

# Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services

## ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Annual General Meeting  
July 14th, 2016



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## Message from the President

July 14, 2016

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

It is my privilege to welcome you all to the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM) of BCS, a non-profit, charitable, multi-service organization that has been providing services to the Bangladeshi and other communities in Scarborough and East York since 2000. BCS, with its mission objectives, "Helping People to Help Themselves", have supported the needs of thousands of newcomers, youth, seniors and children over the last 15 year by developing and delivering programs of importance to them. In 2015 alone, BCS served more than 1500 clients, of which nearly 1000 are direct service clients and 525 indirect. The Executive Director's report will provide further insights into the programs and services offered by BCS.

2015 has been one of revitalization, reorganization and re-growth for BCS, as in this period we ventured to move into newer heights by transforming the Board and reconstituting the Board governance structure, including a new President of the Board of Directors. Thanks to our Ad-hoc Committee members, volunteers and well-wishers who have worked hard to reconstitute the Board within the shortest possible time. Their volunteering spirit is truly commendable. I extend my heartiest appreciation to all of our volunteers and pool of youth for their untiring efforts in the success of the organization. I also welcome our new Board of Directors and thank outgoing Board members for their commitment, contribution and support to the cause of our community.

As we look into the future, we are confronted with the challenge of continuously improving our funding levels, improving volunteer base and developing new programs so that we are able to meet the ever increasing needs of our clients. I have no hesitation to say that we have a dynamic Board that is dedicated to the continued success of BCS. I take this opportunity to thank all of my fellow colleagues for their commitment to the cause and confidence in my ability. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our Executive Director Dr. Nasima Akhter for her relentless efforts in securing funding for BCS.

In concluding, I would like to thank all of our funders for their sensitivity and support towards our mission. Most particularly, the support from the City of Toronto is critical to our on-going success.

Thank you all for attending and for your unfailing support.



Dr. Kazi S. Hoque  
President, Board of Directors of BCS



## Preamble

BCS is proud to announce another great year for the organization. Many objectives were accomplished throughout the year and we were able to launch new events and initiatives. Our existing programs have also been a continuous success.

Youth Eliminates Smoking (YES), one of our youth projects, has completed Phase 7 and is now progressing to Phase 8. We are sure Phase 8 will be another eventful and exciting time for BCS. YES is currently organized by its 14 youth leaders. The recently launched Crescent Town Youth Fitness Initiative (CTYFI) has found continued success with more youths than ever participating in bi-weekly active living events. CTYFI has on average 25 regular participants who benefit from the program.

Bringing Back the Golden Age for Seniors is now in Phase 5 and continues to empower seniors within the community by engaging them in weekly discussions and giving them the opportunities to be influential in the community. This year, 314 seniors participated in various activities and services under this program.

Additionally, our Afterschool Tutoring Program (ASTP) and Summer Sports programs have also been well regarded and supported by the community. The ASTP program has enabled 40 volunteers to help more than 500 kids through the year.

The summer sports program has helped more than 200 youth participate in a free annual soccer tournament and 50 kids in track and field events.

Along with these initiatives, BCS is continuing its ongoing research within the community to learn about the important issues that holds its members back. Numerous studies specific to the community have been completed and presented in different forums and seminars such as the Metropolis Conference, Conference on the Economics of Migration, Health and Equity Conference, Centre for Social Justice, University of Toronto, and more which have laid the organization for future developments.

Celebratory events (in conjunction with the City of Toronto and other organizations), both international and cultural, have been effective in uniting the community.

These accomplishments could not have been possible without the extraordinary commitment and hard work from our staff, volunteers, and board members. The support of our partner organizations and funders have also been greatly significant to our operations.

*Nasima Akter*

Dr. Nasima Akter  
Executive Director  
July 14, 2016



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## Introduction

### **BCS MISSION: “HELPING PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES”**

**BCS MANDATE:** BCS shall provide information, referrals, skill development and settlement services to diverse communities in the Greater Toronto area (GTA). Services shall be adaptive to the changing community needs and are delivered in partnership with other committees and service providers.

Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS) is a non-profit organization serving not only the vast Bangladeshi population here in Toronto, but also the local (Taylor-Massey, Crescent Town and adjacent neighbourhoods) community since 2000. Our focuses are youth, seniors and newcomers and we now serve over 3000 beneficiaries that rely on the services we provide, with the number increasing every year.

**Youth engagement:** In the past few years, we have had five projects (YES, CTYFI, Summer Sports, RBC Vital Youth, Girls Active Living) catered specifically to the adolescents of the community. Through these initiatives, we have been able to develop healthy living, strong community as well as an onslaught of inter/intra personal skills (leadership, communication, time management, etc.). In the past year specifically, BCS has met with success in all of our campaigns: we have completed Phase 7 of our **Youth Eliminates Smoking (YES)** Project and have moved onto Phase 8, which we anticipate will be bigger and better than before. In Phase 6/7, monthly leadership meetings have been held amongst our 14 youth leaders who have worked tirelessly to develop the YES Program to its fullest. Additionally, bi-weekly Smoke-Free Movie Nights and Smoke-Free Board Game Nights have seen 30-40 youth in attendance for each event. The **Crescent Town Youth Fitness Initiative (CTYFI)**, which was launched in 2014, has been successful thus far and sees 20-25 youth consistently participating in bi-weekly active living events, with special events such as both of our Bowling Nights and Beach Day bringing 30-35 youth and 50 youth, respectively. **The Summer Sports Program** now in its 11th year, has helped more than 280 youth (registered participants per year) participate in a free annual soccer tournament, as well as soccer training camp in the weeks leading up to the tournament. The **RBC Vital Youth Program** has empowered children and youth by organizing engaging activities for building physical literacy and strong youth networks: Monthly Ping-Pong Nights and Physical Literacy Workshops bring 10-15 youth and 20-25 youth per event, respectively. Finally, the **Girls Active Living Program** created awareness about the importance of active living and healthy eating amongst adolescent girls and empowered girls to implement the necessary lifestyle changes. This was done via health promotion workshops focusing on food literacy (using Canada’s Food Guide) as well as activities such as beach days, yoga lessons, all girls sporting events, etc. which brought 20-30 south Asian girls per event.

**Seniors support services:** Our seniors’ program (**Bringing Back the Golden Age for Seniors Project**), now in its 5th Phase, has continued to empower more than 314 seniors within the community by engaging them in weekly discussions and facilitating their contributions to the community. The program has been tailored to address an aging population facing a wide range of difficulties, including frailty, social isolation, immobility, depression, etc. Essentially, it has been designed to support seniors by giving them the means to improve their lives whilst also feeling comfortable alone at home. This has been achieved by hosting regular health

workshops which are attended by 40-50 seniors per session as well as weekly fitness activities, which are attended by 10-15 seniors. Additional services such as home support and accompaniment have helped 124 seniors and 108 seniors, respectively, in the past year; and regular telephone follow-ups and friendly visits have ensured seniors are confident in the fact that someone is there to stand by their side when needed.

