



ANNUAL REPORT

AUGUST 2020 - JULY 2021

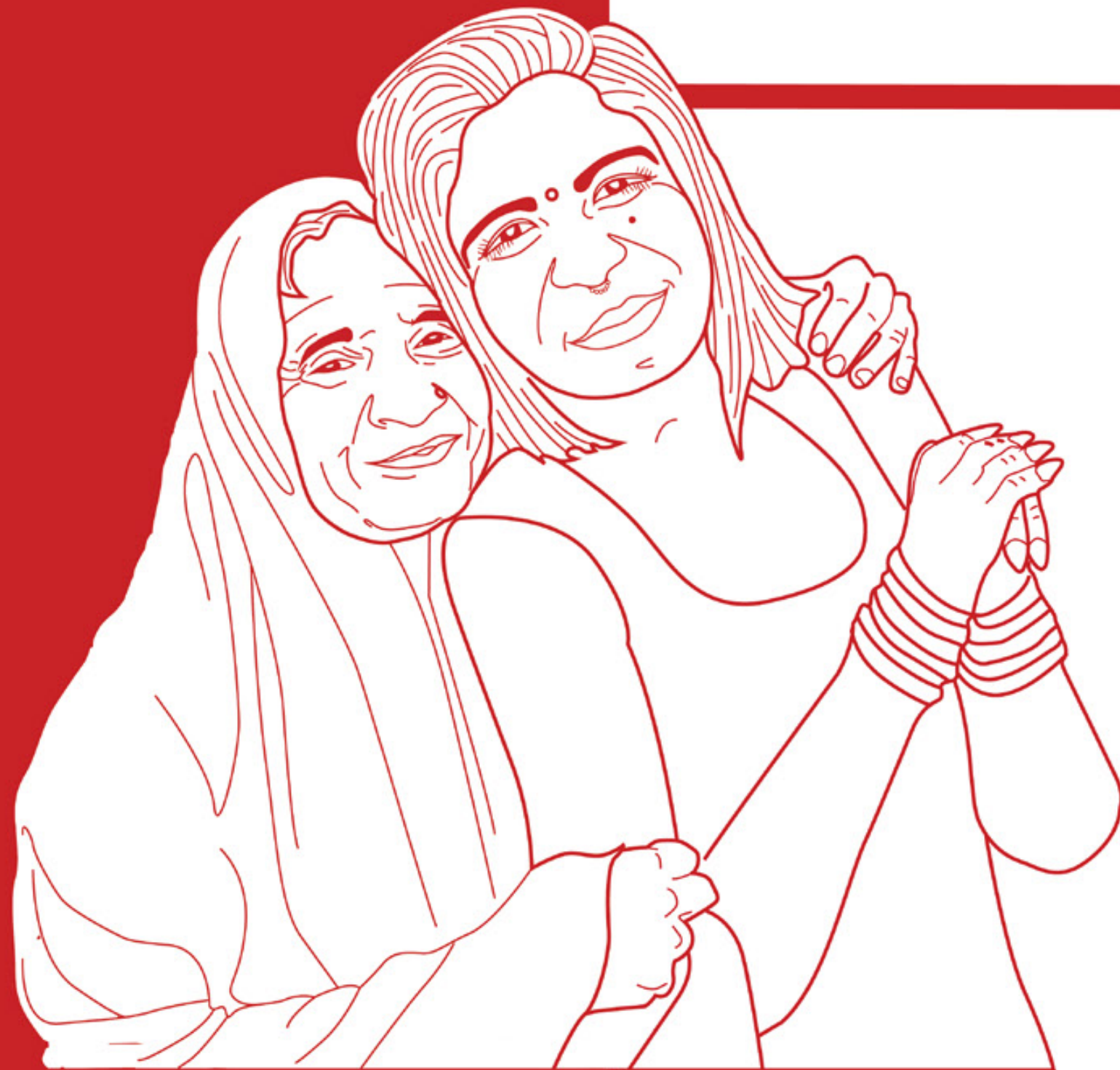
**Laal provides resources Bengali womxn need to
live healthy, engaged, joyful lives**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Note from Our Director.....	2
Our Journey.....	3
Adapting to Changing Times.....	5
Rooted in Community.....	6
Taking Care of Our Mental Health.....	7
Finding Our Voice.....	8
Our Radical Approach to ESL.....	9
Wellness.....	10
Laal Baari.....	11
Laal Mohila Shomiti: Womxn's Support Group (লাল মোহিলা সমিতি)....	12
Laal Baghan: Laal's Community Garden (লাল বাগান).....	13
Laal X.....	15
Growing Together as a Team.....	16
Being Together in Community.....	17
Data Initiatives.....	18
Laal in the Media.....	19
Financial Statement.....	20
Our Funders.....	21
A Note to Laal Donors.....	22
Team Credits.....	28



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 womxn, 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

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.

