

## Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Afrah Abdulkader  
Interviewer: Hannah Drake  
Transcribed By: Hannah Drake  
Location: Zoom  
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Length of Interview: 57:14

**[PART ONE]** - 23:03:50, time seen at bottom right

**Hannah Drake** (they/them): Okay, um, so hi oh for the recording. My name is Hannah Drake. Today is June 3rd, 2022. And I'm interviewing Afrah Abdulkader for the UCSD Race and Oral History project. For the purpose of this project, do you agree to grant the university permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

**Afrah Abdulkader** (she/her): I do. Thank you.

**Hannah Drake**: It's so nice seeing you.

**Afrah Abdulkader**: It's so wonderful. I had a fantastic call with you last couple of weeks, so looking forward for more to know.

**Hannah Drake**: First off, I wanted to start, um how are you doing today? \*giggles\*

**Afrah Abdulkader**: It's Friday. It's been a short week.

**Hannah Drake**: Yeah!!

**Afrah Abdulkader**: It's fantastic. Yes, we returned with tons of work. That said, who cares? It's Friday, and tomorrow I'm going to be in bed so—

**Hannah Drake**: \*laughs\*

**Afrah Abdulkader**: Thank you for asking. How about you? How was your day?

**Hannah Drake**: Oh, it's good. It was really busy, you know I had like classes. \*laughs\*

**Afrah Abdulkader**: I understand, and I wish you all the best in your further education. All the best.

**Hannah Drake**: I was so excited to meet with you today. I was like "Oh I can't wait."

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So kind. Thank you for approaching me and I really appreciate the Majdal for reaching out and, and you know, asking if I would be having the time to participate in such kind of activity. And believe me, it's such a busy, busy field that we do and work that we do. That said, I think in a way, we need to dedicate some of our time to share some of our stories and what we do and how we were able to achieve such kind of life and accomplishment. So that might give some hope to others. So thank you, thank you for reaching out.

**Hannah Drake:** Thank you for being here.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So kind.

Time - 23:05:50

**Hannah Drake:** I wanted to ask, what have you been up to lately?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Lately, personally, I just the beginning of May, I had a second knee surgery. So I have two brand new knees. So I can jump all over the place. So that will help me go back to walking and enjoying going to museums and parks and you know, all the wonderful healthy activities. Specifically with COVID, we sat at home for a long time, bending our backs on our laptops and working, so it's about time to go.

**Hannah Drake:** Yeah. \*nodding head\*

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Just start and recharge our, like they say, our batteries and then [inaudible]. For other things is that IRC – International Rescue Committee – the agency that I joined them five years ago and my role as survivor advocate in a safety and wellness unit. We have lots of referrals and cases and clients from all over the world who arriving as newcomers and also struggling with unhealthy relationships. So we try to support them in that field by educating them about their rights and responsibilities. As also, we have the resettlement and placement program where we invite and welcome refugees. So imagine the crisis that happened last August 2021, the Afghan situation, so we were focusing on how we support all those who left their countries in a very, you know, instant kind of a situation. And now we have the aggression act of Russia on Ukraine, and now we are welcoming Ukrainians. So it's one challenge after another. So all humanitarian agencies, specifically the full resettlement agencies in San Diego – IRC on the top of them – we don't have not one dull moment. So we all been busy. All our programs been busy, and we're doing our best to help our newcomers at least start a safe and healthy future in this new life with their families.

Time - 23:08:01

**Hannah Drake:** Mhmm. Um, I do have some questions about your work later on. But I first wanted to start off with like, could you give a brief introduction as to who you are?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So as you know, my name is Afrah Abdulkader. I was born in Iraq, Baghdad. I'm not gonna say the year but it was long, long, long time ago. My parents come from a very dominated city in Iraq, and they were very much politically activist during this, that era,

