



SAHELI SANDESH

The Quarterly Newsletter
for Saheli, Friendship for
South Asian Women

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Challenges and Successes of 2007

Usha Vakil, Chair

As we look back at the 2007 and look at 2008, Saheli, Support and Friendship for South Asian Women is preparing for a busy and exciting 2008. We would like to thank our community members for making 2007 our most successful year yet, and we look forward to working with you in the New Year!

We started 2007 with a social event including Bhangra dancing and in keeping with the theme of 'friendship for all'. We ended the year with the theme of 'Support for all' by holding a Conference on Domestic Violence (DV) in Concord and Men's Initiative at the Lahey Clinic Auditorium in December.

Just on the heels of our Domestic Violence conference in October, the Boston Globe reported that there were 39 Domestic Violence related murders in Massachusetts in 2007, comparing to 31 in 2006. This rise in DV related deaths is alarming and is a reminder to all of us to continue our work in preventive education while supporting and helping woman in need of our services. We receive numerous calls relating to family discord and in the final 20 days of 2007', Saheli fielded 10 calls, showing the enormity of the situation at hand.

To keep with the challenges and the workload of DV cases and other areas of Saheli's mission, we have a dedicated and a supportive group of core members and volunteers, the back bone of Saheli. . In September, record numbers of community members joined Saheli in their annual Walkathon in Burlington to raise funds for the Domestic Violence Emergency Fund.

In 2007, our core membership underwent a few major changes. Meena Sonea-Hewett, a core member, became a full-time student at Brandeis University. Lata Rao left to pursue a career in the 'world of travel'. Rita Shah was recently appointed President of India Association of Greater Boston (IAGB) and she will continue with Saheli's responsibilities as well.

We have many new faces both in the executive committee and among the volunteer members. Mala Krishnamurthy heads up the literacy and citizenship classes in Lowell. Lija Joseph, who juggles between her medical profession and raising young family, has managed to organize 2 major

events for Saheli besides taking lead in the Men's Initiative and Health program. Barinder Ahluwalia is the new Saheli executive member from Nashua, New Hampshire. Saheli Boston and Saheli New Hampshire will work collaboratively in 2008 in addressing women's issues. Rekha Singh, Saheli Treasurer, with her excellent management skills, continues to keep Saheli's finances in order and contributes towards services, as needed.

Anita Raj, has worked hard to formalize Saheli's relationship with Jane Doe Inc, a premier women's organization in the Boston area doing work in domestic violence and sexual assault. Gouri, as usual, is indispensable and picks up all the dropped balls. She has made the Personal Computer program in Cambridge very strong and popular. And, we have Seema Shenoy as our organization coordinator. I wonder how we did all the work before she came aboard. She keeps us informed, connected and busy.

We thank our advisory board, dedicated volunteers, and many donors. Because of all of you, Saheli has made an impact in 07' in amplifying the issues and concerns affecting our community.

If you are not a member of Saheli, I urge you on behalf of all the Saheli, to join us. We need your voice and you.

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Family Discord and Domestic Violence Program

Gouri Banerjee, Co-Chair

Saheli's domestic violence program was very active under the leadership of Lata Rao and Meena Sonea-Hewett in 2007. This year women received support and friendship, financial help, referrals to family law and immigration attorneys, help in preparing legal documents, assistance in getting to court, translation services and transportation assistance. Many women continued to call the Saheli hotline, but more women, preferred to reach out by email and personal phone-calls. Responding to this, the Saheli executive board appointed a program coordinator to facilitate a more rapid response to hotline and email messages. The program coordinator has significantly reduced the time needed to respond to clients.

Increasingly, there was an increase in the number of web contacts from different states in U.S and South Asian sub continent. One woman from India needed help in dismissing her current lawyer and finding a new one. Another woman, while visiting her parents in India with children, was refused re-entry documents by her husband who asked for a divorce. Living in India with aged parents, and children, one with serious medical problems, the woman sought help from Saheli to reenter the US and seek child custody, support and alimony from her spouse. Another woman went to Bangladesh to visit her parents while her green card was being processed. Her husband informed her that she could not return unless she promised to become a 'better wife and mother' quit her job, and take better care of the husband's extended family.

