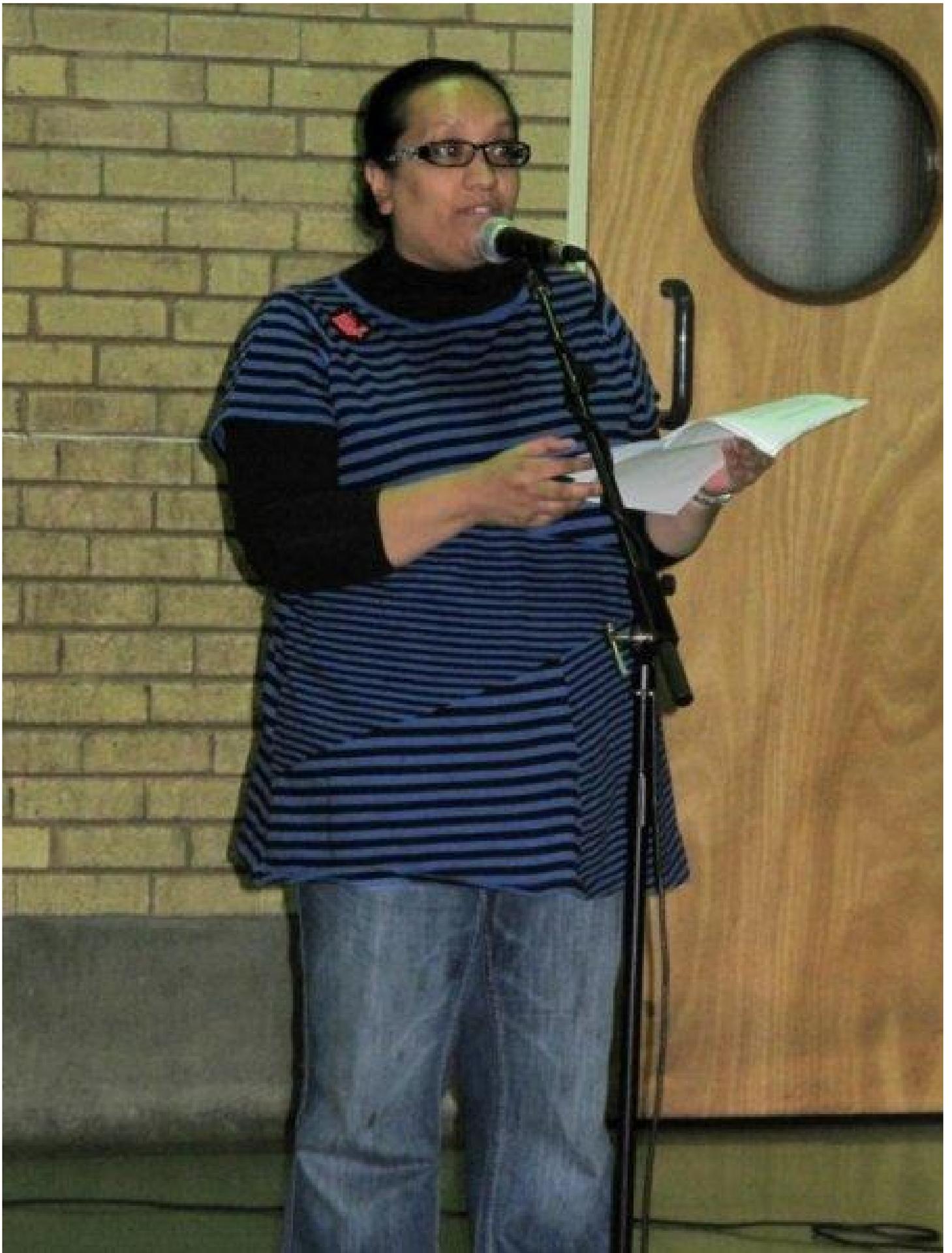


Shahida Choudhry



By Channelling her Many Skills and Energy, Shahida

Choudhry Is on a Mission - to Make a Difference for Women Everywhere, Via the Women's Networking Hub!

Shahida set up the [Women's Networking Hub](#) in 2009, in order to work collectively with independent women activists and change makers, and, those working in the voluntary, statutory and independent sector. All those involved work towards eradicating gender inequality, in all its forms, at grass roots level. The work is varied, and in the past has included networking events using the arts as a means of engaging with women, and raising awareness of sensitive and highly critical issues, such as **forced marriage**, **FGM**, and **domestic violence**.

Shahida says, "I am the designated Birmingham lead (since 2008) for the national **Million Women Rise** movement that campaigns and raises awareness of violence against women and children." The annual Million Women Rise march is the largest gathering of women in the UK to date, since Greenham Common and the Suffragettes.

In 2011 Shahida set up the Women's Enterprise Network as an affiliated Partner of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, aimed at women working in **micro-enterprise** that are not formally linked and operating within the wider business structures. Many women rely precisely on these kinds of informal money generating opportunities.

Since 2003, she has become an experienced trainer delivering domestic violence training to women survivors and to professionals. Also since 2003, Shahida also trained in the role of Facilitator, and now delivers programmes of empowerment and citizenship training, to women in the community.

The 'Hub' as it is known locally, is becoming quite a focal point of attention with, to date, a growing membership of almost 1000 women. Many more women are able to follow its activities via a range of available social media outputs. The Hub wants to establish ways to engage women from communities currently underrepresented, and develop ways in which all women can campaign for social change, using digital tools and social networks. One empowerment aim is for women have a public 'space', so that their voices are heard in the right places, by those who have the moral responsibility to affect change for the better!

Shahida personally understands the problems surrounding violence against women. She herself escaped a forced marriage, and related honour-based violence and abuse, that took place in Pakistan. Shahida wanted to share these personal moments with other women, in the hope that they were also empowered to try to take control of their own lives. Despite her own problems, Shahida looks only ahead these days. In 2007 she fostered three children whom she has subsequently formally adopted.

The Hub understands the importance of initiatives such as the [16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign](#) to get women started in campaigning. The 16 Days campaign started on 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) and ran until to 10th December 2011 (International Human Rights Day) to symbolically emphasise that violence against women is a human rights violation.

Shahida recently shared with Hub members 16 quick and easy ways for women to join in with the 16 days of activism – be it online or offline. She's calling it **16X16 Activate, Activism, Action 16 Days 16 Ways!**

Relevant Information:

CoE statistics show that 12 % - 15 % of women in Europe face violence in the home every day. In May 2011, the Council of Europe opened a newly ratified convention for signatures. This new landmark treaty is the first legally binding instrument in Europe creating a comprehensive legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence. Since then, it has been signed by 17 countries. The UK is not one of them. The convention ([called the Istanbul Convention](#) - please use this web-link to find out more), seeks to make sure countries are working towards a new minimum standard on violence against women. This would include making sure they had a proper framework for protecting and assisting victims, promoting equality between women and men, and, supporting law enforcement and international co-operation on eliminating violence against women.

The UK has a double responsibility at the moment. On the 7th November 2011, the country took over as Chair of the Council of Europe for a six month term. At the time, the government promised to use the position to focus on promoting human rights. If it does sign up to the Istanbul Convention whilst Chair of the CoE, it would certainly be fulfilling its pledge to recognise that attention needs to focus on delivering change for women at risk from violence in the UK, and indeed internationally, on the policy agenda.

Metadata

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[female genital mutilation, violence](#)