Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors including physical, emotional, psychological and financial coercion in intimate relationships. Inflicting violence in family is a chosen and learned behavior which can be learned in families, communities and cultures. We have to be mindful of the fact that domestic violence is not caused by illness, substance abuse, behavior of the victims or problems in the relationship but by solely the sense of entitlement. Perpetrators think that they have the right to use violence to make their spouses and children behave in a certain way, which is right in their own minds. Let’s remember that violent acts are individual acts and they cross all boundaries of gender, faith, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds.

DHF primarily serves women and children, but this does not mean that men cannot be the victims of violence, it can happen to anyone. When a woman calls us for help, our role is to listen to her and ask if she and her children are safe. Most of the time callers call us after exhausting all the avenues of talking to the family, friends and clergies. Our first advice is to them is to get counseling for the client and her spouse so that they can work towards creating harmony within their family and see past
their conflicts.

90% of our clients’ call back saying that her husband refuses to go for counseling and she does not feel safe at home. Then we go over the safety planning with the clients and let them know of their legal rights so as to protect themselves and their children. We talk about their options, provide them counseling, referrals and a safe space where they could find peace and make their own decisions for themselves and their children.

We know that breaking the cycle of abuse is very difficult and especially for South Asian women due to certain ingrained cultural values, women think a thousand times before taking any step. But when they reach out for help, it’s imperative to have a support system ready for them because it’s not easy to do it alone.

Once considered a private ‘family,’ domestic violence has emerged as one of the most significant societal concerns. By publically denouncing domestic violence and shifting the blame and shame to the perpetrator, we are making strides to eradicate this epidemic from our communities.

We need to draw massive attention to the campaign through impassioned speeches and actions. As a powerful movement, we must challenge patriarchy, strengthen resistance, transform our culture to promote dignity and safety for each and every member of the family.

We need to teach our sons that violence does not equal strength. If gender equality continues to be a women’s issue, then progress will remain slow. We can’t really speak about injustices against women without finding a way to engage men as meaningful partners.

We are making incredible progress thanks to the support of regular folks who share a commitment to end the cycle of domestic violence. By raising the awareness about domestic violence, DHF is striving to give voice to the silenced and the oppressed, and uplift those who are being forced to live a life of terror and pain within their own homes.

Domestic Harmony Foundation supports and empowers adults, youth, and children to lead safe and healthy lives based on dignity, compassion, and mutual respect. We are committed to preventing and ending domestic violence by myriad of ways such as helping victims to break the cycle of abuse, educating community members on how domestic violence affects families and children and providing tools to our youth on non-violent communication methods.

At DHF we honor the courage and strength of survivors of violence. The
path to a life free from violence is mired with many conflicts, uncertainties and fears. In the words of Nelson Mandela, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.”

**The DHF Model**

*By Nazli Chaudhry*

Domestic Harmony Model for grassroots community organization serving South Asian and Middle Eastern survivors of Domestic violence. How do we begin to talk about domestic violence in our communities? How do we make a masjid a place of refuge and safe haven for the oppressed and provide the services needed to empower the ones whose human rights (which are synonymous with Islamic rights) have been violated? How do we emulate the beloved community that our Prophet Muhammad pbuh created? How do we love like the Prophet? Do we have a model for how to create an organization that provides culturally and religiously sensitive services with confidentiality and professionalism?

One such example exists in the Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) in Long Island, NY.

I joined DHF in 1999 (then known as Domestic Harmony Committee). It was and still is the only organization on Long Island serving the myriad needs of South Asian and Middle Eastern families dealing with domestic violence and other human rights violations. I was asked by Karamah, to talk about the process of founding DHC/DHF and the challenges faced and best practices we implemented so that other communities may have a "recipe" to use when they are ready to form a DV service organization in their communities.

Karamah, Muslim Women Lawyers For Human Rights is a US-based non-profit organization that values the participation of its members through the pursuit of knowledge, access to opportunities, and equity among all. Through education, legal outreach, and advocacy, they contribute to the understanding and promotion of human rights worldwide, particularly the rights of Muslim women in Islamic and civil law.
As an advisory board member of DHF, I was honored to present at Karamah's annual "Love Like the Prophet" events hosted by "I Make Space" in the Providence Recreation Center, VA (www.imakespace.com) and Masjid Muhammad in Washington, DC. At each event there was a scholar from whom we learned the Prophetic model of love and harmonious family relations, a Karamah Legal services representative and a presentation about DHF's model of community based organization. Both events were very well attended with almost equal number of men and women, young and old. It was heartening to see the interest in learning about healthy relationships free from violence.