very nationalist. So my father was like a principal in one of the schools and also very active in social justice, participating in rallies and writing articles. And also, he was a poet. He loves to write poems, completely dedicated to the change – requesting change of life and social justice in Iraq, Baghdad, in Iraq in general at that era. So it became a little bit dangerous for him to stay. Therefore, he decided that it's time to leave his country and go to the nearest neighboring country, Kuwait, to save his family, because he was prosecuted and that he was almost going to be arrested. And they were hanging people who are against the government. So he came to Kuwait, found a job as a teacher, and then brought the whole family. At that time, I was only three months old when I came to Kuwait, whom I consider is my second homeland, because it's the country where my family felt safe. My family- I pursue my education, had lived there for thirty plus years. Still, I emigrated from Kuwait to United States, San Diego. I am the youngest of five girls and have two brothers. My two parents have passed away. But I mean, like many immigrants from different countries, we live through journeys, of of changes and ups and down. And I don't believe any of us had any chances in changing these things because it's a political game being played, where human beings be suffering. When I was in Kuwait in the 90s 1990, the Iraq invasion happened to Kuwait. So I'm Iraqi living in Kuwait, and the country invaded my other homeland. The invasion lasted for seven months. Yes, Kuwait was liberated and went back to normal life, but there's still a trauma and a crack happened. Add to it is the crisis the Iraqi nation suffered afterwards, they- the 13 years of sanction that the Iraqi nation left, and then the invasion of United States or Iraq in 2003. And then the withdrawal of the American troops in 2009/10, where created ISIS. And so this is a country, the cradle of civilization Iraq, right? Where Mesopotamia and Babylonia and Assyria and the ones who discovered all the beautiful things be struggling for centuries, right? To try, and we pray that eventually a new government with people who really love the nation can stand up. So imagine coming from a country like Iraq, being in Kuwait, coming to America, definitely you carry with you–

**Hannah Drake:** Yeah. \*nods head\*

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So many things, your history, your civilization, your beliefs, your identity, and you try as much as you can to introduce it to the Americans whenever you have the chance to speak openly about and eliminate any stereotype they might have about the role of a woman. “Oh, all women from the Middle East are covered.” Well, here I am! Right? I'm not covered. “All, you know, certain women are controlled by men.” Let me explain that to you or, “Woman in this country don't have chance to like–” Well I've been living there and I studied and I worked. And so, media plays a huge part of disfiguring facts, right? Because this is the news, is how to show the ugly not really what's the happiness. So it's nice from time to time to have such kind of conversation to talk about the cultures of nations and celebrate. And yes, there are the good, the ugly, but this is life. This is what build civilization.

**Hannah Drake:** Oh wow, that was so– I was like, “Oh my gosh, that's so much!” Um, yeah I just loved that. Oh my gosh.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So happy you like it. I'm sorry. I know some information might trigger some listeners who are from Iraq, or who are from Syria, who are from countries who left their country

because of war. And for that I apologize, and let me know if I need to censor anything. And we were just talking about in a meeting about how are we doing as social workers and advocates working with clients suffering and listening to the news. You know, every day we- This is the 300th in 2022, we had 322 shootings happen, right? And then one of my clients was saying, "Yes I came from a country of war, but never had a school shooting. Yes, we had soldiers, invasion, ISIS, and all of the above but never ever had a school shooting."

**Hannah Drake:** Mhmm, mhmm. \*nods head\*

**Afrak Abdulkader:** So it was very interesting, these two concepts. Yes, we suffered war. We lived war, bombing and all of that, which we understand by a certain army by a certain dictator. But we never feared of school shooting, right? So that's an interesting conversation and realization is that the assumption that we came to the United States seeking safety and thriving in our life. That said, the United States is a continent of several states. There's the Indigenous nation, and then the rest are all immigrants, who comes with different mental health and dreams and goals and belief and biases, right? So assuming that all of us are lovey dovey—

**Hannah Drake:** \*laughs and nods head\*

**Afrak Abdulkader:** Not gonna happen! So that's a new level of conversation services we are providing to our newcomers is how to be safe, how to know your rights, how to report any hate crimes, and how to protect yourself and children if you are bullied, or in a situation that you don't feel good. Many complexity. Hannah, I'm sorry but it is what it is.

**Hannah Drake:** Oh it's totally fine. That's life. \*laughs\*

**Afrak Abdulkader:** That's life! \*smiles and nods\*

Time - 23:15:29

**Hannah Drake:** I know you mentioned how like as you grow up or move, you carry everything with you. So I was wondering, how did your childhood impact the person you are today?

**Afrak Abdulkader:** Oh my god. Hannah, do you have like a week? Oh my god. So I consider myself very lucky, knock on wood \*knocks wooden table\* I had the most wonderful parents who both of them love sports, and they are very socialist. And we, I live in a house full of books that it's open for all of us to read. My father had no sense of when to start reading. So at the age, I think 10 or 11, I was reading Leo Tolstoy War and Peace. And then he said, "Eh you know, the second part, don't read it. Wait 'til you are 13 (??) or 30 (??)." He said, "Yeah, maybe there are too much information." And they told us how to be independent. They taught us how to, to, to have voices, and in a community—in a culture where gender privileges very much strong, and male existence stronger. How as a female, as a woman as again, how to speak up and prove yourself and be independent and, and continue education and read and travel and discover and try things and don't be afraid of failure. And if you fall, you stand up. If you get injured, it will be healed. So what? It will heal. All of these things. And the thing my parents told us about religion

