

Born in the late 1960s in Essex as the youngest of five children, Yasmin Khan showed interest in justice and fairness from a young age. With a father in local politics, and a devoted, kind mother, she always understood the power of community. Ingrained in her childhood memories are attending events such as those for the Commonwealth Institute, which she found engaging and exciting – seeing other people she identified as being like her – coming together, being happy, and celebrating important dates in various cultural calendars. Her hopes were to do this herself when she grew up, and she dreamed of becoming an ambassador – bringing people together and holding together communities.

In reality, life rather than dreams took over, and after finishing school in the East End of London she followed her older sister into international banking, then as a reservation sales agent for an airline, before getting married, having two children and moving to Middlesbrough, near here, in North-East England. In Middlesbrough, she found herself returning to her early interests around justice and fairness, working in a range of equality and diversity positions including with the racial equalities body, the police independent advisory group and a housing association, and advisor to the Welsh government. She gained a Masters in Social Justice from Teesside University.

All around her, she saw how racially minoritised women and girls were harmed by domestic and other forms of abuse, and how these harms intersected and were exacerbated by racism. She recollects hearing about one woman who had set fire to herself, and started hearing more and more examples of violence linked to so called ‘honour’ within families. She reminisced about herself as a child of 9, on her way back from the mosque with her brother for Arabic lessons. When her brother went into a shop, she was pushed and shoved by two men from the National Front who pulled her headscarf off her head.

In 2011 she founded the Halo Project - an award-winning national charity that supports Black and minoritised victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and hidden harms including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and honour-based abuse. Based in Middlesbrough, Halo and its umbrella organisation, Tees Valley Inclusion Project has supported over 2,500 Black and minoritised women. Halo led on one of the first ever ‘super complaints’, which provided unequivocal evidence of the failings of police responses to Black and Minority Ethnic victims of sexual abuse – ‘invisible survivors’ that Halo shone a light on.

The Halo project opened its first ever student hub at Durham University ten years ago. The hub offers free training and development opportunities to students, who have gone on to work in local specialist charities such as the Angelou Centre and internationally, including the United Nations. Halo and Durham University are proud to be the flagship hub, which has now expanded to many other universities and colleges.

Yasmin’s vision is to bring people together, to work to achieve community and systemic changes on issues that are not easy to work on for marginalised people who cannot create that change on their own. While she may not have achieved her dream of becoming a state ambassador, which she now admits may also have been linked to a love of Ferrero Roche chocolates, she certainly *has* become a powerful, fearless, brave ambassador for Black and Minoritised victims and survivors of violence and abuse. Many lives have been and continued to be changed for the better by the Yasmin Khan’s unwavering leadership, and we at Durham University are proud to work in partnership with her.

Chancellor/Vice-Chancellor I present Yasmin Khan to receive the degree of Doctor of Civil Law honoris causa.