



BOSTON IMMIGRANT COVID-19 COLLABORATIVE

Phase I Report



Summary

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on immigrant families, the Rian Immigrant Center and 10 other partner organizations came together to form the Boston Immigrant COVID-19 Collaborative (BICC) with support from the Boston Resiliency Fund. Immigrants are the backbone of support for the City of Boston and its surrounding communities. Many immigrants were struck by losing their jobs and having little-to-no access to benefits or healthcare. The focus of BICC's partner organizations immediately shifted to meet the needs of its diverse communities. The purpose of the collaboration is to address immigrant families' most urgent needs by providing direct financial relief and other resources, especially for those not eligible for unemployment or federal relief. Joining forces has allowed BICC to serve 20,000 immigrants since April 13, 2020.



COVID-19 has impacted the lives of immigrants throughout Boston

The mother of a family connected to the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center is under a huge amount of pressure to buy food and pay rent for her entire family. Her husband is unemployed due to COVID-19 and her three adult children are returning home because their colleges and workplace are closed.

After a strong start to the spring semester, a youth in Sociedad Latina's Academy for Latinos Achieving Success (ALAS) program found himself struggling academically and personally. Once his college moved to remote learning and the city closed, he has struggled to keep up with fluctuating information from his professors as well as the media. He did not have a job as a full-time student focusing on his studies. His parents are currently unemployed due to the pandemic, and he lives in a large household with a very limited income.

Rian Immigrant Center learned of a mother who was eating her children's leftovers from the school meal program for the past week because she could not afford groceries.

continued

A BINcA student, who came to the US after Hurricane Maria destroyed Puerto Rico, lost more than just her job and her ability to attend school due to COVID-19; she felt herself losing hope as she saw both her father and boyfriend also lose their jobs. Then, they lost a dear friend.

A young man who is an essential worker and whose wife lost her job must try his best to quarantine himself from his mother who is a cancer patient and at high risk for contracting COVID-19.

A pregnant mother connected to Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative had completed a course to be a home health aide and started class as a Certified Nursing Assistant before the pandemic began. With her career aspirations stalled, she struggles to provide for her family due to conflicts with her children's father and managing with a broken ankle.

When one of Agencia ALPHA's food delivery drivers dropped off a box of food to a resident of a large apartment complex in East Boston, she encountered a neighbor, a visually-impaired, single mom and her 12-year-old daughter, also experiencing challenges accessing food.

For stories of resilience, please visit page 22.



The Immigrant Community's Need

While it is uncertain how long the COVID-19 pandemic will last, the long-term impacts from the public health and economic crisis will significantly affect already underrepresented populations such as immigrants. Many immigrants work in essential roles in restaurants, grocery stores, cleaning services, childcare, healthcare and more. Many jobs in those industries have been cut. For those that are still able to work, there is no safety net if they or someone in their family becomes ill and cannot work. Although the federal government has provided financial assistance to those in need, many tax-paying immigrants are not eligible for these benefits. Even some U.S. Citizens and immigrants with status are not able to receive the stimulus tax rebate because their head of household is ineligible (mixed status families). In addition, the income insecurity affects more than 30,000 people without immigration status in Boston alone. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for Unemployment Insurance or the Pandemic Unemployment Insurance through the CARES Act. In the midst of one of the national hotspots for COVID-19 cases, 7% of immigrants in Boston do not have health insurance.

A Call-to-Action from the City of Boston and Mayor Walsh

The City of Boston under the leadership of Mayor Martin J. Walsh understands the need to protect and support immigrants, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Boston depends on the immigrant workforce. Immigrants are on the front lines in a variety of roles combatting COVID-19 by serving as health aides and nurses as well as providing essential services in the food sector with approximately 23% of Boston's undocumented population working in this industry. Ensuring that Boston's immigrant workforce is physically healthy and financially stable during this pandemic will accelerate economic recovery efforts, as Boston and the region's economy relies on immigrants.



Photo: Robbin Lubbock/WBUR

The City of Boston created the Boston Resiliency Fund to help coordinate fundraising and philanthropic efforts to provide essential services to Boston residents whose health and well-being are most immediately impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.



