

SAHELI

SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP FOR SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN AND FAMILIES

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Domestic Violence: Prevention, Education and Empowerment

Empowering South Asian women and families to lead safe and healthy lives



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION • EMPOWERMENT • EDUCATION
Empowering South Asian women & families to lead safe and healthy lives

1-866-4SAHELI | info@saheliboston.org | www.saheliboston.org

2015-2017 Governing Board

Barinder Ahluwalia
Gouri Banerjee, Ph.D.
Tanvi Devimane
Mala Krishnamurthy
Deepika Madan
Kumkum Pareek Malik, Psy. D.
Lata Parwani
Manish Patel
Pradip Tandon
Usha Vakil

Staff

Family Services Coordinator

Rita Shah

Domestic Violence Advocate

Salita Mehta

South Shore Coordinator

Vandana Sharma

Programs Coordinator

Mariya Taher – Katy Hurley (3/1/2016)

Advisory Committee

Ramesh Advani
Anu Chitrapu
David S. Ludwig MD, Ph.D.
Sweta Mepani
Trupti Patel, Esq
Lata Rao
Ranjani Saigal
Manju Sheth, MD
Rajendra Trivedi, MD
Jaya Voruganti
Neelam Wali

Contact Us

1-866-472-4354
info@saheliboston.org
P.O. Box 1345 Burlington, MA 01803
Office: 11 Bedford Street, Burlington, MA 01803

President's Message



Dear Friends,

I am honored to present the Saheli annual report for 2015, a year in which over 158 women, their children and families have turned to us for life-changing support, services and financial assistance. Your generous support of Nirbhaya in September 2015 and continued financial donations have allowed Saheli to pursue an exciting path in community service.

If you are an existing or past donor, we thank you! Without you we could not offer so much to the South Asian community. If you are a prospective supporter we welcome you as a volunteer, donor and advisor to Saheli, please talk to us about how your skills and ideas can sustain Saheli's efforts towards eradicating gender based violence.

In 2015 we focused upon organizational improvements, new programs, and built relationships with mainstream domestic violence agencies. With help from three new board members, we have improved the domestic violence program by adding more staff hours, increased training, and revised procedures, manuals, databases and reporting systems. We have initiated a new fundraising strategic plan. Our volunteer recruitment and retention program has made substantial strides especially in recruiting younger volunteers. We've introduced a new computer literacy program in Quincy, run focus groups on South Asian domestic violence, and revived relationships with the India Society of Worcester Crises Intervention Team.

Saheli's new office in Burlington is a hub for meetings with clients, partners, and board and staff members. We have launched new initiatives in mental health and emotional wellbeing using the Saheli website and community workshops across eastern Massachusetts. Saheli has strengthened relationships with partners by attending conferences and meeting officers at other agencies and successfully built relationships with new Asian organizations such as Asian Women for Health.

In 2015 Saheli received awards for its work from the *Massachusetts Asian American Commission*, and the online site *Great Non-Profits*. Our work in the community has been supported by six foundations and by South Asian friends and supporters and by the women we help. As we approach twenty years of service in Eastern Massachusetts, again, we thank you so much for your friendship and support.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gouri Banerjee". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Gouri Banerjee, Ph. D., President of the Board, 2015-2017

About Saheli

Saheli means female 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 was founded in 1996 as an affiliate of India Association of Greater Boston, dedicated to supporting South Asian women and families. It was created by South Asian immigrant women who witnessed unacceptable rates of domestic violence in their community as well as the lack of targeted services for South Asian people.

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.

We serve families from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Staff, board members and volunteers speak many South Asian languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati and Punjabi. Saheli maintains strict confidentiality protocols and focuses upon the safety and health of South Asian families.

Mission

Our mission is to empower South Asian women and their families to lead safe and healthy lives in the United States.

Vision for the future

We visualize safe, healthy and happy families, free of gender based abuse and violence, where men, women and children thrive and flourish according to their fullest potential.

Saheli grew significantly in 2015 in terms of the number of clients seeking help, the number of programs, and increased activity at two service centers. The volunteer base also saw growth as did partnerships with peer agencies and community connections with state, federal and local authorities. It was a challenging year for fundraising as fewer foundation funds were received; despite this, Saheli improved its internal governance structures, clarified staff, board and volunteer roles, and took significant steps towards implementing a strategic development plan.

