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RAISING AWARENESS: Singaporean Shereen Aziz-Williams (right) receives an award from Rt Hon Hazel Blears, MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, in London.

She's an unsung hero on a mission

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WHEN Singaporean Shereen Aziz-Williams wore the niqaab (veil) for a day last December to test people's reactions in Britain, the results shocked and scared her.

"Some people called me a ninja and other names," she said.

"But the most scary thing was when I passed a group of construction workers and one of them said, 'Next time I'll take a gun and shoot you'."

She was working on a social experiment as part of a BBC documentary White, Welsh and Muslim.

That's why she works so hard in raising awareness about Islamophobia. She wants to help those who might not be able to help themselves.

For that, the 26-year-old was awarded the Uthman Dan Fodio Award for Excellence in Community Development in London on 30 Mar.

She was the first Singaporean to be presented the award at the Muslim News Excellence Awards.

The award, in its ninth year, is given to unsung heroes of the Muslim community and recognises the best of Muslim contribution to British society.

When she moved to Wales in 2005, the Singapore Management University graduate was looking for a job in accountancy.

Her Welsh husband, Mr Omer Willams, a Muslim convert who works in the voluntary sector in Wales, suggested that she volunteer in the meantime.

In July 2006, she became a community development officer in the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations (Cemvo), an organisation which helps disadvantaged and minority communities in Britain.

Within one year, Mrs Williams was promoted to become the director of the council – the only female director in Cemvo and the youngest director appointed by the organisation in UK.

She helps to secure funding for various organisations across Wales, ranging from youth groups and women's groups.

Over the past two years, she has raised $3.3 million in grant funding for Muslim and other community organisations.

Opposing Islamophobia

She has also been on the forefront of opposing Islamophobia in Wales. She believes her Singaporean roots and growing up in an inter-racial community has allowed her to assimilate well into UK's diverse ethnic community and promoting inter-faith.

"I've never had to think about it in Singapore and I lived in harmony there all my life.

"So I know it is possible here in Wales as well and I'm just doing my part to achieve that."

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