A NOTE FROM OUR CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Two short years ago, our world, community, and organization faced a level of unprecedented and intertwining health, economic, and political crises that pushed us to reorient our efforts to combat sexual violence and promote health education and empowerment among Muslims. We are still growing and learning from this time of reckoning, resistance, and healing.

In 2021, amidst continued challenges, our team re-dedicated ourselves to illuminating the way we are continuing to embody our values: centering our faith as Muslims, practicing humility, empathy and belonging, and lifting up compassionate, bold, and unapologetic truth-telling.

Truth-telling, in particular, is something by which we measure our progress: because we know that in order for us to end violence and sustainably cultivate communities that thrive, we need to create a culture shift around how we talk about, and take action around, personal and community health, safety and reproductive justice.
Through bringing on a Co-Executive Director, we are developing a shared leadership model in which our staff and community can evolve as leaders through deepening our commitment to dismantling traditional power structures as we combat power-based violence. By developing culturally-responsive sexual health information, we are equipping individuals with the information they need to make informed and empowered decisions about their bodies and health.

This culture shift, which we are actively manifesting day in and day out, also requires the voices of not one but many. It calls for the steadfast unity and solidarity of all of us striving together to create the change we need - as survivors, allies, and accomplices. Above all, our team at HEART knows that in order to develop a strong community of advocates and maximize people power, we must lead by example and start with our people - the survivors we work with through case management, those who help grow and sustain our health education, training and research, and our core team:

- Through bringing on a Co-Executive Director, we are developing a shared leadership model in which our staff and community can evolve as leaders through deepening our commitment to dismantling traditional power structures as we combat power-based violence.
- By offering financial assistance and a referral network to survivors, we are providing the care and support they need to move toward safety, healing and justice.
- By training 40 imams, chaplains, and community advocates in partnership with Bayan Institute, we equipped our first cohort of leaders to address and prevent gender-based violence in their communities.
- Through our national, first-of-its-kind research study, we will have a tangible understanding of the prevalence of sexual violence, spiritual abuse, and sexual dysfunction in Muslim communities.
- By continuing to build out our advocacy arm to important work such as the Partnership to End Gendered Islamophobia, Muslim Abolitionist Futures, and multiple talks at the White House, we included systems advocacy and coalition building as part of our work.
Being unapologetic and creating systemic and interpersonal change takes **courage**. It takes intentional community-building, truth-telling, and collectively disrupting norms that we have all internalized and that - once we transform them - pave the way for increased trust, communication, accountability, and wellness.

**Join us.** We invite you to renew and revitalize your commitment to reproductive justice and ending gender-based violence by catching up on our team’s progress over the past year and our various calls to action to you, our community.

In solidarity,

Nadiah Mohajir, Founder and Co-Executive Director

Aliza Kazmi, Co-Executive Director
Mission: To advance reproductive justice and uproot gendered violence, by establishing access and choice for the most impacted Muslims.

Vision: A world where all Muslims are safe, can exercise self determination over their reproductive lives and thrive in the communities they live, work and pray.
Values:

We are faith-driven. Compassion, justice, accountability, and gratitude are core Islamic values that drive our work.

We practice empathy. Non-judgmental support is essential for individuals to heal, live authentically, and reclaim their stories.

We cultivate belonging. Everyone – including Muslims – of all races, sexual orientation, gender identities, economic backgrounds, abilities and religious practice should feel welcome, seen, and heard.

We are committed to compassionate truth telling. Challenging harmful narratives is critical to achieving equity and freedom.

We approach our work with humility. Those we work with are experts in their cultural realities and are our partners to help grow this work.
HEALTH EDUCATION
Connecting people with resources is just part of the equation. To equip people to be agents of change in their own communities means cultivating spaces to share accurate and culturally competent health information in ways that are trauma-informed and intersectional. We do this through our interactive campus and community workshops, virtual resource center, and virtual peer educators, as well as through content development. Through our health education programming, we equip our trainers to carry the resources and tools into their own communities and find ways to connect the most marginalized and most vulnerable to information critical to their own decision making process. We often collaborate with different campuses nationally and implement our workshops and get assistance from our network of trainers representing the different hubs of HEART.

