



# Laal

**Laal provides programs and resources so that Bengali women can live healthy, engaged, joyful lives.**

**Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Annual Report**

# Laal means red in Bangla.

Laal symbolizes the mark of menstruation, the alta Bengali womxn use to adorn themselves; the red saree Bengali womxn wear on their wedding day; the red bindi for which Bengali womxn are famous; and the red sun which is in the center of the Bangladeshi flag.

We chose this as our name because it serves as a reminder of the strength and resilience of Bengali womxn.

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# Note about the Founders

Sanjana Khan and Ayesha Akhtar met on a hot humid summer night in 2018. Within the first few minutes of meeting, they discovered that they both had attended the same elementary school (P.S. 56), grew up just a block apart in Norwood, the Bronx, and that both of their families hailed from the city of Sylhet along the Surma River in Bangladesh. Despite this shared background and close proximity, they had never met in the past 29 years. However, just months after meeting, Laal was born.

When Laal first started, the team operated with a budget of less than \$3,000. Laal conducted a needs-based assessment which created the foundation for Laal's pilot programs. In Laal's first fundraising event, the team raised over \$12,000. 100% of the proceeds were used to fund the 7-weeks of pilot programs. Laal is committed to centering the needs of the Bangladeshi womxn through access to education, resources, and outreach. Too often, due to systemic and institutional structures, the voices of Bangladeshi womxn are overshadowed and ignored; as daughters of the very community they serve, they understand firsthand the importance of centering the voices of Bangladeshi womxn.

The community Laal fosters within its classes for its womxn is revolutionary, it is remarkable, and it is a testament to the sheer resilience of Bangladeshi womxn. Together, they are leading Laal towards sustainability, recognition, and community-driven impact. Together, with their team, their board, and their womxn; they are Laal.

**Sanjana Khan**

Executive Director  
& Co-Founder

**Ayesha Akhtar**

Board Chair  
& Co-Founder



*Taken by Salma Ahmed at The New York Botanical Garden, February 2019*

# Laal's Mission

Laal's methodology was influenced by civil rights leaders and the history of black communities organizing in the US. Between 1957 and 1970, civil rights activists established over 900 Citizenship Schools in rural areas throughout the South. The immediate goal of this grassroots educational campaign was to help African Americans pass the literacy tests required for voter registration. However, the schools also trained people to become activists themselves and work for change in their communities. Septima Clark, founder and director of the program summarized its mission: "Literacy means liberation."

In the same spirit of striving for change within one's community, Laal conducted a thorough needs-based assessment in Norwood, from March to August of 2019, where we surveyed 200 Bangladeshi and South Asian womxn. These surveys asked qualitative and quantitative questions to determine what resources the community needed and what the most prominent problems facing the community were. These surveys were also imperative in establishing a rapport with the local community members and laying a foundation within a community that has historically been overlooked and underserved for over 30 years. Through programming and resources, Laal aims to create an active community of womxn who can empower themselves and one another through direct action and deliberative dialogue. Historically, immigrant Bangladeshi womxn in New York City have lacked the necessary space and resources to learn English, obtain a job, or vote because they have been treated as second class citizens-- culturally, systematically, and institutionally. Laal is eradicating a stigma that has been culturally, traditionally, and religiously interwoven into this community's foundation; in following Septima Clark's legacy, we too, believe that Bangladeshi womxn will find liberation through literacy.



# Laal Team



**SANJANA KHAN**  
Executive Director  
& Co-Founder



**MAISHA KHAN**  
Executive  
Assistant



**JONAS STANKOVICH**  
Director of  
Finance



**ISHRAT AISHEE**  
Strategic  
Development Coordinator



**MITHILA FARIN**  
Development  
Intern



**TANIA WAHDUD**  
Outreach  
Specialist



**NAZNIN SULTANA**  
Community  
Advocate



**SHIREEN SHAMS**  
Outreach  
Coordinator



**PRIYANA HANNAN**  
Outreach  
Coordinator



**TASRIQUL ISLAM**  
Bangla  
Translator



**AMATAN NOOR**  
Program  
Manager



**HAMIDA CHUMPA**  
Program  
Assistant



**SUMAIYA TASNEEM**  
Conversational  
ESL Instructor



**MONIKA KHAN**  
Wellness  
Instructor



**SAKIB HOQUE**  
Research  
Assistant



**TASNIMA TANZIM**  
Marketing  
Consultant



**SAHER JAFRI**  
Design  
Assistant

# Laal Board



**AYESHA AKHTAR**  
Board Chair  
& Co-Founder



**BUSHRA ALAM**  
Board  
Member



**ZULEKHA HAIDER**  
Board  
Member



**MOUMITA RAHMAN**  
Board  
Member



**SAIYA SHETH**  
Board  
Member

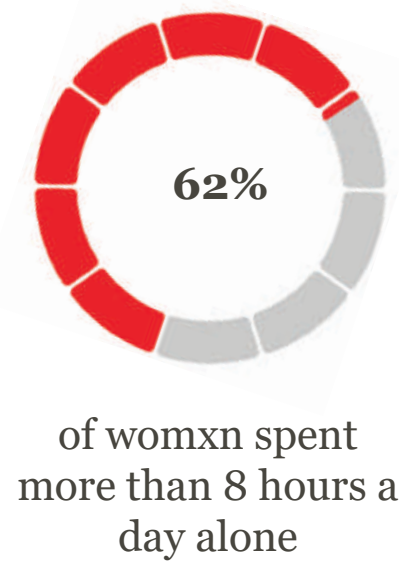
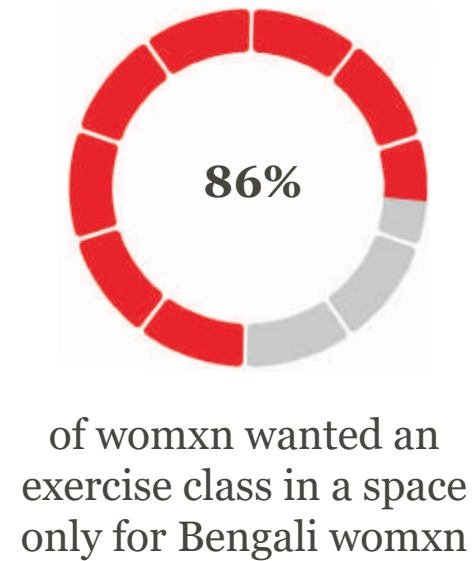
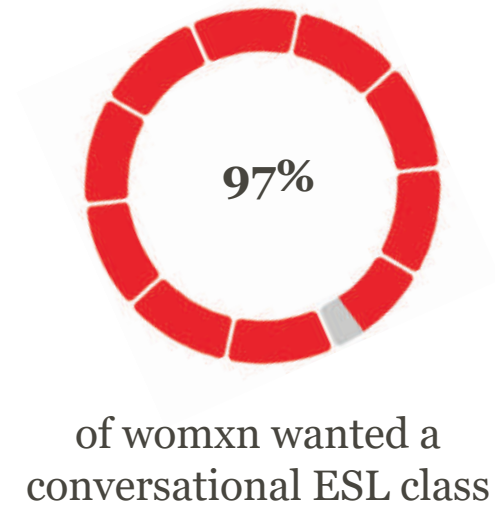


**JAFREEN UDDIN**  
Board  
Member

# Needs-Based Assessment

As part of the foundation for Laal's community-based programming, in 2019, Laal conducted a needs-based assessment to gather qualitative and quantitative data that properly identified the needs of the Bangladeshi community in Norwood. Reaching over 200 womxn in the local community, results from the assessment determined key findings of several gaps that presently exist for the Bangladeshi community, including access to healthcare, mental health resources, and a lack of economic empowerment.

