Upon hearing a remark at a specifically gender-based, domestic violence conference; I began to realize just how much there is wide-spread misconceptions regarding this complex social issue in the public sphere. Especially more so, there is a large misunderstanding, even amongst people who are genuinely concerned with raising awareness about this issue. While many victims of domestic violence are still struggling to overcome their hardships, and many people are striving to show their support against this crime against humanity; yet there are still many battles in raising awareness which we collectively must take into consideration so that we may understand the full complexities of the conflict at hand.

The most prevalent fallacy of all, which is being promoted fundamentally within the rising public support against domestic violence, is that there is growing increase in advocating for particular feminist doctrines in order for victims to overcome the struggles of domestic violence. In other words, it is commonly being proclaimed that in order to get out of abusive relationships, it is up to the women, individually, to develop a sense of self-respect and regard themselves on a basis of achieving equality with our male counterparts, in order to get out of abusive relationships. In response to this one-sided solution, I must emphasize upon the fact that domestic violence is multi-dimensional issue, and is in reality a very diverse, social issue. More so, women are not the only ones who are victims of abuse. Men, although a relatively small percentage, are also victims of domestic violence. Also, abuse does not occur solely in heteronormative relationships. Unfortunately, domestic violence is so wide-spread, that it is also a significant issue faced by LGBTQ communities. Hence, ultimately no one is immune to this very real, socio-cultural problem.
Furthermore, domestic violence is a truly complex issue which entails numerous intertwined factors. For example, in contrast to the common stereotypes associated with the subject of domestic violence - perpetrators do not always abuse, degrade, and/or mistreat their victims as constantly all the time. On the contrary, a pre-abusive relationship may begin with a so-called “honeymoon” phase in which an illusionary facade of romantic love is conveyed by the perpetrator to an innocent, unaware victim who in turn then clings on to the good times often out of fear pertaining to financial, legal, or other inevitably imminent difficulties. However, it is vital to stress that the level of violence, which the victim is subject to, elevates with each cycle of abuse.

In addition, there are several more aspects that are being overlooked when it comes to understanding the difficulty of the decision-making process for victims. We, as a society, need to understand that a family is a unit that is not easy to break, especially when children are involved. Often, victims will sense warning signs of their abusive partner before the actual negative incidents occur. Most of the time, instead of opting out, victims stay in the relationship in hopes to reform their partner’s behavior gradually, or take preventive strategies by avoiding behaviors which may trigger an outbreak from their partner. The victim opting to remain hopeful instead of opting for an exit strategy may be a direct result of a victim’s personal insecurity based upon an individual reflection of a true inner fear which all single parents fear. Hence, the victims continue staying in an abusive relationship instead of escaping the hardship in entirety, due to having a sincere personal fear of being unable to support themselves and their children on their own. Also, besides the lack of financial support which may occur by escaping, there is the concern of the psychological or emotional deprivation of the children of a significant parental figure, such as a father or mother.

The major message I wish to emphasize upon is that overcoming domestic violence is clearly no easy feat which can be summed up by telling women to “simply leave” the relationship and/or situation. This is a ludicrous assertion which is overlooking several other essential components and complex factors within this multifaceted social issue of domestic violence. Individuals cannot ignore the acknowledgement of the fact that leaving an abusive relationship requires tremendous support from others, such as from family, friends, community acquaintances, and so forth. It is highly difficult for a survivor to overcome domestic violence on their own, especially since human beings as a whole are inter-dependent by nature.

In conclusion, the epidemic social disease of domestic violence plagues our communities at every socioeconomic level. We need community's support for our ongoing struggle to raise awareness in regards to the prevalence of domestic violence in addition to the need for community-based interventions to help victims overcome abuse. Domestic Harmony Foundation strives to provide victims with necessary support through both interventions and preventive strategies, for example by educating our youth about the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics. The battle against domestic violence in our society is an ongoing one and there is an incredible amount of goals still to be achieved for society as a whole. DHF depends on the support and generosity of people like you to continue making crucially significant progress, so that we can eradicate domestic violence collectively as a society in today’s times and age. So please continue helping our cause in raising awareness for promotion of healthy personal relationships and against abusive personal relationships within our communities for today’s generation and for tomorrow’s future generations to come.

~ By: Jasia Mirza ~
During a DHF Summer Youth Group meeting, my fellow peers and I had the great pleasure of welcoming Sister Saadia to learn from her valuable, profound insight on how to create, build, and maintain healthy personal relationships with our family, friends, loved ones, etc. Sister Saadia is a certified family and marriage therapist with extensive Masters-level educational and real-world experience in helping people enrich their knowledge level on how to improve any types of relationship in their lives.


After that, Sister Saadia applauded our feedback and provided us the following tips/advice for constructing healthy relationships. So here is what everyone needs to know about personal relationships:

- Since people have such different background life experiences, we need to be aware that bad experiences in the past make for baggage that can hold people back from being good in their present and future relationships.
- The greatest thing to keep in mind in relationships is about upholding personal responsibility. Each person in a relationship is always expecting more from the other, and is always ready to blame the other in anger as well as to hold resentment against them. But we must keep in mind is that we can’t change others, we can only change ourselves.
- The reality is that even though you can’t directly cause the other person to change, you actually can indirectly cause the other person to change - when you change your own habits/behavior/response, then in turn, slowly, the other person will change in response to your change and thus causing a ripple effect.
- We are creatures of habit, used to thinking or feeling or behaving in our usual manners, but that doesn’t mean we cannot enrich ourselves or improve or evolve.
- What happens in an argument - one person is angry and the other is defensive. There are and will always be different ways to respond to any given situation. When you give more, you will get more, if not immediately, then surely gradually!
- Open your eyes more up to what you do have, and remember to practice gratitude.
- What causes a major issue - sometimes naturally, we are expecting more than we are willing to give ourselves, and the other person is doing the same thing.
- Try giving more love, time, attention, and respect to the other person in the relationship but maintain your individuality; don’t lose yourself in the relationship. When people are fighting at home, kids lose their sense of self in their home family trouble. So parents don’t forget that your marital issues do and will affect the well-being of your children.
- Keep in mind your values. And certainly express, to the other in the relationship, what’s important to you as well as what matters to you the most.
- Be open to positively changing yourself. Be patient, and increase your level of patience!
- “If you don’t like something, then change it. If you can’t change it, then change the way you feel about it.” Remember to “treat others the way you want to be treated.”
The gratitude begins with appreciation! Whenever things go bad, go back to gratitude and remember whatever is/was good in the relationship and/or with that person and focus on that by reflecting on the good things. This process of positive reflection will actually rewire our brain to think more warm-heartedly about the relationship than just pessimistically. It is quite interesting how our brains are typically just thinking about what’s missing in our lives, and what’s bad and wrong in our relationships!

We must think on the good to appreciate the good, to realize and put things into perspective that things are not all bad!

Be honest with yourself, and your values. Think about what is right in the relationship versus what is wrong, what is good versus bad. Listen to what your conscience tells you.

Increase your awareness in the relationship situations! You can achieve this by trying to see what the situation looks like from an outside objective point of view and judge how you are behaving, reacting, responding, interacting, etc. instead of just the other person.

Don’t ever forget to keep and maintain respect for yourself. Balance is the key. Make sure there is a comfortable balance of decision-making, responsibilities, and power, and make sure neither person is too bossy or too submissive.

Relationships require mutual healthy dose of compromise and understanding.

Communication is a major component of maintaining a strong, healthy relationship and the best way to get to know the other person’s mind and nature, needs, wants, desires, values, interests, likes, dislikes, habits, lifestyle preferences etc.

Seek help if need be! Everyone could use a therapist, or a counselor. If one way doesn’t work to get your point across, don’t keep nagging the other person until they begin to eventually neglect the message all together! It’s certainly important how you send the message across to the other person to express your concern! Try different strategies to bring attention to a matter – via writing, calling, meeting over food, etc.

If things are troubling in a relationship, try fixing it. Fixable relationships are worth repairing, but stay away from toxic people and toxic relationships. Self-check your values continuously.

Don’t overlook negative things in the relationship, because they build up, and bottle up inside. Instead bring up the topic in a respectful, courteous manner.

These next four statements are referenced to be known as the “four horsemen of the apocalypse” which greatly damage any relationship:

- Consistently negative criticism and character assassination as well as blame.
- Upholding non-stop defensiveness instead of taking personal responsibility.
- Maintaining contempt, and thinking you are better than the other. Because when someone looks down upon someone else, they can’t treat them right.
- Building an invisible wall- by ignoring, avoiding, and neglecting.

There must be a balance maintained on both ends.

Instead of always seeing the negative side of things, we must strive to maintain a positive vision and positive view.

We must not forget that while the grass may be greener on the side, its only greener where the grass is receiving the proper care, and attention it deserves! So we must also water and give sunlight to our relationships by nurturing and replenishing it with the love, care, and attention our loved ones deserve. We cannot egotistical or selfish in relationships, because a truly harmonious and fulfilling relationship requires a deep sense of love, respect, and compromise on both ends. Remember that a relationship is a two-party participation, not one-sided. Hence, a relationship is truly about teamwork, and learning each other’s strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging and accepting their natural qualities versus their habits whether they are positive or negative, and it’s a give and take process. Teamwork is all about collaboration and requires deep understanding mutually in order to excel and achieve success together.

~ By: Lila Ijaz ~
The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was signed into law by President Clinton in 1994, hence establishing the first major law to help government agencies and victim advocates work together in order to fight domestic violence, sexual assault, and other types of violence against women. The generation of this federal law created new punishments for specific crimes against women, and initiated programs to prevent violence as well as to assist victims. Over the years, this law has been further developed and thus expanded to provide greater legal enforcement of programs and services to support women against violence.

For example, the VAWA provides violence prevention programs in communities, and protection for victims who are evicted from their homes due to events relating to domestic violence or stalking. It provides funding for victim assistance services like rape crisis centers and hotlines. The Violence Against Women Act provides programs to meet the needs of immigrant women and women of different races or ethnicities, as well as victims with disabilities. It also provides legal aid for survivors of violence and services for children and teens.

The Violence Against Women Act has advocated significantly for victims’ and their families to have essential access to the services they need, in order to achieve security and rebuild their lives. This act responded to the urgent calls for help by establishing the National Domestic Violence Hotline, which has answered over 3 million calls thus far and receives over 22,000 calls every month; 92% of callers report that it’s their first call for help! It is also improving safety and reducing the repeat of offences by developing coordinated community responses.

One of the major goals of this act is to collaborate collectively, while uniting in diversity and standing together to provide more protection, services, and community resources for women affected by violence regardless of their citizen status, income level, race, etc. Additionally, this law focuses it’s attention on the needs of under-served communities, by creating legal relief for abused immigrants, so that the offenders can’t use the victim’s immigration status to prevent victims from calling the police or seeking safety. It also greatly supports tribal governments in building their capacity to protect American Indian and Alaska Native women.

