15 women, ages 55 and above, participated in WAW’s new senior support and community program. Everyone had near-perfect attendance.

This program was created after seniors in the community shared that they feel lonely and isolated. They live with their families but are often alone at home during the day. Because they do not speak English well and are older, they are too intimidated and overwhelmed to travel far. And while they are curious and interested in NYC’s great landmarks and cultural offerings, they do not feel comfortable venturing out on their own.

Seniors also expressed the desire to have a safe space to be in community with each other. They also wanted to have information sessions and screenings related to their health issues and practice exercises appropriate for seniors, like yoga.

In addition, the program discusses women’s rights and mental health practices because many of the seniors who come to WAW face difficulty at home. Some still experience the trauma of obeying their families’ wishes when they were forced into marriage when they were girls. Many have little education because their families deemed that to be unimportant.

WAW’s seniors support program addresses all of these needs.

WAW offers weekly sessions where senior program participants have:

- Yoga and activities that promote an active lifestyle.
- Communal lunch to promote community.
- Movie screenings focused on cultural and social issues with discussions afterward to foster community and awareness of important issues.
- Health talks and screenings to promote healthy living.
- Trips to local institutions to promote community, connection with the larger NYC community, and decrease feelings of isolation.
As an 11-year old girl living in Afghanistan, AFROOZ’S parents forced her to marry an older man who paid a large dowry because he wanted a second wife to bear him a son (his first marriage produced no children). She was forced to drink “medicines” to make her fertile and even forced to lay down in her in-laws’ clay oven to keep her body temperature warm and optimal for bearing a son. In the end, she never did get pregnant (she later learned that a doctor had already diagnosed her husband to be infertile before they were married).

While in her late twenties, her husband died, and she remarried to an Afghan man living in the US. She did not experience much happiness in her new marriage either. Her stepchildren were abusive and her husband was controlling. Despite these difficulties, she began to make a name for herself locally as an excellent baker and started to sell her breads and treats regularly. Her family’s cruelty towards her decreased as her income increased, and as a result, her suffering waned. Many years later, her second husband passed away.

Now, Afrooz lives on her own and enjoys her independence. She continues to cater her treats. She attends WAW’s programs regularly and is making friends. Before WAW, she never spoke to anyone about her life and the many difficulties she has had to face. But at WAW, for the first time, Afrooz has found support, community, and now she is on her path to healing.

VISION FORWARD:
We want to expand this program to reach more seniors in the community, including separate sessions for men.