Domestic Violence Survivors

In 2015 roughly 30% of survivors who called Saheli's bilingual helpline reported physical abuse and sexual assault; advocates know that these rates are underreported and the prevalence of abuse among SA is, in fact, much higher. Over 70% of helpline callers also reported trauma on account of verbal/emotional abuse by an intimate partner or a family member. They spoke about extreme loneliness, isolation, denial of access to phone, internet and TV, economic

abuse, abandonment and neglect, and lack of food, transportation and medical care. In 2015, Saheli obtained shelter services for 6 women, sent one woman back to family in India, and used the services of religious leaders and social workers to counsel couples. Saheli also worked with the Department of Children's Services to help families where abuse and neglect were alleged.

One hundred and fifty eight women were helped with direct domestic violence and economic empowerment services. They included South Asian women and children living across roughly thirty cities and towns in Massachusetts. About seventy percent of the women were low income, and had national origins in India. Increasing numbers of women from Bangladesh now seek help from Saheli for themselves and their young children. The majority of clients are low income women, who are unable to access the medical and legal systems due to language, literacy and cultural barriers. The greatest need among these clients is one-on-one counseling in a South Asian language and a kind and compassionate understanding of their condition. In 2014 we enabled 164 South Asian women and their families with 740 hours of consultation and 476 face to face meetings. In 2015 Saheli helped 158 women, provided 856 hours of consultation in 487 meetings. Case management continues to be time consuming and complex as abandonment of wives and children overseas is emerging as a major domestic violence threat.

Programs

To address domestic violence among South Asians Saheli has developed two programs:

1. Domestic Violence Response and Prevention Program, and
2. Economic Empowerment and Financial Assistance Program.

Domestic violence affects all people and the South Asian community is no different than any other. However, South Asian women face linguistic and cultural barriers, experience greater stigma and shame in revealing abuse, and in the present political climate, face greater anti-immigrant and racist sentiments. Not enough DV agencies in suburban Boston are available to help them in the specific ways that they need. South Asians, newly arrived in the US, isolated from mainstream culture, with limited English fluency, and financial resources, are particularly vulnerable. Distance from providers and unfamiliarity with services in Boston and Cambridge leave no choice but to continue to live with abusers for long periods of time, often leading to drug dependency, depression, anxiety, PTSD, other mental illnesses and suicide.

The main components of the Saheli domestic violence program are:

- 24 x 7 bilingual helpline in English and Hindi
- 8 trained domestic violence advocates with South Asian linguistic skills
- Advocate who work with clients to obtain legal help, access court services, accompany women to police and communicate on their behalf with attorneys and paralegals
- Provide one on one counseling to women and their families in a safe private office

- Share knowledge, information, and resources with clients to enable them to make informed decisions about housing, finance, child custody, immigration, and employment

The main components of the Saheli economic empowerment program are:

- Funds and financial aid to women and families in crises
- Funding to gain skills, get certification for employment and attend college
- Post career opportunities and networking events, mentor women seeking employment
- Volunteers assist with resumes and applications for employment
- Disadvantaged minority girls are mentored on college application procedures
- Free literacy classes in public libraries.

Services

Saheli has limited capacity to provide all services needed by abused women. Women in crises need many additional services: shelter, support for physical and mental illness, services for children and elderly parents, and substantial financial help for basic needs. Immigrant populations have additional needs to confirm their legal status. Unable to provide for all these needs Saheli refers survivors to better resourced partner agencies.

On July 1, 2015 Saheli proudly established its first office, renting a space in Burlington to serve as a safe, private space to meet clients, partner agency staff and hold meetings. The office is staffed four days of the week by dv advocates/staff and board members.