The Violence Against Women Act is both a symbol and actualization of what it means to create healing and justice for survivors, their families, as well as for their communities. From 1993 - 2010, the rate of intimate partner violence declined 67%; the rate of intimate partner homicides of females decreased 35%, and the rate of intimate partner homicides of males decreased 46%. Most importantly, more and more victims are proactively reporting domestic and sexual violence to police. Thus, more and more reports to police are also resulting in the rise of increasing arrests of serious offenders.
Since its enactment almost 20 years ago – the VAWA has saved countless lives, protected families, given a voice to survivors, and has vastly provided invaluable training to the criminal justice resources within communities. The VAWA has persistently increased the rates of prosecution, conviction, and sentences of offenders by helping communities develop dedicated law enforcement, prosecution units, as well as domestic violence resources. In addition, the Violence Against Women Act has ensured that the police appropriately respond to crisis calls, and that judges understand the realities of domestic and sexual violence - by training law enforcement officers, prosecutors, victim advocates and judges. In fact, the VAWA provides funding of training over 500,000 law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, and other personnel every year.

The Violence Against Women Act has tremendously improved the criminal justice response to violence against women by holding rapists accountable for their crimes. For example, due to this law there are stronger federal penalties for repeat sex offenders. Additionally, this led to the development of a federal “rape shield law,” which is intended to prevent offenders from using victims’ past sexual conduct against them during a rape trial. Furthermore, it has mandated that victims, regardless of their income levels, are not forced to bear the expense of their own rape exams or for the service of a protection order. The development of these laws is so greatly committed to maintaining the safety and security of victims - that the law also supports the recognition and enforcement of a victim’s protection order in all states, regional, and territorial jurisdictions within the United States.

Consequently, more and more states have prominently reformed their state laws to take violence against women more seriously. All states in the USA have thus improved on laws, which previously treated date or spousal rape as a lesser crime than stranger rape. All American states have passed laws imposing that stalking is a criminal offence and have authorized warrantless arrests in misdemeanor domestic violence cases in which the responding officer determines that a probable cause exists. Furthermore, all states provide criminal sanctions for the violation of a civil protection order. In addition, states have passed laws prohibiting polygraphing of rape victims. Thanks to the efforts of a coalition of 300 advocacy groups and service providers, Congress re-authorized the further developments of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) on February 28, 2013.

~ By: Honour Odigie ~

REFERENCES:


The Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) held its 6th Annual Fundraiser at the North Ritz Club in Syosset on Sunday, May 4, 2014. With over 160 supporters in attendance, this community-wide event included an award presentation, a keynote delivered by a prominent speaker, and various displays of artistic creativity. Throughout the event, while delicious appetizers were served and raffle tickets were sold - guests took the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and socialize with new friends. The atmosphere was filled with guests sharing their experiences and finding similarities in their diverse backgrounds.

In one instance, a judge of color who struggled ethnically while attending law school in Ohio during the 1970’s, connected with a younger Muslim attendee who wore a scarf as part of her outfit to school. Through conversation and inter-cultural personal dialogue, together they had discovered that they both had encountered the equivalent type of discriminatory stares and social harassment while walking into a public restaurant. Such social prejudice is quite frighteningly prevalent throughout society for a vast amount of time also considering the significant difference of settings, as one recalled personal experiences in 1970’s Ohio and the other from modern day, present times of Florida – both agreeing upon similarly shared social experiences.

In another corner of the room, a domestic abuse survivor empathized and connected with a cancer survivor. They learned how much they both had shared a similarly positive, participatory experience by being a part of a local community support group during their difficulties in hardship. Both survivors proclaimed and agreed upon that organizations, like DHF, which bring survivors together to share their traumatic experiences with others plays a vitally, significant role in our communities. Together they shared heartfelt sentiments about how such community support groups played a great role in helping them strive through their adversities - by providing the support for them to express what they were going through. Both survivors also agreed that one way in which the survivors deal with the trauma is through art, and one of their art projects was on display throughout the event. Titled “Healthy Relationships Are the ‘Knots’ That Bind Family Ties” - this project displayed knotted neckties and scarves, which reinforced the belief that families are interwoven knots of love, understanding, and mutual respect.

For the second half of the program, guests were seated for lunch and treated to a variety of events. First Zubeida Lunat, one of the founding members of DHF, delivered the invocation speech and said a prayer. Then DHF’s Program Coordinator, Jasia Mirza, welcomed all of the guests and outlined the afternoon’s planned event. After that, Kushalata Ahmed one of the founding members of DHF and the consultant psychiatrist, recited the Greetings Letter from New York Senator Gillibrand’s office. The first of the proceeding events began with an award presentation honored to Hazel Weiser, Esq., whose notable professional accomplishments are shadowed only by her impact in the community. Ms. Weiser found a passion for helping others early on.
While she attended George Washington University, Hazel Weiser, ESQ., spent time working as a reading tutor for young men of color. Upon graduating, she brought this same passion to working with street runaways, many of whom had come from homes lacking domestic harmony. After earning her law degree from Brooklyn Law School, Ms. Weiser became a practicing attorney and held varying posts as a dean. She is currently the Assistant Dean for Graduate Programs at New York Law School. Throughout the years, Ms. Weiser has lent her professional expertise to several non-profit organizations on Long Island, including DHF. During the last thirteen years of this partnership - she has advised the Board, trained staff and clients, as well as helped to secure grant funding. It was for her tireless efforts in the community, especially with DHF, that earned Ms. Hazel Weiser, Esq. this honor.

Following the award presentation, Amal Wahib, a DHF board member who specializes in domestic violence counseling, introduced a domestic violence survivor to recite a poem recounting her experience. The poem creatively detailed how her relationship with her husband deteriorated and depicted some of the inhumane acts of violence committed against her. Conveying the emotions behind her poetic words, the audience was captivated as she expressed her strength throughout the poem, yet finished by revealing the vulnerability she was fighting to hide.