**Domestic Violence**

We may ask, what makes awareness about domestic abuse such an important issue? I ask you to take a moment to consider the alternative – imagine a household with this epidemic. Abuse and violence does not have one victim per household. The sense of despair, hurt, and helplessness is not suffered alone by the abused. It is suffered directly and sometimes indirectly by the children and extended family in the household.

Every child has the right to expect a childhood free of the hurt and trauma that comes with abuse as home. He or she should not have to suffer mentally, emotionally, academically, or in any other way because of violence at home. But every child of a violent household does. Our children deserve better and the battered victims deserve a life free of abuse.

We may question why anyone would commit acts of violence and intimidation against their intimate partners? There is never one answer. Admittedly, there are many uncomfortable questions and equally disturbing realities that answer those questions, but all good change comes with discomfort. That is why we urge you to take steps to closely examine and challenge set beliefs and begin a journey towards understanding domestic violence.

**Why Don’t People in Abusive Relationship Just Leave?**

*By Tehreem Rehman*

This is a question that is all too often asked. There are numerous barriers that prevent victims of domestic violence from leaving abusive situations such as racism in the criminal justice system, immigration status, and fear for one’s safety, just to name a few. Financial barriers also play a significant role.
Recent estimates suggest that approximately 94% of domestic violence survivors have experienced economic abuse. Economic abuse can entail preventing the victim from keeping employment, engaging in credit-related transactions and subsequently accruing debt in the victim’s name without his or her consent, and/or prohibiting the victim from accessing current funds. Even if a victim is able to escape, crippled financial literacy can pressure the survivor to return to the abusive situation.

Furthermore, a lack of affordable housing can prevent victims of domestic violence from escaping abuse or otherwise generate dire circumstances for those who have managed to leave. One report by the ACLU found that half of all cities in the United States point to domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness. In response, states like New York have announced plans to expand emergency housing for domestic violence survivors.

Yet, increasing access to safe and affordable housing is just one component of empowerment for survivors of domestic violence. In order to truly support economic empowerment, organizations providing services to survivors of domestic violence must assist them in areas such as securing further education or training, subsidizing childcare, and even something as speciously basic as attaining a driver’s license. Education, child-care, and access to transportation are each vital to a person’s capacity for both securing and maintaining employment. Indeed, such factors have previously been shown to comprise the most common barriers to low-income women’s employment.

Harmony Foundation (DHF) does support the economic empowerment for survivors of domestic violence. DHF is dedicated to working with underserved populations, such as South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Muslim women and children, who have difficulty utilizing mainstream domestic violence services. While procuring counseling for survivors of domestic violence is certainly one of DHF’s priorities, staff and board members also spend considerable time focusing on services such as skill building and job training.

Other domestic violence organizations across the country have also been working tirelessly to address the numerous financial barriers confronted by victims and survivors of domestic violence. According to a 2014 report by the National Network to End Domestic Violence, 88% of domestic violence organizations provided services related to transportation, 75% provided services related to financial literacy/budgeting, and 61% provided services related to job training/employment assistance. While 87% of organizations provided
services related to emergency shelter, only 42% of organizations provided services related to transitional housing, 25% of organizations provided services related to safe houses, and 9% of organizations provided services related to Matched Savings Programs and/or Micro Loans.

A significant unmet need for domestic violence services remains. The 2014 report goes on to describe how approximately 11,000 request for services were unmet that year due to limited resources. 40% of those unmet needs were for emergency shelter and 16% of those unmet needs were for transitional housing. In other words, over 6,000 women in a single year were presumably unable to leave their abusive situations due to limited alternative housing. It is important to note that these numbers only reflect the victims who were actually able to interface with domestic violence organizations.

Although financial barriers have been clearly shown to significantly impact the ability of a domestic violence victim to escape abuse, those barriers no longer appear to be given priority by the national Office on Violence Against Women. While “restoring and protecting the economic security of victims of violence” was designated as one of the four priority areas for funding by OVW back in 2013, it is no longer included in the current priority areas for funding by OVW. Since economic insecurity can coerce victims to be placed at risk for abuse again, it is imperative to prioritize financial abuse and economic empowerment when seeking to combat the epidemic of domestic violence in this country.

Forced Marriages

By Jasie Mirza

Forced marriage occurs when a man or woman is coerced by their family or other persons in authority, to marry, without any regard for their consent. A forced marriage may involve many forms of oppression and abuse such as threats, emotional blackmail, fraud, and even bribes. Emotional and social coercion is often experienced as threatening by the individual, as distress may lead to accepting the decision that is against
Sometimes a forced marriage is mistaken as an arranged marriage. The practice of arranged marriages has been a long-standing tradition in many cultures and countries. In an arranged marriage, the families of both spouses take an active role in arranging the marriage; however, the choice whether to accept the arrangement remains with the individuals, and is valued.

