And Still We Rise: 2020 in Review

Sakhi
for South Asian Women
And Still We Rise:
2020 in Review

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©2020 Sakhi for South Asian Women
Dear Friends,

Since 1989, Sakhi for South Asian Women has advocated for a future wherein every individual—regardless of race, gender, sexuality, class, caste, or religious creed—receives the holistic support they need. Now more than ever, with your dedication to our gender justice movement, we have offered sanctuary to survivors. Together, we have built pathways of healing through food, housing, and economic assistance, mental health counseling, and advocacy.

We have faced many challenges as an organization, yet there is no doubt that this year has been the most difficult to date. When the institutions that we should have been able to trust failed us, Sakhi carried on as a community lifeline.

Living through the pandemic as essential workers, the consequences of systemic inequality enraged us, as they collided with both the violent displays of structural racism that continue to plague this country and the Trump administration’s frequent policy attacks on human rights. Under unresponsive leadership, the pandemic proliferated, compromising the lives of the most vulnerable among us: those with pre-existing conditions, those who live below the poverty line, recent immigrants, and survivors of gender-based violence.

Not only was the diminishment of autonomy and mobility triggering, but survivors were also facing job losses, evictions, a lack of access to contraception, and food insecurity. They wondered how they would feed their families. Many shared that abusers were manipulating their way back into homes, or that abusers were using the virus as an excuse to violate orders of protection or prevent parents from seeing their children in court-mandated visitations. We knew that we could not cut back on any of our services.

In these unprecedented times, we were fortunate to be held up by the many collectives, families, institutions, and individuals who rallied in support of Sakhi, and demonstrated that, although we must be isolated, we are not alone. Through creative solutions and community power, we responded to the crisis with care.

Up against lockdowns, widespread fear, and flagrant inequalities of race and gender, we rapidly adapted our core programs to become more accessible to survivors and address the pandemic’s unforeseen obstacles. We worked with survivors to update their safety plans to accommodate increasingly dangerous circumstance, set up a new text message service to create safe, alternative lines of multilingual communication, hosted our legal clinics virtually to help survivors navigate court closures and file orders of protection, expanded our mental health program to address survivors’ increased stress and anxiety, and aided parents in navigating the school system’s abrupt fluctuations.

Additionally, we assembled a team on the ground to adapt our Food Justice Program to a delivery model, and expanded our cash assistance program. Thanks to the community support that made this trauma-informed response possible, we were able to triple the rate of food and emergency assistance we had distributed to clients before the pandemic. From March to September, Sakhi distributed over $130,000 in Sakhi Solidarity Grants, and delivered 16,000 pounds of food.

This report is a reflection of our 2020—a year that has pushed us to rethink the scope and depth of our work. We are excited to share our learnings and growth with you through survivors’ stories, team insights, measurable impacts, and our most memorable moments.

I am immensely grateful to our team at Sakhi, as each and every one of my colleagues has worked beyond the scope of what we had previously deemed possible. Our response to the pandemic was made possible by their resilience.

Thank you for uplifting our work. At the close of this year, we recommit ourselves to doing whatever it takes to bring safety and healing to all survivors. Throughout this pandemic and beyond, as long as we need to exist, we will continue to persist.

In Solidarity,

Kavita Mehra
Executive Director
Gender-based violence is a global public health crisis.

- Gender-based violence is defined as any harmful threat or act that is directed by discrimination against someone's actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially-constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is complex and systemic in nature, and is rooted in gender-based power inequalities and gender-based discrimination.

- While gender-based violence happens in all communities regardless of class, ethnicity, race, or religion, it disproportionately impacts women and members of the LGBTQIA community.

Gender-based violence affects:

- 25% of women in the United States
- 35% of women worldwide
- 40% of South Asian women in the United States
We exist to represent the South Asian diaspora in a survivor-led, survivor-centered movement for gender-justice, and to honor the collective and inherent power of all survivors of violence.

- Founded in 1989, Sakhi for South Asian Women is a gender justice organization in New York City that works with survivors of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence in our community.

- We are the second-oldest South Asian women's organization in the United States, and the first to break the silence surrounding domestic and sexual violence within New York's vast South Asian immigrant population.

- Sakhi serves survivors and families of South Asian origin, whether they come from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or the South Asian Diaspora in Africa and the Caribbean.

- Ninety-five percent of Sakhi's clients are recent immigrants, eighty percent are limited English proficient, and seventy-five percent reside below the federal poverty line.

Sakhi has served more than 12,000 survivors and has been a recognized leader in the field, locally and nationally, for over thirty-one years.
Sakhi’s programs promote self-sufficiency, civic integration, and healing to reduce poverty and break the cycle of violence.

Anti-Violence

Sakhi supports survivors through an array of culturally-sensitive, linguistically-appropriate services. This includes crisis intervention, safety-planning, and ongoing emotional support; accompaniments, translation assistance and advocacy in court, during healthcare visits, and at public benefits and welfare agencies, weekly support groups, connections to counseling, low-cost or free health consultations and exams, public benefits, shelter, and housing. Sakhi also supports survivors of forced marriage, as well as students with Title IX Sexual Assault cases.

Mental Health

As trauma-informed service providers, we understand the importance of having mental health services available to the community. Mental health services are neither affordable nor accessible for most United States residents. Furthermore, those services that are available are rarely culturally- or linguistically-specific. Since 2017, Sakhi has provided in-house mental health counseling. Currently, we have two full-time counselors on our team.

Economic Empowerment

Sakhi’s Economic Empowerment Program is a pioneering model of linguistically-specific and culturally-sensitive services that exists to ensure the financial stability and economic security of survivors of gender-based violence. We believe that self-determination and self-access—the ability to make decisions for one’s self and access a pathway to one’s own goals—is key to an individual’s long-term safety and security. We provide case management as well as organize various workshops and skills trainings, career fairs, financial literacy classes, resume building, credit repair, and scholarships to survivors. We also assist survivors with accessing public benefits, and job opportunities. This multi-pronged approach aims to help survivors achieve self-sufficiency and safety.

We know that access to food, shelter, and mental health care are basic needs along one’s healing journey. As such, we take a holistic approach to addressing survivor’s needs.

Food Justice

Sakhi’s Food Justice Program was established in 2019, as the first such program for South Asians in Manhattan. This program was born out of our understanding of how destabilizing it is to be without basic necessities, particularly while experiencing trauma. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, our program was available five days a week, as a resource to those with limited access to food, hygiene, and infant products. In direct response to the public health crisis, we remodeled our program to expand both our reach and our level of care. We hired a team to source, assemble, and deliver nutritious, easy-to-prepare, and culturally-familiar food packages for survivors and their children.
Transitional Housing

In April of 2019, Sakhi expanded its housing services to provide tenant-based rental assistance. Our program supports survivors with full rent for two years in an apartment of their choice in a location that is safe and accessible. In addition, Sakhi provides help with safety measures, relocation and moving fees, security deposit payments, and utilities.

Community Engagement

Sakhi has an extensive outreach and education program that includes workshops and trainings for community members and other service providers. We strive to increase awareness of our services and other available resources to those experiencing violence within the greater South Asian community in New York City. In addition to these workshops, Sakhi has a robust calendar of community engagement events, where we seek to educate on topics such as bystander intervention, trauma-informed care, mental health, rights of the individual, Sakhi’s services and history, and culturally- and linguistically-specific programming.

Youth Empowerment

In 2016, Sakhi developed our Youth Empowerment Program as a way to support survivors under the age of 24. Sakhi seeks to empower young people with the skills to break cycles of interpersonal and gender-based violence by providing: individual youth mental health counseling, mentorships, financial planning, legal, medical, and housing referrals, and peer support groups on topics such as financial literacy, community organizing, and leadership development. The Youth Empowerment Program provides a safe space for South Asian youth to freely discuss and explore issues around identity, family, relationships, positive sexuality, and gender.

We offer a safe, nonjudgmental environment to every survivor who walks through our doors.
I hope you, your family, and everyone at Sakhi are doing great.

I am writing this email to share the good news with all my Sakhis (friends) who were always there during and before the pandemic.

After the tough time of unemployment for months finally, my job search and long-term goal are complete. I have received the job as a Chemistry High school teacher with NYCDOE.

Very much thankful to all Sakhis who helped me in various ways specifically the food basket and other school supplies during the Pandemic which saved me and my daughter from exposure to it.

Thank you again for everything.

—VS
In 2020, Sakhi provided services to over 450 survivors in 8 South Asian languages.

Many of the survivors we work with are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, stepping in and out of poverty—a situation that the COVID-19 pandemic only complicates. We work with survivors from all across the city, but nearly half are located in Queens, described by *The New York Times* as the “epicenter of the epicenter.”

95% are immigrants
7% are undocumented
11% unknown status
18% were under age 18
73% are parents
27% single adults

Mothers, immigrants, and high-risk survivors struggle with the financial, emotional, and physical challenges of leaving the house and caring for family members. As such, Sakhi continues to present creative solutions to complex issues in order to support our community along their healing journeys.
The COVID-19 public health crisis has both showcased and exacerbated immense inequalities.

Before COVID-19, survivors were already facing multiple economic hardships and threats to their safety. One's immigration status, poverty level, age, and need to take care of dependents—whether they be children, elderly parents, or others—compound the threat and consequence of this virus. Many of the survivors we work with are hourly workers without paid sick leave or access to childcare services, and many have tenuous immigration statuses.

In direct response to the pandemic, Sakhi rapidly adapted to meet survivors’ critical needs. On March 12th, we modified all of our core services to maintain continuity of support for survivors, even from afar.

With this virtual infrastructure, we were able to:

- Shift to operating remotely, as we conduct tele-therapy sessions and offer our core services over the phone.
- Coordinate at-home, grocery basket deliveries through our Food Justice Program to address immediate financial concerns.
- Expand our direct emergency assistance by supporting payments for essential items such as phone bills, sanitary products, medication, and diapers to ease the financial burdens suffered throughout this crisis.
- Add a text line option (1-305-MY-SAKHI) for clients who seek alternate ways to reach us outside of our multilingual helpline.
WE BELIEVE SANCTUARY AND SAFETY ARE ESSENTIAL TO HEALING.

36 survivors received rental assistance, 11 of whom will receive up to 24 months of support with our Transitional Housing Program.

OUR MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS HELP GUIDE SURVIVORS ALONG THEIR HEALING JOURNEYS.

77 survivors were supported with individual counseling. We held 52 virtual support groups, with 28 consistent attendees.

WE ASPIRE TO PROMOTE JUSTICE, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND DIGNITY.

160 survivors were provided with Economic Empowerment services, including job preparation, trainings, and public benefits support.

OUR HOLISTIC SERVICES ARE CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY SPECIFIC.

450 survivors were provided with individual case management, including crisis intervention and legal assistance. We provided services in 8 South Asian languages: Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Punjabi, Sylheti, and Urdu.

OUR COMMUNITY IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR WORK.

750 community members were reached by our events. We hosted webinars, joined panels, and virtually-presented the fifth annual Gender Justice & the Arts Showcase.

WE ARE SURVIVOR-CENTERED AND COMMITTED TO ACCESSIBILITY.

1,800 calls were received on our helpline. We saw a significant decrease in the number of calls to our helpline from March to April, indicating to us that survivors lacked a safe place and could not reach out. To make ourselves more accessible to survivors, we added a text line.

WE SEEK TO REALIZE FOOD JUSTICE AS A HUMAN RIGHT FOR ALL SURVIVORS.

16,000 pounds of food were distributed through 1,500 deliveries to 170 individual households.

WE ARE ADAPTABLE AND RESILIENT.

130,000 dollars were distributed to 112 survivors through our Sakhi Solidarity Grants, in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
We responded swiftly and holistically at the onset of the crisis, setting up a virtual office just weeks after the first COVID-19 case was confirmed.

March 1, 2020
First coronavirus case detected in NYC


March 5, 2020
Launch of new Queens site

Sakhi opens a second office in order to provide comprehensive programming in Queens, home to the highest concentration of South Asians in the United States.

March 12, 2020
Modified our services to operate remotely

Sakhi’s Program Advocates began offering case management, safety planning, counseling, employment advising, benefits navigation, legal consultations, and more, all by phone or videoconference.

March 14, 2020
Expanding our Food Justice Program to address rising food insecurity

Survivors report both shortages and fast-rising prices of staple items in the Bangladeshi and Indian grocery stores they frequent. To address this, Sakhi expands our Food Justice Program to make nutritious, shelf-stable, easy-to-prepare, and culturally-familiar food more available to clients facing housing, food, and income instability.

March 29, 2020
Isolated But Not Alone campaign launched

In light of the public health crisis, Sakhi cancels its annual gala. Given this cancellation and during this time of social distancing, we call upon our community to join us in demonstrating that we are Isolated But Not Alone. Together, we ensure the continued provision of critical direct services.

April 2, 2020
Poorna Jagannathan & Kavita Mehra host a Brown Girl Magazine Community Webinar

Sakhi’s Executive Director, Kavita Mehra, actress and activist, Poorna Jagannathan, and Brown Girl Magazine host a virtual discussion with other community members on the sociopolitical climate during this pandemic from a South Asian and gender-based violence lens.

May 5, 2020
Virtual Support Group for Parents

Sakhi’s Youth Empowerment Program opens a virtual space for parents to talk about parenting struggles related to COVID-19, anxiety, and more.

May 19, 2020
May Workshop: Grounding & Modeling Mental Health

In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, Sakhi leads grounding and mindfulness exercises and discusses practices for prioritizing mental health during times of crisis within a community space.

June 1–9, 2020
Sakhi conducts training for Safe Horizon’s Crime Victim Assistance Program

Sakhi conducts cultural competency trainings for DV-case responders at precincts. Training topics include: Privilege, Culture and Intersectionality; Youth Empowerment; Forced Marriage and Mental Health in the South Asian Diaspora, and more.
**June 15, 2020**

Sakhi distributes over 3,500 pounds of food

Between April 15 and June 15, 2020, Sakhi distributes over 3,500 pounds of food to over 100 clients and their families through our Food Justice Program.

**August 22, 2020**

5th Annual Gender Justice & the Arts

Sakhi premieres its 5th Gender Justice & the Arts program virtually, featuring South Asian performers and visual artists from across the country.

**September 12-26, 2020**

Backpack dropoff with Khalsa Aid

Khalsa Aid supports Sakhi in distributing backpacks and school supplies to students in the Sakhi community.

**October 20, 2020**

Building Movement Coalition panel: "Pandemic & Protest: Perspectives from Nonprofit Leaders of Color"

Building Movement Project's report, "On the Frontlines," is released. Sakhi joins their virtual panel discussion.

**November 1, 2020**

#MeToo Hear My Truth Panel

Sakhi hosts a virtual panel of South Asian poet-activists and survivors to discuss breaking down stigmas, reimagining survivorship, healing, and the #MeToo movement.

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**June 25, 2020**

Fireside Chat: What is Food Insecurity and How Does It Impact Our Community?

Kavita Mehra joins Deepti Sharma and Joya Dass for a Fireside Chat on food insecurity. Together, they explore its impact on the community throughout the pandemic.

**August 23, 2020**

Virtual English Second Language courses begin

Responding to survivor requests, Sakhi's Economic Empowerment team organizes ESL classes to support personal and professional skill-building.

**October 15, 2020**

"My Life, My Story" Series Premiere

To provide survivors a platform to share their stories, DV Program Manager & Advocate, Shyda Rashid, creates the four-part series, "My Life, My Story".

**October 29, 2020**

Panel with First Lady of NYC Chirlane McCray and Commissioner Noel

In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Sakhi presents a cross-organizational community webinar in partnership with the Queens Family Justice Center. Jahajee Sisters, Manavi, Safe Horizon, and South Queens Women's March join the conversation.

**November 15, 2020**

Padma Lakshmi makes aloo tikki on IG Live in support of Sakhi

Celebrity chef and activist, Padma Lakshmi, hosts a fundraiser for Sakhi on her Instagram page, in celebration of Diwali.
Letters from Survivors

We are humbled by the messages we receive from our community. Making a difference in survivors’ lives is what maintains our resilience.

I was having sleepless nights—How can I manage food for my kids? What about rent? Then I got the check, exactly on my birthday. It was awesome. It is not just money for me: it is a message from my Allah that he is always with me.

—TL

I received a shipment of groceries today and I just wanted to say thank you! It was wonderful to have some fresh vegetables for dinner with my family.

I used the ingredients to make some Bengali dishes: begun bhorta, cauliflower and fish curry, and beef curry with tomatoes.

—NM

You’ve come into my life like a guiding star.

—SL
As 2020 comes to a close, we take this opportunity to reflect on the work we have done, the relationships we have built, and the memories we have created while serving our community.

In their words, members of our team share some of the moments and stories that have left an impression on their hearts.

2020 has been a tumultuous year for human beings, including myself, as a mental health counselor at Sakhi. In reflecting back on the year, I recall the hardships yet the strides, the lack of connection yet the willingness to engage and the struggle yet the resiliency. For instance, in a population where mental health is stigmatized, many survivors connected with us to prioritize their mental health and our efforts remained in meeting their needs, just as they would in person. Though we were far from each other, we had a collective experience that united us; therefore, we balanced our empathy and connection. As 2020 comes to an end, I connect and lean on the value of resiliency, collectiveness and creativity.

–Pooja Raj, Associate Director, Counseling & Youth

All I can say is that it is a privilege to be in a position where I am able to be a source of guidance and support to survivors on a daily basis. Some days are tough. In fact many of these last 300 days have been tough. But I am consistently able to draw strength from and be inspired by my dear colleagues and the steady and consistent determination and perseverance of the extraordinary women that I serve.

–Anusha Goossens, Anti-Violence Program Manager

My favorite memory of 2020 is a survivor's journey to love and hope amidst a global pandemic. Despite all the harassment that this survivor has been facing from her son's father, she finally found courage in her heart to stand up to him and start a new narrative of healing and happiness.

I found her story inspiring, as our work attains its true meaning when a survivor begins to or continues to believe that they deserve a life of dignity, love and hope.

–Shilpy Chatterjee, Senior Anti-Violence Program Advocate
I started 2020 with a lot of hope and self-improvement plans, some I have accomplished and others I had to let go of. The pandemic brought with itself feelings of loss, isolation, and disappointment. During this time, I was able to draw strength from my clients and my colleagues. Their resilience awakened the fighter spirit in me and pushed me to endure and not give up professionally and personally.

I also witnessed rich instances of empathy and compassion amongst our clients during the pandemic. Our clients are themselves going through financial distress but they still manage to keep their problems aside and provide support to other clients. For instance, on a call with a client about FJP services, she said, “I and my two children are managing fine but please give my spot to my other sisters (clients) at Sakhi who are more vulnerable and have no support." We as social workers and advocates often get to see the destructive side of humanity which fills us with despair and cynicism but such acts of selflessness help to reinstate our belief in humanity.

–Sweta Saji, Economic Empowerment Program Manager

As I woke up this morning in the sanctuary of my home, I couldn’t stop thinking of my clients who would have woken up to a not-so-perfect picture. A perfect day for a lot of them would have been waking up knowing that their public benefits were still intact; knowing that they were secure in safe housing, or knowing that their work authorization had not been denied so they could pursue their dream job. 2020 has been the most surreal year for me as I have tried to make sense of the jarring inequities that were worsened through the pandemic.

As I sat from the comfort of my home working, I felt the anxieties of my clients as my own, sometimes helpless and crippled with the idea that they would have to make a choice between staying home with their abuser and leaving the abuser to be exposed to the pandemic. There were times I thought of giving up but the only thing that kept me going was this quote: “No matter what our personal circumstances may be, if we ourselves become a source of light there will be no darkness.”

This was recently made true when I told a client in a shelter last week that Sakhi would help her with her housing situation—she burst out crying. Through her sobs, I could just about piece together what she said to me, “I wish I could appear out of the phone to give you a hug right now.” Those are the moments that have lifted my spirits through most of 2020.

–Pria Sibal, Housing Development Manager
Our Team

Founders
Anannya Bhattacharjee
Mallika Dutt
Tula Goenka
Geetanjali Misra
Romita Shetty

Board of Directors
Vidya Satchit, Board Chair
Nandini Mongia, Treasurer
Anitha Iyer, Secretary
Bushra Mannan
Sunanda Nair-Bidkar
Shaheen Rushd
Beesham A. Seecharan
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Chandni Prasad
Santushi Kuruppu
Subadra Panchanadeswaran
Krupa Sharma
Romita Shetty
Tamseela Tayyabkhan
Neeta Rastogi Singh

Staff
Shana Bhattacharya, Director of Development
Shilpy Chatterjee, Senior Anti-Violence Program Advocate
Anusha Goossens, Anti-Violence Program Manager
Veda Kamra, Senior Communications Associate
Aroob Khan, Economic Empowerment Program Advocate
Azaadi Khan, Youth Counselor & Advocate
Malini Khorana, Director of Finance & Operations
Priya Krishna, Development and Operations Associate
Rezowana Linta, Counselor
Rashmi Luthra, Director of Programs, Queens & Brooklyn
Shubhekchy Malla, Anti-Violence Program Advocate
Kavita Mehra, Executive Director
Vidula Pant, Senior Director of Programs
Pooja Raj, Associate Director, Counseling & Youth
Shyda Rashid, Manager, Anti-Violence Program
Sweta Saji, Economic Empowerment Program Manager
Reshmi Sengupta, Community Outreach Specialist
Pria Sibal, Housing Development Manager
Fyzah Tajdin, Youth Counselor & Advocate
Mayuri Vedi, Special Projects Associate
Jason Yoon, Grants Manager

Young Professionals Network
Neha Sodhi, Co-chair
Sneha Subramanian, Co-chair
Sonia Mittal
Ayman Mohammad
Armaan Nathani
Zachary Patel
Susan Varghese
Sakhi in the Spotlight

As the nexus representing the South Asian diaspora in an intersectional, intergenerational movement, our outreach efforts make Sakhi an engaged, accountable, and visible presence.

“In the Heart of New York’s Pandemic, This Group Is Fighting for South Asian Abuse Survivors”
NowThis, December 2020

“Impossible Choices (with Kavita Mehra and Margarita Guzman)”
Hearing with Tali Farhadian Weinstein, December 2020

“Why domestic violence calls are surging for Asian American women amid the pandemic”
NBC News, September 2020

“Violence against women spikes worldwide under COVID-19 lockdowns”
CNN, August 2020

“In the Heart of New York’s Pandemic, This Group Is Fighting for South Asian Abuse Survivors”
Rewire.News, May 2020

“Boaz, Tali Weinstein Gift Fuels Fight Against Domestic Violence”
Bloomberg, May 2020

“You Just Can’t Say No: Muslim Essential Workers on Working Through Ramadan”
VICE, April 2020

“Why a Drop in Domestic Violence Reports Might Not Be a Good Sign”
The New York Times, April 2020

“It’s not safe to leave the house, and it’s not safe to stay in the house.’ How coronavirus could exacerbate domestic violence”
MarketWatch, March 2020

“NY domestic violence programs see client numbers decline as coronavirus traps survivors at home”
CNBC, March 2020
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A Look at Our Growth

A 34% increase in expenses between FY 2019 and FY 2020 attests to the expansion of our services to survivors of gender-based violence. A 32% increase in income attests to the robust support Sakhi has received from the community.

**FY 2020 Assets**

Grants/contributions receivable, net................................................................. $840,112
Property and equipment, net........................................................................ $7,461
Prepaid expenses........................................................................................... $22,744
Other assets..................................................................................................... $68,643
Cash and cash equivalents............................................................................... $708,529

**FY 2020 Liabilities & Net Assets**

Accounts payable & accrued expenses......................................................... $332,288
Deferred rent liability..................................................................................... $37,518
Net Assets....................................................................................................... $1,277,683
On the Horizon

2020 was a year of learning and adapting for Sakhi. Just before the pandemic halted in-person services, we opened our new Queens site. We continued to expand the team with new counselors and advocates as we simultaneously shifted our operations to function remotely. In 2021, we look forward to launching another new site in Brooklyn, further growing our team and expanding the reach of our services.

To learn more about Sakhi, please contact our Director of Development, Shana Bhattacharya, at shana.bhattacharya@sakhi.org