

BUILDING POWER & SAFETY THROUGH SOLIDARITY

WORKING CLASS ORGANIZING IN NYC DURING COVID-19

A COMMUNITY REPORT BY DESIS RISING UP & MOVING



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Reader,

We are living through a period of great upheaval. The pandemic and the ensuing economic and social crises have exposed the precarious foundations of our society that have left so many people so vulnerable. As the largest civil rights mobilizations in US history, the uprisings for Black lives are a source of hope. The millions of peoples in the streets have transformed our imaginations and understandings on issues of policing and accountability, as well as what's needed to confront racism as a historic and present reality.

While appreciating this breakthrough in our collective consciousness as a nation, we should temper our optimism. While these shifts are not merely a passing moment, if they are not solidified, they will not be sustained.

While the uprisings continue, we have not seen any fundamental changes to how our society and economy are structured, which are the root causes of the problems we are facing. Our movements have not had the capacity or readiness to convert the presence of millions of people in the streets into relationships grounded in commitments to long-term struggles and sustained pressure. As masses of people risk police violence to take over the streets, we, as movements, have been unable to systematically respond to their anger with political education and relationships rooted in learning

how to join the long-term struggle. In that absence, the shifts in our consciousness have been easily co-opted towards symbolic concessions by all levels of government, elected officials, and corporations. As cities unleash police violence against protestors while painting Black Lives Matter on a street, they have moved the conversation away from serious discussions about the deeper structural changes that are needed.

We need base building and peoples' organizations that can turn the widespread anger and despair into larger politicized and disciplined forces. As policymakers will offer up band-aid solutions, it is only such fighting forces that can go beyond making demands, to force major systemic changes to address the deepening crisis. This report offers for consideration the results and lessons of our efforts towards those goals through the Building Power and Safety through Solidarity campaign.

In solidarity,

Fahd Ahmed

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DRUM IS AN INTERGENERATIONAL South Asian and Indo-Caribbean membership-based organization in New York City. Our members are working-class youth and adults whose lives have been upended by the coronavirus pandemic. As our neighborhoods transformed into COVID-19 hotspots, DRUM reimagined how to build power and organize in the absence of in-person meetings, rallies or outreach.

We pivoted our work to meet people's realities and began a new campaign, Building Power and Safety through Solidarity (PaSS), in which we established a framework on how to organize over the phone and online. Organizers and members conducted phone calls with community members to ensure they had access to food as well as essential information about the virus and safety protocols. We engaged with them on why the richest country in the world was unable to support working-class communities amidst a crisis. The campaign built a culture of mutuality and collective care, pushing individuals to think about the needs of other community members not solely themselves.

Through the PaSS campaign we made over 12,075+ calls to build working class power. We connected individuals to ongoing campaigns and efforts such as organizing rent strikes, building women's power to end gender based violence, advocating for an excluded worker's fund in New York State, criminal justice reform, and the cancellation of rent. Amidst isolation and uncertainty, the PaSS campaign allowed us to bring new people into our movements to prepare larger forces to fight upcoming struggles.

At every level, the government has spent decades slashing

funding for public programs and benefits that our lives depend on while expanding police and military budgets. The pandemic has laid bare the consequences of these policies as the number of COVID-19 deaths continue to rise across the country.

New York has garnered national praise for drastically lowering the rate of COVID-19 infections. While we welcome this shift, we recognize that this so-called "success" rests upon the graves of the city's most marginalized residents. The low death toll in nations such as Vietnam demonstrates that the deaths of low-income residents of color, particularly Black and Latinx residents, could and should have been prevented.

During the peak of the pandemic, our relatives, friends and community died in overwhelmed hospitals or at their homes because their case was not severe enough to merit hospitalization. Our communities (and even more so Black and Latinx communities) paid the price for austerity measures. For example, in the last two decades in New York City, 18 hospitals have closed. These closures created the conditions for hospitals in low-income communities of color to become overwhelmed when COVID-19 infections first spiked. 91% of DRUM members live in neighborhoods impacted by hospital closures.

Crises transform society. But first we need to transform as a people. The pandemic represents an opening to bring more people into our movements so we can fight for the world we're trying to build on the other side of the pandemic. For those wondering whether their loved ones would have survived COVID-19 had their local hospital not been overwhelmed, the thwarted priorities of the state are clearer than ever. We've



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seen community members who would normally not support defunding the police now respond to the national uprisings in agreement that the state is far too invested in locking certain groups up in cages than they are in keeping them safe and healthy.

The bereaved relatives, the family forced to the street in the middle of the pandemic, the unemployed, the hungry, the

struggling masses have to be organized together to build the power we need. As movements, we must invest in their political education and leadership development to transform their anger and consciousness, to abolish the systems that do not serve us, and to build the world we need and deserve.

THE PANDEMIC: A PORTAL TO A NEW REALITY

ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, over 100 DRUM members and allies gathered in front of Sona Chaandi, a jewelry store, to hold an exploitative and abusive local business accountable. Nargis, a DRUM member, worked at Sona Chaandi for four years. As an employee, Nargis was not only exploited and underpaid but also sexually and verbally harassed by the business owner. Sona Chaandi is located minutes away from the DRUM office in Jackson Heights, Queens.

Dilip Malani, the owner, glared at the crowd of over 100 DRUM members and allies through the glass walls of the store. "Dilip Malani, shame on you! Harassing workers, how dare you?!" shouted the group of predominantly South Asian and Indo-Caribbean women. Members hung artwork on the streets affirming the value of women's labor and calling on businesses to compensate them fairly. They chalked feminist slogans in various languages on the sidewalk. The action turned into a march around the block, passing by other small businesses in the neighborhood as a show of support to all workers.

Four days later on March 12, DRUM closed its offices and suspended all mass-based activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The day after the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic, DRUM determined staff would work remotely and there would be no meetings or mobilizations for the coming future. At

that time New York had declared the nation's first coronavirus containment zone in Westchester county. The following week, New York City closed its public schools and switched to remote learning. About two weeks later, all non-essential businesses in New York State were forced to close.

New York state recorded its first COVID-19 case on March 1. Within the course of a month, the state reached 83,000 cases with over 2,300 deaths.¹ Queens, a borough largely ignored by national media, suddenly became the epicenter within the epicenter, garnering global attention.² Elmhurst Hospital, a public hospital serving low-income and undocumented residents including many DRUM members, became the first hospital overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases.

By the end of March, it was normal to see refrigerated trucks outside of Elmhurst Hospital as they ran out of space to hold the dead bodies of COVID-19 patients.³ The line for COVID testing spanned several blocks, with individuals lining up before testing began and many turned away every day.⁴ Local businesses shut

down due to safety concerns for both workers and customers. Mundane aspects of everyday life such as taking the subway suddenly became a huge risk. As the infection rate of MTA workers began to rise, the subways ran less frequently leading to overcrowding in low-income neighborhoods with high numbers of essential workers.⁵ When schools switched to remote learning, the majority of parents were left with no child care options. In early April, mass graves were dug in Hart's Island to bury the unclaimed dead bodies of COVID-19 patients.⁶

As our city transformed, so did our work. Organizing is grounded in personal relationships and conversations which form the

cornerstone of recruitment, leadership development and campaign work. In our 20 years of existence, we suddenly faced unprecedented issues: Is it possible to function as a membership-led organization if you can't convene your members? How do you organize when you can't see people or go to their neighborhoods? Despite the seeming omnipresence of death, the failure of the government to support working-class New Yorkers meant that sustaining the power of our members was crucial for the fights ahead to ensure our survival.



WHO ARE DRUM'S MEMBERS?



An Overview of DRUM's Membership

DRUM IS A MEMBERSHIP-LED organization meaning our members make decisions regarding the future of campaigns as well as the organization. Members are recruited from within the neighborhoods where we have bases. Our bases span across three boroughs: Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Our South Asian and Indo-Caribbean members must fulfill particular criteria based on income and household size to meet the definition of working-class. These criteria are important to quantify because many community members describe themselves as "middle-class" despite their working-class material realities.

We are intentional about creating truly multilingual spaces rooted in language justice. Our pre-pandemic membership meetings reflected these values, where various parts of the meeting were facilitated in the different languages spoken by members. The transition to virtual meetings has required us to adapt our interpretation practices to virtual platforms.

DRUM members work in a variety of low-wage industries, with the majority of women members engaged in domestic labor often in addition to waged labor. As of March 22, Governor Cuomo's PAUSE Act required all non-essential businesses to shut down. Workers were suddenly categorized as either essential or non-essential.

Essential workers were abruptly lauded as heroes. This included those who worked in: supermarkets, the postal service, sanitation or public transit as well as doctors and nurses. The COVID-19 pandemic created a newfound consciousness among the public of the importance of certain low-wage workers who were now working in dangerous conditions to ensure basic services remained accessible. In large part, these risks were connected to the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and safeguards, which was a policy failure on the state and federal level. The government's failure to ensure access to PPE resulted in the deaths of workers in each of the listed categories in New York City and now, across the country.¹

The essential worker category has served as the basis for numerous struggles for financial assistance for exploited groups such as undocumented workers. Many advocates emphasized the amount of DACA recipients working in the healthcare industry prior to the June Supreme Court decision allowing the program to continue.²

Lauding essential workers as heroes normalizes their death and reinforces disaster capitalism.³ For example, during the peak of the coronavirus in Queens, only "essential" construction was allowed. This included the completion of a new Starbucks and Chipotle near the DRUM office.⁴ In addition to serving as harbingers of

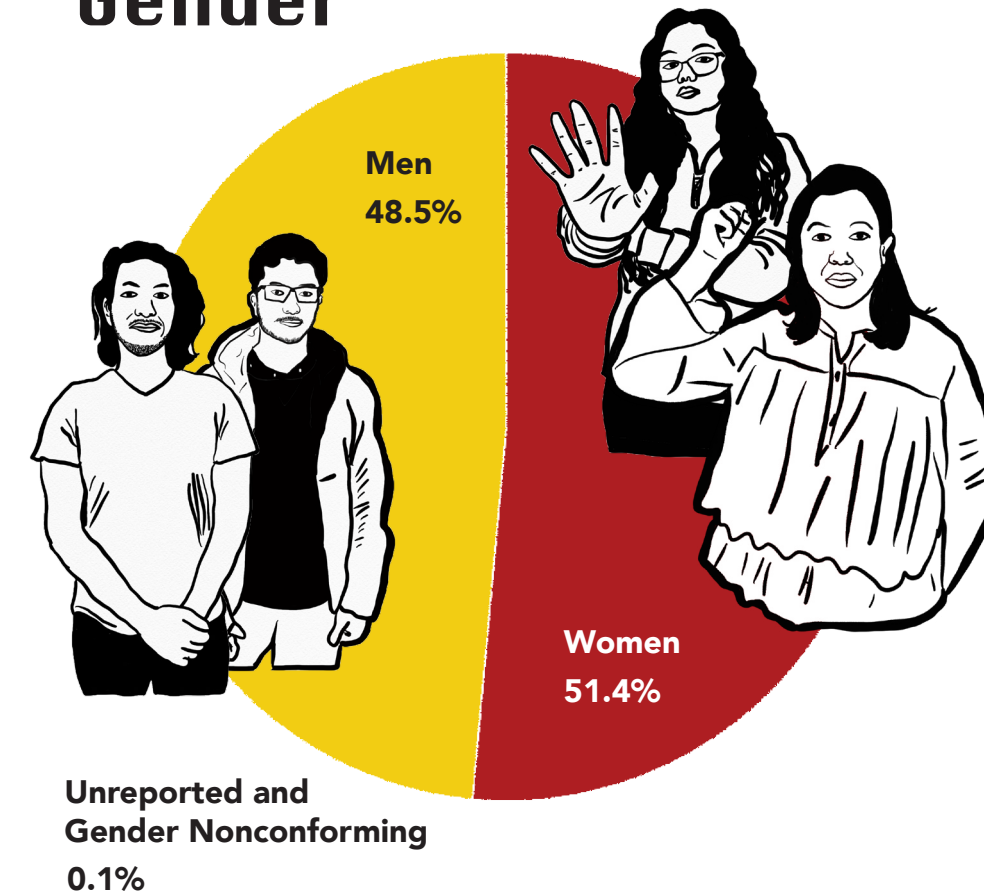


gentrification, these corporate businesses were located a block away from Elmhurst Hospital which faced 'apocalyptic' conditions during the pandemic.⁵ Construction workers were expected to risk their lives in the hotspot of an airborne disease merely to build a Starbucks and a Chipotle that would remain closed. These thwarted priorities demonstrate how corporate interests outweigh workers' safety. Additionally, the erasure of working-class hospital staff such as janitors from the "essential worker" narrative demonstrated its limitations.

