SBAA
SOMALI BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS ASSOCIATION

June 2026

# The SBAA Quarterly

The official publication of the Somali Behaviour Analysis Association (SBAA)

A dabqaad is a traditional Somali incense burner, usually made of clay, stone, or metal, used to burn uunsi (incense) and aromatic resins. In Somali culture, it is commonly used in homes—especially by women—to perfume rooms, clothing, and hair. It also plays an important role in hospitality, celebrations, weddings, and daily household rituals. The fragrant smoke from a dabqaad is associated with cleanliness, warmth, and welcoming guests.

Issue 002

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# Editor's Message

As editor, I'm honoured to reflect on our recent SBAA event. This quarter's SBAA event marked an important moment for our community. What began as an opportunity to introduce ourselves and our work became something far more meaningful: a space where professionals, parents, advocates, and neurodivergent individuals came together to understand the importance of working together to provide the best support for individuals with neurodiverse needs.

As SBAA continues to grow, our aim is not simply to provide information or professional networking opportunities. Our long-term vision is larger than that. We hope to contribute towards building a society that understands autism and neurodiversity more deeply, one where families feel less isolated, where neurodivergent individuals are supported with dignity, and where collaboration between professionals and communities becomes the standard rather than the exception.

This event was only the beginning, but it reminded us of something important: meaningful change happens when communities come together with openness, compassion, and a shared commitment to understanding one another better.

With gratitude,

**Nasteya Mahamud**

*People and Partnerships Coordinator for the Somali Behaviour Analysis Association (SBAA).*

*Editor, Inaugural 2nd Issue – SBAA Quarterly*

# About The Event



On April 25th 2026, the Somali Behaviour Analysis Association (SBAA) hosted its first community event in London, bringing together professionals, parents, advocates, neurodivergent individuals, and community members for an afternoon centred on collaboration, understanding, and culturally informed support.

The aim of the event was not only to introduce SBAA and the work we hope to do within the community, but also to better understand the areas in which support is most needed and how professionals, families, and advocates can work together more effectively.

Throughout the day, attendees engaged in open conversations around autism, neurodiversity, mental health, communication, family support, and access to services. Professionals from different disciplines shared insights from their work, while parents and neurodivergent individuals contributed lived experiences that grounded the discussions in honesty and reality. The event created space for meaningful dialogue between those providing support and those directly navigating these systems every day.

A strong theme that emerged throughout the event was the importance of building culturally responsive systems of support. Many attendees reflected on the challenges Somali families often face when trying to access information, navigate services, or find professionals who understand the intersection of culture, faith, family dynamics, and neurodiversity.

One of the most significant outcomes of the gathering was hearing from late-diagnosed autistic and neurodivergent adults within the community who expressed a desire for greater understanding, connection, and support spaces designed with their experiences in mind. These conversations reinforced the importance of extending community support beyond childhood-focused services and

# About The Event


acknowledging the experiences of neurodivergent adults within Somali spaces.

More than anything, the event highlighted the power of bringing people together. It demonstrated that meaningful progress happens when professionals, families, advocates, and communities collaborate openly, share knowledge, and work towards a common goal: building a society that understands and supports neurodivergent individuals with dignity, compassion, and respect.

# Meet The Speakers


**Dr. Nafisa Darod**
Consultant Psychiatrist

## Question

**Where do you think the biggest gaps still exist in how we understand and support autistic people?**

I think one of the biggest gaps in neurodiversity support is still around diagnosis and understanding of how it shows up in ethnic minority communities and among women. So many people are missed because the signs can present differently, or because cultural stigma and lack of awareness delay recognition and support.

> ***So many people are missed because the signs can present differently, or because cultural stigma and lack of awareness delay recognition and support.***

# Meet The Speakers

**Munira**
Mother & Behaviour Therapist

## Question

**Reflecting on your journey as a mother what has been the hardest part of accessing services for your child, what was the hardest part and what has that taught you about how support systems need to improve?**

The hardest part before my daughter was assessed was fighting to be believed that she needed support. I often felt dismissed by family doctors and left feeling unheard when I knew something wasn't right. Another major challenge was the lack of clear information and guidance, I didn't know where to turn, what services were available, or how to access the right help for her.

That experience taught me how important it is for support systems to listen to parents early and take their concerns seriously.