is how to love all religions and respect. And how to look at the creator as not one thing. It's to look at birds and plants and bees and honey and all of that, and say, "Yeah, this is faith. This is religion." So these small things, when you planted seeds and your children as part of parenting, you start to look at things differently in different eyes. Everything is fresh and new and 'I wonder what, I wonder how.' So you start to have an inquisitive mind. So that's what I really appreciate. As a child, I was given the opportunity through my parents and siblings to try, to fall and stand up, and learn. And then the most important thing is how to be kind to each other, how to respect every human being and also be empathetic. Put yourself in their shoes, and then they will understand why they did this. So I remember my father used to tell us five sisters, "When you get married—" This is recorded, right? Good. "When you get married, you need to keep your job. You need to have your own bank account. You need to stand up. You have to do this, you have to do this. Don't let any man control you." I said, "Wow wonderful" and my mother "Yeah exactly what your father said."

**Hannah Drake:** \*laughing\*

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Fantastic. It's really nice to live a childhood that listening to my, the journey of my parents and how they were persecuted in their homeland, politically, and how they miss their homeland, right? And then at the same time be in a new land in a new country, which is Middle Eastern. Kuwait is an Arabic country, right? And lot of expatriates with all of us. And it's less than seven hours driving over there. At the same time, seeing a different life and different understanding and different concepts of freedom of speech and others, and be able to see people from all over the world because it is a small country full of expatriates. So I had friends from India, from Philippines, from Russia, from Egypt, from Palestine, and all of us as a united nation are living in this country. Our family is trying to secure a safe life for us. So it's been fantastic. I mean, I'm lucky. Again, the invasion happened in 1990. Things changed for so many people. I stayed in Kuwait. Due to having family in the United States who applied for me to come to emigrate, after waiting seven years, I was granted the immigrant status. And here I am as a U.S. citizen Arab-American.

**Hannah Drake:** Yeah, I can relate because for me, I'm the first in my family to be born here, because my mom's from the Philippines. So yeah, every time I hear about what life was like in the Philippines, I'm just like "Woah, like it's so different." You know?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** I hear you, and I'm sure you ask your parents to tell you stories because they share. I'm sure they share stories and things they miss over there or thing they practicing here which connect them to their home.

Time - 23:20:46

**Hannah Drake:** Um, I was wondering like, did you have any culture shocks moving to Kuwait or anywhere else you've lived in?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So Hannah, I would like just to um— This is Afrah story, MY perspective. Some people might disagree with me, but it's my story. I did not. Kuwait is a very small country,

very rich because of oil. Population is very small. It's a semi-model of America because its banks and business and, and very much affiliated with American and European companies. So wherever you work, wherever you go, English language is a must. Right? Banking and all, we have malls and restaurants which has McDonald's and Wendy's and Hardee's and you know, Popeye, so you have all these franchise. We have cable, so we see all of the movies and, you know, westerns and sitcoms. So it's all familiar, right? When I came to the United States, San Diego in 1999, maybe it's a culture shock. Maybe it's a "Oh really? I thought in United States, things are different?" Remember, I shared with you the story. I was, I couldn't, I didn't have a laptop with me or internet, right? So I said, "Okay let me look for internet cafe." Because in Kuwait, internet cafes in every single place. You go buy this card, at that time 90s, they— and then you have a connection. I couldn't find one. And they said, "Go to the libraries." But it's the United States, they should have internet cafe. You know, something as simple as that. But of course, later after a month, I got me the connection and all of the above. Another thing is in the Middle East, we are a nation like European since the country, we work. And then we take a siesta, which is a break. Then around 6, 7, 8PM we go out.

**Hannah Drake:** Mhmm.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Shopping and eating and all of our things still open, markets sometimes 24 hour nonstop. People visit each other families at 9PM. The first couple of month, I wanted to go out around 9 something. And my sister, she was "Everything is closed. We wait till Friday weekend, things will stay late." I said, "Why are they closing?" And they said, "Because we have work in the next working. Everything needs to close and weekend is the time where people go." So that's actually the thing that I missed. Other than my friends, my sisters who stayed back with their children, you know, because they are living and working over there. All this familiarities. And now, this is now my familiarities. And now, when I go back, I said "Oh how come you have this? In San Diego, we have it in a different way. In San Diego, we don't have lines like this." And then, they say "Huh culture shock!" So now when I go back, I have a culture shock.

**Hannah Drake:** That's so funny, it's like in reverse.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** In reverse, exactly! Which is funny, very funny. But still, the word is it's becoming one village, right? And so many things through social media and all this changes. It's, familiarity is amazing. It's amazing. It's how you have this open mind to accept it and welcome it.

