’s important the woman does receive help and support,” Alison continued.

“The Trust also offers a clinic for pregnant women, and referrals for this come through their community midwife.

“Some women don’t realise they have undergone FGM until they become pregnant. They are then treated accordingly for this whilst they are pregnant.”

To refer to the clinic for non-pregnant women email swbh.summerfieldfgm@nhs.net.
Basma’s story was featured on Midlands Today earlier this month.