These are not new phenomena, but rather are problems that Bangladeshi womxn have grappled with for years, many of which have remained unaddressed by local municipal or state resources. This is where Laal's programs come in-- uniquely positioned to address these challenges by equipping these womxn with the skills and resources necessary to navigate these barriers.



**200** total number of womxn surveyed

**39%** of womxn wanted support in finding employment

## THE BRONX

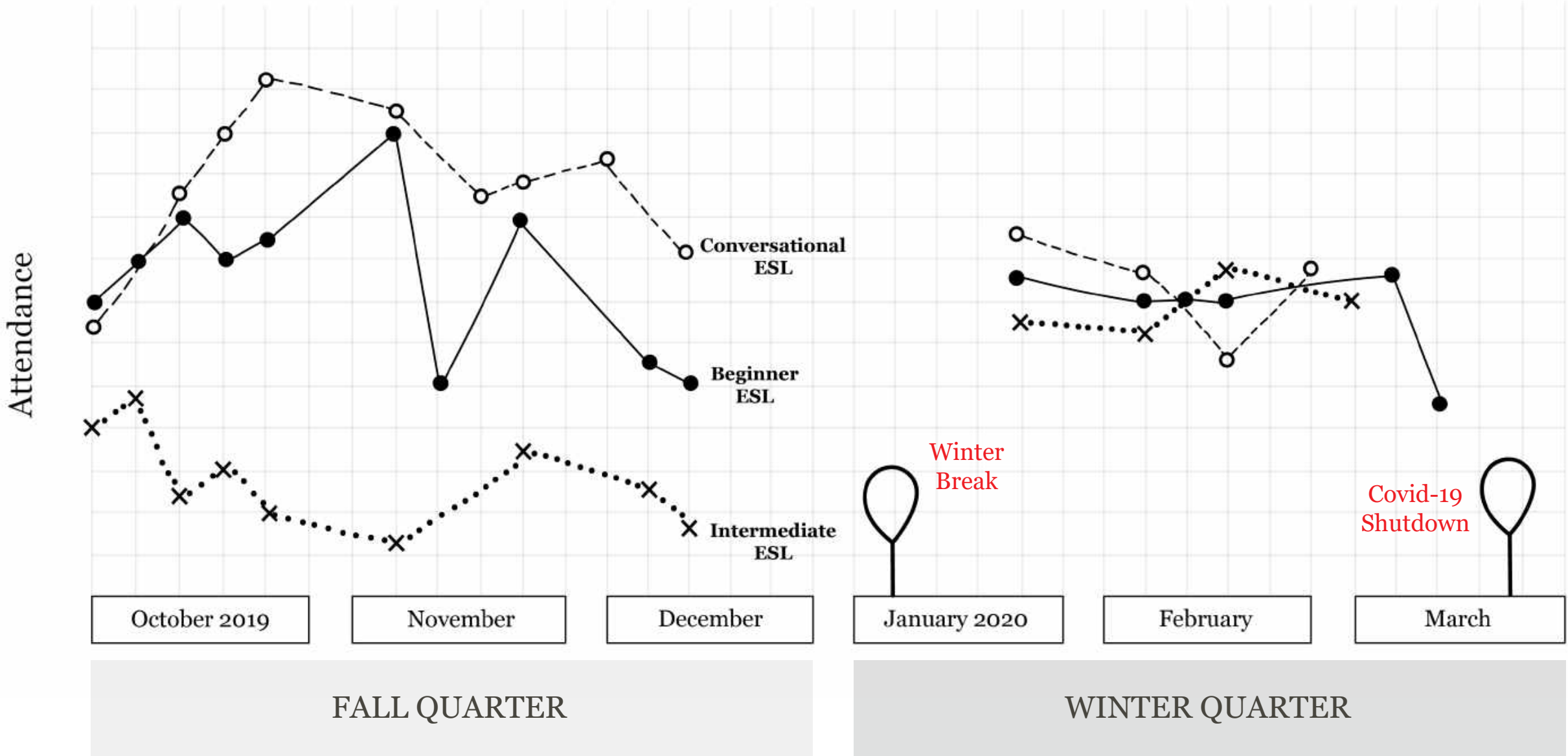


# 2019-2020 Pilot Programs

## ESL CLASSES

The need for local, culturally appropriate English Classes was illustrated through findings from the 2019 needs-based assessment. 97% of the womxn wanted to participate in conversational English class and many stated that they felt uncomfortable communicating in English because it would not “come out of their mouths”. These classes are imperative because they create a safe space for womxn to practice speaking about fundamental topics and apply every-day situations in conversations with one another.

By overcoming the language access barriers that presently exist for these womxn, they will be able to navigate broader, systemic barriers of access to resources and self-advocacy which will ultimately empower them to lead healthy and joyful lives.





# 2019-2020 Pilot Programs

## WELLNESS PROGRAMS

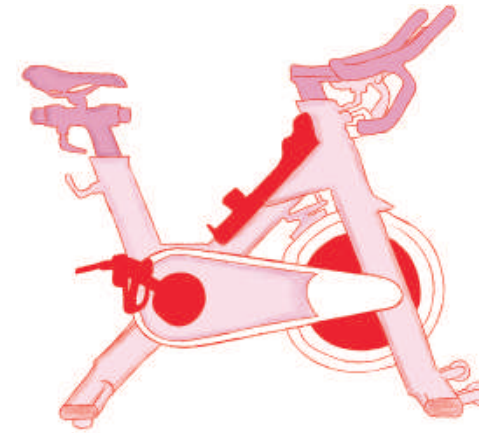
It is revolutionary to have an exclusively all-womxn's space where program participants are encouraged to be physically active through structured programming. The results of the 2019 needs-based assessment further identified the need for a space with culturally appropriate exercise classes in the community. 86% of womxn surveyed wanted a class where they could be physically active, in a space for only Bengali womxn.

Through yoga and spin classes, attendees are learning the importance of mental health. Many of the womxn who attended rode a bicycle for the first time in Laal's spin classes, and have consistently encouraged their peers to attend these classes, despite navigating cultural and familial responsibilities in the home. In addition to breaking cultural barriers, Laal's classes are encouraging womxn to create space for their own physical and emotional well-being through action.

**48**  
classes

**115**  
attendees

**16**  
weeks



Spin



Yoga



Bhangra



Cardio

# CENSUS 2020 INITIATIVE



Out of **132** households counted,

**86%**

rent their  
place of residence

**12.4%**

of families  
own their place of  
residence

Although the United States Census is conducted every 10 years, and despite Bangladeshis in New York City being one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations, there exists no data about the robust Bangladeshi population that resides in Norwood.

