

## ► ZEIN DHANIDINA

### Community Services category

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#### FUNDRAISING AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, 2006

#### FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, REFUGEE WOMEN'S NETWORK

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Zein Dhanidina graduated from Georgian's Fundraising and Resource Development program in 2006, and credits the college's flexible learning options for allowing her to pursue her passion, while raising two young children and caring for an elderly parent at home.

"Being able to do distance education was a saving grace," says Zein, who immigrated to Canada from Tanzania with her parents at the age of six.

"I felt comfortable at Georgian College and knew I would get the support I needed," she says, while praising the college as one of her biggest supports during the early days of her career. "When I was a new graduate, I could call my professors for advice, and they were always there to help me out."

In 2016, Zein founded the Refugee Women's Network, a charitable organization that empowers refugee and new immigrant women by helping them rebuild their lives through education. The organization assists refugee women with overcoming the early barriers that many face when coming to Canada. This includes assessing language abilities and providing language programs, preparing women for formal education, providing financial support for training and development and helping women become confident, empowered and self-sufficient.

She notes that some of the women that she works with have been in Canada for years and have never had the opportunity to learn English, creating a barrier between them and available services, community and their own children who have grown up speaking English in Canada. "You can see it in their eyes, the sorrow and suffering," says Zein about the hopelessness and isolation many of the women feel before they come to the Refugee Women's Network.

In addition to working with refugee women, Zein has spent the last five years as a volunteer tutoring centre manager at the Ismaili Community Centre and Jamatkhana in Willowdale, Ontario. Here, she helps children from grades one to 11 three days a week with their math and English skills. Many of these children have spent significant time in refugee camps prior to coming to Canada and have fallen behind their peers in their studies.

Prior to founding the Refugee Women's Network, Zein held a number of other roles in the non-profit sector, including development manager with New Circles and was the first executive

director of NephCure Kidney International Canada. She has volunteered for over 30 years with the Aga Khan Foundation Canada's World Partnership Walk and has raised close to \$1 million for the charity.

Through her work, Zein now recognizes the challenges her mother would have experienced as an immigrant to Canada. "It's a really strong motivator for me to help these moms who can in turn help their families," Zein says, and while she smiles when thinking about all the lives she has already changed, she notes that "there is still so much more to do."