Families need clearer information, better guidance, and quicker pathways to assessment and support. Early intervention and early assessments should be prioritised, because the sooner children receive help, the better the outcomes can be for both the child and their family.

> ***The sooner children receive help, the better the outcomes can be for both the child and their family.***

# Neurodiversity Corner

**Yazmin**
Diagnosed with Autism in Adulthood

> ***When I got my official diagnosis, I actually cried. I did not cry because I upset it was because it was a relief that finally I understand myself and I'm not broken, I don't need to be fixed.***

## Question

**How did receiving your diagnosis later in life change the way you understand yourself and what do you think is the most important thing when supporting adults on that journey?**

Before I got my diagnosis, I had done a lot of research online about autism and I felt like it made sense to me so when I got my official diagnosis, I actually cried. I did not cry because I upset it was because it was a relief that finally I understand myself and I'm not broken, I don't need to be fixed. I'm perfect just the way I am and there's people just like me. I was able to look back at the way I grew up and the last few years and realised that there was a reason why I did things the way I did and acted the way I did and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Even though I wish I'd got the diagnosis as a child, I was more able to understand what it truly meant as an adult.

The most important thing is, to remind people that no matter what, they are absolutely amazing no matter they're quirks, they're differences, they're struggles. Getting a diagnosis does not mean you are dramatic, it's just means you want to better understand yourself which is such a beautiful thing to do. Don't worry about other peoples opinions. If it's right for you then that's all that matters.

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# Why Collaboration Matters

Supporting neurodivergent individuals cannot rest on one person, one profession, or one system alone. Meaningful support is built through collaboration between families, clinicians, educators, advocates, and communities. each bringing different forms of knowledge, experience, and understanding.

Throughout the SBAA event, one message became increasingly clear: no single professional holds the entire picture. Behaviour analysts, psychiatrists, speech and language therapists, educators, mental health professionals, and community advocates all contribute valuable perspectives, but families and neurodivergent individuals themselves remain central to that understanding. Parents and carers often notice patterns, needs, strengths, and challenges long before systems do, while neurodivergent individuals bring lived experiences that professionals alone cannot replicate.

Collaboration also creates consistency. When professionals communicate openly with one another and with families, support becomes more coordinated, more respectful, and ultimately more effective. Neurodivergent individuals benefit most when the people around them work towards shared goals rather than isolated approaches.

For Somali families, culturally informed collaboration is especially important. Many families face barriers when navigating services, including language differences, stigma, limited awareness around neurodiversity, and systems that may not fully understand the role culture, faith, and family dynamics play in shaping experiences. Building collaborative spaces allows these realities to be acknowledged rather than overlooked.

The event also reinforced that support must extend beyond childhood. Conversations with late-diagnosed autistic and neurodivergent adults highlighted the importance of creating community spaces where people feel understood throughout every stage of life. Collaboration, therefore, is not simply about professionals working together, it is about communities learning to listen to one another more deeply.

At its core, collaboration is about building a society that approaches neurodiversity with greater understanding, compassion, and dignity. When knowledge, lived experience, and community come together, stronger and more inclusive systems of support become possible.

# ABA Around The World

## Spotlight: Haven Clinic Founded By Hodman Noor

Hodman Noor is the founder of Haven Clinic in Hanwell, a community-centred ABA clinic that grew from a weekend social club into a dedicated support space for neurodivergent children and their families. With a background in research and lived experience as a mother to an autistic child, Hodan's work is deeply rooted in both evidence-based practice and community understanding. Through Haven Clinic, Hodman offers a multidisciplinary approach to supporting neurodivergent children and their families bringing together speech, occupational and applied behaviour therapy all under one roof. Recognising that meaningful support extends beyond the therapy sessions, the clinic also provides parent and family training to equip caregivers with the knowledge and practical strategies needed to support their children confidently in everyday life.

After visiting the clinic myself, what I found quite impressive among the many things I was pleased to see is the unique commitment to supporting families holistically. Alongside therapeutic services, The Haven clinic hosts specialist advice clinics, including sessions with legal professionals who provide guidance on navigating educational systems, accessing appropriate support and understanding families' rights to and available pathways. I had the privilege of sitting down and asking the following questions to the very busy founder of the Haven clinic Hodman Noor.