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

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

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

Summer 2019
The Citizens Committee awards Laal's first grant of \$2,700. Laal Grishmo fundraiser launched, successfully raising \$12,500.

Winter 2019-20
A second site visit was conducted and the 1st 5-year funding was secured from NYF. 72 womxn become members after participating in 7 weeks of ESL & Wellness. Next round of classes started in January with 37 new registrations.





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
First Annual Report published. Board approved budget. Classes pivot to online and outdoors. ESL focuses on American Government, voting, and womxn's rights.

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

E. 204th

2nd Floor Discount Items

CLARYS
UNISEX SALON

SHAHJALAL GROCERY & VARIETY INC

Zam Zam Drugs
PHARMACY

STAR FURNITURE

Dhaka SUPERMARKET
& HALAL MEATS

Spring 2020
COVID-19 hits. Census Initiative & Demographic Survey launched.

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 BollyX classes resume at the Laal Baari in addition to study halls & workshops.

ADAPTING TO CHANGING TIMES

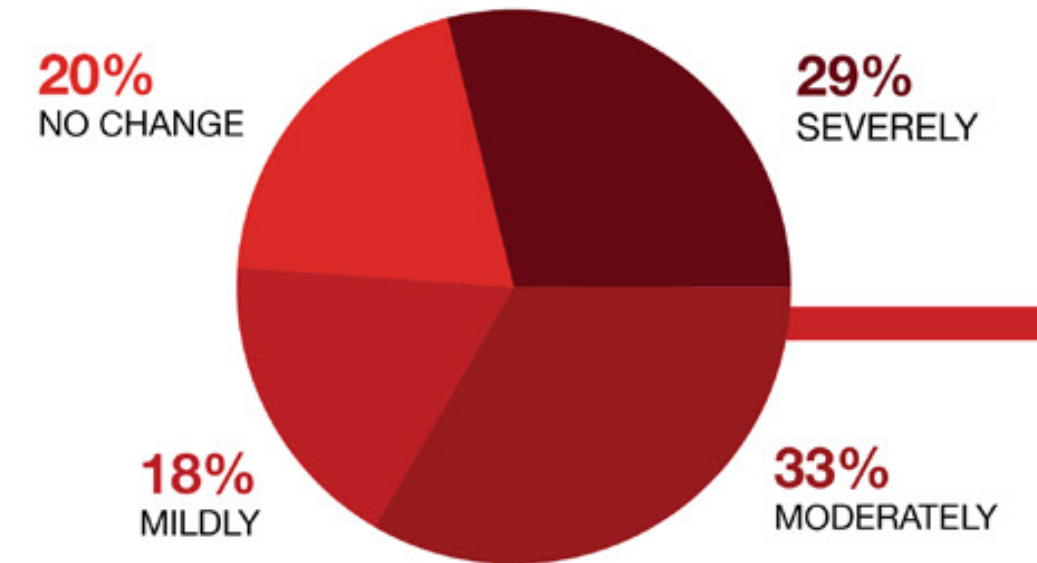
COVID-19 undeniably changed our community. Even though many are “essential workers”, community members lacked access to information, lived in close quarters and experienced spikes in mental health issues. Across the board, we faced higher rates of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths. In the 10467 zip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

At the same time, the pandemic shined a light on the Bangladeshi womxn 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.

