

# Heart of a Tiger: Farheen Khan and her spirit of generosity

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - At Fort Hays State University, we foster an ethic of care for others beyond friendly and nice. This focus on cultivating intentional relationships that engage in people's stories, build self-confidence, and attend generously to each other's needs, is precisely why I love to write and talk about "Heart of a Tiger" stories.

This column's inspiring example of care started with an annual email from our Director of International Student Services, Carol Solko-Olliff, to the campus community. Each year, as Ramadan approaches, Carol sends a campus email to remind faculty and staff about the upcoming Ramadan observance. Ramadan is an Islam practice of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community.

In response to the email, our student affairs staff provided a private prayer room and transportation to a local mosque. Graduate Assistant Diane Hernandez-Ramirez, worked closely with the students to plan the event—pretty much standard protocol for FHSU.

But then, out of the kindness of her heart, Farheen Khan, Assistant Professor of Art and Design, read the email and immediately reached out to see how she could support the students.

Carol shared that the Muslim Student Organization was planning an educational event for the campus community about Ramadan, where the students would break their fast after the presentation and share a meal with those in attendance. Professor Khan immediately wanted to get involved and provide some food. Carol thought that was great.

What Carol did not know was "some food" turned out to be a feast! An entire table was filled with food, and she paid careful attention to how it was set out and presented. Carol said, "It was amazing!" The students were so excited and grateful for this act of kindness.

Professor Khan's support and commitment did not stop there; she continued to cook and support the students. She shared that her cultural values have always inspired her to care for others. "Sharing the Iftar feast with our community members and FHSU International Muslim students, who are away from their homes and observing fast, was an excellent way to foster a sense of connection & community."

Professor Khan also shared that organizing the meal took "good intention, patience, goal setting, time management, of course, cooking skills, and helping kids who were involved in planning and organizing. Everything was prepared on the same day; therefore, it was a complete process of planning, shopping, cooking, packing, transferring, presenting, and sharing." Ultimately, she planned and provided for four gatherings for our students over two consecutive weekends.

Carol was so taken by Professor Khan's kindness that she sent photos to several other administrators and me to share the joy and generosity of Farheen's kindness. It did not take long for many to comment and share.

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation asks us to "imagine a world where you can succeed by being nice, where we all pay it forward. Where people look out for each other." They then declare, "It all starts with an act."

Thank you, Farheen Khan, for your generous act of kindness. It is a gesture that will live in the hearts of many. Like many acts of kindness, I continue to observe that the sharing of this story throughout campus has taken on a "life of its own."

In the meantime, our ethic of care culture ripples throughout our campus, in both big and small ways, to communicate "you matter." Our strength of connectedness provides an abundance of opportunities to amplify learning, and by doing so, develops generations primed for success who look out for each other – the essence of an engaged citizen leader.

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