

# Graphic Lives

## Telling Bangladeshi migrant women's stories through graphic narratives

Graphic Lives was a joint project between Manchester Metropolitan University and Hyde Community Action in 2017-18. It was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and saw a group of women from the Bangladeshi community in Hyde, Greater Manchester exploring their own life stories, and the historical narratives of their communities, to create digital comics.

We ran a series of workshops to encourage the women to think and talk about their stories: we talked about personal and community histories; developed digital skills such as editing photos; looked at different ways of telling stories through comics; and visited the Whitworth Art Gallery and Manchester Museum.

Each of the women had her own mini tablet computer to collect photos and start to build up her story. We used an app called Book Creator (<https://bookcreator.com/>) that meant the women could incorporate words in any language as well as images. The idea was that, using different languages and different media, the women could express ideas are difficult to communicate in written English alone. Some produced drawings that they then scanned and added to their comic, while others searched online for images, and yet others made copies of their own family photographs and digitally altered them so people were not easily recognisable. In producing their final comics, most of the women used a combination of these methods.

This booklet contains summary versions of each of the comics to give you an overview of their stories. For full versions of the comic books the women created, please visit <https://goo.gl/Ty2nAT>.

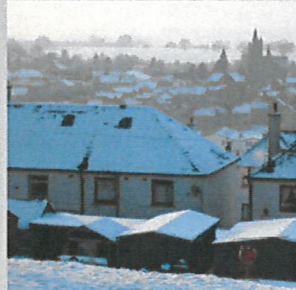






## Amina's Story

Coming to the UK, I had to face a lots of difficulties. I have to learn English language. It was a different environment. I had more responsibilities as I lived with my in-laws for the first 6 years. The cold weather!

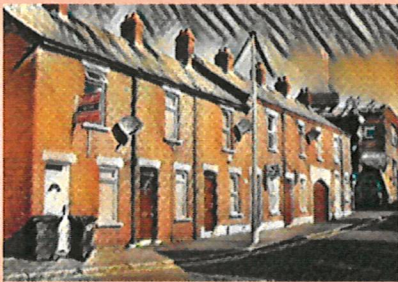


My in-laws owned a factory. I worked long days at the factory. I have learnt to use so many different machines.



I couldn't learn to speak English for a few years due to being stuck working in the factory.

I moved to my own house after 6 years. I had two daughters by that time.



I was looking for work. I had a terrible pregnancy. But I started to meet people outside. I started learning English and took short courses.



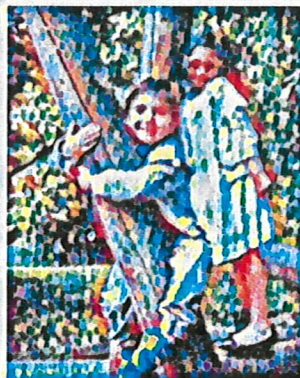
My career development continued. I studied at college while my kids were in the crèche.



At present, I am living with my two children. Both have graduated and have done well.



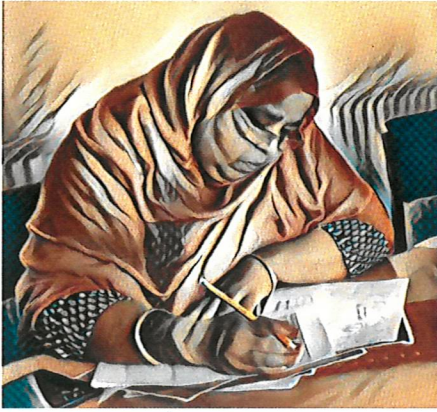
My eldest daughter is married and I have two grandchildren.



I would love to see my other two children married soon. I would like grandchildren from all my children!