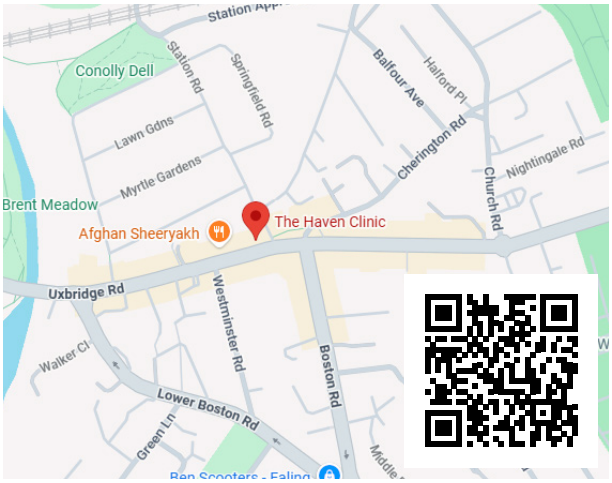
**01**

### How did your journey as both a researcher and a mother shape the vision behind Haven Clinic?

My journey has been the driving force behind Haven Clinic. Professionally, I have spent years working in research and understanding the importance of evidence-based interventions and inclusive practices. Personally, as a mother of a child with autism and complex needs, I experienced first-hand the challenges families face when trying to access timely assessments, support services, and reliable information.

# ABA Around The World

I often found that services were fragmented, difficult to navigate, and did not always reflect the cultural and practical realities of families from diverse backgrounds. This combination of professional knowledge and lived experience inspired me to create Haven Clinic a place where families feel heard, understood, and supported throughout their journey.
My vision was to bridge the gap between research, clinical practice, and real-life family experiences.




02

## What started as a weekend social club has now grown into a clinic. What did that journey teach you about what families are truly needing?

The journey taught me that families need much more than assessments and reports they need connection, understanding, and ongoing support. When we started as a weekend social club, parents often came seeking opportunities for their children to socialise, but what emerged was a safe space where families could share experiences, learn from one another, and feel less isolated.
Over time, we recognised recurring themes: long waiting lists, difficulties accessing services, lack of culturally sensitive support, and uncertainty about what steps to take next. Families wanted practical guidance and someone to walk alongside them. The transition from a social club to a clinic was a direct response to those needs. It reinforced the importance of providing holistic support that addresses not only the child's needs but also the wellbeing of the entire family.

# ABA Around The World

## 03

### What do you think families are most often missing when trying to access support for their children?

I believe the biggest thing families are missing is clear, coordinated, and accessible support. Many parents are left navigating complex systems on their own, often at a time when they are already emotionally overwhelmed.

Families frequently tell us they don't know where to start, which services are available, or how to advocate effectively for their child. For many families from ethnic minority communities, there can also be additional barriers such as language, stigma, cultural misunderstandings, and a lack of representation within services.

What families need is not just information, but guidance, empowerment, and a trusted support network that helps them make informed decisions and feel confident throughout the process.

## 04

### What do you hope the future of support for neurodivergent individuals and their families looks like within our communities?

I hope to see communities where neurodivergent individuals are fully accepted, valued, and included, rather than simply accommodated. Support should be accessible early, culturally responsive, and centred around the strengths and needs of the individual.

I would like to see stronger collaboration between families, healthcare professionals, educators, researchers, and community organisations. Most importantly, I want neurodivergent individuals and their families to have a genuine voice in shaping the services designed for them.

My hope is that future generations will grow up in communities where differences are celebrated, barriers are reduced, and every individual can thrive, reach their potential, and feel a true sense of belonging.

> ***My hope is that future generations will grow up in communities where differences are celebrated, barriers are reduced, and every individual can thrive, reach their potential, and feel a true sense of belonging.***

# Creating a Third Space: The SBAA Support Circle

**By Suaad Jama, SBAA Creative Strategist and Neurodiversity Advisor**

As SBAA's Neurodiversity Advisor, I had the privilege of hosting our panellists and engaging with attendees throughout SBAA's London launch event in April. What stayed with me most after the event were the conversations that followed. Several people approached me to share their experiences of late diagnosis, belonging and the ongoing challenge of navigating neurodivergence within Somali cultural contexts.