“Being a Virtual Peer Educator has been incredible. I didn’t realize the need for this in our community until I started doing it. I believe that we need to do preventative work to combat patriarchal values and sexual & domestic violence, and empowering people through education has been a large, significant part of this. When we educate community members and they pass the education forward, we can slowly start to break stigmas and change norms.”

Kinza Khan
OUR FIRST PUBLICATION

The Sex Talk: A Muslim’s Guide to Healthy Sex and Relationships is our upcoming book that serves as an introduction to talking about sex, reproductive health, and sexual violence in Muslim communities. It is meant to be a resource that addresses the emotional, physical, and spiritual side of sexuality, in order to break the silence around these important conversations. The advice offered inside goes beyond first-time sex and covers other issues—particularly, healthy sexual relationships—that are relevant whether it is your first time having sex, or not.

Muslims should have access to accurate reproductive and sexual health information in a way that is empowering, gender-equitable, and free of shame and blame. When we do, this information allows us to think critically about how our faith and cultural identities intersect with our sexuality so that we can live out our values in the way that we believe is best.

FERTILITY PODCAST SERIES

Our virtual resource center not only hosts published articles, handouts, guides, and one pagers, but it also is the home of our collaboration with Irene Khan through our fertility podcast series. The video podcast series is co-hosted by Sahar Pirzada, HEART’s West Coast and Advocacy Manager and Irene Khan, Beauty Blogger. In this series, they talk with individuals who hold professional expertise and lived experience to create a space for anyone who has questions about fertility and reproductive health. Each episode is crafted around a topic accompanied by a resource one pager of information shared by the expert.
INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY
Individual Advocacy: 
Enhancing safety for survivors of violence as they seek healing and justice

Connecting survivors of gender-based violence directly to resources, information, and support is a critical part of their journey to justice and healing. We provide this through our trauma-informed case management that is a curated space solely for survivors to take advantage of the resources and referrals from the HEART network. Our team offers individuals what they need to move toward healing, justice, and empowerment.

“...In the midst of deep confusion and crisis, reaching out to the HEART team was one of the greatest blessings from Allah. I hesitated so many times to contact them because I was afraid and unsure how they could help. Not only did they respond quickly, they were professional in their communication and efficient in their support, spending hours of one on one time to witness my story, explore my fears and concerns, and draw a plan that felt safe for me and aligned with my goals. I openly and gladly refer others to HEART, and I'm immensely grateful to Nadiah and Navila and the entire team for their tireless work in the unfortunate reality of abuse.”

- Survivor
SURVIVOR CARE FUND

Many survivors of violence often do not have the financial stability to leave abusive situations. According to FreeFrom’s Survivor’s Know Best report, “the number one reason survivors stay in or return to abuse is because they cannot afford to get or stay safe.” HEART’s Survivor Care Fund—formerly known as our Zakat Fund—is a pool of funding that is solely reserved to directly support survivors of violence. We distribute funds directly to survivors of violence to support them in accessing critical services and support in times of crisis to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Our fund helps survivors by providing cash assistance to cover legal services, mental health therapy, housing and transportation costs, and any other needs they may have.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE FUND

After supporting our community for the past decade in navigating reproductive and sexual health systems, it is apparent that resources are scarce. The state continues to underresource and undervalue the necessity for access to reproductive and sexual health services for marginalized communities across the United States. We rely on our people to build up these resources and continue to fill the gaps so we can grow towards our vision for wellness, strength, and healing.

We are excited to launch the first ever Reproductive Justice Fund at HEART for our community members. This fund will help individuals get greater access to critical, and often lifesaving reproductive health information and services.
REFERRAL NETWORK

We are committed to connecting people to information and a network of excellent practitioners and professionals, including direct service organizations, lawyers or legal clinics, and mental health services or practitioners. We have curated a list to reach across about eight cities nationally. The network is a thoughtful list where we have built a relationship with the organizations or individuals and continue to work with them to ensure that they are trauma informed, survivor centered, and have a shared understanding of what it means to serve Muslim communities.

