ANNUAL REPORT
AUGUST 2020 - JULY 2021

Laal provides resources Bengali womxn need to live healthy, engaged, joyful lives
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A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

There is no doubt that 2021 was an intense, difficult year for everyone. For myself, it was a year of immense personal and professional growth, and realizations propelled by a continuously changing environment.

What I have learned is to lead with joy, radical care, and transparency, but also to create a space for new ideas, co-leadership, and vulnerability. It is revolutionary to take care of our health, each other, our community members, and to somehow find time to prioritize our individual joy. We have to move past hustle culture especially in the nonprofit sector, past productivity and towards collective, community healing and rest. In an economy, where the work we do as women, immigrants, undocumented folks is largely unaccounted for, Laal keeps pioneering to change that narrative.

The amount of growth we have experienced in just three years is phenomenal. According to Forbes, 40% of nonprofits fail within their first year, 70% of nonprofits fail within the start-up phase and less than 9% of funding is awarded to women of color founders. What started as a project with less than $3,000 has become a thriving non-profit with a current budget of $580,000. Laal has defied and continues to defy the odds.

In 2022, we plan to launch our Reproductive Justice Curriculum in partnership with the Midwifery Clinic at The North Central Bronx Hospital. We will be conducting Needs-Based Assessments in the summer of 2022 in Parkchester and the Grand Concourse, expanding Laal’s services and going Bronx-wide! Laal is also publishing our first journal article about our preliminary findings from Monoshik Shastho, Laal’s Mental Health Initiative, and a Census Report to break down the statistics about the Bengali/Bangladeshi community in the Bronx.

To my staff, board, funders, partners, supporters, and especially the Laal womxn, as we grow, I hope you all know, together in community, we will continue to be Laal.

Sanjana Khan, (she/they)
Co-Founder and Executive Director of Laal
OUR JOURNEY

Fall 2018
Sanjana & Ayesha meet at The Bronx Museum. Laal files to become a 501(c)(3).

Winter 2018-19
Co-founders each invest $750 to open a bank account for Laal. Laal launches their website & social media. Laal has their first site visit for NYF.

Spring 2019
Laal conducts a Needs-Based Assessment, surveying over 200 women in Norwood.

Fall 2019
SABANY awards Laal a grant for $5,000. Laal Sheeth fundraiser raised $6,500. Pilot programs launched.

Summer 2019
The Citizens Committee awards Laal’s first grant of $2,700. Laal Visits fundraiser launched, successfully raising $52,000.

Winter 2019-20
A second site visit was conducted and the 1st 5-year funding was secured from NYF. 72 women became members after participating in 7 weeks of ESL & Wellness. Next round of classes started in January with 37 new registrants.
Summer 2020
Laal’s first Board is established. COVID-19 relief fund supports 54 families during the pandemic. Second 5-year funding secured from New York Women’s Foundation. Laal X is launched.

Fall 2020

Spring 2021
Launch of Women’s Support Group & Community Garden. Community members register to get vaccinated.

Winter 2020-21
Mental Health Fundraiser launched, raising over $15,000. The third food pantry is held and community COVID-19 testing becomes available onsite.

Summer 2021
Laal Baari acquired! Laal now has 3 full-time employees with health, dental & 401K benefits, in addition to 9 part-time staff & 6 consultants.

Fall 2021
ESL, Yoga and Belly X classes resume at the Laal Baari in addition to study halls & workshops.

Spring 2020
ADAPTING TO CHANGING TIMES

COVID-19 undeniably changed our community. Even though many are “essential workers”, community members lacked access to information, lived in close quarters and experienced spikes in mental health issues. Across the board, we faced higher rates of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths. In the 10467 zip code, 1 out of 189 people died from COVID-19.

At the same time, the pandemic shined a light on the Bangladeshi women of Norwood, the Bronx. Through the difficult times, our community came together to support each other. Laal saw a 15% increase in membership and a renewed commitment to its programs.

1 out of every 6 people was diagnosed with COVID-19 in the zip code 10467

Source: Laal Mental Health Survey 2021

HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME?

- 20% NO CHANGE
- 29% SEVERELY
- 18% MILDLY
- 33% MODERATELY
ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

COVID-19 wrecked our community, a time that was isolating, financially straining and rife with misinformation. In response, Laal mobilized community resources. Holding food pantries, outreach events, information sessions, vaccination and testing sites were some of the ways we showed up for our Norwood community members. Through Laal’s efforts, we were able to reach over 2,000 individuals.