The Response from Boston's Community-Based Organizations

Seeing the immediate action from the City of Boston, Brazilian Worker Center Executive Director Natalicia Tracy, Agencia ALPHA Executive Director Patricia Sobalvarro and Rian Immigrant Center Executive Director Ronnie Millar came together to assess how to address the needs of diverse immigrant populations throughout Boston. Collectively, they discussed how they could create an alliance to connect with the immigrant community in ways that the government alone cannot do with Yusufi Vali, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement (MOIA) of the City of Boston. Vali encouraged these leaders to engage with other nonprofit leaders to consider forming a collaborative to provide necessary, emergency assistance to those most vulnerable. Drawing on the strengths of these community-based organizations, this model aligns with MOIA's goals while also promoting cross-collaboration and learnings that can be shared efficiently across organizations.

About Boston Immigrant COVID-19 Collaborative

The Boston Immigrant COVID-19 Collaborative (BICC) is formed by a diverse and multicultural range of immigrant support organizations to provide direct emergency relief to Boston's most vulnerable immigrant families during this public health crisis.

BICC is a collaborative effort that promotes equity, trust, partnership and transparency in its decision-making and operations. Emergency relief is provided in alignment with these operating principles:

1. Respect for families' privacy, dignity and humanity
2. Disbursements are made easily and efficiently
3. Safety for staff and families
4. Transparency with accountability

BICC was initially formed by 11 organizations serving Boston immigrants including:

1. Agencia ALPHA
2. Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC)
3. Brazilian Workers Center
4. Caribbean Youth Club
5. Centro Presente
6. Center for Collaborative Education, Boston International Newcomers Academy (BINcA)
7. Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)
8. ICNA Relief
9. Immigrant Family Services Institute (IFSI)
10. Rian Immigrant Center
11. Sociedad Latina

The Rian Immigrant Center serves as the lead partner and fiscal agent to ensure efficient and transparent disbursement of funds under the leadership of Gjergji Cani directly to families in diverse immigrant communities and in coordination with Boston's existing food distribution operators. The steering committee is comprised of Agencia ALPHA Executive Director Patricia Sobalvarro, Brazilian Worker Center Executive Director Natalicia Tracy and Rian Immigrant Center Executive Director Ronnie Millar.

The success of the efforts has been BICC's ability to provide structure while also encouraging flexibility within that structure. Each partner knows the specific needs of their communities and constituents and are able to use the funds at their discretion while still being accountable for the expenditures. BICC operates on the assumption that organizations will be audited.

As BICC came together to serve residents of Boston for Phase I, it became clear that there was a need beyond city limits. Metrowest Workers Center: Casa (Framingham) and Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores (New Bedford) joined BICC for Phase II.

