ANNUAL REPORT 2020

A BRIEF RECORD OF THE YEAR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING
The year that CHALLENGED everything
Brought deep introspection and change

When we RE-IMAGINED our role
RE-CALIBRATED our outreach

HELD THE HANDS of our clients
AS TIGHTLY AS WE COULD...

Starting OCTOBER 1, 2021 ASHA for Women is now ASHIYANAA
This Annual Report captures a period of transition in our organization,
when we began to re-define our identity and mission.It reflects the
activities, processes and rationale leading to Ashiyanaa.
Message from the Board

Dear Friends,
The year 2020 was momentous for all of us across the world. From March onwards, it trapped us and tried to challenge our very existence. While we grappled with difficult outcomes at ASHA for Women, we also found ourselves in a position to review many things, the way we were growing, the needs of our expanding community, how to deliver appropriate services under tough circumstances, and how to change community mindset about deep-rooted social issues. While we caught our breath, our minds came alive.

REINVENT!
Were we serving the current and emerging unmet needs of the South Asian community? Did we have a responsibility to leverage our years of experience and insights to make a broader societal impact? This became a fundamental concern as we mulled over changing demographics, increasing lifestyle and work pressures, and shifting attitudes among South Asians and across our heterogeneous society.

Was it time to broaden our reach within the community, to look into other services and programs, without discrimination of age or gender? We were already adding South Asian seniors under our care umbrella. Now our research pointed to a further inclusive approach. The groundwork began for reinventing ourselves as Ashiyanaa.

CHANGING PATTERNS
- Increase in ‘Intakes’ from resident aliens, H1 but fewer H4 visas reported in 2019
- Steady flow of sexual abuse/assault cases in 2019
- Increase in ‘Intakes’ from the LGBTQIA community in the last 10 years. Intakes were steady in 2019

CHANGING SOUTH ASIAN POPULATION
The South Asian American community grew roughly 40% between 2010 and 2017. By 2065, it is projected that Asian Americans will be the largest immigrant population.

Percent change:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Bhutanese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Nepali</th>
<th>Pakistani</th>
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<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>200.1%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
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RECHARGE

Everything was changing - and yet much was also the same! Many South Asians continue to cling to age-old taboos and practices leading to inter-generational tension within families and lack of understanding in the larger social sphere.

So, despite lockdown curbs, we revved up our outreach activities, to educate and sensitize, through all available communication channels. Over the year we contacted over 65 community groups, government agencies, nonprofits, religious institutions, cultural organizations, universities, hospitals and medical providers, legal professionals, and news agencies.

A massive, user-friendly database was created to fuel our outreach activities. Bi-weekly calls to potential partners and donors yielded great results. By the end of 2020, we had created 19 successful partnerships - with ten government agencies, with nine other nonprofits, and with a hospital and a community group. Four memorandums of understanding (MOUs) were signed with counties in Virginia and Maryland. We also worked towards developing a partnership with Survivors & Organizations in Alliance & Rising (SOAR).

Our county partnerships were strategic in more ways than one - to direct new clients to us, to leverage much needed resources and help us source grants.

In October, the murder of George Floyd and its aftermath, and the xenophobia created by labeling the Corona virus ‘China virus’, drove the point home as never before: We as South Asians needed, more than ever, to build bridges of understanding, align with other underserved and discriminated populations, and work together.

RESTRUCTURE

ASHA for Women was founded way back in 1989 over cups of coffee. We developed organically, with the board members forming the peer counseling group and volunteers signing in their support as advocates, and for fundraising, outreach, events and other activities. Gradually, as the demands increased we reinforced our structure and upgraded training programs. The network of volunteers continued to grow.

While we continued to primarily be a volunteer-run organization, we recognized the need for full-time staff with specific areas of expertise. In 2020, we hired a Program Manager, who has significantly helped shape and drive our programs, services and outreach. We also approved the plan to induct a well qualified social worker.

