

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

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# CONTENTS

2	Chair's Introduction
3	Coordinator's Report
4	Finances and Fundraising
5-6	Insights from Mentees and Mentors
7	Teaching English
8-9	Aliyah Project
10-11	Nefertiti Wellbeing Hub
12-13	Nefertiti Employment Hub
14	Nefertiti Digital Hub

## Chair's Introduction

### Welcome to Laamiga's Annual Report 2020 - 2021

Laamiga is a charity working in inner city London with women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to help them build financial resilience and gain meaningful employment that reflects their talents and experience. All our trustees, staff and mentors are women, and I would like to thank every one of them for their amazing commitment and creativity.

The past year has been very hard for many of our mentees. Our experience, as well as independent research on BAME communities and women, shows that they suffered particular hardship during the pandemic: facing financial difficulties, housing and health issues, isolation and stress, and family challenges. Unable to offer Laamiga's support through meeting face-to-face, we had to innovate. Mentoring took place via phone calls and online chats, and we set up group support sessions on Zoom which improved mentees' emotional well-being and confidence.

Our Aliyah funder helped by enabling us to give grants to those who had inadequate broadband so they could participate fully, and all 12 students progressed into employment or further training. One Aliyah member was selected for an internship over 100 other applicants! In our Nefertiti project, the workshop leaders trained participants to co-host and lead sessions, which also resulted in great gains in their IT skills and confidence.

We are already starting Sheba, our follow-on to Aliyah and, when safe to do so, look forward to meeting face-to-face again, and building on the new skills we have all learned during the pandemic.

**Anna Reisenberger, Chair**

## Coordinator's Report

We give appreciation and great thanks to our hard working and dedicated volunteers without whom we would not exist as a charity; to our mentors who go above and beyond their commitment to support their mentees to develop the confidence to fulfil their potential; and to our tireless trustees who manage the charity. We acknowledge all our funders whose financial support has kept Laamiga going throughout the pandemic. We are grateful to our partners both small and large including Training Link, Camden Giving, Voluntary Action Camden, Voluntary Action Islington, Volunteer Centre Camden, Mer-IT Digital, Baker McKenzie, Clifford Chance, Springer Nature, UCL Volunteering Service, and local organisations whose collaboration, support and generosity have provided us with mentee and mentor referrals, a variety of free resources including refurbished laptops, mock interviews, training courses, and workshop trainers.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant we changed from face-to-face learning and our Aliyah project transferred to online video workshops. Our mentors and mentees also held their meetings remotely by telephone and video calls. We had a wonderful Aliyah celebration event online in December 2020 with all twelve mentees who received certificates and were given grants to attend further training and development opportunities. We have a mentee who is graduating from university and was supported throughout a three-year degree course by her mentor. We ran the Nefertiti project that had over 50 registered participants and provided online support groups, and virtual webinars on wellbeing and health, employment and computer skills. Our core mentoring programme continued, with over 30 mentee and mentor pairs.

## Finances and Fundraising

The funding and partnership from our generous sponsors and donors, along with the selfless contributions from our volunteers, remain the lifeblood of Laamiga.

During the past year, we completed our Aliyah project (funded by the European Social Fund), supporting unemployed women aged 18+ from Black, Asian, minority ethnic refugee and migrant communities.

Just before our October financial year end, we were delighted to secure a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to launch "Nefertiti". This community empowerment project supported women across three themes: wellbeing, digital literacy and employment/business.

We also participated in Camden Giving's International Women's Day event with local businesses, which allowed us to showcase Laamiga.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, moving online has meant more spending on technology solutions and broadband support and less on costs such as travel. We are grateful that our project funders have allowed us to continue our work in this new format. We continue to seek general funding for fixed costs, to support the mentoring at the core of our service, as well as funding for new projects.

The contribution of our volunteers is critical in making Laamiga's work possible. Beyond that, Laamiga is almost entirely dependent on grants. Our financial health depends on the balance between the inflow of funds and keeping expenditure as low as possible. Our financial procedures are regularly reviewed by the trustees to maintain proper governance.

We also have a small number of regular monthly donations and receive individual contributions via Laamiga's website and our Facebook page. These donations, especially with 25% extra when taxpayers sign up to Gift Aid, are very important, as they contribute to vital costs like website hosting, travel, childcare, and insurance.