Although the basic difference between an arranged and forced marriage often involves the issue of choice and consent, it is important to understand what choice and consent means and looks like. Some parents use the tactic of not speaking to a son/daughter for months at a time to convince him/her to get married to the person of their (the parents’) choice; they may threaten to disown the child if he or she does not accept the prospective spouse. Others would not even give the right to a daughter to decline. In many cultures, girls are trained from a very young age to obey their parents and never to say “no” to them. Parents often do not realize that they destroy their own children's lives by coercing them into an unwanted marriage.

What is wrong with such a marital relationship? Early and forced marriage is associated with many adverse psychological, emotional, medical, financial and legal consequences. Early marriage often interrupts a victim's education and hence limits any possibility of economic independence. Daughters of young, uneducated mothers are more likely to drop out of school and be married early, repeating the cycle. Many times such marriages go unregistered, leaving a woman with no legal protection in case of abuse or divorce.

Girls who are victims of early and forced marriage have higher mortality rates compared to their unmarried counterparts. According to a research carried out by the World Health Organization, married girls between the ages of 15 to 19 are more likely to experience violence compared to older married women. Due to a lack of education, lower socio-economic status, lack of
control and powerlessness, girls subjected to early or forced marriage often suffer higher levels of violence, abuse and rape.

**Eid Celebration for DHF Client Families**

DHF organized an Eid picnic for client families at Westbury Gardens. Clients and their children not only enjoyed good food and games but also received beautiful gifts. This year’s Eid was very special in so many ways, Eid gifts put smile on many faces. Some caring community members got together and did a toy and clothing drive for us. Toy drive was so successful that we were not only able to provide toys for our client’s children but the extra ones were donated to local masjids. Money raised by clothing drive was given to a client towards the car purchase.

**Touching the Lives of Others**

*By Shagufta Siddiqi*

*Member of DHF*

“The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good “– Samuel Johnson

Life is full of magnificent adventures; mountains to climb, records to break and goals to achieve. But the greatest adventure by far Allah (swt) has in store for us is the opportunities to touch the lives of others. We are all connected to each other. If our hearts are well connected only then we can feel the pain of others in our heart.

Our heart is always connected to everything. If we listen to it more often we would see how many opportunities we have to touch the lives of others in a positive way by providing support and guidance.

We often don’t think about the powerful effect our words and actions can have on others. By different ways we can serve as angels for each other. Think about someone who has encouraged you, strengthened your belief in yourself and helped become who you are today.

Everyone has the ability to reach out and make a difference in the lives of others. It might be nothing more than a few kind words uttered when someone is at their lowest. Though it seems like a small effort on our part, it might mean the world to the person receiving our attention and encouragement.

We should be motivated out of genuine concern for the needs of others and be willing to show true compassion for those in need whether emotional or material need.
Let us not think that we must do something “grand or spectacular” to touch someone’s life, just what is needed and all we can do. Though our words of encouragement and hope is all someone needs for that moment and they can long remember what we said when they needed it most.

Words may give comfort for a moment but they do not fill the stomach, do not warm the body and mean little if they are not backed up with actions. We can make a difference in their lives.

One way to bring a change is to reach out to families where wives are abused, husbands are bullied, children and elderly parents are neglected. When such violations occur and no one acts in their defense innocent lives get destroyed. Children face threatening future of moral confusion, personal shame, spiritual disillusionment, emotional scars and anger. We all have social responsibility toward them, and should step in to extend a helping hand. By doing this we could bring the glimmer of hope in their lives!

You and I can be the ones who are not afraid to reach out to them and help them without any bias or judgment. We can make a difference in their lives and give them new hopeful beginnings.

**Trauma and Hope**

**Trauma:**

What is trauma? It is when someone goes through traumatic experience and struggle with upsetting emotions, fearful memories or sense of lurking danger. Some people may feel numb, disconnected or unable to
trust others. Trauma can shatter someone’s sense of security and make them feel helpless and vulnerable. Threatening situations alone can be overwhelming even if it does not include physical harm.

Emotional or psychological trauma could happen when someone is intentionally cruel and repeatedly make the other person feel alone and powerless. It can be caused by one time event or stem from ongoing stress of living in violent situations. Children who witness violence at homes see the world as dangerous and frightening place and may develop anxiety, depression and other behavioral disorders. When bad things happen, it takes a while to get over the pain and feel safe again. With support, counseling and self-help tools there is a hope for the recovery. People can heal and move on with their lives.

