

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

by Sana Najafi

I'm a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. It was March 2020 (pre-pandemic) and I had lined up a summer internship. In the matter of a couple of weeks, the world as we know it changed drastically. Many people lost their jobs or had to cancel exciting summer plans. Students were, of course, no exception. My internship got cancelled, and I felt defeated. I spent the next few months seeking a new summer position. Every time I came close to securing something, it would get cancelled. Then, Canada Summer Jobs funding was released, and the very first position I saw and heard back from was North York Women's Centre. Having previous experience working at a women's centre and a deep interest in feminist and social support work, I felt a strong connection to the position. I was honoured to have been selected as one of the Peer Support Workers at NYWC for the summer.

While the role was mostly a work from home position, there was a unique opportunity to actually develop in-person connections through the Tech-Savvy Empowered Older Women's Program. In this program, senior women are provided tablets and access to the internet, as well as training on how to use technology. As a Peer Support Worker, I was one of the people responsible for facilitating the program and teaching the senior women. It has largely become the central activity for me this summer. It is a time-consuming and draining process at times, but the reward and satisfaction it brings far outweighs these few cases. It is an incredibly isolating time for all of us right now, let alone for senior woman (often living alone), with limited social connections. The community and social programming which was a vital part of these women's lives was cancelled, and their heightened susceptibility to contracting COVID-19 meant they needed to demonstrate extreme caution whenever they went outside of home, if they went at all.

It has been my honour and privilege to provide some level of connection and support to these women during this time (while adhering to public health safety guidelines, of course). While I have taught these women how to use their tablets, they have taught and shared with me many things about their life and their stories. In many of them I have found a friend, and I appreciate their willingness to let me into their homes and lives for this short period of time. While I do not live in North York, I was born and spent the first 12 years of my life there. I was amazed to see that many of my clients lived down the street from my old apartment building, or from my elementary school, or from a plaza I would go to every weekend. In this way, it felt like a special full-circle moment where I could serve the community that raised and nourished me throughout my childhood.

Beyond this, working at the Centre has allowed me to develop friendships (albeit over Zoom) and work relationships with the other students and employees. Each person has provided me with the support I often needed to get me through challenging situations, or just to get through the day. I have leaned on each of them to teach me and expand my skill sets, and I hope in turn they have learned at least a small bit from me. It is a special thing whenever you are afforded the opportunity to work with a group of strong, bright and caring women. I will greatly miss all the incredible women this role has exposed me to. As I move onto a new chapter in my life, I will look back fondly on the connections created here. I hope to continue to stay involved and support the Centre.

In the words of poet Rupi Kaur: "we all move forward when we recognize how resilient and striking the women around us are."

Dear Sana,

I am really happy to meet you. You teach me a lot. Thank you for everything.

You are very patient and kind. I will write down all you teach me today and I will write down what I don't know and I am afraid to click. Next time when you come you can teach me. You are good teacher and I really appreciate you teach me.

English and computer I just learning day by day. In my country we did not have those things when we were there and we were young. All things I am learning after I came to Canada. Getting old is not easy.

Since I have cancer I try to learn every thing. 2003 started my treatment and until 2020 (17) years is a long journey. I went through the hard time. I understand tomorrow is a good day. So I always think positive. Hope is a strong word for me.

Stay safe when you see clients Thanks again and take care. Best wishes always,

Mary