1. Year in Review

Domestic violence has many faces including physical, verbal, psychological, sexual and financial abuse. It is so important to know that domestic violence can be intergenerational. It comes not only from learned behavior but also from learned acceptance, so it is important to address it at all levels. Domestic crime victims are often unable to provide evidence about their abuse and sometimes decide to withdraw evidence because they feel that coming forward will place themselves, their children and family members at a serious risk of danger.

Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) provides culturally sensitive and linguistically diverse services such as counseling, connections to resource information, referrals and emergency assistance to survivors of domestic violence. The organization raises awareness of the occurrence of domestic abuse on Long Island and surrounding communities, organizes and participates in conferences, lectures & walkathons, and collaborates with other local and mainstream agencies resulting in a wider reach.

When a woman who has escaped abuse comes to us, we provide her a platform where she feels safe and learns how to access available resources. DHF support groups are indicative of the way DHF approaches survivors of violence as integral parts of our community who can benefit from a supportive and inclusive environment. With positive role modeling and emotional support, most of our clients are on the road to self-sufficiency.
Domestic Harmony Foundation Newsletter October 2017

The DHF Youth Summer Leadership program has completed five successful years. This program was developed to bring co-survivors of domestic violence and mainstream youth to the same platform, and provide them the ability to identify unhealthy relationships and foster respectful, healthy relationships. We have offered scholarships to young adults towards their educational costs, and hence helped them achieve their professional goals. We strongly believe that true justice entails more than providing equal opportunities to all; it requires us to first lift up the fallen ones, and then provide them equal opportunities. As the saying goes...we rise by lifting others.

This year we started a project called ‘I promise’, to engage boys and men in the conversation to promote healthy relationships and families. We asked the men in our lives to think about and express their response to the question of how they value and respect women and girls in their life. I must say we got a very positive response and we admire our male allies who are consciously engaging other men in the conversation, holding other men accountable and demonstrating respect for women and girls.

From its inception in 1992, DHF members believed that in order to have strong families, we must ensure the well-being of women and children in our communities.

With your help in the past we've made significant strides. However, we cannot continue these services without your active participation now. The organization needs generous support from the community to run its essential services and unique programs. We hope you will continue to support DHF as your organization of choice when choosing your charitable contributions. Your donations are a lifeline and help us sustain our work. We are counting on YOU!

Jasia Mirza (Program Director)
2. Executive Director’s Message

Dear Friends and Supporters of Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF),

With humility, gratitude and excitement, in March 2017, I extended my heart and hand for the torch of leadership in joining the extraordinary DHF team. As I settle into the role as DHF’s new incoming Executive Director, I take this opportunity to connect with all of you to say hello as this process unfolds and as we usher in the new month of October, when we highlight National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I am present to the fact that I stand on the shoulders of giants and follow in the footsteps of trailblazers, many of whom I have the privilege of working alongside every day, building upon a shared commitment to promote healthy and peaceful relationships and families in our community and in the world.

Working as a partner in the field years ago, and as a long-time admirer, friend and supporter, I’m continually inspired by the creation of DHF as an organization specifically designed to address the solution to gender-based violence, rather than lingering on the problem; we know the saying, “What you resist, persists!”; well, when we focus our efforts working “against” the tides of a social ill, we may only get so far, if at all. For me, the word “Harmony” in Domestic Harmony Foundation, exemplifies the magnetic pull towards having this organization grow to the next level, while immersing myself further in service of advancing social justice.

It is from a clear space of nothing, that we cause transformation to soar - where healing, resilience, hope and action replace fear, uncertainty and despair. And it is in this context, that I am committed to conversations that shift the existing paradigm around how we deal with the many forms of domestic violence, while taking active steps in the global movement to emancipate women and girls from oppression. It is my belief that transforming the idea of violence in our homes to eliminate the *stigma* and difficulty around bringing it to light, is a key element in achieving the safety and healing towards living the best version of ourselves possible, something we all desire as our fundamental human right.

I am delighted for this opportunity to partner with all of you in collective spirit to cause a shift in attitudes and perceptions, and to influence a new generation of changemakers creating a harmonious world based on equality and justice that we all envision. I sincerely thank you for your dedicated support in sustaining DHF over the years and encourage all of you to continually follow *your* heart and engage with us in this work as a community moving forward. Please share your thoughts and ideas with us - I look forward to meeting and hearing from you – especially lacing up our shoes together at DHF’s upcoming Walkathon to end Domestic Violence on Sunday, October 22, 2017 in Eisenhower Park! It is a privilege to carry the baton.

In Solidarity,

Neelofer Chaudry, M.Sc.
Executive Director
3. Annual Fundraiser - 2017

On Sunday, April 30, 2017, the Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) held its 9th Annual Fundraiser at the Milleridge Cottage in Jericho, NY. Distinct from previous years, the theme of this year’s awards luncheon, “Acclamation. Applause. Accolades” celebrated the guidance, compassion and loyalty of DHF’s friends and supporters that have enabled the organization to continue the crucial work of ending gender-based violence.

The afternoon commenced at high noon as guests entered the beautiful venue creating an exciting and energetic hubbub in the lobby around the unique and colorful “I Promise” art exhibit – a new project designed to engage men in the conversation to promote healthy relationships and families. Guests filtered through to the charming Atrium of the Cottage where bright natural daylight streamed through for the cocktail hour, fostering a wonderful environment to network and socialize together over scrumptious hors d’oeuvres and fruit drinks.

As guests were seated on round tables in the main ballroom, the formal program began with a touching Invocation given by Board Member Dr. Kushalata Jayakar Ahmed, followed by a warm welcome and highlight of DHF’s programs and services by Program Director Jasia Mirza, who then introduced Neelofer Chaudry, DHF’s recently hired new Executive Director. Neelofer introduced herself to the audience and shared that she was inspired to join the team because DHF was specifically designed to address the social injustice of domestic violence from a solution-oriented, transformational approach. Rather than working ‘against’ the dynamics of a hidden problem that is controversial to talk about, DHF seeks to break the silence and keep its’ eye on the end goal of safe, healthy and harmonious relationships. As an Overview of DHF, Neelofer and Zuhal Abrar, DHF’s first Mental Health Clinician, provided a thought-provoking “Myth & Fact” power point presentation in the effort to dispel stereotypes and to promote education and prevention information; this involved a brief discussion of a client case study highlighting the progress she made from a mental health perspective, and statistics of DHF services provided from the 2016 Annual Report.

After the presentation, the audience was entranced by an expressive women’s dance troop performing classical kathak dance. This set the tone for the Award Ceremony awarding two group entities and three dynamic individuals who have greatly impacted DHF and its clients: The Islamic Center of Long Island, Project Niyyah, Rev. Thomas Goodhue, Shanti Kumar and DHF’s board member Amal Wahib. The main highlight of the program was delivered by a DHF client relating her own story as a survivor. Captivated and touched, listeners journeyed alongside her to understand the stages of abuse and crisis she faced, on the way to transformation, freedom and resiliency; not a dry eye in the room! A delicious sit-down lunch was enjoyed by all and the afternoon’s program ended with a powerful vocal performance and standup comedy routine, followed by the ending vote of thanks. DHF extends its’ gratitude to this year’s lead sponsors, HAB Bank, People’s United Bank, Islamic Center of Long Island, Suleman Lunat MIII Partners, LI Urgent Care, Vass Pipe & Steel Co., Inc., Mr. Sajid Shah, Dr. Unni Mooppan, Drs. Fakhiuddin & Kushalata Ahmed, Rachel Hall, Senior V.P. of Investments Raymond James & Associates, Dr. Aziz R. Chaudry, and Abdulrahman Khwaja.

