

Staten Island filmmaker featured in virtual film festival focusing on mental health



A scene from 24-year-old filmmaker Naeela Djemil's project "Petrichor." The film will be included in the Community Access "Changing Minds Young Filmmaker" Festival April 9, 2021. (Courtesy of Naeela Djemil)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — A virtual film festival focusing on mental health will feature a Staten Island filmmaker next month.

Naeela Djemil, 24, of Mariners Harbor will be one of the filmmakers featured in the "Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival," taking place virtually April 9. Community Access, a New York City-based mental health nonprofit, will host the festival from 6 to 8 p.m., bringing local-grown filmmakers and projects together for viewers.

"I feel honored to be a part of this event and that my film received recognition," Djemil told the Advance/SILive.com. "I think that mental health is an important topic to normalize, and I hope that it inspires others to explore their mental health journey."

The film screenings begin at 6 p.m., followed by a question-and-answer session with the filmmakers moderated by Shadille Estepan of Lady Gaga's Born this Way Foundation.

Djemil's film, "Petrichor," was one of eight chosen from more than 700 submissions, according to the organization.

"Petrichor" is based on a young Muslim-American woman, Jiniya Azad, who tries to balance her struggle with depression and her social and religious life. The film follows Azad at the mosque, walking through New York City and details the messages she thinks internally through external conversation.

This film also was used as Djemil's thesis film for college based on mental health in the Muslim community. In

2019, she graduated the City College of New York with a bachelor's degree in cinematography and film/video production.

"While we will miss gathering in person, we are excited that our virtual festival will allow us to connect with a global audience at a time when connection and community are so needed," Cal Hedigan, CEO of Community Access, wrote in a release. "We are grateful to these talented filmmakers for sharing their stories and look forward to celebrating their important work."

HOW TO TUNE IN

The "Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival" will be streamed from 6 to 8 p.m. April 9.

Alongside Djemil, filmmakers Savannah Mears, Hannah Flores, Britney Bautista, Alisha Heng, Rebecca Anton, Ji Seon Lee and Kat Dolan will be featured during the event. The projects highlighted in the festival are based on a variety of topics, from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to mental illness and navigating emotional trauma.

The festival is free and open to the public, but tickets should be reserved ahead of time. Those who sign up to attend will receive a confirmation email with the log-in information for the event.

For more information, visit www.communityaccess.org/changingminds.