**Free after school support:** For young children and newcomers, our free **After School Tutoring Program (ASTP)** has provided supplementary education to children of families that could not otherwise afford paid services. One of our most successful initiatives, the ASTP program has enabled 40 volunteers to help 500 kids through the year.

**Research:** Along with these initiatives, numerous studies specific to the community have been completed and presented in different forum and seminars like Metropolis Conference, Conference on the Economics of Migration, Health & Equity Conference and more which have laid the foundation for future developments.

Additionally, settlement services are provided in partnership with other community organizations, helping approximately 1200 clients over the past year. Our clients include new and old residents of the catchments area who are not only Bangladeshi but from other ethnicities as well.

Additionally, celebratory events have been organized (in conjunction with other organizations and/or the City of Toronto) and have been successful in uniting the community.

Now BCS spreads its roots deeply into the South Asian societies. However, the main challenge of BCS is shortage of funding to implement the wide range of activities that are crucial for the community to connect to Canadian main streamlining. When our South Asian have learned the ways of achieving betterment, and they need a strong back support further, BCS has fallen in shortage of funding to act a strong pillar on their ways. Our all success will go in vein due to lack of funding. BCS anticipates many youths will be distracted from the main streamlining and will be deprived of healthy living style. On the other hand, the demands for youth activities are increasing in our community as many immigrants already arrived in Toronto and many will come shortly. BCS has strong intention and is committed to support these youths and seniors in need living in this community.

## 2015 At a Glance

Knowledge of cultural norms and values has allowed BCS to maximize its potential by providing services targeted at new comes, youth and seniors. BCS has over 3000 beneficiaries that rely on the services provided by the organization, with a steady increase in beneficiaries every year. Our achievements in 2015 is given below.

### Youth Initiatives

Activity	# of participants per session
Cultural Performance (in partnership with CASSA)	8 Youth
Anti-Smoking Promotional Material Production and Distribution	120 Youth
<b>Youth Eliminates Smoking (YES)</b>	
Monthly Leadership Meetings	14 Youth
Smoke-Free Movie Night	20-30 Youth
Smoke-Free Board Game Night	20-30 Youth
World No Tobacco Day Celebrations	100 Participants
<b>Crescent Town Youth Fitness Initiative (CTYFI)</b>	
Monthly Wii Nights	20-25 Youth
Beach Day	50 Youth
Bi-Weekly Sports Night	20-25 Youth
2 Bowling Nights	30-35 Youth
2 Yoga Nights	20-25 Youth
<b>Summer Sports</b>	
Track and Field Day	50 registered participants plus visitors
10 Session Training Camp	10-15 Youth
Soccer Tournament Weekend	200 registered participants plus visitors
<b>RBC Vital Youth Project</b>	
Monthly Ping-Pong Night	10-15 Youth
Monthly Physical Literacy Workshop	20-25 Youth

### Settlement Services

Support type	# of participants per session
Day -to-day settlement services	40-50 Individuals monthly

### Celebrations

Event	# of participants
Bangladeshi New Year	250 Visitors
Bangladeshi New Year's Art Competition	40 Kids
International Mother Language Day	120 Visitors
Victory Day Cultural Show	120 Visitors
Canada Day Rally in Taylor-Massey	50 Participants
Canada Day Celebrations	60-70 Participants

## 2015 At a Glance

### Senior initiatives

Activity	# of Participants per session
Weekly Exercise Sessions	10-15 Seniors / 32 Sessions
Bangladesh Independence Day Celebrations	100 Seniors
11 Seniors' Health Workshops	40-50 Seniors
Home Support	108 Seniors
Accompaniment (for interpreter, travel assistance, etc.)	124 Seniors
Barriers to Access, Demographics and Health Concerns Survey	314 Seniors
Beach Day	50 Seniors

### After School Tutoring & Heritage Program

Activity	# of participants per session
Free weekly tutoring sessions	500 students per year (cumulative) with an average of 25 students per session as well as 40 volunteers throughout the year (8 volunteers on average per session)

### Research

FOCUS	STATUS
1. Bringing Back the Golden Age for Seniors - Ways to Improve their Health Situations	Completed
2. Barriers of Seniors While Accessing to Health Care System	Abstract Presented in 5 <sup>th</sup> Health Annual Equity Summit
3. How Knowledgeable are Seniors Towards The Prevention and Control of Chronic Illnesses	In Progress
4. Paving Their Way and Earning Their Pay: Economic Survival Experiences of Immigrants in East Toronto	Submitted for publication in referred journal
5. Is Dhaka's urban ecological decline stimulating an out-migration of professionals? Findings from an exploratory study	Submitted for publication in referred journal
6. Climate disasters threaten Bangladesh's social gains	Presentation
7. Climate Change Impacts on the Global South and Inadequate UN Agreements	Presentation
8. Climate Change: Migration and Displacement	Presentation
9. Waste management and its health and environmental effect	Presentation

## BCS Initiatives

### Settlement Services

Settlement Services is at the core of BCS' initiatives. We are continuously aiding newcomers with the transition of living in a new foreign country.

We have continued to provide settlement services in partnership with other community organizations, helping approximately 1200 clients yearly. Our clients include new and old residents of the local area who are primarily but not only limited to Bengalis.

### Youth Engagement

BCS supports a variety of youth-oriented initiatives by providing free programs that engage youth in extra-curricular activities focused on engaging, educating and empowering them.

### Youth Eliminates Smoking (YES)

Due to the overwhelming support from the community, the City of Toronto's Identify 'n Impact Grant has made it possible to continue the YES program into an 8<sup>th</sup> year from January 2016 - December 2016. The purpose of YES is to provide recreational and cultural programming to the children of the community as a way to deter them from beginning the unhealthy habit of smoking. The initiative also works to building a strong community awareness against tobacco use.



With YES currently in phase 7, the chosen theme for this phase was the arts. This led to numerous arts-driven events which embraced children's creativity and explored the benefits of leading a smoke free lifestyle. Monthly leadership meetings have been held amongst the 14 youth leaders who have worked tirelessly to develop the YES program to its fullest.

