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WHAT’S NEW ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ISSUES IN THE COMMUNITY (LINKS):

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- **Long Island Fund for Women & Girls Annual Awards Breakfast** – October 20, 2010
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- **Nassau County Executive Mangano Declares “Family Violence Public Health Emergency” in Nassau County**
- **Start Strong Initiative to Build Healthy Teen Relationships**
- **Family Violence Prevention Fund** - [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)
- **Senate Passes Bill Funding Family Violence Prevention & Services Act & Other Violence Against Women Programs**
- **Symposium for the 15th Anniversary of VAWA - Commentary on the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) by Judith Resnik, provided by Legal Momentum**
- **UNIFEM - Take a Stand Against Violence - Support the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)**

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Supporting Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) gives you the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of local community residents most in need. Through our free services, any person, regardless of income level, can access medical, financial, and legal information, often resulting in employment training, needed healthcare, housing, and legal protection from violence. In fact, with help from committed individuals like you, numerous women and children have received assistance in the past year. In addition, many community-based groups turn to Domestic Harmony Foundation for information and training. They also refer their clients to us on a daily basis. Even local government officials call on our board members for policy analysis and recommendations.

A gift to DHF is an important way to improve our community by providing services to those who cannot afford them. Each year thousands of our local residents face domestic violence. Our board members take on cases that are difficult, complex, and lengthy. They are cases that demand an understanding of the unique problems clients face because of traumatic physical abuse and psychological demoralization. They are cases that require intimate familiarity with complicated legal and ethical rules and other specialized areas of law. With your continued support, DHF will help clients seek relief from domestic violence through the legal process of the family and matrimonial courts.

Please join me by becoming our partner in justice. Generous gifts to our organization help Domestic Harmony Foundation carry out its mission to ensure equal access to justice for all. We hope you will support an institution that is a critical resource for our community. Justice demands that we raise our voices against the iniquity of domestic violence.

M. Omar Chaudhry, Esq.,
Chairperson
Board of Directors
MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano declared Domestic Violence to be a Public Health Emergency on Long Island this August, he was not kidding. There has been a substantial rise in domestic violence on Long Island. As he stated, "These numbers are shocking, and today I am declaring this a public health emergency."

According to a Newsday article from August 11, 2010, “In Nassau, a report prepared by the county's Task Force on Family Violence documented a 25 percent increase from 2008 to 2009 in domestic violence reports by police, a 4 percent increase in physical abuse reported by children, and a 58 percent increase in domestic violence arrests... In Suffolk, Gregory Blass, chairman of the Suffolk County Task Force to Prevent Family Violence, said reported domestic violence incidents increased 2 percent while there was a 24.2 percent increase in arrests and a 5 percent increase in physical abuse reported on behalf of children.”

These statistics do not exclude the South Asian and Middle Eastern populations, which, according to U.S. Census reports, are around 74,000 in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. This rise in domestic violence could be due to a variety of factors, foremost of which is likely the current economic strain which fuels the situation. Effective education and outreach campaigns from law enforcement and social service agencies like ours may account for the increase in reports. The ongoing economic crisis has decreased the financial support we receive and increased the need for our services. To date, we have served over 900 families and during the last year, have seen a significant increase in the number of calls and emails per month, 60% of which required direct services. This has resulted in the need for additional funding, resources and support from the community at large.

Domestic violence is an epidemic that transcends culture and religion, and is stigmatized and under-reported in all communities, including our own. However, for the Muslim community, this issue is compounded with the hostile and complex political climate in post 9/11 America. Muslims feel scrutinized and under siege, and fear and suspicions are easily raised on both sides. As the political climate has become more hostile toward Muslims, the worst affected are the victims of domestic violence. It has become even more difficult for them to speak out and seek help. In such an atmosphere these women are torn between staying loyal to their families and husbands, and their own safety.