# Aysha's Story

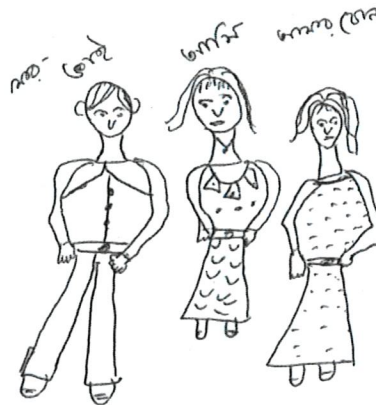
This is my mum and dad. We were a happy family: mother, father, brother and sister. My dad used to live in the UK while I was in Bangladesh with my mother, my sister and my brother. But when I was 11, my father passed away.

This is me in Bangladesh with my sister when we were girls.



This is my sister, my brother and me. My sister still lives in Bangladesh and I miss her a lot.

After my dad passed away, my mum struggled because it is really hard being a single parent in Bangladesh. There are no benefits like there are in the UK.



I am still close to my sister. I visited her in 2013. She gave me this bangle. I like it very much.



I got married in Bangladesh and had all my three children there.

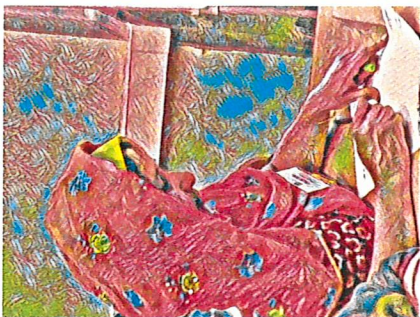


I came to the UK first. I came on my own and left my husband and children in Bangladesh. I applied for a visa for them, but I had to wait one year for them to come to England to join me.

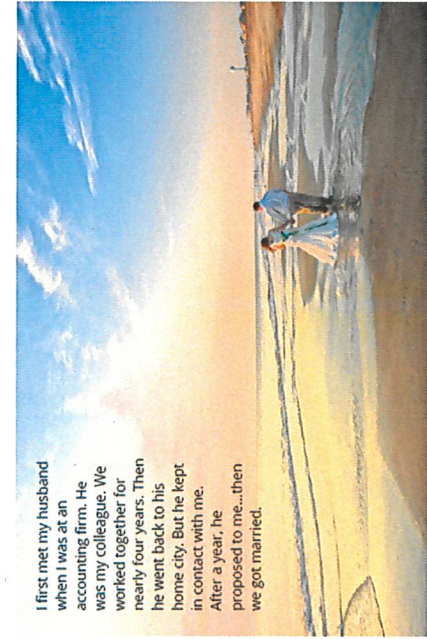


This is one of my memories of Bangladesh. My in-laws used to live on the other side of this lake. I had to pass over the bridge to go to their house. It was a very scary experience walking on this bridge!

