



The Survivors, not Victims

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Wazhma actively engages in Manbeh activities & sometimes write bills for Eqlima

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Zardozi's client fought against child marriage

Zardozi's client Eqlima teaches tailoring in one of our Community Business Centers (Manbeh) in Herat. Eqlima saved her 14-year-old student Wazhma from marrying a man three times her age. Wazhma, unfortunately, was forced to pay for her brother's crime until her instructor interfered and the unfair agreement between the two families was broken. Eqlima narrates the story as such:

Like every other day, students came to my house to learn about new models as part of their tailoring lessons, but Wazhma, who happens to be my neighbor, caught much of my attention those days. She seemed distracted and upset and didn't pay any attention to the lessons.

Soon after the class ended, I asked Wazhma to stay for a cup of tea and a little chit-chat. In order to get Wazhma to open up about her problem and talk freely with me, I asked about her family and how she was doing.

Within some minutes of chatting, when Wazhma no longer could hide her pain, she burst into tears and sobbed that her grandfather is giving her in marriage to an older man who has kids and is the age of her deceased father.

After asking about the reasons behind the forced marriage, I learned that her brother had accidentally killed one of his friends during a playful wrestling. Therefore, the friend's family asked for a girl in marriage so that Wazhma's family would have paid for the price of the bloodshed.

Wazhma's condition was heart-wrenching so I decided to speak up for her. Together with Wazhma we went to their house and spoke to her grandmother first. After a little while, her grandfather noticed that I was stopping them from the marriage. He asked me to leave his house and not to interfere in other people's family affairs. He was convinced that his grandchild would be happy with this rich family and at the same time she would have spared her brother's life.

At night, I thought about all the possible ways to persuade Wazhma's grandparents and went to their house again in the morning. Advising them did not work until I told them that we will write a complaint to the Women's Affairs Department. Meanwhile, Wazhma also started crying and said she will burn herself if she is forced to get married. Enraged by the talk, the grandfather took me out of their house and said, "Your life will be in danger if the deceased boy's family learns that you are manipulating Wazhma and stopping the marriage."

At that moment, I was scared and thought about my own kids' safety. For a few days, I would take my daughter and son to school myself, afraid that something may happen to them. However, I could also not stop myself from helping the helpless girl who needed me more than anyone at that time.

"Wazhma will commit suicide," I thought to myself. The next day, I bravely went back to their home and told them that we will either solve this inside these four walls or else we will have to go to the police and courts. Whoever is responsible for the death of the boy should bear the punishment, and Wazhma is completely innocent.

Wazhma's family realized that I was not backing down, so they decided to talk to the boy's family and tell them that their daughter does not want to marry the man, but if they still insist going to the court will be the last option.

Luckily, after talking to the other family, it was decided that a substantial amount of money should be paid to them to compensate for the death of their son.

"Where is Wazhma now?"

Wazhma passed the legal age to get married and is now engaged to a better person who allows her to get her education and then settle in Iran.

When the time comes, women have taken the cruelest decisions- ending their lives to put end to their suffering. Women everywhere are paying the price for their men's debts and crimes but their weakness, innocence and silence is what enables some men to be oppressive.

In the middle of these entire grievances, Zardozi is proud and delighted that it has given its clients the voice to stand for other women and put an end to violence.

Nadera runs her restaurant behind closed curtains



From the back of Nadera's small restaurant linked to her house at right

Thirty seven-years-old Nadera comes from Shiwaki village of Kabul. She has 9 children and is also financially supporting 9 more children from her husband's first wife. Nadera's husband married her when his first wife became mentally ill and couldn't look after their family.

Nadera's husband, who was the only bread-winner at the family, faced many financial difficulties. Therefore, Nadera started sheep husbandry which could afford them a meal for dinner. Unluckily, Nadera was diagnosed with animal disease which was transmitted to her during sheep farming.

That's when Nadera consulted with her husband about opening a shop where she will cook and her sons will sell the food for her. Nadera's husband, who had always supported his wife's decisions, sold the Sheep. At the meanwhile, Zardozi also trusted her with some loan money and Nadera was able to build the first restaurant in her village in two months.

"I am very happy for opening this place because the villagers had to go an extra mile to eat fast food. Now, they can access it within less than 5 or 10 minutes of walk. I also feel very proud that the initiative is taken by me. My relatives and family praise me a lot for this work. They are asking me to make a space for female customers as well," exclaimed Nadera.

More than that, Nadera's hard work and efforts were inspired by her children's dreams who are very passionate about education and learning English and Computer just like their friends. Jawid, who is Nadera's older son left school, because he had to either help his father at work (doing small labour) or attend his classes. "Now that my mother opened this shop, I am going back to school in the next month. I don't know how to thank her," said Jawid.

Nadera says that she is very happy with her husband and his first wife never made her feel uncomfortable in the house. "He is a very kind man. He has never differentiated between me and his first wife. If it was another woman instead of me, she would have forced her husband to divorce his ill wife, but I feel sorry for the other woman who is helpless and weak. We are like sisters now," added Nadera.

Nadera's kindness, creativity and hard work are what have made her successful so far. With the help of business, marketing, and accounting training at Zardozi, she was soon able to open up to new ideas and take risks. As she moves forward, Zardozi will stand with her because this is the talent and potential which Zardozi intends to bring out in women.

About Zardozi

ZARDOZI is a local non-government and non-profit organization aiming to provide economic and social services to around 6,000 Afghan women in four provinces such as Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad and Kapisa with its main office in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Zardozi's objective is to support and empower Afghan women living in the urban and rural areas through its business skills development programs to engage them in the market economy. To achieve this goal, Zardozi has established Nisfe Jahan as an independent membership-based civil society organization which also runs local Community Business Center where women gather to receive business startup loans; and technical, advisory, business and marketing skills trainings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please contact:

info@zardozi.org

Zardozi – Markets for Afghan Artisans
Qala-e-Musa Square, Kabul,
Afghanistan

www.zardozi.org

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