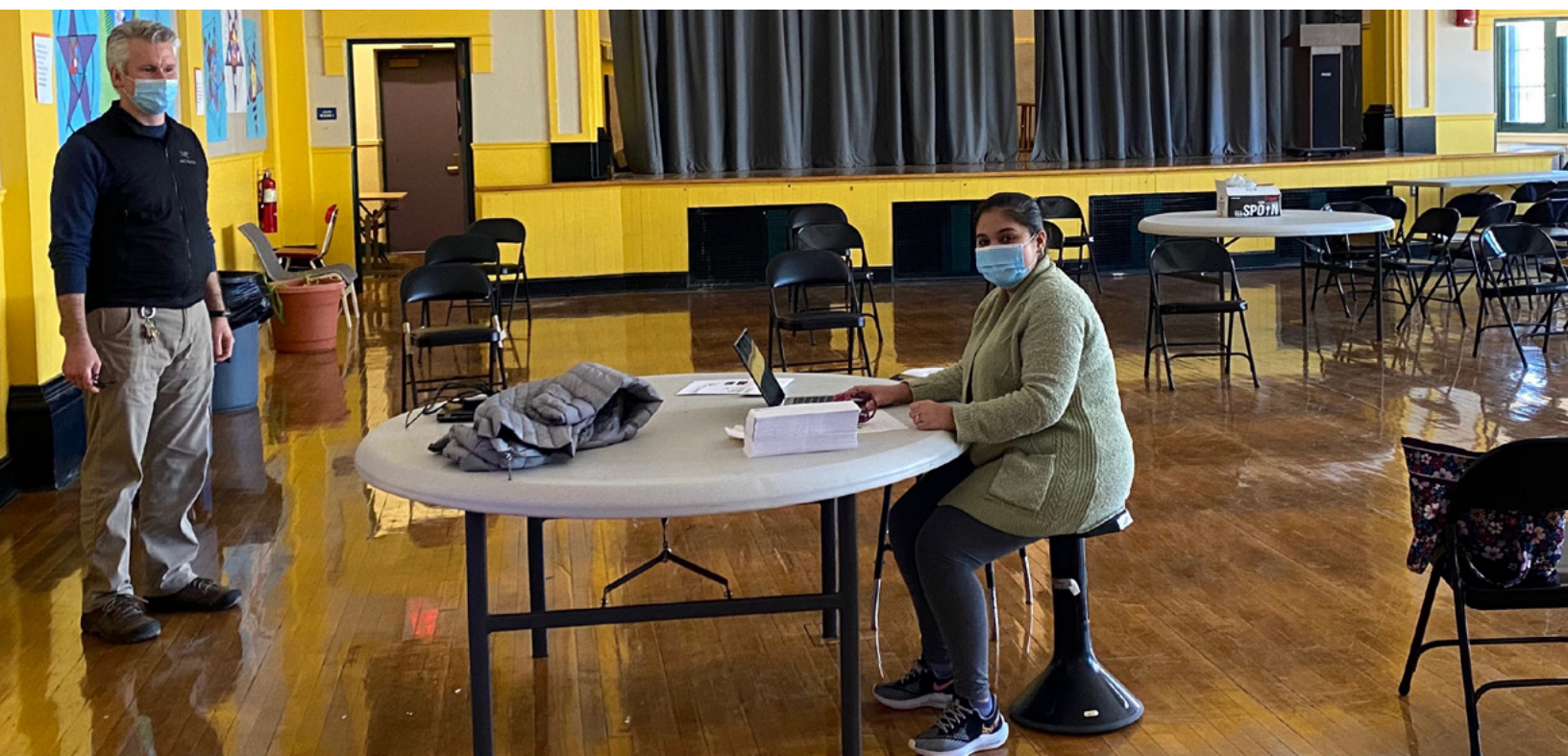


Populations Served

BICC serves diverse populations of immigrant families in Boston* who are especially vulnerable during this crisis as they work in frontline jobs in healthcare, food services, retail, tourism, construction, cleaning services, domestic work. Many have lost their jobs and income. BICC's emergency fund targets underserved and low-income immigrant families who are extremely vulnerable and who are experiencing tremendous stress and anxiety. The Collaborative supports documented and undocumented families including many who are homeless, survivors of domestic violence including single mothers, medical patients and the elderly.

Many families in the community are undocumented and not eligible to receive unemployment benefits or relief and need immediate support for basic needs such as groceries, food, pharmacy products, diapers, utilities, hygiene products, childcare and rent. They are deeply anxious about employment, legal status and access to health care, particularly since the introduction of the Public Charge test, an immigration rule which denies green cards to immigrants accessing public benefits including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Federal Public Housing Section 8 assistance and Medicaid. Significant delays and increasing barriers to legal status and citizenship were already the norm before the crisis, and will now likely be exacerbated. With those underlying concerns, the immigrant community needs access to resources that can address their most urgent needs.

*Phase II extended beyond the City of Boston.



BICC's Direct Relief

Phase I of BICC's funding came from the Boston Resiliency Fund (BRF) with a grant totaling \$650,000. Lead partner and fiscal agent Rian Immigrant Center worked with the partner organizations to coordinate disbursement of emergency financial assistance to immigrant families for basic needs to Boston residents. Each group received an equal baseline amount of \$30,000, in disbursements of \$15,000. The remaining funds were placed into an emergency pool that organizations could request funds from as available. This pool was also used for cultural competence food supplies, and to support emergency requests external to the 11 BICC partners.