DHF is delighted with the success of this event and the opportunity to partner with the community in causing a shift in attitudes and perceptions about violence against women and to influence a new generation of changemakers creating the harmonious world that we all envision.

Neelofer Chaudry (Executive Director)
4. Project Niyyah

I would like to start off by saying thank you for such a well organized, wonderful event this past weekend. Also thank you for such an honorable recognition for Project Niyyah.

I just wanted to give you some feedback on the event if you don’t mind. First of all, I applaud how everything was so well organized and was pretty much on schedule throughout the afternoon. The food was delicious, the place was beautiful and it was such an amazing opportunity to meet some wonderful people who all came together for this cause.

In my opinion, the highlight of the event was the survivor speech from such a beautiful young lady. For someone to have so much strength and courage to go up in front of a large group of people and share her personal story of survival is not easy by far, and I would like to commend her for that.

I loved how she spoke about services that DHF provided her to help her get out of her situation and stand on her own two feet. In my opinion I think that was important for us in the audience to hear. It gave a sense of where our donations are going and how much they benefit these amazing survivors and their children.

There were a lot of facts stated about domestic violence throughout the event however for me I think her story touched me the most. It was important to see the struggles of the survivors and what they endure and how they make strides to stand where they are today.

Sumer Khan | Project Niyyah

5. How DHF is helping the client families

Many ways Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) assists clients:

- Mental health clinician is providing clients with individual counseling, helping them recover from trauma and teaching them skills to move on with their lives.

- Support group sessions offer positive role modeling and help women build their self-esteem, positive self-image, while empowering the intention of resiliency, healing and recovery.
- DHF provides different opportunities and referrals to outside community agencies, offering tools and resources aimed at fostering self-sufficiency and the ability to advance in areas of life that are important to them.

- Clients are given the opportunity to ‘re-invent’ themselves by creating new possibilities for the future by setting goals and putting structures in place to achieve them.

- DHF provides a platform where clients don’t feel judged or alone, they build bonds and friendships and feel that they have someone to talk to who understands them.

- Effective parenting and stress relief strategies are discussed at group sessions.

- DHF brings some normalcy to clients’ lives by celebrating Holidays such as Eid, Christmas, and Diwali together with client families.

- DHF addresses the emotional, physical and social well-being of clients in a holistic way by encouraging participation in mind-body activities such as yoga and various events designed to promote health and empowerment.

- Clients are connected to resources such as legal consultations free of charge, thus alleviating extensive fears once they are advised of their rights.

6. Hope

There have been many obstacles in my life but my biggest challenge was overcoming the pain and financial problems my father left me. My mother had an arranged marriage with my Father. My Father alongside my uncles and aunts on my Dad’s side of the family had abused my Mother both verbally and physically for years. Even after me and my sister were born, all of this had still been going on. Eventually my Father had left my Mom and they were separated. I loved my Father because we would many fun things and it pained me in my soul to see my parents fight. My mother told me that one day while I was at school, my father had thrown a suitcase at my mother who was holding my infant sister at the time. I also remembered that my mother would constantly cry and be very depressed and would go to her and tell her everything will be alright.

I remember an instance where me, my mother, and my sister were walking to a Masjid (holy place for Muslims) on a Muslim holiday known as Eid and my Dad had shown up in his car and started to cuss out my Mom in front of everyone. I was roughly 8 at the time and I realized that my Mom ignored him and kept walking. I (looking back on it) feel so very proud that my Mom is such an excellent role model.

Back on track, my Mother, my sister, and me were very scared because when my Father had left, he had pretty much planned everything because there were many court cases regarding child custody and who lives in the house very quickly and there was very little my mother could do because my father did not have anything under her name. I still really loved my Father despite everything he did. Then there was a period where my Mother had a restraining order on him and I did not see him for about 4 years. I still remember the first time I did see him after that 4-year period. I had never seen my Father cry ever. When we did meet, (because of the court) he was crying and thanking my Father’s friend for picking me and my
sister up for him. Fast Forward to now, I messaged my Father but he has not responded. My mom is still fighting in court and it is certain we will have to move into an apartment but there is now hope. Hope that I will be successful and get into a good college. Hope that my Mom will open a salon so she can make money. Hope that one day me and my family can be at ease. Hope is all you can cling to in a world that seems to be completely shrouded in darkness.

I feel that this program will really help people be aware and it will make a foundation which will result in a stable and peaceful community. It brings attention to the youth, the future of the world. There are ups and downs in everyone’s life. Everyone loses people they care about. The real test of character is what you do after they are gone.

Participant of Summer Youth Leadership Program

7. Survivor’s Story

At the age of 20, my parents arranged my marriage in Pakistan. I had never met or seen the man I was to marry. He had been living in the US with his parents and siblings since he was very young. The first time I saw him was at our wedding.

In the beginning my husband claimed to love me, but within a week of marriage, he started insulting me about the dowry. When I told this to my brother, my husband saw my text message, got angry and started beating me. He also took away my cell phone so I had no way to stay in touch with my family.

He left for U.S. after a couple of months, while I stayed in Pakistan waiting for my visa. After giving birth to our son, I had to repeatedly request him to come and see our baby. Over the phone, my mother-in-law told me that my husband could live without me and our son, but not without his mother. Eventually, he showed up in Pakistan when our son got very sick.

When my visa came through, I moved to U.S. along with my son and started living with my husband and his family. As soon as we moved in, I was expected to be the obedient cook and housekeeper for the whole household. In the beginning, my husband seemed to care, but gradually he started belittling me in front of his family. Little things would trigger his anger and he would start abusing me verbally and physically.

Initially his family had told my parents that he was working to become a police officer but it never happened; he worked odd hours. He would come home and demand the use of the bedroom alone. My son and I had to sleep on the living room couch when he was home, even in the extreme heat of the summer with no air conditioning. His parents said that he was entitled to do this.
As days passed, the abuse took many forms. My phone calls were constantly monitored. My mother-in-law controlled all the money matters. I was not allowed to do anything outside the house or associate with anyone other than their friends and family. Even when his brother was rude and disrespectful to me, I was not allowed to say anything back. Anything could provoke my husband, even a simple phone call. When he lost his temper, he threw objects at me and pulled me by my hair.

All the while, my mother-in-law would tell my family, “She is very happy here. We love her.” My family discovered the truth when my father in-law visited my parents in Pakistan and demanded the dowry money. When the discussion became heated, my father-in-law pulled out a gun and threatened my family. He had to be dragged out onto the street where he stood cursing and abusing my family in public. My family gave in and handed my father-in-law the money to save my marriage and not to tarnish our family’s reputation.

When I asked my mother-in-law for a small amount of that money to buy my son a bed, she refused. When my husband found out about it, he grabbed the rolling pin and started beating me while yelling, “I am so sick of you... I’m going to kill you.” He continued hitting me until the rolling pin snapped into two pieces, so he picked up a broom and finally his shoes to hit me.

My two-year old son saw blood coming from my mouth and ran into my arms. Even this did not stop my husband from hitting me; he kept saying, “I’m going to get rid of you today”. He spat on me, pulled off my pants and kept hitting me on my bare legs with the rod. Then he told his mother, “Today I have fixed her properly”. I was bleeding and shattered. His parents did not offer any support; instead they blamed me, saying “You must have done something to provoke him”.

