

BREAKING THE STIGMA AROUND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Humaira's own history makes it easier to help women experiencing domestic violence. ♦

"I gave up a lot to be where I am today. It's not easy for a South Asian woman to leave a marriage. Many times, women won't come out of a domestic abuse situation because they don't want to feel ostracized or cut off from the rest of their community. Even now, divorce is a huge taboo in our communities. Divorced women are not treated with the same respect as married women - they are constantly being judged.

When I came to Canada from Saudi Arabia, I had no idea about the country and how the system worked. I was experiencing domestic violence, but leaving my marriage was hard because I didn't know the language and I was experiencing culture shock. When I did leave, I had to go to a shelter because I didn't have community support. But when I got there and started getting in touch with various professionals, I began to feel more familiar with Canadian culture and the system here.

Now, I use that knowledge to support my community. It feels great to be able to help women who are going through the same situation I went through a few years ago. When you're experiencing domestic abuse, you need that one person who can actually empathize with you,

"The voices of women like me have power now. We can make our community a better place to live."

who knows your struggles and can show you the bigger picture. Now, I'm in a position where I can help and guide other women. I often get calls in the middle of the night from women who don't know where to go for help. Being a survivor, I can provide that support.

Today, when I talk about domestic abuse in our community, I'm not hesitant to bring up the dark aspects of it, or the issues that we rarely talk about. I know now that I have support of the United Way-funded group I work with. We develop resources that help people in the South Asian community to recognize domestic violence and show them where to turn. And we work to change the perception of domestic violence in our community. I know that even though I am a single mother of two girls, organizations like United Way will support me.

Volunteering has made me very strong over the years. I've changed as a person. The voices of women like me have power now. We can reach out to people. We can make our community a better place to live."

-Humaira



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