

Family Crisis Leads to Contact Tracing



SAMIRA BETHALA

When Samira Bethala's uncle tested positive for COVID-19 in Maryland, her family rushed to support him through prayer as he began to fear the worst.

They spoke through Zoom calls, and with each passing day Bethala saw hope fading away.

"You could see it in his eyes," she said. "He just didn't think a future was possible, and we did our best to cheer him up. People want to know that they're not alone."

But the unexpected occurred, and he fully recovered after nearly five weeks in a hospital connected to a respirator. The moment still had an impact on Bethala. Her family, a mix of physicians and nurses in Maryland, didn't understand resources that could help her uncle as he recovered. It was a learning process for them all.

Her experience is part of what inspired her to become a Community Engagement Specialist with the Test & Trace Corps, where she will connect with patients in the Bayside, Flushing and Clearview neighborhoods of Queens.

She recently moved from New Jersey to join her partner in Queens, and she immediately felt a connection. It's family-oriented, her neighbors were kind and caring and she found comfort in the diversity of immigrants. But when Coronavirus spread, friendly faces were hidden behind masks and people began to keep to themselves.

"Everything was busy before," she said, "but now nobody really walks in the streets anymore."

Bethala, who has a Masters in Public Health and Biomedical Sciences from Liberty University, heard of the Test & Trace Corps through an ad and immediately jumped at the opportunity. She brings to the job her public health expertise, along with experience in educating communities about infectious diseases.

After completion of the training program with the Corps, she will soon begin meeting clients and community members and building trust by being an effective listener and compassionate communicator. She's eager to become one of the friendly faces to help her community recover as people look to her for support during the crisis.

"I'm excited to plan out my day in the community to share what we can provide for people," she said. "I'm going to let them know that I'm here for them, just like my uncle. We're in this together."

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