

**Saheli**  
**Support and Friendship for South Asian Women**  
**Annual Report 2014**



**Domestic Violence: Prevention, Education and Empowerment**  
Empowering South Asian women and families to lead safe and healthy lives

*This annual report was prepared for Saheli by Ms. Zehra Khan, a loyal volunteer.*

## **The Saheli Team**

### **2013-2015 Governing Board**

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 Mala Krishnamurthy  
 Deepika Madan  
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 Manish Patel  
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Rita Shah

#### ***Domestic Violence Advocate***

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#### ***South Shore Coordinator***

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## **Saheli**

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Dear Friends and Community Partners,

It is our pleasure to present the 2014 Annual Report of Saheli Support and Friendship for South Asian Women.

First and foremost, on behalf of the board and staff, we thank you for your longstanding and generous support. Saheli continues to fulfill its mission and perform its work due to the dedication and the hard work of the board, staff and many volunteers.

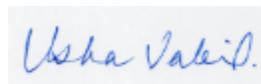
In 2014, we were excited to expand Saheli's programs by launching the Men Against Violence Initiative, and hosting the first-ever Emotional Well-Being Awareness Symposium in partnership with Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare Foundation. We also rolled out our Economic Empowerment Program with the funds generated at Nirbhaya<sup>1</sup>, the 2013 fundraising gala.

In 2014, we saw a 20% increase in the number of calls from survivors of domestic abuse. Ashamed, afraid and silent, they were extremely isolated. Saheli alleviated their pain, agony and grief and saw the impact of abuse upon children and members of the family.

At Saheli, we endeavor to support clients with limited financial and human resources; your unwavering support enables us to march on, and help each survivor to find a voice. Each voice is a powerful story and drives us to continue the work of preventing domestic abuse with both hearts and minds.

More remains to be done. Saheli needs to identify and reach out to the many women who, in spite of being trapped in abusive situations, do not reach out for help due to social, economic and cultural stigma. We invite you to help women who are facing domestic abuse with strong programs in prevention, education and empowerment.

We are grateful for the trust you have placed in us by donating time, service and funding. We look forward to serving the South Asian community zealously in 2015 and beyond.



**Usha Vakil**  
President, Saheli Board, 2014

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<sup>1</sup>"Nirbhaya" means fearless in the Sanskrit and Hindi languages.

## **Saheli: Background**

The word “Saheli” means friend in several South Asian languages. It specifically refers to female-to-female friendship in the South Asian cultural context, and connotes a safe, caring relationship. The organization Saheli was founded in Boston in 1996 as an affiliate of India Association of Greater Boston, dedicated to supporting South Asian women and families in the Greater Boston area. The organization was created by a determined group of South Asian immigrant women. Over the years, they had witnessed unacceptable rates of domestic violence in their community as well as the lack of services that catered specifically to their community’s needs.

In its 19 years of existence, Saheli has helped many women reclaim their lives, protect their families, and secure a brighter future. The organization has grown into a respected community institution headquartered in Burlington, MA, with service branches in Shrewsbury and Quincy, MA, and Nashua, NH.

Saheli maintains strict confidentiality and focuses upon the privacy of South Asian women. We serve families from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Its staff and volunteers speak many South Asian languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati and Punjabi.

## **Vision and Mission**

Saheli’s vision is to create an abuse-free environment for South Asians. Its mission is to empower South Asian women and their families to lead safe and healthy lives in the United States.

## **The Spirit of Volunteerism**

Saheli, which is primarily a volunteer organization, relies on their tireless support, and four part-time staff members. With a firm focus on Saheli's mission, they together helped 164 women and their families in 2014.

By their service on the Governing Board, Advisory Committee and Community Volunteering many men and women devoted valuable time, knowledge and resources to Saheli’s clients, and helped with governance, strategic planning, administrative work, events management, fundraising and program implementation. We thank you all.