The category of essential work continued the legacy of erasing informal or invisible labor, which includes day laborers, street vendors, sex workers, and unpaid domestic laborers. As families remained at home, domestic labor (cooking, cleaning, child and elder care) drastically increased resulting in an increase in domestic violence in some families.

Within our membership, approximately 1,017 women members engage in unpaid care work. We recognize that women have always been essential to those they support. These responsibilities fall heavily on women with no recognition, let alone compensation from the state.

Gender



DRUM Members by Neighborhood

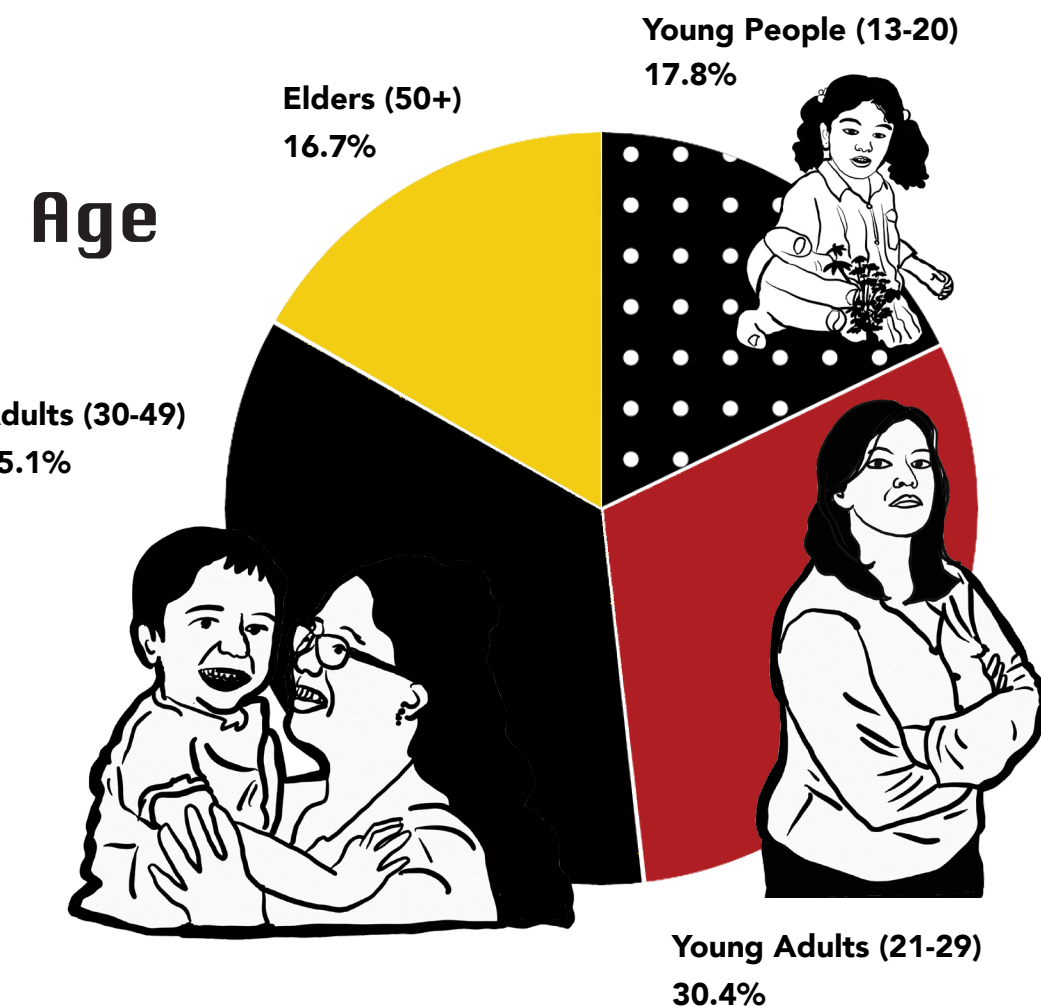
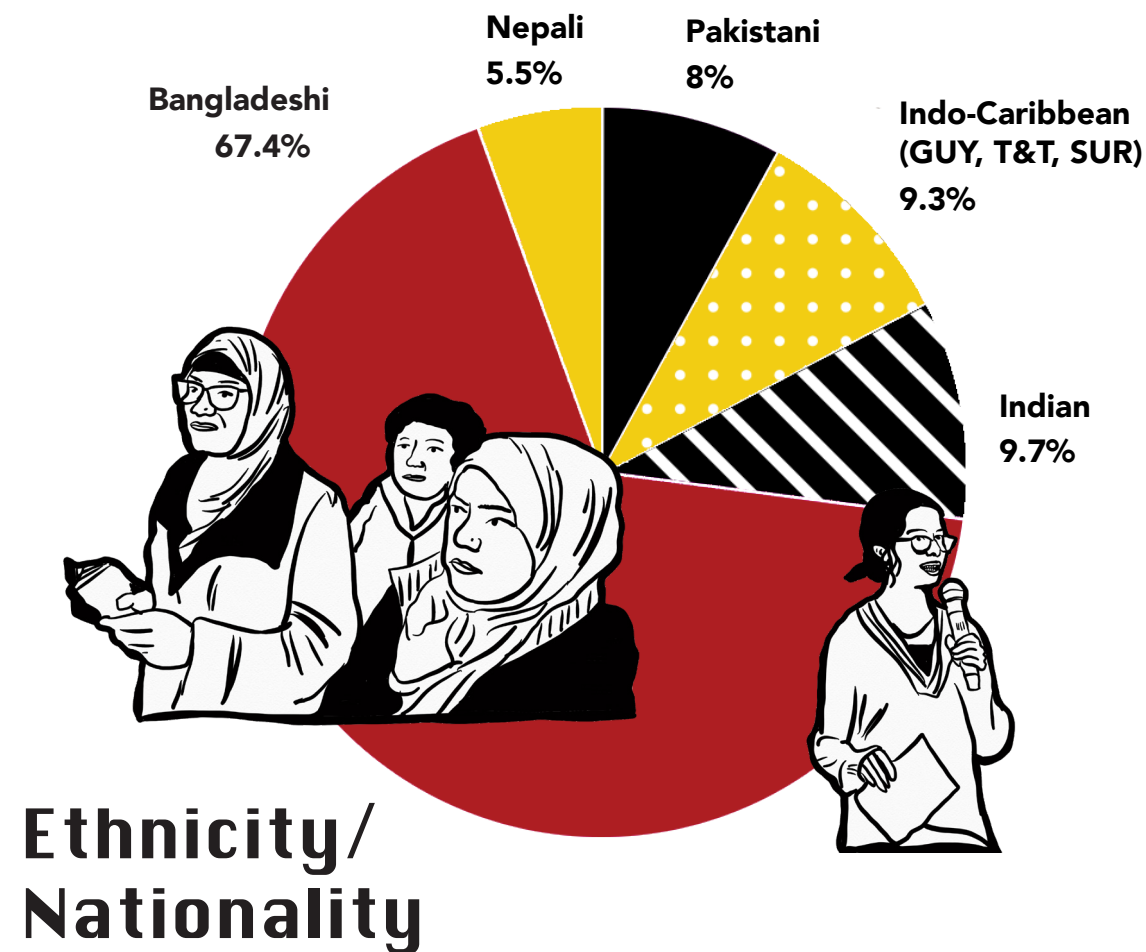
DRUM'S MEMBERSHIP IS SPREAD across three boroughs, with the largest base in Queens, where we began organizing. See the map on page 36 for the breakdown of our membership by neighborhood.

One out of three DRUM members lived in neighborhoods with the highest number of COVID cases.⁶ The overwhelming majority of members live with their families or roommates, representing large swaths of the community. About 28% of our membership live in neighborhoods with the highest number of COVID deaths.⁷

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene statistics on the confirmed death toll of COVID-19, Asian communities suffered the lowest amount of deaths while Latinx and Black communities suffered the greatest. While we recognize the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Latinx communities, we question the accuracy of these statistics with regards to Asian communities.⁸ The category itself represents a huge swath of ethnicities and nationalities. The numbers themselves could have been incorrectly reported since city officials rely on lab and medical records for this information and where it is not indicated, those individuals fall into the "unknown" category where many of our loved ones may have been classified.⁹ Our communities also face high poverty rates within New York City, a factor closely correlated with high COVID-19 deaths and raising questions about the accuracy of the data with regards to Asians.¹⁰

It is unclear how the city derived racial demographic data for a large number of probable COVID-19 deaths that took place at home since those individuals were not tested for the coronavirus.¹¹ Based on our intimate knowledge of our communities, we know many people were afraid to go to the hospital or assumed they had the flu and subsequently died at home which further questions the accuracy of the data.

*Percentages based on tracking of demographic data of ~2,500 DRUM's members from 2010 onwards.



CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS BY THE NUMBERS



600+

Groceries Delivered to Community Members or Families

16

Members + Co-tenants organizing Rent Strikes

400

Grocery Deliveries to DRUM Members

75

Participating in Strikes & Not Paying Rent

72

Campaign Members Trained

1,100+

Cooked Meals Delivered



2,175

New contacts interested in DRUM membership

\$350,000+

Relief Funds Distributed

12,075+

Campaign Calls Made

16,300+

Personal Protection Equipment Distributed

12,700+

Census Completions



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Organizational Shift: Meeting the Moment

ORGANIZING IS ROOTED IN conversations and meetings that allow us to build relationships and engage in political education. DRUM was suddenly forced to pivot its work to meet the unprecedented moment of a global pandemic spreading across New York City. The following section explores how we reimagined our organizing amidst the constant ambulance sirens and the preventable deaths of our loved ones.