Laal's 2020 Demographic Survey was born as a result of a lack of data that presently exists about this community, and was conducted alongside Laal's efforts to count the Bangladeshi population in the 2020 Census.

Prior to this phone banking initiative, hundreds of families in the district remained unrepresented and unaccounted for when it came to federal and state funding.

**554+** individuals  
counted

**9.4** average number  
of years in the US



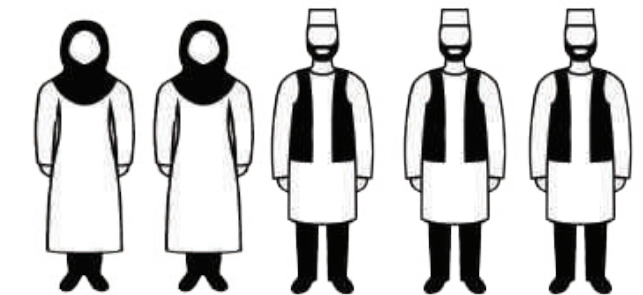
**43.4%**

from the city



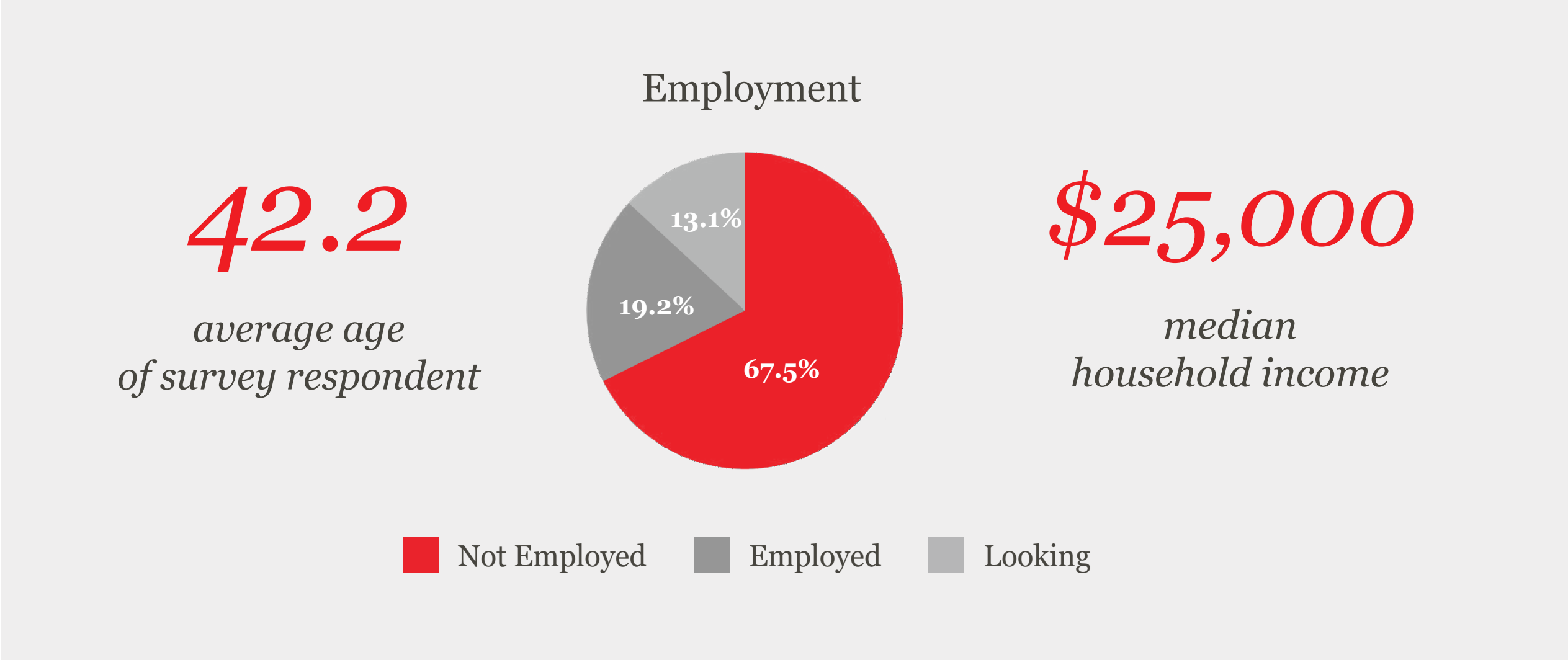
**56.6%**

from the countryside



average number of  
people per household

# Demographic Survey Findings



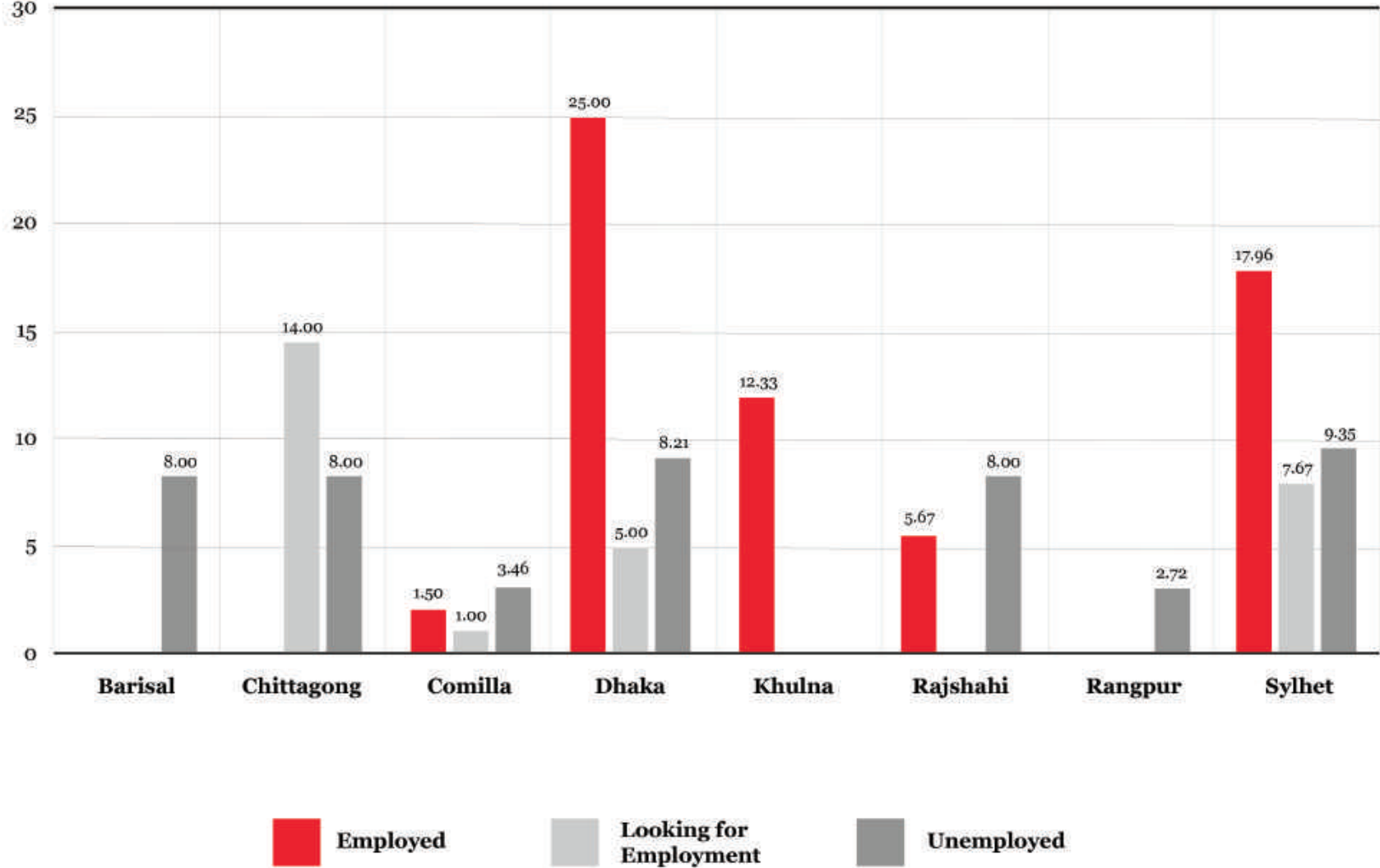
# Demographic Survey Findings

Laal’s efforts have been instrumental in establishing relationships of support with community members, by providing emotional support, monetary assistance (through COVID-19 emergency relief aid), disseminating information about the importance of the Census, and encouraging households to be active in their civic participation.

Laal’s 10 question demographic survey asked questions concerning district of origin, years in the US, household size, yearly income, and rural or city upbringing. The survey results will be instrumental in understanding associations between districts of origin in Bangladesh with annual household income, years of residence in the United States, employment rates, and more.

**Key Findings:**  
 Respondents that are employed and originally from Dhaka and Sylhet, on average, have resided in the United States longer than those who are looking for employment or not employed. Not shown in this graph, but based on the numbers from the demographic survey, most of the respondents are originally from Dhaka and Sylhet.

