

# **Sr. Asma Mneina (AM) and Br. Ryan Ramchandrar (RR)**

Profiled by: Sr. Nusrrat Masood.

## **1) How old are you?**

**AM:** I am 19 years old.

**RR:** I am 23 years old.

## **2) Where are your parents from?**

**AM:** My parents are originally from Libya.

**RR:** My parents are from Trinidad and Tobago.

## **3) What are you studying in school?**

**AM:** Currently I'm in my first year at the University of Manitoba studying a variety of Arts courses.

**RR:** I'm on my final term in Computer Engineering at the University of Manitoba.

## **4) What are the different committees/projects you have volunteered your time towards presently and in the past?**

**AM:** Within the Muslim community, I've been working with the CICC (Canadian Islamic Chamber of Commerce) for the past few months, putting together a Resource Guide for the Muslim Community. I got the opportunity to Emcee the Canadian Islamic Chamber of Commerce's First Annual Awards Gala. This November I will be speaking as a Muslim youth at an interfaith meeting at the Unitarian Church. I taped two episodes of Islam 101 with Taibah Awan in 2004 and I just recently joined the Al - Hikma Library Committee. I've also had the opportunity to write for the Manitoba Muslim magazine on a few occasions and I am currently writing a piece on their 10th Anniversary Dinner. Outside the community, in my senior year of high school I was Co-Chair of Amnesty International at Fort Richmond Collegiate. This was an especially successful year, as we had a great team. We planned two coffeehouses, a letter writing campaign, designed and sold t-shirts, and a Taste for Justice Dinner. I am continuing my involvement with Amnesty International at the University of Manitoba and I am a volunteer writer for the Manitoban.

**RR:** Well I'm currently on the executive board for the Manitoba Muslim magazine. I also maintain the MIA website miaonline.org and I send out all the E-Newsletter emails. I was also a counsellor at Camp Awakening which is the boys' youth camp. I've done a lot of work without any specific formal positions, e.g. , I've done some MSA work, I was part of the Join the Caravan event, I help out with Eid dinners and prayers and I've helped out at different conferences.

## **5) Why and how do you make time to volunteer?**

**AM:** Volunteering definitely takes a lot of time and effort. Balancing work and school is challenging on its own, without throwing volunteering into the mix. However volunteering is not just a time consuming feat, it's also meeting new people, making connections you otherwise wouldn't have, and feeling good about your efforts.

**RR:** I help out because I believe it's beneficial to me. I like helping others and there's reward in it Insha Allah. It's not always easy. Sometimes it's too much. Early on I was doing too much but now I've limited it to weekends and any free time I have.

## **6) What's the first project you got involved with? How did you get involved that first time?**

**AM:** I believe the first volunteering I did within the Muslim community was at Kids Day Camps - probably because I still wanted to attend but just surpassed the age limit. Then I believe I was twelve when Taibah Awan, Talia Joundi and I started a Muslim Youth Magazine we called "Seeds". Anyone remember that? It was pretty legit. We passed out flyers advertising the need for writers, planned the issues out, printed them, passed out hundreds of copies during Eid prayer, and burned out after two issues. Just a few weeks ago I discovered one of the issues in my closet. I have to say, I was quite impressed with the result.

**RR:** My first entrance into working for the community came through a paid position. I applied for and got a position as an MIA secretary. After that initial introduction I got pulled aside a lot at Isha prayers at St. Vital, or Jummah at Waverley, or at University with additional volunteer opportunities.

**7) What advice would you give to youth that \*do not\* want to get involved?**

**AM:** To youth who do not want to get involved; whatever. I'm just kidding! It's not easy to commit your free time (which we're all running low on this time of year) to any cause, although helping to create that sense of community is worth the hassle.

**RR:** It's always tempting to sit by and watch others do the work. In the end you'll be asked about your contributions by Allah so why not have something to show? There are a lot of great opportunities that come up when you work for this community. You can get networking opportunities for jobs and meet really good people that grow to be friends you confide in and trust. It's interesting to see how different people have different things to contribute and how we can actually strengthen this community.

**8) What do you think is preventing youth from getting involved right now?**

**AM:** First and foremost, youth in general are quite active nowadays. Muslim youth are no exception to that. I know a group of Muslim girls who, with Saadia Qureshi, created a team, raised money, and did the walk for Multiple Sclerosis last spring. Others organized volleyball on Monday nights at the Grand Mosque, while others volunteer their time further from the community at hospitals, school clubs and campus organizations. Many youth are proactive. This being said, to be honest, I believe what's preventing Muslim youth in this community from getting involved is the lack of projects to be involved in. Mashaallah the community has a few things going for it; Manitoba Muslim Magazine, Muslim Girls Camp/Camp Awakening, Al Hikma Library Committee, The Canadian Islamic Chamber of Commerce, and few others that call for volunteers. However, as large and old as the Manitoba Muslim community is, it's only starting to grow in terms of involvement. It's only starting to grow *together*.

For instance, the MSA (Muslim Students Association) at the University of Manitoba just held elections this past October. The dedication and ambition the youth on campus put into their campaign was both excellent and refreshing to see as the MSA has been, and is seriously lacking. Thus, it's not quite about getting youth active, but the community needs to acknowledge that there are students yearning to be. It's up to the community to create programs and projects for the youth to involve themselves in, or at least in the case of programs that have long term standing in the community (especially but not exclusively the MSA) some community members need to step aside, and let the youth of the community shine.

**RR:** I think youth feel like they can't relate to the rest of the Muslims in Winnipeg. There are lots of programs and they're advertised pretty well but when you go to an event you want to know that you'll be seeing your friends there. I think if you're not involved then it's hard to start because you feel intimidated, like the others are on a way higher level than you and they may look down on you or something because you're not a good Muslim and you don't practise as much. However, that's not the case. You'll be surprised at how much your help is needed and how welcomed you are.

**9) What are some hopes you have for the youth in the Muslim community?**

**AM:** I know for a fact that the community does realize the importance of its youth, however, I'm hoping it will work harder to act on it. I, as well as many others believe that the MSA is a vehicle into reviving the youth of the community, and in order to spark this activism in the youth that they've wanted, the MSA needs to change. As this is my interview, I can say that I hope the results for the next elections will be different. There's still hope, but this, I believe is the best method to reach our population.

**RR:** I would really like to see more youth get involved. I think if they did they would develop more spiritually and physically and realize that this community is not just for the elderly or some other group and that the community and the Ummah can prosper.

**10) How have your parents shaped you?**

**AM:** Alhamdulillah my parents have exposed me to the community through Camp that I attended for several summers, and encouraged me to participate in various activities. That was completely cliched and not my style, but I was raised to aim high and contribute positively to the community, to the world. My parents have made a point in raising me to be a very reasonable, mindful person. Volunteering, in my opinion, is just that.

**RR:** My parents were very open with me. They allowed me a lot of freedom to learn and make my own mistakes. They were so patient with me too. Whenever I went back to them and realized they were right all along they didn't just brush me aside. They always wanted the best for me and provided the very best opportunities through education. They always drilled in manners with me. They never were tied down with one way of thinking. They taught me to do the best in whatever I did. They were really supportive.