



*The average stay for a Deaf client in a domestic violence shelter is three days, in large part because of the extreme isolation felt when communication with others is not possible.*

*STAND!'s Cultural Competency Committee set out to change that statistic at our emergency shelter and began collaboration with DeafHOPE to better serve Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing clients, to make Deaf clients feel welcome and supported at our shelter.*

### ***A Client Story***

My name is Fareena and I am a survivor. I have broken the generational cycle of violence and am proud to say that my 3 year old daughter, Aalia, will not grow up the same way I did.

I was born in Fiji and have 3 sisters. I am the only member of my family who is deaf. I have been deaf since birth.

My parents always fought a lot. My father is an alcoholic. As a child my father was very violent. He would hurt my mother, and my sisters, and myself. He would often hit my mother. My sisters and I would try and protect my mother, and there were times that in trying to protect our mother, we would be hit instead.

When I was 15 my family moved to the United States. When we moved, my father's physical abuse stopped, but the emotional abuse continues to this day. My parent's marriage has always been very hard and it was not made easier with our families move. Though my father's physical abuse had stopped, my mother now found herself isolated and alone in a new country.

In Fiji I went to a school for the Deaf. After we moved to the United States, I went to a mainstream High School, which meant that I was in regular classes with an interpreter. In high school, I learned some American Sign Language, but it was only when I went to Ohlone College that I really learned American Sign Language.

At home my communication with my family is through what we call home signs, which is largely made up of gestures that we came up with to allow us to communicate with each other. My father writes, my mother gestures, and one of my sisters knows a little bit of Fijian Sign Language.

When we first moved here, I felt very isolated. My family was not good at communicating with me. They would talk and laugh, but I could not understand what was going on. My feelings of isolation and frustration culminated in my attempt to kill myself. It was at that point that my family realized how alone I was, and made an effort to communicate better with me.

My father became stricter about when I would come home and I tried to explain to him that no I want and need friends and stimulation and communication. Now that we are older, my sisters and their husbands have learned to sign.

In 2005, I became a US citizen and my family arranged my marriage to a Deaf man from Fiji. I flew home to Fiji to meet my future husband. We became engaged, and while he applied for his green card I came back to the United States. He was given his green card and on February 4, 2006, we were married.

In the beginning my marriage seemed fine. My husband knew Fijian Sign Language and I was very motivated to teach him American Sign Language. I would sign and try to teach him ASL. I found myself teaching him things over and over and over. He couldn't remember what I taught him. I began to realize he might be mentally slow. I wanted to find a different way to teach him

but I couldn't figure it out. I encouraged him to take a class at Ohlone to learn basic Sign Language so that we could talk to each other. He is still taking classes at Ohlone today.

Even with the ASL classes, we still had a serious lack of communication. We argued a lot. I wanted to go out with him. I would ask him to go out; he would always say "No. No. I don't want to go" I became very isolated. He didn't want to go anywhere. I would stay home because he was my husband. He would stop me from speaking more by grabbing my hands. I didn't think it was appropriate for anybody to grab my hands but I was tired so I started speaking and communicating less and less. I began to lose contact with my friends because of his refusal to go out.

My husband and I lived with my parents and sisters, his parents still live in Fiji.

I didn't know if it was a normal, healthy marriage. This was my first marriage, I didn't know the difference. I had grown up with this; I didn't know that marriage should be any different. He worked part-time at Sears and STAPLES, but he didn't drive so I had to drive him everywhere.

Then, I became pregnant. My husband and family were thrilled that I was pregnant, but I was very unhappy about it. I was already taking care of my husband, I didn't want to worry about a baby as well. At the ultrasound, I found out I was going to have a girl, I was ok with that, but my husband was upset it wasn't a boy.

When I went into labor, I told him "I need help my water broke", he said "No I'm tired," and then did nothing to help me. I was in labor, with his child, but he just sat there. I don't know why, maybe because it was a girl, he didn't care. Luckily my sister heard me yelling and took me to the hospital.

When Aalia was born he said he wanted to quit one job because it was too much stress for him. I said fine because I thought then he could take the bus to work and I could take care of my daughter.

He didn't help much with Aalia. My family would help and support me and the baby, but he did nothing.

I started making new friends. I wanted some adult conversation and couldn't get that with my husband so I started to go out and meet other Deaf people. I made friends and I encouraged him to come with me to meet other Deaf people and he refused. I got fed up. I had my own videophone so I would talk with my friends because he wouldn't communicate with me.

As a Deaf person my videophone is my lifeline to the world. The first time he took my videophone from me I was in the middle of talking to a friend. He yanked away my phone and wrenched my arm. He was trying to scare me and control who I could talk to.

My friend saw it all happen on the videophone. She got scared and called the police. As often happens, when the police showed up, they had no interpreter. They wanted to write back and forth to find out what happened. This is an unnatural way of communicating for me and I was too emotional to get my point across in writing. I tried to get my parents to tell the police that he hurt me, but my parents ignored me.

My family, my culture, they don't want the police involved. My family was telling the police nothing happened as I was trying to sign to them that "yes, yes he hurt me." My family was on his side. My father, my mother, even my sisters took his side in the fight.

The police gave me a report number and then they left. Basically, they did nothing. I felt like "oh well, what can I do, even the police won't help me." I became more cautious around him.

Then for Valentine's Day 2010, my husband and I went with a group of friends to Reno for the weekend. We had a fantastic time. I was with my friends, I was able to go out and have fun. But my husband seemed like he was sitting on the outside watching everybody. When we got home, he was extremely upset with me. I had been talking, laughing with all my friends in ASL. He was very upset because he couldn't understand. He didn't want to say anything during the trip because other people were around. When we fought, he was very mean to me. He called me fat. He said I was a whore; he insulted me because I was talking with my male friend.

After we had been fighting for a while, I decided to go into the bedroom and get away from him. I started talking to a friend on the videophone. I had my phone, and Aalia was playing in the room with me. He kept bothering me. I asked him to give me space, I was having a private conversation, but he wouldn't leave me alone. Aalia was in the room when he came back into

the bedroom and grabbed away my videophone. When I stood up to grab it from him, he dropped the videophone, grabbed me by my legs, lifted me up and threw me against the doorframe. I hit my head on the door hinge. I got up from the ground and he tried to grab me again. I was scared so I left my daughter with my mom, grabbed my license and took off.

I ran to a friend's house who took care of me and iced my head wound. He called everybody we knew trying to find me. I calmed down and went home.

I was really concerned about my mom because she has cancer and I didn't want to worry her or be a burden on her. My father was very angry at me, blaming me for what happened. My husband was apologetic "I'm so sorry, it'll never happen again," etc. I was very angry so I went into my daughter's bedroom with my daughter and closed the door.

The next morning I woke up and my head was killing me, so I called the doctor. I said I wanted to get checked out to make sure everything was ok. The nurse on the phone asked me what happened. I told her the truth, my husband hit me. She was shocked. The nurse called the police to go to my house. I did not know she was calling them so I was very shocked when they showed up.

Once again, the police showed up with no interpreter. My family again told the police that nothing happened. I tried to tell them what happened and my family said "no no that's not true."

My father said "oh no she's seeing another man so obviously that's why there was an argument." Again, it was the police talking to my hearing family, not me. My voice was lost because they would not communicate with me. When they had a choice between trying to communicate with me, or just listen to my hearing family, they ignored me, and listened to them.

After the incident – I thought he would abuse me again. My daughter had seen the attack and she was terrified. He came back and said he was sorry, I told him, I don't want to stay in this.

Throughout our marriage he always grabbed my arms, which in the Deaf community is a very effective way of silencing another person's voice. He would pick on me and made me feel like less of a person. The isolation he tried to force on me and the emotional abuse was bad, but throwing me against the door in front of our daughter was the last straw. I was afraid it would

happen again. I didn't want to live like that. I decided it was just better for me and my daughter to be alone.

I called my friend and asked who can help me. She suggested I contact Jane at DeafHope. Jane explained power and control and asked if I wanted to stay in a shelter. I said "Yes," so Jane contacted STAND! for me. STAND! Put me on the waiting list because there was no space. They gave me vouchers for a motel.

My screening for the shelter took only about an hour on the videophone. It used to be that an intake similar to mine could take 3 or more hours with the old TTY system. Even e-mail and writing aren't the best ways of communicating because ASL is such an expressive language. It is a 3-D language. Signing indicates more than just words; it can indicate tone and feeling which is lost in the translation to a 2-D format like writing.

STAND! had a videophone that I could use any time. I cannot tell you how much I really appreciated that STAND! was able to provide all the equipment necessary, from a videophone to a visual doorbell and vibrating alarm which allowed me to feel safe and comfortable. Without a videophone I would have felt lost and even Jane has mentioned how much more difficult it would have been to communicate and set up appointments and court dates. The videophone allowed me to stay in the shelter for 11 weeks, without it, I probably would have given up and left the shelter after a short time like so many other deaf clients in emergency shelters.

Aalia was a very emotional child; she had learned volatile behavior from her father. She would hit me and was very clingy. She always wanted to be around me.

When I got to the shelter, I enrolled my daughter, who is hearing, into the shelter's therapeutic pre-school program. Aalia really enjoyed going to the school. She was finally happy, they taught her so much. She used to scratch me and get angry at me, and stubborn and the teachers helped her. It really helped us a lot. She has become a lot less angry. She's now very good at saying sorry, excuse me. Jane's helped her a lot too. She's just a much happier child. She even got the other children in the program to start using sign language.

At the shelter I finally got my "down" time so I could begin to process what had happened and what I was going to do. I felt so safe and at peace there. I was so happy and I was able to learn.

To be alone for the first time was awkward and scary at first. I felt great, I was independent. This was my first time on my own. When I left her family I really had no idea what independence was like. When I went to the shelter I started to learn a lot about myself. What I am capable of doing on my own without my family telling me what to do constantly.

I was able to communicate with everybody. I finally had people who supported me and cared for me, it was wonderful. I loved being with the other clients; we would watch TV and cook. I became very close to other clients. Everybody would come up and talk to me. I still keep in touch with 2 of the women I was in the shelter with.

After I left the shelter I could not move back in with my parents as my husband still lives there. When I left my husband, my father was very angry with me. My mom was much more understanding. Now I see my mom and I don't really have a relationship with my dad.

When I go to visit my mom, unfortunately my husband is there and for right now that is the situation. But I am free from him and that is what matters.

My sisters realized that I was thriving on my own. One of them asked me to stay at her apartment, when I left the shelter. I found an apartment thru my other sister. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, Aalia and I moved into our own apartment.

I am so glad that STAND! and DeafHope helped me. Because of my stay here and working with you, my daughter will not grow up in an abusive household like I did. Because of you, she will grow up and have a husband who loves her and does not hurt her.