**Project Hope:**
This year, Domestic Harmony Foundation’s art therapist, Wahib did an amazing art project with the support group members called ‘Project Hope.’ Art therapy is a way for survivors to express difficult and terrorizing feelings, cope with traumatic memories and work towards emotional stabilization and strengthen sense of safety. Survivors used art to express their feelings and self-expression.

**The DHF 7th Annual Gala**

May 17, 2015 - Queens, NY – Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) has become a staple in the community for victims of domestic violence by offering support services that empower victims to independence. On Sunday May 17 they held their 7th Annual Fundraising Gala at Terrace on the Park that featured the theme of “Break the Silence...Be the Change.” This theme pervaded every aspect of the program, as guests were treated to speeches and performances that sought to demonstrate ways in which domestic violence affects individuals and families. During the Invocation Zubeida Lunat highlighted the goals of the
Domestic Harmony Foundation as establishing “enduring values in life” and helping victims of domestic violence “make a better life for themselves and their families.” Following right after was Jasia Mirza, the DHF Program Coordinator, who addressed why domestic violence is a continuing issue and what DHF is doing to make a difference. Jasia presented that “domestic violence is a learned behavior and the mindfulness of violence arises from a sense of entitlement,” additionally that domestic violence is a crime where “the blame is often shifted from the perpetrator to the victim.”

Having explained mechanisms underlying domestic violence relationships, Jasia explained that the “DHF has a support system ready,” and “provides a safe space to escape the violence and break the cycle of abuse.” One goal Jasia says that the Domestic Harmony Foundation is constantly working on is “addressing the men in the community and engaging them as meaningful partners.” She also made a call for volunteers and donors to continue showing their support and help to scale the organization so that the problem of domestic violence is properly addressed in our community.

One such individual who had become a meaningful partner of the Domestic Harmony Foundation is Dr. John E. Imhof, the Chairman of the Task Force against Domestic Violence and Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. Dr. Imhof stepped on stage for a brief moment to congratulate DHF on another great turn-out and encouraged them to keep making a difference in the community and offered Nassau County’s full help and support. Another meaningful male partner to the DHF was then welcomed on stage by one of his students, Ammar Hamid, who credited this guest speaker for helping him understand manhood. Imam Khalid Latif serves as the NYU University Chaplain, Executive Director of the Islamic Center at NYU, and as a Chaplain for the NYPD. In his time addressing the audience Imam Latif shared a powerful personal story where in his youth a victim of domestic violence needed his assistance and he wasn’t fully equipped to provide the help she needed.

Years later, however, when he encountered her a second time he made sure he had all the tools at his disposal to be in the position and help her out second time around. In conveying this anecdote Imam Latif
encouraged every guest in attendance to equip them to be able to help those in need.

Following this was a presentation of awards to various contributors to the success of DHF, and the two most prominent recipients of the awards were Mr. Rizwan Qureshi and the South Asian Council for Social Services who were awarded “Friend of DHF Award,” and the “DHF Change maker Award, respectively. After the award presentation was the Keynote Address by Ms. Joya Dass, a South Asian news anchor. In her address Ms. Dass proudly shared her story of success through failure, and was open regarding her experiences with domestic violence. Her ultimate career goal was to be an on-air news anchor and in achieving her goal she had to fight for every ounce of opportunity to prove herself in advancing her career. The message her keynote conveyed to the victims of domestic violence was that no matter what type of failure you are faced with, perseverance requires an attitude of never quitting. The last speech before lunch was made by the director of the art program, Amal Wahib.

In addressing the guests, Amal Wahib, shared that in the corner of the banquet hall were tables full of artwork that were being sold in a silent auction.

Each of these pieces was inspired by the way domestic violence affected each of the artists personally. Browsing through the artwork pieces there was themes of feelings of being lost, alone, and abandoned; many pieces also conveyed protective nature of motherhood. This artwork spoke to theme of the program, “Break the Silence...Be the Change.”

Following lunch, Dr. Anila Midha set the scene for an adapted play titled “Seema’s Story.” The play was narrated by Rabab Ahmed, violin and viola were played by Spencer Rudolph and the lead role of Seema was played by Gunjan Rastogi. The play set the scene by having several family and community members lined up in row as Seema walked across and confronted them before taking a seat in the center of the stage.
They spoke as different individuals in Seema’s life, including her, sister, daughter, best friend, policeman, clergy, and community leader; these roles were played by volunteers. In the first act the voices of each of these characters were narrated in a harsh light, intentionally placing the blame on who is the victim of domestic violence as the reason for the violence, with the music in the background conveying a somber tone for ‘Blanketed by Blame, Empowered by Support.’ As the lines were being read each character would step forward and place a shawl over the head of Seema. In the second act of the play the roles are reversed.