Coincidently, my mother called the same day of this incident, and I finally broke down and told her what was happening. She asked me to return immediately to Pakistan. But my husband’s family started blackmailing me by saying “You can go, but our grandson will stay here.” My husband threatened to throw acid on my face so no one will ever marry me again, if I leave him. At this point, I decided to leave for the safety and well-being of my son and myself.

I took all my documents and left the house at the first opportunity I got. My mother-in-law with her friend chased after me by car. I had to hide behind a fence with my son, while holding a heavy bag. I finally ran into a nail salon and requested them to give me a place to hide until the police got there. I came out once the police arrived. As I was making a police report, my brother-in-law appeared and threatened me “See what happens to your family in Pakistan.”

Police referred me to a safe home and they sent me to a Domestic Violence (DV) Shelter. In the past, my doctor to whom I had confided in about my situation, had told me about Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF), and advised me to contact the organization. Scared and confused, I got in touch with DHF and was counseled on safety planning; I chose to enter a DV Shelter with my child where we spent four months, after which I was referred to another resource where we could live.

Meanwhile, my husband began contacting me and apologized, demanding me to drop the charges against him. Eventually, I decided to drop the charges fearing for the safety of my family back home and also because he was the father of my son.
After finding out about the struggles with my son, my family in Pakistan asked me to return home, so I decided to go back. Once I got there, my husband also arrived, asked for forgiveness and promised to change. I reconciled with him and came back to U.S. I soon realized that nothing had changed when the emotional and physical abuse started all over again.

I was hesitant to reach out to DHF again but they never made me feel alone or judged me. DHF became my big support where I built bonds and friendships.

I moved out of the shelter and into a rental housing arrangement soon after, and then filed for child support. The small child support checks were not sufficient at all. I started working at a super market. DHF assisted me in some financial areas when I requested help.

My son has speech disability and needs extensive speech, behavioral and occupational therapy to overcome the trauma he suffered as a child. My husband tried to fight for custody and failed. I went through many hardships with my son, living in horrible conditions with the bare minimum for more than 2 years.

At this point, I decided to file for divorce. Things started to change for the better after I got my degree evaluated and got a job at my son’s school. My divorce became final earlier this year. Now my son and I live in a nice apartment and we drive to school together. Finally, I have broken the barriers of shame and fear. I am now self-sufficient and making more strides every day. Now I have peace of mind, and am able to focus on my own well-being and the upbringing of my son.

8. Marital Conflict in South Asian Cultures and Communities

Published on July 21, 2017

Jacqueline Harounian

SUNY Graduate Student - Behavioral Forensics

As part of my continuing volunteer work at The Safe Center of Long Island (TSCLI.org), I attended an excellent training session today relating to counseling of victims of domestic violence in the
domestically traditional Hindu and Muslim South Asian communities. The training was arranged by Anthony Zenkus, Director of Education at The Safe Center. The presentation was led by two highly knowledgeable and inspirational women: Neelofer Chaudry (Executive Director) and Jasia Mirza (Program Director) of the Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) in Syosset, New York.

About the Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF)

DHF started as a committee of the Islamic Mosque of Long Island and quickly gained a following due to the needs of the local Muslim community. In 2009, it became a separate community based non-profit organization, and now serves as a model entity for other South Asian community service organizations.

One of the challenges facing the organization is the barriers in the Muslim community to victims coming forward when abuse has occurred. Cultural sensitivity is needed for social workers, child protective services, and police that are working with the Muslim population. Despite stereotypes perpetuated by media (including news stories with victims burned by fire or disfigured by acid), violence is not part of South Asian culture. Furthermore, women are not indoctrinated to accept domestic abuse by their spouses, and men are not prone to violence based on their culture. The origin of violence and coercive control of women is due to patriarchy in the cultural system, not South Asian culture itself.

The South Asian community

The term "South Asian community" is a social construct referring to immigrants to North America people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal. It is a label that can serve as a cultural identifier, regional identifier, and a basis for collective action. The label itself can be problematic due to the complex history of these countries. What is also problematic is the fact that up to the 1990’s, it was a considered a model minority, with a well-educated, economically successful group with good family values and strong family ties.

In Western cultures such as the United States, independence and individualism are highly prized. In Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, there is a higher value placed on interdependence in functioning within the family / community / group and collectivism. There are a lot of positive aspects to interdependence in a community and culture. In general, older members of the family make the major decisions. This teaches
respect for elders, and the importance of following rules. Often, religion is an anchor that unites and stabilizes the community in good times and bad. On the negative side, if the elders are not fair, it can cause oppression and imbalance of power. Furthermore, divorce is very taboo and shameful -- and therefore more rare -- in collectivist cultures. This is because the divorce is between two families, not just two individuals. (FYI: There is a very similar stigma and collectivist dynamic in other traditional and patriarchal religions and cultures, including Jewish and Christian groups.)

Unique challenges facing South Asian women

As a deeply traditional Muslim culture, there is particular pressure to women to maintain family honor and marriage at all costs in South Asian culture. The prevailing mindset is that women should never break up their families, they should stay with their husbands no matter what. There is a strong concern for a family's reputation and image in the community. There is strong pressure for women to marry due to the high cultural value placed on marriage in defining a woman's social status. The family is viewed as part of a private realm, away from the scrutiny of outsiders. For this reason, there is extreme hesitancy to report abuse, even to community elders, or the Imam. Involving the police is rare. Women end up staying much longer in harmful relationships just to preserve the marriage. What's more, their children are sometimes on the frontline, witnessing the abuse which is very detrimental to their welfare. If a woman dares to leave the marriage, she is often blamed for destroying the family. Furthermore, there is often no way to go back to her family of origin. Lack of family support, immigration status, victim blaming and isolation, are all factors that inhibit the victim from asking for help.

Advice to victims

Victims need to know that there are place to go for help and get support, such as the Domestic Harmony Foundation, and that they should tell people and not be ashamed of their situation. There will be no legal action or formal steps taken without their consent. Women in harmful relationships need know that they are not alone, and that they can get referrals for further help. In cases of conflict and emotional abuse, a referral to a therapist or marriage counselor can be made. (There is a Nassau County Muslim Coalition, NCMC, that makes professional referrals in certain cases.) However, in cases of physical abuse, referral to mediation and marriage counseling are not considered appropriate due to the imbalance of power. One of the most powerful effects of seeking help is to provide the victim with support groups and role models, so that she can become empowered and encouraged by the experience of others in her situation. Sometimes, a victim will take months and years before she will take steps against her spouse. Many others learn how to manage conflict and communication in a more productive manner. In every case, due to the powerful stigma and fear, it takes enormous courage for the woman to tell others outside her family.

We cannot confirm the reference of Nassau County Muslim Coalition.

9. DHF Eid Celebration

On Sunday afternoon, July 2, 2017, Domestic Harmony Foundation client families, together with a handful of board and staff members, enjoyed a bright and sunny Eid-al-Fitr celebration at a beautiful Long Island venue. There were 12 mothers and 25 of their children in attendance at the post Eid festivities designed to bring the DHF family together to commemorate the June 25th end of the holy month of Ramadan. As
observers of the Muslim faith reflect on the gems of the previous month spent in increased prayer, charity, fasting and heightened spirituality and meditation -- especially our DHF clients who participate in one-on-one and support group counseling, and may be experiencing a wide range of emotions, transition and uncertainty at any given time- this warm and joyous holiday gathering is always an opportunity to demonstrate and share in the values we prize most highly: support, strength, resilience, community, hope and transformation.

