**One Million Stories – Salma**

British Tennis has a mission to get more people playing tennis more often and a big part of this is played by female participation. Salma is one of the great examples that showcase why tennis participation accounted a growth of +15.8% for females in October last year, against a declining trend

#### **Salma’s journey through physical activity in London was probably more challenging than the average one. However, the challenges and barriers that she’s facing haven’t stopped her from being active. At the age of 31, tennis is her favourite activity and with support from local organisations she has also been involved in netball, jogging or gym sessions in the park. Read on to find out more about Salma’s story.**

##### **Tell us about London… Why is it so unique?**

##### What makes London unique is the welcoming environment open to everyone. People of all colours, ages, shapes and sizes come together and form something marvellous. I have lived in London all my life and have travelled over the world. However, I feel most comfortable being in the area I live – Isle of Dogs. When I first moved here, I got so excited to see that I have access to parks and leisure centres, which are very close to where I live. We are fortunate to be in the docklands as we have the riverside walkways and other nearby facilities such as the yacht club, rowing club, farm and many more.

##### **How do you use these spaces to be physically active?**

##### We use the riverside walkway to go jogging on Friday morning. The walkway provides us with a better level of privacy to jog freely, safely and enjoy a refreshing breeze from the river while we jog. We are eagerly waiting for an outdoor gym opening in Island Garden Park which will be accessible and free for everyone to use. Our schools parents were involved in the consultations that were the foundation of this. We plan to use the gym as part of our Friday morning jogs with a gym session at the park. I also have St John’s Park only a few minutes away from my flat. We started to use the tennis courts there twice weekly thanks to the Active Local Links Project, London Sport and Tower Hamlets Tennis. We have free beginners tennis lessons on Tuesday and cardio tennis on Thursdays, which was funded by [Tower Hamlets Tennis](http://www.towerhamletstennis.org.uk/) and London Sport. On Thursdays after tennis, I attend a keep fit class.

##### **What was your journey through physical activity and sport, what got you to where you are now?**

From a young age, I have always enjoyed taking part in any physical activity. During my secondary education, I was part of the netball team and competed in local tournaments. I played the position of goal attack and goal shooter. I also competed in a national weightlifting competition held in Manchester and came first in my weight group. I always excelled in sports and was top of class in any sports activity and games. When I left secondary school I did not exercise much and concentrated on my studies. I was in good shape and didn’t feel the need to. I occasionally went swimming for fun. I then fell pregnant and had 3 children and saw myself go from a size 10 to a size 14. I really felt uncomfortable with my body and needed to do something about it. My time was spent looking after my children and as soon as they started school, I had some free time to try to get back into shape. I first started by walking. It made a dramatic impact on my size and this motivated me to carry on and take part in extra sports activities. I then started to do weight training at a local gym for women in Bethnal Green called Bodylines. I had to stop as this was an extra expense.

##### **How does physical activity fits with your lifestyle now?**

My children attend Cubitt Town Infants School, which has a Community House that provides workshops for parents from Cubitt Town Infants and Junior Schools to help them support their children’s learning and their own personal development. Some of the sports activities that are organised by Jacqui Jenkins (the Parent Liaison Coordinator) are tennis for beginners, cardio tennis, keep-fit classes and jogging. I joined all the activities when all my children were in school and nursery. I now see myself as being extremely active which has resulted in yielding an enormous amount of energy and has uplifted my mood. I have noticed along with other parents in the group who take part in these activities, that we have seen a massive improvement in our body size and well-being. We all recommend everyone to take part in any sports activity as it helps you physically and mentally and it’s all for free!

##### **What is your motivation and struggles to being physically active and how do you overcome these?**

What motivates me is seeing my time being using productively. I have an aim to get back into shape. One of my struggles is the need to cover up during when I exercise. I normally wear the niqab (face veil) and it is hard to exercise with it on. I do not wear the niqab when I run and because we run along the riverside there are not many people around, just other joggers or people walking their dogs. There several other Asian women who run with us and they wear clothes that they find comfortable to wear such as a jilbab (long dress) and shalwar kameez to run. I encourage everyone to take part in sports activity and not let the need to cover stop them. We are all capable of running with modest clothes on. We may think that people are watching us, but really we are more conscious of it ourselves.

##### **Why is physical activity essential to your identity, has it helped you overcome anything in life?**

I suffer from ankylosis spondylitis. This is a form of spinal arthritis and some of the symptoms are back pain, stiffness and extreme fatigue. I believe that I have relief from most of my symptoms by exercising regularly. It has helped to keep my moods up and energy levels boosted. There are times when I feel like I have no illness due to keeping active.

### **Do you have your own physical activity or sport story to tell?**Just get in touch with us to share your story.