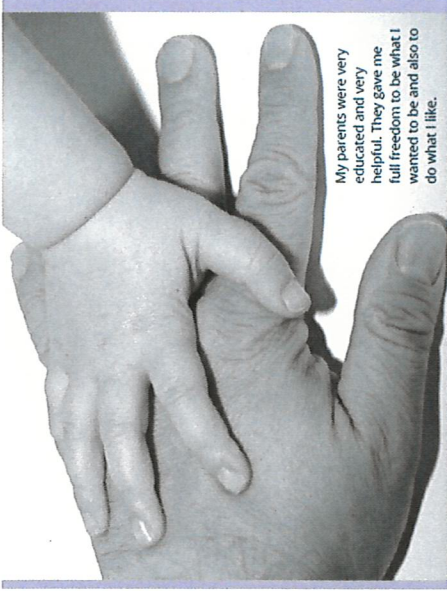




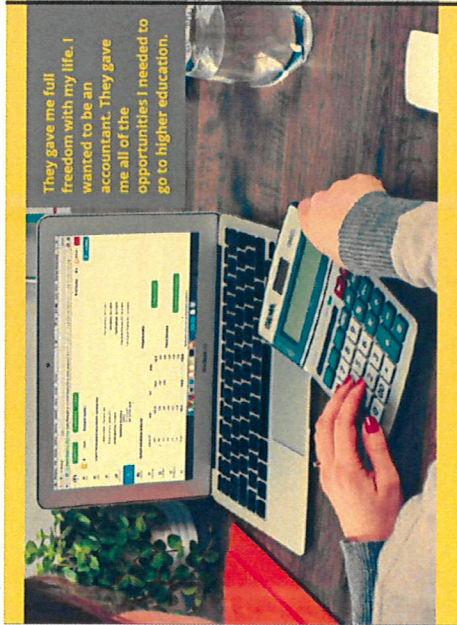
# Fatima's Story



I first met my husband when I was at an accounting firm. He was my colleague. We worked together for nearly four years. Then he went back to his home city. But he kept in contact with me. After a year, he proposed to me...then we got married!



My parents were very educated and very helpful. They gave me full freedom to be what I wanted to be and also to do what I like.



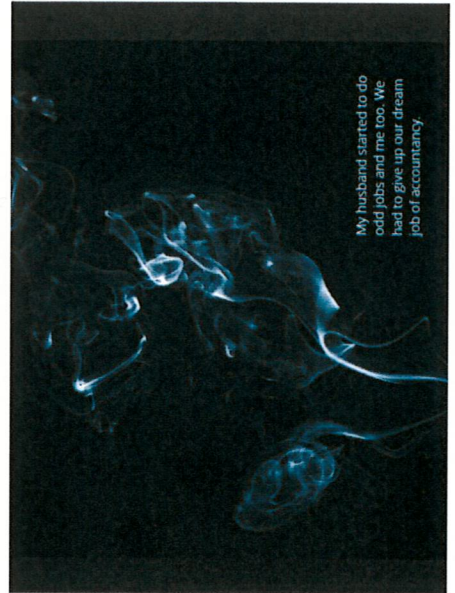
They gave me full freedom with my life. I wanted to be an accountant. They gave me all of the opportunities I needed to go to higher education.



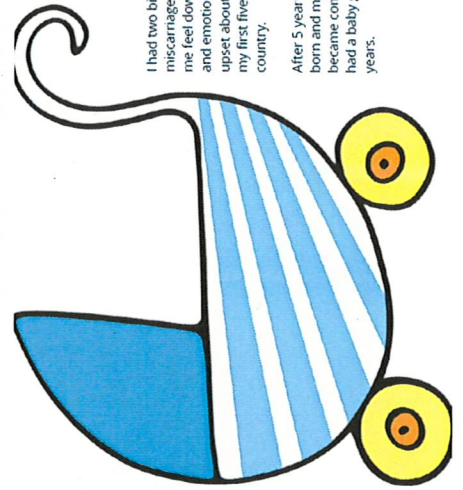
I was so happy in my country like the blue bright sky in my home country in Bangladesh.



I joined my in-law family in the UK. Me and my husband wanted to do further study here, but it became so difficult for us. There were so many problems.



My husband started to do odd jobs and me too. We had to give up our dream job of accountancy.



I had two big miscarriages, which made me feel down physically and emotionally. I was so upset about this during my first five years in this country.

After 5 years, my boy was born and my family became complete. Then I had a baby girl after 4 years.



Now I am happy about my family. But now I want to fulfil my dream: to be an accountant in this country and to learn to drive.







## Juie's Story



When I finished high school, it was very difficult for me because everything was up to me now.



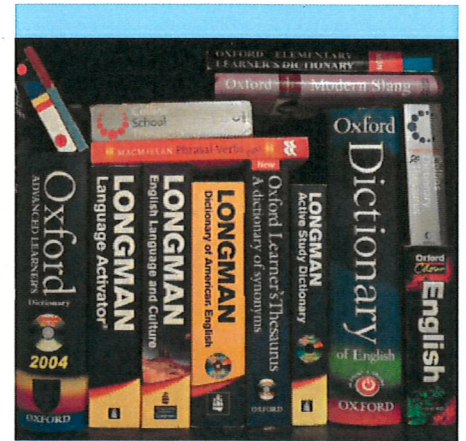
We moved house. I went to college and I was happy. I made new friends.