Not unexpectedly, women abandoned overseas need multiple layers of immigration and family law legal services, and psychological, financial and medical support in order to re-enter the US and gain financial security for

themselves and their children. Saheli has helped in this effort by sending money to India, finding lawyers for family law and immigration and legal problems, and by providing caring support and friendship to women overseas.

In 2007 Saheli Rita Shah took the lead in helping women with medical, family, relationship, and child rearing issues while also dealing with serious medical problem. Saheli Meena Sonea-Hewett organized a well-attended conference to bring together experts, practitioners, and service providers in collaboration with Domestic Violence Services of Central Middlesex with the aim of preventing domestic violence through education and awareness.

In 2007 Saheli collaborated with well-established domestic violence, serving organizations in Boston and in other states. We collaborated with the Lahey Clinic, Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence, Greater Boston Legal Services, Jane Doe, Inc. and DVAPP. We worked with Manavi in New Jersey and APIAF in San Francisco at the national level to bring about changes in H-1/H-4 visa issue, and in domestic violence prevention efforts in Asian communities.

The Saheli executive committee, an all volunteer group, continues to maintain a \$5000 emergency fund for women in crises, has established the Sujana Chalasani Economic Empowerment grant with a generous donation. The grant supports women trying to establish a new business or career. In addition, Saheli has taken steps to educate the community and prevent domestic violence by organizing events that engage men, educate members of local police departments, and provide the South Asian community opportunities to get training and knowledge about domestic violence issues in a fun-filled social environment.

Donate A Cell Phone Program

Kumu Gupta, Saheli Volunteer

Donate A Cell Phone program was founded in 2003, during National Domestic Violence Awareness month in October, when Kumu Gupta in working with The Wireless Foundation in Washington DC's Call To Protect program, was able to get Saheli 10 cell phones with 30 minutes of free pre-paid time for women in need. Saheli's Donate A Cell Phone program in modeled on a similar program by Jane Doe Inc.

In 2006, an autographed baseball from the Red Sox Foundation was presented to a raffle winner of phone drive, conducted by Saheli, during Republic Day celebration of India by IAGB (Saheli is a sister affiliate of IAGB). Since the inception of the program, Saheli has been conducting phone drives at all major events hosted by IAGB and Saheli. These phones

are then sent to The Wireless Foundation, where they are re-furbished and come back to Saheli when needed.

During Independence Day program, last year, the Donate A Cell Phone program announced its partnership with Verizon Wireless' Hope Line program, to obtain cell phones for victims of domestic violence.

You can help with the Donate A Cell Phone program, by bringing your used cell phone to any IAGB or Saheli event or contacting Kumu Gupta at Sahelihelp@gmail.com. You can also drop off your used cell phone, with charger at any local Verizon Wireless store in your town. The donated cell phones are tax deductible and can help save a life.

FOURTH ANNUAL SAHELI WALK FOR NON-VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, SEPTEMBER 29, 2007

Mala Krishnamurthy, ESL Class Coordinator

The Fourth Annual 2007 Saheli 5k Walk/Run which originated at Burlington High School on Saturday, September 29, 2007 to raise funds for Domestic Violence Women's issues could not have been conducted on a more glorious sunny and pleasant fall morning.

A very diverse crowd including eager tots, energetic high school and college students, industry professionals and social workers, Saheli volunteers and members along with family and friends combined with strong support and presence from the Burlington Police Department and Lahey Clinic was enough to create a cheerful and very enthusiastic atmosphere for the entire Walk/Run.

There were 2 groups of Walkers/Runners who completed the session at their pace. Good weather, enthusiasm of the Walkers/Runners and the strong encouragement and support from the Burlington Police throughout the route securing traffic orderliness and safety ensured the success of this Walk/Run and left everyone in high spirits of fellowship and good cheer.