“HEART has been a great resource and an incredible source of support. It has helped me incredibly on my path toward healing... I honestly don’t know where I would be if it weren’t for Muslim orgs that take this issue head on with openness, honesty and respect.”
SYSTEMS ADVOCACY
Systems Advocacy: Creating change through targeting policy and systems to reduce barriers

PARTNERSHIP TO END GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA

In 2021, the Partnership to End Gendered Islamophobia continued to meet in coalition on a monthly basis to deepen our relationship building, develop resources for shared analysis, and heal in community. The coalition wrote and released a community report on Gendered Islamophobia which gained national attention and led to two workshops - one with the API-GBV Institute and the other with the American Islamic College.

In June 2021, the anchor organizations of the coalition held a student convening called Students Rise Against Gendered Islamophobia that brought together 20+ individuals from academic settings across the nation. HEART presented on how state solutions to gender based violence reinforce gendered islamophobia and the ways the campus setting is a microcosm of the state’s systems.

HEART was also invited to participate in several listening sessions for the White House Gender Policy Council. The listening sessions involved providing feedback on the language and policy recommendations of the Council. The Partnership to End Gendered Islamophobia worked on a Memo on Women’s Empowerment Programs in Security Rights which was sent to the Council on multiple instances.
MUSLIM ABOLITIONIST FUTURES

On the 20th anniversary of September 11th, HEART joined forces with coalition partners Justice for Muslims Collective, Vigilant Love, Project South, Palestinian Youth Movement, and PANA San Diego to launch Muslim Abolitionist Futures. The project entailed a two day convening, website, oral history archive, and the release of the second version of an abolitionist policy agenda, “Abolishing the War on Terror, Building Communities of Care”. Our organizations launched the interactive platform to create a space for our communities and larger movement spaces to learn and engage with the stories and work of resistance against the War on Terror.

Our goal is to build deeper relationships, a baseline analysis and shared framework, a shared vision for abolition, and a discussion around what actionable steps we can take from the grassroots policy agenda to inform our local and national organizing work.
Research:

Bridging the gap between research and practice to better understand the needs of Muslim communities

This is really groundbreaking work that is being done right now. As someone that treats sexual dysfunction in Muslim women - 30-40% of my patients are Muslim and we don't have any studies right now to go off of....Community organizations like HEART can go in and educate. And this is what needs to be done to reduce the burden of sexual dysfunction and sexual violence to destigmatize a lot of this so that women can get help for what they experience....Once this is out there, this is really going to be the study that is quoted, particularly for this area.

Dr. Sameena Rahman, Principal Investigator

To do the work, we need data specific to Muslim communities to be able to develop effective, sustainable programming. We partner with universities and research institutions to deepen our understanding of the sexual health and sexual violence needs of Muslim communities.

Our partners include the Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) at Loyola University and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

We use our findings to further improve our own programming, contribute to peer-reviewed literature, and make informed policy and programming recommendations.
SEXUAL VIOLENCE BURDEN STUDY

Our most current research study is looking to deepen our collective understanding of sexual violence and barriers to services in Muslim communities. We are proud that we have nearly 830 respondents from across the US and Canada that have responded to the IRB approved online survey. Currently, we are in the process of analyzing the data and hope to share our findings about the prevalence of sexual violence, sexual dysfunction, and spiritual abuse in Muslim communities, as well as the barriers to services.

