

CASE STUDY | WHEN COMMUNITY RESIDENTS DEFINE PRIORITIES

LAADLIYAN'S RESPONSIVE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN PEEL

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IMPACT SUMMARY

5 COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS HOSTED

33 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN STUDENTS SUPPORTED AND ENGAGED

OUTCOMES

Laadliyan's efforts, and those of the other funded organizations, have strengthened the Peel region's capacity to meaningfully support immigrants and refugees.

OVERVIEW

From 2021 to 2023, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund partnered with the Tamarack Institute to implement a participatory grantmaking pilot project aiming to build more equitable economies for immigrants and refugees in the Peel Region (located within Ontario, Canada). [Click here to learn more about this pilot, the project partners and the participatory processes utilized to facilitate this project.](#)

Tamarack engaged Peel residents and involved them in the design and implementation of this participatory funding opportunity. To ground this process in the Peel community, the Tamarack team formed a People's Panel. The People's Panel was made up of engaged Peel



The 6 Grantee Organizations:

- Afghan Women's Organization
- Family Services of Peel
- Laadliyan
- MIAG Centre for Diverse Women and Families
- Peel District School Board
- Sikhs Serving Canada Association (Seva Food Bank)
- Afghan Women's Organization

[Click here to learn more about the six projects selected to improve economic opportunity for immigrants in the Peel Region](#)

community members who applied their lived experiences and their knowledge of the newcomer settlement sector to identify key issues related to the economic mobility of immigrants and refugees within their community.

Tamarack worked with the People’s Panel and supported them as they:

- Co-designed the *Building Equitable Economies for Immigrants and Refugees Peel funding opportunity* and defined key funding priorities
- Made funding decisions to support the development of equitable economies for immigrants and refugees within the Peel region

After having reviewed many submissions, the People’s Panel selected six projects to fund. One of these projects was put forth by **Laadliyan**. Laadliyan’s project (*Women International Students: The Invisible Workforce*) was identified as being a project that aptly addressed emerging needs within the Peel landscape. Laadliyan is a non-profit organization that inspires South Asian girls and women of all ages to become empowered individuals through engagement, education, and awareness. [To learn more about the work Laadliyan is engaged in, please visit their website.](#)



ABOUT LAADLIYAN

The Peel region of Ontario is home to a large international student population and although they live, study and work within the Peel region, this demographic is often not eligible for many supports and resources for newcomers. As such, they have become an increasingly vulnerable demographic.

Laadliyan have been engaging South Asian women in the Peel region since 2013 and have directly supported over 250 women identifying international students over the past 2 years. This support has included providing access to employment, housing, sexual/mental health resources and food security.

The Laadliyan team felt compelled to propose a project for this funding opportunity as they recognized that women identifying international students were a vulnerable group that required responsive access to supports and resources. During the pandemic, the Laadliyan team saw an influx of calls for support from international students in the Peel region. Through this outreach, they learned that many of these international students were engaged in precarious employment and were being exploited by their employers. They also recognized a considerable knowledge gap as many of the international students they supported lacked knowledge about their rights and their employers' responsibilities.

When this funding opportunity was launched, the Laadliyan team felt that it aligned with the work they had started doing during the pandemic. They also believed that this was a valuable opportunity to advocate for better working conditions for international students. Laadliyan were also drawn to this funding opportunity as it was unique and different from the conventional funding opportunities that they were used to applying to. They appreciated how accessible this opportunity was and how it did not create any unnecessary hurdles for them. They also appreciated how the funding opportunity accurately reflected the Peel context and how the funding objectives were aligned with the community's needs. Additionally, they valued the presence of the People's Panel and felt comfortable in knowing that members of the Peel community would be making the final funding decisions.



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ABOUT LAADLIYAN'S FUNDED PROJECT

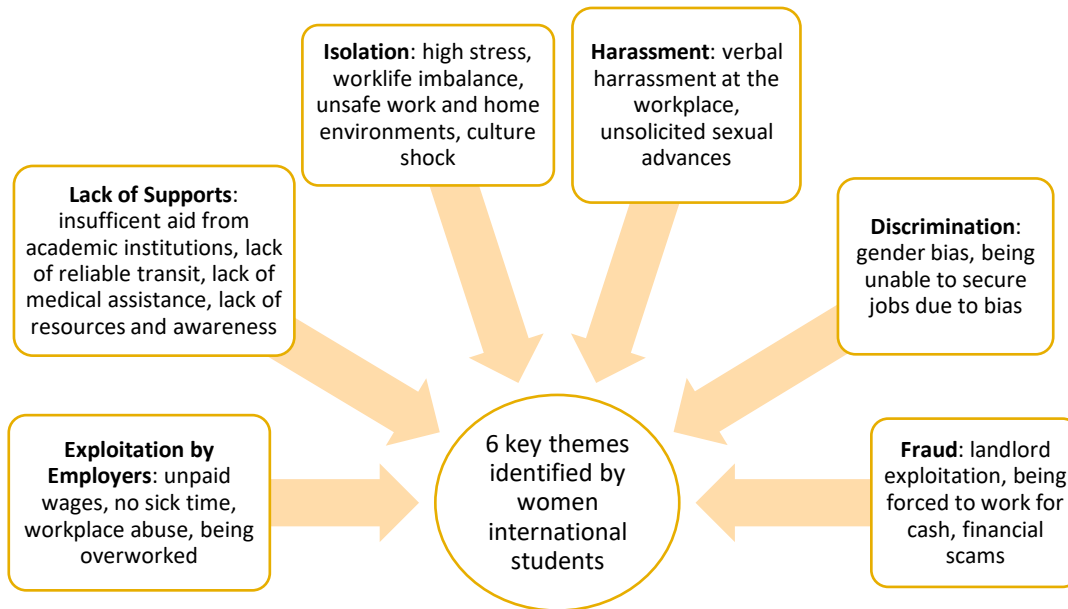
Women International Students: The Invisible Workforce

Their project, which is in partnership with [Lotus STEMM](#) (a Peel region-based non-profit supporting South Asian women/girls/non-binary folks navigating sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine domains of work and study) has engaged women identifying international students to develop responsive training modules for local employers. These modules will be focused on how employers can make their workplaces safer and more inclusive. These modules will consider specifically the lived and living experiences of women international students and how their experiences shape the way they navigate employment. The goal of these training modules is to give employers the knowledge and resources necessary to ensure that they can offer valuable and meaningful employment to the international students they employ.

Laadliyan's methodology for this project drew inspiration from the participatory methods used to form the funding opportunity by the People's Panel. Their project was informed by their target population of women-identifying international students. They collected input from this demographic in an intentional and thoughtful manner, as they wanted to make sure that these international students felt safe and supported as they shared vulnerable reflections.

They conducted focus groups which allowed these international students to find community amongst each other. These young women were not only given the space to share about their

experiences, but they were also able to find a sense of ease and community knowing they weren't alone. Through this effort, they engaged 33 women international students and hosted 5 community consultations. To further support and engage this community, the Laadliyan team also hosted bi-weekly information sessions for these international students on key topics of concerns. Thus far, they've hosted 8 information sessions on pertinent subjects such as: legal support, rights in the workplace, financial literacy, health and wellness, self-defense, professional development, and nutrition.



From these consultations, 6 key themes were identified as areas of concern for women international students. These themes included: exploitation by employers, lack of supports, isolation, harassment, discrimination, and fraud. The reflections that have emerged on each of these key themes have continued to shape the front-line programming at Laadliyan. This

includes continuing to provide women-identifying international students with timely and responsive resources, dispersing an emergency fund for students in immediate need and providing ongoing mentorship and community. This work has also shaped the steps Laadliyan has taken towards enacting meaningful systems change. The interest that their project has garnered has led to several partnerships with academic institutions. Laadliyan are supporting these academic institutions in building their capacity to support women-identifying international students who are facing employment exploitation.

This project engaged 33 women identifying international students for input (through 5 community consultations hosted by the Laadliyan team).

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They hope to continue conducting community-based research to collect data on issues faced by international students so that they can continue advocating for change and responsive supports. They also hope to continue developing partnerships with key service providers so that necessary supports and resources

for international students can become more readily available. [Additional findings and reflections from this research effort can be found within Laadliyan’s final project report.](#)

CONCLUSION

The People’s Panel selected Laadliyan to receive funding as they believed that their work and project aligned with the Peel region's needs. As the Panel worked together to make their funding decisions, they sincerely considered the advocacy work Laadliyan was engaged with and how they were supporting international students at the grassroots level. With this funding, Laadliyan have thoughtfully engaged women-identifying international students to develop training modules for local employers. The input provided by these international students has also informed the ongoing programming and advocacy work Laadliyan engages in on a day-to-day basis. The insight that has emerged from this project will continue to shape Laadliyan’s work and will strengthen the Peel region’s ability to respond and accommodate to the lived experiences of international students. The efforts put forth by Laadliyan, and the other funded organizations, have strengthened the Peel region’s capacity to meaningfully support immigrants and refugees by removing economic barriers and building more equitable economies.

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