Reimagining the Census Work

PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC, DRUM's priority was ensuring communities understood the importance of completing the census and demanding our fair share of resources. Members hired as census outreach workers made significant progress before they were forced to shift from in-person outreach to phone calls. The responses they received over the phone amidst the pandemic were hostile. Working-class South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities were focused on survival, not the census and future funding.

The primary questions census workers received were: "How can I pay rent? How do I not get sick? How do I make sure my family and people I live with don't get sick? How do I get food if it's not safe to go out?"



Unable to work amidst the shutdown, community members lost their income and had to scrape by on their savings, which were minimal as a result of being working-class and living in a high-cost city.

Since the census no longer spoke to people's immediate reality, we reimagined the work. We pivoted the existing infrastructure (consisting of trained DRUM members) to meet people's needs within a new political reality. We sought a path for DRUM members to remain engaged in organizing as a means to meet their material needs during the pandemic. This pivot led to the creation of a new campaign: Building Power and Safety through Solidarity (see Chapter II).



Rent Strikes

NEW YORK CITY, LIKE cities across the country, is in the midst of an eviction crisis. Recent state and federal legislation offers bare minimum protections. The governor's Executive Order protects some tenants facing evictions prior to the pandemic until January 1st 2021, while the Tenant Safe Harbor Act prevents evictions of tenants who suffered financial hardship due to COVID-19. The Act places the burden on individuals to prove financial hardship, which is difficult for undocumented workers and others who don't work on the books.¹ While the CDC has banned evictions nationwide for some tenants, it will not apply to tenants in unregulated apartments.² Ultimately, without state legislation cancelling rent, tenants will be expected to pay back rent.³ Without an eviction moratorium that halts all landlord lawsuits during and after the pandemic, tenants face the risk of homelessness or crushing debt amidst a pandemic and economic recession. Housing courts have reopened this month and about a third of tenants have missed their first court appearance.⁴ If they fail to appear again, they will lose the case, potentially leaving them homeless during the pandemic as a second wave is expected in the coming winter months.

Rent strikes are part of gender justice. If our only choices are either to pay rent or face eviction, this adds more burden onto women who are also trying to fight violence inside the home.



Nasreen

47 year old,
Bangladeshi, Home
Health Aide

Nasreen was an active member in DRUM's gender justice committee. She was involved in building community-based alternatives to dealing with issues of gender-based violence. During the pandemic, Nasreen coordinated a rent strike with 10 other tenants in her building. She conducted outreach with other tenants and arranged Zoom calls with them so they could learn how to carry out a rent strike.

DRUM is not a housing rights organization, but the needs of our members propelled us into this work. Campaigns calling for the cancellation of rent represented a clear path for us to channel the power of our members who began to sign petitions and call their legislators. Our members also joined the Housing Justice For All Coalition day of action. They marched across midtown Manhattan, ending at the Real Estate Board of New York which donates to political campaigns gathering support from elected officials for landlords and developers in New York City instead of working-class people.

Governor Cuomo's utterly inadequate response to the housing crisis confirmed the difficulty of this campaign and demonstrated the need for rent strikes. When members exhausted their limited financial safety nets they were concerned about how they could afford necessities. In response, we introduced the idea of organizing rent strikes. Amidst the uncertainty around whether they would have jobs to return to, the increasing prices of food and the lack of policies to support working-class people, many members did not realize that a rent strike was even a possibility.

We encouraged them to gauge interest from their neighbors and build relationships rooted in an understanding of their shared struggle. Members who had never met their neighbors began to forge these relationships. Some worked with organizers to create flyers they could hang in a shared space such as the lobby or slip under residents' doors. The flyers included the DRUM member's contact information.

After collecting their neighbor's contact information, members created a virtual space for them to gather whether via a group chat or a video call. This gathering was an opportunity to contextualize their struggles as working-class people within the context of the federal coronavirus relief bill, which bailed out corporations while offering crumbs to US citizens.⁵ The collective would determine next steps and weigh the possibility of a rent strike and whether to pay a portion of the rent or none at all and how to communicate this decision to the landlord.

Building Feminist Power

DRUM'S GENDER JUSTICE WORK addresses the root causes of gender based violence by creating cultural change. This includes building the leadership of members to begin community based interventions to address various forms of interpersonal violence instead of turning towards the police or the state to address situations such as domestic violence.

Women can confront violence both in the home and at their workplace whether they are working in an exploitative business or as domestic care workers. The inability to meet in person meant it would not be possible to organize follow-up actions to hold predatory business owners accountable. Consequently, organizers focused on the reality of women members at home. Gender based violence increases when family members are at home, as studies across the world have shown.⁶ Women's domestic labor also increases when everyone is at home, but how do you take advantage of a crisis to expand women's power?

“How do you organize around preventing gender based violence knowing that it increases when everyone is confined to their homes?”

—Jensine Raihan, Gender Justice Organizer



Rent strikes presented an opportunity for women to build power within their families as well as their buildings. Many women were not involved in household financial decisions pre-pandemic but involvement in rent strikes enabled them to take responsibility and ownership over one of their most pressing financial concerns. Organizing a rent strike requires creating a network within an apartment building. This network would have a sense of ownership over their housing that was previously nonexistent.

The pandemic represents an opportunity for women to expand their power through multifaceted means. By gaining access to information and training on how and why to conduct rent strikes, they can bypass family systems where women must generally seek “permission” from their husbands or in-laws. The rent strikes themselves reap material benefits for families struggling financially. By creating organizing infrastructure for rent strikes, members are establishing the foundations for a future in which these networks can play a central role in efforts to affect cultural change and address gender based violence as it unfolds between family members.



Ajay
16 years old, Guyanese,
Construction Worker & Student

This is about survival. Everyone in this city and state are only as safe and healthy as my family and all undocumented people in this pandemic.

Young people are persistently overlooked during the pandemic with regards to the role they play in supporting their families and communities. Ajay is an undocumented 16 year old from Guyana. He used to work weekends in a roti shop.

Due to the pandemic, both Ajay and his mother have lost their jobs. Ajay lives with both of his parents and when they were unable to pay rent during the pandemic, their landlord threatened to call the police and ICE on their family. They had no choice but to move and currently live in a basement. AJ is a leader in fighting for the excluded workers fund and to ensure future federal legislation covers all excluded undocumented workers. He’s organized over 50 members through calls to action. Many of those he’s contacted are DRUM youth members who are also becoming active in campaign work by pushing for rent cancellation and ensuring that our communities are counted in the Census

Excluded Workers Fund Campaign



WIELDING PITCHFORKS AND PROTEST signs, DRUM members travelled in yellow cabs to the Hamptons to demand a tax on billionaires. Along with the Fund Excluded Workers Coalition, members stood outside of the homes of billionaires who are major donors to Governor Cuomo, calling for the establishment of an Excluded Workers Fund in New York state.⁷ The fund would provide workers excluded from federal or state relief with \$3,300 in monthly financial assistance by taxing the assets of billionaires.⁸

Months prior, some of those same members were anxiously asking about the federal coronavirus relief bill. For those who were undocumented, we could hear the desperation as they asked about whether there was any assistance available to help them survive. The federal coronavirus relief bill excluded undocumented workers and mixed status families.⁹

A youth member explained that previously he did not believe that as working-class people, we had the right to ask or demand support, but as the Hamptons protest demonstrated to him, billionaires earn their wealth from our labor. The bill has been introduced into the state legislature and DRUM has co-organized virtual town hall meetings with elected representatives as well as a one-day hunger strike and sleep out in front of Jeff Bezos’ Manhattan penthouse that culminated in a march to Governor Cuomo’s Manhattan office.¹⁰

The bill would benefit DRUM members who are undocumented as well as informal workers who do not qualify for unemployment benefits including day laborers and street vendors. On the city level, DRUM is continuing to work with the Fund Excluded Workers Coalition to demand that the city step in where the federal government has failed to provide financial assistance to households that did not qualify for past or future federal relief.¹¹

No matter how much we try to 'resolve' these issues on our own it won't work. We need community, we are only stronger together.



Dipina

17 years old, Nepali, Student, former restaurant worker/ unemployed

Dipina and her family migrated from Nepal and when she enrolled in school, she was dismayed at the glaring lack of instructional support in Nepali. In the pandemic, the 16 year old youth member has taken up the role of making sure Nepali community members are able to get important information on how to fill out their Census, file unemployment benefits, support for food deliveries, all in their own language. Dipina has also engaged fellow classmates in becoming involved with the PaSS campaign and in doing a workshop on challenging anti-Blackness and taking action as a community.

Growing Abolitionism Amidst National Uprisings

THE NATIONAL UPRISINGS THAT followed the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Daniel Prude and Walter Wallace by police officers, propelled calls to defund and abolish the police into the mainstream.

Abolitionist principles have guided our work for the past 20 years. Previously, following abolitionist principles set us apart from other South-Asian and Indo-Caribbean organizations and created tension in coalitions when, for example, we would advocate for removing police from schools altogether. As the uprisings have propelled the growth and transformation of various organizations' stances, we look forward to building with groups, particularly other South Asian organizations, that are engaging with these ideas for the first time.

Our stances are grounded in the experiences of our members.

Our youth members have witnessed how the school to prison and deportation pipeline functions, which is why we advocate for removing School Safety Agents and the NYPD from schools. We have held this stance and called for funding more counselors, not cops since 2006.¹² Our undocumented members understand the violence of immigration raids, whether Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers are outside their homes or in their workplaces so we fight to abolish ICE and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). This stance includes advocating for cutting funding for ICE and CBP as well as opposing the continuation or establishment of local counties' contracts with ICE to assist them in detaining immigrants.¹³ For 20 years we have not supported any legislation that includes increased immigration enforcement and border militarization.¹⁴ We are an anti-enforcement organization, committed to defunding and abolishing all carceral institutions.

In the current moment, this translated into joining the campaign to repeal 50a within New York. Under the statute, police departments could avoid releasing police disciplinary records to the public and conceal information about officers' misconduct.¹⁵ The legislative campaign had previously failed but the uprisings brought about a new political reality.



I wish I knew about DRUM years ago. I only learned about this organization after my situation became difficult. There isn't anyone in the community to support women in similar situations and I want to play this role for others.



Jonaki 37 year old, Bangladeshi, Homemaker

In March 2020, immediately before New Yorkers began to quarantine, Jonaki separated from her abusive husband. Amidst the pandemic, Jonaki had to figure out how to pay rent on her own and support her two children. She joined a rent strike that other DRUM members were organizing and then led other community members to join the strike.



I never thought that I can work for my community especially during a pandemic. I feel so fortunate and proud to play an important role in supporting people standing up for themselves against eviction, ICE and the police.