### Laamiga Accounts

Companies House: <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/07808750/filing-history>

Charity Commission: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5022084/financial-history>

## Mentee Insight

It was a very challenging time for me. Starting college was my way out of depression and feeling uncertain because of Covid-19. The college had a mentee programme. I signed up but little did I know, before the college kicked me out and I didn't have anything but my mentor, that she would be my lifeline. She found me at a time when nothing was working for me. I was at my lowest point: no job, no money, our place was falling apart, no heating in the middle of winter, and nothing to look forward to. At times I didn't even want to open my mouth to say a word, but she pushed me to, when all was lost. I rose, but she will not take the credit for it. We did it together. My mentor was my life saver, and such bonds can never be broken. I'm eternally grateful that when the waves were crashing full force on me, she was my lifeboat.

## Mentor Insight

Mentoring during Covid-19 has been challenging, bringing a new set of hurdles for my mentee. At times she was exhausted with depression and anxiety, reluctant to engage, but together we persevered. A few months ago, my mentee was a single mother, unemployed, facing many difficulties, too low some days to even talk to me (or anyone). Now, she has a full-time customer-facing job and is thriving, receiving great feedback from her manager and colleagues. I cannot take credit - she is bright, strong and did all the work! I'm glad she let me listen to her during her dark hours so I could support her from the sidelines. Watching her rise up against all the challenges that came her way has been remarkable.

## Mentee Insight

I have been a mentee under the Laamiga women's project for over a year. I was a recent graduate when this opportunity was presented to me. Over the past year, my mentor has encouraged and reminded me to set goals in a holistic way, and work towards achieving balance and contentment in all areas of life. We have regular catch ups and discuss a range of subjects.

My mentor also connected me with people from her own extensive network to give me great opportunities to do mock interviews and receive quick, authentic feedback.

Through working with my mentor, I learned to be more relaxed in interviews, which helped me to secure my current job role. I found it refreshing and a great relief to trust myself more in interview settings, to show more of my personality and give less rehearsed answers to questions, through the prompting of my mentor. I believe this has helped me to connect better with recruiters and experience less anxiety around interviews.

The Laamiga project is a unique programme which has helped many people. I would recommend the Laamiga project to other women for the opportunities it provides for learning more about oneself and others.

I would also recommend the Laamiga project for expanding the community that one is a part of, particularly a community of other women who are similarly seeking to grow and develop to achieve their individual goals, which can be interesting to learn about.

## Teaching English

During the pandemic, I have been teaching English to two women in very different circumstances via Zoom.

One is a fully qualified nursery schoolteacher, but her qualification is not recognised here so she has started training for the British equivalent. Her English is quite good, but she finds writing difficult. We use a fairly advanced textbook and we used to have sessions twice a week, however we have progressed to weekly sessions now she is working full-time and dealing with assignments.

The other learner is in need of company rather than English teaching. Her English is not good, although her family all speak it well and have studied here. She speaks Arabic to them and does not speak English to anyone. She has poor health and is very worried about Covid-19, and as a result she does not go out much. Her experience shows how it is possible to live here without learning English, especially if you have children who can act as interpreters. Such women cannot take part in English social and professional lives and suffer more from isolation than their husbands, who naturally acquire some level of English from going out to work.



## Aliyah Project

Laamiga's Aliyah project, funded by the European Social Fund, helped twelve women to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to fulfil their potential. The programme included a combination of workshops, seminars, group sessions, action learning sets and one-to-one mentoring, in order to upskill, encourage and motivate them to take the next steps in their careers.

It was promoted locally via community organisations, parenting groups, schools, job centres, volunteering centres and libraries. Mentees were put in touch with a volunteer mentor for one-to-one mentoring and began by completing an individual action plan. Mentors were trained and provided with a mentor handbook that outlined their role in detail.