It is in the fold of these shared values that for the first time, one of our DHF clients took the lead in generously sharing her culinary talent in preparing a scrumptious home-cooked lunch buffet of chicken biryani, raita (garnished yogurt), kofta salon (spiced meatballs in gravy), palak-daal (spinach-lentil vegetables), baked ziti and potato salad for all attendees to feast on. And to top off our sweet tooth, all enjoyed a wonderfully decorated Eid Mubarak cake, fruit, tea and soft drinks to boot.

While our palates were happy as we bonded over breaking bread together, equally fulfilling were the bonds forged in conversation and engaging in some fun, friendly competitive games, also orchestrated by another talented DHF client! The children had a blast as they ran the sac race, balanced vegetables on spoons and played hot potato, while all the Moms and DHF board and staff members engaged in a lively round of the iconic Musical Chairs game. All winners walked away with fabulous gift prizes and on a parting note, each child was delighted to accept their very own Eid gift to take home, compliments of our partner organization, Project Niyyah.

It is our belief that in community and self-expression, we begin to heal and let go of what is not working for us. It is in conversation, sharing and connecting, that bonds are made and wounds are replaced with open hearts and new possibilities. Empowering ourselves and fellow survivors to capitalize on our strength and live in the NOW is the best example to pave the way forward. To see our DHF Moms energized and enlivened and to witness the smile on a child’s face is precious and priceless. We are committed that none of us experience being alone on the journey- and we are grateful for the opportunity to make that difference. Until next year’s Eid Celebration, here’s to lots of salaam (peace) and harmony to go all the way around.

Neelofer Chaudry
10. Back to School Drive!

Success in school depends on many factors including family support, the desire to learn, and having the tools and supplies necessary for effective learning. Thanks to our community partner ‘Project Niyyah’, Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) distributed school supplies to less privileged children for the second year in a row this Labor Day Weekend.

We know that preparing for the school year is often challenging for struggling families and may cause stress and anxiety among children and parents. This Back-to-School supplies drive coordinated between Project Niyyah and DHF, provides just the critical resources and support necessary for children to begin the school year set up for success while fostering a love for lifelong learning.

The design of the drive offers an added bonus to the joy of receiving, where students were invited to visit our on-site, do-it-yourself DHF "School Store" to shop, choose and assemble their very own school kits. This gives the power of choice, individuality, and independence!

In our view, facilitating ease and access to needed provisions is a great way to empower children and families to have positive school experiences throughout the year and encourages the pursuit of knowledge! Here's to a healthy, strong and safe start to the new school year!

THANK YOU ‘PROJECT NIYYAH’

Project Niyyah is a group of young Long Islanders coming together for the Intention of helping others through various community service events throughout the year @ projectniyyah.

11. Empowering Girls & Women

South Asian American Women's Alliance (SAAWA) organized a Science Fair for all high school students on Long Island in April 2017. Science research project presentation had to be based on actual experiments or field observations performed by participants in school or outside. Each project physical display had to include a proposal, an abstract and a bibliography. The subjects of entry were Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Environmental engineering and Behavioral science. Three awards were awarded in each category on May21, 2017.

SAAWA Science Fair encourages South Asian American high school girls to participate in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in this highly competitive global world. SAAWA also gives awards for excellence in community service, mathematics and science to deserving high school girls. SAAWA
What ‘NO’ Means?

Pink is a Bollywood courtroom drama film starring famous Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan. It is a film about women’s rights and their right to consent. The movie starts off showing a disoriented and unclear scene.

A man enters a hospital bleeding profusely from his head and three women entering a taxi looking shaken. Then the movie shows these three women attempting to move on with their life, as clearly the first scene had caused some trauma to them. The man from the beginning of the movie comes back to claim his revenge on these girls and a series of threats on these women follow. This results in them being stalked, harassed and losing their jobs. Yet still, they are discouraged by the police from filing a complaint simply because they are women and these men are powerful and have connections. In other words, no one would believe these women or take their complaints seriously and it would just ultimately bring more damage to them. They are advised to stay silent.

Despite this, a complaint is filed. The woman is then kidnapped and molested in retaliation to this complaint. Deepak, played by Amitabh Bachchan, witnesses this incident, as he is her next door neighbor. Deepak is a retired lawyer and decides to help these women. A lawsuit follows with two completely different stories being told in the courtroom. These courtroom scenes are intense and chilling, labeling these women as prostitutes because they went to a concert alone.

These scenes show the length that men will go to silence women. These men treated women as objects and nothing more. In the end, the film shows that the courtroom rules in favor of the women. This movie raises a bigger question to the audience: Why are women treated like this in society? Why is it that when women are independent and self-sufficient, they are viewed as "prostitutes", yet it is okay for men to be the same? Society has extremely oppressive views on women and it is time to take action to combat this. This movie also opens eyes to the fact that "no" means "no", and men do not have any right over women without their consent. Overall, this was an extremely significant and relevant film. I greatly enjoyed watching this film, and I think the moral of the movie is important to women everywhere.

Noreen Mamoor
13. Article Review 1

I read an article about a teen who killed her abusive father. She fatally shot her father on July 28th, 2016. Bresha Meadows, 15, has already served nine months in jail for this crime. Her mother calls her daughter a hero for shooting her father in his sleep, as they stated he was cruel and abusive. He would physically beat her mother and abuse the family, to the point where they all feared for their lives. In this article, it discusses how the teen was offered a plea deal. The deal states that Bresha would serve a total of 18 months, taking into account the nine months she has already spent in jail. She would spend the remaining time at an in-patient mental health care facility receiving treatment for her PTSD, anxiety and depression. Bresha would likely enter a plea of “true” to an involuntary manslaughter charge. As part of the deal, her record would be sealed and then expunged so she could start her adult life fresh.

Thanks to the help of social media, this fatal shooting of an abusive man came into the spotlight, and brought national attention to domestic violence. Criminal justice reform advocates argued that she was an example of how black women and children are unfairly criminalized for acts of survival. Activists created the hashtag #FreeBresha and many people argued that we should not criminalize victims of domestic violence and crimes. Many gathered around the courthouse and spoke out about ending violence against women. In my opinion, I am grateful that we live in a world where technology is at our fingertips and we can use social media as a way to speak out against these issues. This case is a perfect example of what domestic violence and abuse does to a family. Bresha will now finally get the help she needs thanks to the support of so many others.

Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bresha-meadows-plea-deal_us_591093ebe4b0d5d9049e6369?utm_hp_ref=domestic-violence](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bresha-meadows-plea-deal_us_591093ebe4b0d5d9049e6369?utm_hp_ref=domestic-violence)

Noreen Mamoor

14. Article Review 2

I recently read an article titled, "Domestic Violence Still Not Grounds for Divorce in Mississippi". A Republican lawmaker said a bill allowing domestic violence as a legal reason for divorce would open “the floodgates” to more divorces. It was written on March 1st, 2017. Chairman state Republican Andy Gipson stated his reasoning as: “Sometimes [divorce] is necessary and/or unavoidable, and especially so in cases of domestic abuse...Victims of cruel and inhuman treatment should get out. But Mississippi doesn’t need another bill to say what the law already says.”

Advocates who work with domestic violence victims don’t agree. The problem with the law is that if there is abuse occurring in a marriage, there must be a witness, otherwise it is difficult to prove, especially if it is emotional abuse. Domestic violence happens behind closed doors and it is not specifically covered by any law. “The law right now provides a path for the abuser to continue. It perpetuates the abuse.”

I find it extremely disappointing that in today's society we still need to fight for basic human rights. Society needs to realize that domestic violence is a recurring problem within our communities. We need to pass a bill that specifically addresses this problem, so abusers can understand that their behavior is not acceptable under any circumstances. Victims of domestic violence could feel stronger and more reassured
while knowing that there is a law that backs them up and stands by them. If we continue to turn a blind eye to domestic violence, then it will continue to occur in our communities.