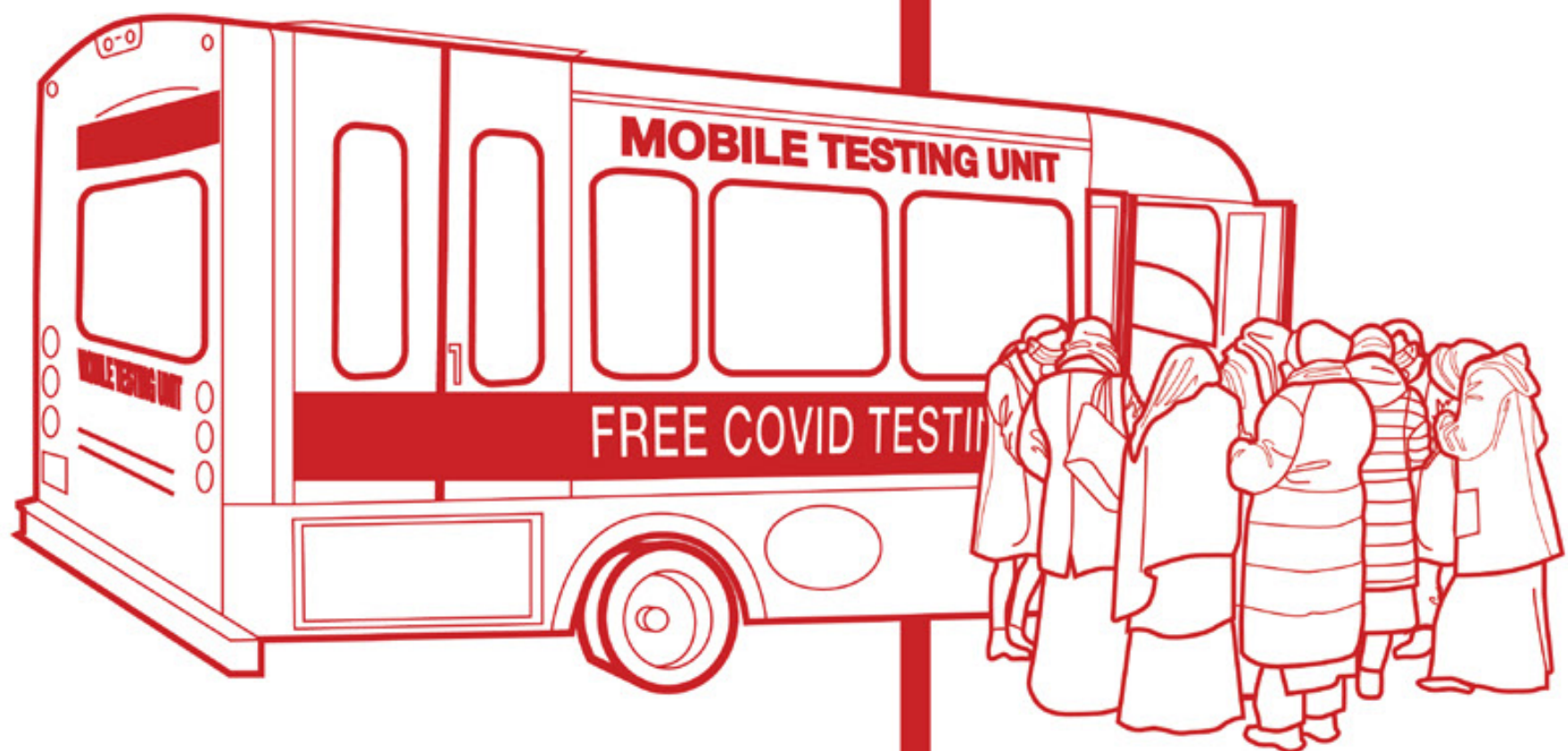
1 out of every 6 people was diagnosed with COVID-19 in the zip code 10467



HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME?



Source: Laal Mental Health Survey 2021



This testing was provided through a partnership from NYC's Test and Trace during which a testing van was onsite parked in front of Dhaka Discount Grocery, making it accessible for the community.

2,800
individuals received
food aid

2

Test & Trace sites

3

food pantries

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

COVID19 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



FINDING OUR VOICE

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 city-wide 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.

9
forums with
Bronx & city-
wide candidates

560
participants
joined launch
event



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?*

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 Wahdud
- **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 social 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

(Laal Mental Health Survey, 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