In this act the violin more upbeat tone the narrator conveys lines that offer support and prevent re-victimizing Seema, instead establishing a healthy discourse for helping her fix her problem and each character walking toward Seema and removing the shawl from her head. This play served as a powerful demonstration of the dichotomy of how society treats domestic violence victims, illustrating how they should be treated.

The last performance of the day was a singing performance by Ms. Nazida, whose renditions of "Title of Song" and "Rolling in the Deep" were all very well received. By the end of the event guests were treated to tea and desserts as the silent auction winners were announced and Jasia Mirza, Program Coordinator thanked all attendees and participants for their participation and encouraged them to stay involved throughout the year.

**Peer-Pressure & Self-Esteem**

*By Ahmad Chaudhry*

On July 31st, the third session of the Domestic Harmony Foundation’s Youth Leadership Program of 2015 focused on Peer Pressure on Self Esteem. Mr. Timothy Thom of the Freeport School District led the session, facilitated by Ahmad Chaudhry and Samia Mustafa. Through a series of interactive activities and open discussions, Mr. Thom offered the young leaders in the room an opportunity to sincerely pose
questions to themselves and to their peers as to how they would like to shape their personalities and beliefs in order to become strong and individualistic versions of themselves.

Mr. Thom not only brought a charming sense of buoyancy to the room, but also brought it out in even the shyest of students. His ability to convey the important message of mindfulness and establishing a sense of equilibrium in one’s own psychology is an essential aspect to becoming an effective leader. Most of the world’s leaders would agree that no one person can lead others if he or she cannot lead himself or herself effectively, and Mr. Thom’s program exemplifies this truth in its entirety.

He conducted a series of activities that taught us to examine what qualities we deemed essential in a “best friend.” Among the excitement of naming qualities that we all would love to see in a great friend, Mr. Thom brought us to the realization that the wide array of great “friend” qualities we listed must be congruent within ourselves and must be incorporated in our practice of living honest and meaningful lives.

Our young leaders and facilitators would agree that the highlight of this session was when we all partook in the “victory breath” and the “power breath”, which are breathing exercises that allow an individual to experience potent sensations of serenity and vigilance, respectively.

To conclude, the “Peer Pressure and Self Esteem” session of the Domestic Harmony Foundation’s 2015 Youth Leadership Program proved to be successful in the short term and long term, by not only allowing these bright young students to tap into their inner potential in that present moment, but by also reassuring them that this potential can and will turn into reality.
Public Speaking

On August 7, 2015, the fourth session of the Domestic Harmony Foundation’s Youth Leadership Program of 2015 focused on tackling Public Speaking. Dr. Isma H. Chaudhry, president of the Islamic Center of Long Island, led the session, which was facilitated by Ahmad Chaudhry and Samia Mustafa.

Dr. Chaudhry led an interactive session involving each student individually to openly discuss the “do’s” and “don'ts’s” of public speaking. Dr. Chaudhry made it her intention to have a completely honest discussion about audiences, public crowds, and the general responses that are associated with strong presentations and weaker presentations.

“Practice! Practice! And more practice!” Dr. Chaudhry said that every good speaker should recite these words like a prayer! Nothing great was ever achieved without practicing and engulfing yourself in a certain craft. As one gains more competence, one gains more confidence in his or her trade. “The more you practice, the more your nerves settle. Not only does your preparation build on your integrity to respect the audience’s time and attention, but the more your nerves settle, the more you can achieve, and ‘WOW’ your audience, and that’s the beauty of public speaking!”

Dr. Chaudhry felt compelled to discuss the important and vital aspects of public speaking as well as challenged our young leaders to read between the lines and assess how they, in fact, judge other public speakers, in order to better hone their own presentation abilities.

Dr. Chaudhry explained to the young leaders that she has no regrets in her experience in public speaking, for her mistakes were her greatest lessons and they pushed her beyond her perceived boundaries. This left each of the students with a newfound hope and instilled sense of confidence.

Dr. Chaudhry grabbed the attention of the young leaders immediately by, essentially, putting herself on the spot and asking the students, point blank, how they would judge her as a speaker, after having introduced herself briefly. Dr. Chaudhry even broke down the steps that she herself took to prepare for that very session!