Between March and July 2020, Laal spent over $25,000 for monthly staple Bengali and Halal groceries to 2,800 individuals and distributed $54,000 in direct cash aid to our undocumented community members.
TAKING CARE OF OUR MENTAL HEALTH

There is almost no community led, community focused data about the Mental Health status of the Bangladeshi community in NYC. Our Mental Health Initiative looks at existing mental health conditions and the impact of COVID19.

As a trusted community resource, Laal is working to lessen the stigma around mental health. At the moment, there is limited access to mental health programs and minimal community engagement due to a lack of trust and culturally nuanced materials.

The preliminary results report for the initiative is set to be published in 2022. Additionally, Laal hopes to hire a full-time licensed, culturally competent mental health counselor and publish a journal article.

MENTAL HEALTH BROCHURE
During the pandemic, Laal began the conversation on mental health and learned that language and cultural barriers prevented community members from advocating for themselves. In partnership with the Bengali Mental Health Movement, Laal created a culturally nuanced brochure that spoke to the unique needs of our community.

650+ brochures distributed

Manoshik Shastho Fundraiser
February 2021 - March 2021

6 Weeks

Raised
$15,273

Laal has additionally secured
$35,000 in funding
There is nothing more powerful than voicing our needs to our elected officials. During Laal’s District 11 Candidate Debate for City Council, 2 Laal womxn asked questions around housing and support for smaller businesses. One of Laal’s goals is to increase civic participation through representation of Bangladeshi womxn in local and citywide elections.

Laal is also a key member of the Bronx People’s Policy Platform, a coalition of 24 grassroots organizations to address inequities in the Bronx using a framework of racial justice and economic democracy.

City Council 11 Candidate Forum

Rumana’s question: Would you support Intro 2050 - making the Right to Counsel accessible city-wide as a short term solution and what are your long-term strategies that you would introduce as a City Council member to address the housing crisis not just within the district but across NYC?

Rehana’s question: As council-member, what specifically will you do to ensure that business owners like me grow and thrive? And will you work to ensure commercial tenants rights and provide protections against displacement? If so, how?

9 forums with Bronx & citywide candidates

560 participants joined launch event

3k+ people watched on Facebook Live

250k+ Bronxites reached via phone banking
OUR RADICAL APPROACH TO ESL

Laal continued programming by offering 4 levels of remote ESL over WhatsApp. Over 10 weeks, 45 students participated in small classes of 2-4 students for personalized mentorship and teaching. However, this transition had its own challenges.

- **Technology**: Womxn had difficulty navigating digital platforms, accessing the internet, highlighting the need for digital literacy.
- **Cost**: Remote ESL courses required 6 instructors as compared to 2 instructors in-person, making them significantly more expensive.
- **Lack of Privacy**: Womxn had no privacy for lessons as most lived in multi-generational, overcrowded households where they shared a room with others during remote ESL classes.

WHY DID WE CHOOSE WHATSAPP?

65% of womxn said Whatsapp was the best form of communication for class, compared to less than 10% who said Zoom.

Only 35% of womxn were familiar or had access to a computer, while 93% had access to a phone.

8 UNITS OF POLICY-FOCUSED CURRICULUM

- **HEALTH** by Hamida Chumpa
- **EDUCATION** by Tania Wahhud
- **GEOGRAPHY** by Alexandra Sanyal
- **IMMIGRATION** by Mithila Farin
- **FINANCES** by Shireen Shams
- **JUSTICE & SAFETY** by Priyana Hannan
- **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE** by Shahela Begum
- **VOTING** by Priyana Hannan & Shahela Begum

Laal’s participation in the Bronx People’s Policy Platform led to the ESL curriculum being designed around community issues using a socio-justice framework, developed by our staff.
of womxn did not leave their household for a majority of the year

of womxn left their homes on average 1-2 times per week for errands

of womxn did not engage in any form of exercise from March 2020 to re-opening in October 2021

WELLNESS

Laal continued wellness classes and workshops by holding them outdoors. Holding socially distanced workshops was an opportunity for womxn to socialize and maintain physical activity during a period of isolation. However, some womxn felt uncomfortable practicing yoga and dance in public parks. The program highlighted a need for a safe, inclusive physical space. In the summer of 2021, Laal Baari was acquired!

3 Wellness Workshops a week for 10 weeks

(Laal Mental Health Survey, 2021)
When Laal was founded, there was no physical space for Bengali womxn in Norwood. Programming was based out of the recreation center at Oval Park. Laal hoped to secure a designated space within five years. Incredibly, in just two years since the organization was founded, Laal acquired the Laal Baari on June 1st 2021.