Noreen Mamoor

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/domestic-violence-divorce-mississippi_us_58b75242e4b0284854b3dc96?utm_hp_ref=domestic-violence

15. Mental Health & Self Esteem

“We of course, it is happening inside your head, but why on earth should that mean it is not real.” - J.K. Rowling

This session of DHF youth group focused on identifying mental health problems and taking the correct steps in addressing them. Most of us belong to a society in which mental health is considered a taboo and often pushed away. The generation before us believed that mental health was something of little importance and would consider one weak for reaching out for help. Many first-generation Americans have difficulty communicating with their parents about their mental health. Thus, spreading awareness to all people in society is crucial. If parents take mental health seriously, their children will follow.

I was personally impacted by the raw humanity which my peers had expressed. It was important to hear that many of them had gone to therapy at some point in their lives. I feel that people in our progressive society should be able to express their views on therapy/psychology without judgment and shame. This, we agreed is the first step one can take to encourage others to reach out for help before relatively small issues become larger and more burdensome. Many believe that their problems cannot be solved through therapy, on the contrary studies show that most mental health afflictions are not chronic and that therapy can be a significant potential cure.

Also, I learned that everyone encounters hardships which can either make or break them. In these crucial developmental times, it is of utmost importance to find help wherever you can. Therapy involving talking out the problems can be available in more places than one can imagine. I was awestruck to find out that therapists, such as Ms. Zuhal Khwaja who spoke to us, offer therapy without cost for those in need.
Therapists deserve a higher place in society for helping people and we hope to change these views. Thus, it is our responsibility as the posterity of the world to change this toxic mindset and ensure that forthcoming generations do not revert to it.

Asheena Siddiqi

16. Making a Difference

An old man was picking up the objects off the beach and tossing them out into the sea. A young man approached him and saw that the objects were starfish. ‘Why in the world are you throwing starfish into the water?’

‘If the starfish are still on the beach when the tide goes out and the sun rises high in the sky, they will die,’ replied the old man.

‘That is ridiculous. There are thousands of miles of beach and millions of starfish. You can’t really believe that what you are doing could possibly make a difference.’

The wise old man picked up another starfish, paused thoughtfully, and remarked as he tossed it out into the waves:

‘It makes a difference to this one.’

Source: Star Thrower (1979)

17. Promise Project

This outreach initiative is designed to engage men in the conversation to promote healthy relationships and families.

We ask the men in our lives to think about and express their response to the following question,

“How do you value and respect women and girls in your life?”

The idea inspiring this project calls boys and men to action as valuable partners and allies in the conversation to break the silence and end violence against women and gender-based discrimination.

This is a family and societal issue, not solely a woman’s issue.
I promise to see the different style women may have in the workplace and remove any bias about it. - Atif (Age- 42)

I promise that I will value and respect women around me by treating them nicely, being polite with them, encouraging and thanking them for whatever they are doing to make our society better. - Imran Zaidi (Age- 34)

I promise to my future wife that I will be your friend and support when everyone else fades. I will include your opinions in all my decisions. I will choose to understand your feelings rather than ignore them. I promise to be a positive role model for our children. I will love you for not just your outer beauty, but also the essence of your being. For you are the one whom God has shown me, I will give you my life's last breath. - Jomi (Age -24)

I promise to appreciate and respect the women in my life. I promise to speak up against gender stereotypes and to support women. - Gee-Wey Yue

I promise I will never abandon any women that is my responsibility to take care of. I promise I will never be a bystander to any injustice happening towards any woman. - Hamza Noor (Age -16)

I promise I will always stand against any violence against women and will always motivate and help women to learn how they can handle challenges in their life. - Usama Noor (Age-27)

I Rayhan Momin, promise to value women and girls in my life no less than I would value myself - (Age 27)

I will try to promote gender equality for women and girls. - Tony (Age-24)

If I see a women or girl mistreated or abused, I will try to speak up. - Joseph (Age-25)

I promise to stand against misogyny. And to stand for the empowerment of women with my fellow men. - Tycho D (Age - 38)

I promise to Love, respect and empower women in achieving their goals, aspirations and dreams. - Peter M.

I promise to always treat women with respect & make sure they know their worth. - Kelvin Varughese (Age-18)

I promise to listen to what's important to women & girls and treat them with love and respect. - Ashley H. (Age -47)

To the women and girls in my life: I promise honor, respect empowerment and love. - David B.
I promise to value women through all stages of my life and speak up whenever I see mistreatment based on gender. - Bilal Ahmed (Age-22).

I promise to speak out against prejudice towards women and to help them have a safer journey through life. Marco (Age-18).

I promise to treat the women in my life as a part of me. There are the women who raise us. There are women who support us. There are the women who love us. The women who break our hearts. The women who stand by our sides, as the walls come crashing down and the waves come rumbling in. There are the women who never give up. The women who are never afraid to start anew. The women that care, for me and you. The women who always have our back, never lead us astray, and always welcome us home. There is a special place in my heart that women hold. A place of love, of virtue, of life, and of forgiveness. Most importantly, they hold a place of hope. I promise to treat the women in my life as a part of me. And I promise to only live by so. All I have is you. And all you have is me. - Connor Hodgson (Age-18)

I promise I will always respect and value women of all races, religions and cultures. I will always stand with the oppressed and make sure a woman's voice is heard. I will always support and give importance to their decisions and be willing to help in any way possible and this goes for all females of any race, religion or caste. - John Elliya, (Age-25)

19. Growing Pains: A Reflection

I’ve experienced the Summer Youth Program twice, before becoming one of the youth coordinators this year. I can still remember how I had protested going - it was my mother’s idea to go, something to do over my summer before my junior year of high school. I was reluctant about it at first; youth groups, in my experience, were always a little bit awkward for me. As a person who was unsure about herself and her confidence, I didn’t want to reveal information about myself to other people whom I was sure didn’t want to hear about me. I could imagine the situation clearly before the first meeting: staying quiet in the sidelines, watching the other kids give half-answers to questions adults wanted the answers to. We didn’t even understand ourselves; how could we explain our feelings to others? I believed that being a leader was for the people that suited being a leader; I was not one of them.

To my pleasant surprise, DHF’s Summer Youth Program wasn’t like that. I still remember the feeling that overcame me when I walked in; it was inviting, a happy voice telling me that I was welcome and that I could speak when I wanted to or simply listen. I felt awkward for possibly the span of one session; the speakers, the presence of my fellow peers that were just as reluctant as I, made me comfortable. I think this was one of the first places I had ever experienced the feeling of being able to speak my mind without being judged for it. No other place - school, which was high school back then - or my home - or my friends - made it as easy to talk about my feelings and my thoughts as DHF had. With that experience, I began to learn and
accept more about myself. Even though I originally thought it difficult, with time, speaking in front of a group became easier. The transition that I was going through - that of a teenager to an adult - was difficult, and DHF made it less confusing. I learned that confidence and leadership was not a thing for “other people” as I had once assumed; it was a possibility in all us, something we could all achieve if one took the time to cultivate those skills.