BICC's model ensures funds are efficiently dispersed in a direct, safe (including social distancing), transparent (fiscal compliance) and confidential system. The partner organizations that make up the Collaborative are advocates and ambassadors for the most vulnerable, undocumented immigrants.

Each organization has a dedicated coordinator responsible for this program. Partners are expected to:

1. Reach out to constituents or receive requests for assistance
2. Review, assess, and approve the amount of disbursements
3. Disburse funds while keeping all back up documentation for each transaction
4. Report back to fiscal sponsor.

In addition to supporting immigrants, the BRF supported the nonprofit partner organizations by allocating 20% of the funds to pay for staffing support to enable disbursements and food assistance. This funding was essential in order to facilitate the emergency relief program.

The Direct Impact of the Partner Organizations

Agencia ALPHA

Agencia ALPHA is an immigrant-led grassroots, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of immigrant communities through legalization and citizenship services, community organizing and leadership development. Its mission is to integrate immigrants into the social, political and economic fabric of society to improve the quality of life for immigrants in the United States.

“On many levels, our communities were already facing inequities.”

– Patricia Sobalvarro, Executive Director

The inequities faced by Agencia ALPHA’s community were compounded by the pandemic with many family members falling ill with COVID-19, unable to work and unable to provide for their families. With many single-income homes and single-mother families, Agencia ALPHA provided support for basic needs such as food, child care essentials such as diapers and baby formula and rent. Agencia ALPHA provided more than 110 families with financial assistance of \$300-500 depending on family size. Additional assistance was provided to some such as a few families in which multiple members tested positive for COVID-19.

Agencia ALPHA activated two food distribution centers in East Boston and Dorchester plus food delivery for 629 homebound families weekly throughout the Boston area including folks from at least five churches. To date, they have distributed more than 600 boxes/grocery bags to 600 families. We have more than 20 volunteer drivers. In addition, they solicited two special requests for culturally sensitive food for more than 1,600 families through April and part of May.

The need for Agencia ALPHA’s community remains dire. There are hundreds of people on their waiting list to receive funding and many people who received initial funding who have not been able to return to work. Fear and uncertainty remain top of mind.

Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center

Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center empowers Asians and new immigrants to build healthy families, achieve greater economic success and contribute to thriving communities by providing a broad range of innovative and family-centered programs and services to more than 13,000 children, youth and adults every year. The mission of BCNC is to ensure that the children, youth and families have the resources and supports they need to achieve greater economic success and social well-being.

“Health and safety are huge concerns for this community.”

– Yoyo Yau, Director of Programs

The BCNC community felt the effects of COVID-19 before the rest of Boston with many Chinatown residents losing their jobs late January. Xenophobia and racism quickly followed and added to the stresses the families were facing. BCNC provided \$300 to more than 100 families to assist with groceries, monthly bills and rent. As the pandemic continues, the mental health of this community remains a top concern as many families live in multi-generational homes with many stresses and little relief.



Center for Collaborative Education, Boston International Newcomers Academy

Boston International Newcomers Academy (BINcA) is the Boston Public School designed to meet the educational needs of immigrant students. There are two programs in BINcA, Boston International, a four-year, college prep high school and Newcomers Academy, a program for students newly arrived in the U.S. and those who have little or no schooling in their home country or whose education has been interrupted.

“Our goal is to help families bridge this crisis.”

– Tony King, Headmaster

With school buildings closed for the remainder of the academic year, BINcA support staff shifted its focus to ensure that its students are able to continue learning by providing their families with support. More than 150 families were provided \$100-500 in financial assistance to help pay for rent, cell phone or internet bills, electricity or groceries. The need to fill this gap continues for the families of BINcA's students who are trying to chart a path to success in the US.

Brazilian Worker Center

The mission of the Brazilian Worker Center is to support workers' struggles in the Greater Boston area around issues of workplace rights and immigration. Through organizing, advocacy, education, leadership and capacity building, BWC joins immigrant workers and their families in the fight against economic, social and political marginalization and in working to create a more just society.