**[PART TWO] - 23:24:23**

**Hannah Drake:** When you visit, did you find like a lot of things have changed since you used to live there?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So this holidays like December, January, I traveled. First went with my sisters to London, fantastic, and then went to Dubai to attend a wedding. And also I have a family living there. And I've been to United Arab Emirates several time, and it's a new country. They were just celebrating 50 years since they started. So everything is brand new. Everything

is new. Many malls and many restaurants and activities. Expo 2020 was there, huge. The people, the way the people are talking, the way the people are dressed, the way how the— even certain conversation and how each community is looking at others or other subjects or topics in a different way. Yes, this is what I've noticed. I missed something. Maybe I missed a certain character of the country. I would say, "Oh this is Middle Eastern." And it's there, but now it's very much revolving around so many European. Even the language.

**Hannah Drake:** Woah.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Even the language, so I've noticed if I'm speaking to Arabic, you know, Arabs. Our sentence is one word Arabic, three English.

**Hannah Drake:** Woahh. \*nodding head\*

**Afrah Abdulkader:** And then because of social media, so if they are someone trying to describe to me, you know, "I was watching Instagram and on social media." So it's one word Arabic, and then the post, the thing, and all of thing. Said, "What happened to the language?" And I found the language is, became cosmopolitan. Right? Due to the education, to the social media, to traveling and many, many aspects that I— It made me wonder about the identity. Are we losing this identity? Is the new generation aware of their culture and identity? Are they celebrating it and proud of it? Or are they just following without understanding? What is it? What's the value behind it?

Time - 23:27:00

**Hannah Drake:** On that note, how did you keep your pride in your culture while moving to so many different places?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So I emigrated the age that's different if I immigrated young, right? So I emigrated while I was 30 years old. So at this age, I already had and established an identity and acknowledgment, awareness, of pride in my upbringing, in my family, in my everything, right? And celebrated and still celebrating it. And came, emigrated with privileges. Because I came as an immigrant, not a refugee, so there comes certain privileges, and resources, and came with finding a family who already also celebrating and have pride in their identity which continued. And also my sisters who have been participating in democratic parties and rallies in San Diego in 20- 2000, 2001. And before, we used to have a Friendship Festival in El Cajon, where all communities and cultures come and set their tent and booth for three days, weekend—Friday, Saturday, Sunday—and sell food and dress their culture clothes. And so, we used to have our own booth when we would wear our dresses and have map of Iraq and talk about Mesopotamia. We do certain activities just to introduce visitors.

**Hannah Drake:** Mhmm.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Attend any multicultural activities to introduce our history. The speaker in any event that we are invited to talk about the region and certain challenges as the situation in

Palestine, situation in Iraq, equality, equity, women's rights, you know all of this. Why? Because we wanted to be part of the fabric of this community. We want others to hear us while we also learning from others. And again, to advocate for those who are unable to have a voice. As a voter, someone who have that right, I want to be participating also in the political change. As a Middle East and Arab American, seeing things in my community here, I have to say something and be part of that change. By that, this is where my identity comes. This is my pride comes and that's where people start to know about, you know, certain cultures.

Time - 23:29:49

**Hannah Drake:** Did you find when you came to San Diego, it to be a welcoming place?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Yes. Very much. Seriously, very much. Like I said, I came with many privileges first, because I have a family here. Been here for a while. So they opened so many doors for me. The weather, this the nature of the city, the ocean, the blue, the sky, you know, all these demographics—topography, I mean—just welcoming. San Diego, it's a city also full of refugees and newcomers. So you hear different accents and new, see different faces. And you don't feel like, "Oh, I'm a stranger here." I have to say in 1999, there weren't that many Middle Eastern stores and restaurants. For example, I'm here with you meeting in our IRC El Cajon office. This is our blue room, Safety and Wellness Blue Room. In El Cajon, and I remember in 1999 when I used to come to El Cajon, there was one Middle Eastern restaurant and one store. And it was a ghost town. Seriously, I called it a ghost town. Now, El Cajon, it's so vibrant. My god. We have the antique car show on Wednesdays and Thursday, they have live music. And you should see the number of restaurants and baklava, sweet places. And the smell of kebab and shawarma and grocery stores and people dressed in different clothes walking around. It's such a fun, fun, fun place to be. Plus, many nonprofit agencies and frontline service providers has opened here. So it became a place where many newcomers prefer to come and start from El Cajon due to the familiarity. And then, when they settle down and find a job say, "Oh, now I know my way. I'm going to Anaheim" or "I'm going to Missouri" or "I'm going to New York" or "I'm staying somewhere else."