## Budget 2014

### Revenue

Individuals	22,742
Foundation	27,500
<b>Total Contributions</b>	<b>50,242</b>

### Core Expenses

Domestic Violence & Empowerment	29,703
Operations	28,015
<b>Total Core Expenses</b>	<b>57,718</b>

### One time or Grant Related Expenses

Awareness and Education Seminars	13,649
Strategic Initiatives	6,978
<b>Total Grant Related Expenses</b>	<b>20,627</b>

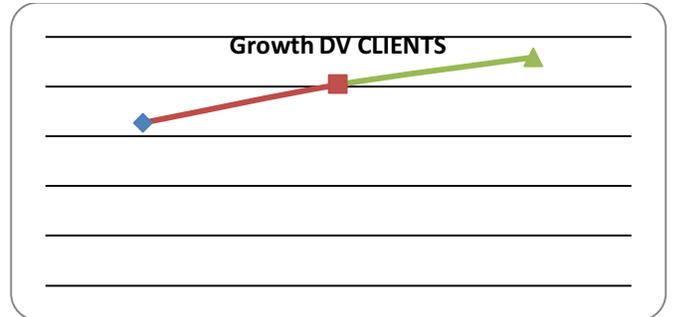
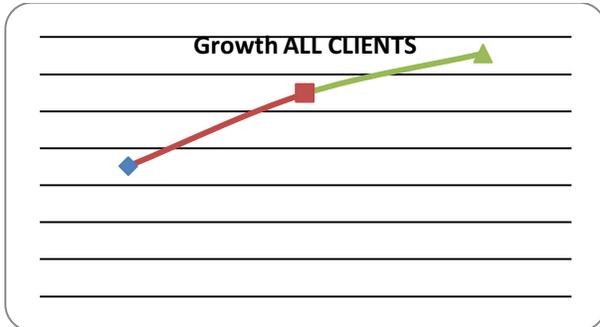
**Cash\*** \$91,028

\* Saheli does not have any assets other than "cash". Saheli also does not have any liabilities. Ending cash for 2013 was \$119,131.00

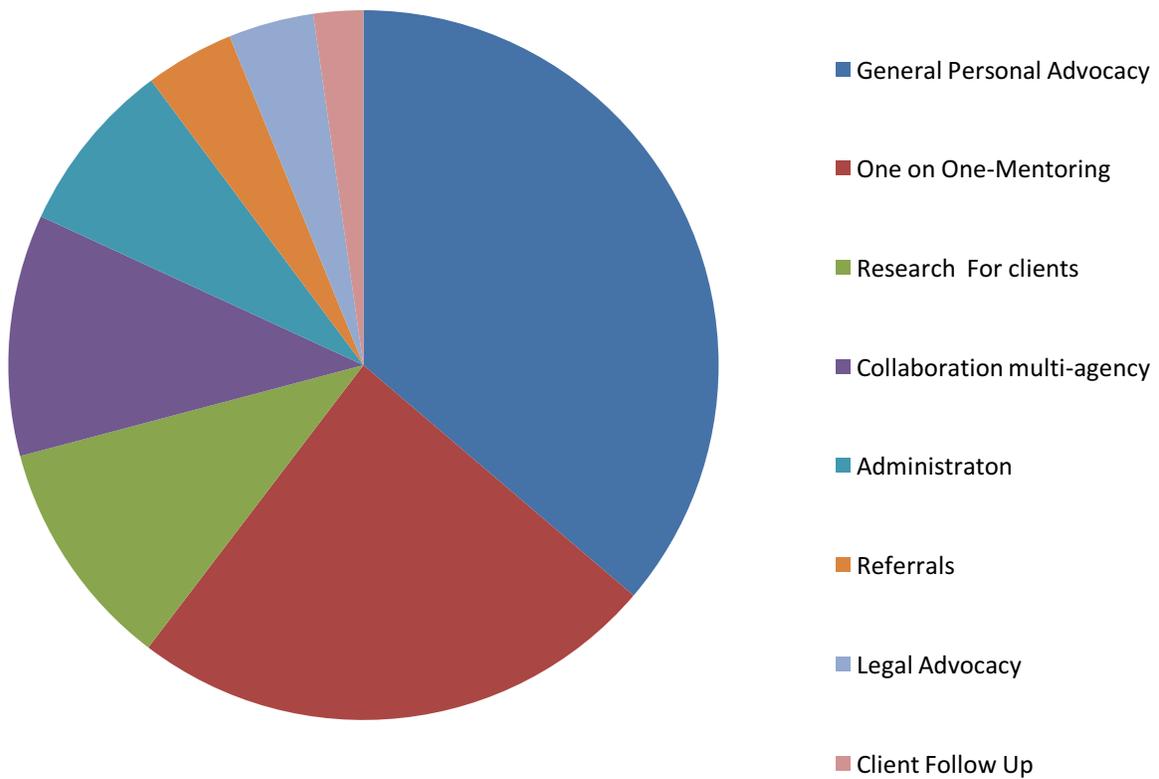
In 2014, Saheli was able to support programs due to a great fundraising/grant writing effort late in 2013. Not only did we have our major fundraiser late in 2013 but we also received a large grant from Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare Foundation. Most of the funds were spent in 2014. We were able to hold seminars on Mental Health as well as programs related to the Men's Initiative. We were able to fully fund the Empowerment Program which helped women achieve skill's necessary for them to be self-sufficient.