Serving a primarily immigrant, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Muslim community has its own unique challenges. It is important to understand that because of their status as immigrants, language barriers, social isolation and lack of financial resources, immigrant women have a harder time on their journey to safety, and in deciding whether or not to leave an abusive relationship. They also have less access to legal and social services than others, and tend to suffer in silence because of the cultural stigma of shame and divorce in the community.

Despite these challenges, the Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) continues to provide counseling and support services, legal referrals, translation assistance, English lessons, and emergency assistance to those affected by domestic violence. DHF runs a helpline through which people can set up appointments or find out information in a confidential and safe manner. Most of the casework is carried out by dedicated volunteers who work on individual cases and collaborate with other DHF volunteers, staff, and board members to garner a variety of perspectives and information pertinent to each case. DHF is currently governed by a Board of Directors and an Executive Director who participate in casework to guide the direction of DHF programming based on the needs of the people with whom they work.

One of our clients recently said to me: “I wish I had reached out for help sooner and yet I am glad it was not too late. Whenever I come to the DHF office I feel like I am going home to a family that I don’t have here in this country. The love, warmth and hope I receive from you all cannot be overshadowed by my abuser and his tactics." A statement or sentiment like this makes the challenges we face well worth the effort. I pray and hope that we can continue to bring this positive change and can hold the hands of these women on their journey to empowerment and safety.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, members, sponsors, supporters, and clients, we thank you for your confidence and request your ongoing financial support so that we may continue to provide these critical services.

Shaida Khan
Executive Director
EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

DHF and Muslims Against Hunger – September, 2009

DHF members and their kids at the Hempstead Soup Kitchen during Ramadan last year, assisting Muslims Against Hunger, a network of volunteer communities. For more info, go to: www.muslimsagainsthunger.org.

DHF members at the Noor Masjid Health Fair – October 3, 2009

DHF participated at the Health Fair organized by the APPNA Women’s Alliance at Noor Masjid in Huntington. Dr. Rafia Hamid and Board Member Nazli Chaudhry each presented two different topics, which were very well received by an audience of women and girls. Nazli’s topic was, “What Does Domestic Violence (DV) Mean?” It was meant to bring to surface some existing cultural practices that may really be DV. For example, some women may not consider verbal, emotional or sexual abuse as DV, and only think that ‘beating’ is DV. Nazli clarified that DV was a pattern of abusive behavior – be it emotional, verbal, sexual or physical – used by an individual to gain control over a partner. Anyone can be victim of DV as it is prevalent across all socio-economic levels, ages, religions, races, cultures, etc. Children are greatly impacted as they witness the abuse. Nazli also talked about the use of religion to justify abuse or control, and mentioned the example of Prophet Mohammed (saw) who never abused any woman, let alone his wives. Nazli also covered what Islam says about gender roles and women’s rights, and in conclusion, discussed strategies on how an abused person can seek assistance, providing contacts of DV organizations.

Rafia’s topic was “Effective Communication with Your Children”. She talked about individualism vs. family values, cultural vs. Western values, obedience vs. outspokenness, etc. She discussed problems associated with immigrant parents bringing cultural baggage that may not jive with Western values, and about the stress children have in juggling two cultures and living a dual life: one at home and one at school. She also discussed specific concerns with girls and teen conflicts. In conclusion she advised parents to take the "middle road" approach, i.e., neither be too permissive nor too controlling; teach children boundaries; validate good Western values such as honesty, work ethic, freedom of speech, etc.

Program Coordinator Rabab Ahmed did an amazing job of preparing and printing informative flyers for the event and ensuring that the DHF table was well-stocked with brochures, donation box, envelopes, etc. The audience was very appreciative and grateful to DHF for bringing awareness about DV within their community and wanted us to do many more such programs for them in the future. DHF thanked Drs. Humaira Iqbal and Zoha Gondal for giving DHF this opportunity. Board Member Homaira Mamoor also did a presentation for a group of around 20 women physicians of APPNA Women’s Alliance the previous night at Dr. Donna Rehman’s residence.