The events of the year concluded with the YES team delivering the annual World No Tobacco Day event on May 30, 2015. The event consisted of a workshop with a guest speaker who spoke about the significance of the program and art activities were held for the kids. The event was successful and engaged over 100 individuals from across the community. Additionally, bi-weekly Smoke-Free Movie Nights and Smoke-Free board Game Nights have seen 30-40 youth in attendance for each event. Social media contests were held as a way to let the community voice their support towards the cause.

YES also places focus on physical literacy as well to make sure kids have the opportunity to learn about the importance of integrating exercise in their daily lifestyle.

### Crescent Town Youth Fitness Initiative (CTYFI)

The *Crescent Town Youth Fitness Initiative (CTYFI)* is funded by the City of Toronto, which began at the beginning of 2014.

*CTYFI* sees 20-25 youth regularly from the Crescent Town community participating in bi-weekly events that promote mental and physical health. Partnerships with Access Alliance, Crescent-Town Club and LA Fitness have allowed *CTYFI* to flourish in the past year.



Preliminary studies conducted in the community found that local youth had a desire to participate in sports and other recreation activities; however they were limited by a lack of space, safety concerns as well as increasing costs. For this reason, the goal of *CTYFI* is to engage youth in recreational activities in a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment. With special events such as both of our Bowling Nights and Beach Day bringing 35 and 50 youths, respectively. This has proven to be a positive

deterrent from risky behaviors, resulting in a more vibrant and healthy community.

The success of *CTYFI* has led to further events such as Board Games Nights, Wii Nights, trivia games, etc.

### Summer Sports

*Summer Sports* is another initiative focused on providing youth with quality opportunities to engage in sports and other physical activities. This has been achieved by coordinating a comprehensive Summer Sports program that has seen nearly a decade's worth of success. BCS's *Summer Sports* program has helped



more than 200 youth (per year), and this number is growing with every passing year.

Children from low income families or those who have recently immigrated to Canada often do not have the resources necessary to enjoy the benefits of being part of an organized sports program. In response to this concern, BCS has committed to creating a sports initiative for youth that is 100% free and inclusive.

### After School Tutoring Program

The *After School Tutoring Program* is one of the pioneer initiatives taken by BCS and has provided quality tutoring for the last 16 years. It is an extremely successful project and helps over 500 students (per year) achieve, if not surpass, the TDSB's expectations of them. These efforts are implemented by volunteers, which includes current and former TDSB students. Additionally, the physical health of children has been made a primary concern for *ASTP*, thus leading to physical activity days that occur once a month. The relationships that are developed as well as the success achieved by students and teachers alike extends beyond the walls of the *After School Program* and continues to better the community in years to come.



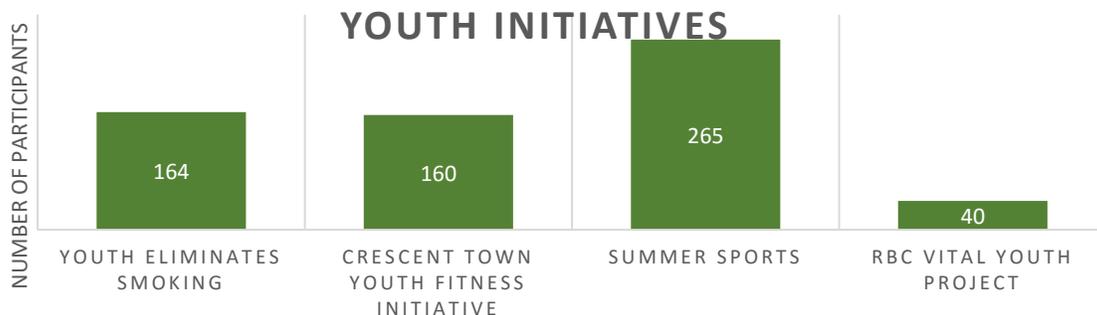
The *After School Tutoring Program* is open to all youth (as young as grade 1 to as old as grade 12) on a drop-in basis. However, the focus of ASTP is on children who may not have the necessary resources to achieve academic success: children who have recently immigrated to Canada with their families and/or children of low income families who often face numerous barriers to learning (such as language, financials, etc.). As a result, the *After School Tutoring Program* is offered free of charge every Saturday.

ASTP has organized multiple events throughout the year; such as Earth Day, the Language Movement Competition, and the Welcome to Canada Art Competition that informed students about the current events surrounding migrating Syrians.

### RBC Physical Literacy

This project provided the opportunity for children and youth from the Crescent Town community to learn about physical literacy and play the sport of table tennis. During 2015, BCS staff and volunteers facilitated free weekly sessions for both children and youth. The sessions for children ages 0-9 allowed them to have fun and master fundamental movement skills. The other session, for youth ages 10-18, focused on offering instruction on fundamental sport skills, and free play, related to table tennis.

BCS truly believes “children are the future” and as such supports a variety of youth-oriented initiatives. These free programs engage youth in extracurricular activities focused on empowering them in the years to come.



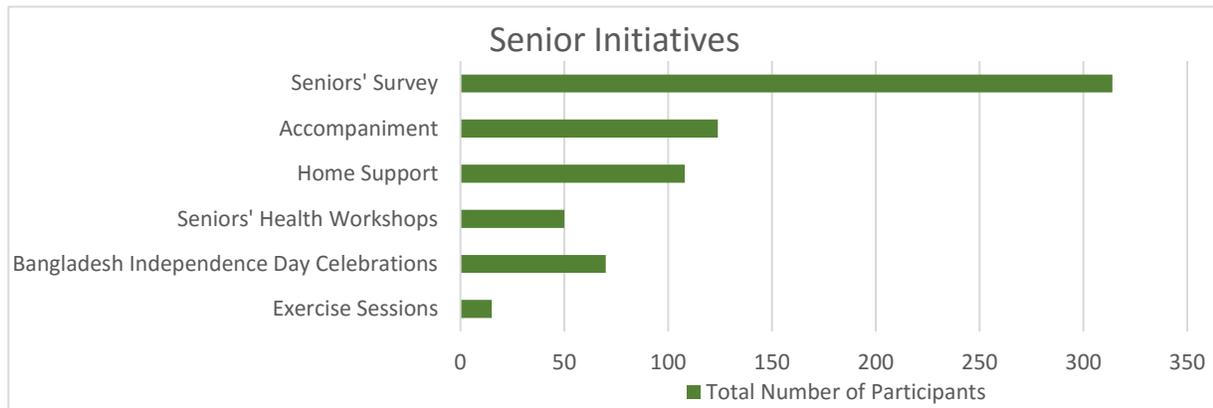
### Senior Engagement

The BCS senior program has been tailored to address an aging population facing a wide range of difficulties, including frailty, social isolation, immobility, depression, etc. Essentially, it has been designed to support seniors by giving them the means to improve their lives whilst also feeling comfortable alone at home. Now in its 4<sup>th</sup> phase, BCS has continued to empower more than 314 seniors within the community by engaging them in weekly discussions and facilitating their contributions to the community. BCS ensures seniors are confident in the fact that someone is there to stand by their side when needed.