Consequently, next up to the podium was a prominent keynote speech delivered by the Counsel General of India, Ambassador Dnyaneshwar Manohar Mulay. To begin, the Ambassador mentioned how he saw on the very same day earlier, that the New York Times featured three separate stories highlighting domestic abuse in three different situations. Mentioning that being a male he is less probable to experience such a situation - yet nonetheless, organizations, like DHF, and male members of the community need to continue working closer together to help resolve this major societal issue in order to make all of our community members safe. Additionally, Ambassador Mulay enlightened the audience with an interesting story from the village where he grew up, in the Kolhapur District of Maharashtra State in India. The moral of the story conveyed that as a community we often fail to empower our women with the freedom to choose their own life decisions. Furthermore, he announced that traditional values dictate women into an obedient role from a young age. Ambassador Mulay concluded his speech by proclaiming that although with each generation these traditions are changing, the community as a whole, needs to embrace and also support this change.

Following up, Naisha Balay presented the next performance, a dance duo from Hofstra University performing to the song “Break the Chain.” The two students displayed a dance of strength which was dedicated to inspiring and also encouraging female empowerment. After lunch, guests were treated to comedic skits by Saad Haroon. The comedian related his past experiences and frequently interacted with the audience, inducing laughter and an enjoyable way to conclude the event. To end the evening, over fifteen raffle prizes were awarded to the guests with the winning tickets.

This diverse group of attendees underscored the universal nature of the agenda, which the fundraiser for the Domestic Harmony Foundation calls attention to – advocating for domestic harmony as well as putting an end to domestic violence in our homes, communities, and overall within society as a whole.
Don’t Be Scared of Loans: Planning For College Advice

The average undergraduate student loan debt upon graduation is currently sitting at roughly $29,000. The total student loan debt for this country is a whopping $1.2 trillion. We hear countless horror stories of students going deep into six-figure debt to finance their education only to become unable to pay it later on. This type of debt can cripple one’s entire life. Most people will tell you to steer clear of student loans entirely, but for some (like myself) that is not an option. If you are an informed borrower, there is no reason why you cannot manage a loan. Here are some helpful tips that should make your decision to take out a loan a little easier.

First of all, you should never take out a private loan! If you need a large loan there are other options (such as the Parent Plus Loan). Private loans get you on high variable interest rates upwards of 18%. These payments start while you are in school making it almost impossible to pay off these loans. The Parent Plus Loan is a much better government-funded option. With a fixed interest rate of only 6% the loan is much more manageable. You can take out as much as up to the-cost of attendance with Parent Plus (pending you pass a credit check), but as always it is recommended you take as small a loan as possible. Another option which people do not realize that they have is the ability to pay off interest while in school.

The majority of students completely ignore their loans until they graduate, and then later end up saddled with a large compounded interest to pay off on top of their loan. Instead, you can avoid this problem right from the start! Paying off monthly interest while in school, which could be efficiently manageable for a college student, can potentially save you hundreds, even thousands of dollars in the long run!

Domestic Harmony Foundation: Youth Group: Session on Financial Empowerment

For today’s youth, financial empowerment can seem like an entirely foreign concept. Reckless spending and the ignorance that comes along with such behavior has become wide-spread among the majority within American society. In a materialistic society where too-often people spend well-above their means and carry more credit cards when they shop rather than cash – majority of Americans are in some kind debt. Financial debt can be a product of credit card debt, car loans, college loans, mortgage, etc.

This may lead a modern day individual to ponder if there really is such a thing, called “Financial Empowerment.” You may find even yourself asking - “Really now, what exactly is financial empowerment and what are the steps I need to take to achieve such a positive-sounding impact on personal financial management?” Put quite simply, financial empowerment is the ability to free oneself from the entrapment of debt, so that one can live a more satisfactory, debt-free, and thus hassle-free life.
Thousands and thousands of people cannot fully grasp mainstream concepts of building credit and managing loans. It becomes easy to fall into a downward spiral financially in debt, due to overspending on credit cards or taking out large loans, when one does not fully understand the negative consequences of not using credit wisely. The best way to avoid falling into the credit card trap is to only have one credit card and to keep spending at a low. Taking out multiple credit cards can end up hurting your credit score more, therefore making it difficult for you to borrow more money in the future. The most important thing is to make your minimum payments on time. This can really help you successfully avoid the increase in debt that the majority of Americans have unfortunately attained.

Achieving financial independence is crucially significant in today’s day and age, as well as overall as a society; so learn more as much as you can about this topic by reading more online, asking a bank representative, or a school financial counselor! Become informed as much as possible, to help yourself, but also to spread tips to your friends and all your loved ones! We must work as a community to help each other rise above our common day challenges and struggles, because we’re all in this together. Let’s keep in mind and remember that, “united we stand, divided we fall.” Especially, since credit card debt is such a immensely, critical social issue - which can play out in a much larger domino effect on the greater economy in the grand scheme of things. Therefore, we must all be aware that our individual actions can collectively accumulate mass debt for our society, leading to economic inflation and worse economic depression. Unfortunately, this leads to higher unemployment rates, greatly impacts the housing markets, businesses suffer, and also thousands of people get laid off from jobs, etc.!

~ By : Reza Sabooni ~
On Sunday October 26th, 2014 the Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) held our third annual “Walk to End Domestic Violence.” Over 200 people were excited to be in attendance at Eisenhower Park to help raise awareness to the ever-present issue of domestic violence and help stomp it out in our community.