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Leave your comments on facebook
DHF at the ICLI Health Fair – October 11, 2009

Hempstead High School Health Fair – October 29, 2009
DHF participated in Hempstead High School’s Health Fair for its students. DHF representatives set up a table where materials were distributed, and quite a few conversations were held with students on various topics such as their individual rights in a dating relationship as well as in other personal relationships. DHF also had the opportunity to introduce themselves to other organizations and County officials at the fair, who were all working towards providing services for the public.

DHF Training on the Issues of Domestic Violence – November 08, 2009
This training session was designed to provide an introductory and comprehensive overview of Domestic Violence with a focus on the South Asian and Muslim communities, as an introductory course for new volunteers and a refresher course for DHF’s existing workers.
✓ Mindy Perlmutter, Director of Education at Nassau County Coalition Against Domestic Violence gave an introductory overview of domestic violence
✓ Dr. Asma Ejaz, M.B.B.S, MD; Psychiatrist, gave a cultural/religious overview on understanding the dynamics of domestic violence
✓ Lawyer Guljit Bains, former public prosecutor in Queens, NY, addressed the legal aspects of domestic violence

DHF Eid Party – November 7, 2009
DHF Eid Party for clients and supporters, held at The Cotillion, Jericho, NY
DHF Training With Sakhi – January 24, 2010

DHF held a training session for its members and new volunteers with Jyotswaroop Bawa, Economic Empowerment Coordinator from Sakhi, a community-based organization founded in 1989 and based in the New York metropolitan area committed to ending violence against women of South Asian origin. The training covered a general introduction to providing crisis counseling and services to victims of violence, and the discussions that the Q&A fostered were focused around issues of maintaining confidentiality in small communities, dealing with extended families and cultural influences in certain cases, and other issues that DHF and Sakhi often find in their casework. The training closed with a presentation from DHF staff about ethical practices, casework guidelines, and the importance of doing safety planning in all cases, together with some hypothetical scenarios. Although some of the volunteers that attended the training may not participate in providing direct services or doing casework, the training provided valuable insights for all into the type of work organizations dedicated to assisting survivors of domestic violence do, and the struggles families face in our surrounding communities.

Family Wellness Fair at Freeport High School – May 1, 2010

DHF Program Coordinator Rabab Ahmed participated in the Family Wellness Fair at Freeport High School for its students and their families. A table was set up with materials which were distributed. Quite a few families visited the table and we spoke on various topics of interest to parents and students. DHF also had the opportunity to become known to other attending organizations at the fair and build relationships for everyone’s future benefit.

New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Workshop – May 27, 2010

DHF sponsored four members (Mr. Omar Chaudhry, Esq., Program Coordinator Rabab Ahmed, and Volunteers Yasmin Wasti and Zainab Nasser) to attend this free full-day training event held at the Touro College Law Center in Central Islip. The training was conducted by Lorien Castelle, Director of Prevention Programming, covering two sessions as detailed below:

Principles for Prevention Workshop
This session discussed the necessity of all agencies and systems, not just domestic violence programs, engaged in community-wide efforts in eradicating domestic violence. These efforts should encourage individuals and institutions to challenge attitudes, behaviors, and norms that support violence against women in our society. Promising models, tools and resources to support prevention efforts were shared and discussed. This workshop also engaged participants through use of PowerPoint slides, interactive discussions, and large group exercises that were also appealing to practitioners in addressing domestic violence.

