

## Capital's Muslim women set the scene for a Koran special

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IT is an annual chance for children to take part in a play and improve their acting skills whilst learning a religious story and making their parents in the audience proud.

But this is not the traditional Christmas nativity play seen in schools across Edinburgh at this time of year. It is a Muslim play telling one of the most famous stories from the Koran that will be performed for the first time in the Capital next month.

The event, organised by the recently-created Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh (MWAE), is an attempt to improve the understanding of the Muslim community among non-Muslim groups.

It is one part of an Eid party, which will take place at the Park View Hotel in Hermitage Place on January 15 , to celebrate the annual Muslim Eid al-Adha festival.

The event is an attempt to mark the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, which more than ten million people take part in on January 10.

Muslim people from all over the world are expected to perform the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. But in years that they cannot take part they are to hold their own festival in their own homes to remember the journey of the prophet Abraham.

The group of children from Edinburgh will tell the story of Abraham, with the intention being to educate themselves and the mixed audience about the story.

Tasneem Ali, one of the main organisers of the event, from the MWAE, said: "In a way this play is similar to a Christian nativity play in that the main aim is to educate the children taking part in an enjoyable way.

"It will also give the children more confidence to do things like this in the future. It gives them the chance to learn about drama and maybe take part in it at school."

The MWAE wants to use the evening's entertainment to show what their faith is really all about, as opposed to what they perceive to be a false image that many people in the UK have.

Ms Ali said: "The image that most people have is not what Islam is all about. We're not all terrorists like some people think - we're not a faith of suicide bombers. Islam is all about peace and we want to show we can all live together, whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish or anything else.

"We also want to show that we have many links with people in other faiths. The evening won't all be religious, there will be children playing Arabic music, an art gallery and a lot of fun.

"But because the night is for women to "let their hair down", men won't be welcome on this occasion, although the group hopes to invite men to future events.

The Muslim Council of Britain welcomed the "very laudable initiative" by the Muslim women of Edinburgh. Spokesman Inayat Bunglawala said: "We have seen Muslim communities throughout the UK reach out by organising exhibitions about their faith to try to dispel some of the misapprehensions.

"The Hajj is a great festival that highlights that the faith is colour-blind. The lesson is that we are all one race."

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