Laal Baari is located between Mosholu Parkway North and Bainbridge Avenue at the heart of Norwood. It serves as both an office and community center. It is equipped with four rooms for classes and office space, two bathrooms, a community kitchen, and gardening space for the womxn.

Having a physical space allows us to operate with more agency and create a safe haven where the womxn can reclaim their own space.
LAAL MOHILA SHOMITI: WOMXN’S SUPPORT GROUP
লাল মোহিলা সমিতি

Laal’s Mohila Shomiti was launched out of the need for Bangladeshi womxn to have a space to connect with each other in a safe, inclusive space. Led by the womxn, topics include health, education, housing, and gardening. Members feel empowered as they find solutions together, forge stronger relationships and share a collective vision for future programming.

62% of Bengali womxn spend over 8 hours alone

50% of womxn socialized less since the Covid-19 Pandemic

Source: Laal Needs Based Assessment, 2019
Source: Laal Mental Health Survey, 2020
LAAL BAGHAN: COMMUNITY GARDEN

As climate change refugees, Bangladeshi womxn carry generations of indigenous agrarian knowledge, yet do not have the space or resources to garden in Norwood. Laal Baghan was created in partnership with Friends of Moshulu Park in Spring 2021, and was Laal’s first in-person programming outside.

Over 20 Bengali womxn stepped into independently stewarding the garden space at Keeper’s House. Laal Baghan is led directly by Laal’s womxn as they build a resilient community.

65% of womxn gardened in Bangladesh

93% of vegetables grown are Bengali
Laal Baghan is based on principles of permaculture. By using stacking functions, the garden was able to maximize harvests. Laal members grew a cornucopia of produce specific to Bangladesh like bitter melon, red spinach, lima beans and zucchini. Alongside gardening, they also took field trips to local nature conservatorships and learned about climate justice issues in the Bronx.

Our program director, Shahela Begum, has a wealth of knowledge and holds a Master’s degree in Permaculture Design and Environmental Studies from NYU. Shahela created, executed and measured the impact of Laal Baghan.

Through Laal Baghan, we learned how impactful gardening is to our womxn. It not only connects them to Bengali tradition, but also allows them to create a new connection to their new home.
Launched in November 2020, Laal X is a worker-owned cooperative run by Bangladeshi womxn. Prior to the pandemic, many Bangladeshi womxn faced barriers to employment such as unstable working conditions and immigration status.

Laal X is an educational and economic tool that allows Bangladeshi womxn to remain financially sovereign. Three Bangladeshi womxn received a living wage to create masks from upcycled, South Asian cloth material. Each mask was beautifully embroidered with traditional nokshi katha stitches. In addition, each womxn received guidance on managing personal finances.

In just three days, Laal was able to sell 75 masks. Despite its initial success, Laal X was difficult to sustain through the pandemic. Due to limited capacity, funding and technical difficulties, the program was put on hold. Now with our new Laal Baari and expanded staff, Laal hopes to relaunch Laal X as an unique model of economic equity and sustainability.
GROWING TOGETHER AS A TEAM

While the pandemic posed enormous challenges, the team was able to expand to include 6 new staff members since 2020. During Spring 2021, Laal took a weekend retreat to Upstate, NY. At the retreat our team of 12 staff members vision boarded professional goals, cooked together, participated in yoga and meditation, hiked and feasted on food by the lake. Not only was this a rejuvenating experience for the team, but it was also an opportunity to share our collective vision for the future of Laal and create a deep sense of community within our team members.
BEING TOGETHER, IN COMMUNITY

On May 22nd 2021, Laal held its first Eid Picnic to celebrate the end of Ramadan. Held in Moshulu Park across from Laal Baari, this marked the first in-person event for many Laal members. Over 50 womxn across generations gathered, dressed in gorgeous sarees, salwar kameezes and burkas.

Each womxn shared their aspirations for the coming year while eating home cooked dishes. Laal’s Eid Picnic celebrated the resilience of our womxn with friends, family and community.
DATA INITIATIVES

Grouping Asians as a monolith obscures the distinct barriers faced by our community. Bangladeshi womxn in particular face high rates of gender based violence, health disparities, mental health illness, exacerbated by longstanding systems of oppression. Laal is collecting some of the first data on Bangladeshi womxn in the United States. From 2020-2021, Laal conducted eight surveys. This data not only helps Laal understand the real-time conditions, but also assists in designing programs that meet community needs.