But I wasn't able to finish my college course because I got married.



Two and half years later, I joined my husband in England.



I joined an ESOL course. I didn't finish it, but I want to improve my English skills.

I want to learn advanced computer skills too.



I have lived in the UK for 9 years now, but I still miss my family every day.

I hope I will achieve all my dreams...







# Sadisa's Story

When I was little, I became very close to my mum. She is very loving and encourages me with everything. I remember learning to cook by watching and helping her.

When I was 10 years old, I went to a boarding school on my own. In the beginning, it was difficult to live without my family, but later I got used to it.

I was doing Islamic study and I became an Alima (a female Quran teacher) at the age of 16.

I moved to the UK and started living with my in-laws. It was very hard at the beginning to adjust to living with my in-laws and being in a new country.

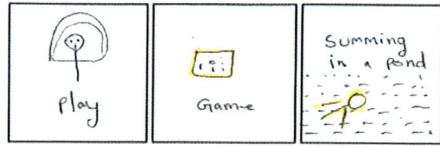
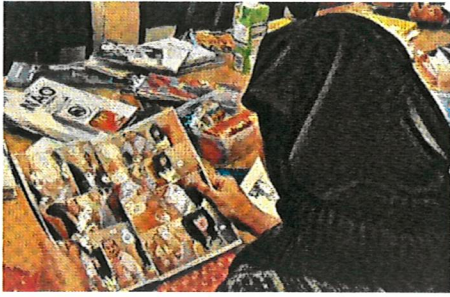
Now I teach Arabic to local children. I had to stop for a few years when I had my children, but now I am teaching again as my children are growing up.

At the moment, I am a full-time carer for my mother-in-law.

I am learning more English to develop further.

Graphic Lives is the first project I have participated in. I am really enjoying it and I am pleased to take part.

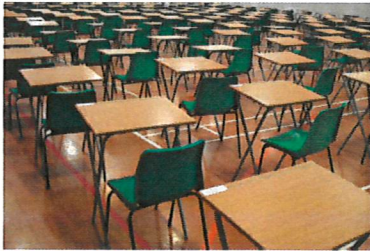




# Samia's Story

When I was 12, I liked playing all the time. I didn't like going to school! I would play games and swim in the pond instead.

But when I was 15, I stopped playing and started to care about my education.



So when I was 19, I got married and stopped my education. I was very sad to leave my family. I was also upset not to complete my education.



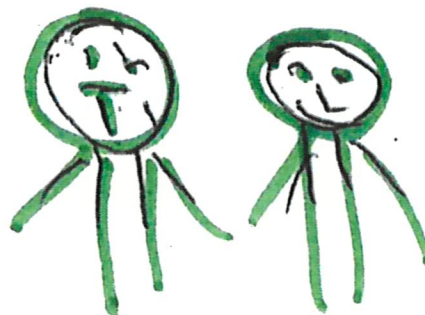
But I didn't do well in my SSC (school leaving exam).

I came to England with my husband. I was a bit nervous. Everything was new and different. I had to face many challenges and adjustments.

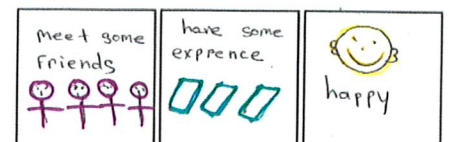
The textiles we saw in the Whitworth Art Gallery remind me of my wedding sari.



I missed my old friends and my mum. I was very sad.



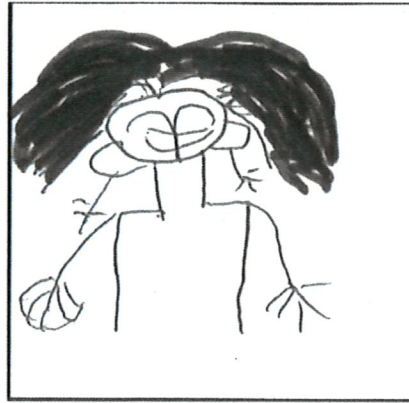
But now I have children.