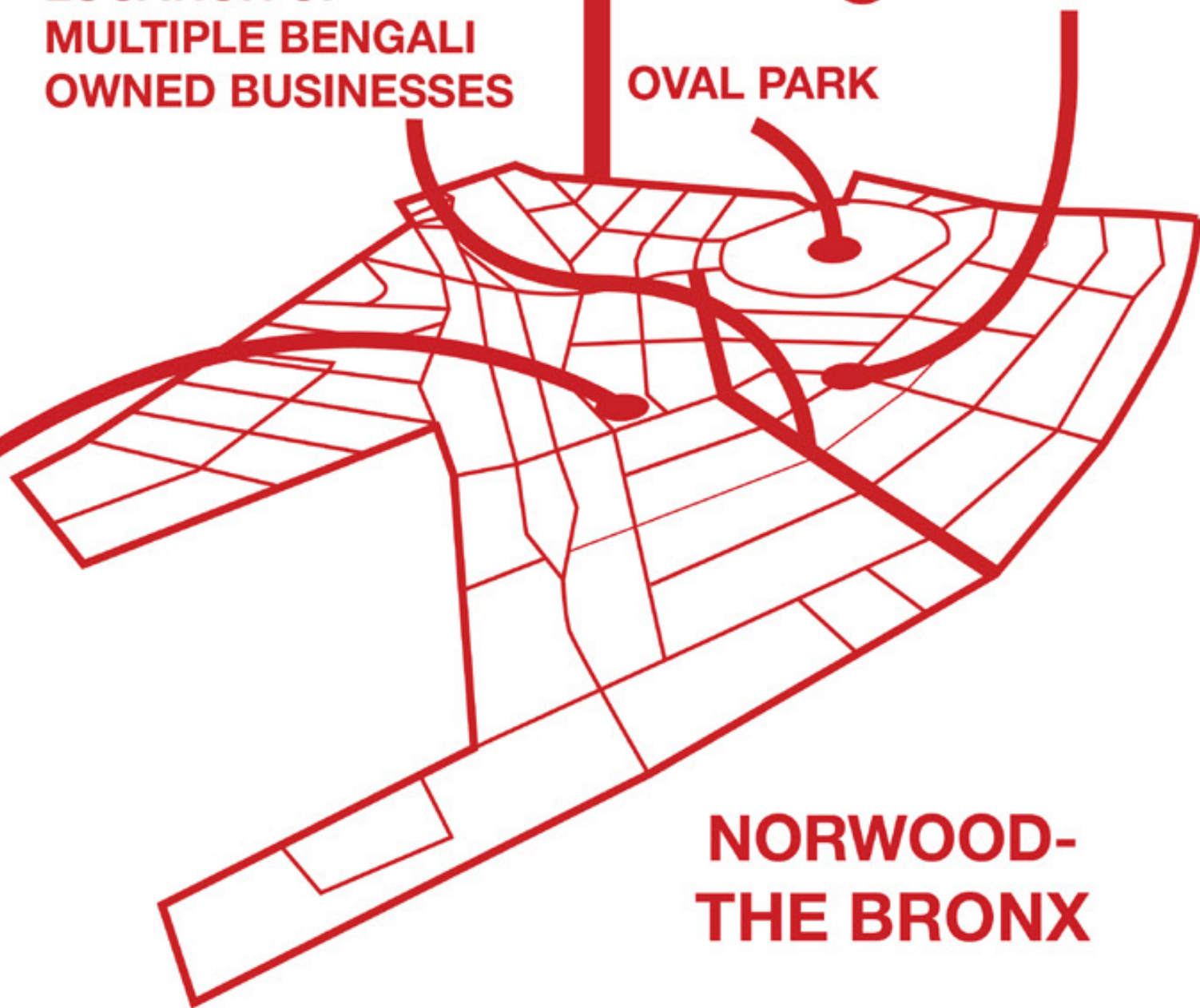
LAAL BAARI



**EAST 204th St:
LOCATION OF
MULTIPLE BENGALI
OWNED BUSINESSES**

**NORWOOD-205 ST
D SUBWAY STOP**

OVAL PARK



**NORWOOD-
THE BRONX**

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

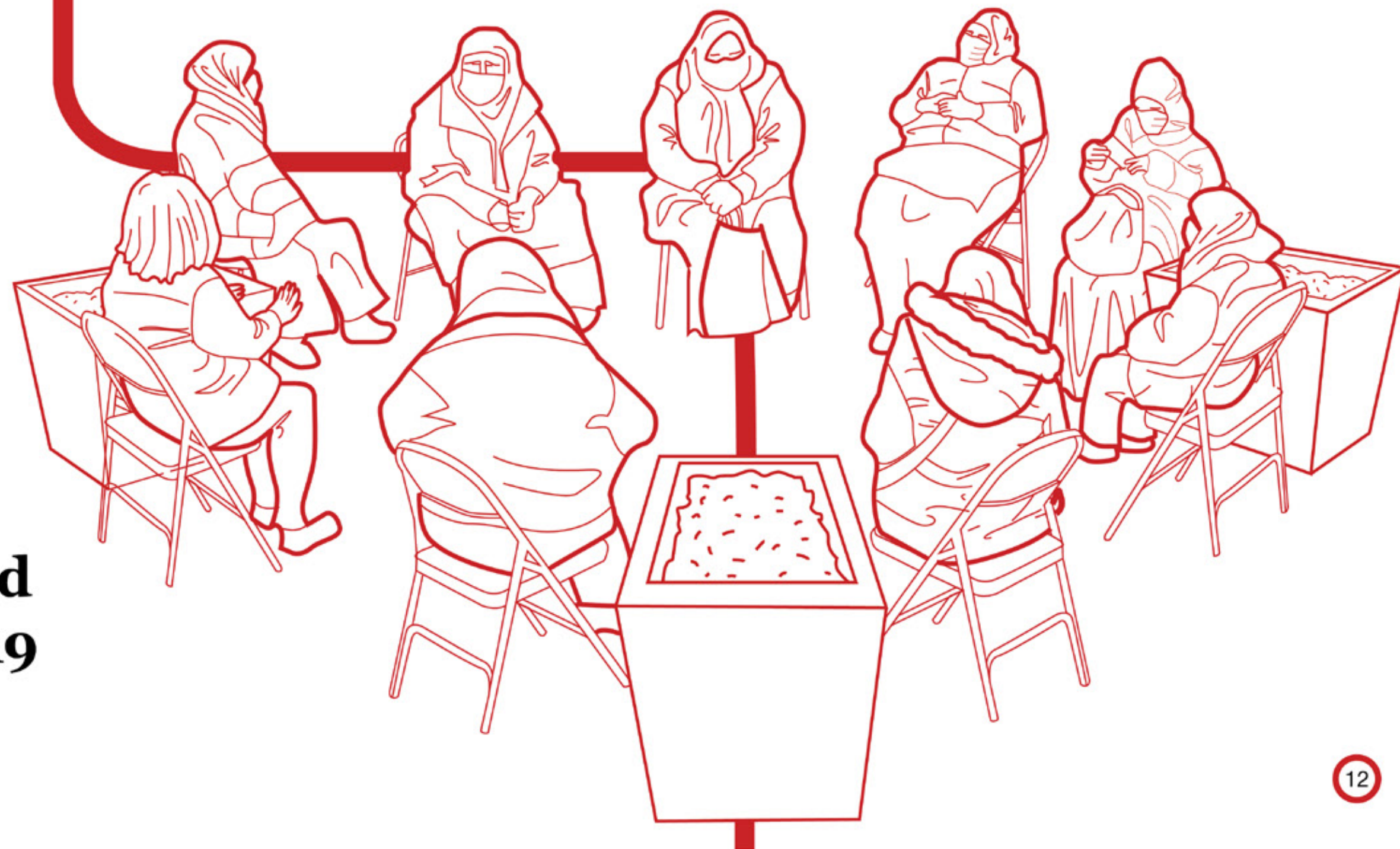
Laal's Mohila Shomiti was launched out of the need for Bangladeshi womxn to have a space to connect with each other in a safe, inclusive space. Led by the womxn, topics include health, education, housing, and gardening. Members feel empowered as they find solutions together, forge stronger relationships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