“Throughout my decades of public speaking, it’s very apparent to me that the devil is truly in the details,” explained Dr. Chaudhry, “I cannot tell you how many times I’ve had to publically speak in an outside event and the wind blew my papers all over the stage!” Taking care of the simple things, such as numbering the pages of the speech, adds a
completely new dimension to one’s preparation.
Dr. Chaudhry’s seminar was one of the most helpful and informative workshops some of these students have ever been a part of. Her insight, experience, knowledge, and wisdom gave these youth leaders the tools and the drive that are necessary to succeed at public speaking. Dr. Chaudhry was honest: the hours can be long and hard at time; however the payoff in getting a genuine applause is more than worth it.

Youth Participation Feedback

By Subhana Zafar

“I have benefitted immensely from the Domestic Harmony’s youth Program. I found that the Stress relieving class had aided me the most recently. The breathing exercises I learned help clear my mind and relax me every time I would feel stressed. My favorite breath, the victory Breath, would calm me down quite easily. I enjoy doing this at night so I can have a peaceful night rest. Overall all the programs within the class have been able to apply to my daily life. I cannot wait until next year!”

Fourth Annual Walkathon 2015

The Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) held its fourth annual 'Run/Walk to End Domestic Violence' at Eisenhower Park on Sunday, October 11th, 2015. Under the warm fall sun, volunteers, walkers and runners alike joined us for a day to spread awareness about the social ill we hide so well.

Grandparents brought their grandchildren and children brought their parents for a day full of excitement and support for the victims of domestic violence, not just in spirit, but by attending it personally. There were members from the Arab community, South Asian community, Latin American community, Jewish community - just to name a few. People are realizing that thoughts and prayers are not enough; we must find
ways and take action to end this epidemic of gender based violence.

**Community Responses**

What is domestic violence? It is gaining control over another person through coercion, force and threat. It has many forms ranging from physical, verbal, psychological and financial. What are the social, economic and political causes for domestic violence and how could we prevent future occurrences, what needs to be changed in the legal system and in terms of community response when dealing with this offense.

Social and political movements and academic research is needed for understanding the nature and causes of partner abuse, therefore changing cultural attitudes, condemning domestic violence and making perpetrators responsible for the crime are all of the things that play a major role in preventing domestic violence. Giving a voice to those who have been silenced due to shame, blame and social stigma is essential in this movement.

Statistics show that 41 – 61% of Asian women report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. That does not mean that domestic violence is solely a women’s issue and only affects women. Violence is a societal issue and affects men, women, children and society at large. Children raised in such households develop behavioral and psychological problems, people get hurt and homes become dysfunctional.

Acknowledge woman’s humanity before anything else, and do not consider her as a possession or property. Remember if you love someone that doesn’t mean you should control that person on the contrary true love is seeing that loved ones flourishing and thrive.

We are well aware that domestic abuse is perpetuated, condoned and incited by women as well. Practices like treating sons differently or commending sons to exert manly control, over tears, emotions, women, households and careers can spiral into abuse of power. Subjecting daughters to forced marriages, mistreating daughter’s in-law or constantly criticizing and putting down husbands could all escalate violence at home. Take the ownership of the problem and remember that boys who are raised with such mindset, end up being miserable themselves and cannot live a happy and full life. Fight against domestic violence is not between men and women but against the cultural norms
Gender equality is the answer for violence free futures. Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) is one of a kind community based not-for-profit organization in Long Island, working to empower victims of domestic violence through support services such as advocacy, counseling, legal consultations, support groups, crisis intervention, financial assistance and leadership development.

Survivor Stories

Survivor Story 1

“Domestic violence is a deeply rooted problem in many communities especially within our own communities. Although domestic violence isn’t a topic people of our community speak much about publicly, we all as a nation, at some point in our lives have been the victim of it or have seen it by seeing a member of family being abused by another family member. Family violence or domestic violence is recognized as a serious problem unanimously but it is majorly recognized as a severe problem at the expense of the lives of women and children.

As I, myself have been at the other end of the gamut, from being abused physically, mentally, emotionally and financially, by being cheated on, lied to, manipulated and abused in every way possible. I was able to come out of it regardless of fear hopelessness, scared of the thought ‘If I can do this by myself?’ scared that now I will be considered ‘damaged goods’ by society. To now tackling this problem head on, by doing all that has to be done, in order to come out of it completely, and by doing so the right way. Along with the help of lovely strangers who became my dear friends from Domestic Harmony Foundation, with the help of Masjid Darul Quran, and also with the help of this amazing nation we live in, which has provided me with immense help into getting back onto my own feet, to now being able to help others who are on the same situation, as I once was not too long ago.