Average # of Years in USA by District and Employment Status



# COVID-19 Impact

**14%** of households surveyed are undocumented and did not receive benefits (unemployment, stimulus check or SNAP)

**58%** of households surveyed reported financial hardships due to Covid-19

**72%** of households surveyed received SNAP benefits before the onset of Covid-19

In response to the burgeoning crisis, Laal acted quickly. In partnership with Local Zakat, Laal initiated a fundraising campaign, COVID-19 Relief Fund. To distribute the assistance equitably, Laal created a formula to calculate assistance amounts by measuring household size, immigration status, SNAP benefits recipients, and health impact due to COVID-19. Using this formula, Laal distributed cash aid amounts ranging from \$400-\$1000.

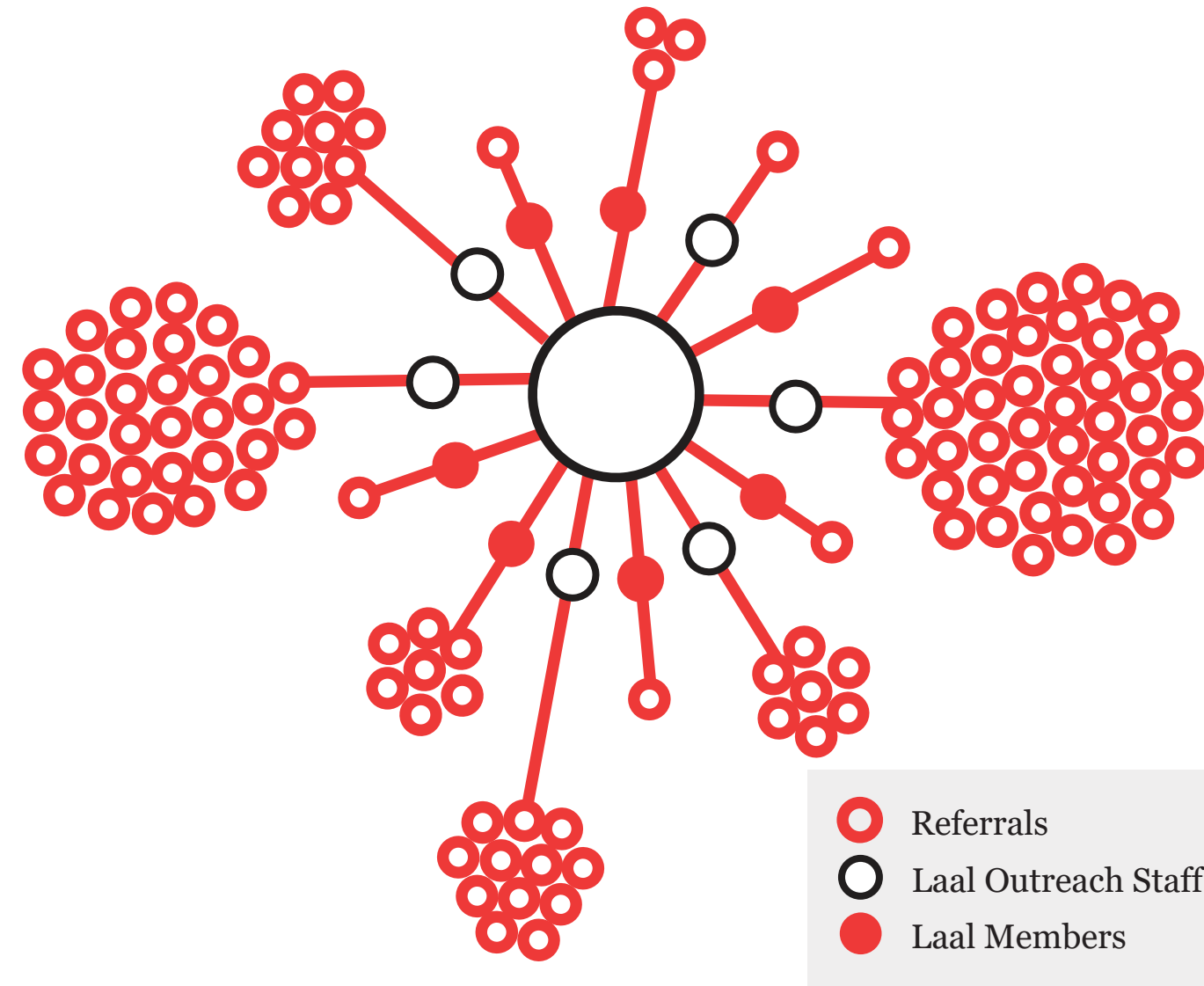
Through the Relief Fund, Laal distributed groceries and cash aid to over 54 families. Further, Laal received a \$10,000 NYC Impact Grant to support an additional 30 families with assistance. Laal has directed all cash aid in the womxn's name, ensuring that households were aware of which family member was responsible for bringing in the income.



Our COVID-19 deliveries consisted of cash aid ranging from \$400-1,000, ethnic groceries including eggs, tuna, rice, milk, bread, lentils (daal), pasta, cilantro, mangoes, okra, potatoes, onions, bananas, and Desi yogurt, plus disinfectant wipes, hand soap, and sanitizer, which were items that are of limited availability within the community.