62%
of Bengali womxn
spend over 8 hours
alone

Source: Laal Needs Based Assessment, 2019

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

Source: Laal Mental Health Survey, 2021



LAAL BAGHAN: COMMUNITY GARDEN

লাল বাগান

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 Mosholu 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.



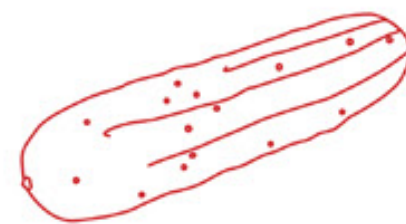
lau



bitter melon



parsley



cucumber



lima beans



pumpkin



laal saag



naga morich



spinach



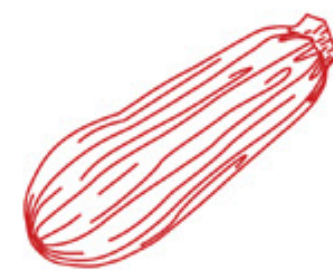
eggplant



mint



cilantro



squash



tomato

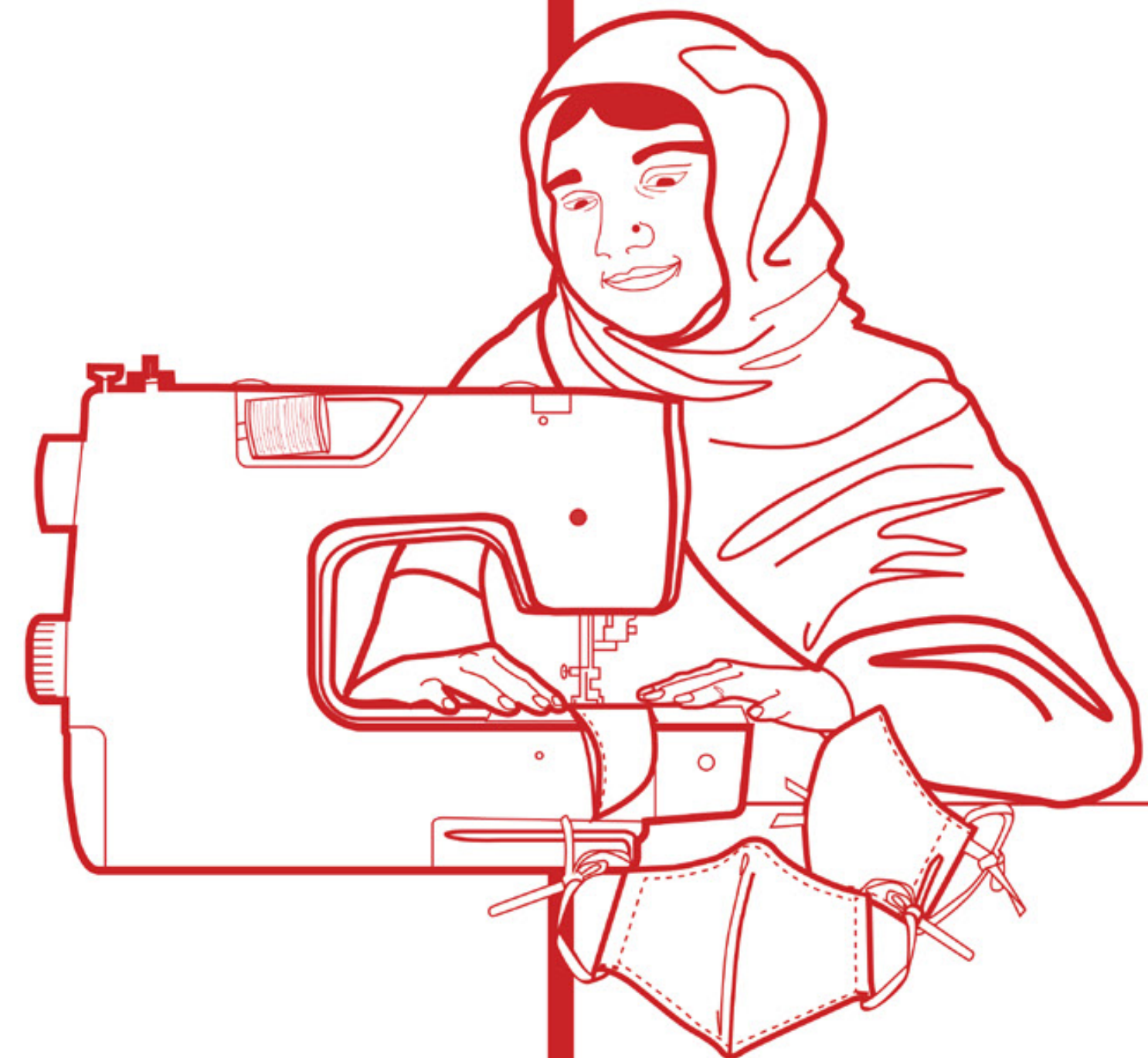
LAAL X

**75 up-cycled masks
sold in 3 days**

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 Mosholu 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

Mental Health Survey

~80% of womxn reported feeling sad or down

Food Insecurity Survey

78% of womxn reported difficulty paying for groceries

Womxn's Group Interest Survey

76% of womxn expressed interest

ESL Diagnostic Exam

97% of womxn wanted to take ESL classes

Gardening Experience Survey

60% of womxn are from a rural area

Citizenship Survey

67% of womxn are naturalized citizens

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 womxn'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.

News 12

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

Norwood News

**Norwood: Bengali Women
Celebrate the End of
Ramadan**

The Fuller Project

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

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.