Kazi Nahar

42 years old,
Bangladeshi, Homemaker

When Kazi Nahar joined as a member in August 2019, she was quiet during membership meetings and hardly ever voiced her opinions. Kazi Nahar is an undocumented domestic worker. Prior to the pandemic, she dedicated all of her time to taking care of her son's special needs, particularly around schooling. Her husband was a handyman at a hospital. During the pandemic, in addition to caring and advocating for her son, Kazi Nahar developed her leadership in the Bangladeshi community through the PASS campaign. She supported 500 community members and their families to: complete the Census, apply for unemployment benefits, access healthcare information with regards to Covid-19, and carry out rent strikes. Additionally, she provided social and emotional support to women dealing with domestic violence at home and assisted families who were dealing with police attempting to enter their homes.



For any network to be effective, we have to be able to deliver services in the South Asian languages that represent the community being served. Which is why I set up a hotline for the network to make sure there was always someone available to speak in the languages community members needed.

The goal has always been to do mutual aid as solidarity, not charity. And this can only happen if we develop strong infrastructure for engaging people beyond the pandemic to build power.

AAMNAH

24 years old,
Pakistani, Unemployed

The pandemic brought forth a need for mutual aid networks to support people in quarantine. Aamnah is a 24 year old Pakistani member whose family members became unemployed during the pandemic, with a father who is immuno-compromised, co-founded the Kensington Mutual Aid network because of the lack of networks that were run by members of impacted communities.

I couldn't even be there for the friends and family members I lost while they were dying in this pandemic. But through this campaign I've been able to support people before it was too late. Organizing has given me a taste of what independence feels like.



Farhana

39 years old,
Bangladeshi, Homemaker

Farhana has supported 600 community members and families in the Bronx. This is no small feat, as she has three children and her husband lost his job as a grocery store worker during the pandemic. Through her engagement, Farhana already recruited 15 undocumented people to join DRUM's membership. Additionally, she has supported others in filing for unemployment benefits. Through Farhana, four other members joined the PaSS campaign as workers who will build further power and solidarity within the Bronx.

From the recent Black Lives Matter protests, I learned that for any movement, the more people and the more allies we can bring to our cause, the stronger we become. Through the PaSS campaign, I've reached out to many people in our communities who are struggling with rent.

I brought them into our fight to cancel rent and educated them about rent strikes. We have to continue to unite those of us who cannot afford rent and build solidarity with those who can pay rent but are willing to stand with us.

Shaheen *42 years old, Bangladeshi, School Crossing Guard*

Shaheen is a Bangladeshi undocumented school crossing guard who lost her job during the pandemic. She was the only one working in her family. When she struggled with paying rent for the basement her family lived in, her landlord harassed her constantly for rent. Shaheen did a non-compliance on rent and got her landlord to reduce her rent by 50%. She became someone other community members looked to for guidance on how to do a non-compliance and get rent reduction.

It breaks my heart to know that there are so many families with young children who are starving because there wasn't a system put in place to properly take care of them and get real meals to them. I know first hand what the power of community-led organizing is and in these times, organizing is the only life-line we have to take care of each other.

**STOP
POLICE
BRUTALITY**

Sherry *31 years old, Guyanese, School Aide*

Sherry has become a leader in the South Queens community, advocating for other working-class Indo-Caribbean and South Asian families and their needs. Sherry is a Guyanese undocumented immigrant, and a domestic violence survivor. Throughout the pandemic, Sherry continued working to support her three children. She commuted to work via bus and train, which was particularly risky during the peak of the pandemic due to her inability to safely practice social distancing both at work and during her commute. Amidst supporting her family, Sherry has mobilized regular food distribution for over 40 families. Within her South Queens community, Sherry has supported families' access to food and engaged undocumented families to become active with DRUM's organizing work.

I realized as a homeowner, with a tenant, that both of us lost jobs and were left with no support. This campaign gave us the collective opportunity to figure out how to survive.

I started to wonder that if I, as a small homeowner am able to support my tenant, then why are the government and large building owners failing to support people with basic rent relief? How can we be such a rich city and country and at the same time, have so many people face homelessness because they can't pay rent?

Shamsun *57 year old, Bangladeshi, former Restaurant worker/Unemployed*

It's one thing to be in solidarity with people who are in the same situation as you and it's another thing entirely to be in solidarity by giving up a privilege you benefit from. Shamsun is the rare undocumented homeowner. She found herself unemployed during the pandemic and getting rent from her tenants would be her only source of income. When Shamsun's tenants became unemployed, struggled with food and could not pay rent, and were planning to leave in the middle of a pandemic, she stopped them from leaving because of the concern for their safety. Instead, she chose to get them mutual aid for food and access to healthcare. And Shamsun's solidarity extended much further than her own home. She became a life-line for 600 people and their families in accessing important information about the pandemic, including where to get testing, food deliveries, filling out the Census, their rights as tenants, how to organize rent strikes, and all in their own language, Bangla.

BUILDING WORKING CLASS POWER

Campaign Goals

Power

Building Working Class Power

- Develop leadership as DRUM members
 - Political understanding
 - Connecting and building with others
 - Develop skills and increase capacity
 - Expand DRUM's membership base
- Deepen connections to each other with a focal point at DRUM
 - Increase political awareness, agitation, and action on rent strikes, census etc.

Safety

Maximize Health and Safety

- Maximize Health and Safety
- Provide health information
- Updates on ongoing developments of the health, economic, and social crisis
- Connections to resources—Food, housing, health, masks, gloves, financial resources, counter misinformation, etc.

Soldarity

Act in Solidarity

- Building connections in a time of isolation
- Building new relations and a culture of supporting each other
- Taking a stand even if you are not impacted by an issue



Building Power & Safety through Solidarity

OUR POWER COMES FROM our membership. The PaSS campaign was an opportunity to expand our membership during a moment of crisis as opposed to focusing solely on our current members. 72 DRUM members, trained and stipended, made over 12,075+ calls during the campaign resulting in over 2,175 individuals who expressed interest in becoming DRUM members. While we do not expect every single one of these individuals to become members, on average we recruit about 300 new members in a year, meaning this level of interest in a single year is unprecedented.

In order to gauge these individual's investment and familiarize them with DRUM's work, we asked them to engage in organizing work to see if they'd be interested in calling their contacts. This resulted in a multiplier effect, where our outreach resulted in some of those individuals, in turn, contacting others.

We were able to contact community members unfamiliar with DRUM's work through our existing relationships with community institutions such as cultural groups or immigrant businesses who shared the contact information of members and employees respectively. Mutual aid groups also shared contact lists with us, enabling us to expand our reach.

When designing the PaSS campaign, we made assessments based on our first-hand familiarity with our communities and organizing expertise that proved accurate and ensured the success of the campaign. We recognized that during quarantine people were cooped up at home, unable to work and facing different degrees of social isolation. As a result, we accurately predicted that they would be more receptive to phone outreach particularly when the call was rooted in ensuring their safety and well-being and speaking to their current experience.

In the middle of all this death and sadness, this campaign was the only powerful thing I could do.

Syeda

44 year old, Bangladeshi, former Daycare Worker, Unemployed

Like millions of people, Syeda and her husband struggled with paying rent, utility bills and food after they became unemployed during the pandemic. They have two children. Syeda used to work at a daycare center. Now, through her work with the PaSS campaign, Syeda has made 1,000 calls. She is directly supporting 700 members and their families to access food, fighting against utility cancellations from landlords, and organizing rent strikes. Additionally, she is comforting those who have lost loved ones and other undocumented community members who are trying to survive. Syeda is also a cancer survivor. Her leadership has inspired her husband to deliver food to families for the campaign. Her son Rafi now assists people in filing for unemployment benefits. She organized a rent strike within her building that nine other tenants have joined.



Safety

OUR COMMUNITIES DID NOT receive information about how to keep themselves safe and what they were or were not supposed to do. When calling community members, we were confronted with widespread misinformation or a lack of information. Some individuals were not leaving their house but still inviting guests over. Others would reuse gloves in ways that could cause cross-contamination, such as touching their faces with the gloves.

This reflects the failure of the local, state and federal government to provide effective and accessible prevention education prior to the pandemic. When the city government first began disseminating safety protocols around hand washing and avoiding touching your face, the information was in English, played on repeat in the trains, and inaccessible to large swaths of the population whose neighborhoods would become hotspots.

When they finally began translating guidelines to various languages, there was no meaningful dissemination strategy beyond text alerts or commercials in English or documents posted online with translations of questionable quality.¹ We devoted significant time to sharing safety protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in addition to providing updates with regards to the shutdown, rent and mortgage payments, COVID-19 testing, and the continuation of ICE raids. We assisted people with filing for unemployment benefits and clarified who would benefit from the federal coronavirus relief package. We ensured people had access

to food and if not, connected them to necessary services. We also warned them about ongoing scams asking for personal information as well as information related to mental health and well being.

With regards to food access, we found some individuals who were receiving groceries via mutual aid efforts but were unable to cook and feed their children because they were infected with COVID-19. In those instances, we connected them with groups delivering prepared meals.

After asking individuals about their basic needs and providing relevant updates about policies impacting their lives, we agitated members to make clear the structural factors that led to the current crisis. Agitation served as a bridge connecting their material realities to the need for organizing for collective liberation. It provided an opportunity to reflect on why the richest country in the world was facing the worst crisis. We explored the government's response and how it prioritized the well-being of the stock market, corporations and businesses at the expense of working-class and poor people, which is further explored in the following section.

Agitation was followed by calls to action which included signing relevant petitions calling for rent cancellation, advocating for legislation enabling working-class people to survive, filling out the census and sharing the contact information of other community members. For those who were willing to call others, they conducted outreach after receiving training on how to do so.





