

Shopping with Purpose: Santa Cruz Non-profit Spotlight

For 18 years, victims of homelessness, domestic violence, and human trafficking have counted on Rising International for support to navigate and push through life's hardballs. Rising's mission is to support women locally and globally to show that they're not alone in this vision for a just and humane world. Rising's work began as a business centered on training women in social entrepreneurship in Afghanistan by hiring women to create artisan jewelry, handbags, and accessories. Rising allows women to become entrepreneurs, business owners, and form a tight knit community of support.

On October 29th and November 12th, Rising international held an inspiring and tear-jerking night where attendees were able to hear about the story of Rising planting its roots. Jaamila Hashimi was the evening's courageous guest speaker. Jaamila shared that 1 in 3 women will be married before the age of 18 in Afghanistan. Jaamila knew that education was freedom for the women in Afghanistan despite her father forbidding her to attend school due to cultural beliefs. This did not stop her. When she was 6, she decided to secretly enroll herself in school. She then earned her bachelor's degree and was the first woman in her family to receive a formal education. The idea of fearlessness took over Jaamila's mind and carved her life's work. After the Taliban took control in 1996, she started a secret school for girls in her basement.

Born and raised in a rough neighborhood splattered with drugs and gangs in Santa Cruz, Maricruz has been a Rising International representative for two and a half years. She was able to run her own business through Rising and never thought that she had the power to change lives. In 2016, Maricruz was able to graduate from Cabrillo college and is now on her way to nursing school. Maricruz recalls her first day of Rising, feeling like an outsider and filled with fear of judgement. Rising gave Mari the confidence to start her own business and the means necessary to support herself as a young mom of 2.

The last spotlight of the evening's heroes is Catie Hart. Catie was trafficked for seven years and went on to attend UC Berkeley after she was finally able to escape her abuser. She teaches survivors of human trafficking to code in Oakland, CA and is the head of the human trafficking education prevention program, Safe and Sound. I was lucky to witness a Safe and Sound presentation in Watsonville, CA while working at Rising in 2017. Safe and Sound teaches at-risk youth about the warning signs of potential abusers.

Rising's year goals are to train 100 survivors to become social entrepreneurs. Rising has a 24 hour hotline where people can call that need assistance with housing during the pandemic. For more information, visit risinginternational.org. Check their retail website for your holiday shopping at risinginternational.com/products.