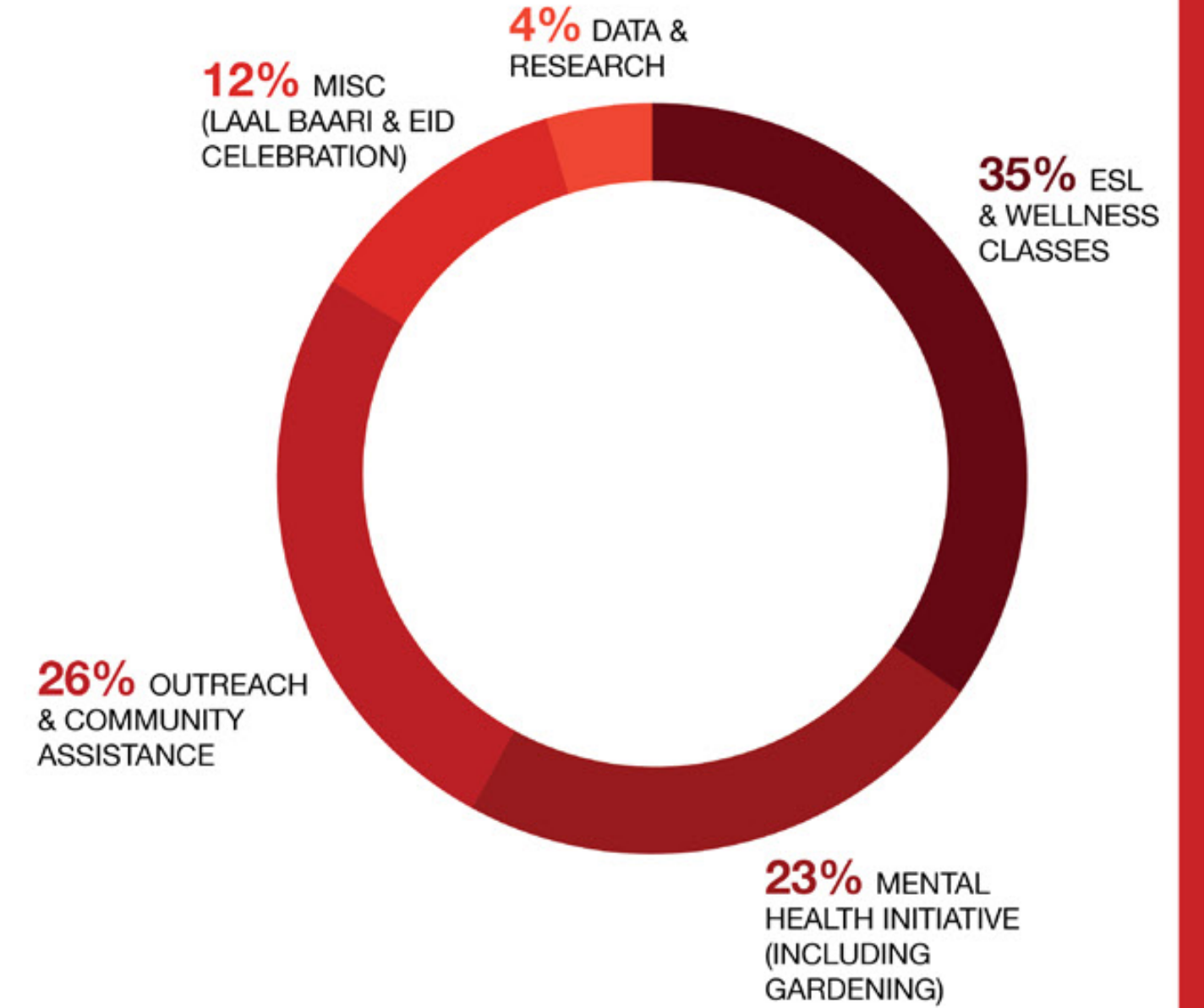
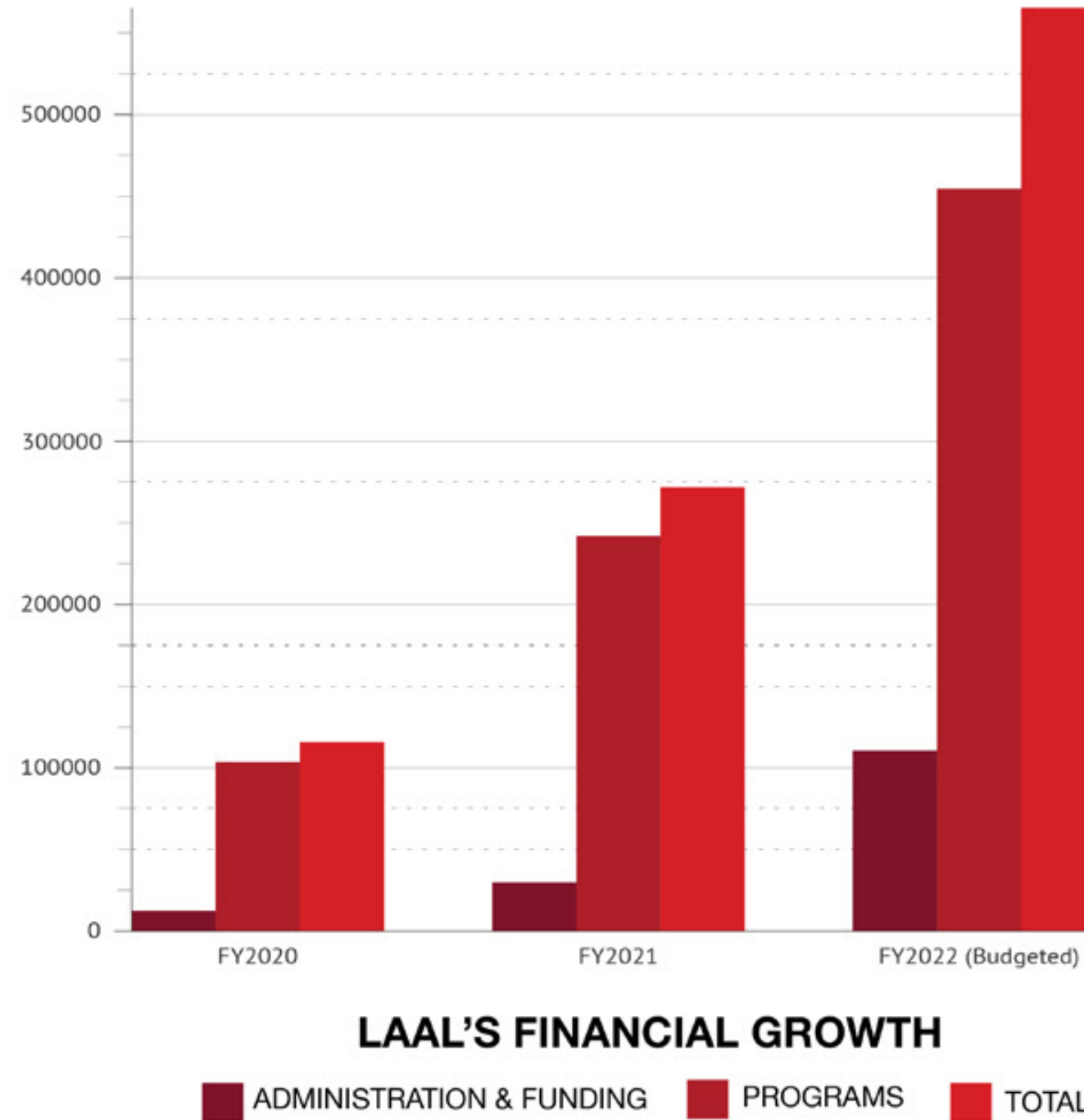
- 12 board and staff members publicly shared stories
- 1,595 accounts were reached

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

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.