Time - 23:32:06

**Hannah Drake:** Speaking of jobs, I know you've mentioned it throughout our whole conversation, but what kind of work do you do?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** So I didn't tell you. Yeah, that should be bad. So I studied in Bahrain. I graduated in this island Bahrain, Business Administration - Marketing. Right and returned to Kuwait and worked in Industrial Bank of Kuwait. Major, major work was feasibility studies and marketing researches to help provide small loans to industries to start a new business, right? And then we start working with privatization and all of the above. And then when I immigrated to the United States, continued in banking and home loans. So this is my speciality. But then in 2003/4, when the Iraqi refugees started to come more because of the War of 2003. While I was at store or at a bank or a doctor appointment, I've noticed— For example, I would wait for my turn to attend, go to a doctor appointment. And I will see a family with an interpreter who's interpreting, and the interpretation is not right. Just because the family let's say Egyptian, the



interpreter is Lebanese, and there are certain words that they don't. So I said, "No, no, no. This is not how they say it" or an Iraqi family with Sudanese interpreters, "No, this is not." So I start noticing. And of course, we've been listening and meeting with families who say, "Oh, I'm struggling with this. I'm struggling with housing. I'm struggling with that." So I start volunteering as an interpreter or volunteering to accompany a family to welfare office or volunteering to help people fill papers, right? For their, whatever documentation. And also, I joined Grossmont Adult School to get the medical interpretation certificate, so I can understand the ethics.

**Hannah Drake:** Mhmm. \*nodding head\*

**Afrah Abdulkader:** And you know, the boundaries and roles and all of the above and the styles just so it can help me. And in 2007, one of— I met a friend, and she said, "They are looking for someone and the advocate at an agency work with survivors of domestic violence. I think you will love it." So I said, "Let me apply. Why not? What's gonna go?" Ah! Lesson number one I learned in the United States, my sister told me, "Don't ever be afraid to try. If you apply for a job and they deny you, so what? No harm done. You applied. You learn. Better chance next time." So anyway, I applied for this agency called Center for Community Solutions. And they met with me one. And the second time they said, "Why would we hire you? I mean you have zero, ZERO experience in advocacy." And I said, "It's that kind of commitment and passion needed to support those who need support. Also, trying to be someone from a certain culture, who I'm not assuming I am the expert of this culture, but at least I can add something regarding the cultural sensitivity when working with newcomers. With training and support, definitely I will gain. And all my life, I was working in marketing and research. And we have services for survivors of domestic violence, you would like to introduce and sell it basically. And I think I can market this service." So I was hired as survivor advocate. And they had a office at the police station at [inaudible] where we did ride along with law enforcement to attend to first calls where there are victims and provide them with resources and safety planning and then follow up with case management. And now, after doing this for the last 12, 13 years at that position, we started receiving referrals from IRC of the newcomers who are also struggling with unhealthy relationship. We started talking about how wonderful if International Rescue Committee have a program of safety where they can offer advocacy to survivors of unhealthy relationships, so they can know their rights—their victim rights, apply for restraining order, divorce therapy, counseling, all of the above. And sure enough, IRC San Diego Office submitted a grant, received the fund. And I joined them April 2018 as a survivor advocate in this program where we offer advocacy and case management to refugees, asylum seekers, asylees, SIV which is Special Immigration Visa, offered to interpreters who worked in Afghanistan and Iraq, who are survivors of crime, whether crime happened back home or in the United States. I am focused specifically on domestic violence and sexual assault and human trafficking. And we just got a new grant specifically for human trafficking. And we were interviewing caseworkers to be specifically working with survivors of human trafficking, because it's increasing. As you know, San Diego is a border city. And there are many, many of our newcomers due to the lack of finances or jobs easily can be victims and trafficked, especially labor trafficking. So that's my role is to support survivors to know more about their victim rights. I can connect them with legal services, help them to file for a restraining order, accompany them to court, refer them to therapy and

counseling, if they need emergency funds, DV shelters domestic violence shelters, but just have someone who can listen to them, validate their feels, and to help plant seeds of trust. So whenever they are ready to leave this abusive relationship, they know they can come to Afrah, IRC whom they will start a plan so they can help them to leave. Yes. That said, many of survivors all they need sometimes at this moment employment. So I refer them to IRC early employment. Or all they want is a small loan so they can buy a car, so they can start a business, or go to work. I refer them to our financial empowerment and economy, economic empowerment to help them with credit building or financial coaching or small loans, even bigger grant loans. So, so many programs we have over here that I can talk about it forever.