These are things that I have carried - and still carry - with me. Some lessons, such as one of the first workshops I ever participated in that had to do with controlling our breathing, have made such an impact on me that I still use them until today. With this in mind, I realized that I wanted to do more DHF’s Youth Leadership Program than just participating. I loved it. I loved being there, being with other people my age who both shared opinions with me and juxtaposed it greatly. I didn’t know much of what to expect when I took this leadership position; I thought that I had to draw from all the things I had learned before about this program, but going through the sessions themselves and meeting with the kids who participated this year changed my mind. It was a learning experience as much as being a participant was. Leadership isn’t about getting your voice heard, at least not entirely - it’s also learning how to listen. It’s about taking the thoughts and feelings of others into account before giving your all toward something you’re passionate about. It’s not only about being a figurehead, but a role model. Sometimes I had to speak first in a discussion so that the others felt comfortable with sharing information about themselves too. It was about giving something of yourself to help someone else smile. Being a leader of the group made me realize that in “leading” others, you had to accept the fact that there will always be something new to learn; that others had voices that deserved to be heard just as much as yours.

Participating in DHF’s Summer Youth Leadership Program has always changed something about me or taught me something; this year, I am grateful for what I’ve retained the most out of all my years participating in his program. Thank you to all the people - both the coordinators and the kids who joined us for this program - for being part of my change. I hope that I can continue to learn and grow with the lessons that I’ve learned from DHF, as well as help other people learn and grow as well.

Sadia Rahman

20. Parental, Sibling and Peer Relationships

Our session leader told us the importance of learning our personalities - there are numerous different ways someone can compartmentalize their personality, but one way that our session leader taught us about was
the color wheel. We learned that each color has different personality traits that can be taken as both good and bad things. To get along with other people, we need to take into consideration their personality.

In a relationship, there always has to be good communication, or else the relationship itself falls apart. We watched a video on an example of bad communication, all of which contained three key things that lead up to arguments; avoidance, negative interpretation, and invalidation. Avoidance isn’t when someone walks away from a fight - it’s when someone actively avoids the other person in the relationship, always wanting to leave the cause of the argument alone, or bringing up another topic.

Negative interpretation is when someone in the relationship takes the words of another in a negative way. Invalidation is when someone belittles or demeans the other person in the relationship. We talked about ways we could get around this sort of argument building miscommunication; a lot of it had to do with how we should be able to know about our strengths and weaknesses and about the personalities of other people. If we’re angry, we should take a time out to get ourselves together and come back to the problem at hand with a calm mind. If we know that we’re talking to someone with a vastly different personality type than us, we need to take into consideration the other person. And, we learned that eventually, if we employ these methods of avoiding arguments and learning how to communicate, we can excel in our relationships and be able to maintain them well.

**Sadia Rahman**

21. Summer Youth Leadership Program, 2017 – Award Ceremony

On Friday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) hosted the closing Awards Ceremony of its 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Youth Leadership Program (SYLP) at a beautiful private venue on Long Island. One of DHF’s core prevention education programs specifically for young people, the SYLP is designed to model, uplift and empower healthy relationships, confidence, self-expression and interrupt the generational cycle of violence. Participants gathered with their parents, siblings and friends to celebrate their experience by sharing their thoughts and impressions about the 6- session program that addressed topics such as cyber-bullying & social media, self-esteem, mental health and leadership development. Participants eagerly showcased their talents before the audience including original spoken word poetry pieces, stand-up comedy and on-the-spot cartoon/caricature drawing. Scholarships were awarded to winning participants who successfully met the criteria measures in their age category for essay submissions, participation and attendance. This year, there was a tie in the older age category, creating three winning scholarship recipients. Participants received Certificates of Completion and are left inspired to
utilize the skills they learned and pay it forward out in the world. The DHF Team is happy to witness the results of new friendships and a strong sense of community and communication. Look out for the dates of next year’s SYLP to enroll your child!

22. Social Issues in My Community

I think a huge social issue in my community is the lack of understanding different racial, ethnic and religious groups have for each other. I feel as though people in my community tend to focus on what is different instead of what is the same. For example, my neighbors practice a different religion than my family and are thus hostile towards us. Instead I feel that they should focus on the fact that we are both part of minority immigrant groups and for this reason respect each other’s differences. I feel as though spreading awareness through social media and entertainment will address these issues. For example, shows such as ABC’s “Blackish” or “Fresh off the Boat” do not simply entertain a diverse group of audiences but also help society understand each other’s differing backgrounds and lifestyles. I believe that this understanding can directly result in stopping the ignorance which fuels hate crimes and animosity between the different, yet similar individuals in my community. In addition, I feel that everyone should be able to have real life experiences of different without having to travel around the world. At my high school, we have an annual show entitled “Diversity Day” in which there are speeches, food and dances from all over the world. I feel that shows like this should not be limited to high schools but should be brought out to the public. I strongly desire to one day organize a Long Island wide “Diversity Festival” so that all people regardless of age or occupation can socialize with people of different ethnicities and learn that human beings possess the same traits at the core.

AS – Summer Youth Leadership Participant

As a member of the South Asian community a social issue that really needs attention and should be addressed and
taken seriously is recognizing that sometimes our children need help not physically, but emotionally, and giving attention and aid to those struggling with mental health is as important as giving aid to someone who's physically in pain or hurt. I feel that mental health is something that is being taken for granted and is often overlooked or is used as a last resort in a situation. Parents in the community feel as though mental health does not exist and if it does, then it means you must be crazy or not stable. Which is not true at all because no one in this world is normal and living without problems. If mental health care isn’t used at the beginning of the problems then the problem will grow and escalate rapidly out of control and the person will become unstable. To address this situation, we must begin with the base of the problem: parents. I feel if parents in our community would just be more accepting and talk to their kids about their stress, there would not be that lonely feeling inside a kid that is all compressed in a bottle which keeps building and building until it explodes.

JN – Summer Youth Leadership Participant

Overcoming Anxiety

Cold sweats, shaking and stuttering are all parts of me that decided to reach its worst in the September of junior year in high school. My English teacher, a blunt seventy-four years old woman, showed me that what matters is the results over anything else. Although it is true in many cases, the pressure became too much for me to handle at the time. I found myself crying silently during class after she said, “did you even read the chapter?!” yelling. I spent hours reading it, writing pages of notes for more hours, and this is what I get. Sometimes, I had to work harder to catch up to where the majority of my classmates stood, but I eventually proved to myself that I too, can improve.

Junior year for me, especially in that September, was an obstacle in itself. Suddenly, I have to balance all of my school work and tests aside studying for the SATs, APs, the standardized tests that are supposed to show me how I stand in comparison to everyone else. It gave me unimaginable amounts of anxiety- at least more than my former self could have imagined. I would have expected it all to go downhill at that point, but I realized I needed to find a way to balance these things out, essentially, manage my time.

And manage my time is exactly what I tried to do; I was never a planner, but this became a big part of my life: keeping notes. Notes saved my days. School forced me to prioritize my time, all the while dealing with any anxiety and stress that I have simultaneously. I planned what I was going to do every hour, and made sub-plans if I had any sort of interruption (my family often asks for help around the house and such). I kept an hour to myself where I wasn’t allowed to do anything but relax. I called it “tea-time”. It was from eleven to midnight, and I would routinely drink chamomile tea (earl grey if I wanted to spice it up) and talk to my best friend for an hour before I went to bed. It was simple, but one of the best decisions I had ever made. I slept better, I thought better- it was so little but astoundingly helpful to my health mentally.

Although anxiety is still a big part of my life, I realized that the gradual improvement of my outlook after that disastrous September was something I want to remember forever, and use as an example to remind myself that I can conquer my anxieties. In the future, I hope to manage my time and thus calm anxieties about doing well that I have in the same way, or try new methods that may be helpful to me.

YV – Summer Youth Leadership Participant
**23. Spoken Word**

I’ll tell you a story of a sort...