New Intake Form
18 new referrals to Laal

ESL Diagnostic Exam
97% of womxn wanted to take ESL classes

Mental Health Survey
~80% of womxn reported feeling sad or down

Gardening Experience Survey
60% of womxn are from a rural area

Food Insecurity Survey
78% of womxn reported difficulty paying for groceries

Citizenship Survey
67% of womxn are naturalized citizens

Womxn’s Group Interest Survey
76% of womxn expressed interest

Demographic Survey
Counted 554 individuals for the Census
LAAL IN THE MEDIA

Through Laal’s Instagram, website, annual report and other platforms, we have the honor of sharing our women’s journeys. From documenting their needs to showcasing their achievements, Laal is rooted in the Bengali community, in creating a space by us, for us. Laal created a social media documentary series which focused on Laal X, Made in the BX and Bengali Norwood. Our docuseries reached over 6,000 views.

The Fuller Project

‘We Have to Survive’: Meet NYC Immigrant Women Fighting for Their Communities During the Pandemic

News 12

On a positive note: Incredible women in the tri-state area

Norwood News

Norwood: Bengali Women Celebrate the End of Ramadan

SOCIAL MEDIA

FOLLOWERS  
+49%  +1665%

REACH  
+20%  +3796%

#METOO

In summer 2020, the #MeToo movement called the Bangladeshi/Bengali diaspora community into action. As countless testimonies washed over the internet, Laal showed our unwavering support through sharing personal stories on our Instagram.

- 12 board and staff members publicly shared stories
- 1,595 accounts were reached
Laal continued a rapid expansion in Fiscal Year 2021 (August 2020 - July 2021), and succeeded in obtaining new and recurring grants from major foundations, along with more contributions from generous individual donors.

Revenues increased 73%, from **$150,000 to $259,000**. Laal put that money to work by expanding the quality and quantity of its programming (including new programs like the Pop-Up Food Pantry and Mental Health Initiative), along with leasing its first physical location, Laal Baari. Laal’s operations have stayed efficient; with 89% of expenses going to programming and just 11% spent on administration.

Looking forward, Laal has already obtained several key grants in FY 2022 that will help reach the goal of more than doubling the programming budget in the year ahead.
We express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the following foundations and organizations for their unwavering commitment to Laul. Without your support, Laul could not provide vital resources, direct services and leadership opportunities for its staff and womxn.

- New York Foundation
- New York Women's Foundation
- Bronx Community Foundation
- CACF CCNSF
- Citizens Committee for New York
- Mosholu Preservation Corporation
- NYC Civic Impact
- Asian American Impact Fund
- Hyde and Watson Foundation
- Bronx Council On the Arts
- Jerome Gunhill BID
- Montefiore Medical Group
A
A, Maheeb
Abbas, Sayeeda
Abedin, Lubna
Abraham, Jagan
Abraham, Josh
Adagun, Idera
Ademinu, Aluna
Afrin, Nafisa
Ahad, Mehjib
Ahamed, Tasnia
Ahmad, Ali
Ahmad, Nadeem
Ahmad, Nadia
Ahmad, Musaddeque
Ahmad, Shamial
Ahmed, Afsan
Ahmed, Fabeeca
Ahmed, Farid
Ahmed, Firoz
Ahmed, Marystella
Ahmed, Manir
Ahmed, Nazia
Ahmed, Neeta
Ahmed, Omar
Ahmed, Priom
Ahmed, Riya
Ahmed, Sadia
Ahmed, Sophia
Ahmed, Tahina
Ahmed, Tammam
Ahmed, Tasnia
Ahmed, Yasmeen
Ahsan, Atyah
Ahsan, Sarah
Ahsan, Tamanna
Aishe, Ishrat
Ajjabde, Ayodele
Akbar, Tahmin
Akhtar, Ayesha
Akhtar, Favad
Akhtar, Naswhah
Akhter, Shreena
Amin, Asseer
Amin, Eida
Amin, Shreena
Aminullah, Humna
Anjum, Aisha
Anjum, Malia
Anonymous, A
Antal, Chandni
Anwar, Mansoor
Aquino, Shelissa
Araujo, Aabilemmis
Arbel, Doreen
Arthur, Alexa
Asch, Ariel
Ashraf, Syed
Ashton, Izzy
Atew, Ali
Atif, Saadia
Alam, Youmna
Alberti, Paul
Ali, Shaheen
Almukhaini, Nouf
Alnasur, Saif
Amin, Asseer
Amin, Eida
Amin, Shreena
Aminullah, Humna
Angelson, Jessica & John
Anjum, Aisha
Anjum, Malia
Anonymous, A
Antal, Chandni
Anwar, Mansoor
Aquino, Shelissa
Araujo, Aabilemmis
Arbel, Doreen
Arthur, Alexa
Asch, Ariel
Ashraf, Syed
Ashton, Izzy
Atew, Ali
Atif, Saadia
Awad, Ihab
Azad, Aucal
Azeem, Fareen
Azhari, Aly
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B. Jara
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Bacchus, Farial
Badiuzzaman, Meraj
Bae, Hannah
Bai, Valerie
Baidya, Shash
Baig, Eimad
Bakht, Mehrin
Banavar, Amiti
Bangladesh Development Project
Banu, Farda
Banu, Tazin
Bapps, Mo
Barham, Elena
Bari, Mohamad
Barker, Leah
Barney, Barney
Baten-Tschank, Nasreen
Batista, Cynthia
Bauduin, Luisa
Bearisto, Shanna
Beauchemin, Marie
Becker, Emily
Bedminster, Melissa
Begum, Asma
Begum, Delwar
Begum, Momina
Begum, Nur
Begum, Rohima
Begum, Rupa
Begum, Shaheela
Begum-Yafi, Hamida
Bera, Suraj
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Bhargava, Arian
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Bhatta, Krishna
Bhattacharya, Nilanjana
Bhattacharya, Subarna
Bhuyan, Nadera
Bhuyan, Samantha
Bid, Jerome
Biederman, Emily
An immense thanks to our donors for pledging their support and believing in Laal’s work since its inception. Each and every single donor has been instrumental in the success of Laal’s second year of programming.