Vicarious Trauma and Self Care Workshop
Vicarious trauma, also referred to as compassion fatigue or secondary trauma, is used to describe the psychological consequences persons in the helping professions may experience as a result of being exposed to a survivor’s accounts of trauma and witnessing the survivor’s pain and suffering from victimization. This workshop described symptoms and characteristics of vicarious trauma with tips for what we can do to protect ourselves from these negative harmful effects, while still being effective advocates and allies to those who come for help.
DHF Annual Fundraiser – April 17, 2010

Speakers:

⇒ Laleh Bakhtiar (Fourth from Right)

⇒ Shamita Das Dasgupta

DHF’s 2nd Annual Fundraiser was held on Saturday, April 17, 2010 at The Greens at Half Hollow in Melville, NY. The event was titled, “Living with Dignity & Honor,” and was educational as well as emotional. The cocktail hour at the beautiful and spacious venue gave the guests a chance to interact with one another, get to know the speakers, and buy their books, which were on sale. The Keynote Speaker at the event was Ms. Laleh Bakhtiar, translator and author of *The Sublime Quran*, who tried to give voice to the frustrations felt by women activists and policy-makers towards the arguably flawed interpretation of certain verses in the Quran that have been used to justify violence against women.

Scholar, social activist and co-founder of Manavi, Ms. Shamita Das Dasgupta apprised the audience of the high incidence of domestic violence (DV) in South Asian communities by providing government statistics. She implored the audience to speak up and educate the perpetrators of DV even if they are family members, neighbors, friends or colleagues.

On a more personal level, a client, who had been assisted by DHF, courageously faced the audience and told of the abuse she endured for years from her husband and how she found the courage to seek help for herself and her two daughters. With humility and pride she spoke about how having a job and providing a safe home for her daughters has helped them excel in school. With her husband getting counseling at the time, she said she was hopeful of a happy, cohesive future for her family. Dr. Kushalata Ahmed followed up with a poignant and moving song in tribute to all survivors. It essentially encouraged an individual to keep courage, no matter how difficult the present may be, and to remember that “no matter how dark the night may look, it has to end and the sun will rise.” Ms. Maysoon Zayid, a Palestinian-American and a well-known comedian, gave levity to the function with her humorous take on her family and community. A DHF-commissioned fictional short film, *Living with a Stranger*, written and produced by Jennifer Maharajh, was about DV in an educated, middle-class family, and received mixed reviews from the attendees. During dinner, a raffle was conducted with about 30 prizes including opera and comedy club tickets, studio portrait packages, U.S. Open tennis finals tickets, as well as the Grand Prize of a 5-day vacation package to Egypt, donated by Mohsin Khalafan of Skyline Tours & Safaris. The evening ended with Vishal Bhalla (of *Sa Re Ga Ma* fame) and group entertaining the guests with a mix of Hindi songs as well as Arabic and English songs. The attendance of more than 200 people made it a modest success despite the tough economic times. The DHF Board of Directors, members, and volunteers who worked hard to make the event a success appreciated the commitment of supporters and donors. DHF hopes to receive continuing and ongoing support of the South Asian and Muslim communities for our upcoming 2011 Fundraiser Dinner.
The summer youth group at Domestic Harmony Foundation’s inception can be traced to a casual conversation between Mrs. Shaida Khan and me last June. She had commenced a discussion on why there was a need for a summer youth group in her community, especially for the children of the women that utilized services at DHF. Having just served as an Evaluations Research Assistant for youth programs run through a local university, I recognized the significant positive impact that youth development services can have on participants. However, I was certainly not prepared for the words that came next out of Mrs. Khan’s mouth: “You should lead it this summer!”

Needless to say, I was startled and uneasy at first from her suggestion. How could I lead the group when some of the participants would be around my age, perhaps even older? But at the encouragement of Mrs. Khan, I finally came on board. And I am very happy I did.

The summer youth group was created to serve a dual purpose. The youth group would establish a safe space where young adults from the ages of 13 to 25 can freely express themselves to their peers. Just as importantly, the group would also create a forum for them to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to serve as leaders in their respective communities. We hoped that this group would fill a void of youth development services in our community, especially within the South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Muslim populations. Yet, it was incontrovertible that in order to adhere to DHF’s overall mission of addressing the issue of domestic abuse on Long Island, recruitment would emphasize on co-survivors of domestic abuse. Many of the youth group participants, including some of the co-survivors of domestic abuse, were able to open up and talk to each other about some of the issues they were dealing with in life – stress from school, peer pressure, racism, and feelings of loneliness.