REVIEW

Early in the year, we started the process of reviewing the way ahead. We conducted research, reviewed internal evaluations, and discussed our perspectives and experiences to align on a strategic plan for the next 30 years. The strategy addressed capacity challenges and organization restructuring, and pointed
towards inclusive services for all South Asians, regardless of age or gender. On careful consideration of pros and cons, the Board unanimously voted for rebranding the organization.

It was a bold step to take in an uncertain year. In May, we hired a consultant to work with our researched data and create a new identity. A skillfully constructed questionnaire was sent to a selected segment of our associates and supporters to get their opinion on many aspects. Inclusiveness, right from this point!

RESONATE!
Mobilization of our core group and our volunteers has always been driven by deep study of current needs, and the empathetic yet objective role we can play in helping the community. We have to be mindful to strike a fine balance, as it can be difficult to take initiatives that question age-old taboos and practices.

Holding a banner for social change is always difficult. But necessary. Throughout 2020, we connected and integrated with multiple groups in South Asian society, and across all faiths. We sincerely believe that our efforts to resonate will help open many doors and windows, as we move forward with Ashiyanaa.

THE STRATEGY:
ASHIYANAA, a new name with a renewed mission.
- Fresh contemporary identity.
- Redefining the service reach, covering South Asian individuals and families, taking a clear direction for inclusivity
- Ashiyanaa means ‘Home’

MISSION: Empowering South Asians to lead peaceful lives of dignity, hope, and self-sufficiency by providing comprehensive and culturally-sensitive services.

VISION: To create culturally sensitive pathways to empower individuals and families in the South Asian community.

Leadership

Board of Directors 2020

Priya Kulkarni - President
Priya Kulkarni currently serves as President and Secretary of the Board of Directors and serves as the Chair for the Executive Planning Committee. She has been with the organization for 14 years.

Lakshmi Aiyappa - Executive Director
Lakshmi Aiyappa retired as a Social Worker after working in the field for 25+ years. Since then she has been volunteering with several Social Service Organizations. Lakshmi has been associated with ASHA since 2005 and serves as a Board Member and has been the pro bono Executive Director since 2011.

Maya Virani - Treasurer
Maya Virani currently serves as Treasurer and the Chair of the Finance Committee. She joined in 2006 and has served in many capacities including being the Director of Senior Services.

Nalini Rajguru - Secretary
Nalini Rajguru currently serves as a Board Member and Secretary. She started volunteering with ASHA in 2001 and joined the Board in 2004. She was a past President from 2007-2011. Nalini is on the Executive and Planning Committee and has conducted strategic planning sessions in 2012, 2016, and 2020. She works as a law librarian at a DC law firm.

Jaya Nelliot
Jaya Nelliot is an Ayurvedic practitioner and holistic coach. She and her family have always volunteered with social service organizations. Jaya started volunteering with ASHA in 2009 as an advocate and now is a Board Member and the Outreach Director.

Jyoti Ramesh
Jyoti Ramesh joined ASHA as a Board member and the Director of Volunteer Services after a career as Business System Analyst with experience in the insurance industry. Jyoti has varied interests, as a certified Yoga Practitioner and founder and trustee of a private school in India.

Abraham Mathew
Abraham Mathew came to ASHA after spending 22+ years as a Banker. He has been a full-time volunteer and Board member since 2019, supporting Fundraising and Outreach activities. Previously, Abraham was Vice President at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, leading the Consumer Mortgage Department in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Staff

Pro Bono Executive Director - Lakshmi Aiyappa, MS
Manager of Client Services - Shaila Kelkar

Coordinator, Senior Program - Suroor Ahmed
Program Manager - Sana Ansari, MPH

Auditors

Desai & Shah, PC, CPAs

ANNUAL REPORT 2020
January
We shake off the holiday season. Service Program Training is planned, even as the first case of novel coronavirus is detected in the US. A public health emergency is declared by World Health Organization on January 30, 2020.

February
The first covid death in the US sets alarm bells ringing. On our turf, the Senior Program gains momentum: training/orientation for volunteers is presented by Elder Care. We finalize our annual ASHA for Women budget, little realizing how our modest resources will be strained to the max.

March
Lockdown is imposed. We use this time to begin reflecting on the way forward ‘NEXT STEPS’, for 30 years - capacity challenges, inclusiveness for all, organization restructuring. ‘Rebranding’ is a unanimous decision.
Board members form task-oriented teams, to go full steam into outreach activities. The senior outreach program is formulated with the support of a separate group of volunteers.

April
We notice an alarming drop in calls from our domestic violence clients. The UN calls it the ‘Shadow Pandemic’.
We try desperately to maintain contact, letting clients know we are working and available to help.
To enhance our reach, we plunge into social media. We formulate strategies to connect through phone and zoom sessions with advocates (volunteers), lawyers, attorneys, shelters, community organizations & government agencies.

May
A consultant is hired to work on the new identity and branding.
Training is conducted for volunteers to interact with senior clients.
We distribute flyers at Senior Homes encouraging seniors to stay connected in this time of enforced isolation. Motivational messages are also conveyed through WhatsApp and Facebook.

June
George Floyd protests rage across the nation. We express our solidarity with the Black Community. Biweekly zoom sessions are held with senior volunteers. Five volunteers have been assigned the task of creating partnerships with other agencies: by year end they would have achieved this with 25 key entities.

"Our newsletter talks about unusual times. "As stress levels have increased the world over with job losses and financial uncertainties, domestic violence has escalated with stay-at-home impositions of the pandemic. This is being reported again and again in almost every part of the globe. We are working with a great sense of disquiet. We are unable to easily reach our clients - and they are finding it difficult to talk to us, closeted at home with their perpetrators. We have been trying to raise awareness of this situation among the South Asian community, through a surge of messages on different social media."
July
We hold a strategic Board meeting on new identity and branding. Full of plans and purpose, we begin the process of hiring a Program Manager, and start building a massive database for outreach. Everything has a new intensity.

August
The Outreach Committee meets regularly. Four different surveys are designed to obtain feedback from clients, teammates, donors on new structure. This will guide decision making by the Board. We hire our Program Manager.

September
The first online zoom program is recorded and broadcast AGE NO BAR FUN BAR BAR, appealing to all age groups with special interest in capturing senior attention. While webinars and zoom meetings have shown the way ahead, our advocates maintain their vital one-on-one support lines with survivors.

October
We go all out to reach our domestic violence clients through messaging “WE ARE AVAILABLE, emergency services are working”. October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and as such we multiply our outreach activity and issue a public service announcement on the radio. We conduct a Medicare webinar for our clients and launch our Meet & Greet program on Grandparents Day. We build teams with external partners. This includes partnerships with other South Asian DV organizations such as SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR).

November
The Board defines the new pathway – the new name and mission, upheld by a contemporary identity to resonate with all ages and gender. We conduct a webinar for caregivers. Our Senior Meet and Greet Zoom events are launched, with the first one featuring Chef Rajiv Jaggi.

December
The year has been a challenge. We create a holiday wish list for our clients, many of whom are in financial crisis. A Women’s group is initiated, providing a safe space for our clients to connect with each other.

Taking the challenge head-on, it has been our best year for Outreach. We have strengthened our pillars in society, created supportive partnerships, secured five grants and signed 4 MOUs with counties in Virginia and Maryland to leverage much needed resources and connect with new clients.

The year ends with a celebration, a Volunteer Holiday event in gratitude to our dedicated ASHA volunteers.
Impact 2020

HELPLINE AND EMAIL INQUIRIES
ADDRESSED FROM JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2020
The Helpline calls were from clients, relatives or friends requesting resources and from service organizations referring clients.

TOTAL CLIENTS SERVED
- We gave support to women affected by domestic violence
- Their children were assisted in many ways
- 79 women
- 64 children

CLIENTS COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
- India: 50 cases
- Pakistan: 9 cases
- Bangladesh: 6 cases
- Nepal: 1 case

MAJOR ISSUES REPORTED BY CLIENTS SERVED
Domestic Violence
Transnational Abandonment (13)

FACILITATION
- Bus tokens, taxi fare, donated cars etc;
- telephone cards; translation of documents.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
- Assistance with tuition fees, donated computers etc.
- Referrals for employment.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED
- For referrals to legal representation, mental health counseling, food assistance, and housing.
- Legal representation, counseling, employment & career counseling, and housing services.