For seniors, aging comes with many problems; health issues such as multiple physiological illnesses, and decreased mobility can make everyday life very difficult. Additionally, loneliness and potential abuse from their families can lead to worsening conditions. Much of the seniors’ concerns in this community are a result

of socioeconomic burdens that prevent immigrant families from dedicating time and resources to their elders. Burdens such as income insecurity, housing affordability and inadequate social support undermine the seniors' ability to obtain optimal healthcare.

BCS' senior initiatives are designed to support seniors by giving them the means to improve their lives while also feeling comfortable to be independent. This is achieved by hosting regular workshops addressing health concerns and other relevant issues.



### Senior Cabinet

The cabinet is the ideal way to bridge the gap between the needs of seniors and the services provided. Through the Cabinet, BCS is able to offer enhanced programs to resolve issues seniors face.

### Medical Assistance

BCS provides accompaniment, pharmacy assistance and support for any medical appointments for seniors when required. BCS also provides home support services for seniors such as scheduling medical appointments, basic cleaning and meal preparation, emotional support, and assistance in walking. Home support has helped 124 seniors and accompaniment has aided 108 seniors.

### Referral and Connections

BCS has strong ties with various organizations and individuals and is able to connect seniors with the right resources when necessary.

### Literacy Health & Fitness

BCS hosts monthly health promotion and health management workshops, and informal discussions to relay and discuss vital health related topics. Attendance for these monthly health workshops is approximately 40-50 seniors per session.



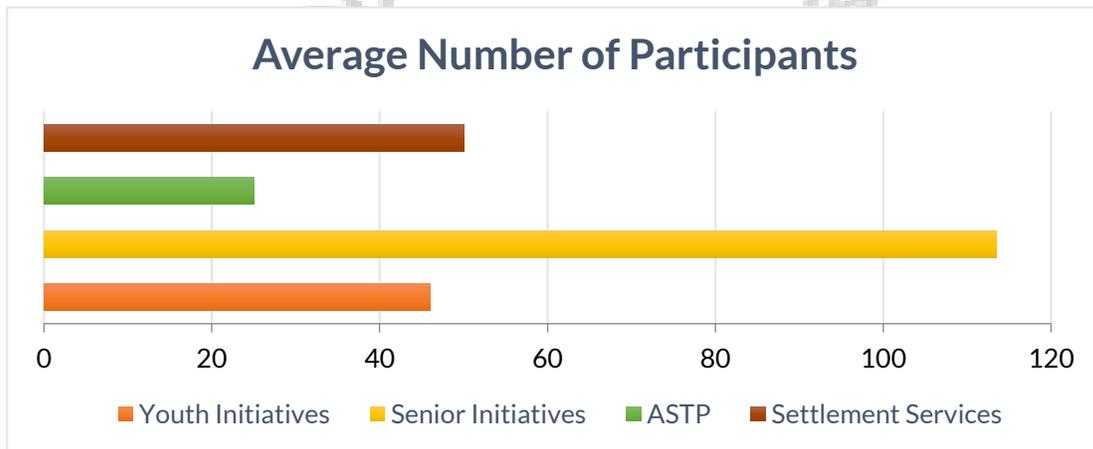
### Health and Recreation

BCS believes seniors are eager to explore different parts of the city and recreational spots, thus BCS takes seniors on bi-monthly field trips. BCS hosts weekly exercise and meditation programs which are attended by 10-15 seniors.



### Inter-Gen Activities

BCS works on bridging the generational social gap that exists between the youth and senior populations in the community. Through technology and social media, a writers club, and cultural events both groups of citizens are able to learn something new from each other. BCS will also organize beach days and tourist trips with youths and seniors together to increase inter-gen activities.



### Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Management

BCS hosts monthly health promotion and health management workshops, and informal discussions to relay and discuss vital health related topics. The primary goal is to help seniors maintain or prevent various chronic diseases they are prone to.

### South Asian Seniors Network (SASN): A social heart for being active, engaged, and empowered

The goal is to build a vibrant network of seniors to keep them active, engaged, and empowered by providing multiple opportunities. Peer Lead will allow them to assume a leadership role in planning and implementing projects. The 'My Health-My Right' portion provides seniors with comprehensive knowledge upon chronic illness they may lack. With the help of volunteers, seniors will be educated on the latest technologies such as social media and SMS. Through the weekly 'Coffee and Chat' sessions, seniors are enabled to share information, ideas and make new connections.



## Research

### Community Research

BCS is conducting community research in various issues related to immigrant communities such as; economic development and informal economy, social determinants of health, healthy living for youth and seniors, and many more. Some of our research highlights are presented in this report.

1. **Bringing back the golden age of seniors-** Ways to improve their Health Situations. – Qazi Shafayetul Islam, Nasima Akter

#### Key findings:

- a. A great majority of seniors came to Canada recently (within 5-10 years) and were sponsored by their children. Abuse and deprivation are the common fate of Bengali seniors.
- b. A great majority of Bengali seniors had high blood pressure (59%) and diabetes (40%) followed by arthritis/chronic pain (28%), cardiac disease (20%), and mental illness (anxiety disorder/depression) (15%) (Under-reporting before the project started. About 86% had occasional/no family support to manage chronic illness. Majority expressed their need related to reminding them to take their medicines (prescription management), accompaniment to go to doctor, hospital, home support, and social connections to reduce physical and mental isolations. About 26% of seniors were dissatisfied with family doctors or did not have family physician that directly affected their health seeking before the project started. Furthermore, 17% faced difficulties to go to medical appointment and other difficulties in accessing health system.
- c. Our seniors were divided into three groups: **First group:** the seniors had family physician and good prescription; however, their socio-economic determinants /factors were prominent and act as barriers. **Second group:** the seniors had no doctors (used walk-in-clinic, and emergency) and no specific prescription (they bring medicines from home country/ follow medicines prescribed by home country's doctor). **Third group:** no doctor/prescription and social determinants were influential (act as barriers), hence called double burden (especially for visitors).

2. **Community Services for Managing Chronic Illness: Barriers of Service Utilization of Bengali Seniors-** Qazi Shafayetul Islam

The study was conducted to explore the barriers of service utilization of Bengali seniors. Health services of seniors included family physician, health institutions (hospital, clinics) and non-profit healthcare services.