A tragedy, if you don’t mind,

Of the fool that was made of a woman-

Named mother nature, by humankind.

It starts when he knocked on her door,

On a bright, beautiful summer day

She opened up, and he told her:

He only needed a place to stay.

Slow and steady, he took over,

Not telling her he wouldn’t leave.

Slow and steady, like the devil,

When he tricked Adam and Eve.

Sly as a snake, he took over her abode,

As if it were his own.

He wrenched out it’s beautiful in a breeze-

As he turned it’s gold to stone.

He turned her luscious emerald earth,

Into a grey, ashen war-field.

And for only he kept her company,

She kept her rosy lips sealed.

He told mother nature she was beautiful...

As he wrenched out strands of her silky hair.

Her internal cries were like waterfalls-

But she knew her screams would turn to thin air.

He told her that he would bring back her beautiful,

Fix her home--clean up all the mud.

But time went on, millions of year till-

She was drowning in pools of her own blood.

It was alas till she started to disintegrate,

Her bones weakened as beautiful threatened to give away.

He started to panic, where else could he go?

In the universe, there was no were else to stay.

Behind beautiful pursed lips, she realized,

Was a gun held by a tight fist.

She’d been fooled by a layer, a layer--

Beneath which only greed did exist.

He himself, his hands, had been painted,

With a fire that beckoned to come close.

She never knew he hadn’t loved her soul,

But on the rainbows behind her he dozed.

And when she shattered, the ground shook...

And all the buildings he’d built tumbled down.

For what belonged to her had been stolen--

But alas, humankind could not take her crown.

Sidrah Nadeem
24. Why Now?

With hopes of becoming a genetic engineer and carrying suitcases crammed with shalwar kameezes, my mom first set foot on American soil for the first time in 1990. Her first stop? Queens, NY. Where you can walk by entire blocks without seeing a single storefront in English and more languages are spoken than anywhere else in the world. Within just a few months my mom developed close friendships with women who had also immigrated from South Asia and who shared her love for drinking chai while watching depressing Pakistani dramas or taking strolls when the moon was out and the sweet scent of dewy soil hung in the air. Soon after, she learned that she was pregnant – with me.

I have many fond childhood memories although I concede I have none without the presence of my younger sister, Rubab. Rubab joined me in voicing our reluctance to being adorned in matching bright yellow or polka dot sundresses yet again. And she also joined me when we easily succumbed to our mom’s pleas to wear them after she lovingly sewed the dresses using fabric bought at the flea market nearby. Rubab was also there, anxiously watching when I brazenly pushed out the furniture from our dad’s “office”. I was determined to claim all fifty square feet as our first bedroom and I’m sure my sister was also excited to no longer wake up in the middle of the night on the living room sofa bed with my feet suddenly two inches from her face. Upon entering the apartment and seeing the desk, chair and piles of cardboard boxes strewn across the floor, my mom looked utterly shocked and my dad’s eyes surprisingly betrayed only amusement before agreeing to take Rubab and I out the next day to buy a bunk bed.

The following morning, my sister and I giddily skipped down the sidewalk ahead of our dad towards the furniture store. We abruptly stopped in our tracks when hearing the screamed words, “Go back to where you came from!” followed by the four-letter F word that no ten-year old should ever hear being hurled at her father. The year was 2001 and the tragic events of 9/11 had just taken place a few weeks ago. A few days later my mom, with sunken eyes, told me that someone had broken the windows and spray painted “Terrorist” on my dad’s small perfume store in Manhattan. After years of saving up while working as a NYC Yellow Cab driver, my dad was forced to close down the store after his business partner, very shaken up by the incident, suddenly moved back to Pakistan.

In the months that ensued, I was warned to no longer walk outside in the neighborhood wearing shalwar kameez or to go to the mosque nearby for my weekly Quran classes wearing a hijab or to openly discuss politics of any kind with other people. The constant threat to safety lingered in my mind while at the same time I grew particularly conscious of my identity as an “Other”. I slowly became more aware of my family’s struggle to keep food on the table or to make sure we weren’t evicted from our apartment after months of unpaid rent. I was afraid to bring any friend home from school due to my dad’s increasingly volatile and controlling behavior, the same behavior that prevented my mom from enrolling into college as she initially had hoped or to get a job despite the fact that we were living below the federal poverty level.
But my mom certainly invested all of her time and energy to make sure that her daughters had a good education. She made sure to attend all parent-teacher meetings and was present at informational meetings later on to learn about how the college admissions system worked in the U.S. And she was understandably elated when I was accepted to Columbia’s School of Engineering as a C.P Davis Scholar.

During my college freshman year, my mom courageously left her abusive marriage and moved into a battered women’s shelter with my sister. And I became increasingly immersed in advocacy efforts both on and outside campus, soon after transferring to Columbia College to major in the humanities much to my mom’s disappointment. But I remained determined to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively promote social justice, recognizing that I was incredibly privileged to be given a change at an elite institution and thus felt obligated to give back to the community.

You see, growing up, I saw firsthand how one’s race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic class could render one disproportionately vulnerable to assaults on one’s well-being and health. Whether it’s having your body being in a state of “perpetual crisis”, or not being able to adequately nourish your body through food and exercise because of financial constraints or safety concerns, or more simply, not having the luxury to take time off from work for a doctor’s appointment, your identities inevitably intersect in a manner that uniquely shapes your lived experience. And as the intersection of marginalized identities magnifies the risk of exposure to structural and physical violence, it’s crucial to engage in relationships of healing individuals or advocacy with large communities in a truly intersectional manner.

Both personal and academic experiences eventually led me to choose the field of medicine as my future profession. I learned how poor health can adversely impact every facet of one’s life and how one’s health is actually largely shaped by forces outside of the walls of the hospital. Yet, I was eager to join a profession that gave one the unique privilege to directly alleviate physical and mental suffering while elevating the human story (imbued with complexity and beautiful nuance) in the process. That is why I’m ecstatic to be a part of this exciting moment in which the leadership of the AAMC Group on Diversity and Inclusion and Group on Women in Medicine and Science have joined forces for the very first time to host a discussion on “Why the time is now for diversity, inclusion, and equality in academic medicine?” Although I’d like to stress that the question for me really is “If not now, then when?”

When I first enrolled into medical school fall of 2013, I was disheartened by the significant dearth of instruction on domestic health inequities. In response, a fellow classmate Robert Rock, who was born to Haitian immigrants and also hailed from Queens, NY (coincidence?) joined me as we spent months meeting with faculty members, administrators, and, most importantly, local community leaders, to muster support for a course on US Health Justice. That summer we developed the curriculum for an eleven-session pilot course with the aim of providing students from not just the medical school, but also from the nursing school and the physician associate program, with the critical knowledge and skills to provide excellent patient care and to engage in meaningful advocacy to ensure that structural determinants of health inequity are appropriately addressed both within and outside the clinical setting. Since the pilot, the course has grown beautifully in size and impact, with less than half of applicants now accepted due to resource constraints and ten student leaders who have agreed to spearhead the continuous revamping of the curriculum to make it ever more rigorous and relevant. Through the larger U.S. Health Justice Collaborative that was launched soon after the course pilot, students are also charged with organizing programming for
the entire university, including the law school and business school, for instance, that addresses issues such as food insecurity and criminal justice reform.