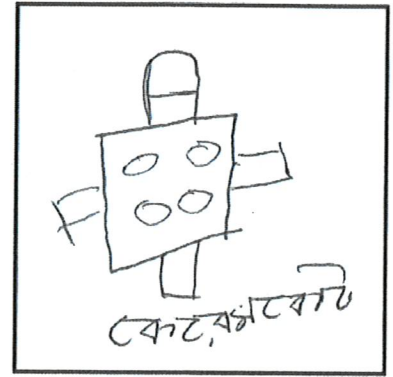
I want to meet new friends and have some happy experiences.



## Shahida's Story



This is me when I was a girl. I was happy and had no worries.



I like playing with my friends. We play a board game.



This is my family.



I miss my three boys and two girls in Bangladesh.

They need to pass the English test to come to the UK.



My husband is in Bangladesh too. He looks after the children. We have been apart for 8 years.



I like gardening. I had a garden in Bangladesh and I like gardening here too.

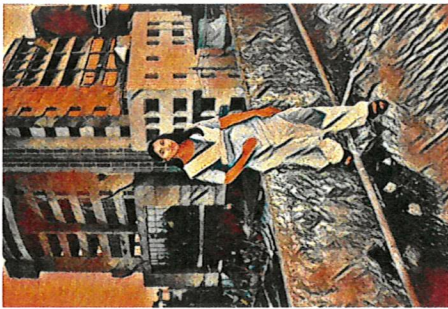


Now I live in Hyde in Greater Manchester. I am happy to come to Hyde Healthy Living Centre because I can get good help here and I have friends here.

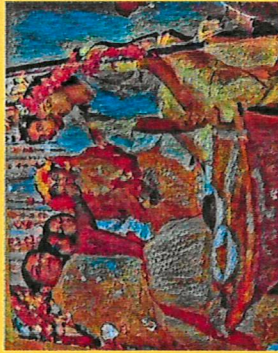


I imagine that in the future my husband and children have passed the English test and can come to England to live with me. I feel excited and happy.

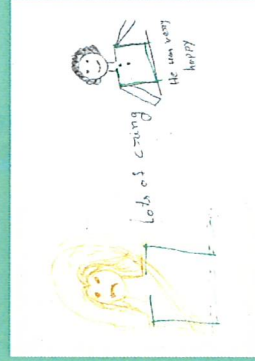




# Shapla's Story



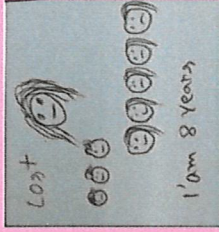
We are five sisters in this photo. This photo is part of my sister's wedding. It's a celebration called Gaye Holud and Mehndi party. But I can't remember all of the things that happened on that day!



When I saw the plane taking us from Bangladesh to the UK, I was crying a lot, but my husband felt very happy. This was not my first journey. My first plane journey was with my husband from Sylhet to Dhaka.

I am Shapla. My family has eight children, we are five sisters and three brothers. My mum I call Amma and my dad I call Abba.

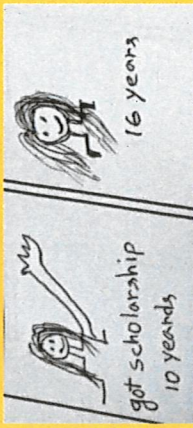
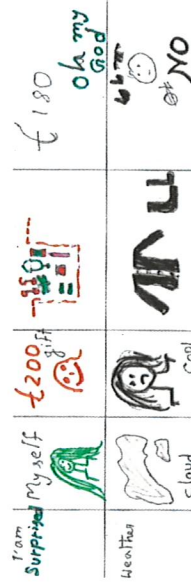
When I was eight years old, my Abba passed away. I am the youngest of my family.