INVESTING IN RESEARCHERS

We cannot do our research without our commitment to invest in young researchers and build their capacity to design thoughtful, trauma-informed research studies for Muslim communities. Each year, we host graduate students who are interested in deepening their understanding of reproductive justice and gender-based violence needs of Muslim communities. We provide them with mentorship around best practices in research as they help us advance our research studies.
TRAINING
Everyone can play a role in responding to and preventing sexual violence and building safer communities. Our trainings aim to build the capacity of Muslim leaders, institutions, and mainstream professionals to more effectively meet the sexual health and anti-sexual violence advocacy needs of Muslims. From local social services organizations to mosque leadership and Islamic colleges, we’ve trained over 750 of professionals. Using a public health framework, our trainings provide an in-depth understanding of gender based violence across the lifespan, the root causes of violence, and practical tools and frameworks on how to respond to, address, and prevent gender based violence in their communities.

I believe that this course was exactly what I needed, at the exact moment it was necessary for my community. We are struggling with issues of spiritual abuse and I feel like I have been armed with the knowledge I need to speak to it with confidence and competence.

It has equipped me with knowledge, tools, resources and more importantly, a support network of outstanding committed Muslims doing the work who are resources in themselves. This course experience has empowered me to make more of an impact helping people than I could have made had I not gone through this course.
In 2020 and 2021, Bayan Islamic Graduate School partnered with HEART to co-create a 12-week online course titled “Caring Communities: Taking on Gender-Based Violence,” to offer leaders in our communities an opportunity to develop shared language to begin addressing gender-based violence in Muslim communities and workplaces. This fully-online course is the first of its kind, bringing together the knowledge, expertise and wisdom of scholars, leaders, and experts in various domains who are involved in educating communities about the dynamics, impacts, and implications of gender-based violence for maintaining trust, accountability and safety within our communities. The course identified key principles that Muslims should: uphold when crafting community spaces; adhere to when investigating incidents that are reported to have occurred; and implement when performing due diligence and demonstrating transparency in the pursuit of justice for victims. Course evaluations indicated that the course was an overwhelming success, showing that course participants graduated with a greater understanding of gender-based violence, and feeling more equipped to respond to survivors and address gender-based violence in their communities and organizations.
INTERNAL ORGANIZATION WORK
Internal Organization Work:
Reimagining workplaces to be people-centered and free of harm

HEART’s creation and growth was a direct response to the organization’s founders not seeing themselves (Muslim women survivors and caregivers) represented authentically in positions of leadership in either mainstream movements or in Muslim institutions. The very structure and culture at HEART was put in place to create a safe and dignified workplace grounded in racial, gender, and economic justice. At every stage in our growth, we’ve been intentional about building a workplace that challenges “traditional workplace culture”—which we understand as being grounded in white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. And with the guidance of partner organizations beautifully modeling this way of being—like Move to End Violence—we’ve been able to deepen and expand our efforts to build a people-centered organization.

In 2021, HEART officially transitioned to a shared leadership model with the hiring of our new Co-Executive Director, Aliza Kazmi. As a team, we practice shared decision making for small and large decisions alike, and we collaborate closely with community members to ensure our programming is curated to meet the unique needs of the communities we serve. Our transition to a co-directorship was a step in establishing the organizational infrastructure to support the culture we’ve cultivated and hope to continue to build on.
Additionally, our core team met every quarter to put our heads together and identify workplace habits that are disruptive to creating an organization that is people-centered and prioritizes building a culture of care. Through these conversations, we were able to better understand the needs of our staff and instead identify and implement practices that were supportive of collaboration, spaciousness, and accountability to the people who are doing the work. While we’ve come a long way, this work is ongoing and evolving. We’re excited to continue to build on the strong foundation we have established since HEART’s founding.

Interested in our journey? In 2022 and beyond, we’re excited to document the strides that HEART has made to cultivate a workplace that imagines and embodies ways of being and working beyond the traditional models we’ve been offered.

As a previous intern and now employee at HEART, I have seen the ways HEART is dedicated to creating safe, nourishing, and trauma-informed workplaces for everyone involved in their organization, at all levels. Everyone approaches the work with kindness, rahma, and humility. From individual check-ins, to dominant check-ins, to all the ways we center relationality, HEART truly practices what it preaches. HEART doesn’t just theorize about a world without violence, it builds it, even in the workplace.

