

File: Arifa Nasim

It was really my grandfather who started the activism. He came here in the sixties. In about 2000 he became mayor of Waltham Forest and he was awarded an MBE for the services that he'd given to his community. In his meetings, I was sitting at the back with a colouring book and a hot chocolate. You're always listening to the way people speak, the way people introduce themselves. So when I was 14 and I was reading this book, Jasvinder Sanghera's *Daughters of Shame*, and I was hearing about all these horrifying stories of forced marriage and honour abuse and honour killings, I realised that I could do something about it.

I spoke to a few teachers at my school and I said, 'Look, I really want to do a fundraising dinner.' And they quizzed me on the proposal and the most important concern of theirs was how are you going to do your exams and do this project at the same time? I said to them, 'None of you in this room care more about my exams than I do. For you it's a statistic; for me it's my life. If I didn't think I could do this project I wouldn't be sitting here in front of you today.' And something must have clicked for them because the very next day I got an email saying, 'Your project has been approved. Good luck.'

We got a team together. We would get into the school at 8:00 in the morning and leave at 8:00 pm and we would cold call businesses saying, 'Could you sponsor us or could you donate a prize to our raffle, to our auction?'

And the evening came and we raised over £5,000 in that evening with ticket sales, there was a three-course meal, Baroness Scotland gave a speech. We had an amazing, incredible evening. There were councillors, local parents, students even came to the event. I actually left that school with seven A*s and six As. There is nothing that you can't do when you put your mind to it and you have a good team behind you. It was from that I met Hibo Wardare, who was a female genital mutilation survivor.

Last year I founded Educate to Eradicate. We wanted to train all teachers everywhere in the UK so that they knew what FGM was, they knew what honour and forced marriage was, so they could protect young people in schools before these horrendous practices happen.

In September I got the opportunity to apply to be on the UK delegation to the UN. When I got the call I wanted to scream obviously but I was on the phone to a civil servant so I couldn't. and we were shipped off to New York for eight days. There was a moment there where Rhona and I were introducing John Kerry, the Secretary of State for the US, David Cameron, the president of Liberia and the president of Columbia. It was just the most surreal experience to be on the stage with four world leaders. It was quit mesmerising actually.

<Transcript ends>