“Needed but unwanted. Immigrants are left out of almost any government assistance. Our goal is to create visibility for the invisible.”

– Natalicia Tracy, Executive Director

For those in the community BWC serves, many have reached the point of desperation, yet BWC offered its constituents support with respect. More than 100 families received direct financial assistance to support basic needs such as groceries, diapers, medicine, monthly bills and rent. In addition, BWC offers food assistance through a weekly food pantry serving more than 12,000 individuals in greatest need. With many constituents working 2-3 jobs prior to the pandemic, BWC's goal is to maintain human dignity and inspire hope for its community amid the crisis.

Caribbean Youth Club

Caribbean Youth Club serves Caribbean youth who are new arrivals enrolled in Boston Public Schools to help them make successful transitions into American life and succeed through higher education. CYC aims to positively transform the acculturation experience of Afro-Caribbean immigrant youth through the delivery of culturally competent services to generate future success.

“This crisis has reminded me of how deep the needs are in my own cultural community.”

– Nickey Nesbeth, Executive Director

With the funding from the Boston Resiliency Fund, CYC was able to meet the challenge of the COVID-19 head on and provide resources to those in need in real time. With undocumented, unemployed youth facing eviction, stipends averaging \$1,000 were disbursed to 35 individuals. In addition, CYC serves 1,500 individuals through its food pantry while also providing its youth an opportunity to earn wages. CYC has focused on serving its most vulnerable and high-risk constituents, but the need extends into the community, well beyond this nucleus.

Centro Presente

Centro Presente is a member-driven, state-wide Latin American immigrant organization dedicated to the self-determination and self-sufficiency of the Latin American immigrant community of Massachusetts. Centro Presente struggles for immigrant rights and for economic and social justice. Through the integration of community organizing, leadership development and basic services, Centro Presente strives to give its members voice and build community power.

“We want to make sure we’re not giving food as an action of charity, but that we’re giving food because it’s a human right. Paying your rent is a human right.”

– Patricia Montes, Executive Director

The community served by Centro Presente was already in crisis before the pandemic with many undocumented immigrants fearing for their safety and well-being. The Boston Resiliency Fund has allowed Centro Presente to provide 70 families comprised of 500 individuals with financial assistance to cover basic needs such as groceries and rent. There are many more families in need, and as the economy restarts, Centro Presente wants to ensure that immigrants are treated fairly by their employers.

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's mission is to empower Dudley residents to organize, plan for, create and control a vibrant, diverse and high-quality neighborhood in collaboration with community partners.

“It’s heartbreaking to witness the impact of COVID-19 on our community.”

– Ramona Lisa Alexander, Director of Programs

A woman's husband had just died from COVID-19, when she lost her job with two teenagers to care for at home. Another woman could no longer work for a cleaning service because her husband, her brother and her mother contracted COVID-19. These are the impacts of the pandemic on the community served by DSNI. To assist, DSNI provided \$250 to more than 120 families to cover basic needs such as groceries, diapers, hygiene products, phone bill, utilities and rent. The need to support the community remains high.

ICNA Relief

ICNA Relief USA seeks to alleviate human suffering by providing caring and compassionate service to victims of adversities and survivors of disasters. ICNA Relief strives to build healthy communities, strengthen families and create opportunities for those in despair while maintaining their dignity and advocating for their basic human needs. As a Muslim organization, ICNA Relief feels it is its religious responsibility to support those in need in our country regardless of their race, religion or other identifying features.

“These communities are now being recognized in ways they never felt before.”

– Malika MacDonald, Director

ICNA Relief's focus is on hunger prevention for the Arab and African communities in Boston. ICNA Relief provided culturally competent food to its Muslim constituents with its annual Ramadan Food Baskets distribution providing 4,000 pounds of rice and 1,500 pounds of Halal meat along with essential groceries. Each week, ICNA Relief holds a “Drive Thru” pantry serving more than 1,000 vegetarian meals. In addition, ICNA Relief has disbursed \$125-500 in financial assistance to nearly 100 families in its community.