# Community Organizing

This figure is a visualization of how Laal's Census 2020 Initiative and COVID-19 mutual aid spread via word of mouth throughout the community. The middle represents Laal's established network in Norwood. Each circle attached to the middle represents a member of Laal. The smaller red outlined circles represent a household via referral from Laal's network. This illustrates: (1) how Laal reached people in the community to assist them in filling out the Census 2020, surveying households for the demographic survey and gathering information on COVID-19's impact in the community; (2) the importance of staff members being embedded and part of the community they work within.



## Bronx Policy Platform

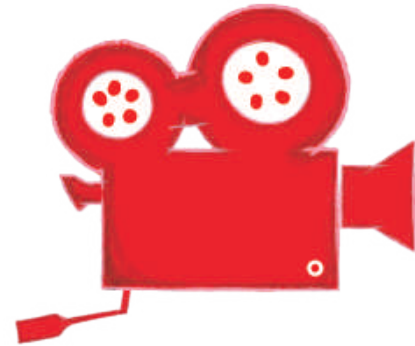
As part of the 2020 Bronx-wide Policy Delegate platform, Laal joined over 20 community-based organizations to represent and advocate for key policy issue areas that are directly relevant to the Bangladeshi community.

At the 2020 Bronx-Wide Policy Delegate Platform, led by the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy (N.W.B.C.C.), Laal participated with various organizations and represented the Bengali community where we elevated constituents' voices on 30 policy areas that directly impacted the Bronx with our top three priorities being: education, housing, and immigration. This work was imperative because as an under-counted demographic, there exists little to no data about this community; thus, it statistically does not exist. As part of this platform, Laal engaged in coalition building with peer organizations by informing the local Bangladeshi community.

## POC Steering Committee for Health Justice

In recent months, the COVID-19 global pandemic has exacerbated the existing health inequities that presently exist, particularly for communities of color. With numerous, preventable deaths that the local Norwood community has mourned, access to healthcare and resources is imperative, and all the more timely. As data disaggregated by race trickles out from state and local health agencies, it has confirmed what many of us not only feared but also anticipated: Asian Pacific American (APA), Black, Latinx, and other people of color, who are the people of the global majority, are disproportionately dying from COVID-19.

As a result, Laal has joined over 15 local, community-based organizations to create a People of Color Health Steering Committee, led by the Coalition for Asian American Children + Families (CACF). As the pandemic has exposed the bitter terms of our racial contract, which deems certain lives of greater value than others, it is all the more imperative to pledge solidarity and amplify the voices of our community.



# Media & Press

## NEWS 12 The Bronx

Jessica Cunnington for NEWS 12 The Bronx interviewed Sanjana Khan, Ayesha Akhtar, and Shumona Shimi on a cold, windy, winter day in March 2019. This was one of the first days of Laal’s needs-based assessment. The media highlight outlines the first steps Laal took to make sure the organization was always centered around the needs of the community. Khan, Akhtar, and Shimi all grew up in Norwood and their families are from Sylhet, each having very personal experiences of isolation, hardship, and patriarchal cultural values that Laal is tackling.

Read the article here: <http://bronx.news12.com/story/40077207/norwood-women-create-nonprofit-dedicated-to-helping-bengali-women>

## Norwood News

Sile Moloney, a journalist with the Norwood News, featured Laal’s work in the article, “A Bengali Women’s Empowerment Group Walks A Tightrope in Norwood.” During Laal’s first community event at the Bangladeshi Bazaar Mela in June 2019, Moloney interviewed Sanjana Khan and Ayesha Akhtar, and exposed the prominent patriarchal figures and culture that Laal was formed in immediate response to. Moloney’s article is an insightful piece that vividly paints a picture of the world Laal is facing head-on.

Read the article here: <https://www.norwood-news.org/a-bengali-womens-empowerment-group-walks-a-tightrope-in-norwood/>

## Al-Jazeera

In the midst of the ongoing pandemic, Laal’s initiatives as one of the first organizations on the ground offering immediate emergency relief to families was spotlighted by journalist Samira Sadeque, from Al-Jazeera. In addition to the disproportionate health disparities the Bangladeshi community faces, Sadeque identified the significance of the programs Laal typically offers for Bangladeshi women, creating a space and offering resources for them to live healthy, joyful lives.

Read the article here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/nyc-bangladeshi-community-struggles-cope-corona-virus-200429180945222.html>

# Laal on Social Media

January 2019 - August 2020

# 1,360

followers on Instagram

# 20,000+

total number of people reached

# 25,000+

total impressions

# Successful Fundraisers

## Laal Grishmo

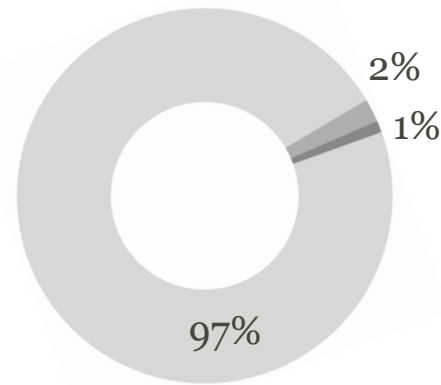


Laal Grishmo, the Red Summer, was the first fundraising event at Laal. In one month, we secured a club, four queer South-Asian performers, and DJ Rekha to headline the dance party. This was an act of resistance and revolution.

**\$12,649**

amount raised

**116** donors within **60** days



Programs  
Operations  
Administrative

## Laal Sheeth

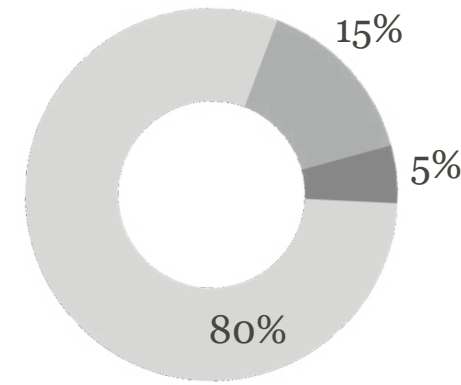


Laal Sheeth, the Red Winter, marked the completion of Laal's second-ever fundraising initiative. During the holiday season, Laal's newly assembled team spread the mission through their personal networks and quickly surpassed the fundraising goal of \$6,000.

**\$8,375**

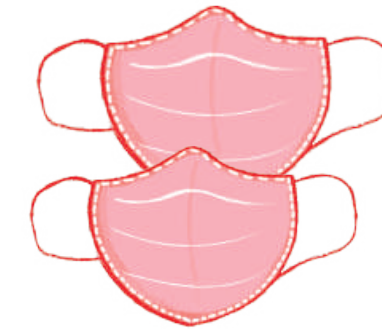
amount raised

**91** donors within **45** days



Programs  
Operations  
Administrative

## Covid-19 Fundraiser



In partnership with Local Zakat, Laal initiated a fundraising campaign in response to the pandemic, the COVID-19 Relief Fund. The initial goal for the fundraiser was \$12,500, but halfway through the campaign Laal exceeded its goal.