#### Key findings:

- a. **Individual barriers:**  
A great majority of seniors had language barrier, so they were completely unable to make a medical appointment (hence called, health system entry point barrier). Furthermore, majority of seniors confessed that they were not aware of appropriate healthcare providers in neighbourhood who offered chronic illness management after the family physicians. Family physicians had less tendency to refer to elsewhere for chronic illness. Moreover, many seniors ignored their chronic illness due to workload at home, being unserious financial problem was identified as a barrier, however, and anxiety for future life engulfed their future plan for health management.
- b. **Family barriers:**  
The seniors who lived in with family of children lacked of family support for managing their illness. Some seniors felt that it was necessary to have a good relationship with family member to manage

their illness. Even, the relationship between other family members affected their health seeking behaviour.

c. **External barriers:**

Extreme weather in winter prevented the seniors from seeking care. Many seniors stopped seeking care due to lack of transportation support. Furthermore, fear to move alone in new settings acted as barrier. The seniors have barriers in three levels while accessing healthcare system for managing illness. **Individual:** Language, Lack of awareness, Lack of seriousness, physical and mental illness, financial problem. **Family:** lack of family support, family issues Dependence, relationship. **External:** Distance, weather, transportation, environment, not referred by doctor, long waiting hours for doctors.

3. **Paving Their Way and Earning Their Pay: Economic Survival Experiences of Immigrants in East Toronto**  
- Keren Gottfried, John Shields, Nasima Akter, Diane Dyson, Sevgul Topkara-Sarsu, Haweiya Egeh, Sandra Guerra

This paper lies at the intersection of precarious labour and immigrant employment experiences. The labour market has evolved over the past few decades such that jobs are increasingly precarious - poorly paid, insecure, and lacking in employee protections. Immigrants are overrepresented among those working precarious jobs and face compounded challenges to achieving socio-economic stability. Immigrants, especially immigrant women, experience heightened exploitation and marginalization in the process of trying to economically and socially integrate into Canadian society. The paper investigates how immigrants living in an east Toronto ethnic enclave navigates the labour market and survive precarious and informal employment realities. It makes use of a unique empirical survey of this community to help shed light on the economic lives of this population.

**KEYWORDS:** immigrants, informal economy, community research, neoliberalism, precarious work



## Environmental Work

As a part of our commitment to sustainable environment we have initiated activities related to environment. We have started incorporating environmental theme in our regular program, activities to raise awareness and act on environmental suitability and conservation. We have done community research on climate and migration in partnership with Prof. McLeman, Robert from Waterloo University. We also conducting talk and presentation on this issues in various gathering. Some of the highlights are given below.

1. **Is Dhaka's urban ecological decline stimulating an out-migration of professionals? Findings from an exploratory study"** by McLeman, Robert; Moniruzzaman, Mohammad ; Akter, Nasima

### ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation and natural hazards have long been recognized as being potential influences on migration, especially rural-to- urban migration in lower-income countries. Less well understood is the possible influence of environmental factors on migration out of urban centres. In this study we investigated how urban ecological decline (UED) in Dhaka (i.e. the cumulative effects of severe air and surface water pollution, soil and groundwater contamination, food insecurity, and lack of greenspace) may be influencing the decision of highly skilled professionals to migrate to Toronto. We conducted focus groups with forty-four migrants who moved to Toronto under Canada's skilled worker permanent residence program to explore various factors that influenced their migration decisions. Seventy percent of participants indicated that UED was a factor that influenced their decision to leave Dhaka. Sixteen percent indicated UED was their primary motivation for leaving, members of the household having suffered in Dhaka from respiratory or other illnesses traceable to air pollution or inadequate urban sanitation systems.

The findings suggest that the cumulative effects of pollution and food safety concerns in Dhaka have become so acute that some urban professionals are willing to sacrifice high levels of financial security and socio-economic status for an uncertain future in Toronto so as to acquire a clean environment for their children.

1. **Climate Change Impacts on the Global South and Inadequate UN Agreements**

**When:** Sunday, March 15th, 2pm, **Where:** Beit Zatoun, 612 Markham St, Toronto.

**Sponsored by:** Centre for Social Justice, Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly, Socialist Project.

Climate change is already catastrophic for countless people around the world, especially in parts of the Global South. Some residents of low-lying Island States in the Pacific Ocean are already having to move to other countries as a result of rising sea levels. Water is also rising in Bangladesh, swallowing up coastal areas and contaminating fertile land. In East Africa changing sea surface temperatures have disrupted seasonal rains and lead to severe droughts while West Africa is experiencing rising temperatures and shifting precipitation patterns which are threatening agriculture. Southern Africa is similarly seeing rising temperatures, below-normal rainfall, and droughts. Meanwhile, South Asia and South East Asia have been subjected to extreme weather events that have killed and displaced tens of thousands of people, with more severe climate impacts on the way.

These developments are revealing all too starkly the limits of neoliberal development strategies of building capitalism. There is a pressing need to turn to ecologically-responsible production and egalitarian development.

Yet, wealthy nations continue to look the other way, formulating weak and non-binding agreements on climate change at UN conferences. Even the 2 degree Celsius target set out by developed countries for capping the rise in warming would lead to full-scale humanitarian disasters in the developing world. Indeed,

scientists say that at 2 degrees of warming, expected in 20 to 30 years, the world will encounter widespread food shortages, unprecedented heat-waves, and more intense cyclones.

Nasima Akter had a talk about the climate impacts in some of the most vulnerable regions in the world, with special reference to Bangladesh, an assessment of the current impasse at the global level, and some thoughts on ways to avoid an escalating crisis.

### **2. Climate disasters threaten Bangladesh's social gains**

3. The following is a report on a meeting held by Toronto East End Against Line 9 January 8. Aside from quotations, the opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. The article was previously published in Notarsandseast.com by John Riddell.
4. "Bangladesh is a world leader in adaptation to natural disasters," Bangladeshi community organizer Nasima Akter told a Toronto audience January 8. "But now climate change threatens to wash away all our gains."
5. Akter had been invited by East End Against Line 9, a neighbourhood committee formed to protest a proposed cross-Toronto tar-sands pipeline. The East End committee wanted to learn about the implications of Canada's reckless tar-sands development for a poor and vulnerable nation.
6. Bangladesh is ranked first as a disaster-prone area of Asia and the Pacific," explained Akter, Executive Director of Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services in Toronto.
7. "More than ten million of its 160 million population are affected by natural disasters each year," she said; the average yearly death toll is above 6,000. More than half the world's yearly deaths from cyclones occur in Bangladesh.
8. The country is low-lying, prone to flooding both from the ocean and the major rivers that snake through the lowlands, Akter said. Such floods affect, on average, more than seven million people a year.