Registration was held at 9:30am and purple colored t-shirts were given to those in attendance, unifying the diverse crowd into a sea of purple. Jasia Mirza, Program Coordinator of DHF, commenced the event by outlying the purpose of the walk and got the crowd pumped. Lauren Joseph, an 11th grade student from Floral Park Memorial High School, was then introduced and gave a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem.

Following the introductions retired Supreme Court Justice, the honorable Ira Warshawsky, spoke at length regarding the prevalent issue of domestic violence, citing current events that have thrust the issue into the national spotlight. Following the honorable Mr. Warshawsky was the Hempstead town clerk, Nasrin Ahmad, who also inspired the crowd to continue fighting domestic violence. The next speech was Mr. Hamza Byas, who took the opportunity to congratulate the Domestic Harmony Foundation for successfully providing the community with an outlet for victims of domestic violence.

Following Mr. Byas was Assemblyman Phil Ramos, who detailed the complexities of domestic violence in the immigrant communities, highlighting an extra layer of domestic violence that gets overlooked. Mr. Anthony Zenkus talked to the crowd about domestic violence from the perspective of a major population that is often unconsidered, children. Finally Mr. Rizwan Qureshi from HAB Bank, anchored the speeches by telling the attendees how HAB Bank is a proud sponsor of the walk and the Domestic Harmony Foundation.

All these speeches provided a fresh dose of varied perspective, and inspired the attendees to continue finding ways in contributing to bring an end to domestic violence. Being energized and pumped up from the speeches, the excited attendees all commenced the mile long walk. The sea of purple could be heard chanting in unison and holding up signs that discouraged domestic violence.

The Staff and Board members of Domestic Harmony Foundation extend our heartfelt thanks to: Macy’s, HAB Bank, Whole Foods Jericho, The Safe Center LI, Student Leadership & Activities Center at Hofstra University, National Council of Jewish Women, Peninsula Section, and Islamic Center of Long Island.

We are also grateful to all of our supporters who came and made our third annual Walkathon a continuing success!!
Over three hundred people attended Domestic Harmony Foundation’s Second Annual Walk to End Domestic Violence. The wide variety of participants reflected the multicultural and socioeconomic diversity of the clients, which DHF works with on a daily basis. This diversity, unfortunately, reaffirms the reality of domestic violence as an issue which impacts people of all backgrounds. DHF strives to provide victims with necessary support through both interventions and preventive strategies, such as by educating our youth about the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics. The battle against domestic violence in our society is ongoing, and thus there is an incredible amount of goals which we must all work together to surpass as a whole.

DHF depends on the support and generosity of people, like the participants of the walk to continue making much-needed progress. Additionally, the walk could not have been made possible without the generous support of it’s co-sponsors: HAB bank of New York and Civic Center of Hofstra University. Mr. Veeran Kutty of GNC Baldwin, Trader Joes’ Merrick, BJ’S and Stop & Shop donated water bottles and energy bars. Participating groups included the following: AAPNA Alliance, Adelphi University, Five Towns Indian Association, Islamic Center of Long Island, National Council of Jewish Women of Peninsula Section, National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University, Office of Student Leadership Activities at Hofstra University, Selden Masjid, South Asian American Women Alliance, Student Activities Center at Hofstra University, The Kerala Center.
Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) is a non-profit, community-based organization committed to promoting peace, safety, and harmony in families by providing support and guidance. The organization aims to fill the immense void in concrete services for South Asian and Middle Eastern women and children who are seeking relief from domestic violence and other human rights violations. It also works towards addressing and raising awareness of domestic abuse and violations of human rights in the communities and areas it serves. Although DHF works mainly with South Asian and Middle Eastern women, these services are available to individuals irrespective of creed, culture, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

In 2013, DHF offered a variety of programs and direct services for clients. Services included in-person and phone counseling to numerous clients who had encountered domestic violence in their families. Support was given through legal consultations and providing referrals to other agencies, as well as offering education and safety planning and facilitating a weekly women’s support group. Clients were also extended financial aid for assistance with rent, food, transportation, driving lessons, medical treatment and vocational training. DHF collaborated with Women for Afghan Women and held ESL classes and Girls Leadership program. DHF’s Youth Leadership Program met 6 weeks in the summer of 2013 and first time an educational scholarship of $500 was offered to two young females based on their participation and educational goals. This year’s youth program was a great success and has increased in membership. Additionally, an Eid/holiday party was organized for clients for a chance to leave their worries at home and socialize to have a good time with friends.

Domestic Harmony Foundation also focused on training and workshops for its staff and volunteers to increase their knowledge and to ultimately reach out to more victims. Domestic Harmony Foundation provided a training workshop for Nassau County HHS Staff development on Wednesday March 13, 2013. Nazli Chaudhry and Amal Wahib provided the overview of Middle Eastern, South Asian and Muslim cultures and discussed the impact of domestic violence on victims and children in these cultures. Member of DHF attended Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence Summit. This Summit provided necessary training in the areas such as individual assessments, client based assessments, and evidence based practices in culturally relevant programs and learned that such conferences are imperative in our collective efforts.

Outreach has been an essential component for DHF. Without outreach, victims and other agencies/organizations would not have been aware of the organization itself and its services. DHF collaborated with agencies and organizations across the nation in speaking out against partner abuse. Members attended the 2nd Outstanding Women’s Achievement Awards Gala held by Indian American Forum Inc. They put up an information booth at the event during the cocktail hour. Indian Americans from all walks of life including local politicians and community activists were among the attendees. Domestic Harmony Foundation also walked in the annual India Day Parade on Sunday, August 11, 2013. Hundreds of people from Indian and Pakistani decent came to celebrate the country’s Independence Day. Annual newsletter was also released to a wide distribution list.
The two largest events of Domestic Harmony Foundation in 2013 were the “Walk to End Domestic Violence” 2nd Annual Walkathon and the 5th Annual Fundraiser Gala. This Walk had symbolized an extraordinary unity among several distinct groups for the common cause of safeguarding individual rights and freedoms by fighting to eradicate domestic violence in our community. On Sunday May 5th, Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) hosted its 5th annual fundraiser at the Milleridge Cottage in Jericho. Nassau County’s Department of Social Services Commissioner John Imhof, read a citation to describe the positive social impact of Domestic Harmony Foundation on the community. An award for outstanding community advocate was presented to Dr. Margaret Abraham, a professor of Sociology and special advisor to the Provost of Diversity Initiatives at Hofstra University.