## Statistics January 1, 2014-December 31, 2014

In 2014, Saheli devoted 740 hours to serving 164 clients. Requests for Saheli's assistance show an overall growth rate of 20% above 2013.



## Number of Hours with clients



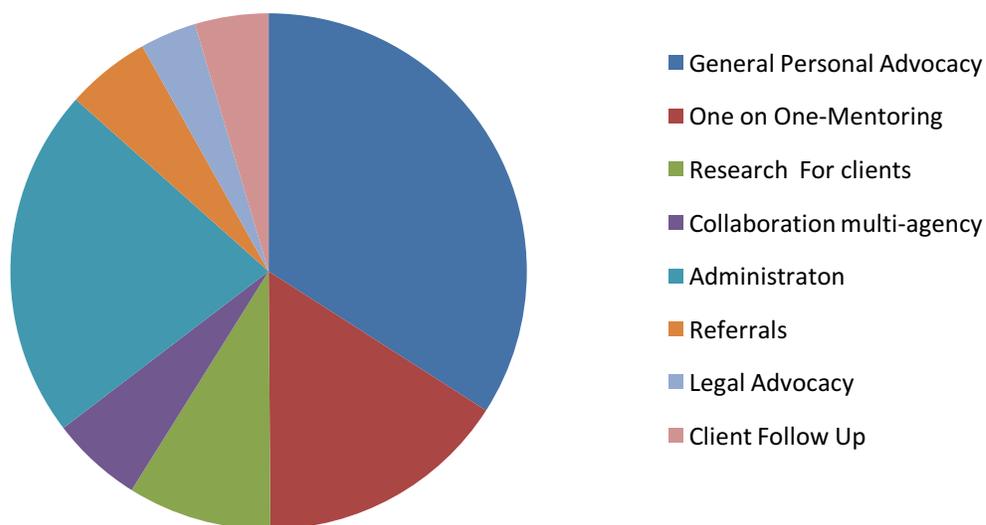
## Domestic Violence in South Asian Communities

Domestic violence (DV) has a powerful connotation and carries multiple implications in South Asian communities. These communities are traditional and with strong family ties that might be considered intrusive in Western societies. South Asian families are often not nuclear and extended families often live under one roof. Hence, perpetrators can be not just the spouse but also the extended family.

On the other hand, the victim is alone. Her family often does not support her because of the stigma of divorce and pressures her to maintain the status quo. Shame, loss of face and the family's need to maintain "honor" leads to extreme isolation of the victim. Both victim and perpetrator are caught in a cycle of saving face: they deny the violence within their family and do not seek help. This denial often ends with tragic consequences for the victim and emotional trauma for the children.

Saheli assists with critical needs in the South Asian community: Preventing Domestic Violence and Education and Empowerment for Women. Anita Raj's research (2002) highlights the extent of the problem among South Asians and helps contextualize the need for Saheli's services.

## Number of Meetings with Clients



## Domestic violence statistics among South Asian women in Greater Boston<sup>2</sup>

- 40.8% of South Asian women surveyed in the Greater Boston area were physically and/or sexually abused by their current male partners in their lifetimes; 36.9% reported having been victimized in the past year.
- 65% of those reporting physical abuse also reported sexual abuse, and almost a third (30.4%) of those reporting sexual abuse reported injuries, some requiring medical attention.
- 15.8% reported injury or the need of medical services as a result of a partner's violence. No significant difference was found in the prevalence of domestic violence between arranged marriages [typically refers to marriages arranged by parents or relatives of each member of the couple] and non-arranged marriages.
- 11% of women reporting intimate partner violence indicated receiving counseling support services for domestic abuse.
- Only 3.1% of the abused women in the study had ever obtained a restraining order against an abusive partner. This rate is substantially lower than that reported in a study of women in Massachusetts, in which over 33% of women who reported intimate partner violence in the past five years had obtained a restraining order.
- Women who reported intimate partner violence were more likely than those without such violence to indicate that they had experienced "poor physical health in seven or more of the last 30 days" (19.5% vs. 6.7%), "depression [in] seven or more of the last 30 days" (31.8% vs. 10.2%), "anxiety [in] seven or more of the last 30 days" (34.1% vs. 20.1%), and "suicidal ideation during the last year" (15.9% vs. 2.5%).