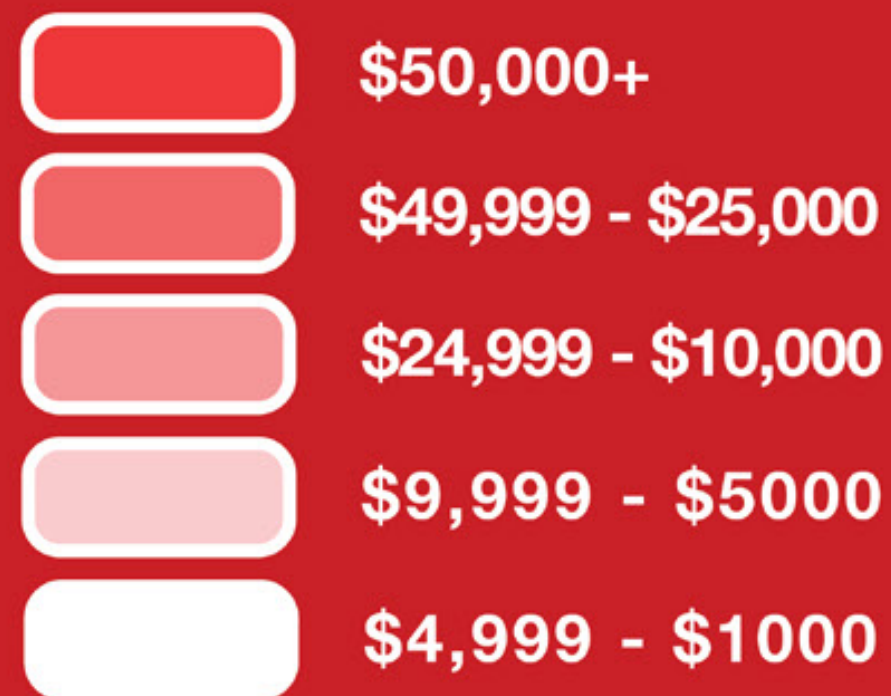
Revenues increased 73%, from **\$150,000 to \$259,000**. Laal put that money to work by expanding the quality and quantity of its programming (including new programs like the Pop-Up Food Pantry and Mental Health Initiative), along with leasing its first physical location, Laal Baari. Laal's operations 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.



FUNDERS

We express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the following foundations and organizations for their unwavering commitment to Laal. Without your support, Laal 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 NOTE TO LAAL DONORS

A

A, Maheeb
Abbas, Sayeeda
Abedin, Lubna
Abraham, Jagan
Abraham, Josh
Adagun, Idera
Ademasu, Aluna
Afrin, Nafisa
Ahad, Mehjbin
Ahamed, Tasnia
Ahmad, Ali
Ahmad, Nadeem
Ahmad, Nadia
Ahmad, Musaddeque
Ahmad, Shamial
Ahmed, Afsan
Ahmed, Fabeeha
Ahmed, Farid
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Ahmed, Munir
Ahmed, Nazia
Ahmed, Neeta
Ahmed, Omar
Ahmed, Priom
Ahmed, Riya

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Ahmed, Tahina
Ahmed, Tammam
Ahmed, Tasnia
Ahmed, Yasmeen
Ahsan, Atiyah
Ahsan, Sarah
Ahsan, Tamanna
Aishee, Ishrat
Ajibade, Ayodele
Akbar, Tahmina
Akhtar, Ayesha
Akhtar, Favad
Akhtar, Nashwah
Akhter, Naureen
Akter, Sherin
Alaie, Mariam
Al Ajmi, Rabab
Alam, Afreen
Alam, Ashfia
Alam, Bushra
Alam, Enary
Alam, Shahid
Alam, Shahibun
Alam, Shaiful
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Alam, Youmna
Alberti, Paul
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Amin, Shreena
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Anjum, Aisha
Anjum, Maliha
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Anwar, Mansoor
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Araujo, Abbilemnis
Arbel, Doreen
Arthur, Alexa
Asch, Ariel
Ashraf, Syed
Ashton, Izzy
Ateew, Ali
Atif, Saadia

Awad, Ihab
Azad, Auchal
Azeem, Fareen
Azhar, Aly
Azim, Shahrin

B
B, Jara
B, Rukshana
Bacchus, Fariel
Badiuzzaman, Meraj
Bae, Hannah
Bai, Valerie
Baidya, Shash
Baig, Eimad
Bakht, Mehrin
Banavar, Amiti
Bangladesh Development
Project
Banu, Farda
Banu, Tazin
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Begum, Momina
Begum, Nur
Begum, Rohima
Begum, Rupa
Begum, Shahela
Begum-Yafi, Hamida
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Bhatta, Krishna
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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

C

C, Nav
Cadena, Alyson
Cajamarca, Erica
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Celin, Steve
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Eyre, Makoto

F

Faisal, Mohammed
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Farraj, Mohammad
Ferdous, Annie
Ferdous, Taseen
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**"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**

**"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**



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