The programs and services provided to the clients, and the outreach that was conducted all contributed to the success that DHF had in 2013. For more information on the Domestic Harmony Foundation, please visit www.DHFNY.org or call (516) 385-8292.
Art Therapy is a beautiful way of utilizing the combination of art and psychology to help people explore the realms of creative self-expression. This creative, emotional outlet can aid to relieving stress, increase self-awareness, and improve self-esteem. Ultimately, Art Therapy provides a great sense of self-empowerment in releasing our inner (positive/negative) energies within us. Hence, by creating any new piece of art, we as individuals find pleasure and joy in having full self-control of producing something through our personal efforts. What’s even more wonderful about Art Therapy is that it can be a great hobby for people of all ages, as well as for families and group settings.

The American Art Therapy Association describe Art Therapy as a helpful, mental-health treatment which uses the creative process of ‘art making’ to improve the quality of health in terms of emotional, mental, and also physical well-being of individuals. The unique process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to think thoroughly, reflect deeply, gain insight, resolve conflicts and problems, develop inter-personal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, and increase self-esteem as well as self-awareness. Throughout history, people have used freestyle art as a tool to express, communicate, and heal for thousands of years.

At the Domestic Harmony Foundation, Art Therapy has been used by members in order to develop and raise self-awareness, self-esteem, and healing. DHF utilized a wide variety of artistic projects in order to create expressive artwork involving: photography, painting, knitting, as well as recycled neckties and scarves. Artwork not only serves as a therapeutic outlet, but also helps any individual to deeply heal themselves - through a personal sense of creativity and expression.

Each survivor had been given a digital camera to keep for some time, and were asked to take pictures of different things, places, and people as they choose to. The objective was geared towards taking photographs of things which touch their heart or things that make them happy or sad – in their everyday lives. Then the participants were asked to provide their feedback on photos of their choosing - in terms of which ones they loved, or which ones had a special significance behind them, or which ones reflected their personalities, or which ones were just overall heart-warming for them. In addition, DHF women participants created art pieces with recycled neckties and scarves. In their eyes, a necktie is an embodiment of honor and respect, which displays the presentation of a gentleman to the man who wears it. By weaving neck ties and scarves together, the participants artistically expressed the notion that a family is an inter-woven knot of love, understanding, and mutual respect.

Knitting a collective quilt was another art project, which DHF engaged participants in. By knitting this beautiful quilt, participants had been engaged in pro-active self-empowerment, which aided them in better managing their emotional levels. A rhythmic movement of knitting produces a harmonious form of meditation. Knitting helps people think and reflect, hence allowing individuals to put things into perspective. This is even more especially in regards to thoughts revolving around subconscious, traumatic issues that would normally hibernate under the more conscious thoughts. This creative form of artistic self-expression has also helped women to find a balance, between problematic events and feelings in exchange for more positive, pleasant sensations in the present moment. Such uplifting art allows individuals to develop and reach a well-balanced, healthy state-of-mind that is not being bogged down over the past or fretting about the future.

As individuals, we all long for social and also personal understanding, compassion, as well as respect. Sometimes it's easier to find this among others who share similar situations or challenges. Furthermore, that is why support groups, such as DHF, help to truly bring people closer together.
* SIGNIFICANT DHF NEWS *

* Honorable Award Presented to DHF *
Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) had been selected as the 2014 recipient of the Nassau County Bar Association’s Liberty Bell Award. The Nassau County Bar Association presents this award each year to a non-lawyer individual or group, which has distinguished itself within the community, in terms of increasing awareness and adherence to the American system of laws.

* 6th Annual Fundraiser *
On Sunday, May 4, 2014 the Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) held its 6th Annual Fundraiser “Empowering Lives…Hopeful Beginnings” at the North Ritz Club in Syosset. With over 160 supporters in attendance, the afternoon was highlighted by an award presentation To Hazel Weiser a big supporter of DHF, a keynote delivered by Counsel General of India, Mr. Dnyaneshwar Mulay and various displays of artistic creativity.

* Girl Rising *
On Sunday March, 23rd support group members went to the movie screening of “Girl Rising” at the Hewlett public library. Girl Rising tells nine stories of different girls around the globe. Each story was about the power of education to change the future for girls, families, communities and entire nations.

* EID Brunch for Client Families *
DHF took client families to the Eid Bruch organized by Islamic Center of Long Island. This brunch was held in exotic Allegria hotel of Long Beach. It was a great event with good food, activities for kids and a comedy stand – up show with the renowned comedian Dean AbeidAllah. Laughter is a great therapy and our clients had enjoyed this program.

* Indian Day Parade *
DHF participated in the India Day Parade (IDPUSA) which is a historic event on Long Island. The parade brought together cultural, religious and not-for-profit organizations under one place. This year’s parade was held on Saturday Aug. 9th, 2014.