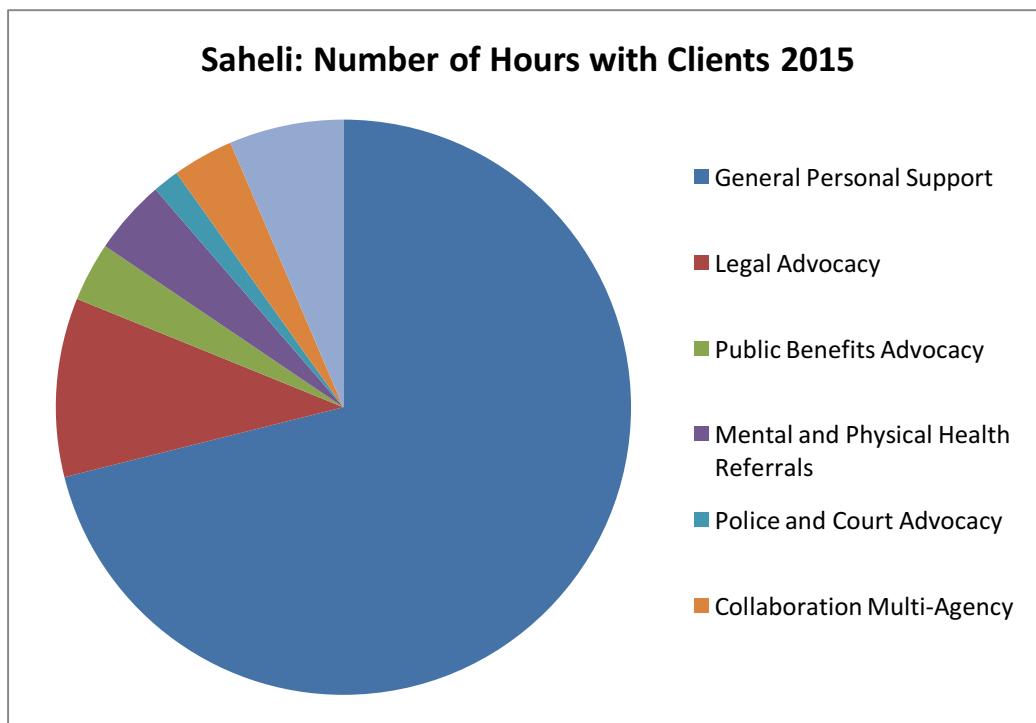
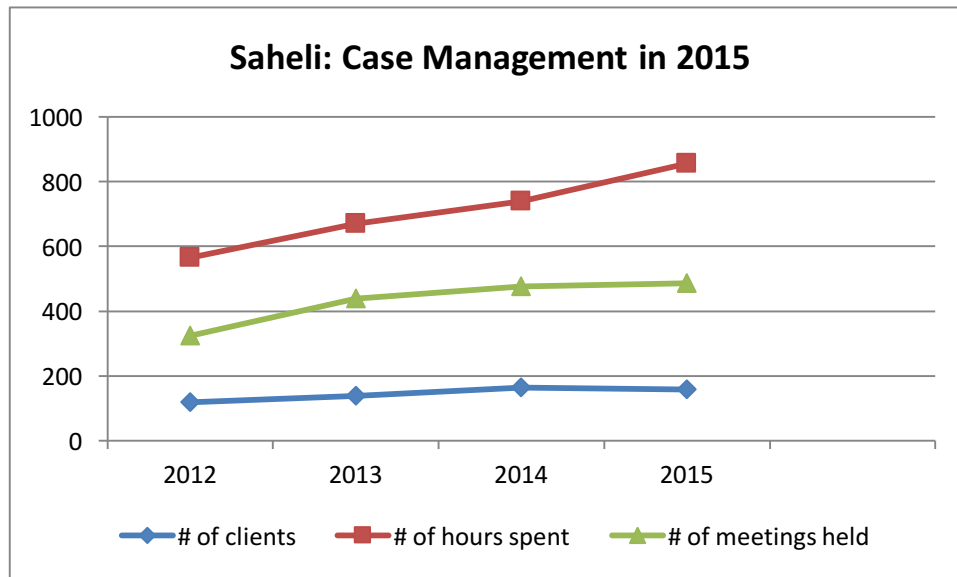
Volunteers

