

# OVERCOMING A PAINFUL PAST TO HELP OTHERS

When Atiya experienced domestic violence, she had to overcome cultural barriers to seek help. Today, she helps other women.

"It's a challenge to navigate the system as a victim. There are several barriers women in the South Asian community face: the lack of information, the lack of awareness that help is out there and understanding that it is okay to reach out. I'm currently separated from my husband and in the process of getting a divorce, but

when I was experiencing domestic violence, my biggest challenge was not getting immediate community support. It was so difficult to escape the violence I was experiencing - and that my two children were witnessing - because I felt like I had no one to turn to.

In our culture, the issue of domestic violence is very personal. It is seen as a failure on the part of a family and is shrouded deeply in the stigma of shame. It remains taboo for us to ask for help, because it's seen as a personal failure. We're not encouraged to step out of the boundaries that have been created by our culture.

But the key to fighting these cultural stigmas and barriers is awareness. I have been working with a United Way-funded organization for five years. It provides a safe space for these women to come and reach out for help. We work in a community that's very ethnically diverse. The majority of people there are first-generation immigrants, so they're still in the settling phase.

We use a very strong cultural lens in the work that we do, because

we understand where these women are coming from and some of the barriers they face.

We encourage them to seek help and we give reassurance. Reassuring survivors is one of the most important parts of our work: Domestic violence is not their fault. It can happen to anyone. It can happen in any culture.

**"YOU WILL THRIVE AND YOU WILL SURVIVE. AND IT'S OKAY TO REACH OUT FOR HELP."**

Having navigated the system as someone who was a victim, it's been a very fulfilling experience for me to volunteer in this field. Now, I'm able to give my voice to those that might not be as confident to reach out for help. There is life after leaving a marriage. You will thrive and you will survive. And it's okay to reach out for help." -Atiya



United Way  
Saskatoon & Area

**BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES**