



Arab-American Family
Support Center

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Examining the pressing needs of immigrant and
refugee families during COVID-19.

March 2020 – June 2021

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OUR WORK

The Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC) is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization founded in Brooklyn in 1994 to provide culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed social services. While we support anyone who walks through our doors, over 27 years, we have developed expertise in serving the Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) immigrant and refugee communities. We are dedicated to helping these populations overcome a nexus of challenges, including lingering trauma, discrimination, poverty, and acculturative stressors. As a settlement house, we are geographically embedded in the communities we serve, with 12 locations across all five boroughs of NYC.

AAFSC works across four priority areas - Promote, Get Ready, Prevent, and Communicate - to achieve our ultimate goal of strengthening families. AAFSC promotes mental and physical well-being, food security, healthy relationships, and family reunification. We get our families ready to succeed, work, and lead productive lives. We prevent domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect by equipping families with the tools to succeed, offering case management services to victims of violence and cultivating healthy relationship skills in young people. AAFSC communicates the needs of the marginalized to partners and policymakers.

OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

As an essential provider, AAFSC has offered uninterrupted services throughout the COVID-19 crisis. We expanded our outreach across programs and launched new initiatives to meet the enhanced need for financial, health, and safety resources. Since March 2020, AAFSC swiftly scaled our service provision in response to heightened demand. We experienced a 40% increase in domestic violence case management, a 450% increase in English literacy enrollment, 90% increase in youth and young adult participation, 258% increase in mental health counseling services, and a 356% increase in SNAP enrollment. AAFSC has also distributed over \$430,000 in emergency relief funding, reached over 6,200 community members through our COVID-19 vaccine awareness campaign, and conducted additional outreach to connect over 3,400 individuals with COVID-19 information and city resources.



SURVEY METHODOLOGY

As a learning organization, AAFSC is committed to measuring and evaluating the landscape of community need. To capture the pressing concerns of community members seeking services, we conduct an ongoing Needs Assessment survey to better understand community challenges and inform our swift and strategic service delivery approach. In the months since the COVID-19 pandemic began, these responses have offered a look into the immense and evolving impact of this public health crisis on vulnerable community members.

AAFSC staff - embedded across all program areas - deliver this 13-question survey to community members at their first point of contact with our array of programs to assess overall need and begin the process of service navigation. We maintain a safe and judgement-free data collection environment by administering surveys verbally in each client's preferred language and adopting a culturally-competent lens. Survey questions capture the primary challenges facing community members which our programs are designed to address - including food access, English literacy, housing, legal support, and mental health.

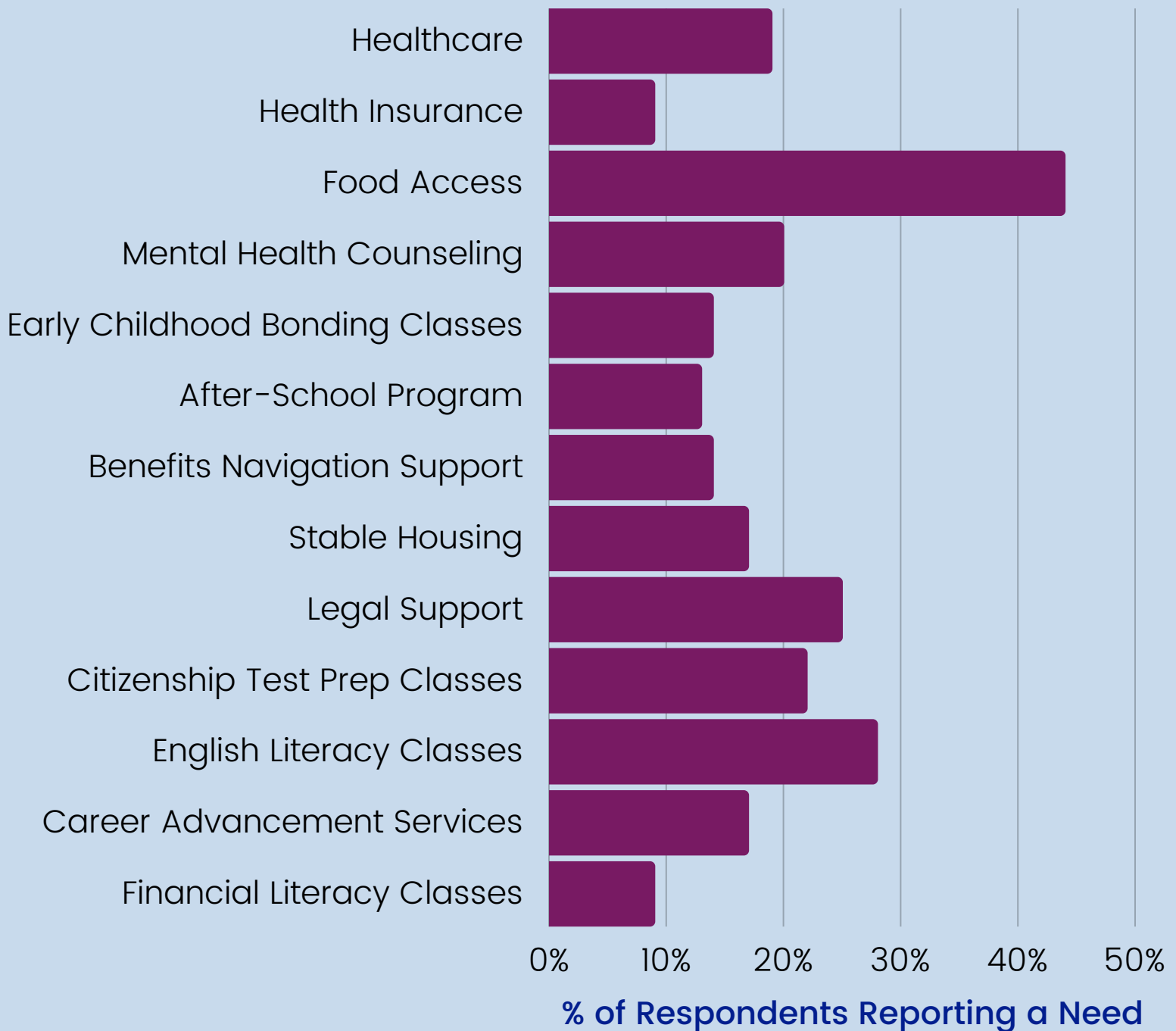
As an organization rooted in the communities we serve, we understand the nuanced challenges of collecting this data and navigating the help-seeking stigma that leads many to decline conversations around unmet needs. Our staff are trained in the Community Resiliency Model, enabling us to approach conversations from a place of trust, mutual understanding, and with a trauma-informed lens. While these attitudes and stigmas are deep-seated and often lead to underreporting, the data collected still demonstrates a significant level of need. From this information, we can begin to parse through the complex challenges facing low-income immigrant and refugee populations.

This report analyzes Needs Assessment responses collected between March 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021, capturing the 16 month period when the COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented harm, particularly to the low-income, outer-borough communities we serve. Analysis of the 953 responses illustrates the impact of COVID-19 on food security, mental health, family well-being, and health access. The insights highlight the particular experiences of Arab, Middle-Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) communities during COVID-19, for which there is little existing data from mainstream research entities. Our findings serve to inform AAFSC's program and outreach expansion and ensure we remain on the front lines for communities in need.



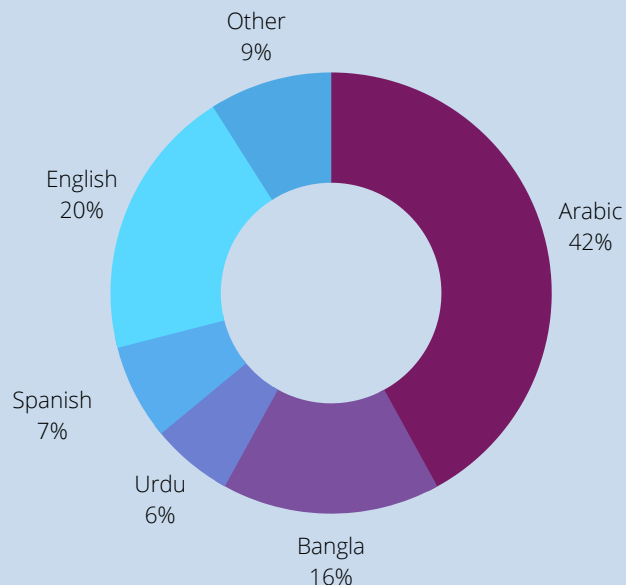
TOP-LINE RESULTS

Need Area



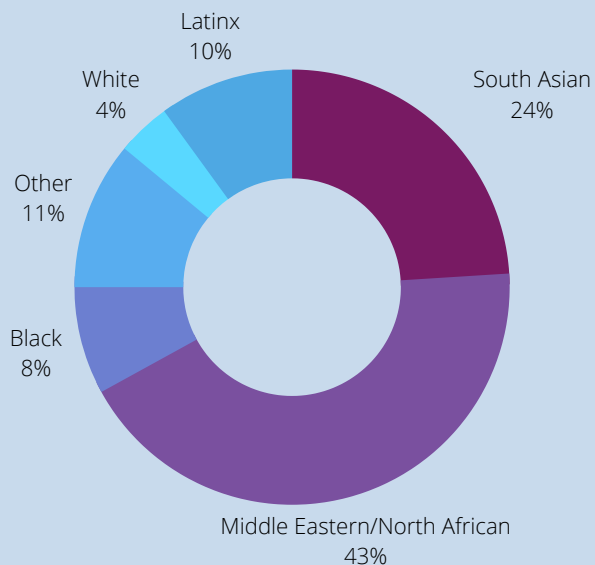
SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

LANGUAGE

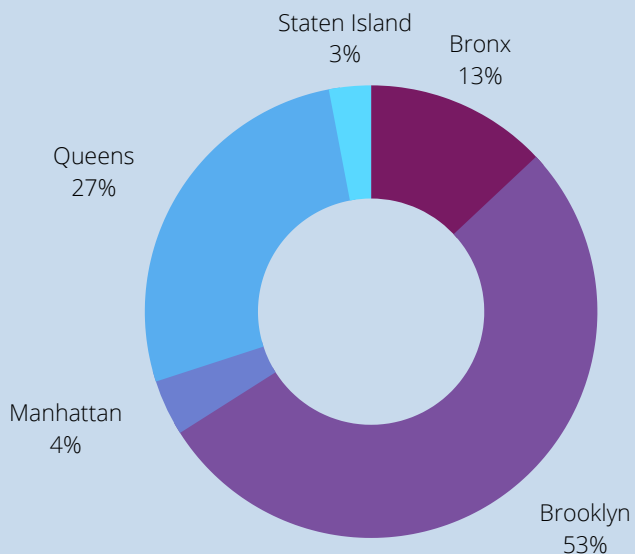


35 total languages spoken by respondents

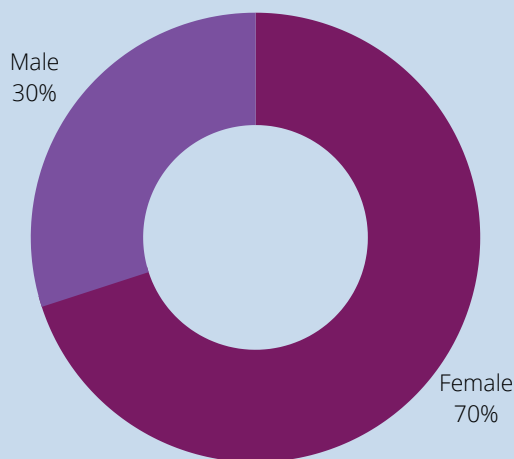
RACE/ETHNICITY



BOROUGH OF RESIDENCE

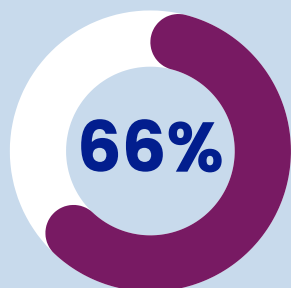


GENDER



PROMOTE

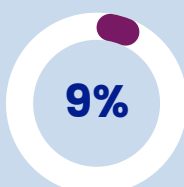
HEALTH



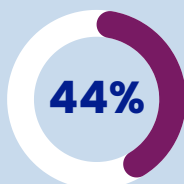
of respondents reported at least one **health-related need**



of respondents do not have **reliable access to a primary care doctor**



of respondents do not have **health insurance**



of respondents do not have **adequate access to food**



of respondents expressed a need for **mental health support** due to stress or anxiety



PROMOTE

FAMILY SUPPORT



of respondents reported at least one need related to **family support**



of respondents need support with **early childhood development and bonding**



of respondents need **after-school support for school-age children and young adults**



of respondents need support **navigating city resources**



of respondents do not have **stable housing**

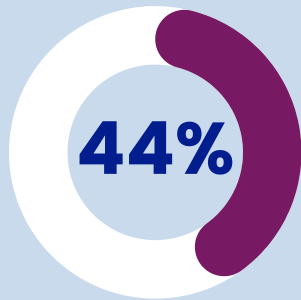


of respondents need help with **immigration-related legal concerns**



GET READY

ECONOMIC MOBILITY



of respondents reported at least one need related to economic mobility



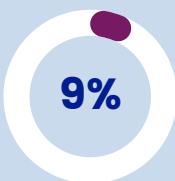
of respondents need support navigating the citizenship test process



of respondents need support communicating in English



of respondents need support navigating career advancement



of respondents need financial literacy support

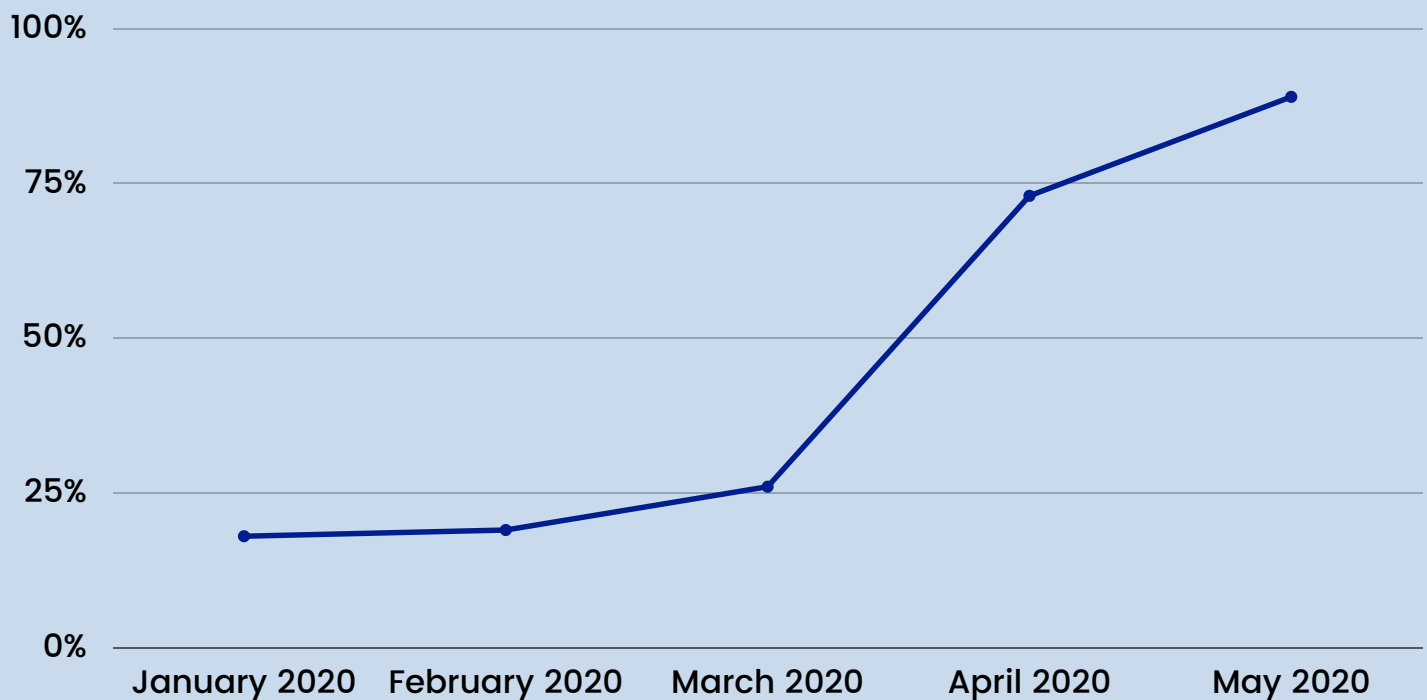


KEY TRENDS: **FOOD INSECURITY**

In the year leading up to the COVID-19 outbreak, harmful policies, such as the previous executive administration's changes to the definition of public charge, impacted the way immigrant families accessed federal aid. Fearful of deportation or family separation, many community members disenrolled in essential benefits including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This chilling effect, along with widespread job loss and business closures in 2020, created an **unprecedented rise in food insecurity**. The percentage of respondents reporting a need for food assistance through our Needs Assessment increased from **19% in February 2020 to 89% in May 2020**.

AAFSC expanded our reach to over **3,000 community members** with SNAP enrollment support, food distribution, and emergency funding (over **\$430,000 distributed in total**) to ensure families could remain fed. Even 1 year after the initial COVID-19 peak, food insecurity remains a consistent issue. **In March 2021, 54% of respondents reported experiencing food insecurity**, and AAFSC is fighting to ensure vulnerable families are still supported as they navigate the long-term impacts of COVID-19.

Percentage of respondents reporting a need for **food assistance**

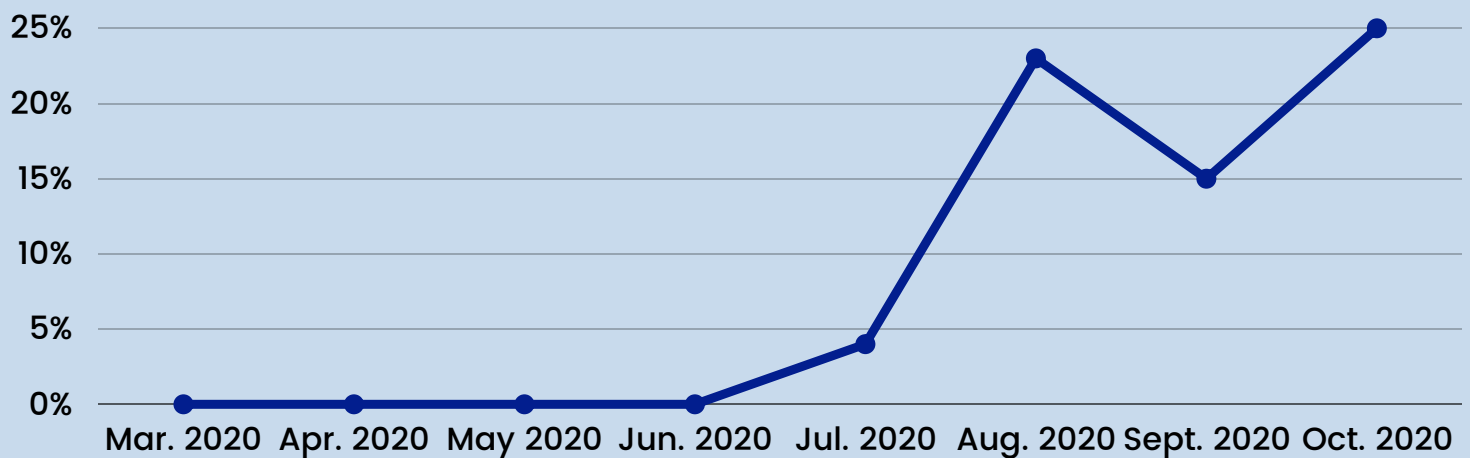


KEY TRENDS: MENTAL HEALTH

Recognizing the nexus of challenges that immigrants endure, including conflict in their countries of origin, harrowing migration journeys, poverty, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, help-seeking stigma, and acculturative stressors, **AAFSC has led the way in promoting mental health awareness and access to services for AMEMSA community members.** For several years, AAFSC has provided free individual counseling services and hosted community conversations to overcome stigmas, develop coping mechanisms, and disseminate information about accessible services.

In the wake of COVID-19's first wave, our Mental Health Counseling program experienced a **350% increase in demand for services** as community members turned to AAFSC as a trusted and confidential resource to help navigate the mental impact of financial strain, isolation, uncertainty, and loss. **In February 2020, only 4% of respondents reported needing mental health support. By August 2020, 23% of respondents were reporting this need, and in January 2021, the trend peaked as 29% of respondents** identified a need for mental health support. While we understand that stigmas lead many to suffer in silence, the proportion of respondents speaking out about their need for support is remarkable. In the past year, AAFSC has provided **1,015 counseling services to 89 individuals**, but our waitlist remains lengthy. With demand still at an all-time high, AAFSC is dedicated to expanding opportunities for free, accessible, and culturally/linguistically-appropriate services for AMEMSA immigrant communities.

Percentage of respondents reporting a need for **mental health support**



CONCLUSION

The results of our Needs Assessment underscore the confluence of intersecting challenges facing immigrant and refugee communities. Our findings bring to light the immense and ongoing impact of COVID-19 and the structural inequities impacting health and well-being. **Economic insecurity, mental health, legal challenges, linguistic difficulties, and access to health services are prominent concerns** impacting community members' physical health, family well-being, and opportunities for economic mobility.

As we envision a path to recovery from COVID-19, it is critical that we act urgently at the local, state, and federal levels to **meet the needs of low-income immigrant populations by increasing access to culturally and linguistically competent social services** that promote health, family well-being, and social/economic mobility, particularly in the areas of food access, mental health support, legal assistance, and English literacy support.

AAFSC remains committed to monitoring and reporting on emerging community needs. Leveraging our position of trust in NYC's immigrant and refugee communities, our data collection and research efforts will continue to inform service provision and serve as a resource for allies and stakeholders who champion their prosperity.

To learn more about our response to these needs, check out our [Impact Report](#).



AAFSC's Research Institute is a hub for research & evaluation that measures community needs and analyzes the impact of culturally and linguistically-responsive programs and initiatives. For more reports and insights, visit our Impact page at aafscny.org/our-impact.



PROGRAM GUIDE

AAFSC is providing multiple in-person and remote services to support community members during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are open for referrals. Please contact our Brooklyn headquarters at 718-643-8000 or info@aafscny.org to learn more.

Preventive Program

We ensure the safety of children in homes where there have been allegations of child abuse or neglect.

Anti-Violence Program

We work to end partner violence, create equitable relationships, and revolutionize gendered discussions.

Legal Services Program

We ensure families have access to their rights, remain with their families, and understand immigration laws.

Community Health & Well-Being Program

We promote mental and physical well-being, healthy relationships, and all forms of community wellness.

Emergency Fund Program

We support vulnerable, low-income communities in need of emergency financial assistance.

Readiness Program

We teach English reading and writing to adults, meeting them where they are at to ensure success.

Young Adult Program

We work with young adults to develop life skills including financial literacy and college and career readiness.

Caregiver-Child Bonding Circle

We provide caregivers with special support and resources to connect with their young children and establish the building blocks for early literacy.

CONNECT WITH US



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To support the immigrant and refugee families that AAFSC serves, please donate today at aafscny.org/donate