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NEWS - RALEIGH

Tuesday, Feb. 19, 2013

College students to attend U.N. meeting on women's rights

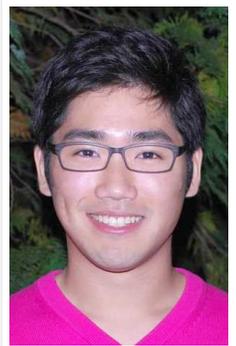
BY SARAH BARR - SBARR@NEWSOBSERVER.COM

Meredith College senior Marzia Nawrozi was still a teenager when she started working as a social worker in her native Afghanistan, helping children in orphanages and girls who had run away from home.

It wasn't an easy job to have in the year before she arrived at Meredith in 2009, but it helped fuel her passion for improving women's rights around the world.

"I heard a lot of heartbreaking stories," Nawrozi said. "But I believe in change."

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Brian Min

Now, she's headed to the United Nations in New York to present her findings on violence against immigrant and refugee women in North Carolina at the U.N.'s annual Commission on the Status of Women. The conference will bring together thousands of government representatives, nonprofit workers and activists.

Nawrozi, 22, is one of five student fellows who will attend the conference through a program sponsored by WomenNC, a local nonprofit that promotes women's rights. Since 2010, WomenNC has run its CSW Student Fellowship Program, which is designed to engage young people in human rights issues and connect local and global efforts to improve the status of women.

"I'm very excited about it," Nawrozi said. "I believe this is one of the best and biggest things I have ever done."

This year, WomenNC recruited fellows from 16 North Carolina colleges and universities, and the fellows were chosen from eight finalists. Beginning in the fall, the fellows researched a topic that reflects the CSW theme, which this year is "the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls." As part of their research, the fellows worked with

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local organizations to understand how women's issues are playing out on the ground in North Carolina.

Nawrozi's research looks at the barriers immigrant and refugee women can face when they are the victims of violence, such as not knowing English, having inadequate access to transportation, and not understanding the legal system. She'll also discuss how the local organizations she worked with, InterAct of Wake County and Kiran, try to help those women.

Sharing their experience

After they attend the conference, the fellows will give presentations to local schools and

organizations. Beth Dehghan, the founder and president of WomenNC, said those presentations are central to the mission of the fellowship because the students bring a global perspective back to the local level after attending the conference.

Brian Min, a graduate of Broughton High School and a senior at UNC-Chapel Hill, spent his time as a fellow researching how to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls. As part of his research, he looked at a violence prevention initiative of the N.C. Coalition Against Sexual Assault and examined how it might work in communities around the world.

Min, 22, said he is looking forward to soaking up as much knowledge as he can while in New York and bringing it back to his campus and the larger community. He expects the fellowship experience to be one that will help him no matter what he does in the future.

"This is something that I'm going to carry with me wherever I go," he said.

The three other fellows are Molly Williams, a sophomore at UNC-Chapel Hill; Yolanda Fair, a third-year law student at UNC-Chapel Hill; and Elizabeth Wise, a senior at UNC-Greensboro. The fellows also will present their research at a dinner on Thursday at the N.C. State University Club.

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