**\$23,833**

of direct aid and groceries

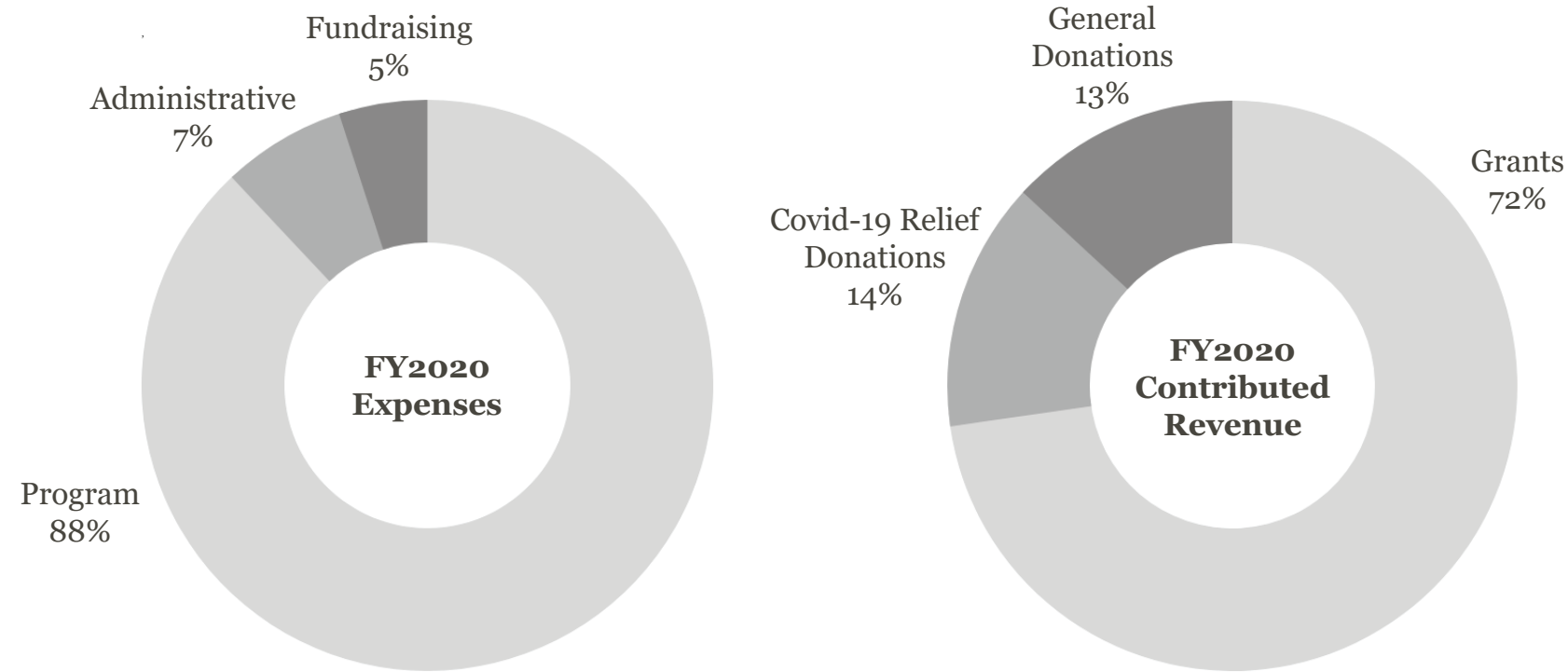
**320** donors within **30** days

distributed to **54** families

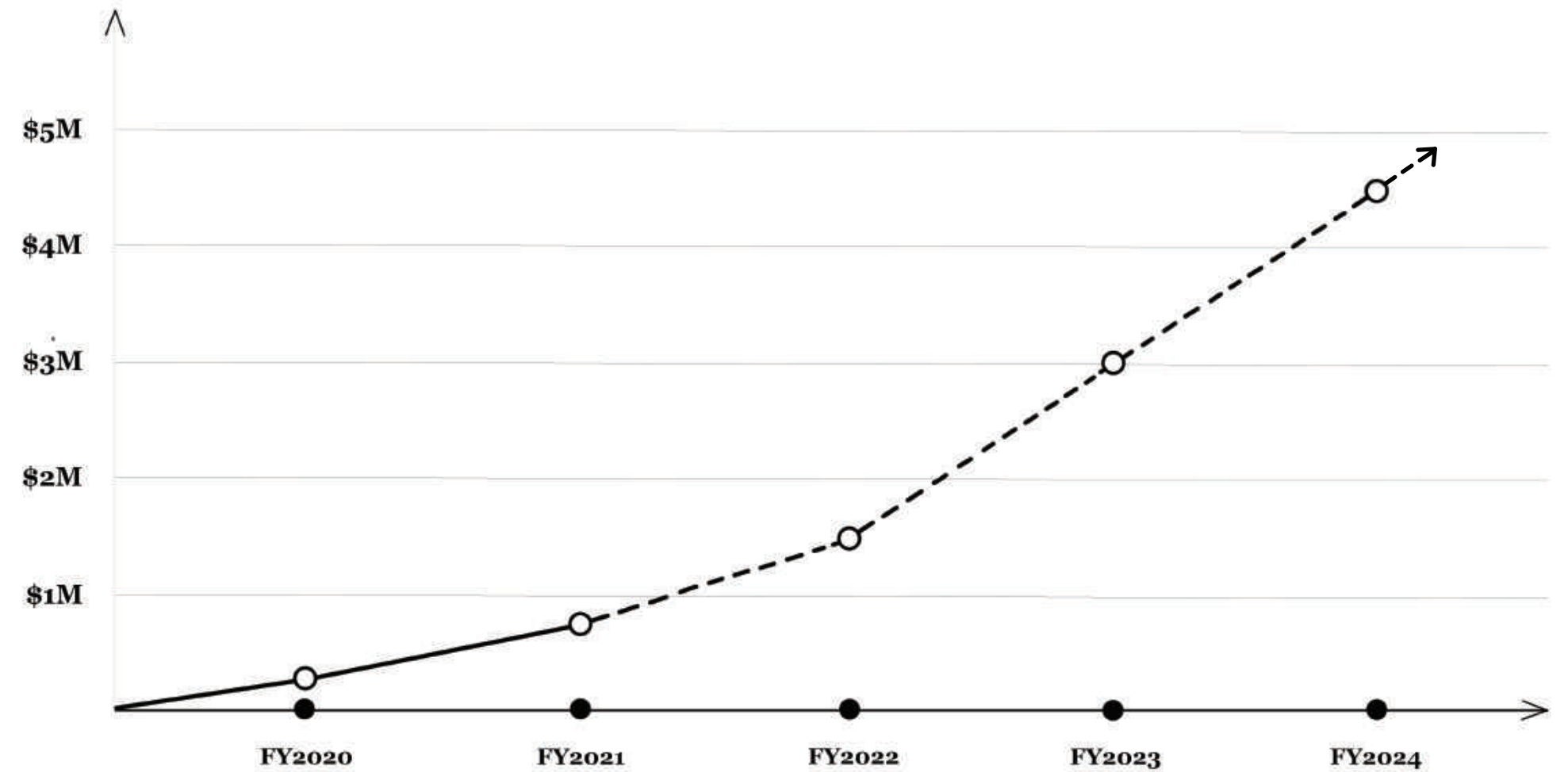


# Financial Statement

In FY2020, 88% of Laal's expenses went toward programmatic expenses, far better than the national average of 70%. This means that 88 cents of every dollar donated to Laal goes directly to its community programming. In the upcoming FY2021, Laal plans to continue its exponential growth. It expects to raise \$662,000 in revenue, by expanding its existing donor base and by attracting more grants. This will enable Laal's program and mission to proliferate. It plans to lease a physical site, which will have space for both programming and offices. Laal plans to hire additional staff, and will spend over \$250,000 on personnel costs, far above the \$25,000 it spent in FY2020. Laal will also invest in new programs, such as the sewing cooperative and reproductive justice campaign.