REFERRALS, COUNSELING
- Immigration & other legal counseling, psychological counseling.

EMERGENCY HELP
- Emergency winter clothes, school uniforms, etc;
- fees for medical care.

ASSISTANCE
- In-person support and instruction
- Court accompaniment to obtain protection orders, child support, etc; life-skills instruction - how to use public transportation, budgeting etc.

COMPLETE SERVICES

IN-PERSON SUPPORT AND INSTRUCTION
Court accompaniment to obtain protection orders, child support, etc; life-skills instruction - how to use public transportation, budgeting etc.

ASSISTANCE
- For child care arrangements and relocation to shelters/apartments.

$18,666
funding
$18,666
funding
42
referrals
42
referrals
Outreach Achievements

65 community groups, government agencies, nonprofits, religious institutions, cultural organizations, universities, hospitals and medical providers, legal professionals, and news agencies.

Successful Outreach Partnerships

19 presentations made to different audiences at diverse venues.

Special Year End Campaign: Holiday Wishlist

December fundraising campaign to benefit needy clients. Cash donations were converted to Indian groceries, personal hygiene items, and client wish list items of clothing, kitchen supplies, and toys.

Email From a Client

I just wanted to take this opportunity on this holiday to “Thank You” for all the help and support you and ASHA have given me. I can’t express in words how grateful I am to you. Since we 1st spoke over the phone till now you were always there for me. You are putting so much effort to set our lives. I haven’t seen anyone like you in my life. You are really a good hearted and kind person. I hope someday I repay you because you made me indebted to you.

I am overwhelmed right now thinking how blessed I am that I found someone like you in my life. You are my adviser and friend too. Wishing you to have a joyful, blessed and happiest thanksgiving with your family and friends.

Seniors Helpline

Went live with 7 calls from seniors/caregiver: resource inquiries, cases of financial exploitation and elder abuse.

Weekly Phone Connect program with isolated seniors implemented.

Virtual Format Programs

Launched celebrating Grandparents Day - “Age No Bar, Fun Bar Bar” with over 110 attendees. Followed by Meet & Greet events in November and December 2020. with about 20 participants.

78 Outreach Phone calls to assisted living facilities, senior housing facilities and county departments. Collaborations established.
**Impact 2020**

**TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS** 8882

- Board member volunteers responded fully to the needs of the hour: 7498 hours
- Our committed volunteers pitched in despite the difficulties: 1384 hours

**OUR LEGACY: THE VOLUNTEERING SPIRIT**
Volunteers are not just our foundation and pillars, but also our arms and legs.

**OUR STRENGTH: DONORS AND GRANTS**
We are deeply grateful to all our donors and funders for the incredible support they have given to us to help survivors since 1989. They continue to be our beacon of hope as we expand our mission to help all South Asians inclusively under our new identity as Ashiyanaa.

**FINANCIALS 2020**

**REVENUE 2020**
- Donations from:
  - Fundraising: 3.6%
  - Individuals: 32.6%
  - Organizations: 26.6%
  - Foundations: 21%
  - Companies: 16.3%

**SPEND 2020**
- The spend on each dollar:
  - 96% on PROGRAMS
  - 4% on AUDIT, etc.
We cannot tell you their names or how they look or where they stay or how old their children may be. All identifiers have been blurred. We can only reveal a little about three women we know trying to survive in a condition termed the ‘shadow pandemic’.

‘Shadow pandemic’, the flaring up of domestic violence in the shuttered existence of the lockdown. So close, but we cannot see or hear it. And if we do, we cannot talk about it.

How are they doing, these three plucky women?