This was the biggest accomplishment of the youth group.

We deliberately formulated an inclusion program rather than a support group for young adult co-survivors of domestic abuse in order to prevent them from feeling as if they were being singled out. This program was not meant to be a replacement for group therapy as many of the co-survivors were already being given access to counseling services. Rather, since many of these co-survivors had recently moved into the area due to an abusive family member, ensuring that they had supportive relationships was essential. Research has shown that youth groups positively impact children’s attitudes and behavior, social competence, positive identity, and ways of coping.

Youth participants engaged in interactive workshops by outside guest speakers in which they were taught how to become more effective leaders in interfaith works and given lessons on how to become more competitive in college admissions and the job market through resume building exercises. My peers and I frequently discussed current affairs issues and participated in formal debates with the goal of increasing our public speaking skills. We watched films and documentaries such as “New Muslim Cool” which discusses discrimination against American Muslims in the post 9/11 era and “Sleeping with the Enemy” which depicts the traumatizing effects of domestic violence on a family. Young adults who participated in the youth group were also routinely given opportunities to become more engaged in the community through enrollment in national youth conferences, volunteer opportunities at local centers and agencies, and internship announcements.

Near the end of the summer, I realized why it was preferable to have a young adult moderate the weekly sessions rather than an adult. Having the youth group led by the youth participants themselves enabled us to take control and feel confident in being in a role of leadership. The turnout for the youth group this summer was fantastic; especially considering this was our first time implementing it at the DHF office. I have no doubt in my mind that this program will continue to grow in the coming years without much additional advertisement simply because it is meeting the demands of the young adults in our community.
DHF at the ICLI Picnic – June 25, 2010

DHF was given space to set-up a table and distribute materials at the annual Islamic Center of Long Island picnic held at Eisenhower Park on June 25th, 2010. A number of attendees visited the DHF table, and the representatives spoke about their programs and passed around a sign-up sheet for free English classes to those who were interested. DHF also held a raffle and gave away photo frames as prizes. Program Coordinator Sapna Mehta did an excellent job of preparing the material for distribution and was assisted at the event by a couple of DHF staffers.

OTHER COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERVICES

Over the past year, Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) has expanded its educational program content in innovative ways, with the help of our wonderful volunteers, interns, and staff, and the support of the Long Island Fund for Women and Girls (LIFWG).

The LIFWG provided funding and assistance to DHF for starting English classes for all women in our surrounding communities. While it took some time to get the word out about these classes, through the hard work of our volunteers, DHF has found that there is quite a demand for English lessons. DHF now hires a trained ESL teacher to teach multiple group lessons, and plans to continue lessons and improve our ability to advertise and offer lessons in more locations throughout Long Island.

The LIFWG has also generously provided funding for our innovative Support Group Photography Project. Survivors who attend DHF support group meetings have been given digital cameras and were asked to submit photographs and blurbs that express their thoughts and points of view. DHF has found that these photographs and written captions not only allow participants to anonymously and directly express themselves, but also allows survivors to educate viewers on what their lives are like as they move forward. These images educate the public and DHF members in a different and unique way in other than the usual lecture-format trainings.
Domestic Violence Victims’ Rights in the Workplace: A law recently signed by Governor Paterson prohibits workplace discrimination against victims of domestic violence. This protection extends to meeting with law enforcement, attending court hearings, as well as broader issues like accommodation for temporary disabilities. The New York State Human Rights Law was recently amended to provide protection from employment discrimination for victims of domestic violence. DHF was invited by James Mulvaney, NYS Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs, to participate in the seminar, which featured speakers Commissioner Galen D. Kirkland, NYS Division of Human Rights, and Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, Sponsor of the Domestic Violence Bill. Omar Chaudhry, DHF Chairman, introduced DHF at the seminar, and talked about DHF’s work and existing needs.