Time - 23:39:09

**Hannah Drake:** Mhmm. How do you think your work has impacted you personally?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** A lot. Thank you for this question Hannah. When you meet individuals from different cultures and all over the world, I mean, the depth and that wealth of information and cultures and, and practices by itself, it's a learning experience, and the story of their journeys, leaving their country and coming that by itself is a learning experience. The resiliency is something impressive, shows you how much there is hope and strength. And also, as you've noticed, I don't call my clients victims. I call them survivors, because even if they are still living in an abusive relationship, but they are waking every morning to go to work to school, feed their children, they are survivors. They have that resiliency, that strength, that makes them wake up and say, "I have to take my children to school, I have to go to work" and pick the phone and call an advocate. That is a survival mode, it's not a victim. So it's really made me look at things, never to take anything for granted and to also feel blessed for all the things I have and had. And look at all those wonderful individuals who were able to leave this abusive relationship and move forward and safe path, and never ever assume anything. And never ever generalize and say, "How, why are they? Why are they living in this abusive relationship?" What I learned is that to change even the language of, "What stopped you from leaving this abuse?" because that open a conversation of challenges, needs and resources. Right? So it really took me out of a silo (??) that I had, and opened my horizon into so many things, and also admiring all the other agencies and individuals who are working in this field. So I've been learning from them back and forth, to enhance and advance my experience. But again, that takes me to another word is how to be humble. How to be humble, that's a major thing.

[PART THREE] - 23:41:49

**Hannah Drake:** I was wondering. From your work, has there been any stories that have been very memorable that you still think about?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** My god Hannah. There are so, so many. The thing that really makes me happy very much is when I see someone. And you know I should not— I always tell them, "If I see you in the market, if I see somewhere and you come and say hi, I will meet you as if I meet you the first time, because I don't want anyone to know what's been happening." But then when someone comes after five, six years and say, or call, or I see them somewhere say, "Afrah, I remember you helped me in finding a job. And remember when you helped me to pay the rent,

and I am now safe and happy and I have children and my child has just graduated. And if it wasn't for you and your program, I would have been, I would have been still abused and completely forgotten." And that brings so much gratitude and happiness and humbleness about oh my god, just a simple act of I connected them with the resources. They are the ones who took it and moved with it right. And that spread their wings and the sky's the limit. I have so many cases domestic happen. Domestic violence happens to anyone no matter what gender, what religion, what ethnicity, what social status. I have so many cases of same sex situation where I am so happy I was able to support them, because they feel that they are neglected, or they might be ashamed, or they might judge them. Just to be able there to support them and provide them with resources and to see them now in a healthier environment with a healthier and happier relationship. It's amazing to see. One of my clients who I just closed her case because she came here as a student, married, being abused by her partner using immigration status as a tool to control. And then she was able to file to adjust her immigration status, continued her education, graduated, got an internship, and now she is hired. And she's been working, believe it or not, as an attorney, as a lawyer, now she is practicing her law. Amazing success story that I just saw impressed by her creativity and happiness and positivity. And every day is a new day for her. There are so many stories, I cannot really count them. And I am very humbled and proud that I was able to be part of their life, and I was able to plant a seed of safety and trust to help them be in where they are right now.

Time - 23:44:57

**Hannah Drake:** I'm so glad we have people like you doing this kind of work, because I know it can be a lot. Like I'm sure they're so thankful to have you too. I was wondering like I know this kind of work can be really heavy. So I was wondering, how do you take care of yourself while doing your work? Or like, you know, for your mental health and everything?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** Oh my god, excellent question! Excellent question. So I work in a program called Safety and Wellness unit. And we basically the core of well being and self care, and we try to promote it to all other programs and remind staff. Like just now in the corridor, I was gonna go into the kitchen to make some popcorn, and then I was reminding a staff that, "Please come to the Blue Room, we have beautiful couches, block the door and take a nap, turn off the side, say, you know, don't not disturb. Take a break. Go for a walk." These are things that we have to remind ourself to find a consistency in practicing it and find a support system to join us and accompany us. Right? And also to have a leadership, a supervisor, who are also part of the self care, someone who will say, "I can see that you have a huge load. Would you like support from an intern, volunteers? Or would you like to talk about it?" Or when I come to discuss a challenging case, right? It's nice to remind ourselves that I don't have that magic stick, I did my best. And it's all Hannah is how when we introduce ourselves to our clients, when we set boundaries and say, "Hey, I will do this much. But I can't do everything. We are limited as much. But we will refer you to this. And if we can't achieve some of your goals, it's not because we failed you. It's just because we have limitations and resources out there." When you start talking to them realistically without giving false expectation, with setting boundaries with telling them what's your work ethics and respect, no judgment, no shame, no plan, they really understand that. Right? So therefore, they will not come and claim you, "You haven't done anything for me.

