

**taleef**  
2022-2023 annual report



EXIT



NEW ORLEANS  
FUTURE

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## "what benefits, remains"

The Arabic word "ta'leef" means to bring together. It describes our mission to build community by creating space for dialogue, education, and fellowship. We aim to provide an authentic experience of American Islam that is culturally relevant and integral to individual and collective growth.

"What's the purpose?" Being the Executive Director of Ta'leef has been the biggest learning experience of my life so far.

When entering this position, Ta'leef had \$20K in the bank and was on the verge of closure. It's only through the sincerity of my colleagues and the Mercy of Allah that we were able to rise above! One of my teacher's used to always say "What benefits remain." Ta'leef has benefited so many individuals in these past three years, but it has truly benefited me in a plethora of ways.

One way is by being honored to witness so many enter into the fold of Islam in such a balanced, healthy, American way. But I did not always see this position in this light. At times, I would ask myself "What's the purpose? What's the point?" I would be in states of complete reliance on God and not know if anyone else believed in this work. But then Allah would bring an individual through the door seeking Him or seeking to better know their religion and it would reassure me that this was the purpose of this work. The purpose behind the sleepless nights and the extra gray hairs in my beard.

It's been said that, if you give knowledge a part of yourself, it gives you none of itself. But if you give knowledge all of yourself, it will give you part of itself! I feel that this work is the same. I have seen every individual of this team give all of her or himself for us to see parts of success at Ta'leef. We pray that you all come with us this year to push Ta'leef further forward and truly make this works purpose shine through every Muslim here in America and beyond.

Please take a look at this past year's work and keep us in your love and prayers.

Sincerely,

Ali Dia, Executive Director

# YOUR IMPACT

In 2022-2023...

Our team held 36 different types of programming. The Ta'leef community experienced weekly, monthly and quarterly. That's two new programs every month. Ta'leef held a program six out of the seven days of the week between Fremont and Chicago campuses. These regular pulses are carefully designed to meet the needs of the diverse members of our community. We have programs that range from addressing practical spirituality, essentials of the Muslim faith and practices, Friday sermons, and artistic expressions of devotion and praise.

two new programs every month



## Weekly Offerings

- Mawlid, A Celebration of The Messenger of God (S)
- Word to the Wise
- Burdah, Recital of the Burdah of Imam Sharaf Uddin al Busiri
- Jummah Prayer (Chicago)

## Monthly Offerings

- Welcome to the Fold
- Coffee Conversations
- Bay Area Pop-Ups
- Inheritors
- Jummah Prayer (Bay Area)

## Annual Offerings

- Eid, a celebration of both Eid al Adha and Eid ul Fitr
- Staff Retreat
- Board Retreat
- Newcomers' Retreat
- Year-End Event
- Ta'leef Umrah

## Ramadan Offerings

- Taraweeh
- Iftars (Fremont + Chicago)
- Taraweeh prayer + Khatm in Chicago
- Qiyam event (Fremont + Chicago)



# YOUR IMPACT

## Service Offerings

- Zakat Assistance: provided over \$140,000 per year of financial support to those eligible for Zakat.
- Convert Care Support: provided over 500 hours a year of one-on-one assistance for newcomers to the faith.
- Initial Contact: Ta'leef was the first community contact for 175 new Muslims in 2022 and 220 new Muslims in 2023.
- Nikkahs: facilitated 30 Nikkahs in 2022-2023.
- Shahadas: facilitated 44 Shahadas in 2022 and 57 Shahadas in 2023.
- Ta'leef Media: provided 900+ hours of live content and programs.
- We have had over 1,300 beneficiaries a week between our regular events and media.