The Walk/Run did create a goal to make this a more serious running event in New England for runners and also create this as a impetus for prospective runners to get started and help Saheli in their fund raising efforts for helping women.

Thanks to the generous and open hearted efforts and contributions of the participants and sponsors, Saheli was

able to raise funds of \$3721 from about 65 participants or more for the Annual 2007 Saheli Walk/Run for Non-Violence Against Women event. All the funds raised will be used to support South Asian women and their families on an emergency basis.

Sahelis extend their thanks to all the participants and sponsors, Saheli volunteers and members besides the Burlington Police Department and Lahey Clinic who have all helped make this event a great success and in helping a worthy cause that will benefit South East Asian families in New England.



Why I Joined Saheli

Mahima Subramanian, Saheli Volunteer

- I want to help other people.
- I want to feel good about the work I do on a daily basis.
- I want to give back to my community.
- I want to set an example for my children about doing charitable work.
- I want to set an example for my children of healthy gender ideologies that break through stereotypical male and female roles.
- I want my children to meet people and develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- I want to do the right thing.
- I want to influence social change in a positive way.
- I want to help because violence against anyone in any form (rape, sexual assault, domestic abuse) is wrong.

offering succor to those in need. Legal referrals, domestic violence advocacy, modest grants of start-up money and even just a friendly ear, Saheli is available.

There are many reasons for joining Saheli.

Most importantly, if I was in trouble, I would want somewhere to turn to for help.

As a grass roots organization, Saheli wears various hats

Saheli Domestic Violence Community Seminar

Satya Montgomery, Saheli Volunteer

On December 2, 2007, Saheli in collaboration with Jane Doe, Inc. sponsored Gala event at the Lahey Clinic in Burlington. The focus of the event was Domestic Violence in our Communities and how men and women can work together to end this violence in the South Asian communities.

Craig Norberg-Bohm, currently the Coordinator for the Men's Initiative for Jane Doe, Inc and co-founder of the MIJD in fall of 1999 along with Dr Jay Jayshankar, a consulting orthopedic surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital and an advocate in the field of domestic violence were the key note speakers at this event. Mr. Norberg-Bohm talked about the Jane Doe Men's Initiative as a way to introduce how men can become involved in their communities to advocate against the continuation of violence against women and children. Dr. Jayshankar talked briefly about the rate of violence in the South Asian communities and how serious the issue is in the community.

This event was the beginning step to launching Saheli's White Ribbon Campaign. We were able to collect at least twenty signatures of men who pledged to stop violence in the community. After our keynote speakers presented a powerful message to the attendees about the importance of not remaining silent about domestic violence, lighter activities occurred, which included dance and instrument performances by different South Asian youth groups. At the end of the performances, performers and participants enjoyed dinner and social hour with each other. The event was a huge success bring together caring and dedicated South Asians together to raise awareness of domestic

violence and how we, women and men, must work in collaboration to stop the continuation violence against women and children in our society.

Here are some concrete ways men can begin this movement toward eliminating violence in their communities. It is the small steps we take together that can make a huge impact to better our communities and bring forth compassion and kindness, which is the foundation of religious teachings and culture.



What Every Man Can Do to Help End Men's Violence Against Women:

1. Listen to women...learn from women.
2. Learn about the problem
3. Learn why some men are violent
4. Support the White Ribbon Campaign
5. Challenge sexist language and jokes that degrade women
6. Learn to identify and oppose sexual harassment and violence in your workplace, school and family.
7. Support local women's programs
8. Examine how your own behavior might contribute to the problem
9. Work toward long-term solutions
10. Get involved with Saheli's educational efforts.

IANH Collaborates With Saheli!

Barinder Ahluwalia, Saheli Core member

IANH-SAHELI is a partnership initiative to raise awareness, provide employable and social skills, and to create a safe and secure networking environment for women in New Hampshire region.

IANH-SAHELI has eleven active members. They offer FREE Computer Classes in Nashua, NH. Classes are conducted every Saturday from 10:15-12:15PM for a period of 6 weeks.