Kiran Waqar
Community:
Cultivating spaces of belonging to build resilient and connected communities

In 2021 and every year, we reaffirm our guiding value, principle, and practice: We believe survivors. We center survivors. We trust survivors.

As a community made up of folks who are survivors of violence on every level - from interpersonal violence, to gender based violence, to state violence - we know the importance of self and community care. Part of this is about our individual and collective resilience. To some, the idea of resilience elicits feelings of hope: for others, it individualizes and romanticizes trauma.

"I am aware of more resources and organizations in my own community after having to complete the community mapping assignment than I was before taking this course. This will help me when I have to make referrals or when I need to connect."
That’s why, in 2021, we doubled down on our commitment to cultivating spaces of belonging to build resilient and connected communities. We have spent the last year leaning into our values of belonging, empathy, compassion, humility, and being faith driven. Community building is challenging, messy, and hard-to-quantify work. It is driven by love and a commitment to each other. Some highlights from 2021 include:

**Hosted our first ever HEART Open Mic!**

Featuring poet, artist, and trauma mental health therapist Nadia Khansa, HEART hosted a collective space to share our stories of resilience. A combination of Khansa’s poetry, healing art activities, and sharing from the audience this space challenged us all to think deeper about resilience.

**Reaffirmed our continued dedication to accessibility and action**

We actively work to serve the most impacted Muslims. That means breaking down research, advocacy, and health education content in ways that are understandable. Through our accessible public dissemination, we hope to lay the foundation for strong, accountable, just communities.
Building Community, Safely

As a public health organization, we are dedicated to keeping members of our community safe. And even though we can’t be together in person, we know opportunities to connect and build with each other are also essential to community wellbeing. That’s why for the second year in a row, we moved our iftars online. With a total of three iftars, we hosted virtual dinners at time zones that worked for the East Coast, West Coast, and the Midwest. Joined by speakers, our HEART chaplain, and all of you, we spent time breaking bread, talking, and laughing together.

Volunteer Appreciation

While we’re a small, but mighty core team of six, in order to make this work possible, there are so many others who invest in this work day in & day out. Our work would not be possible without our incredible trainers, virtual peer educators, volunteers, and interns. As a team built of survivors of violence, we know how important it is to be in community with survivors. Whether we’re expressing our gratitude through events or care packages, HEART is dedicated to giving back to recognize all those who make the work possible.
In addition to doing the advocacy and re-education work to shift culture, HEART also responds to the immediate needs of our communities, including healing and addressing collective trauma. HEART offerings include healing circles and our recently hired chaplain, Seher Siddiqee. Through both, HEART aims to build communal rahma (compassion) and care for one another.

Help us continue the work by taking part in it, sharing it, and funding it. Recommend HEART as a resource to your friends, colleagues, and communities. Share our resources online and with loved ones. Try implementing them and let us know your feedback. And donate to HEART to financially support the work.

As we begin 2022, we continue to deepen our values. Through our continuous transformation and growth as an organization, we do not forget why we exist: for all of you and for each other. So from us to you, thank you for being in community with us.
Funding: When You Support HEART...

YOU’RE HELPING US BUILD A WORLD WHERE ALL PEOPLE--INCLUDING MUSLIMS--ARE FREE FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THRIVE IN THE COMMUNITIES THEY LIVE, WORK, AND PRAY IN.

With the support of our generous donors and funders, we’ve experienced rapid growth in the past five years and have been able to accomplish so much. The past two years have been especially a whirlwind with the triple pandemic: the covid-19 virus combined with the racial inequities and economic distress that is plaguing our communities. And with the rapid rise of in violence in homes, resourcing this work and our communities became more urgent than ever. Thank you to our funders and expansive donor base for ensuring that we can continue to show up to meet the needs of our communities.

