

Sana Ismail is 14 and lives with her mother, Sajeda, in Bolton.

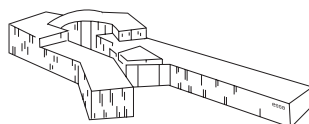
Sana's shyness could have held her back in life, but Essa Academy was **not prepared to let that happen**

A nervous start

Sana Ismail is a Year 10 student at Essa Academy and very glad to be so. For various reasons, Essa had not been her mother's first choice of school but now both she and Sana believe that if she had gone elsewhere she would not be the happy and contented person she is today.

"When I started in Year 7 I was rather shy and nervous and there were things I found quite difficult to deal with because of that. Going to any secondary school is a big step and as I was very quiet it was difficult for me to find a way to fit in. At times I felt I was overlooked in favour of the students who were more confident and who stood out in some way and I feel now that I was very fortunate that my teachers recognised this and found a very effective way to help me."

essa
Academy
'All Will Succeed'



Growing in confidence

Sana's mother, Sajeda, could not agree more. "Because Sana was so reserved I had wanted a smaller secondary school for her but now I know we could not possibly have done better than Essa. Sana has grown in confidence and maturity more than I could ever have thought and I believe that is largely due to the care she has received in every way from Essa Academy. As a parent, there is only so much you can do and it is important to have a strong partnership between family and school. That's what we have and I am extremely grateful for it."

Speaking up for the minority

Sana was offered support from a Social Capital Leader (SCL) at the school, who not only took time to listen to her concerns but understood her point of view so well that many of her observations were acted upon to the benefit of other students as well as Sana herself. "It was very encouraging to feel that someone was prepared to take what I had to say seriously," says Sana. "It's not always easy for teachers to realise that some pupils are struggling if they don't speak up and because they don't speak up they can get overlooked. What Essa did for me was to give me strategies to improve my confidence and although it was a bit daunting at first, it worked amazingly well."

Recognition of ability

As well as taking on board Sana's views on how to address certain issues relating to the more vulnerable students, her SCL gave her a range of responsibilities which although challenging, were just what she needed. "I was asked to help out at various school functions which meant a lot of interaction with new students and their parents, something I was a bit scared about at first but actually made me realise that I had the ability to do it well. It got easier, and now I really enjoy helping out and meeting new people; it's also a great way to make new friends."

A leap of faith

Another thing which went a long way to giving Sana some of the confidence she had lacked was the visit she made to Morocco with the One World charity. "This was a two-week expedition abroad, the first time I had ever been such a long time and distance away from home and I spent my 14th birthday there," she says. "It was a scary prospect for me and my mum but we both realised that it was an opportunity not to be missed and something which would not be possible if the school hadn't helped to put it in place for me."

Sajeda admits to being absolutely terrified: "Sana was only 13, still fairly shy and didn't know anyone else involved in the expedition very well, and there I was, agreeing to her spending two weeks away in another country. It was only because I completely trusted her teachers to take care of her that I agreed and it is difficult to express how glad I am now that I did so. I am immensely proud of her for the way she handled an extremely challenging situation and so glad that it worked out so well. The fact that she had little choice but to form close bonds with people she didn't already know well was actually a positive aspect and gave her greater faith in her own abilities."



Dream come true

Sana spent a week helping to support pupils at a local school and then a further week trekking through the hills and deserts of the Northern Sahara. "It was all very hard work, physically and emotionally, but it was exceptionally beneficial for me in lots of ways. I learned such a lot about myself and other people; it was something I couldn't otherwise have dreamed of and I'll never forget the experience." Sana also had to overcome her shyness in order to raise money to fund her trip, and this was another challenge she successfully overcame.

So much to offer

Sajeda is a teacher herself and believes that what she has seen at Essa has given her an even greater insight into her job. "I have learned a lot from Sana's experience. Because her teachers had time for her she has flourished, knowing she is just as important as everyone else despite her reserved personality. A school's pastoral care of its students is every bit as important as the academic provision and is the most effective way to get the very best from every one of them. Sana and I are in total agreement that it is Essa Academy which has made her into who she is – a confident and emotionally mature young lady with a great deal to offer."

**Essa Academy, Lever Edge Lane, Bolton,
United Kingdom, BL3 3HH.**

t: +44(0)1204 333222 e: info@essaacademy.org

essa
Academy
'All Will Succeed'