Aarti shushes her infant when she cries, muffling the sounds with her garment. Even a child’s cry for milk can be a provocation for a slap or volley of abuse. And not just from her husband but by the family at large. Of course, she is at fault, didn’t she produce a girl child? So Aarti tries hard to make herself as invisible as a ghost. This is tough as everybody’s at home.

Aarti is nobody’s fool. She has charted it all in her mind. She is going to be the sole custodian of her child, and of herself. She will once again make use of her professional skills. She will move from this hell once all legal aspects are completely addressed. Yes, she will make a safe home for her child.

But everything is under lockdown.

Though Aarti has found a way to call us without leaving traces of the call, opportunities to do so are rare. We have been available for her round the clock, working frantically to get all the answers. Slow lockdown responses are stretching out her ‘incarceration’. Our conversations are quick and sharp. The fear from her side is palpable. Each day she is in danger.

We have not heard from her in a few days.

Farzana is on her own now, with her young son, but there is no peace. She has changed the locks. She always keeps the blinds drawn. The restraining order on her husband does not seem to work. She is always afraid. He is sometimes lurking at the store around the corner, waiting to catch his terrified child and shout obscenities at her. He would stalk her to work almost daily, but now she is laid off work with the lockdown — and losing her job has been almost the last straw.

Anxiety and depression have overtaken her life and her son’s life too unfortunately.

At least Farzana can talk to us anytime, just every time she feels she cannot cope or has a panic attack. We are helping her stay ahead on her rent. We have been able to connect her to a psychiatrist. It looks like we see a new stronger Farzana emerging. She may soon even get the strength to take legal action.
Monika’s story makes us all break out in smiles. As a young bride, she came to the United States. In a short amount of time, her husband duped her into divorce and left her with a child. She had not known what papers she was signing. Despite no formal skills, not much English, and with help from us, Monika saw she had what it takes to be functional in a store. Quickly picking up spoken English through classes arranged by us, she has gone from strength to strength and despite lockdown odds, is now juggling two jobs. Her bank balance is looking respectable. Her child is doing well too and is being tutored by an ASHA volunteer as schools are shut.

We are ASHA for Women, a nonprofit with a mandate to provide guidance and support to women and children in abusive homes and empower them to achieve lives of stability and peace. In each case an advocate who shares the client’s cultural markers is the ‘lifeline’, always available, always trying to resolve issues, alert to the safety of the client and her children, never imposing a course of action but showing the way ahead.

Since March, our work has become incredibly difficult. We are unable to connect with many of our clients.

Surveys worldwide are repeating the same disturbing analysis: Reports of domestic violence have dropped while the actual violence has soared. A study by a Massachusetts hospital says that the incidence and severity of injuries is much higher, indicating that women are seeking help only in extreme violence. Medical attention is not being sought for relatively minor physical injuries caused by assaults, which leads us to the worrying question: how are these trapped women attending to their emotional and physical wounds?

**Being Aware & Alert**

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and this year with the lockdown we will not be seeing many purple ribboned marches. But we can participate by having conversations and sharpening perceptions. A social call to a friend is not deemed suspicious activity by a perpetrator. The onus of noticing signs of violence, physical or non-physical, is on us. Go ahead and call that friend, co-worker or loved one that you suspect may be suffering.

If you know anyone who is being abused by her partner, call us for advice on what to do next. Everything you say will be treated in total confidence. You need not give us your name or the name of the person who is being abused. Or better yet, give them our toll-free hotline and email address so they feel empowered by that first step.

Domestic Violence Helpline: 1-888-417-2742
More about our work: www.ashaforwomen.org
Email: coordinator@ashaforwomen.org

Please note our current contact details on the last page of this Annual Report
We look forward to your support as we continue our journey as Ashiyanaa, providing non-judgmental support to South Asians, of all ages and gender, in a culturally-sensitive environment.

Ashiyanaa is a federally tax-exempt organization, as described in IRS code section 501(c)3. Our tax ID number is 52-2193753.

Ashiyanaa
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Suite 300 Bethesda, MD 20817
Phone: 571 645 3233, 9am-5pm, Mon – Fri.

Helpline: 1-888-417-2742

www.ashiyanaa.org

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