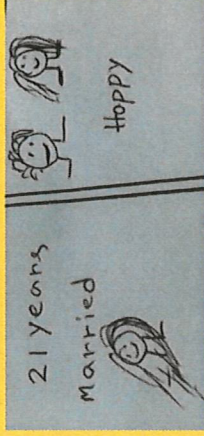
I wanted to be a doctor or a teacher, but money was a big problem. So I couldn't take up this profession. My heart was broken.

But I continued my studies in a general way and eventually passed my Masters of Political Science in M.C. College in Sylhet.

When I came to the UK, I faced lots of differences between the UK and Bangladesh, especially the weather, value of money, clothes and many others things. I was surprised at how much things cost. And I didn't like wearing winter clothes.



After I lost my dad, my young mind was broken. But I was very, very good as a student. When I was 10 years old, I got three scholarships. Remembering those times, I feel very happy. This happiness continued until I was sixteen years old.



When I was 21, I got married to a British Bangladeshi and I felt happy.



After I was married, I faced lots of immigration problem and my husband spent lots of money and was very fed up. But after 5 years I got my UK visa. My family and my husband's family felt so happy.





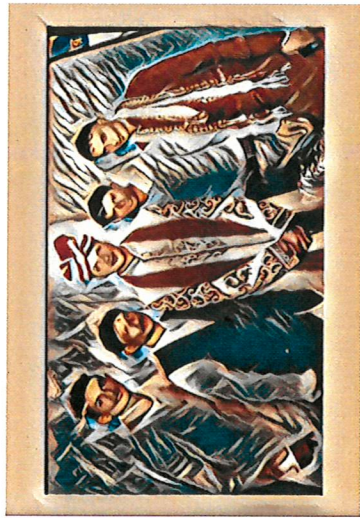
# Siddika's Story



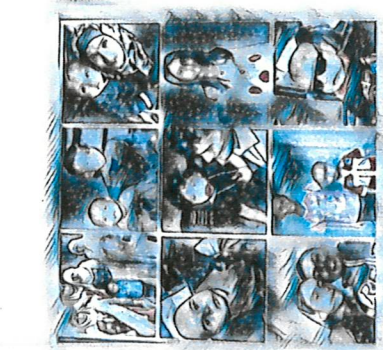
I really miss my dad. He died, but I still have his prayer cap. It helps me to remember him.



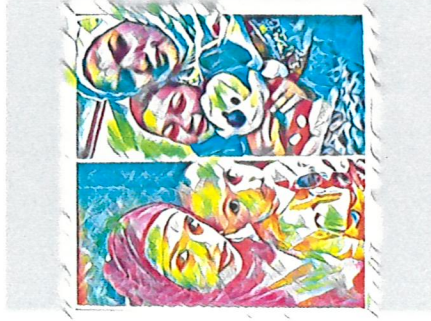
I miss my mum because she is in Bangladesh. I miss my family too.



These are my five brothers. I miss them all. I'm proud of my brothers: they are very strong. If I have any problems, my middle brother will solve them because he is very clever.



I really miss my nieces and nephews. I love them very much.



I miss my sister. I am a bit naughty and she is quieter. We like buying the same clothes.



I have been through many difficulties in my relationship, but I need to be strong for my boys. Things are better now, but I still struggle - sometimes the memories come back.



I have been through many struggles, but I don't complain because the things I have been through make me stronger.



In the future, I imagine my family: my mum, my sister, my brothers, and my nephews and nieces coming here. Finally I am tension-free! I know that if I have any problems, my family will sort them out; they are very supportive.





**Created as part of 'Graphic Lives: telling Bangladeshi migrant women's stories through graphic narratives'**

In 2017, women from the British Bangladeshi community in Hyde explored their own life stories and the history of their communities through life history, cross-cultural storytelling and digital skills, as well as visits to museums and galleries. They then created digital comics using photographs, drawings and text.

This was a joint project between Manchester Metropolitan University and Hyde Community Action, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.