*"I was inspired to join the Aliyah Project because I wanted to spend some time giving back to my community outside of my corporate role. As a mentor I was hoping to be able to give a mentee encouragement and support her career development; whether that was starting a course, gaining employment or exploring her own business idea." – Mentor*

The initial sessions began face-to-face at a local training venue. However, due to the pandemic, the programme was moved online. Mentees were able to access financial support towards their monthly internet usage, to allow them to join the programme online. Funding was also available to help them complete additional skilled-based training courses. During the pandemic, mentors' roles became even more essential in building mentees' self-confidence and reaffirming learning gained during group sessions. Group workshops covered a number of topics, including problem solving, motivation and resilience, time management, business skills, returning to work, personal branding and a CV masterclass. Aliyah organised action learning sets, well-being sessions and opportunities for mentees to connect online and grow their network.

*"In February, when the pandemic started, it was a struggle. But I kept going, knowing the group came together each month. Hearing people share their experiences helped a lot. Everything was going wrong for me but I persevered. The Aliyah project really helped with my self-confidence and I got onto a nutrition course to further my career within the fitness industry." – Mentee*

Aliyah mentees joined the project because they lacked the confidence and knowledge to take the next steps in their business and/or employment plans. 100% successfully completed the programme. Despite the pandemic, 50% of the mentees gained employment and the evaluation showed that all mentees have been on a journey of self-development and growth.

*"The Aliyah project has been a fundamental support in the midst of everything that was happening with the pandemic. The programme has empowered me to make significant progress towards launching my own business and having the confidence to try new things. I am so thankful for this opportunity." – Mentee*

*"The Aliyah Project has provided me with training and increased my knowledge. I have done things outside my comfort zone such as attending a summer entrepreneurs' programme and workshops to improve my interview skills. My mentor has listened and understood me, without judgement. She has supported, encouraged and helped me to reach my goals. She is kind and empathetic and I appreciate her taking the time to be my mentor." – Mentee*

*"I met a friend the other day who wanted to find a job and I told them about Laamiga. The Aliyah project enabled me to network with like-minded people, and I could share my knowledge and experience whilst learning from theirs. My mentor believed in me and encouraged me throughout, not just with the project but more generally in life. Being a part of the project has helped me so much, and I will continue to tell everyone about Laamiga as I want other people to benefit like I did." - Mentee*

With thanks to Anne-Marie Williams, external evaluator for Aliyah, for her full report (available at [www.laamiga.org](http://www.laamiga.org))

## Nefertiti Wellbeing Hub

### **“Isolated but United during Lockdown: Succeeding against the odds”**

When I got into a discussion with Dr Emua Ali about this project, I knew that this was a calling and I felt humbled to be in a position to steer a group of women who needed this the most, at a time when the headlines were affirming that we as a BAME group were being more significantly affected by coronavirus due to a plethora of reasons. It felt important for me to lead in the best way that I could and empower our community.

When everything is drastically changing, the only certainty we have is ourselves, and this was the affirmative constant throughout the programme. We had a group of women whose primary needs were around maintaining positive wellbeing as well as their physical and caring responsibilities. The undercurrent was high levels of anxiety, but there was a clear need to feel empowered, be part of a strong supportive community, and build themselves up. It was important that the programme addressed these needs and set the women up for work they would do themselves or supported by a mentor.

Some of the goals were healthy eating, nutrition, emotional wellbeing. I was able to collaborate with amazing experts that included a GP specialising in women’s health, a psychologist, a nutritionist, a healthy eating chef, plus community builders, yoga teachers, mindfulness teachers and more, to support with the multiple areas of the Wheel of Life. We had members of the group deliver some sessions using their expertise, and this boosted their self-confidence.

The webinars and action learning were truly a masterclass experience. The women benefited so much, as was evident in the sharing of the nuggets they were taking away, and the experts enjoyed it because they felt the commitment and readiness of the group.

The women supported each other, bringing their different experiences to reflect on what was going on, and how they could change their thoughts to have different results. A strong outcome was around 'self-advocacy': self-respect and challenging institutions that put us down. It provided great stepping stones for the women to think about what they had achieved in their own wellbeing, and they were encouraged to set SMART goals and a plan of action after the group.

