



Sahar

SAHAR ABDULLA

Sahar is originally from Syria and studied Geosciences at Damascus University before joining Shell's workforce in the city. She moved to Scotland with her family to study for a masters in 2004, finally settling in Aberdeen where she forged a successful career in oil and gas before pivoting to community-focused work based around social inclusion and global citizenship. She speaks Arabic and English and is a published writer in both languages (her writing blog *Nothing But Words* can be found at: saharabdulla.wordpress.com/about)



In Syria, to learn another language is compulsory... Where I was born originally, in the middle of Syria, French [often taught in Syria] wasn't that popular, so English was the mainstream language. I was 12 when I first learned it. But I loved also my teacher. And since the age of 12/13, I love the language because of that. And that just grew with me and I kept up with English...

[My son] was six when we came, so he already got Arabic. He used to speak and write fluently, but he lost it because of the move here. But with our daughter, it was more challenging because she was born here, went to nursery here... She struggled understanding us when we spoke, and she struggled to communicate more with her dad because he was looking after her. His English wasn't competent. Her Arabic was almost zero... But now she's 19, so now she understands perfect Arabic... and she speaks fully with me in Arabic and with others.

When I came to Aberdeen to work in 2005, I didn't know any Arabic speaking people and I was working 9-to-5 for many years in an international companies with international people, so English was the only spoken language for me for years. And that, in a way, also limited my social exposure to the Arabic community. So I would say speaking English guided my social manoeuvres in the city – most of my network or friends were families through my son in schools or in the community centre. It was only in 2016 when I lost the oil and gas job and I tried to find another job, translation was the easiest because I speak both languages and refugees were starting to arrive to the northeast and Aberdeen... only at that point of time, 2016 till now, I started to use Arabic more.

I was born in Arabic, and I live in both, Arabic and English. This reminds me of Mahmoud's Darwish great poem: *I am from there but not there, I am here but not here.*



When people ask you, 'where are you from?' I've never felt offended. I make fun of it. I say 'guess' because I consider all humanity are like refugees in a way or another. So we are just all individuals in this world.



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