nearly one shahada per week

# THANK YOU

Thank you to all those who  
helped us hold down space 2022-2023

Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah

Imam Zaid Shakir

Shaykh Ahmed Saad Al-Azhari

Tarif Arabi

Yahya Rhodus

Mahdy Amine

Ubaydullah Evans

Adeyinka Mendes

Will Caldwell

Ali Dia

Mike Swies

Umair Haseeb

Tayssir Safi

Dawood Yasin

Saaleh Baseer

Ahmad Deep

Yusuf Weltch

Amir Muhammad

Khalis Rasheed

Walead Mosaad

Fouad Elgohari

Khalid Latif

Abdullah Misra

Hisham Mahmoud

Baraka Blue

Ieasha Prime

Ndidi Okakpu

Hazel Gomez

Sondos Kholaki

Muslema Purmul

Hosai Mojaddidi

Aneesah Nadir



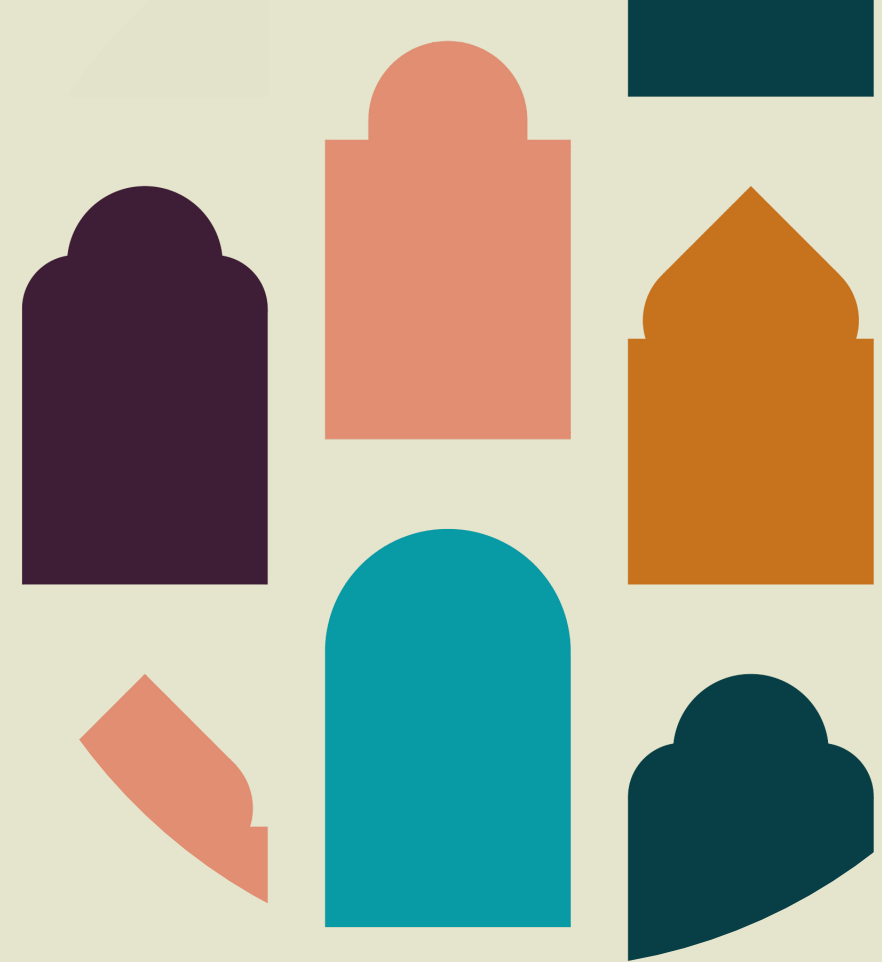
# WELCOME HOME

In August of 2021 we launched our Welcome Home Initiative which is Ta'leef's commitment to serving the community through providing the space, content and companionship that allows the hearts and minds of our community to feel at home to open the doors towards personal growth, worship, and continued learning. This first phase focused on the door into the community. We launched many programs and services this year that assist in keeping that door to fellowship and faith open to those interested in Islam, those new to it, and those renewing their faith. We are now entering the second phase after the open door comes to the community's living room. In this phase, we are focusing on community building, education, and character-building which will be reflected in our media and programs. We have for years described Ta'leef as the Living Room of the community and are placing our resources and energy into building on that.

## Media Offerings

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- Ta'leef launched the Welcome Home Blog with Dr. Will Caldwell, a resource for seekers and new Muslims that provides reflections and advice on learning and living Islam. New articles are posted every month. Total Articles- 30 Articles.
- Ta'leef's very own "Welcome Home" Podcast was made available to the community. Which gave beneficiaries full access to our weekly programming and events. Total Completed Sets: 10 Series Sets.





# NEWCOMERS

Each year, Ta'leef looks forward to hosting a range of retreats for the community. One of them is the Newcomers Retreat. The Newcomers Retreat is extremely powerful because it brings those who have embraced Islam together, both the fresh & well-seasoned, giving them a grounding and empowering experience. Isolation and confusion are common experiences that newcomers to Islam face. This retreat is designed to help newcomers connect with community, recenter God in their lives, and reinforce their knowledge through engaging workshops and fun activities. This year, we held our retreat in the Nations Capital, Washington DC, at the Diyanet Center with 35 attendees joining us from all around the US. The retreat itself was a five day intensive, where we covered essential topics that would provide a newcomer to Islam with a grounding in the religion that leads to empowerment. These include applied theology, practical jurisprudence, prophetic biography, spirituality, and mentorship sessions that address critical questions and inquiries. Attendees bonded through daily tahajjud prayer, martial arts sessions, as well as evening workshops. This practical and uplifting approach created not only a strong bond with the Divine, but also a strong and lasting relationship between attendees, teachers, and volunteers! Due to the generosity of donors in the community we were able to provide full tuition scholarships to all who were in need.

Thank you to all of our 2022-2023 Newcomers Retreat instructors and facilitators for joining us!

Tarif Arabi  
Mahdy Amine  
Adeyinka Mendes  
Will Caldwell  
Tayssir Safi  
Mike Swies  
Ali Dia

Hazel Gomez  
Pashtana Haroon  
Umair Haseeb  
Ariel Syuhadayana  
Andy Mai  
Amir Muhammad

# RETREAT

"[This retreat] increased my enthusiasm and iman so much. I have never met a more loving and welcoming Islamic institution, ever. And I will take what I've learned and forever increase the depth of this knowledge. It's helped get me out of a spiritual rut."