### **9. Increasing toll**

10. This inherent vulnerability to natural disaster is now being dangerously escalated by climate change. "Between 1974 and 2004, Bangladesh experienced eight major floods of the type that are considered once-in-twenty-year events," Akter said.
11. Moreover, the ocean is encroaching. "The sea level is expected to rise 12 to 43 centimetres in this century alone, affecting a population of seventeen million." Expansion of the ocean is a known side-effect of global warming. Warming is also known to increase extreme weather events of all types, leading in Bangladesh to excesses of both rain and drought.
12. "By 2050, the average temperature in Bangladesh is expected to be 1.1°C higher than in 1990 in our monsoon [wet season] and 1.8°C higher in dry season." Result: both seasons will be more extreme. "In the monsoon, rain is expected to be 28% greater, while it will decrease 37% during our dry season."

### **13. Impact on livelihood**

14. These trends threaten to wreak "tremendous and irreparable damage to available land, fresh water supplies, and agricultural and natural resources," Akter pointed out. Every aspect of ecology is affected. "Lean flow in the Ganges River's distributaries jeopardizes forest succession; coastal inundations are increasing salinity intrusion."
15. "Climate change implies serious vulnerabilities in agricultural yield and natural resources availability, with consequent effects on industries directly dependent on these inputs."
16. Ultimately, all business, economy, and ecosystem is affected."

### **17. Resilience**

18. Bangladeshis has responded vigorously to these threats. "Despite all these climate change-related disasters, Bangladesh's economy and food production have continued to grow. Poverty has fallen, and in just over 20 years, the country has managed to bring half of its poor above the poverty level," Akter said.
19. "Child mortality is down, life expectancy has increased, and there has been progress in gender equality. The country is on track to meet all of its Millennium Development Goals by the target year of 2015. Bangladesh is also set to achieve 100% school completion."

20. Akter quoted Indian Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen: “In most of the social indicators Bangladesh has gone ahead of India,” whose per-capita national product is more than twice as high.
21. Bangladesh is a “pioneer and example” in coping with climate change,” Akter said. She quoted climate-change expert Dr. Saleemul Haq that Bangladesh is changing “from one of the most vulnerable countries to one of the most adaptive.”
22. But the threat to Bangladesh is escalating uncontrollably, and the country cannot cope with it by itself.

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### Tar Sands and Bangladesh

Akter spoke while Toronto was recovering from a massive ice storm that knocked out power to 1 million residents – one of the extreme weather events that have grown more frequent here as we begin to feel the grip of climate change. In bitter cold and with the sidewalks icy, it was a good night to stay home. Yet the Bangladesh forum was among the largest educational/planning events that East End Against Line 9 has held.



The East End committee was formed to sound the alarm around a threat to the civic environment: a proposal to pump toxic diluted bitumen (tar sands) through a cross-city pipeline. But engaging with this apparently local issue has required assessing Canada’s tar-sands project as a whole plus how extracting and burning tar sands speeds climate change.

In the discussion following Akter’s talk, participants suggested that Canada’s unrestricted and escalating carbon emissions, which fuel climate change, were a significant contributing factor to extreme weather events in Bangladesh. The Canadian government has now admitted in an official report to the United Nations that the bankruptcy of its promises to reduce carbon emissions. The Guardian reports: “Canada’s carbon emissions will soar 38% by 2030 mainly due to expanding tar sands projects, according to the government’s own projections. In a new report to the United Nations, the Harper administration says it expects emissions of 815 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2030, up from 590Mt in 1990.

“Emissions from the fast-growing tar sands sector is projected to quadruple between 2005 and 2030, reaching 137Mt a year ... the report shows. Worse, Canada is likely under-reporting its emissions. Canada had promised a 20% reduction in emissions by 2020; instead, they will grow 20%.”

Has the Stephen Harper government given even a thought to the effect of the country’s carbon emissions on Bangladesh? Perhaps. Its official travel advisory warns Canadian vacations of tsunamis and seasonal flooding in Bangladesh; every year “a third of the territory is seriously affected.”

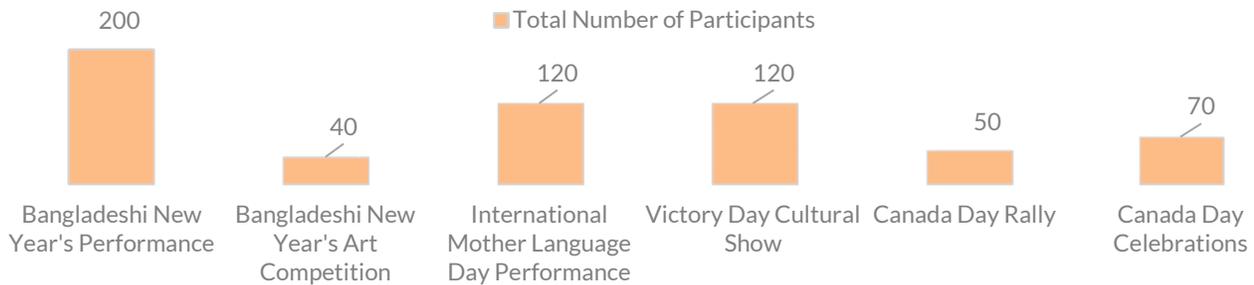
Its foreign ministry (on a page posted by the government agency CIDA), identifies Bangladesh as “a country of focus” for Canadian foreign aid. The statement notes Bangladesh’s poverty, its vulnerability to natural disasters, and its striking social progress. But it does not mention the impact on Bangladesh of climate change. Of course not. It’s up to ecological activists, like those in East End Against Line 9, to demonstrate the devastating impact of Canada’s spiraling carbon emissions on poor countries like Bangladesh and, ultimately, on us all.

[Aside from quotations, the opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. The article was previously published in Climate and Capitalism.]

## Events and Festivals

BCS primarily serves the Crescent Town community, which consists of a predominately South-Asian population, a large majority being Bangladeshi. Numerous cultural festivities exist throughout the year that provides BCS with ample opportunity to celebrate common heritages with the community.

### Celebrations



It also gives BCS a great opportunity to showcase all that is done for the community by the organization – indirectly increasing outreach, awareness and involvement in both the short and long term. Successful events coordinated in the 2015 year include Bengali New Year's celebration, International Mother Language Day, Independence Day celebration and Canada Day.

#### International Mother's Language Day

International Mother's Language day was a cultural event that took place in Crescent Town elementary school. The event included guest speakers, singing performances and cultural dances. Over 120 people visited to celebrate International Mother's Language Day with BCS.

