

## COMMUNITY

## 8th anniversary of 'No More Tears' brings audience in to tears

BY XAHEJ BAJIPURA

"I am so happy. I'm working and learning to drive. Next week I'll have a car."

Carrying a huge smile across her face, Syra Ali sounds like a typical 20-years-young pre-med student.

Externally you can't see signs of the long distance she has traveled both geographically and emotionally in the last five months.

On March 27, Syra was the star at the Bollywood-style eight year celebration of "No More Tears", the 100 percent volunteer-run non-profit that saved her life. Syra is one of 389 adult and 810 child survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking NMT has rescued since 2006.

It was her story of struggle and ultimately strength that moved three young volunteers and over 85 people from all over Florida and internationally.

"I didn't know that a lot of women in America were as abused as they were. I thought it only happened in third world countries," said 15-years-young volunteer Anjou.

Based on the promise of education and a great life, Syra and her family accepted an arranged marriage in Dhaka to a Bangladeshi family living in south Florida. Within a month, her father-in-law began physically beating her for not offering enough dowry. Overhearing him on



Left: 20-year old Syra Ali saved by 'No More Tears' from domestic violence; Right: supporters at the 8th anniversary celebration. — Photos By Sama Askfari and Hafeez Rahman.

the phone talking about returning her to Bangladesh to be gang-raped by four local men, she mustered all her courage at 3am to run away. She had no phone and little fluency in English at the time. With the help of a police officer and a Bangladeshi gas station attendant, Syra was placed in the personal care of Somy Ali, Founder and President of NMT.

Since that night, NMT has provided numerous services, including filing a restraining order against the abuser, filing for divorce, applying for Syra's citizenship, finding a place to live, helping her find a job, opening up a bank account, and driving lessons.

She's saved enough to buy her own car. The next step is

enrolling her in college so she may pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

"No More Tears started very humbly, with Somy and I plac-

no empathy for them.

"Our culture is so weird. 'My son beats his wife.' His parents are so proud. The wife's parents ask her, 'What did you



Left: Immigration Attorney Callan Garcia with founder of No More Tears Somy Ali; Right: Volunteers, who help the victims; Below: Board Chair Dr. Laura Finley with her daughter.

ing brochures in ethnic restaurants and salons—places we thought victims might go without their husbands. We had no office so we met victims at various Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts. Today, we have expanded our network of supporters to include attorneys, doctors, dentists, driving instructors, English instructors and more, so that we can offer a one-stop shop for victims. No one waits in line at NMT. We want survivors to feel like a family, so we operate as one," said Board Chair Dr. Laura Finley.

"We can easily deem Syra's story to be one of trafficking and domestic violence considering her plight," said Somy, who explained both are intertwined in the immigrant community.

According to Somy, a stark distinction between our South Asian community from its American counterpart is "dissociation" or our mindset to shame the abused from such "impurity" and to have little to

do?' They don't want anyone to know she is being abused. It is a shame for us. This happens in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan. Not just the poor, but the rich and middle class-



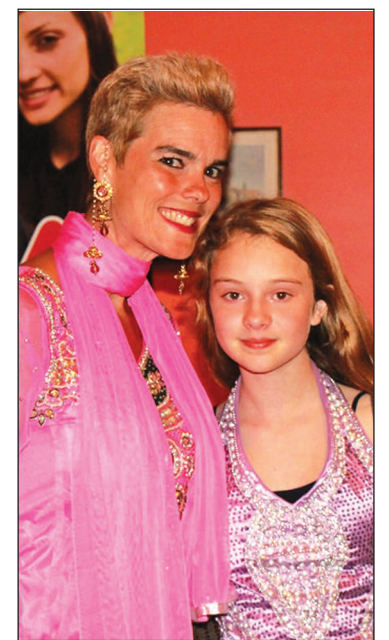
es. As a family we should be there for them. If my daughter gets abused, I don't want to know why. No one has the right to touch my daughter. You can't hit or verbally abuse her. We should give our daughters a fearless environment for them to come home to. Leaving their in-laws house is not a shameful thing," said Bangladesh-born Saverin Ahmed.

"In the big scheme of things, it will be next to impossible to eradicate the acceptance and the mindset of any culture that assumes abuse to be a norm. And we say by this experience that trafficking and DV are not culture specific. Abuse is not discriminatory and affects everyone. However, NMT's goal is to stop this very cycle by extracting not only the victim but his/her children from that environment. We must work towards making abuse abnormal rather than displaying immense amount of apathy toward this very issue," stated Somy.

In the midst of this tragic epidemic, the message of NMT's Let's Go Bollywood benefit was one of upliftment and inspiration. One unified vision can cause small ripples in our community by concerned citizens, professionals, and supporters that make great synergistic change in the world. All hope is never lost.

That night, \$4500 was raised, about the amount needed to save one adult survivor and their children. The impact on saving one survivor is exponential as she or he continues to pay it forward by empowering another survivor from their country of origin.

Awards were presented to Jeetsu Ahuja, Volunteer of the Year; Callan Garcia, immigration attorney; and Dr. Katherine Ferguson of Ferguson Dental, which has provided over \$30,000 worth



of dental care.

For more information about NMT's services and how to contribute in making a change in our South Asian community and the world, please see [www.nmtproject.org](http://www.nmtproject.org).

**Editor's Note:** The photographs used in the story "NetIP Miami chapter celebrates Holi" published in the issue of March 27, India Tribune forgot to give credit to photographer. All pictures were taken by Tushar Bulsara.



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