*"This was amazing. We need to be the power and leaders in our community. We still have to do more."* – a participant

**Juliet Bellagambi, Nefertiti Wellbeing Hub Leader**

### **Mentee 'D' Case Study**

D joined the group after experiencing domestic violence. She said *"I wanted to find a support group just like family. Not only to get family support, but also to know about other women, and if they have experienced what I have and get support for what I was feeling."* She was feeling *"fear, anxieties, loss of confidence, excluded from things, and feeling hopeless. I had lost the way I lived."*

Starting in the group, seeing others and listening to them, made D feel better. It helped change her mindset, and learning about healthy eating helped alleviate her stress. She says, *"look at myself now, how I speak because of what I got from the group"*. She realised she was not alone: *"The psychology, nutrition and all the topics were interconnected, and very helpful."* D was happy to join in and enjoyed listening. She says she found the sessions useful and very educational.

The hub helped D *"believe that I can fight and change my situation, and that I am not the only one with problems. I am feeling confident now and know what I need to do after my housing situation."* The only downside was that the hub finished: *"I wanted the group to carry on."*

## Nefertiti Employment Hub

### "And still I rise" – Maya Angelou

I have been mentoring women in the community with Laamiga for a couple of years and when this project came up, I knew it was something I would love to support. This was a much-needed project in the community, now more than ever. It has been a challenging time for all and people from BAME backgrounds have been massively affected by coronavirus. Lack of confidence, unemployment, isolation, lack of work experience, mental health and language barriers are some of the issues that came up in the group.

I started by listening to the women's needs, aspirations and the support they wanted. These were to be part of a strong community helping them to address the barriers and seek out opportunities, so that they could achieve their goals. Sessions included: Identifying Goals and Learning, Confidence Building, Interview Skills workshop, Business Set-up and Legal structure, Online Job search, SMART Goal setting and Self-Coaching. We brought in some specialist speakers and the hub leads from the Digital and Wellbeing hub to share their specialisms in personal branding and online job search.

There was a wealth of skills and qualities from the women in the Employment hub which came up during the sessions and action learning exercises. We supported two women from the group to co-deliver and share their expertise for the Health & Wellbeing hub. One of the women took the participants on a Virtual Nature Walk and another did an online demonstration of healthy Korean cooking.

From this hub I learned that women are resourceful and resilient, and by being part of a supportive network and positive mind-set, they can build a strong community. We rise by lifting each other up.

**Primrose Christie, Nefertiti Employment Hub Leader**

### Views of women on the Employment Hub:

*"This Empowerment and Employment project was amazing and the skills I have gained throughout the sessions have helped me progress in both my personal and professional life. It has also given me a support network that helps me to continue to grow and I am so grateful."*

*"Great interactive sessions. Looking forward to adding new stuff to my CV."*

*"My biggest achievement in this group is gaining skills to manage my anxiety and learning from other women and how they see anxiety."*

*"I feel so honoured to have been part of this wonderful journey and so grateful that people are able to give their time to help me achieve my goals. I have developed so much as a person."*

*"More confidence to start my business and the ability to set goals along the way."*

*"It has reminded me of my potential and my own qualities which are needed. It has also increased my confidence to do interviews. The project has helped me use my full potential to achieve better, to be more proactive, and has taught me valuable skills I can use to grow my business as well as feeling more empowered to do so. I have really enjoyed the guest speakers and facilitator who have brought their own knowledge about various topics, as well as audience interactions. The sessions were well-organised and engaging, and a good size with the women interacting with each other and empowering one another."*

## Nefertiti Digital Hub

Working with the women at Laamiga as part of the Nefertiti project has been such a brilliant experience. Seeing the women gain confidence, step out of their comfort zones as they learned from one another and us, and then walk away with their learning has been so powerful.

Each woman had their own story and their own needs, and as hub leaders we adapted our lessons to each individual. This allowed us to cover a broad array of topics in the digital world, all the while tailoring the content to help each woman move forward concretely.

From learning the functionalities of Zoom to the best way to launch an online business, we covered many digital skills from the basics to the more technical. All of our lessons included follow-up notes and a presentation the women could keep for reference and future learning. The relationships that were built between the hub attendees will grow and develop in the future, and I am looking forward to the adventures and learning that our next session may hold!

**Katya Cox and Sasha White, Nefertiti Digital Hub Leaders**

### **Views of women on the Digital Hub:**

*"You helped me be braver!"*

*"I can see how I can fit on LinkedIn."*

*"You've made it real for me."*

*"I felt supported, which means everything to someone on their own trying to succeed out in the world of e-commerce."*

*"The advice on the slides was so informative."*