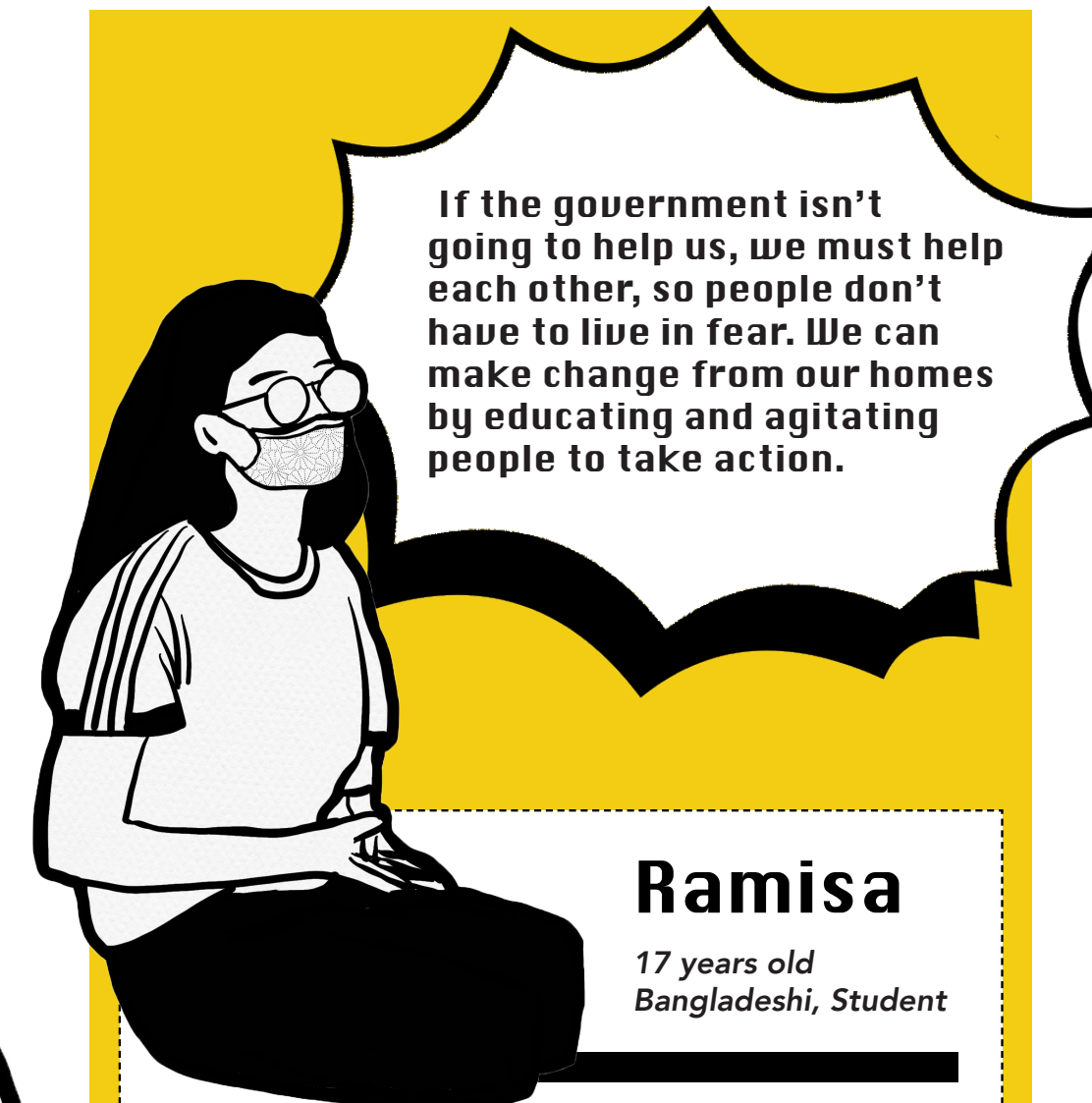
Solidarity

BUILDING A CULTURE OF supporting each other provides the basis for an orientation to collective liberation. PaSS outreach embodied mutuality. Organizers shared pertinent information and resources, and in turn people could share their contacts as well as their time by choosing to make calls themselves. Mutuality overcomes isolation, pessimism and hopelessness. These emotions were rampant during the peak of pandemic as members were surrounded by news of loved ones passing away or struggling to meet basic needs with no clear end in sight.

We did not want community members to feel that PaSS campaign workers were outreach workers or service providers who were going to save them from their suffering. Nor did we want them to see PaSS workers as stepping in to compensate for the government's failures to ensure their safety and well-being during

the pandemic. Our goal was to show that as a working class community, we must support each other. This stands in direct opposition to the culture of individualism and division that led people to hoard essential goods and focus solely on their own survival.

We pushed people to think beyond their relationship with the PaSS campaign worker and to consider their neighbors as well. We asked whether they were considering their neighbor's needs and whether their neighbors were aware of safety protocols or had access to food. Our goal was to create a shift from people thinking only about themselves or the person who is calling them (who can easily become a savior figure) to start thinking collectively of the people around us.



If the government isn't going to help us, we must help each other, so people don't have to live in fear. We can make change from our homes by educating and agitating people to take action.

Ramisa

17 years old
Bangladeshi, Student

Ramisa is a recent high school graduate living in Ozone Park, Queens with her family. The 17-year-old undocumented Bangladeshi and her family struggled with paying rent when both of Ramisa's parents lost their jobs during the pandemic. She hoped to support her family by getting a job, but was unable to find one. During this time Ramisa became active in the PaSS campaign and organized 40 members and their families. While Ramisa and her family do not qualify for unemployment, she stepped up to help other community members file for benefits. Solidarity is a critical part of how Ramisa does her work, which is why she also led a Black Lives Matter workshop for South Queens PaSS campaign workers on ways to take personal and institutional action against white supremacy.

It Takes a Village: Intergenerational Solidarity

WE DID NOT ANTICIPATE the degree to which the PaSS campaign would foster intergenerational connections both within families and among community members.

Building working-class leadership is integral to DRUM's work yet carries unique challenges amidst a pandemic when it's impossible to carry out in-person training or meetings. Many PaSS campaign workers had never heard of Zoom and solely knew how to send and receive calls and text messages on their phones.

As a result, it was difficult for some workers to assist community members they were calling, who themselves often have limited technological skills. This posed countless challenges with data entry or assisting someone with filling out a petition to cancel rent or understanding how to complete the census online. In response, we helped establish intergenerational support systems. If an adult member was struggling with sharing a petition, for example, we would contact their child, often a DRUM youth member, and ask them to assist their parents in developing these skills.

Many PaSS outreach workers were women. Some had never worked outside of the home and others were elderly members with limited digital skills. For some women, their husbands supported them in the work, taking care of the children so they could attend protests or learning how to conduct data entry so they could then teach their wives. This not only lessened the burden on organizers to train PaSS workers, but showed the integral role women played in gaining their family's investment in building working-class power amidst a pandemic. The DRUM Summer Internship Program for youth also contributed to the PaSS campaign

this year, with young people calling community members and engaging in political intergenerational conversations that are rare occurrences in our communities.

Stipending the PaSS workers allowed us to support both their leadership and their financial needs (for both them as individuals and their families) during difficult times.



THE HUMAN COST OF A PROFIT- DRIVEN SYSTEM



The Political Framework

WHEN THE PANDEMIC BEGAN and the initial concerns from our communities centered on how to survive without income, we wondered whether we should pivot to providing services and direct assistance. We witnessed the government abdicate its responsibilities to provide for people's basic needs and simultaneously, mutual aid groups emerged throughout the city. Ultimately, we chose to build power for the long term fights that will emerge from this moment of crises.

How We Got Here

DURING THE PEAK OF THE PANDEMIC in New York City, our neighborhoods became battlegrounds for survival. Our overburdened hospitals required refrigerated trucks to hold the bodies of our families, siblings, parents, children, grandparents, friends and neighbors who died.

Our base of low-wage and undocumented workers were forced to choose between unemployment and potential food insecurity or continuing to work while putting themselves and their families at risk absent safety protocols. We lost two members to COVID-19 both of whom continued to work through the shutdowns because they could not afford to stop working. Rashida Ahmed worked as a home health aide and Rajkumar Thapa was an undocumented Uber driver.¹ They both made valuable contributions to build power among our communities.

Both Rashida and Rajkumar died amidst a health crisis that includes the lack of hospital beds, medical supplies, equipment and public health education. This supply shortage was exacerbated by the lack of a coordinated, centralized system to ensure patients and supplies were evenly distributed within New York City Health and Hospitals (NYC H+H) which oversees public hospitals.² This crisis is the consequence of decades of closing hospitals and cutting funding for the public health system while private hospitals continue to expand and receive massive tax cuts.³ Private hospitals, however, mostly treat white patients with private insurance plans, while public hospitals serve as a "safety net provider" mostly serving

low-income communities of color including those on medicaid and medicare and undocumented patients.⁴

Hospital closures have disproportionately impacted low-income communities of color in the outer boroughs including DRUM members. In the last 22 years, 18 hospitals have closed in New York City. Many were replaced by residential developments for the wealthy.⁵ These hospital closures had dire consequences during the COVID-19 crisis when the lack of beds overwhelmed local hospitals and their supplies, leading to an increase in deaths.⁶ **91% of DRUM members live in neighborhoods impacted by hospital closures.**⁷ When state and local officials enact austerity measures and shut down hospitals, our communities and Black and Latinx communities moreso, pay the consequences with their lives.

Queens was the first borough to be overwhelmed by COVID cases. Also has the lowest hospital beds per capita in the city. Elmhurst Hospital had “apocalyptic” conditions while Jamaica and Flushing hospital faced malfunctioning oxygen delivery systems because their facilities were overwhelmed.⁸ While 91% of DRUM members lived within 5 miles of a closed hospital, the remaining 9% reside in South Queens, where their nearest hospital is Jamaica Hospital which was stretched thin. As a result, hospital closures across New York City affected 100% of DRUM members. If those hospitals had remained open, would 7,131 Queens residents have died during the pandemic?⁹

In a recent investigation into NYC H+H’s response to COVID-19, Comptroller Scott Stringer wrote, “H+H’s outsized role in providing care to these vulnerable City residents most severely impacted by COVID-19 is frustrated by its lack of resources and financing.”¹⁰

Despite multiple reports from as early as 2009 predicting the dire situations residents would face in a public health crisis without ample preparation, the precautions taken to keep our communities safe was wholly inadequate because “the State, the City, H+H, and private hospitals – faced resource tradeoffs between the cost of preparing for a possible future scenario and the daily reality of care delivery.”¹¹

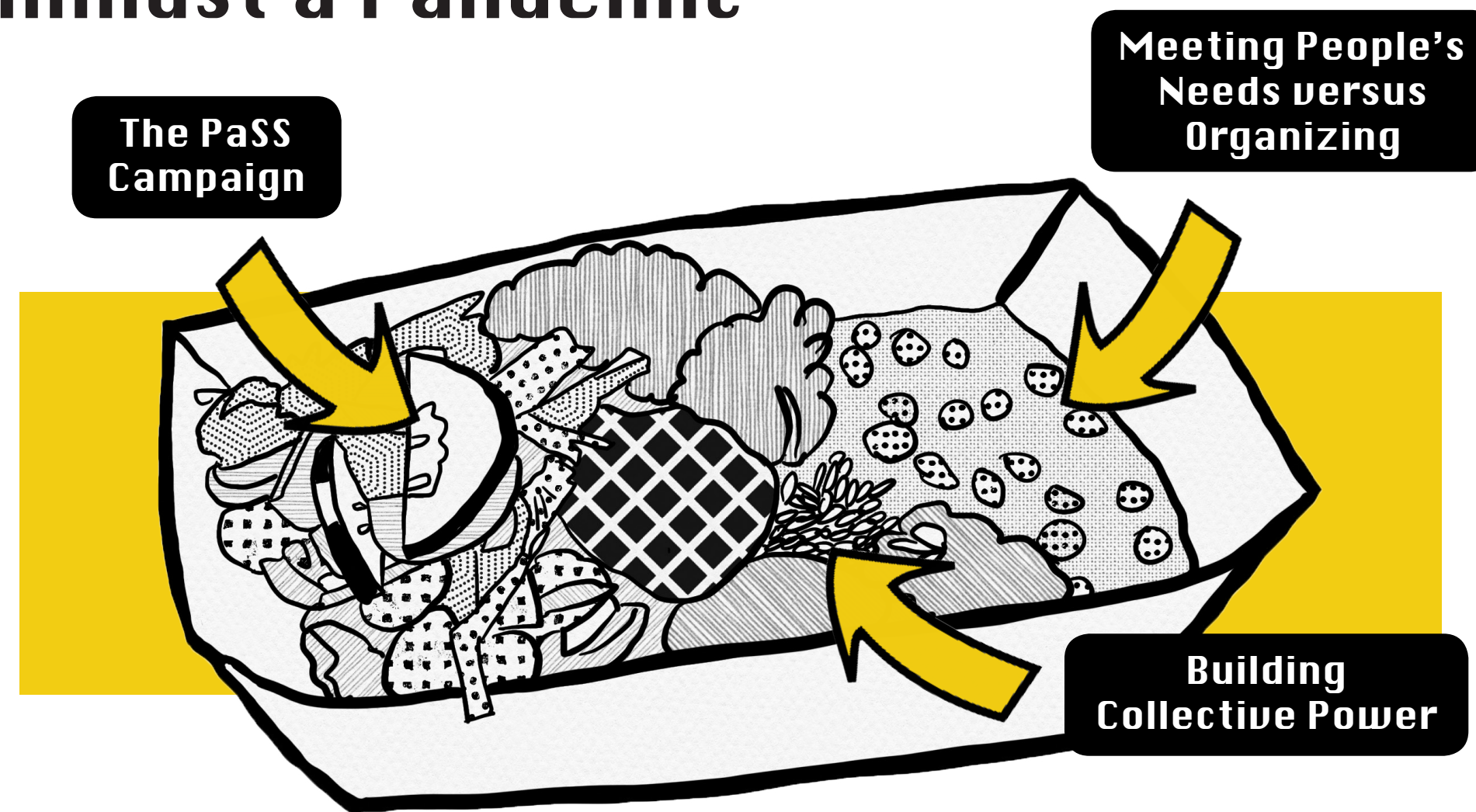
The pandemic has laid bare the realities of decades of intentional gutting of critical public services. Hospital closures have punished the poor, who represent a disproportionate number of preventable COVID deaths.