### Differences between Saheli clients and mainstream victims of abuse

Mainstream domestic violence agencies are often unable to provide services to Saheli's clients. Different cultural norms, language barriers, immigration concerns and visa status often serve as serious barriers to seeking help. Saheli steps in to fill this gap by providing language competency and culturally relevant services to victims and survivors. Saheli also serves as a bridge connecting survivors to much needed resources provided by government programs and other legal and DV agencies. Most Saheli clients lack support systems which makes it difficult to break the silence and stop the cycle of violence and abuse.

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<sup>2</sup> Raj A, Silverman J. Intimate partner violence against South-Asian women in Greater Boston. *Journal of American Medical Women's Association*. 2002; 57(2).

## Saheli's Domestic Violence Prevention Programs Include Men

Saheli recognizes that domestic violence is a human rights issue and not just a woman's issue. As such, Saheli volunteers work to increase awareness of DV and encourage victims to seek help. They are out in the South Asian community, making presentations, distributing literature, holding an annual walk, hosting events and speaking at local colleges.

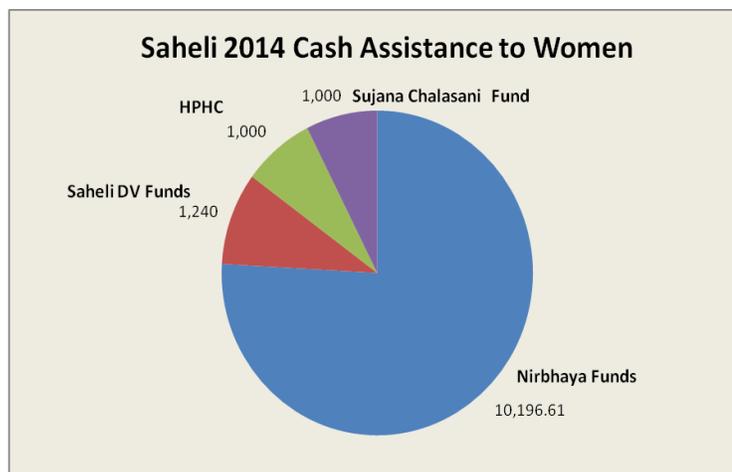
In order to change social norms, Saheli realizes the importance of enlisting men as allies. In this spirit, the organization launched the Men Against Violence Program. This initiative enlists men as allies, they help to raise awareness about the extent of domestic violence among other men with the hope of making DV socially unacceptable.

## Focus on Mental Health and Emotional Well Being

In South Asian culture, stigma around acknowledging mental health issues is strong. However, most DV survivors are scarred emotionally and often suffer from anxiety and depressive disorders, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), eating and related mental and emotional disorders. Saheli recognizes the shroud of silence that envelopes survivors and endeavors to create an environment where "it is okay to talk" about mental health. It recently hosted a very successful Emotional Well-Being Awareness Symposium for the community. A dynamic gathering of experts, professionals and community members discussed the various facets of mental health which is rarely addressed in the South Asian community.

## Economic Empowerment

The economic empowerment program aims to help women to become resilient in the face of adversity. Saheli provides tuition assistance (of up to \$2,000) toward vocational training or short term courses aimed at workforce development. Saheli also offers classes in computer literacy, English as a Second Language, financial literacy and workshops by human resource leaders.



## Testimonials from Survivors

Read some poignant stories from women whom Saheli has helped in recent months, in their own words (names are fictional).

### **Veena**

Abandoned by her husband, Veena was homeless, living in a shelter with her young child, and eating food at soup kitchens. When she called Saheli for help, an advocate connected Veena with resources and arranged for her to get funds from Saheli's Economic Empowerment Fund.<sup>3</sup> Today, Veena has completed computer courses and awaits her first job offer as a quality assurance engineer. Veena writes:

"Heartful thank you to Saheli for helping me when there was no hand to help me, at the times when we were in great need. Saheli helped me, listened to me and advised me whenever I needed and lost confidence. Finally Saheli gave me much needed financial help to buy winter clothing, a laptop, and pay for online software courses in preparation for resuming my earlier career. I am becoming a confident and strong person now. I will remember all of you with gratitude, for the rest of my life! Without your help nothing was possible for me."