#### World No Tobacco Day

World No Tobacco Day is an event that is coordinated annually by Youth Eliminates Smoking. Held at Access Point Danforth, WNTD is a day where the community brings awareness against the dangers of tobacco use. This year BCS 100 people attend, along with having the youth and kids participate in the competitions and activities.



#### Canada Day

BCS held their annual Canada Day festive event on July 1, 2015. It consisted of art and speech competitions, a playback of the national anthem, a ceremonial Canada Day cake-cutting and a parade localized in the Victoria Park and Danforth area. It brought 70 community members to celebrate the event together.

**International Women’s Day**

On March 6, 2015, BCS organized *Voices of Women – A Celebration of International Women’s Day*. The event included a speech from City Councilor Janet Davis and musical performances from female youth to help empower the females of our community.



**Victory Day**

The Victory Day cultural show had 120 participants from BCS’ senior programs and after school programs. It was a cultural event with art and speech competitions highlighting Victory Day.

**Independence Day**

Another important cultural event for BCS was the Bangladesh Independence day event. This is to orient our children about the history of Bangladesh. Our seniors and young kids take part in cultural performances, speech competition and various jeopardy and fun games. This year BCS had 100 seniors attend to celebrate this glorious day together.

**Volunteer Appreciation**

BCS has recognized its generous and hardworking volunteers by continually presenting them with certificates of appreciation and token gifts.



**Bangla New Year**

Pohela Boishakh (Bangla New Year) was a wonderful and entertaining celebration with fun activity and performances for all community members to enjoy. BCS was fortunate to see over 200 visitors come to the event.

Apart from this we also celebrate Family Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and other national day of Canada in our ASTP



## Ongoing Projects

### Settlement Services

Settlement Services is at the core of BCS initiatives, continuously providing new comers with support in all facets of life, whether it is translation of application forms or information about immigration, healthcare, referral, counselling, etc.

### Youth Eliminates Smoking (YES)

The YES program continues to be a strong branch for BCS. The purpose of this initiative is to provide peer mentoring as well as recreational and cultural programming to the children and youth of the community. Youth Eliminates Smoking primarily relies on its youth leadership to plan and implement its events and workshops.

### Crescent Town Youth Fitness Initiative (CTYFI)

CTYFI sees youth from the Crescent Town community actively participating in bi-weekly events that promote both mental and physical health. Partnerships with Access Alliance, Crescent-Town Club and LA Fitness have allowed CTYFI to flourish in the past year.

### Weekly Youth Drop-in

Weekly youth drop-in is our new program started from July this year. Youth will be engage in different physical and sports activities along with capacity/leadership development sessions.

### Senior Engagement Program

BCS senior initiatives have been actively engaged within the community and give seniors the chance to put their knowledge and experience to use in order to better their community. Different activities have been planned though out the year including weekly drop-in, exercise, and technology learning sessions.

### After School Tutoring Program (ASTP)

In its 16<sup>th</sup> year, new initiatives are being taken to ensure students are given every opportunity to meet academic success: teachers are not limited to students who have previously completed the relevant TDSB curriculum. Additionally, the physical health of children has been made a primary concern for ASTP, thus kids also participate in physical activities.

### Summer Sports

The summer sports program has seen 11 years of success and continues to grow with every passing year. This summer, BCS will again be organizing the annual soccer tournament and track and field for kids in grades 1 to 12. This year BCS is expecting participation numbers to exceed previous years'.

## Upcoming Events

Special Events	
Event	Date
YES International Mother Language Day Event	February 20, 2016
YES Bengali New Year's Event	April 16, 2016
World No Tobacco Day Event	June 4, 2016
BCS Iftar	June 18, 2016
BCS Annual Meeting	July 14, 2016
Canada Day Celebrations	July 1, 2016
Community Festival (CBON mela)	31 <sup>st</sup> July 2016
Soccer Tournament	August 27 - 28, 2016
Bangladesh Victory Day Celebrations	December 16, 2016
Beach Day	TBA
Bi-monthly trip for seniors	TBA
Regularly Scheduled Events	
After School Tutoring Program	
Senior's Exercise/Yoga/Meditation/technology learning sessions	
YES Movie Night	
YES Game Night	
Capacity/leadership development sessions	
Vital Youth Table Tennis Session	
Senior's Coffee and Chat	

### Community Involvement

A large portion of BCS's efforts come from the hard work of volunteers. Day-to-day operations may be run by a dedicated staff, but the implementation and execution of all the initiatives is dependent on our volunteers. With over 200 volunteers per year, BCS is fortunate to have self-less individuals who dedicate their time, expertise and efforts to provide quality community services.

## Members

### OFFICE MEMBERS

POSITION	NAME
Executive Director	Dr. Nasima Akter
Project Coordinator	Dr. Qazi Shafeyetul Islam
ASTP Coordinator	Shamima Ahmed
Honorary Volunteer	Mr. Mirza M. Rahman
Assistant Project Manager	Fariha Bakht
Assistant Youth Coordinator	Faiyaz Mustafiz
Assistant Outreach Coordinator	Ibnul Ahmed
Placement Student	Nusrat Farzana
Placement Student	Nusrat Anwar
Placement Student	Taslima Syeda
Placement Student	Shamsul Alam
Placement Student	Nawara Mehnaz Ghazi

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

POSITION	NAME
Chair	Kazi S. Hoque
Vice chair	Rokhsana Reza
Secretary	Preety Ahmed
Director	Israt Ahmed
Director	Sarwar Khan
Director	Teresa gomes
Director	Saklain Jaigirdar
Director	Mirza Rahman
Director	Syed D. Bakht

### YOUTH COORDINATORS

Labiba Bakht	Tahmid Rouf
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### YOUTH LEADERS

Bristi Datta	Fariha Bakht	Rafsan Kabir
Saadia Sarker	Srija Biswas	

### SENIOR CABINET

Abdul Ghani	Bidyut Sarker	Giasuddin Ahmed
Gulnaz Azad	Hasina Talukder	Jahanara Begum
Khalilur Rahman	Md. Rabiul Islam	Rahat Zaman
Shamima Nargis	Syeda Yasmin Ashraf	