Immigrant Family Services Institute

Immigrant Family Services Institute's (IFSI) mission is to expedite the successful integration of recent immigrants into the social and economic fabric of the United States with justice and dignity. IFSI provides targeted academic support and enrichment services, using an holistic approach that addresses the unique challenges of immigrant children as a way to maximize their full potential in school and beyond. In addition, IFSI advocates for immigrant rights.

**“Out of a scale of 1-10, the need is 20.
We feel the severity of the life conditions people are
experiencing.”**

– Dr. Geralde Gabeau, Founder and Executive Director

Serving immigrants from the Caribbean and Central America, IFSI sees its community living under extremely challenging times with many unable to pay their rent and children without access to school. IFSI dispersed \$250 to more than 300 families and organized volunteers to help with schoolwork. In addition, IFSI provides food assistance three times a week to 120 families and has developed a series of sessions on mental health for healthcare workers. As the pandemic continues, the fear of being displaced remains.

Rian Immigrant Center

The Rian Immigrant Center empowers immigrant and refugee families on the path to opportunity, safety and a better future for all. Rian provides legal, wellness and education services, advocating for just and humane immigration policies and building community through our inclusion and civic engagement services. As New England's Welcome Center for immigrant and refugee families, Rian seeks to be proactive, responsive and innovative in meeting the needs of immigrant families.

“When the crisis hit, we immediately pivoted our services to address the urgent needs of our immigrant families.”

– Ronnie Millar, Executive Director

Recognizing the immediate need to provide its community with emergency support, Rian brought the organizations together to form the Collaborative and create an action plan to provide direct assistance. Rian dispersed funds to more than 150 families to cover basic needs such as rent, utilities, internet and cell phone bills, groceries and medicine. The unpredictable nature of this pandemic has exposed major challenges that immigrants are facing and there is no shortage of need.

Sociedad Latina

Sociedad Latina works in partnership with Latino youth and families to end the destructive cycle of poverty, inequality to access of health services and lack of educational and professional opportunities in its community. Sociedad Latina's mission is to create the next generation of Latino leaders who are confident, competent, self-sustaining and proud of their cultural heritage.

“It has brought people to think about priorities, opportunities and lessons learned.”

– Juan Maldonado, Program Director

At the outset of the pandemic, Sociedad Latina mobilized its staff to provide remote learning and engagement for its students. With funding from the Boston Resiliency Fund, Sociedad Latina was able to provide more than 100 families with \$300 in financial assistance to help cover rent, groceries and internet bills for their children's education needs. As the needs in its community continue to grow each week, this crisis has provided Sociedad Latina with an opportunity to build stronger relationships with its families.



Total Impact of the Collaborative

By coming together to form the Boston Immigrant COVID-19 Collaborative, the 11 partner organizations that comprised Phase I were able to provide more than 1,500 families with financial assistance and to serve 20,000 immigrants in need of food assistance. BICC was able to meet this urgent need in the Boston community and support some of its most vulnerable residents in collaboration with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement through the Boston Resiliency Fund. Through its efforts, BICC created visibility for the invisible and restored a sense of humanity and dignity for a diverse group of immigrants throughout Boston.

The City of Boston produced a video about BICC which can be viewed [here](#).

Ongoing Need

As the pandemic continues, the need continues to grow. Many immigrants are not working because of economic shutdowns and for those in essential roles that can, they may have contracted COVID-19 and do not have access to sick time. Their children are at home without access to meals that the schools provide and with limited access to tools for learning. Each day they are not working, the bills continue to mount and the burden to provide for themselves and their families becomes heavier. Their situations are becoming dire. The financial gap needed to fill continues to widen as the waiting lists to receive support continues to grow. Additional support for BICC would allow the partner organizations to continue to care for the diverse immigrant communities that they know intimately and to expand their reach to those who haven't had access to emergency relief.