- Veena

### **Farzana**

Farzana was a young widow with two little boys when she married a man she met online. Within months, her husband's demands upon her life insurance and pension funds became intolerable. A prisoner in her own home, she was isolated from everyone by her bullying husband. An acquaintance referred her to Saheli, and advocates created a safety plan for Farzana, contacted the police on her behalf and hired a lawyer. With Saheli's help, Farzana appeared in court and terminated her marriage. Today, she is safe and healthy, and back to practicing her profession, she expresses her deep appreciation thus:

"In the Muslim religion, we cannot acknowledge humans as god. But when I met the Sahelis, I thought I saw god. I was a prisoner in my own house for four days, and Sahelis brought me and my two boys food and gave me the contact information for the police station and lawyers. I thank Saheli from the bottom of my heart, you saved our lives..."

- Farzana

### **A Bangladeshi family**

This is a struggling family with two children, husband and wife and the wife's mother. Saheli has worked with them for past eight years. They say:

"Thank you, Saheli for taking care of us. Our child has been taken away by the Department of Children and Families and you are helping us a lot. We are poor people from Bangladesh. We do not understand what the police and judges say to us. Thank you for talking in English to the policewoman in Newton about our bad situation."

- A family

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<sup>3</sup> The Economic Empowerment Fund was created in 2014 with the generous support of the South Asian community.

## To All Saheli Volunteers: In Appreciation

You are kindness!  
 You are goodness!  
 A Saheli most sincere  
 A dedicated volunteer.

A helping hand, a good Friend  
 Like a straight line, that will not bend  
 Helping the needy till the end  
 A fount of compassion  
 And relevant information  
 A guiding hand  
 And loving arms  
 Wrapping in warmth  
 A whole community  
 From inside out  
 Forever working hard!

Giving of yourself for no Gain  
 Not for riches, not for fame  
 Not even for community acclaim  
 But from belief in a better world  
 A haven, free of pain!

*- A Saheli Client*

## Saheli Support and Friendship for South Asian Women

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### **Why I Volunteer for Saheli**

As a Saheli volunteer, I get a chance to help improve South Asian women's lives. My role is to educate people on the Saheli projects through posters and presentations. Additionally, I aid in grant writing and brainstorming. I enjoy the congeniality and the strengths of the group members, staff and board. I am glad to be able to help Saheli succeed in making South Asian women's lives better.

*- Zarina Memon*



### **Why I Volunteer for Saheli**

The cause that Saheli stands for, and the work that they do is invaluable and I am proud to do my small part to aid their mission. I have seen domestic violence through the eyes of friends and family in places where one would least expect.

In our culture, this topic is considered taboo, and I believe that Saheli is giving victims a voice and empowering women to speak up and move on. Working with other sahelis has not only granted me personal satisfaction and gratification, but has allowed me to grow stronger as a person as well.

*- Farhat Rangwala*



### **Why I Volunteer for Saheli**

Growing up, I was deeply influenced by my parents' volunteer efforts in changing people's lives. Those memories have always motivated me to find ways to do more for the less fortunate among us. "Volunteering" is a very important value that I want my kids to have because in today's interconnected world we can progress only if all of us progress.

After I moved to the US, I was searching for good organizations to volunteer my time. It was then that I discovered Saheli - when I was approached by a South Asian woman who needed help to address a domestic issue in her life. On contacting the Saheli helpline, I was impressed by the passion, knowledge and accessibility of the Saheli staff in helping out the woman who had reached out to me.

That incident proved to me that Saheli with its mission to empower South Asian women was the type of organization that I wanted to volunteer for. One of the wonderful things about volunteering for Saheli is that the organization matches the skillset, interest and available time of its Volunteers when assigning responsibilities. This is wonderful for me - being a busy mom of two young kids, I find that Saheli provides enough flexibility and opportunity for me to make a meaningful contribution to the society and at the same time teaching my kids the values of helping those that are less fortunate than us.

*- Panna Batra-Iyer*