* ICLI & Emphasizing on Women Rights *
On July 30th DHF members met with Imam Nagm of Islamic Center of Long Island to clarify few misconceptions about the Islamic scripture and practices. Imam Nagm told ladies of DHF that he does talk about women rights in his Friday khutbah's and emphasize about treating women with dignity and respect. He also clarified that if two people are miserable together, Islam does allow them to get divorce and lead a life of their choice. Imam Nagm clarified that he insists on obeying the law of land and the law of land does not allow polygamy in any circumstances. He never allows practicing it and will not do a nikkah of a person who already has a wife.

* DHF Educational Scholarship Winners! *
Reza Sabooni & Amina Shah was awarded $500 educational scholarship. This scholarship has been granted to them for successfully completing the Summer Youth Leadership Program of DHF in addition to strong demonstrated commitment towards their educational goals.
Survivor’s Story

I got married when I was only 18 years old and the second daughter in my family. My older sister was married and by seeing her happy - I use to think marriage meant freedom, getting lots of clothes, make-up, and jewelry. I was completely ignorant of what marriage truly means and especially due to our culture growing up. I had just finished high school when a family from America visited our home. After seeing me, they asked my hand for their son. My mother, father, and the whole family thought that I was very lucky. After all, if I marry this guy I will go to America and live a dream life. I, myself, was very excited and happy.

Unfortunately, little did I know what the future holds for me in that foreign land of dreams. My wedding was done in Pakistan and I came to US with so many dreams and hopes for a happy life. As soon I came here it was like my in-laws got a free servant. I was expected to do so many chores at the house and anything I would do, my mother-in-law would think it was not according to her standards, so either she will do it again or tell me that my mother has not taught me anything. It wouldn't hurt me if she would say anything to me, but whenever she talked ill about my mother, it was very much painful. I tried my best to make her happy and do things according to her expectations, but nothing was ever good enough.

I always use to think what have I done to make her so angry at me? Every time my husband was nice to me, she will get more upset at me. If I would call back home to talk to my family, she would stand by my side, and accuse my mother of doing black magic on her. She would say such awful things to me like, “you and your mother want my son to go along with your wishes and I would never let that happen. He is my son and he will only listen to me.” She even accused me that I spit in her glass of water before giving to her. If I complained to my husband, he would only tell me to go and apologize to his mother. Deep down, he was not a bad person but was tied up with his mother’s selfish desires. My mother in-law was afraid of losing her son and tried hard to keep a hold on him in whatever way possible. I always respected her and even asked my husband to give her more attention. He told me once that he can only keep one person happy so it has to be my mother. I told him that he can be angry with me if I do something wrong, but not to get upset with me for something that I have not even done. Why should I get punishments for the things I have never done?

Now that I think of it, those issues which the mother-in-law made conflicts about were so trivial and absolutely did not make any sense. If she will get sick, she would say that I have done black magic on her to get rid of her. If the food she cooked was not done properly, she would accuse me of slowing down the heat. So, it was like, no matter what I would do I would be wrong and the innocent scapegoat. I was the one who had to apologize to her, meanwhile she would be the one to start yelling and screaming anyway.

Later I became a mother of a baby girl and all my attention went to my child. I tried to ignore her words, but every time she would talk ill of my mother or my family, it would hurt. To make matters worse, my husband never stood up for me. An example of another traumatizing incident occurred when my baby girl was six-months-old and I was in the kitchen making breakfast for everyone. When I came outside the kitchen, I saw a plate of an unfinished egg. I asked my mother-in-law who left that egg, should I take it away? In response, she told me, “yes, we fed this to your daughter and she ate some, but does not want any more so you could throw it.” I was really quite shocked on listening to this being said, especially since the doctor had told me not to give my baby daughter, any solid food especially eggs. After explaining this to my mother-in-law, she got extremely angry in response, and starts shouting saying, “so it means that we do not have any right to feed her?!” Angrily, she told me to put a finger in my daughter’s throat and take the egg out. I was in a complete shock by then, and everyone in the house came running including my husband. My mother-in-law was screaming and yelling saying, “this wife of yours is talking back to me and thinks that I do not have the right to feed your child.” My husband got so mad after listening to this and told me to immediately ask forgiveness from his mother. By then I was so frustrated and tired of everything, so I said, “Apologize for what? What have I done wrong?” Next thing I know, my husband suddenly pushed me and shoved me back with such a force and I completely lost control. After which, my mother-in-law and sister-in-law brought me into my bedroom and locked me there. I cried so much, but no one came to see me or ask anything.
After that our life at home became very quiet after. It seemed almost unreal and my mother-in-law was not so mad all the time. Then one day, out-of-the-blue, my husband came home and told me that I should go to Pakistan and meet my family. I was so happy and thought that finally my prayers are answered and my husband is thinking of me. Later when I went to Pakistan, I received a letter in mail from him, saying the harsh words of, “I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you.” And with that, my marriage ended.

When I got that letter, I had my baby in my lap and all I was thinking was my baby girl's future. I didn't have any education or skills, so how would I raise her? It was the only thought going in my head that time. I had the green card and could go back to US and raise my child there. So that was what I decided to do and came back to US. I am so thankful that I came back. With the support and help of DHF, I got my strength. I am waiting to move into my own apartment, where I will be able to better raise my baby girl. My case worker at DHF is working with me at every step, and I am assured that I will get the support I need to become self-sufficient. My goal is to raise my daughter as a strong and independent woman, so she could have a secure and happy life. I know it will be a long, difficult journey - but I am determined to overcome any obstacles and achieve my wishes for my daughter’s better future.