A Way Forward

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has had a drastic, negative impact on the world, this crisis has sparked innovation. Within a very short period of time, 13 distinct immigrant support organizations came together and are now working collectively to serve their communities. With the guidance of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement and the foresight of BICC's steering committee, these organizations can respond in real time to the communities that are most in need. Bringing a diverse set of organizations together facilitates the sharing of knowledge and best practices to deliver the highest level of support possible. MOIA put the work into the hands of organizations equipped to do it strategically, efficiently and with cultural understanding. BICC has provided support for the most basic needs to immigrants with dignity and respect.

The efforts and outcomes from Phase I proved that BICC identified and met a need that will remain for the foreseeable future. BICC has received funding for a Phase II of the project and will be able to assist immigrant families outside of the City of Boston. BICC Partners wish to:

- Move beyond emergency relief and become a coalition-builder and advocacy movement.
- Provide coordination among immigrant support groups, develop best practices, and build capacity.
- Be the lens for equity and address disparities and be an authentic voice for the marginalized
- Identify emerging trends and needs, for example there are serious emerging needs around how this crisis is impacting the mental health with immigrant families due to trauma and isolation.
- Strengthen the resiliency safety net of the City of Boston.

The partner organizations that comprise the Boston Immigrant COVID-19 Collaborative deeply appreciate the support of the Boston Resiliency Fund, Mayor Walsh, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement and other Foundations. With continued funding, BICC will remain in service of immigrant families well-beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information on BICC and to make a donation to BICC Emergency Relief Fund, please visit <http://immigrantrelief.org/>.



Boston immigrants are resilient

The Caribbean Youth Center reached two immigrant families consisting of six members each, where more than half of each household had contracted COVID-19 and were in desperate need of rental assistance to maintain their shelter. All the adult working members of the households were unable to work due to their illness and their options for support were virtually non-existent. The support of the Boston Resiliency Fund alleviated their stress and allowed them to focus on getting well. We all now share the belief that the City of Boston cares about all of its residents (native born and immigrants alike) and we, in turn, will work to support our City to become a more verdant, inclusive and dynamic place.

“To whom may concern, we are so blessed with the gift at this moment. I didn’t know exactly what to do being home with my two boys out of work with no pay. But God is using you to help me and my boys, I cannot find exact words to describe my gratitude for the money I received from you. May God bless you more and open more doors and protect you and your family. I won’t forget your generosity, your kindness and loveliness hearts you shared with Us. Thank you so much for thinking of us, may God continue to shine his light on your ways.” (Rian)

A TPS recipient from El Salvador with a 9-year-old daughter recently learned that she had terminal stomach cancer. Before the pandemic, this Centro Presente constituent underwent seven chemotherapy treatments to try to extend her life expectancy of a year and a half. Despite that, this mother has assumed a great deal of responsibility to support her sister who is undocumented and the rest of the members who live in her home who are also undocumented. In the midst of all her challenges, she has found the strength to support others.

“I have been in the United States for 22 years and have always worked and supported my family. I have never had to ask for help but today I must humble myself and ask because I am unemployed; this is difficult to ask” (ICNA Relief)

“Thank you so much for caring about me and my family. This has been a difficult time for my family, and we feel happy that we can afford groceries with this money.” (Sociedad Latina)



Acknowledgements

The organizations that make up the Boston Immigrant COVID-19 Collaborative would like to thank all the organizations' staff and volunteers for their unwavering support and commitment to immigrant families during this unprecedented health crisis. The staff and volunteers have been working tirelessly to ensure every family's needs are met whether it be moral support over the phone, listening to the struggles they are facing, helping them identify food banks, delivering groceries to homebound constituents or helping family members navigate our complex health system specially if impacted by COVID-19. BICC's distribution of financial assistance and food would not be possible without the countless hours that its staff has invested in addition to the hours they spend maintaining the day-to-day needs of the organizations. BICC's staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to support families safely while upholding respect for families' privacy, dignity and humanity

BICC would like to thank Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh; Yusufi Vali, Director of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement, Agnes Chang, Resource Development Manager of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement; and Casey Brock-Wilson, Director of Strategic Partnerships of the City of Boston for their guidance and support in realizing this new collaborative. BICC would also like to thank the Boston Resiliency Fund for providing initial funding to assist more than 20,000 people.

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