To enroll, please contact ianh_saheli@ianh.org

Venue:

Southern New Hampshire University-Nashua Center
546 Amherst St.
Nashua, NH 03063

Unique health concerns for the South Asian population in the United States — Diabetes Mellitus

Lija Joseph MD, Core Member

Currently South Asian Diaspora is considered among the most affluent ethnic group in the United States. Changes in diet, lifestyle and other environmental factors have contributed to health risks that the South Asian population now faces. The Saheli newsletter will discuss an ongoing series of health related topics since health of the community is one of the five core missions of the organization.

Diabetes Mellitus is primarily a disorder of carbohydrate (glucose) metabolism. There are two main types of Diabetes, Type I and Type II. Although Type II diabetes used to be often seen in adult patients, there is an increasing incidence of this type of diabetes in children and adolescents. It is a “silent” disease and so up to 50% of the patients afflicted by this disease may not have any signs or symptoms of the disease that will alert you to the possibility of this problem. The basic pathogenic mechanism in Type II diabetes is the lack of tissue response to insulin. Insulin is one the hormones produced by the body that is essential in maintaining a normal blood glucose level. When the tissue or cells does not respond to insulin, the blood sugar (glucose) level goes up and this leads to many complications including hypertension, heart disease, stroke, blindness and kidney failure. Patients with diabetes have increased risk of vascular disease that makes them 100 times more likely to have an amputation of lower legs due to lack of blood flow. Unfortunately the epidemic of obesity, even among children has compounded problems due to diabetes. The excess fat tissue in the bodies of obese patients increase certain hormones that make their tissue resistant to responding to insulin.

Recent studies by several researchers have now also identified that the insulin resistance is inherently high in South Asian population. The person does not even have to be in the obese category to be insulin resistant. In addition to such “prediabetic” risk, this population also has low levels of HDL (good cholesterol) and high levels of LDL (bad cholesterol) as well as many blood markers that appear to increase their risk of heart disease. Although diet may be a contributing factor, lack of exercise is emerging to be a significant factor that accelerates the risk of this disease among “South Asians.”

If you need additional information about this disease please visit the following websites that can provide you information www.diabetes.org , www.cdc.gov , and www.who.int Please remember that “exercise” may be the key to prevent this silent intruder in our families. The current recommendation of exercise by the American Heart Association is 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity for 7 days a week to lose weight and at least 30 minutes for 6-7 days a week to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Walking is a good exercise recommended for starters. Please visit the American Heart Association web site at www.americanheart.org and sign up for their Start! Program or any other free online programs that will help you. Always check with your primary care physician before starting an exercise program.

As New Year resolutions abound during this time, Saheli recommends regular health checkup, exercise, weight management and a well balanced diet to all members of our community.

In 2007, SAHELI ...

- ... received 70 DV phone calls
- ... graduated 47 students from IT computer literacy class
- ... gave emergency cash assistance to several women

SAHELI

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We're on the Web!
www.saheliboston.org

For their support of Saheli in 2007 we would like to thank the following:

- Anne Marie Browne, Detective of the Burlington Police Department
- Asian Task Force (ATF)
- Boston Cares Volunteers
- Chief Hart, Burlington Police Department
- CHNA 15
- Craig Norberg-Bohm, The Men's Initiative of Jane Doe Inc.
- Girish Mehta, Indian Circle Of Caring, USA Inc.
- Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS)
- India Association of Greater Boston
- Jacqueline Apsler, Ph. D., of Domestic Violence Services of Central Middlesex Inc.
- Lowell Senior Center
- Margaret Rocco of REACH Waltham and the Burlington Police Department
- Merle M. Kushner, Lahey Clinic Domestic Violence Initiative
- Neelam Wali
- Organizers of Bhangra Event for SAHELI
- Trupti Patel of the Law Offices of Trupti N Patel & Associates
- The staff of the Burlington Public Library
- The staff of the Cambridge Public Library at Central Square
- All those who have continuously supported our work.

2008 Core Members

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