I am immensely passionate about the cause and effect of domestic violence, as well as women empowerment, as I have a daughter of my own. Today I have nothing to be afraid of; nothing to be ashamed of. Today I thank my abuser for making me stronger than I thought I could ever be. I thank him for making me be fearless and not surrender to abuse. Today I stand for all the women and children that have been victims of domestic violence, today I stand for my daughter, today I say: ENOUGH is ENOUGH.

I am ALREADY HONORED to have Miss Bangladesh USA, give me the opportunity, to be one of the contestants regardless of my age, status of being a young married woman (separated), and a mother of a beautiful
girl. I feel as though, through this opportunity, we as a whole can shape the mindset of our culture and society, where a woman is still accepted even if she’s not a ‘cookie cutter perfect’, perfectly unmarried to be considered the only ‘type’ of women to empower others in their struggles.

Through this opportunity, we can learn to value women who have experienced hardships of life at a young age, and give strong, talented, educated, intelligent, beautiful women the chance to change the standards of what societies consider pageants are like or should be.

I would be HONORED to be the first title holder of Miss Bangladesh USA, in order to give a platform to my fight against domestic violence, the spotlight it deserves in our society today.”

Survivor Story 2

“Where do I begin to tell you my story, the sweet Love Story that turned bitter? The story of those lips who sang nothing but songs of my praises, the words, "wish I had met you earlier", changed into curses and insults. What hurts more is that it did not occur after years of marriage, but started soon after our marriage and slowly gradually. He cursed me for the first time perhaps after six months of marriage while I was driving his car. I stopped the car and before I could step out, he begged forgiveness like crazy and assured his eternal love to me and I continued to drive back home. Yes, in the start, he always wanted me to be in the driving seat, 2 years after our marriage, I was totally incompetent to drive even my own car, so he was always in the driving seat and I almost felt I had forgotten to drive.

"I don't want you to work, because I love it when you open the door for me with a smile". These words meant so powerful and full of love to me that the thought of job would not cross my mind again. But later this statement changed into, "What kind of job can you get, a receptionist, a secretary, that's it?" I never could understand why my “soul-mate”, who promised to love me even after his death, would utter these condescending words to me!

It was all too uncomfortable and raised alarming signs for me but I kept making room for all his moods, he's over protective, a little jealous because he loves me, may be its too early and he will gain trust as he gets to know me more.

“But he had shared everything about himself honestly with me. He told
me about his alcohol and marijuana puffs and girlfriends. He admitted it was all wrong, and he made a promise to himself that he will quit all of this and that he wants to start a noble life with me. I did not want to be skeptical. I accepted him as an honest person trying to change for better. May be God chose me to help him?

Then slowly and gradually all my friends were lost because he made me change my phone number so many times that I lost touch with them and also to please him, I deleted all those numbers. Then came a time that I could not even share with anyone what I was going through, definitely not my family, didn’t want to hurt my years old mother and 80 years old father who is a heart patient.

Where did I go wrong, I would ask myself repeatedly? I changed myself completely to get his approval. What did I not do for my husband? I quit my friends (male or, class-fellows, acquaintances or neighbors), my family (even their phone calls would bother him so much that I had to hang up the phone). I had to smile because he said it can wrong message to the other person. I changed my dressing, my cooking, my hair style, my life style (from a lively, jolly, outgoing, smiling person, I became a quiet, home bound serene person). "Who did you call or must have chatted with your family on messenger where did you go today was a standard everyday question, even if my car wasn’t moved an inch from where it was parked. I was not supposed to keep any secret from my husband so he made me give him all my passwords of the email account, web-accounts, even my bank account online.

I was completely isolated. Then I became pregnant with my first child, the happiest feeling of my life. His abuse aggravated after pregnancy. His arguments, his alcohol consumption became more frequent, made me shred all my photos of traveling around the world, all those memories had to be deleted for he suspected that there may be some hidden persons/memories in those photographs. He made me throw all my past clothes, movies, cds, I kept doing it all as a dutiful wife for I wanted my husband to trust me.

I wanted him to know that I have no past to hang on to and I have nothing to hide. No matter how much I tried, I was never good enough. I went to Emergency Room three times during my pregnancy mostly after his intense arguments, fights, and third time; I was operated to save the child and my life, although I had no complication in my pregnancy. Then came the financial abuse, he started using money out of my personal account without my knowledge or permission and confrontation brought nothing but fights, curses and insults to me. Now I
was worried for my son to grow in the midst of these arguments, which were becoming more frequent.

I tried to talk to him, offered mediation through family, his, or even some Islamic marriage counseling. I did not want this marriage to fail. I did not want to give my child a broken family, but he never agreed to any consultation whatsoever.

I was left with a hard choice whether to stay in this relationship or be financially independent and give my child a better life, but I did not have the courage and I got pregnant again. Abuse continued and then I discovered he was cheating on my now. I was going to be the mother of a girl this time. “Divorce”? No, not me, I will give my best but not leave this relationship. I am a very strong woman, a psychologist, I understand that my husband has trouble dealing with his anger, and I can help him, I can bring him to a dialogue and finally he would be able recognize the problem and we can work it out. No, no, I was not going to live with the stigma of “Divorce”, for people will raise eyebrows on my daughter too, oh her mother got divorced, oh this girl was raised in a broken family, all these thoughts would weigh me even down.

I will always remain indebted to the nurse at my OB/Gyn clinic who recognized that I was dealing with some deep-rooted sadness and the social worker, who after a few sessions provided me with the contact number of Domestic Harmony Foundation. Approached DHF mainly asking for couple therapy, marriage counseling through a Muslim female counselor, because I wanted to give my utmost effort to make this relationship work.

I was walking on egg-shell all the time that anything I say or do may annoy him. His threats made me secluded at home. His cursing and insults had become so frequent that I felt most women on the earth. I felt so shameless that I am being insulted and cursed at day and night with worst possible words and I did not have the courage to stand for myself or even to. There was nothing I could do except serving him, and his older kids with hot meals, cleaning up after them, taking care of my two infants to my room dead tired at night as a worthless piece of crap. Coming to DHF for support group was like having fresh air to breathe in. Listening to others, I realized I was not alone, and the most important thing I learnt through these support groups and counseling sessions with some volunteer counselors here, was that “This is Domestic Violence, that I have been going through all along, disconnecting me from all my friends, my family, job, social networks, financial deprivation, this is abuse!, I did not have a blue eye, or bruises on my body, broken bones,
but I had lost my confidence, my self-esteem shattered to pieces, my betrayed. Yes, finally I was able to say, this is not the life I aspired, this is not the love I dreamt of. Love should not hurt! Thanks to DHF team!

Even though DHF resources were limited and they could not provide me regular counseling but they made sure that I was connected to some other reliable resources, and that I was not left alone at any point. Even when I was physically secluded because of my husband’s threats to kill me if I approached the police or court, DHF coordinator Jasia, stayed in regular contact with me my safety, informing me of all the possible help available to me for myself and my kids. This assurance enabled me to keep my sanity and be prepared to protect myself and my children if I sensed any.

Acknowledging the domestic violence, I was yet not willing to leave my husband. I kept praying to Allah to help me, to guide me choose what is right for me and my kids. I finally broke the silence and told my parents.

I had no choice but to confess after he had disrespected them, cursed me and hit me in front of them and finally announced the “First Divorce” at the Airport. He came back, emptied the bank account and I could only see him doing that for I did not want to stop him and get the remaining two “divorces”. I still wanted to save my marriage. Then he says to me, “I will never divorce you ... I will keep you in this relationship and humiliate you to the worst you could never imagine”. I looked at his mother as he said those words and she said, “if you can’t keep your man in love with you, it is basically your fault”.

After the display of this aggression, now he told me point blank, “women like you who approach these white American cops and go to the court to humiliate our culture meet the same fate as the wife of Muzammil Hussain. You ever think of calling the cops, remember, I will get to you first before they get to me”.

I, now, knew that in his mind the so called love-marriage was over and that he can really hurt me! Yet, the final blow was when he started using my kids to curse at me and cursing them directly. Who can curse his 2 and half years old son or his one year old daughter? And WHAT NEXT was the question that made me put my foot down. Now I knew it is my children and myself, that I have to save and not this broken, troubled and dysfunctional marriage. I knew that if I let my children live under this constant abuse, they will continue this cycle somehow, just like my husband continued his father’s tradition of abusing his mother, which he confessed to hate but today he is doing just the same.
Now, he is doing what any abuser can do, cut all financial support, hire an expensive lawyer and threatening to take the kids away from me, trying to prove me a psycho, abusive and incapable mother and using my kids’ visitation to hurt me. But I have complete faith in my Creator, who gave me life, and two beautiful children and the strength to go on, and I face every day with new courage because I have full faith in Allah and HE has provided me with such friends that I met at DHF and help and resources that with His mercy, in sha’ Allah, I am positive that my children and I would live a better life, an abuse free life, ameen!

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Helpline:  
(516) 385-8292  

Help is available in several languages: English, Urdu, Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, and Bengali  

E-mail: info@dhfny.org