Projected Growth Over the Next Five Years



# 2020 - 2021 Programs

## Voter Outreach

As the 2020 elections are projected to take place, Laal's structured ESL program includes fundamental information about civic engagement and the democratic election process in the United States. Laal's team will reach out to individual households and participants to inform them of candidates, party and political affiliations, and key policy stances that are directly relevant to the Bangladeshi community.

~67%

of womxn are naturalized citizens

600+

individuals projected to vote in the 2020 Election



## Sewing Cooperative

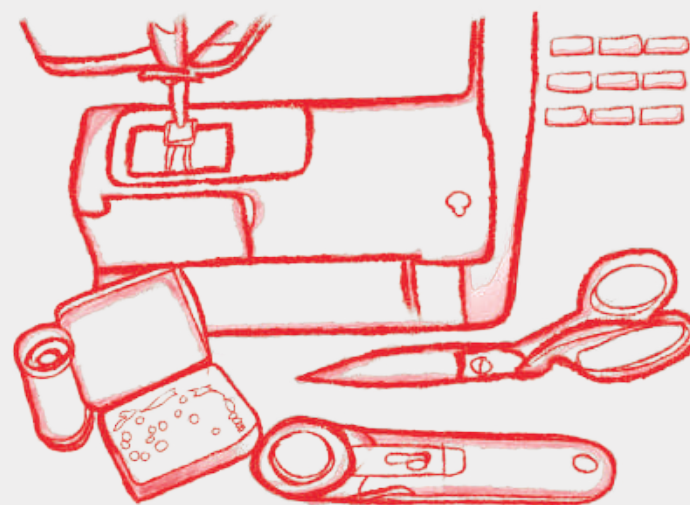
Laal X, a sewing cooperative, will commence as a pilot program with three womxn as worker-owners. As a worker-owned sewing cooperative, each womxn will earn a dignified income. This pilot program was possible through an award from the Robinhood Foundation. With Laal X, we envision creating a space for Nokshi-Katha (traditional Bengali stitching) to be reborn.

51%

of womxn wanted to start a sewing co-op

3

worker owners for Laal X



## Financial Fluency

For a community with high rates of poverty, focusing on economic empowerment for womxn to become financially literate and empower themselves to achieve their own financial goals is imperative. The curriculum will address fundamental topics such as opening a checking and savings account in the name of the participant, creating a structured savings plan, pathways to home ownership, and launching a lending circle to build credit.

83%

of womxn would like to save money each month

18

womxn enrolled for Financial Fluency Fall 2020



# Partnerships

Through well-rooted partnerships, Laal’s goal is to create and provide social services that are essential for the community. This is the foundation for Asian communities to become active members of their communities and organize themselves. Laal strives to ignite that power within the community we are part of, and we have strategically made partnerships and are learning from organizations that work with similar demographics.

By mobilizing in spaces these womxn are already a part of, Laal hopes to empower womxn to overcome barriers educationally, economically, politically, and linguistically.



# Laal Funders

Citizens Committee for NYC

The New York Foundation

Robin Hood Foundation

The Groundswell Fund

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The New York Women's Foundation

The Northwest Merchant's Association

The Bronx Bangladesh Women's Association

SABANY

NYC Civic Impact Fund

The Bronx Arts Council

Monteifiore

## A Note to Our Funders

Without the support of first funders foundations, Laal would not be in existence. As a new community-based organization run by women of color, it can be extremely difficult to get funding. Statistically, only 8% of the funding awarded from foundations goes into communities of color.

In Laal's first year of programming, it was nearly impossible to receive the funding necessary to carry out programs. However, these foundations believed in Laal's mission and vision, and are instrumental to the milestones that Laal has achieved. In the nonprofit world, these foundations are Laal's angel investors.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude, love, and appreciation to all of the individuals at the foundations for their unwavering commitment to Laal's mission.

# Laal Donors

## A

Abraham, Jagan  
Ademasu, Aluna  
Ahad, Mehjbin  
Ahamed, Tasnia  
Ahmad, Musaddeque  
Ahmad, Nadia  
Ahmed, Farid  
Ahmed, Marystella  
Ahmed, Neeta  
Ahmed, Nazia  
Ahmed, Riya  
Ahmed, Sadia  
Ahmed, Sophia  
Ahmed, Tahina  
Ajibade, Ayodele  
Akhtar, Ayesha  
Akhtar, Favad  
Akhter, Naureen  
Alam, Afreen  
Alam, Bushra  
Alam, Abul Shahid  
Alam, Tanisha  
Almukhaini, Nouf  
Alnasur, Saif  
Amin, Asseer  
Amin, Eidia  
Amin, Shreena  
Angelson, Jessica

Antala, Chandni  
Anjum, Aisha  
Araujo, Abbilemnis  
Asch, Ariel  
Ashton, Izzy  
Ashraf, Syed  
Atif, Saadia  
Awad, Ihab  
Azeem, Fareen  
Azim, Shahrin

## B

B, Badrunnesa  
B, Jara  
B., Krishna  
Bacchus, Farial  
Bae, Hannah  
Bai, Valerie  
Baidya, Shash  
Banavar, Amiti  
Banu, Tazin  
Barker, Leah  
Beairsto, Shanna  
Becker, Emily  
Begum, Momina  
Begum, Shahela  
Begum, Rohima  
Begum-Yafi, Hamida

Berman, Ian  
Bhandari, Sajed  
Bhattacharjya, Nilanjana  
Bhuayan, Nadera  
Bhuiyan, Samantha  
Bid, Jerome  
Biederman, Emily  
Bonner, Cleveland  
Bravo, Ischia  
Briskman, Laura  
Budhu, Ryan  
Bushra, Badrunnesa  
Butler, Luz

## C

Cadena, Alyson  
Cajamarca, Erica  
Chaudhuri, Kajori  
Celin, Steve  
Cespedes, Estefani  
Chatterjee, Gaurav  
Chavez, Ronald  
Choudhury, Amani  
Choudhury, Mobin  
Choudhury, Nibras  
Choudhury, Farzana  
Choudhury, Ifti  
Choudhury, Junaina

Chowdhury, Nuzhat  
Chowdhury, Raffin  
Chowdhury, Sirazum  
Chowdhury, Tania  
Choudhury, Samiah  
Choudhury, Saqif  
Chowdhury, Aninda  
Chowdhury, Safa  
Classroom, Colburn  
Collburn, Matt  
Courtney, Madeline  
Crain, John