DHF also assisted the NYS Division of Human Rights translate their pamphlets on the employment rights for victims of domestic violence into Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Hindi and Bengali. This assisted in helping publish an important document, which also helped us in reaching our goal of outreach to victims in this fragile community.

DHF Presentation at LIJ Department of Social Work – January 14, 2010

DHF was invited to speak to a group of social workers, nurses, and other mental health practitioners to address the needs of a large and growing South Asian patient population at LIJ and surrounding communities. In particular, the organization felt the need to understand their specific cultural and religious factors so that the service providers could better engage them in sharing issues of domestic violence and make appropriate referrals. Drs. Kushalata Jayakar Ahmed and Rafia Hamid represented DHF to better define how to provide culturally sensitive services.

The presentation began with an overview of DHF as the only independent community based, not-for-profit organization located in Long Island, New York. The presenters shed light on the fact that domestic violence (DV) is not unique to a single or a few communities, but that it is prevalent in all cultural, racial, occupational, and age groups. It is important to be aware of this within a hospital setting because battered women who do not access any other kind of help will more likely seek help from the medical system. The religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity of South Asians was highlighted, and some research studies were presented that suggest a significantly higher rate of partner violence within the women of South Asian descent (for example, 40% among South Asians vs. 24% among the general U.S. population).

Cultural norms that may affect a woman’s decision to seek help and/or leave the abusive relationship include issues related to marriage and divorce, paternal rights over children, rights of the husband over his wife, and the social stigmatization of being a divorced or single woman. The presenters also explained the “Muslim wheel of domestic violence,” developed by Dr. Sharifa Alkhatateeb, whereby a husband may use religion and cultural norms to isolate the woman; minimize, deny, or blame the victim; use children and male privilege to coerce and intimidate her; and threaten to withhold financial resources and other basic needs. Barriers to seeking help were also highlighted, which include linguistic barriers, cultural misunderstanding, mistrust of government agencies (post 9/11), fear of involvement with law enforcement, lack of knowledge of the U.S. legal system, and immigration status. Other barriers include such factors as shame and guilt, feeling responsible for the failed marriage, fear of being alone in an alien culture and being stigmatized by one’s own community, and lack of basic skills to survive independently. Batterers may threaten to report the victim to the authorities for deportation, report her for “working off the books,” and confiscate or destroy her papers. These women may not know that protection is available, nor do they know how to seek it or access information about the U.S. criminal and immigration laws and systems.

The presentation was followed by active participation from the attendees who asked many thought-provoking questions pertaining to the South Asian and Muslim communities, and examples from specific cases were discussed. Additionally, as Dr. Jayakar noted, she has been involved with DV-related work for more than two decades and has found that the medical specialties had remained uninvolved. This is particularly disturbing as a majority of these physically injured women went to the ER to get treated for those injuries. It is only recently being dealt with more thoroughly, thanks to the advocacy of people working to prevent DV. It was suggested that it is imperative that health care providers routinely screen their clients for domestic violence, ask direct questions, understand their needs and barriers, assess safety, recognize their own biases, and provide support and appropriate referral if applicable.
Healthy Families Initiative – January 23, 2010

The Healthy Families Initiative, under the Rhode Island Council for Muslim Advancement, is an Islamic organization that works on educating Muslims on the Islamic perspective on domestic violence. They offer services and intervention programs to the community in Rhode Island. They met with DHF at our office to get to know what work we do.

DHF / Turning Point: Joint Panel Discussion – February 14, 2010

A joint panel discussion was held by DHF and Turning Point on the First Anniversary of the murder of Aasiya Zubair on February 14, 2010, in memory of the young mother and countless other women who have lost their lives to domestic violence. This discussion was well attended with standing room only for latecomers.