REVENUE AND EXPENSES BY YEAR
Earlier this year, we re-launched our Survivor Care Fund—a pool of funding that is solely reserved to directly support survivors of violence to ensure that they have access to critical services. Since the year started, we’ve been able to redistribute over $50,000 to survivors to help them access the resources they need to get and stay safe like legal fees, housing and rent support, immigration fees, transportation fees, and household fees like utilities.

We invite you to join the hundreds of community members who have contributed generously to this fund and community care.

After supporting our community for the past decade in navigating reproductive and sexual health systems, it is apparent that resources are scarce. We need access to support in all its forms and oftentimes on an urgent basis. In response to this urgent need, HEART launched its first ever Reproductive Justice Fund.

Join us and invest in the Reproductive Justice Fund today. Every donation will go towards critical services and support for people in our communities that are challenged with access to services in the reproductive and sexual health systems like fertility, sexual dysfunction, pregnancy support, abortion access, and miscarriage, pregnancy & infant loss care and support.
LOOKING AHEAD: 2022 AND BEYOND
As we begin 2022, we reflect on the accomplishments, losses, and lessons of 2021. And as 2022 begins to look a little more like 2020-2, we remember our decision to name 2021 “The Year of Resilience.” As our team reflected on how resilient our communities are and have been, we also held the heaviness of the reality that resilience is often an expectation of marginalized communities to “put up and shut up” and an excuse for decision-makers to not make real change. And of course, we know too intimately that so many of us do not survive these systems: we have lost loved ones and community members to gender-based violence, to the negligence of our government in the face of a global pandemic, to an inhumane carceral state, to state-sanctioned violence, and more. We know that resilience as a weapon isn’t equally applied; Black women and gender abundant folks, in particular, are told to be resilient while also having their pain regularly dismissed and erased. We acknowledge the work of our contemporary leaders – Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and many more – who have paved the way for rethinking resilience. We also acknowledge our own positionality as a nonprofit. Though we actively work to disrupt the non-profit industrial complex, we have the ability to flatten and commercialize resilience.
Our communities are strong, we are grieving, and we are tired of having to be resilient in the face of oppression, and year after year, we’re organizing and demanding change. As a team, we sit with this discomfort; of knowing that our resilience is intimate, communal, and immensely powerful AND that it has been co-opted to justify our oppression.

But what if our resilience wasn't reactionary, but intentional and grounded? What if our resilience was from a place of love, not pain? How can we reimagine resilience to be a cornerstone of liberated and just communities, as the legacy of our ancestors and faith tradition? What does it look like? What does it feel like?

Communities that are marginalized are often told to be more resilient, as if we are not already resilient by just existing in this oppressive society. We are not resilient because we succeed in a capitalistic, racist, heteropatriarchal system; we are resilient for our softness, joy, and love in spite of these systems. In a world that tells us over and over again that success is being the biggest, the best, the most productive, we are resilient for softening our hearts. Loving is our jihad.

For that reason, we are leaning into resilience. In fact, we are embracing it, nurturing it, and are cautiously curious about it. We want to grow in that curiosity with all of you. What if we could re-remember resilience for ourselves?
"Everything worthwhile is done with other people" - Mariame Kaba

This work can't be done in isolation. We're so thankful for the coalitions and partnerships we've had the honor to be a part of this year, including Muslim Abolitionist Futures, the Partnership to End Gendered Islamophobia, and the AAPI Reproductive Justice Agenda. May our partnership and dedication to justice continue to strengthen and grow in the next year. Ameen.
Our Grants & Funders

Office on Violence against Women at the US Department of Justice

Hate is a Virus

McCormick Foundation

Collaborative for Gender and Reproductive Equity

Collective Future Fund

Radical Imagination Family Foundation

Afzal Family Foundation

Groundswell Fund

Movement Voter Project Grantmakers for Girls of Color

Tides Foundation

Oak Charter Fund

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Get Involved

Check out our paid & unpaid positions

Sign up to volunteer

Be an intern

Get trained to teach our material

Donate

Donate to keep the work going! Check out our different programming, including our Survivor Care Fund (in 2021, we redistributed over $35,000!)