You told me you will get me this but you did that.” No, I did not. So this is where the conversation start with fact, realistic information, resources. And again, reminding ourselves that we are human beings also. We have our own challenges. We struggled all during COVID and still. We have families. We are adapting. We are taking care of ourselves and how we can do anything so I can save and keep the sanity. So I can continue doing what I'm doing. And if I am unable to be part of this role. Then in that case, I have to be realistic and say, “Maybe I need to find something else.” when I reached the stage where I am burned out, right? So well self care, I really really trying to reduce the amount of coffee that I drink. That, I'm not succeeding. I drink lots of coffee and tea. I been under control with chocolate consumption. I love chocolate, good chocolate. And I have wonderful support system where we go for a walk around the buildings. I love to listen to music. Weekends is a weekend where I see my family and go out, picnic and all of that, and see friends. Simple, simple things that remind you of that \*exhale\* we are humans, and we really deserve to take care of ourself.

**Hannah Drake:** Oh, yeah, I'm so glad you're taking care of yourself. Good luck with the—

**Afrak Abdulkader:** \*shows plushie\* We have these all over the place. Look how cute.

**Hannah Drake:** \*smiling\* Cute!

**Afrak Abdulkader:** Isn't that amazing? Look. \*shows a teddy bear\* We have them all over the place. So anyone comes to our office, [inaudible] they can sit and then have any one of these fantastic stuffed animals \*squeezes panda plushie\* which is so relaxing. So relaxing. So this is fantastic. This is what we do. Yes.

Time - 23:49:33

**Hannah Drake:** I was wondering if you had any advice for someone watching who might be in an abusive relationship?

**Afrak Abdulkader:** I don't want to say as an advice as much as – don't ever blame yourself for any action. Because part of the power and control and abusive mentality is to make the other party feel guilty, feel that they haven't done enough, feel that they are the reason behind the other person anger and violence. It's a cycle. It's a dynamic that the abusive person practice. So when you, when we define what's domestic violence is a repetitive pattern of a violent behavior, where they use threat and intimidation on their intimate present or past partners, right? It can be financially, sexually, isolation, employment, physical or mental, emotional, verbal. So first thing when I meet with a survivor, I always tell them, “Don't ever feel that you are the person or blame yourself or doubt yourself. You came asking for someone to listen to you, because you reached the point where you felt you are living in darkness, that your voice has been taken away from you. And I am here to provide you with tools to empower you. So you can decide when to leave, if you want to leave, right, that's your choice.” Many survivors, their choices and their decisions been taken away from them—how to help them even to make decisions because the doubt, “Am I making the right decision?” because the abuser is making the decisions all the time. So I don't know, “Am I doing the right thing?” because all these events, confidence self esteem, is being

shaken, shaken. The first thing when working with survivors of any crime is to provide them with a safe space based on no shaming, no blaming, and no judgment, and to listen to their story as if you're listening to this story for the first time. And that's the, "Oh, well I had a client similar to your story." No. That story is that person's story. Your story is your story. And you start with them from the beginning. Some of them I work and then disappear, right? Because they either went back to the abuser or they said, "I'm not ready." And if they return after a year say, "Okay Afrah, I would like to continue." So what if I meet them as if I'm meeting them for the first time and say, "Oh, remember I told you all these things and you didn't do anything?" That's the blaming. That's where I lost that trust with them. And they say, "Why am I talking to Afrah? She is judging me. She is abusive." Instead, I said, "Thank you, I really appreciate that you trusted me and came to ask me. Let's start from the beginning." And we listen and provide and validate and respect. And let's start again from the beginning where— I think I didn't tell you. The whole concept of our services is based on the trauma informed care model, where we meet our clients where they are, not where we want them to be. And that means whatever they tell us about the challenges that stops them from leaving an abusive relationship is the service plan that we establish with them that will help them to accomplish and check. \*box ticking motion\* So now they are able to say, "I'm ready to leave. I have a job, I have income, I can pay rent. I'm okay. I have a car, I have a driving license. I can submit a small loan to buy a car. I'm able to leave." "I can speak English. I was in northern ESL. That helped me with my resume. I'm able to leave."

**Hannah Drake:** Mhmm.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** "I found the shelter. I'm in a shelter. I'm in transitional housing. I'm in therapy. I'm ready to leave." Right? So this is the journey, and these are the services we offer to our clients.

**Hannah Drake:** Woah, oh my gosh. I feel like I just learned so much.

**Afrah Abdulkader:** It's a lot, I know. But it's so rewarding, so rewarding. And again, some cases, you know, many cases succeed, and they thrive and are out of abuse. And some, they are still struggling, which we all understand, and we hope that they will reach that point. And still, the minute they decided to even just to come to ask a question, that's hope. That's why we say we succeeded in introducing ourselves, building that trust, and we have the safe space where they can come and talk about their challenges.