Furthermore, my ex-husband has turned out to be a somewhat, responsible father and agreed to pay some child support. He loves his daughter now, who he had previously abandoned before. I have forgiven him for that, and allow him to take our baby girl for a few days to spend some time with her father. Sometimes, I find myself thinking and reflecting, and wondering why my mother-in-law selfishly destroyed three lives. While my daughter and I are striving through challenging hardships – even her own son is miserable now, and really who is responsible for that?
Survivor’s Story

When I was 18-years-old, I met a man who I fell in love with. After seven years of dating, we got married. Only to find out that he is a very different man from what I had known. A year into our marriage, I found out that he is married to another woman in his country, and has three kids with her. After confronting him, I made the decision to stay and try to have a life with him.

However, then I found myself to be the only one wanting a house and children etc. I worked hard to get those things while he worked hard just to provide for his family in Pakistan. I was tired, ready to give up, then I finally got pregnant and was so excited but he wasn’t. He verbally abused me and told me to get rid of it. I was not going to hear of it at all; after all I did give up one pregnancy already for him. We sold our property and rented and I continued working. After giving birth and having my family in my life more now, I decided to move to NY with my mom. She took care of us and he made more and more trips to Pakistan and for longer periods.

I couldn’t live like that; he did nothing to help me financially. In fact he financially neglected us, but had thousands to spend in Pakistan. I wanted out, but he made me feel like I was the wrong one and was going to do the wrong thing. So I called my masjid, because I needed to hear from a more religious Muslim person if I was doing the wrong thing. Eventually, I contacted Domestic Harmony Foundation.

I was being abused by him financially and emotionally, in addition to feeling distraught. DHF referred me to counseling, which helped me to get stronger and helped me in decision making. I was referred to an attorney who took my case and did a wonderful job. The amount of support and advice I got was immense; today DHF is like my family always supporting me and helping me. Because of DHF I am in a better place, I feel better about myself and I have more faith in myself. I am now a working mother who is financially capable to take care of my daughter on my own, I have a car and I am so happy. Now I am also in a place where I can help someone else, where I can give to someone else. I am a stronger, happier, and healthier person because DHF help guide me to the right path.

Breaking the Cycle of Violence

This past year, my family life at home became more challenging to deal with. What was worse was that I found that I did not have anyone to talk to and my personal situation became all the more difficult. I sought out people and places for help, but I had a hard time speaking with someone who could offer truly good advice. Fortunately, over the summer, I’m grateful to have been a part of DHF’s Youth Group. This was where I connected with individuals in my age group, and where we shared our personal life experiences and exchanged advice about individual situations. I’m especially thankful to the Program Coordinator, Jasia, who helped pushed me to join, participate, and also lead within the youth group.

It was great how the youth group incorporated a wide variety of ages to join from high school level students to college level students. It was really a valuable experience for me to be in a position to reflect, and offer advice to folks younger than me. As a college student, I face a very different set of struggles. But I also have experienced the struggles and hardships of high school life, so I was able to share what I learned from my experiences. It was interesting to see that many people identified with many of the similar obstacles, but were taking proactive steps to overcome those issues.

I’m also truly grateful to DHF, for the scholarship money that I received at the end of the program. It was a great help, because I was able to pay for many of my college books this semester. In addition, thanks to DHF, I’ve also sought out counseling. I’m extremely thankful to DHF and to it’s wonderful leaders - who practice open-ness fundamentally, and who make anyone and everyone feel welcome.
Silk Tie

You looked so handsome in your beautiful silk tie,
So groomed and respectful.
I gave you the tie as a gift, since you were the love of my life
with whom I felt protected
Hanging in the closet with all of your silk ties
were the scarves you gave me as gifts
That silk tie made you look incredible when you got dressed
But - Remember when you pulled my scarf and bruised my neck?
You choked me with the same silk tie; I gave you as a gift.
I don't know how I felt, at that moment -
did I hate you or still love you?
All I remember now is
How much I just wanted it to end
and to save my children from all that unnecessary anger and violence.
You promised to stop many times
And I just kept waiting and waiting.........
~ By: A Survivor ~

Knots

We tied the knots with vows, complimenting each other and enhancing each other
Learning together, growing together and then…
You threw a plate at me, and hit me for saying how I felt…
You choked me with the same vows of love, with the love that once completed each other
Where is the air I used to breathe, where is the life I used to live?
~ By: A Survivor ~

Have You Ever Felt so Strong?

Have you ever felt so strong, that it made you feel so weak?
Long days, long nights - have you ever felt so alone?
You are in a room full of people, longing for a single individual to genuinely care for you.
If I was able to reach the sky, I would risk everything just to know how it feels to fly.
Fly with the stars in the sky.
I am no longer trying to survive, I believe that life is a prize, and to live doesn’t mean that you are alive.
~ By: Asiyah Muluk ~

Pieces

I was cut into pieces, but I put myself together and I am whole again.
My hope now is for our children to be whole one day again.
~ By: A Survivor ~

Forgiving Means Moving On…

You promised to be there for me; you lied.
I forgive you.
You promised that my needs will always be met; you lied.
I forgive you.
You promised to give me a life full of love; you lied.
I forgive you.
Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free,
And to discover that the prisoner was within inside of me.
~ By: A Survivor ~
PARTNER WITH DHF

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WELCOMES: individual and corporate sponsors for their events as well as speakers.

DHF would also welcome volunteers and professionals who can offer their time and services towards this cause.

If you are an attorney, social worker, case worker, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, early intervention specialist, or have other skills or resources that you feel could be put to good use, please email us at

SUPPORT DHF

A Donation, In Any Amount, Is The Best Way You Can Directly Aid DHF’s Work

Please make your tax deductible donations to:

Domestic Harmony Foundation
P.O. Box 35, Syosset, NY 11791

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www.DHFNY.org

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Details Of The Program Are Provided Here Below:-

Supporter Donation Levels::

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