Laal is and always will be a grassroots organization, rooted in the community. The donors reflect the collective effort it takes as a community to succeed because it takes a village. We would like to express our deepest gratitude, love, and appreciation to all of the individuals for their unwavering commitment to Laal’s mission.

Together we are Laal.

Bonner, Cleveland
BoNY
Bravo, Ischia
Brecher-Haimson, Jeremy
Briskman, Laura
Bronx Bangladesh Women's Association
Bryant, Jessica
Brys, Martin
Budhu, Ryan
Burch, Lorraine
Bushra, Badrunnesa
Butler, Luz

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Chowdhury, Ifi
Chowdhury, Junaina
Chowdhury, Manal
Chowdhury, Naima
Chowdhury, Nuzhat
Chowdhury, Raffin
Chowdhury, Safa
Chowdhury, Sirazum

Chowdhury, Saizid
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Chowdhury, Tania
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Davies, Abigail
Davis, Brandon
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De Martini, Sabrina
Deane, Eric
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Delacruz, Alfonso
Dellenbach, Eryka
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Farraj, Mohammad
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Ferdous, Taseen
Ferguson, Darien
Fernandez, Erika
Fernandez, Nathalia
Ferri, Robert
Fletcher, Nadia

G
Gadd, Laila
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Galvan, Lisa
Gandhi, Samir
Garnier, Brian
George, Jacob
Giglio, Rebeca
Giving Fund, The Blackbaud
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Gregory, Joseph
Grenier, Nicole
Groarke, Margaret
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Guggenheim, Marilyn

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Sanat, Biswapiya
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Shaikh, Maham
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Shams, Wasil
Sheikh, Jaffer
Sheth, Saiya
Shigir, Shahebano
Shimi, Shumona
Shlimovich, Miriam
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Siddiqui, Afshan
Siddiqui, Faizi
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Siddiqui, Raafeh
Siddiqui, Rayan
Siddiqui, Afshan
Siddiqui, Jamil
Siddiqui, Mahum
Sidker, Selvia
Silver, Bahini
Silver, Lynette
Singh, Kamal
Singh, Kamaruddin
Singh, Navjot
Singh, Ravi
Singh, Sehej
Singleton, Justice
Slattery, Will
Snouffer, Karen
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Staunagitis, Emily
Stein, Erin
Sterling, Johanne
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Swadhin, Swapna
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Tabibzada, Sarah
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Zakat, Laal
Zakat, Local
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Zaman, Binita
Zaman, Moumita
Zaman, Roniya
Zambito, Julia
Zeb, Zehan
Zee, Kristy
Zerin, Ihsat
Zubair, Ayyan
Zurl, Sam
"In Bangladesh, I used to stay home and take care of my family. Now, through Laal, I can do anything. I am sitting in front of you interviewing, oh my god!"
- Rumana Sayeed, Laal Womxn

"For 30 years, I have not been able to make time for myself. When I immigrated to the US, I forgot about myself. I was just fighting to live and survive in this country. Thanks to Laal, I am doing yoga again, I used to be an athlete, I always practiced running and jumping. It's all possible again because of Laal. Also, when I spoke at the forum for District 11 it was one of the best things in my life."
- Rehana Khan, Laal Womxn
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