Time - 23:54:42

**Hannah Drake:** I was wondering if you had any other pieces of advice or like life lessons you'd want to share to someone who may be watching?

**Afrah Abdulkader:** I'm not a wizard or an expert in life. I'm a human being who have, you know, made mistakes and made many successes and accomplishments. Like any human being, right? So this is the part where we have to be humble and aware and acknowledge our limitations also. I always encourage everyone is to never be afraid of asking questions. There is no harm of asking a question if it's asked in a humble and respectful way. And genuinely, you're genuinely—

you are asking because you want to know. I'm not just asking just, I want Hannah to make a mistake so I can jump and tell her, "No, that's not the way you said." And genuinely, "Hannah, so you said you are from your parents from Philippines? What part city are they? When did they come? Oh, my God, how wonderful. Did you see the country? Have you been there?" Genuinely interested in listening to you and by asking questions, so many doors are opened. And we are working with so many individuals from different cultures who are scared and afraid of asking because they might be judged by other. \*mocking tone\* "Really, so you don't know the answer to this question? I thought you knew it." Judging. Will I ask another? Oh, my God, I will never even open my mouth. Or, or I'm afraid to ask a question because that means I need that service. That means I am missing this need, and people will look at me and maybe they judge me. So just be quiet, while so many opportunities is lost if they don't ask a question. If they don't ask that about emergency housing funds, then they miss the chance to file and apply for housing emergency funds for refugee. If they didn't ask about IRC free tax filing, then they missed the chance of filing for free for their taxes and tax return. If they didn't ask about how to file for financial aid so I can continue in my education, then they lost that opportunity. The number one is how we can encourage newcomers is don't be afraid of asking a question because it opens abundance of resources and information. And second is how to really, really respect and love each other, and how to spread the word of humanity and how to step aside from our biases. And just to have an open mind, and yes, we might disagree, but we can disagree and still respect each other. And this is how the whole world— I don't expect everyone to believe in my own ideologies and thoughts, but at the same time, how we can respect our differences. That's all that we hope and pray for—peace. Peace.

Time - 23:57:55

**Hannah Drake:** Was there anything else you wanted to share?

**Afrak Abdulkader:** I would love to thank you, Hannah, for all the efforts that you put into this project and on your team. Thank you for reaching out to me. I love your spirit and your aura. You have a beautiful smile and aura. Continue doing what you're doing, always success in your studies, graduation and whatever path that you choose. I encourage everyone just to be proud of their identity and never shy away from it. And also be sensitive and how to be respectful to each other. I know there are certain things that we started to be aware of—is that when we start a conversation we always say, "May I ask a question? I'm sorry if this question doesn't make you comfortable. Please let me know." Simple things can really encourage the other person to engage in a conversation. Also, reach out to different cultures and identities and say, "Hey, I love what you're wearing. I admire it. May I ask where are you from? What's \*gestures to clothing\* what do you call this?" or "What are you trying? What kind of food is this? I would love to try it." Simple acts of kindness open that door of welcome, right? And then, the sky is the limit. So all I'm saying is just have an open mind. And let's all just pray for peace. And please reach out if you have any questions. I think now you have my contact information, and you can always reach out and we are more than welcoming and happy to support and answer any questions.

**Hannah Drake:** Thank you so much for talking with me.

**Afrak Abdulkader:** Thank you, you're so kind. So kind. What an honor.

**Hannah Drake:** I was so nervous before talking to you over the phone and then I was like, "Ah she's so sweet!" I was so excited.

**Afrak Abdulkader:** So kind. Remember when you called me? I forgot and I was doing so many errands. And then, you called and I said, "Wait" and then I parked, I remember in front of CVS. You said, "This is Hannah" Oh my god, we have a call! We scheduled a call. So I was in front of CVS. And after we finished, I said, "Oh, I need to get my prescription." Good, good timing Hannah! \*two thumbs up\* CVS, I was meant to stop at CVS. So I really enjoyed all your questions. I love your curiosity. And I hope, I hope that I— my statements or my journey did not trigger anyone's emotions or feeling. And if I did, I apologize but it is life and that's part of my identity. So I really appreciate the space and this opportunity to reach out to your audience.

**Hannah Drake:** Thank you so much.

**Afrak Abdulkader:** Thank you so much Hannah.

**Hannah Drake:** Since it's 5, I'll end the recording but wait.

**Afrak Abdulkader:** Absolutely, thank you.