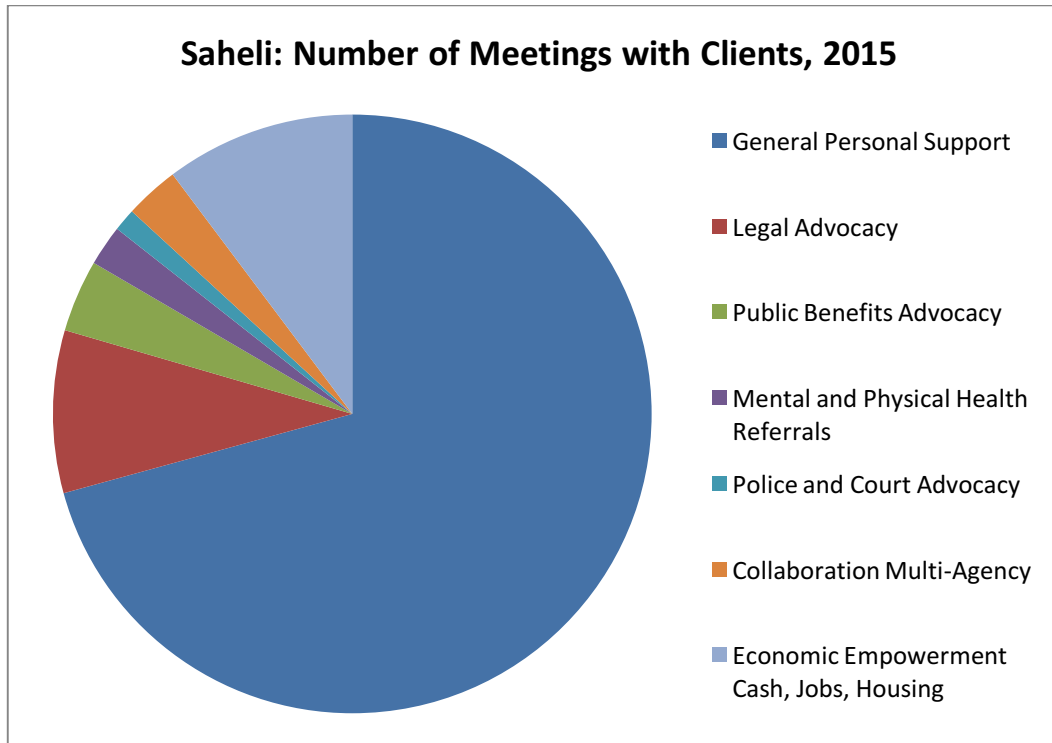
In 2014 Saheli reviewed its volunteer recruitment program and with a few changes, increased the number volunteers. Forty new volunteers were recruited in 2015 to support the domestic violence program by attending events at partner agencies, assist with administrative tasks in the office, represent Saheli at meetings and conferences, assist with phone calls and communication with donors, and teach computer literacy classes in Waltham and Quincy.

Community Connections

Saheli established strong partnerships with Lahey Hospital and Medical Center's Domestic Violence Initiative, the Steering Committee of the Community Health Network Area 15, Burlington Senior Center and Recreation Department, the Indian Medical Association of New England, the Indian Circle of Caring, and the India Association of Greater Boston. In 2015 we started a new Empowerment Program at Thomas Crane Public Library in Quincy and offered free computer literacy classes run entirely by volunteers and one part time staff member.

Overview: Domestic Violence Response and Prevention





Overview of Economic Empowerment and Financial Assistance Program

In 2015 Saheli assisted women and families with crisis management funds and cash grants to pursue skills training, certifications for careers, and complete college courses. Approximately \$8,000 was given in direct financial assistance. In addition, existing programs were realigned to meet the financial needs of women in crisis by creating an enhanced system for disbursing funds, online application forms, and quick turnaround time for South Asian women seeking help. Saheli used funds raised at Nirbhaya for direct cash assistance to women as well as improved staffing to address needs. Additional hours were added for one staff member to better determine need, seek public assistance where women qualified, counsel women where local help was available, and accompany women to agencies to avail of what is available.