The same way the government has reduced spending on public health infrastructure, they have gutted every public benefit and system our lives depend on. Whether on a federal, state or local level, elected officials have slashed funding for public programs and where possible, replaced them with programs run by private corporations that solely value profit margins.

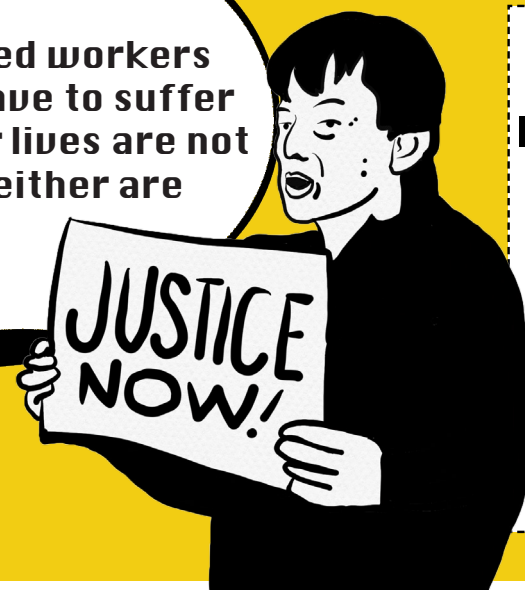
Instead of preparing for the pandemic by stockpiling supplies of PPE and ventilators, New York state did nothing, leaving it up to market forces. It is not profitable, however, for corporations to produce these goods in advance. Instead, as we witnessed, they waited until there was a high global demand and charged exorbitant prices.

From our education system to public housing to social safety nets, the foundations of our social and economic systems are falling apart. The budget the New York City Council has approved will continue these trends as they continue to slash funding for schools, hospitals, and public services while increasing the amount of police officers in schools and making cosmetic changes to the NYPD’s budget.

An Offering to the Movement: A Model for Organizing Amidst a Pandemic



Undocumented workers should not have to suffer this way. Our lives are not respected, neither are our deaths.



Ashok 53 years old, Nepali, former restaurant worker/unemployed

Like millions of New Yorkers, this pandemic brought on many hardships for Ashok, a Nepali undocumented restaurant worker who lost his job at the same time his wife became ill from the coronavirus. In the middle of his own struggles, Ashok reached out to other community members who were also struggling alongside him. He became a resource for 70 Nepali community members and their families in helping them fill out their Census, filing for unemployment and getting food deliveries. When DRUM member Rajkumar passed away from the coronavirus, Ashok supported the family by fundraising for Rajkumar’s funeral.

THE PANDEMIC COMPLETELY DISRUPTED organizing work resulting in feelings of hopelessness and pessimism pervasive across movement organizations. As campaign work, mobilizations and legislative pushes were placed on hold, the switch to remote meetings eventually resulted in fatigue. Some groups focused on mutual aid efforts and online political education.

Within New York City, we saw mutual aid groups emerge across the city and realized our most apt contribution to movement work would be organizing and building power. Amidst the morbid realities of our communities, we drastically shifted our thinking from viewing the pandemic as a barrier to organizing to a moment

where we could expand our bases, bring new people into our movements and prepare larger forces to fight upcoming struggles. Our political analysis around the PaSS campaign as well as the scripts we used when making these calls are all available online in order to serve as a resource to other organizations that they could replicate if relevant. Other groups contacted us to ask if they could use the script and engaged with us on our political analysis of the pandemic thus contributing to the growth of our own thinking.

We hope the PaSS campaign can continue to support the growth of other organizing efforts. We recognize the significant role

“After we launched the PaSS campaign website, it did resonate deeply for movement folks. It provided clarity and a way forward.”

—Fahd Ahmed, Executive Director

mutual aid efforts across New York City have played in ensuring that low-income communities have access to food in an era of record unemployment and hunger. As the eviction and unemployment crises continue, the needs of our communities will increase. Mutual aid groups have a responsibility to meet these needs by not only ensuring that our communities are able to survive, but also organizing for a better society that enables them to thrive.

Meeting people’s basic needs is important and valuable work. It is distinct, however, from organizing. Organizing does not solely consist of delivering food or encouraging individuals to vote, but rather cultivating a network to defend against evictions or fighting to tax billionaires or to abolish the police and invest in community. Considering the amount of people affected by decades of austerity measures, we need to build collective power to oppose the ever-increasing power of systems rooted in our exploitation and death. The relationships built by mutual aid networks represent an untapped potential to organize for the world we deserve.¹²



We only get what we are willing to fight for. And everyday this pandemic is only proving how true that is.

Samira
59 year old,
Pakistani, Vendor

Samira has been a member for 14 years. She’s played an integral role in numerous fights including passing police accountability legislation, fighting against immigration raids and enforcement and currently building power during the pandemic. As a mother of four children, she understands the importance of rent strikes. Within her Pakistani community, she has supported others to engage in rent strikes. She’s also ensured families have access to food by personally making and delivering food. She has created a network for food distribution by buying groceries and encouraging her friends to do the same so they could distribute food to 150 families living in Queens and Long Island.

The Fights Ahead

INITIALLY A HEALTH CRISIS, COVID-19 has had a domino effect revealing the precariousness of our current economic system. Record unemployment is only the beginning. New York is in the midst of an eviction crisis absent rent cancellation. This crisis will impact small landlords who could face mass foreclosures which affects the financial and real estate industry.

The crisis will also have a huge impact on small businesses that cannot financially withstand the shutdown or the reopening process, meaning workers may not have a job to return to. 80% of restaurants and bars in NYC did not pay rent in June. While commercial evictions are on hold through the rest of the year, the fate of many local restaurants and businesses remains uncertain.¹³

The assistance for small businesses, on a federal and city level were not distributed equally with the outer boroughs facing multiple disadvantages despite having been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. NYC’s small business assistance budget was less than many parade budgets and mostly benefited businesses in Manhattan.¹⁴ Federal PPP loan programs benefited those with preexisting relationships with banks that prioritized easy to process applications in wealthier neighborhoods, making it difficult for family owned, immigrant businesses.¹⁵ While small immigrant businesses



unsuccessfully vied for relief from the CARES Act, the elites, including corporations and big businesses, reaped major tax breaks.¹⁶

If small businesses are forced to shut down, workers will not have a job to return to, leaving a greater number of immigrant and undocumented workers unemployed as local economies crumble. As local businesses close and real estate prices potentially decline, this creates conditions in which developers can purchase cheap land in neighborhoods, speeding up already existing processes of gentrification and displacement in working-class immigrant communities across the city. Rezoning efforts pave the way for luxury developments that displace low-income communities of color.¹⁷ From Gowanus to Astoria to Flushing, rezoning efforts are on the rise across the city.¹⁸

Crises transform society. We will never return to the way things were. While billionaires have increased their wealth by \$584 billion, the people and movements must continue to fight in order to ensure that we shape the direction of our society.¹⁹ We need to mobilize a base of people that are ready to engage in collective efforts to restructure society in ways that serve human needs and development over profits while ensuring holistic support and care for communities built around a culture of solidarity and mutuality.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Our Communities

Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic was exacerbated by crumbling infrastructure within our communities. As the map shows, most of the communities DRUM members live in have higher poverty rates than the NYC average of 20%. All bases have a higher portion of residents who spend disproportionate amounts of their income on rent than the NYC average of 51%. Members live in neighborhoods where less than half of all rented apartments are adequately maintained meaning a minority of tenants do not have to worry about heating or toilet breakdowns, water leaks, holes, mice or rats and other defects.

Most DRUM members attend safety-net public hospitals. The portion of hospital reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid captures the hospital's revenue streams. Hospitals lose money when they treat Medicaid or Medicare patients and must depend on other forms of revenue such as government funding to remain open.

White, salaried professionals living in downtown Manhattan can nurture themselves to good health after a medical issue while working-class people of color such as day laborers are left to fend for themselves. Patient outcome scores reflect these entrenched inequalities, and other factors such as clinical outcomes. While the New York Presbyterian hospital system, top rated in the nation, earned an A- patient outcome score, the highest score earned by any of the hospitals our members attend is a C-.