However, despite this success, we still have a lot of work to do. Only less than a quarter of the pilot curriculum has been integrated into the main curriculum for all medical students so far and, hence, only a self-selected group of students are getting this crucial training on how to effectively take care of patients with the understanding that factors like race, gender, or class actively shape the lived experiences of their patients and, consequently, significantly inform the health of their patients. We already know that the continued lack of such training contributes to the incongruence between people’s expectations of the practice of medicine and the reality of the practice of medicine. This incongruence has been shown to play a role in the rising rates of physician burnout.

Recent surveys conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are reassuring.

In that a growing number of physicians are aware that substantial and persistent health inequities exist in the US but unfortunately a much fewer number of physicians feel adequately prepared to address the causes of health inequities, such as food insecurity or poor housing conditions, with their patients. And, sadly this gap in knowledge and skills, frustrating for physicians and dangerous for patients, will continue to persist unless medical schools institutionalize the curricular reform on issues related to social justice and health inequities that is still, due a large degree, led by medical students across the country.

But, if we really want to be effective in addressing the multifactorial causes of health inequities, we need to address bias. And I don’t mean just acknowledging that we as humans all have implicit or unconscious biases but recognizing that in the context of policies and structures that have institutionalized racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and so forth, our biases wield immense power and harm to the very people whose well-being we are entrusted with. In response to some painful experiences I myself had with encountering bias during the medical school interview process and which I actually recounted in a piece for the AAMC’s Aspiring Docs Diaries blog, I felt compelled to help create Systemic Disease. Systemic Disease is an online platform seeking to promote dialogue and healing around issues related to bias in medicine while pushing for all health care providers and those in-training to actively work towards countering biases in patient care and beyond so that we don’t continue to have health injustices such as stark racial disparities in treatment of pain or gender gaps in post-MI mortality and morbidity.

Yet, in order to effectively counter the impact of bias in our clinical encounters, it’s imperative to also counter the impact of bias in our learning and training environments. Ensuring that the makeup of our
patient populations is appropriately reflected in the physician workforce and, in particular, the leadership of those entrusted with training the future workforce, is vital. According to a recent AAMC report, there were fewer Black men in medical school in 2014 than in 1978. Meanwhile, while approximately 60 percent of medical students hail from families with incomes in the top twenty percent of the nation, only three percent come from families with incomes in the lowest 20 percent. And, of course, as two recent JAMA research papers have demonstrated, women are still less likely to get full professorship or get paid equally as their male counterparts in academic medicine even after adjusting for factors like age, experience, specialty, and research productivity.

But, again, the question of why now? Why is the time now for diversity, inclusion, and equality in academic medicine? As physicians, we freely get access to people's most intimate and vulnerable moments and spaces while being treated with great respect in not only clinical encounters, but also in other social and political spaces. Such privilege is heightened for those in academic medicine and, hence, recognizes as leaders in medicine.

With that privilege comes great responsibility and we can no longer afford to remain silent in the face of heightened vulnerability for many in this country. When we have 3.4 million undocumented homeowners who are struggling to look into who can replace their names on their leases and take custody of their children in case they are deported amidst the recent onslaught of ICE raids. When we have reports of increased anxiety, depression and PTSD among Muslims, immigrants and members of other groups targeted with violence and intimidation that escalated under the current president's election campaign and further worsened under the Muslim Ban. When the incidents of anti-black hate crimes and black lives lost to police brutality are actually higher this year than they were two years ago. When there are ongoing threats to federal funding for basic reproductive health services for women and to welfare programs such as Meals on Wheels which strives to prevent the elderly in our country from going hungry. When the president of our country is expected to sign a religious liberty executive order that may condone discrimination against gay Americans on the basis of religion. When 24 million Americans are at risk of losing healthcare if the GOP health care bill is passed.

That is why the time is now.

Tehreem Rehman

25. Bullying and Social Media

To start off the animated discussion we had today, Miss Jennifer Lopez began with the meaning of micro-aggression, how cyber bullying can lead to suicide and the popular social networking apps of today that we all use (without really understanding how cautious we must be. She asked us what we expected from her today and if we had any questions or concerns of any relating to this topic. And we quickly delved into the problematic issues that concern social networking and how closely bullying coincides within that general subject. We briefly discussed the widely popular show, Thirteen Reasons Why, and how social networking plays a significant role in someone’s life. Miss Jennifer has quite the interest in shows, which really made us feel comfortable since these are shows we’re familiar with. Miss Lopez is honestly a really humorous and warm person and I was so glad I got the opportunity to meet a school physiologist! It gave me hope that maybe it is alright to approach counselors at school. She even informed us of this act called the Dignity
for All Students Act (DASA) which offers students of every school ground support in the cases of bullying or some sort of harassment. Which is honestly intriguing since I’ve never quite heard of this act! I learned two interesting things today. The DAS Act and that 99.9% of the time when someone insults you, it is because they are saying what they themselves have. I never knew that! I just always believed that maybe it is something of my own making, a flaw I harbor and should work on. Coincidentally, I learned that micro-aggression, which is when someone subtly (more like low-key) mocks you racially or ethnically, continues on into our adult lives. I wondered almost always if this ‘bullying’ would really come to an end once we are adults, but it is not a life experience. It’s a continuous cycle and it is for us to decide if we’ll stand up for ourselves. I also learned that intent can determine whether it may be bullying or altercation. A few within the group shared their stories of how they’d experienced either bullying or altercation. One of the participants had an interesting situation where a friend of hers mentioned something that was offensive and she firmly reprimanded her which is a great way of letting people around us understand. Another girl mentioned that there is a fine line between ignorance and arrogance. And I agree with her wholeheartedly. The final point we touched upon for the greater half of the session was the issue between student and teacher relations. Lastly, to wrap things up, I'd like to end with a thank you to Miss Jennifer Lopez. And I wish I could meet her brave son. I hope he continues to stand up for what is right.

26. Preventive Mental Health Approach

Having started as a mental health clinician at Domestic Harmony Foundation exactly one year ago, and dealing with a weekly case-load of 10-12 therapy clients, I would like to propose a series of continuous workshops on a yearly basis, to promote self and community awareness on the socio-political climate, but through the mental health perspective.

Individuals who are on a constant uphill battle, whether it be due to professional or personal reasons, it has surely become very easy for them to fall into despair when it comes to dealing with socio-political issues in our news-media centered society. The emotional exaggeration we experience on the day-to-day, outside of our homes, whether it is from the newspapers, television networks or especially social media sources, affect us all on a very deep and subconscious level. The current climate is not only powerfully persuasive and disturbing to those who have a stable and agile personal life, but it affects most deeply those who are already in personal or professional turmoil. The level of desperation and weakness that this target population is experiencing, is most effectively called collateral damage.

DHF wants to take a preventive approach in a series of workshops throughout the year, rather than a reactive one. Workshops that engage attendees, holding open ended discussions, and tutorials on both personal and professional issues they need help with. We have a vast board of psychologists and psychiatrists who work with us, and will surely conduct outreach to other educators, and community leaders for their involvement as well.

Conducting therapy with clients at DHF is highly centered around domestic and personal issues, therefore every client has consistently voiced concerns and fears to us when it comes to guiding their children and families around the political tension and anxiety in the greater community. It is pertinent for us at this time to be able to provide the tools and resources to our clients and the general affected community to be able to most-effectively combat the fear and anxiety penetrating our lives and our children's lives.
27. Shop for a Cause

Remember to always start at smile.amazon.com to support Domestic Harmony Foundation every time you shop. Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible Amazon Smile purchases. Thank you for your charitable contribution!

28. Walkathon

DHF is striving to end domestic violence with the help of the community. DHF invites all to walk and make strides in effort to stomp out domestic violence. You can make a difference; Come join us!

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