



Special Feature: A Founder's Story

Meet Micheline Khan, founder of the first app in Canada focused on culturally responsive mental health support for BIPOC communities

by [Lisa Richmon](#)

Easier said than done is founder speak for following the advice you dispense.

Accidental entrepreneur, mental health champion, and ecologist, [Micheline Khan](#) designed the [Althea Therapy](#) app to connect culturally responsive mental healthcare providers with communities of color across Canada. She wanted to build trust and create a safe space for Blacks, Indigenous, and racialized groups who have experienced barriers to therapy that go way deeper than the mental health stigma endured by white communities.

The full-time ecologist-turned-founder says the 24/7 Founder/CEO struggle is real. "When you love what you're building and you're filling a mental health void for oppressed communities, you want to spend all your time doing it."

She gets that her commitment to her cause often contradicts what she preaches as a mental health advocate focused on wellness. Real talk about her own mental health journey doesn't ruffle her. It informs her why.

Raised by Trinidadian and Guyanese parents, Micheline grew up in Ontario in a home with a strong mental health foundation that provided support and information. Unlike the typical BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) experience, stigma and shame never prevented her from asking for help and working through issues and challenges.

Althea Therapy started as a project sparked by Micheline's interest in the pandemic's stress-stretching impact on BIPOC in Canada. "Communities of color are at greater risk but don't see themselves reflected in the existing mental healthcare platform," she says. "Black and Brown people are four times more likely to be admitted to a psychiatric unit and less likely to be offered psychotherapy over medication." Her goal was to normalize the ask for help – and create a safe space with a therapist who could relate culturally. To execute her vision, she built a culturally robust platform that truly reflects and attracts individuals who have been discriminated against and excluded from the current delivery system.

"The app was just a project until I showed it to a friend who stared me dead in the eye and said how important and necessary this work is. 'The world needs this. It can't be your secret. You have to put this out there.' So that's what I did."

If therapy is like dating, and therapist chemistry is the greatest indicator of future success, you want someone who gets you. "Opening up to a therapist who shares a common cultural background and understands concepts such as microaggressions and racial prejudice can make clients feel more empowered, says Micheline. "You don't have to spend so much time backing up to explain every nuance and issue. In therapy, you need someone who understands the different layers of identity. It's so important to be able to address those issues in a safe space."

From a user experience perspective, Micheline says she's grateful for the positive feedback on the app's value connecting individuals with a hybrid intersectional identity and talking about the layers of identity and culture. It's so important to have professionals on the platform who are culturally intuitive and know how to address patients' true selves. It's also equally affirming for the therapists to be validated while serving their unique communities.

"I built this for people across Canada because I'm Canadian and I know my community best. I see the same issues reflected in different countries so perhaps one day we will scale Althea Therapy to serve people globally."

Micheline recently entered and won the pitch event for The GUILD's [GUILD Academy](#), an 8-week pre-accelerator program to help entrepreneurs launch a startup.

"The Fourth Floor has so many advisors who are very strong with strategic marketing and sales. What I need to move forward and build this out in the workplace is a strategic partner or advisor who can help with sales and marketing. I'm not tied to someone in a particular industry. It's more about what values we share and what they're willing to do for their communities.

Being a founder (and full-time ecologist) forces me to set boundaries on my time and energy. When I don't comply, I get a harsh reminder or a little nudge, like losing my voice just two weeks before I fly home to Canada for Christmas!

Members of the female-founders club know that your private life can take a hit too and before you know it, you're back 'on the couch.'

"There's this feedback loop of euphoria and crashing depression, like 'what am I doing here?' It takes time and experience, embracing the highs and lows, not letting them take away your motivation. Being prepared for the full range of emotions helps me stay the course."

We're thrilled to count Micheline as a member of The Fourth Floor. Please reach out to her if you can support her on her journey.