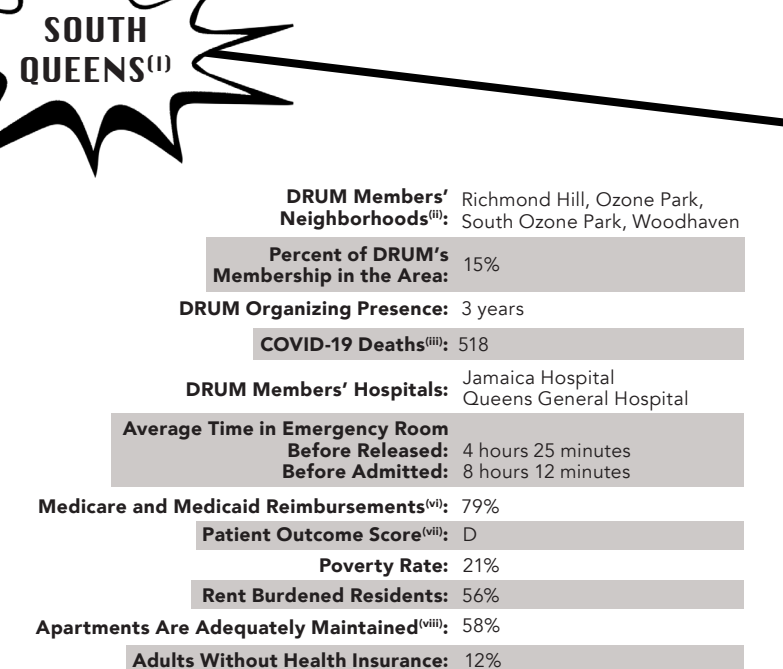
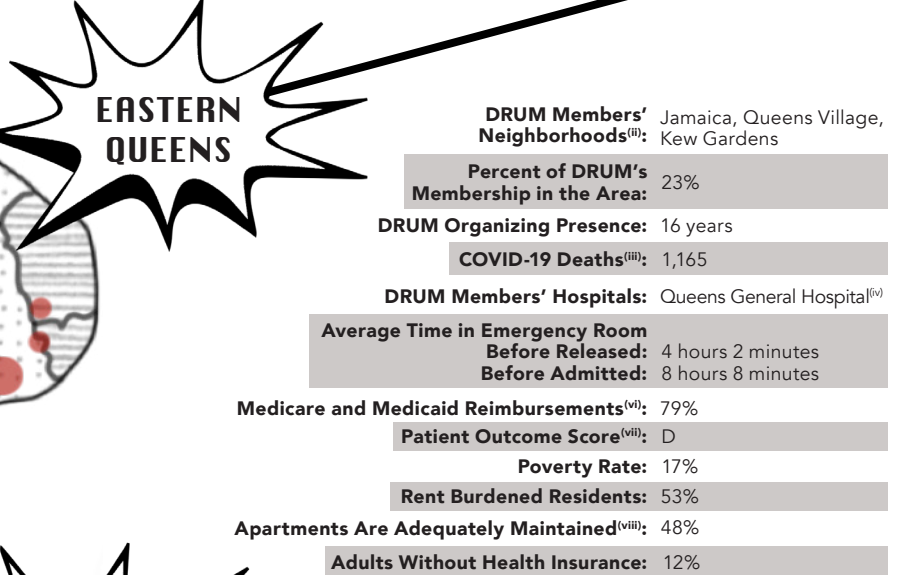
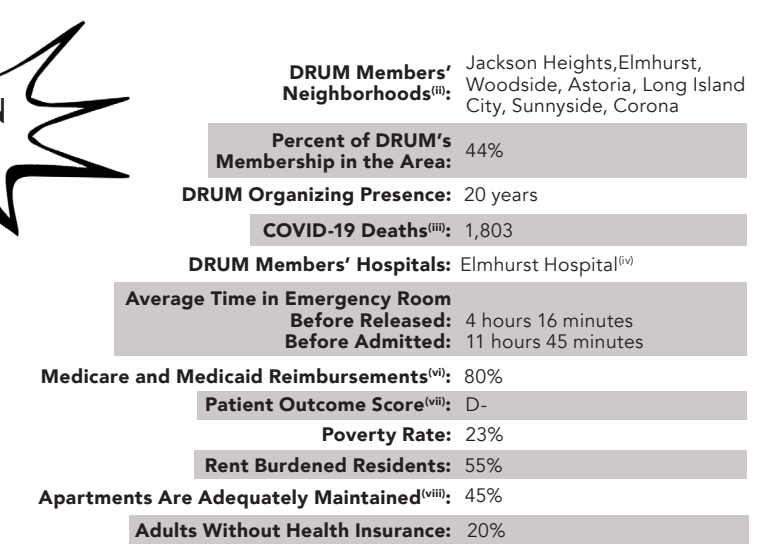
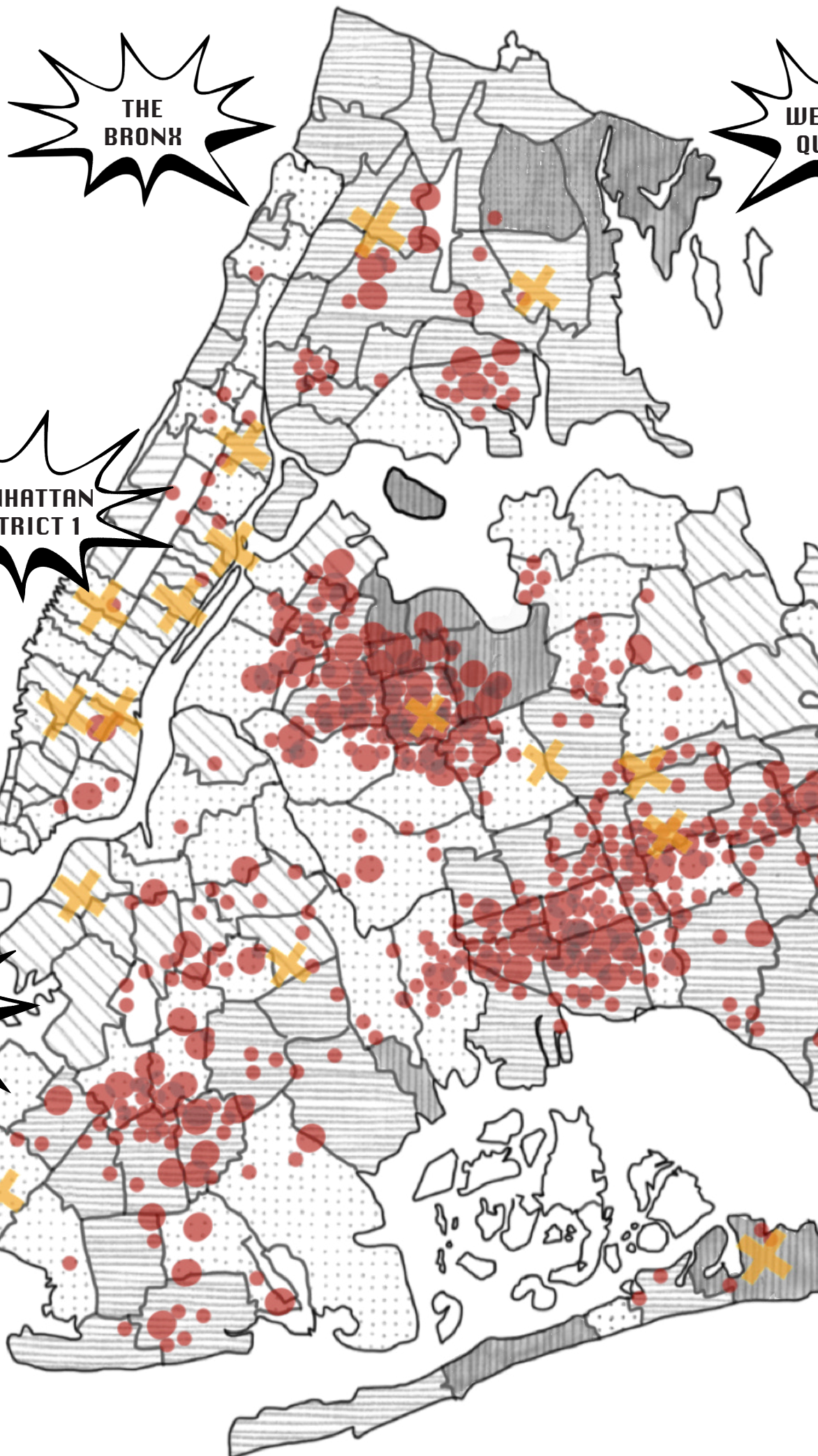
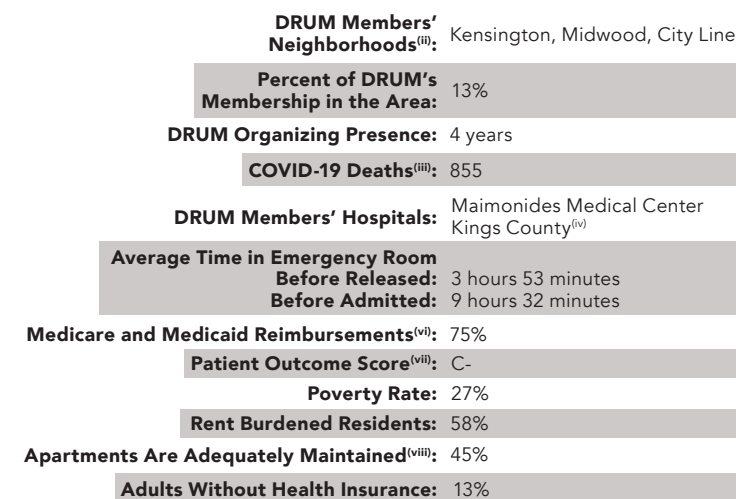
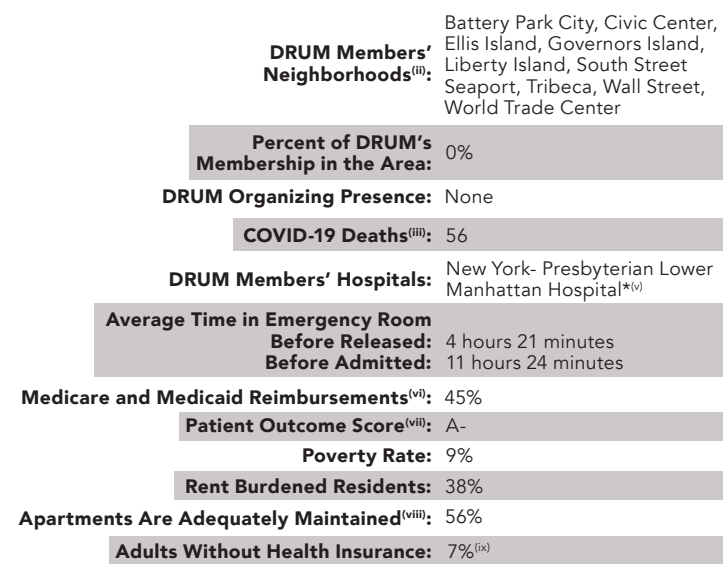
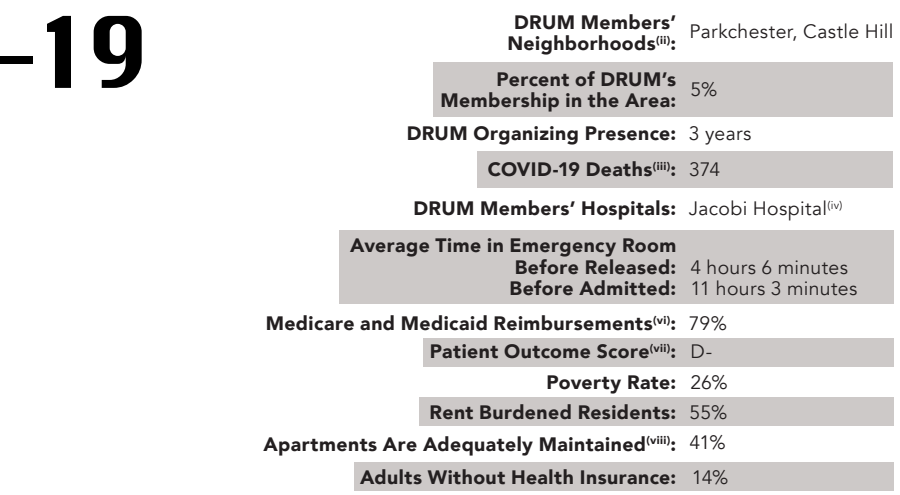
56 people died from COVID-19 in the financial district of Manhattan compared to 1,803 in Western Queens. Without accounting for population disparities, that's nearly 32 times greater deaths in dense, working-class immigrant neighborhoods compared to an elite, affluent community.

