

YWCA honour for Beacher activist

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By [Kris Scheuer](#)

Calling activist, DJ, lawyer Zahra Dhanani a woman of distinction is an understatement.

Yet the Beach resident said she's humbled to be receiving an award for social justice at the YWCA's Woman of Distinction Awards on June 3.

"The women and agencies that put forward my nomination are so generous in the work I do and supportive of me. I feel humbled by that," she said.

The legal director for the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children said more needs to be done legislatively and socially so females feel comfortable in seeking aid from the community.

"We need to see what we can do so women feel safer to leave (violent situations) without feeling they may have to give up their families."

Part of the solution, for her, is engaging the victims and criminals in repairing the damage done from sexual abuse and violence.

Dhanani, who is currently pursuing her masters in conflict resolution and restorative justice at Osgoode Hall, is also a big advocate of societal involvement in solutions.

"Every single one of us can make a difference especially at a neighbourhood level," she said. "We can get to a place where everyone in a neighbourhood is aware of their rights and freedoms."

Dhanani currently runs a support group at Sheena's Place for women with self-esteem problems and eating disorders using a combination of talking, art, psychodrama, dance and music therapy.

"When you can engage people in something that makes them feel good about themselves it's easier to engage them in other socio-economic issues," she said.



WOMAN OF DISTINCTION:
Lawyer, activist and DJ Zahra Dhanani embraces her mother after one of her performances.

Dhanani had her own radio program for six years that mixed South Asian style music with discussion about issues ranging from incest to how youth integrate into western society.

That parlays into her other career: DJ. For five years she held a monthly Funkasia evening that had 800 people pack her events. You'll find her spinning tunes at this year's Gay Pride event on June 27.

Dhanani is a lesbian, Muslim, woman of colour who has struggled with weight issues and has experienced her share of discrimination.

"I was a chubby child and got teased and beat up a lot and that created a real sense of shame for me that I had to work through," said Dhanani, who resides near Greenwood Ave. and Queen St.

Pushing for equality is her passionate life mission.

"Prevention, healing and growth are my main focus," she said. "My absolute prayer and hope is we get to a place where we stop hating on each other."

This article also found in:
[Beach - Riverdale - East York](#)

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