The discussion aimed at bringing a clear and educated understanding of the principles of Islam and to address misconceptions about the status and treatment of women. Islam cannot be used to justify domestic violence in any form. Aasiya’s murder was the act of an individual – allegedly her abusive husband – and must be understood as such!

This was the gist of the presentations by Ms. Shaida Khan and Robina Niaz. Kushal Ahmed recited a very moving poem. The program also included a presentation by Turning Point’s Youth Members and was followed by a lengthy Q&A session.

DHF Participates: Nassau County Executive's Family Violence Task Force, February 2010

The Task Force is comprised of representatives of public and private agencies and organizations, working together to reduce the incidence of all forms of family violence – domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, sexual assault, and dating violence – in Nassau County. The Task Force is chaired by the Department of Social Services Commissioner John E. Imhof who will be working with the committee on developing a long-range plan to address the increasing incidence of family violence in Nassau County. DHF is a member of this Task Force.
Support Group for Survivors of Domestic Violence Held at Domestic Harmony Foundation’s Office

By A Survivor

Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) has been holding a support group for women who have been subject to family or domestic violence. The goal of the group was for these survivors to come together, share similar experiences, offer support to one another and to help members cope with the stressful events in their lives.

I have been a member of the DHF support group since its inception last January, with the original intention of having the group run for up to 10-12 weeks. We were supposed to meet once a week for an hour. However, our meetings often ran beyond the allotted time. Everything said in our meetings is confidential which enabled participants, including myself, to feel comfortable to talk. At times we say things that are difficult for us to say, to the extent that they sometimes seem foreign to our own ears. In this support group, we have gone through tumultuous times together – from holding back our tears, to glancing at each other with teary eyes, to crying together at numerous times. We have learned a lot from each others’ experiences. The primary lesson I attained from attending the support group meetings was the realization that I was not alone in being a survivor of domestic violence. There were women who were in even worse circumstances than I was, and if they could deal with their situations, why couldn’t I?

I was initially very depressed and ashamed to acknowledge the fact that I was in fact a victim of domestic violence. I just wanted to disappear so that I would never have to face the world. Yet, with the help of DHF and this support group, I have overcome this depression and anxiety. Attending the support group meetings was therapeutic for me, where I talked, listened and learned to revitalize my coping ability. We learned that we should respect ourselves first and then others would respect us. Most of us in this support group knew the problems of our spouses, but thought we could fix it and when we could not, we started blaming ourselves that we had not tried hard enough. It was like giving up on ourselves. It was through this support group that we became aware that we cannot change anyone unless he or she wants to change themselves. It was not our shortcoming but the perpetrator's issue. We also discussed the issues of safety, self esteem, and anger, how domestic violence affects our children, and coping techniques. In this group, we have talked about personal growth in all areas of life – whether it’s our job, school, or finding the right spiritual path. We have evolved into stronger personalities, now recognizing that we can shape our lives into any way we want to.

Almost eight months have passed by and this support group is still going on with success. Some new survivors have joined this group and some have left too, but there are several members, including myself, who continue to regularly attend meetings. I’m looking forward to going back again this week.

Legal Internship Program

A legal internship program at DHF was initiated by M. Omar Chaudhry in March 2010. Two law students were recruited from the New York Law School, at a legal conference held there. From early June 2010 to late August 2010, both these law school students were trained in the areas of family law and immigration law.

Mr. Taneem Kabir and Ms. Haadia Siddiqi were outstanding law students who demonstrated a passion for assisting survivors of domestic violence. Under the personal supervision of M. Omar Chaudhry, these two law interns (i) provided numerous legal consultations for our survivors and (ii) researched and developed six (6) PowerPoint presentations that explain the essential strategies involved in the legal representation of survivors of domestic violence. Their productive summer work enhanced DHF’s ability to provide legal advice to our clients and legal training to our board members and staff.

SAVE THE DATE

Muslim Men Speaking Up Against Domestic Violence – October 24, 2010
DHF Annual Fundraiser Gala – April 09, 2011