**VOLUNTEERS**

**YOUTH BRIGADE**

Abida Sultana	Abrar Alam	Adib Azhor
Albab Jaigirdar	Ayaz Zafar	Aymon Bint-E
Bilal Chaudhry	Bristi Datta	Fabiha Hasan
Farihan Alam	Farhan Zidane	Fariha Bakht
Mahin Bari	Mehrab Mashud	Mirza Faiyaz Mustafiz
Mursaleen Khandaker	Mobarrat Shahriar	Nahida Mujib
Nahyan Jaigirdar	Naushin Nawal	Nihon Akbar
Nousen	Oishe Farhan	Omer Faruque
Rabeya Farzana	Rabaka Sultana	Radia Roza
Rafayet Amer	Saadia Sarker	Sadi Wali
Saif Murtaza	Sakib Sarker	Saraf Siddique
Sayan Faraz	Sayem Hossain	Sayra Nudrat Nawmi
Shafiur Majumder	Shairi Islam	Safwan Hasan
Srija Biswas	Syed Ahmed Tawfik	Tabeeb Yeamin
Taharat Khandaker	Tamanna Tasnim	Taseen Ali
Teresa Antora Gomes		

**AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS**

Aira Biswas	Jahanara Khatun	Nilufar Yesmin
Abida Rahman	Joyto Roy	Noshen A.
Amrita Shome	Kanta Proma	Parvin Khan
Aninda Poddar	Lubaba Lamia	Pronoti Mahmud
Arik Hasan	Mansur Mohammad	Rifat Khan
Arthi Sarkar	Masum Billah	Saraf Wasima Siddique
Babla Chandra	Mosammat Jahanara Khatun	Sayam Hossain
Erfan Sheikh	Mursaleen Khandaker	Syeda Shamima Ahmed
Fabiha Tahsin	Nafio Miah	Taharat Khandaker
Farhan Alam	Nahian Khan	Tajmeela Jahan
Faryaz Khaled	Naomi Monower	Yusra Chowdhury
Gazi Jabin		

**ADULT AND SENIORS**

Abdul Gani	Khalilur Rahman	Rani Hoque
Abdus Sattar	Khodez Khatun	Robiul Islam
Ajmera Rahman	Lina Nizam	Rokaiya Begum
Aklima Akter	Lutfunnesa	Sabah Chowdury
Anwara Begum	Mamtaj Jahan	Shahanaj Begum
Asma Akter	Mohammad Arif	Shahnaz Begum
Aysha Parvin	Mohammad Monirul Alam	Shamima Begum
Bidyot Sarker	Mohammad Omar Shiddike	Shamima Narges
Bilkis Nahar	Monjur Morshed	Shilpi Bhattacharjee

## Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services

Bilkis Rina	Monowara Begum	SK Monira
Bushra Rahman	Mosammat Jahanara Khatun	Sofia Islam
Dr. Mahbub Alam	Msuma Sultana	Sufia Khatun
Easmin Begum	Mujibur Rahman	Sultana Jasmine
Farzana Ahmed	Nadira Tabassum	Syed Mohammad Ali
Farzana Akter	Nawara Mehnaz Ghazi-Huda	Syed Shamim Ahmed
Fatima Khatun	Nazma Afroz	Syeda Lubna Abedin
Gazi Md. Golam Farok	Nurjahan Rahman	Syeda Taslima
Giasuddin Ahmed	Nusrat Anwar	Tahmina Akter
Gulnaz Azad	Parvin Sultana	Tanzina Khan
Hasina Talukder	Qazi Fil Akmam	Taslima Begum
Hasmot Ara	Quazi Dilruba Raihan	Tazmila Jahan
Helena Khatun	Rafika Hakim	Tonmoy Talukder
Jahanara Khanam	Rahat Zaman	Umme Salwa Begum
Kaniz Fatima	Rahela Haque	Yasmin Begum
Kazi Shamima		

## BCS Members

Abdul Ghani	Giasuddin Ahmed	Nurus Saba Chowdhury
Abid Chowdhury	Gulnaz Azad	Nusrat Anwar
Abu Said Sikder	Hamida Chowdhury	Qazi Shafayetul Islam
Abu Tareque	Hasina Talukder	Quazi Waliul Islam
AFSAN CHOUDHURY	Jahanara Khanam	RAHAT ZAMAN
Akhter Ahmad	Kazi Fil Akmam	Rizuan Rahman
Aliya Bindi	Khaaliquzzaman	Rumana Islam
Aliya Rahman Bindi	Khalilur Rahman	Sadeq Ahmed Choudhury
Amal Akash	Khandaker Iqbal	Shakila Chowdhury
Asad Asraf	Mahfuz Khalili	Shamima Nargis
Ashraf Khan	Maruf Reza	Shapna Iqbal Khandaker
Asma Begum	Mashkur Reza	Souri Zaman
Atiqur Rahman	Md. Abdul Wahid	Syeda Shamima Ahmed
Benu Bakht	Md. Moyeen Uddin	Syeda Taslima
Bidyut Sarker	Md. Rabiul Islam	Tahlee Afzal
Bilquis Nahar	Mirza Rahman	Tahmid Rouf
Chaman Ara Begum	Moezur Reza	Towhid Noman
Dewan Shuaib Afzal	Mohammed Khaliquzzaman	Yasmin Asraf
Dewan W Alam	Mustaq Ahmed	Zinat Mahal
Dr. Shamima Nasrin Shahed	Nasima Akter	

## Funding Agencies

City of Toronto	Canadian Heritage
Toronto Public Health	United Way
Service Canada	New Horizon
Wood Green	Ministry of Health

## Partnerships/Affiliations

Access Alliance Multi-Cultural Health and Community Services (AAMHCS)	Family Service, Toronto
Association of Bangladeshi Professionals in Accounting & Finance (ABPAFC)	Flemingdon Community Health Center
Bangladesh Center and Community Services (BCCS)	Flemingdon Community Hospital
Bangladeshi Students Association – Universities: McMaster/ Ryerson/ UTSG/ UTSC/ York/ Waterloo	Harmony Hall center for Seniors
Birchmount Bluffs Neighborhood Centre	Heart & Stroke Foundation
Bloor Information and Life Skills Centre (BILS)	Hindu Society
Children’s Peace Theatre	Neighbourhood Link
City of Toronto, Parks, Forestry & Recreation	Neighbourhood Link Support Services (NLSS)
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)	Opening Doors Project, CMHA
Crescent Town Club	Regent Park Tenant Association
Crescent Town Youth Support Network (CT-YSN)	Settlement Assistance and Family
Danforth Islamic Society	Support Services (SAFSS)
Dixon Hall	Sunshine Centre For Seniors
East Toronto Health Link	Teesdale Support Network
Fairlawn Avenue United Church	Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office (TNO)
Toronto Community Housing (TCHC)	Toronto District School Board (TDSB)
West Scarborough Neighbourhood community Centre	Young Bangladeshi-Canadian Professionals
Young Diplomats	Youth-In-Action