## D

DeFilippis, Lindsay  
De La Cruz, Mariel  
De Martini, Sabrina  
Deane, Erica  
Delacruz, Alfonso  
Dellenbach, Eryka  
Dhanraj, Ganesh  
Diaspora, Bengali  
Djenohan, Zora  
Doorga, Anya  
Dsouza, Esther

## E

Ebanks, Sophia  
Elliott, Leila  
Elztahry, Basma  
Etienne, Benjamin  
Eyre, Makoto

## F

Faisal, Mohammed  
Faizullah, Fahmida  
Fardin, Fariha  
Farraj, Mohammed  
Ferdous, Taseen  
Ferguson, Darien  
Fernandes, Erika  
Fernandez, Erika  
Ferri, Robert  
Fletcher, Nadia

## G

Gaddam, Mallikarjun  
George, Jacob  
Giglio, Rebecca  
Gregory, Joseph  
Grennan, Nicole  
Groarke, Margaret  
Guggenheim, Marilyn

## H

H, Christina  
Ha, Taylor  
Habiba, Ummay  
Hadi, Romman  
Haider, Zulekha  
Halaka, NJ Halaka  
Hall, Sabrina  
Hanif, Shahana  
Haque, Ehsanul  
Haque, Kash  
Haque, Nevin  
Haque, Zahra  
Hasan, Maria  
Hasan, Tanzania  
Ho, Alexander  
Hoffman, Lauren  
Hom, Andy  
Hoque, Aziz  
Hoque, Nasima  
Hoque, Noshin  
Hoque, Raham  
Hosain, Daud  
Hossain, Ahmmed  
Hossain, Anwar  
Hossain, Fariha  
Hossain, Mufazzal

Hossain, Raeesa  
Howlader, Sermona  
Hu, Whitney  
Huang, Emily  
Huq, Shafqat  
Hussain, Syed

## I

Iglehart, Jaime  
Imam, Tasneem  
Iqbal, Anum  
Iqbal, Nafisa Afrin  
Iqbal, Saad  
Islam, Ayesha  
Islam, Hasina  
Islam, M  
Islam, Naasik  
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Urken, Ross Kenneth

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## A Note to Our Donors

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 first year of programming.

With the support of our generous donors, Laal was able to roll out robust pilot programs, that will serve as the foundation for Laal's future 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.

# Authors & Designers



## Data Analysis Team

**Saiya Sheth,**  
Lead Data Analyst

**Ishrat Aishee,**  
Strategic Development Coordinator

**Hamida Chumpa,**  
Program Assistant



## Art & Design Team

**Saher Jafri,**  
Lead Graphic Design

**Sanjana Khan,**  
Executive Director

**Saiya Sheth,**  
Lead Data Analyst



## Laal Storytellers

**Sanjana Khan,**  
Executive Director

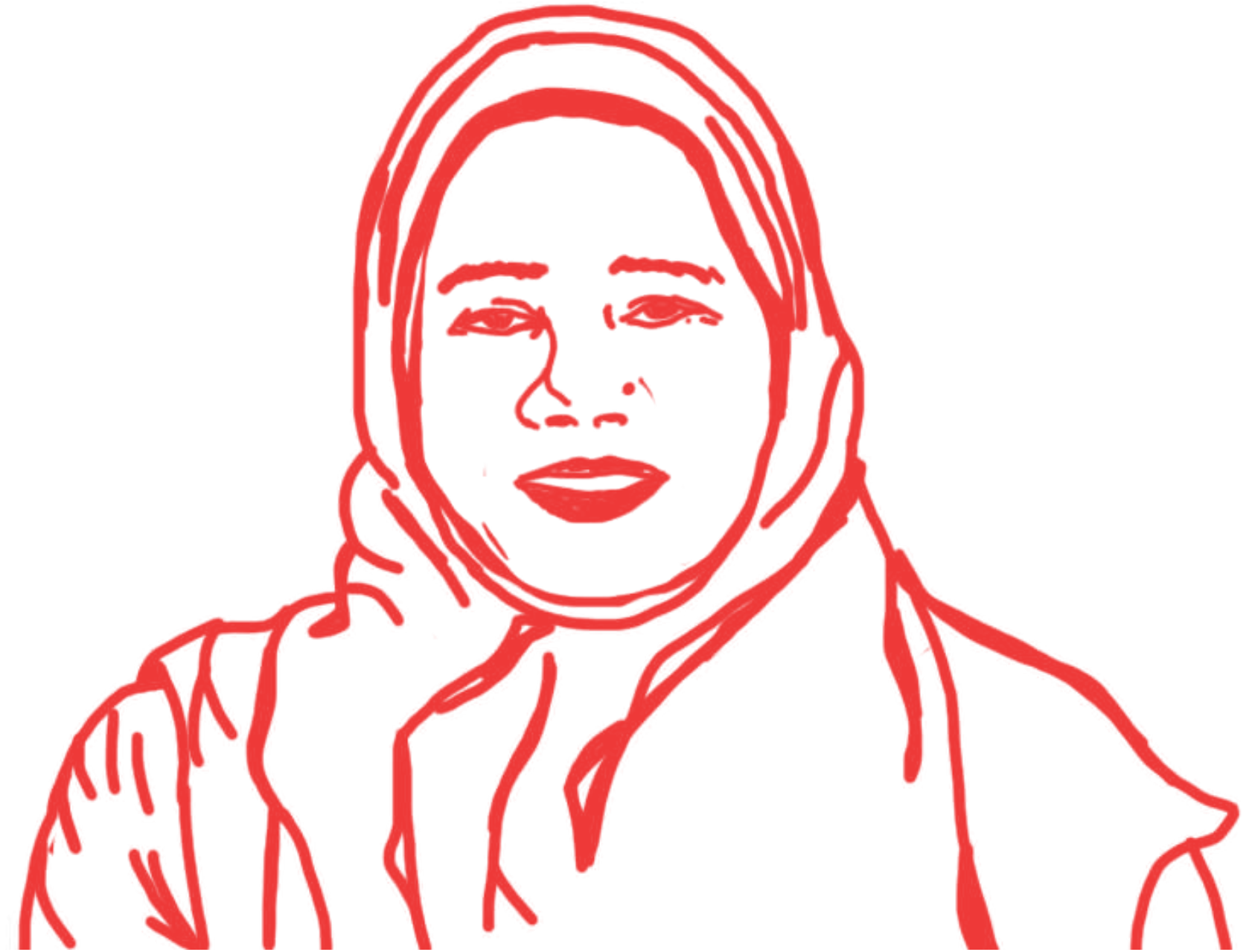
**Ishrat Aishee,**  
Strategic Development Coordinator

**Tasriqul Islam,**  
Bangla Translator



*“I’m happy today because  
I’m getting to spend time  
with myself.”*

*- Sanjida Sadat,  
Laal Womxn*



*Featured above: Rehana Begum, Laal X worker-owner  
Laal Womxn’s Portrait Series, taken by Nafisa Islam 2019*