For descriptions of (i) to (ix) see Appendix

Legend

- Hospital closures
- Presence of DRUM members
- less than 1,206 case rate per 100,000 people

- 1,206-3,087 case rate per 100,000 people
- 3,088-4399 case rate per 100,000 people
- 4400-4890 case rate per 100,000 people



RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations for Policy Makers

COVID-19

Federal and State Governments Should:

1. Cancel rent for tenants, and mortgage payments for small landlords, for the duration of the pandemic.
2. Universal healthcare with a robust public health education and employment program.
3. Include all excluded workers in future State and Federal stimulus, regardless of immigration status. In the long term, the federal government should provide Universal Basic Income for everyone for the duration of the pandemic, regardless of immigration status.
4. All educational instruction should take place remotely for the duration of the pandemic, with fully functioning internet and equipment provided by the DOE with the exception of childcare and educational services that should be made available to all essential workers across industries.
5. Moratorium on all hospital and health clinic closures and budget cuts.
6. Stimulus fund for women taking on unpaid domestic duties and are unemployed

NYC Should:

7. Close Rikers Island and release all those incarcerated. Ensure secure housing and access to healthcare.
8. Ensure transparency to show information collected through contact tracing of COVID-19 will not be shared with NYPD, ICE and DHS.



Defund & Abolish

1. Immediately end memorandum of understanding between DOE and NYPD on school police. Immediately remove control of school safety officers from the NYPD to the DOE. The process should not take two years.
2. Dismantle School Safety Agents Unit and redirect all personnel to training for youth engagement and programming jobs.
3. Stop all efforts to recruit students to join the NYPD.
4. Immediate hiring freeze for all NYPD personnel.
5. Defund NYPD by 50% in 2022 budget.
6. Cancel NYC plan to build 4 new jails with \$11 Billion.
7. All current elected officials must publicly renounce and return any money taken from police unions and corrections officer unions.
8. Anyone running for office in NYC and NY State must make a public pledge to never accept any donation from police unions and correction unions
9. Federal government should Immediately end the 1033 program and remove all military grade equipment from local police departments.
10. Federal government should broaden "certifiers" definition for U-Visas so that it includes counselors, health professionals, transformative justice and restorative justice practitioners as well as redefining "helpfulness" to a lower threshold.

Recommendations for Funders

1. Provide multi-year general operating support grants that allow, in fact encourage, organizations to make these kinds of pivots, adjustments or do experimentation.
2. Simplify grant proposal and reporting systems so organizations can focus on the work. Offer options to do phone, video, or standard methods.

Building Alternatives

1. Create an educators jobs pipeline for students graduating from NYC public high schools to return as educators and youth workers in their school districts.
2. Replace the NYPD with civilian first responders to address medical emergency calls to 911 especially in instances of mental health crises.
3. Money removed from NYPD's budget will be directed to community-controlled alternatives that train and support people to respond to and resolve conflicts and abuse.
4. Subsidize the education and training for students graduating from the NYC public school system to become healthcare professionals, and mental health workers.
5. Invest in community alternatives to address gender-based violence.



Recommendations for Allies

1. Use this moment to bring people into the movement:
 - a) The crisis has spurred fear and isolation among frontline communities. This is an opportunity for our movements to build and expand our forces for the upcoming fights by engaging people and providing answers to why we are in this crisis in the richest country in the world.
2. Invest in building the leadership and capacity of new members
 - a) We cannot rely on organizational staff or seasoned activists to get all the work done. Considering the immense challenges our communities are confronting, we must invest in expanding leadership. Ordinary people without training or experience can step in to fill needs and gaps, but it is our responsibility to discern those opportunities and provide the necessary support for them to step into these roles.
3. More hyper-local organizing capacities will be necessary to confront the threats that we face, namely mass evictions and right wing violence
 - a) By investing in the leadership of new members we can ensure there is the capacity to also carry out community defense work.
4. Determine which organization or formation is suited to meet which kinds of needs
 - a) Groups seeking to organize with frontline communities can identify people's needs but they do not need to meet every one of those needs.
 - b) We encourage you to think critically about organizing versus providing direct services and assess: is this a need we should meet or someone else should meet? Will this align people with us on a political basis or or a charitable basis?
 - c) DRUM provides food to certain members but if we find those who we provide food to are not interested or



invested in organizing, then we will refer them elsewhere. However, if we find that individuals want to build with us politically, then we will continue providing them with food with goal of building mutuality.

5. Develop a political orientation
 - a) Recognize the limitations of direct service work. If the role you're playing in someone's life is to provide them with groceries or fulfil other material needs, they will likely view you as a service provider. There is a distinction between building relationships to help people and building relationships as means to struggle together for liberation and mutually support each other in the struggle.
 - b) For mutual aid groups supporting frontline communities with food access, we encourage you to explore why certain groups are experiencing food insecurity. What are the deeper systemic and structural issues causing communities to struggle with food and housing? Focusing on symptoms (ie poverty) of systemic issues (ie capitalism and wealth inequality) presents an incomplete picture. We encourage you to join us in the fight against the systems that created these conditions. We welcome your presence in the movement.

Appendix

Additional Notes: The Impact of COVID-19 on Our Communities

(i) In the Brooklyn and Southern Queens bases, most members attend one of two hospitals. The hospital statistics reflect the averages of both hospitals.

(ii) New York City uses various classifications of neighborhoods, each with different boundaries. COVID deaths and cases are reported based on zip codes while community health and demographic data are reported based on community boards and their distinct boundaries. For more information about these differing classifications, see: <http://a816-dohbsp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Closerlook/geographies/index.html>

(iii) COVID deaths and cases in Manhattan are as of October 9 while figures from other boroughs are as of September 18. Please note the number of COVID deaths and cases in Manhattan is higher because they include parts of Chinatown that fall outside of the boundaries of Manhattan Community District 1. This discrepancy is due to the fact that COVID deaths and cases have only been reported according to zip codes, not community districts, which draw distinct neighborhood boundaries.

(iv) These hospitals are part of New York City's public hospital system: New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (NYC H+H).

(v) All data for this hospital reflects the data of the entire NY Presbyterian hospital system, which includes 6 locations across NYC.

(vi) Medicare and Medicaid does not cover the full cost of care: hospitals receive 87 cents for every dollar spent caring for patients covered by Medicare and Medicaid.¹ These hospitals are then dependent on alternative revenue (such as government funding) to remain open. Consequently, they are perpetually underfunded with subpar equipment that led to more COVID-19 deaths and less access to the life saving technology that kept COVID-19 patients alive in private hospitals.² Amidst the pandemic, Cuomo contemplated major cuts to medicaid that would endanger hospital funding and ultimately, the finalized

budget implemented cuts recommended by a state panel that excluded any representatives from NYC H+H.³

In contrast, private insurance companies cover the full cost of care. Prestigious hospitals turn a profit by focusing on lucrative elective procedures for wealthy patients with great insurance policies and avoiding treating low-income patients with Medicare or Medicaid.⁴ Hospitals like NYC Health and Hospitals that serve the uninsured or medicaid and medicare patients are "punished financially for taking on poorer patients." Our members and low income people of color across the city pay the price for this two-tiered medical system with their lives.

(vii) This metric, developed by Lown Institute Hospitals Index, takes into account clinical outcomes, patient safety, patient satisfaction and the impact of environmental and social factors on patient outcomes.⁵ How well a patient recovers varies immensely based on wealth and access. Wealthy patients can afford healthy foods and health aides and have access to primary care providers. Most importantly, they have the time to invest in their well-being and health unlike many DRUM members whose priority is often survival and supporting relatives abroad. As a result, they may not be able to afford to take off work to attend a doctor's appointment or their health issues may be exacerbated by their living conditions. Alternatively, they may not be able to afford treatments that are not fully covered by their insurance or Medicaid such as physical therapy which would negatively impact their recovery.

(viii) Many of our members live in apartments with serious issues that their landlords refuse to repair such as mold, heating issues or a rat infestation in the building. In contrast to luxury buildings with state of the art appliances, many old apartment buildings in New York that cater to low-income tenants are in serious states of disrepair which can impact health by potentially worsening respiratory illnesses such as asthma.⁶ This statistic captures the number of tenants in the area who live in apartments adequately maintained by landlords. Meaning the apartment is free from heating breakdowns, water leaks, cracks, holes, peeling paint toilet breakdowns, presence of mice or rats and other defects.⁷

(ix) Based on a small sample size, please interpret estimate with caution.

Endnotes

THE PANDEMIC: A PORTAL TO A NEW REALITY

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- (3) <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/inside-coronavirus-ground-elmhurst-hospital-york-city/story?id=69804681>
- (4) <https://nypost.com/2020/03/23/long-lines-and-respirator-shortage-plague-city-hospitals-under-coronavirus-siege/>
- (5) <https://gothamist.com/news/subway-bus-coronavirus-covid-19-crowded-mta>
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- (6) Based on the 20 neighborhoods with the highest number of COVID cases as reported by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.
- (7) Based on the 20 neighborhoods with the highest number of COVID deaths as reported by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.
- (8) <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/nyc-bangladeshi-community-struggles-cope-coronavirus-200429180945222.html>
- (9) <https://www.thecity.nyc/coronavirus/2020/4/26/21247099/nyc-south-asian-leaders-say-community-covid-toll-undercounted>

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- (10) https://www.huffpost.com/entry/asian-american-poverty-nyc_n_58ff7f40e4b0c46f0782a5b6
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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

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- (11) Households with an undocumented family member were excluded from the federal coronavirus relief legislation and the financial assistance it provided. The proposed city legislation calls on the city government to match past and any future payments from the federal government to these excluded families.
- (12) http://cdp.urbanjustice.org/sites/default/files/Education_Not_Deportation_Report_06jun06.pdf
- (13) For more information, see: <https://indypendent.org/2018/10/shut-it-down-or-keep-it-open-immigrant-advocates-debate-fate-of-nj-detention-center/>
- (14) This stance emerged when deciding whether to support legislation on comprehensive immigration reform from approximately 2008 to 2012. The proposed bills would have provided some members, identified as “Dreamers” a pathway to citizenship but would have increased funding for ICE and CBP which would harm other undocumented members, our membership voted not to support the legislation. For some families, this meant their undocumented children could have attained a pathway to citizenship at the expense of their parents, whose vulnerability would only increase with more funding for ICE.
- (15) <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/ny-legislature-50a-transparency-george-floyd-20200609-yew7soogazfmdg3cr3xlsbwmwye-story.html>

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