Financial Overview

SUMMARY

End of Year Cash Assets \$116,686

Total Income **\$119,941**

Expenses

Personnel \$29,019

Operations \$28,524

Survivor Support \$3,208

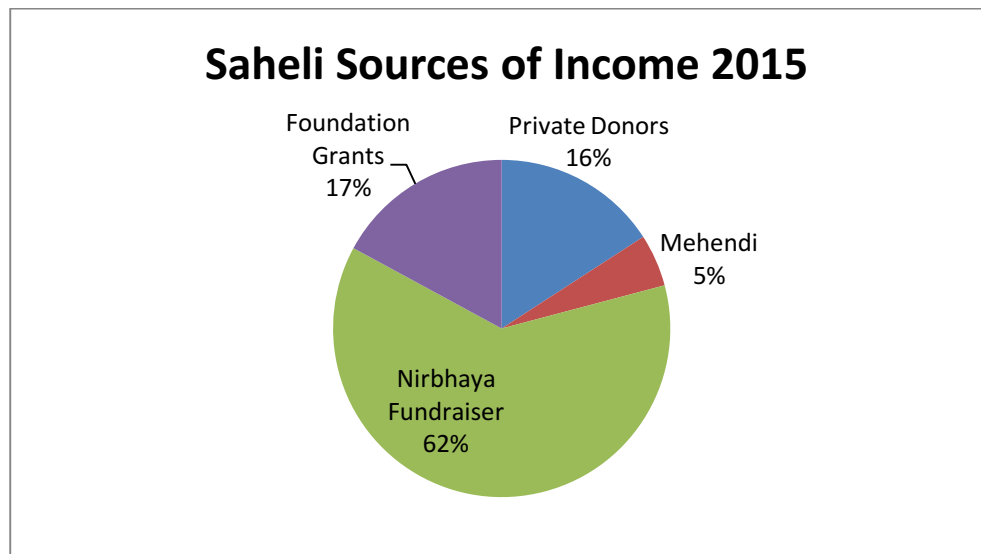
Empowerment Fund \$4,798

Event Expenses \$24,062

Other Expenses \$3,275

Total Expenses **\$92,886**

Financial details



2015 Stories from the Saheli Archives

Saheli's helps South Asian clients to access the justice system

Dear Saheli Advocate,

Thank you for taking valuable time for writing excellent letter to Dean X at Boston University and accompanying me to Boston Municipal Court. I have no words for expressing my utmost gratitude and sincerest gratefulness to you for writing the letter to the Dean. It will truly help me during my hearings. You are so kind and nice to write such wonderfully articulated fact based strong letter for me, that I am extremely happy for that. Again I have no words to express my sincere gratitude to you.

Truly and gratefully MJ

From a student alleged to have committed a sexual assault.

Saheli, Support and Friendship for South Asian Families Opens New Offices

By Mariya Taher, Program Coordinator

Home is where the heart is. I'm not sure who said that first, but for Saheli, this expression couldn't be truer, as the organization welcomes the opening of Saheli's new offices in Burlington this May. There is still some work to be done, making sure furniture arrives, a private room for domestic violence advocates to meet with survivors of domestic violence is set up, resource materials for those seeking support are properly placed throughout the office, and much more. But for those amazing Saheli Board members, staff, and volunteers who couldn't be more excited to have a beautiful location across from Burlington Common to be able to meet with survivors, host monthly board meetings and public general meetings, the heart is there, and they are eager to set-up the office.

The new offices are located on the first floor at 11 Bedford Street, right next to the Burlington Recreation Center, and on the other side of the Burlington Commons, can be found the Burlington Public Library, and the Burlington Police Department, organizations Saheli partners with often. In the coming weeks, Saheli will notify the public of office hours.

Saheli is truly lucky to have supporters in the community, who without their generous donations, we would not be able to afford this safe place to work with South Asian Families in need of support.

Saheli's Economic Empowerment Program Helps Survivors

By Salita Mehta, Senior Domestic Violence Advocate

Radha, is a qualified software engineer, she was abandoned and left penniless by her husband a few years back. At the same time, DCF temporarily fostered her child out to a local family. Saheli rescued her from a shelter where she was forced to stay and found her a job as a live-in health aide. Within three months she was reunited with her daughter. Saheli introduced her to a lawyer who helped her with immigration issues. Earlier, Radha had been diagnosed with trauma-induced PTSD and now developed backaches from the physically grueling demands of the job . After 18 months her deteriorating health, forced her to quit the job. Radha and her daughter moved into public housing that Saheli had helped her acquire. Saheli continued to help her with gifts of food and winter clothing as she took on baby-sitting jobs to supplement her income. Eventually, Radha recovered enough to go back to work. Through their Economic Empowerment program, Saheli bought her a laptop computer and paid for an on-line course so she could refresh/add to her skills. Within six weeks of completing her course, she found a job that paid \$60,000 dollars. She has since received a promotion and is happily employed in a lucrative career that allows her fulfill some of the dreams she had for her daughter.

For more information about Saheli and its programs write to info@saheliboston.org

Visit us on the web at www.saheliboston.org

Visit us on Facebook: [saheliboston](https://www.facebook.com/saheliboston)