These conversations did not feel separate from the work I had already been doing. Prior to the event, I had begun reviewing research and community evidence around late-diagnosed autistic adults, peer support and culturally responsive practice. A consistent theme across both research and lived experience was the same: diagnosis often creates clarity, but it does not always create space. Many adults are left without environments where they can process what their diagnosis means in relation to identity, culture and faith.

As someone who was also diagnosed later in life, this resonated deeply with my own experience. Diagnosis helped me make sense of parts of my life that had previously felt confusing or disconnected, but it also raised new questions about who I was and how I understood myself within my relationships and wider society. What was missing was not information alone, but space - a space to speak and reflect alongside others with similar experiences.

My training as a Peer Support Worker further reinforced this understanding. Across peer support literature and practice, one principle remains consistent: meaningful change and understanding often emerge through shared reflection rather than instruction. People can make sense of their experiences not only through professional frameworks, but through dialogue with others who can recognise and relate to what they are describing. The SBAA Support Circle was created from this intersection of research, lived experience and a community need.

Inspired by the Somali tradition of shir - a community assembly where people gather to discuss matters of collective importance through dialogue and consultation - the Support Circle draws on long-standing values of listening, mutual respect and collective understanding. While it is not a shir, it carries forward it's spirit: that wisdom is strengthened when people come together to speak, reflect and learn as a community.

# Creating a Third Space: The SBAA Support Circle


The Support Circle will be intentionally bilingual (English and Somali), recognising that language is not only a tool for communication but a way of shaping identity and meaning. It will also create space for reflection informed by Islamic values and traditions, including tafakkur (thoughtful reflection), which encourages deeper understanding of oneself, one's experiences and one's place in the world. For many late diagnosed individuals, this reflective dimension is an important part of making sense of diagnosis in relation to faith, family and their own personal identity.

Alongside peer connection and discussion, the Support Circle will incorporate opportunities for collective learning, including a community book club exploring works by neurodivergent researchers and advocates. This reflects findings in both research and lived experience that understanding neurodivergence cannot rely on a single narrative. Instead, it is shaped through multiple voices with different perspectives and ways of knowing.

Importantly, this is a social space rather than a clinical one as it is designed for connection and shared reflections, not diagnosis or therapy. The Support Circle's value lies in creating room for people to speak freely, be understood and build community outside of formal clinical frameworks. At it's heart, the SBAA Support Circle emerged from a clear need I could not ignore: the need for a culturally grounded space where Somali autistic and neurodivergent adults can process their experiences together, beyond clinical definitions or isolated self-understanding. It is a space shaped by research, strengthened by lived experience that can be rooted in the realities of our community.

More than anything, it reflects a simple conviction I returned to again and again throughout this process: some forms of understanding only become possible when the right space exists for them.

# What's Next For The SBAA

One of the most valuable outcomes of our London event was the opportunity to listen. While the event was designed to introduce SBAA to the community, it also allowed us to better understand where support is most needed and how we can respond in ways that are meaningful, practical, and community-led.

A recurring theme throughout the day was the need for support spaces for late-diagnosed autistic and neurodivergent adults. Many attendees spoke about navigating life without understanding their neurodivergence. These conversations highlighted the importance of creating spaces where individuals can connect with others who share similar experiences while also accessing structured, evidence-based support.

In response, SBAA is developing a peer-led support circle for late-diagnosed autistic and neurodivergent adults. Led by a neurodivergent community member, the initiative will combine lived experience with guidance informed by the science of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). The vision is to create a space where individuals can better understand themselves, learn from one another, and build supportive relationships grounded in both shared experience and practical strategies.

This initiative also reflects a wider commitment within SBAA: to build with the community rather than for the community. As we continue to grow, we hope to take the same listening-first approach to other cities and communities, including upcoming engagement opportunities in Canada. By learning directly from community members about what support is needed, we hope to create initiatives that are relevant, sustainable, and shaped by the people they are intended to serve.

Alongside these initiatives, SBAA will continue to provide online educational content, resources, and discussions that raise awareness of neurodiversity, behaviour analysis, and inclusive practice. Throughout our social media platforms we aim to connect with professional Somali ABA practitioners worldwide while also engaging families, advocates, and community members in meaningful learning, collaboration, and culturally responsive conversations.

For SBAA, the future is not simply about expanding services. It is about building connected communities, creating culturally informed spaces, and ensuring that neurodivergent individuals and their families have a voice in shaping the support systems around them.

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