Sakhi for South Asian Women exists to end violence against women.

We unite survivors, communities, and institutions to eradicate domestic violence as we work together to create strong and healthy communities. Sakhi uses an integrated approach that combines support and empowerment through service delivery, community engagement, advocacy, and policy initiatives.

Sakhi was founded in 1989 in order to fill a gap in services and support in the community for survivors of domestic violence. More than twenty years later, we have become a trusted partner in our community, an advocate for women’s rights from the local to the national stage, and a thought leader in the global movement to end violence against women. The women we work with are of South Asian origin and trace their backgrounds to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the South Asian Diaspora including the Indo-Caribbean. Though the South Asian women who contact Sakhi are diverse in terms of class, immigration status, education, and economic background, our largest and most vulnerable group consists of first-generation, low-income immigrant women who often have limited resources, are unaware of their rights, and are isolated from family and community support. Through our life-saving work, we simultaneously translate our expertise of working with individual women to larger policy recommendations and advocacy initiatives that seek to prevent and eliminate violence against women through promoting and protecting women’s human rights.

IN MEMORIAM
Sowna Chalasani
12/06/1967 - 9/11/2001

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In Memoriam
Swarna Chalasani
Sakhi’s Economic Empowerment (EE) Program is a crucial component of economic recovery efforts occurring nationwide. The recent global financial crisis illustrated the particular vulnerability of women to economic insecurity, which renders them more vulnerable to violence as well as other forms of discrimination and oppression. Not only does Sakhi work to respond to individual survivor needs, but we also promote system-wide reform and advocacy in order to better enable communities in need to receive greater access to benefits and support.

Sakhi’s EE Program provides survivors of violence with opportunities to build skills that strengthen their capacity to be financially independent. The EE Program addresses the specific obstacles survivors face while making decisions for their own safety and the safety of their children, including: spousal control and financial manipulation, the absence of work permits or certifications which are applicable in the U.S., and lack of awareness of U.S. systems and practices. By focusing on short-term response and long-term skills-building, the EE Program helps abused South Asian women become empowered with respect to their economic future, feel capable of supporting themselves and their children, and realize their potential for gaining a fulfilling career.

Our EE Program currently includes case management, job readiness support, ESL and computer classes, workshops that focus on topics such as starting small businesses and employee rights, and financial literacy training which includes topics on budgeting, savings, bank loans, investing, retirement funds, and credit.

We contextualize these services within an economic justice framework to address the root causes of violence. Violence against women is a manifestation of discrimination against women. Accordingly, when women are aware of their fundamental rights, such as the right to education, work, housing, food and health, and they are able to exercise those rights, they will be less accessible to abuse. Consequently, they can become independent and full participants in society, rendering them less vulnerable to violence and gender-based discrimination.

Sakhi’s Economic Empowerment Program also houses the Swarna Chalasani Economic Empowerment Fund, which was established in 2002 in the memory of a beloved volunteer who passed away in the tragic 9/11 attacks. Sakhi offers Swarna Fund scholarships to women who aspire towards educational or vocational goals of self-empowerment. These grants are designed to further educational and professional advancement, and empower women. These grants enable survivors to pursue opportunities that they would otherwise have difficulty accessing in order to promote financial security and gainful employment.

Currently, funds are awarded for expenses related to economic empowerment activities such as educational expenditures (including tuition, books, supplies, lab fees, and certification or exam expenses at accredited institutions), and licensing fees. Some funds may also be used for transportation and childcare expenses. Grant recipients have gone on to graduate with higher degrees, and have been able to obtain higher paying and more skilled jobs, establishing themselves in professions in banking, as teachers, and certified home assistants. The women we work with are eligible to apply for every grant cycle, so that they may receive sustainable support as they journey towards their long-term goals of self-sufficiency. Thanks to Swarna Funds, we have funded survivors who have completed their Bachelor’s and Master’s programs in fields ranging from social work and early childhood education to biomedical engineering and computer science, as well as those who have used funds to complete training in business skills, certification programs as physician’s assistants, more advanced ESL classes, and residency programs to become doctors and nurses.

Survivors can self-nominate, or can be recommended by staff to apply for a Swarna Fund grant. Sakhi’s Swarna Committee, which assesses applications each cycle, is comprised of long-term Sakhi volunteers and a member of our Board of Directors. This committee works in partnership with Sakhi staff as they deliberate and decide awards every cycle.

Currently, Sakhi provides grants of up to $1,500 per survivor per grant cycle, allowing on average for 20 grants to be awarded during our two annual grant cycles. With the ongoing support of donors and community members, Sakhi hopes to further expand the Swarna Fund to include and support diverse paths to women’s economic self-sufficiency and leadership, and to be able to award more applicants with funding so that they can achieve their dreams.
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In less than a decade, Sakhi has awarded nearly $100,000 in support to nearly 100 survivors. The table below gives a breakdown of each grant cycle, and the graph shows for what purpose the women have used the grant funds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Total Awards</th>
<th>Total Amount Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$4,953.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,682.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5,139.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6,974.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7,925.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10,313.22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17,415.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13,081.06</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7,630.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$87,682.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GRANT USE BY CATEGORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Usage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books/Supplies</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam/Preparation courses</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam/preparation courses</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transforming women's lives, one grant at a time: Survivors' Stories

The following three stories are those of Swarna Fund Scholarship recipients, revealing what drew them to apply for the grant and how they have used funds to achieve their goals of independence and self-sufficiency. Names and details have been changed to protect their privacy.
In less than a decade, Sakhi has awarded nearly $100,000 in support to nearly 100 survivors. The table below gives a breakdown of each grant cycle, and the graph shows for what purpose the women have used the grant funds:

### Year | Season | Total Awards | Total Amount Awarded
--- | --- | --- | ---
2003 | FALL | 7 | $4,953.56
2004 | FALL | 4 | 3,682.49
2005 | SPRING | 3 | 2,083.06
2005 | FALL | 2 | 2,083.06
2006 | SPRING | 4 | 4,090.08
2007 | SPRING | 8 | 5,024.08
2007 | FALL | 4 | 5,126.36
2008 | SPRING | 9 | 6,575.25
2009 | FALL | 11 | 7,820.15
2009 | SPRING | 9 | 10,313.62
2010 | FALL | 14 | 17,145.68
2010 | SPRING | 5 | 6,075.08
### TOTAL | | 93 | $87,682.97

**Transformation of women’s lives, one grant at a time: Survivors’ Stories**

The following three stories are those of Swarna Fund Scholarship recipients, revealing what drew them to apply for the grant and how they have used funds to achieve their goals of independence and self-sufficiency. Names and details have been changed to protect their privacy.
Tina’s greatest ambition was to become independent and strong so that she could provide for herself and her daughter. She believed that having an education offered her the greatest opportunity to achieve this ambition. Although she was verbally abused and severely beaten by her husband, and in spite of having limited English skills, Tina’s dream became a reality. Today, thanks to sustained support provided by Sakhi staff and through the Swarna Fund, Tina is no longer in an abusive home and is currently enrolled in a Master’s program in Computer Science. Tina went on to pursue a Bachelor’s Degree in Computer Science while working part-time. During this time, she realized that her limited English skills were preventing her from reaching her highest potential, the physical and emotional abuse within Tina’s home escalated.

Tina left her spouse after many years of abuse. After experiencing physical abuse and living in fear of what he might do to her, Tina decided to take the first steps to regain control of her life. In the fall of 2000, Tina matriculated to a community college where she obtained an Associate’s Degree in Computer Science. Tina went on to pursue a Bachelor’s Degree in Computer Science while working part-time. During this time period, aside from realizing that her limited English skills were preventing her from reaching her highest potential, the physical and emotional abuse within Tina’s home escalated.

In addition to the economic empowerment that Sakhi provided to Tina, she also felt fortunate that she was able to feel connected to Sakhi and its community.

Tina could no longer endure her husband’s abuse so she contacted a mentor at her college who immediately put her in contact with Sakhi. Through Sakhi’s ongoing support services, legal referrals, and Economic Empowerment Program, Tina built the courage and resilience to leave her husband. Even after leaving him, her husband continued to stalk and intimidate Tina so she gathered up the courage and filed for an order of protection. Unfortunately, Tina had to leave the home without her young daughter. Since her daughter feared that Tina would not be able to financially support her, she decided to remain with her father. Tina was struggling financially, but she desperately wanted to be reunited with her daughter, so she contemplated sacrificing her educational ambitions. However, Sakhi advocates encouraged Tina to apply to the Swarna Fund and she received $1000 towards her college tuition. For nearly three years, Tina continued to apply for and receive Swarna grants during the subsequent semesters up to the Spring of 2009, when she successfully graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Computer Science.

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In addition to the economic empowerment that Sakhi provided to Tina, she also felt fortunate that she was able to feel connected to Sakhi and its community.

Tina continues to accelerate in her career and education and is currently looking for a full-time job with the hopes of bringing her daughter to live with her. Her English has improved tremendously and she feels hopeful about her future. As she looks back, she remembers the many battles she faced as a survivor of violence: a new immigrant, a mother raising a daughter, and South Asian woman assimilating to a new culture and society. She hopes to use her experiences in overcoming these obstacles as the force and motivation to keep on thriving. Tina wants to talk to other women about her experiences with Sakhi and with the Swarna Fund grants as she believes that it can “help empower other women during their time of struggles.”

“Sakhi has been a great support for me. This community has given me the strength to continue to pursue my goals.” — Tina
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Now that Surekha is earning her own money, she has applied for citizenship for her children as well as for her parents. She is taking driving classes like she had always wanted and is also trying to find separate housing so that she can live on her own with her children. Surekha continues to work towards increasing her certificate level so that she can have more responsibility at work, receive a better salary and one day fulfill her dream of becoming a full time biology teacher in the New York City public school system.

“I love my teaching profession. In my country I was a teacher. I love my new school. The environment is so good and everyone is so good to me. Your organization really helped me every step of the way. I never used a computer; never used the mouse and now I have a job. — Surekha

Surekha’s Story

Valuing women’s contributions to family and society

“My husband pays the rent and bills but he does not want to spend any money on my education.” This was one of the realities Surekha faced during the course of her marriage. Aside from being suppressed by her husband from advancing in her education, Surekha frequently suffered verbal and emotional abuse. He was very controlling, often physically holding her down and shaking her to prevent her from leaving the home. Surekha suffered greatly because of her husband’s abuse towards her and felt that the only way she could gain some independence from her life at home would be to find a job.

Surekha was a teacher for ten years in Bangladesh before she came to the U.S. with her husband and children. She yearned to return to the vocation she truly loved so she began looking into teaching careers in the U.S. However, her limited English skills and lack of credentials prevented her from applying to any teaching positions. Nevertheless, Surekha signed up to take the Teacher’s Licensing Exam. She missed passing the test by 10 points and felt that she needed to achieve greater proficiency in English in order to pass the test. Surekha sought help from Sakhi initially for emotional support. By attending Sakhi’s support groups, economic empowerment workshops, and working one on one with Sakhi’s advocates, Surekha found the confidence she needed to continue her pursuit towards financial independence.

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LeeLA’S STORY

Abandoned in India, in the U.S.

“Being an educated woman coming from a very cultured family and having graduated as a doctor, I had always imagined that life was all set for me. I was for a rath shrub.” These words came from LeeLA, a survivor of domestic violence who was verbally abused and repeatedly threatened by her husband. She came to the U.S. with her spouse in 2003 after they were married. Shortly after arriving in the states, the relationship became abusive. Small instances of yelling turned into hours of horrendous verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, and threats of physical violence. LeeLA felt trapped. She had no friends or relatives in the U.S. and being on an H-4 visa prevented her from seeking help. She became completely financially and socially dependent on her husband and thus felt extremely isolated and alone. After her daughter’s birth, while on a trip to India, her husband abandoned her in India in 2007, leaving her and her daughter behind with no sense of control over her life or her situation and thus no idea how to move forward. “I became a virtual prisoner of my circumstances.”

Today LeeLA feels that she is in full control of her life. She is living on her own with her daughter and is enrolled in a residency program in radiology with two years left before she becomes a licensed practicing physician in the U.S. She continues to work with a lawyer that Sakhi connected her with who is helping her to work out visitation and child support issues on a pro bono basis. While she recognizes that her experiences have changed her in many ways and have left her with very deep scars, she feels that they have helped her to realize that abuse can happen to anyone no matter how educated or financially secure they are.

LeeLA aspires to mentor other women that Sakhi works with as she wants to help empower others as she was empowered. She wants to tutor women who are trying to become doctors in the U.S. so that they can do well in exams like the USMLE.

LeeLA applied in 2008 for Sakhi’s Swarna grant to help her pay for her residency applications. She believes that without Sakhi, her road to self-sufficiency would have been much more difficult.

A.R. Galinsky
Dir. Abhanchand
Ghoshal
Nili Agarwal
Raina Shetye and
Nasser Ahmed
Aditya Foundation*
Arup Nathan*
Sakhi’s Swarna Fund grants.

A community committed to ending violence
Thank you for your support!
Sakhi has been fortunate to rely on the support of our staff, Board, volunteers, interns, donors, funders, and allies over the years. We would like to say thank you to the following individuals and institutions for their support of the Sakhi Chalasani Economic Empowerment Fund.

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A.R. Galley
DirecElle Ablmam
Ghala Ali
Nili Ayaward
Ravina Sethy and
Nasser Ahmad*
Advocacy Foundation
Arum Agapantes*
Mary Almas
Kevin and Brinda award
David Akila
Ashesh Badani
Berries and Bees
Samar Bowinick
Meenakshi Bhuvaneswar
Rajat Singh
Alicia Bowers*
Sushma Boppa
Mary Chandra
Srijani Chakravarthy
India Chinavoy
K. Chalasani
Sujata Chauhan*
Ree Brown Chauhan*
Veekar Chauhan*
Mita Chandu
Rita Chaudhary
Sheng Hang Chen
Prachin Chowsi
Niki Chokshi
Cheecky Family
Foundation*
Jonathan Cohen
Barry Cooper
Elaine Cunnings
Deutsche Bank*
Dave and Andrea
Gould Services, Inc.*
Henry Douglass
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Maddia Dut
Gopashanthri Eler
Officer Christopher
Farrel
Eileen Fisher
Anne Blair Foster
Shamba Singh
Vahid Goel
Tula Gokhale
Z de Goik
Rashid Greiner*
Vivek Gupta
Viren Bhatia Gupta
Viren Gupta
Yogesh Gupta
Wilson Hunt
Sri Iyer
Raja Jantala
Tima Jagasiri
Santhali Kampusu and
Mercy
Praphat
Nag
Joy Fadsick, Inc.
Dr. Kaan
Samantha Kasten
Alice Khalric
Zenoss Khan
Teresa Tapashian
and Saranya Khanna*
Sandesh K. Naidu
R. Mohan
Bali
Mayak
Ashish Kalsi
Aruna Reddy
Usha Kumar
Deepa Mahajan
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Li Feng Li
Haasit, Inc.
Mili Lynn
Alyha Nosse Majidpour
Jasmit Mehu
Yoon Myung
Gail McDaniell*
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Veron Moore
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Dinesh Prasad*
Prakrana Foundation*
Hari Chandra
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Robert Gilt
Margaret Abraham
and Pandig Singh*
Robert Gild
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Nancy Tobin
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Anita Warrel
Robert Whisen
Tanvi Varma
*(denotes major donors.)
With the support of community partners like you, Sakhi will be able to sustain its efforts to end violence against women and create lasting community change. While the loss of Swarna Chalasani and the tragedy of 9/11 remain with us, the future of so many women Sakhi works with have, and will, continue to be transformed through the Swarna Fund.

While we have been able to give close to 100 grants thus far, we continue to receive more requests and applications than we are able to fund. In each cycle, we are limited in the amount of grants we are able to give, therefore the grant committee often has the difficult task of deciding which women will receive funding. In order to reach our goal of funding more women, we need additional support from community members like you. You are all significant contributors in helping to change the lives of the women we serve. Your financial donation to the Swarna Chalasani Economic Empowerment Fund offers us the opportunity to expand the grant process to encompass additional paths to self-sufficiency. Your support establishes you not only as an ally to the violence against women movement but as a supporter of a woman’s human right to be independent.

If you would like to donate, every dollar you contribute will go directly to serving women and providing them with tools, scholarships, resources, and skills to become empowered and safe. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Please continue to support our life-saving, transformative work.
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For more information, please contact Payal Hathi, Economic Empowerment Coordinator, at 212.714.9153 or payal.hathi@sakhi.org

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