VAL CONKLIN  
NEWCOMERS RETREAT ATTENDEE



# ANNUAL UMRAH

We're excited to announce our second Ta'leef Annual Umrah, which took place between the 19th and 28th of December with a group of 19 members of the community! We're honored and moved to take newcomers to the faith on this spiritual journey. We had mothers, young community leaders, new Muslims, community pioneers, and more join us in this blessed journey.

When we embrace Islam, most of what we learn feels theoretical. But seeing the sacred sites and experiencing the rites of Mecca & Madinah provides a tangible and powerful experience. The group visited numerous scholars, explored historical sites, engaged in worship, and learned together under the direction of the group leaders Ali Dia and Umair Haseeb. More importantly, we provided scholarships to 4 attendees who otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity visit the holy sites. Filled with tears, laughter, and profound reflections, this group was a gift to us from God.

Seeing those who have embraced Islam see the sacred sites and fulfill the blessed rites of Umrah reminded our team of the importance of serving the community and the meaning behind Beyond the Shahadah. We look forward to our Winter 2023 Umrah trip and to continue this blessed tradition in the coming years, with the permission of God.

"The most special moment was seeing the kabah, as we approached it all I kept hearing was the sister guiding me telling me to keep my head down and not look up yet. When I opened my eyes there it was, after 37 years of a lot of patience, prayers and sacrifice I was finally there. It reinvigorated my spirit. I am forever indebted to Taleef for treating me like a queen."

UMM GEMALI  
UMRAH ATTENDEE



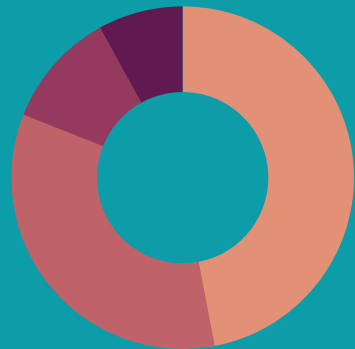
# INSIGHTS

## Annual Budget

2021  
\$840,000

2022  
\$1,100,000

2023  
\$1,100,000



## 2022-2023 expenses

47% of expenses went to programs  
34% of expenses went to operations  
11% of expenses went to general admin  
8% of expenses went to beautifying space







## hearts of taleef

The 1000 Hearts campaign is an effort to gather 1000 Hearts together in support of Ta'leef's work. 1000 supporters coming together forming one beating heart that helps keep this work alive. By giving \$3 a day(\$90/month recurring) we would meet our annual budget and more. 1000 hearts came from an effort to highlight the individuals that we take care of at Ta'leef. The seeker, the newcomer and the youth. By giving \$1/day for each category above you would sustain our work and beneficiaries at Ta'leef. Please support so we can continue lending a heart to those that need our support the most!

Here is one story that is close to our hearts. Read about Carmen's story!



Carmen first began looking into Islam because she needed a spiritual refuge. "I just started reading. I admired the faith and orientation of my Muslim friends. The very first thing I started doing was praying salah regularly before even taking shahada. I didn't overwhelm myself and I wasn't sure that I would want to commit to Islam but found refuge and meaning in prayer." However, this was a lonely journey that she took for a couple of years before finding a community. She prayed and fasted Ramadan on her own. "I got to this crossroad where I love all these devotional practices I'm engaging in. It all makes sense to me but I didn't know if I could keep doing it by myself or if I need a community. Once I got a taste of community I quickly decided that this is what I wanted."

MCC East Bay became her first spiritual home and she finally found Taleef through our organization's partnership with the convert care program there. She reached out to Mike Swies, our Outreach Director, for a one-to-one meeting, and eventually said her shahadah at Taleef Fremont. "One of the most beautiful things to me was that my brother came to my shahada and he was made to feel welcome. Mahdy had him come up, sit with me and hold my hand. Mahdy really honored my brother at the moment that I embraced Islam.... Afterward my brother said it was an amazing experience and he might want to go back sometime and that is a testament to how welcome he felt and how he felt how was there."

Carmen honored us by attending our annual Newcomers Retreat in November, where she had to opportunity to take a deep dive into the fundamentals of Islam and build bonds with her brothers and sisters on the path. "I realized I was in a group of people who really understood this spiritual journey and were on the same spiritual journey that I had never experienced before. The newcomers' retreat really nourished me and aided me on many levels spiritually, emotionally and socially."

# THE TEAM

By the blessing of God, we were able to go above and beyond. In-person pulses were back in session, our retreats were a success, and the need of services that we provided at Ta'leef have become more evident.

This could not have been possible without the tireless efforts of our staff. This work required depth, sacrifice, passion, and unrelenting dedication. We can truly say that everyone stepped up to the plate. With this extraordinary team of people, we truly believe that in the coming years Ta'leef will expand its horizons to uncharted territory and bring forth a lasting impact on the fabric of Islam in America. And there is no Success except through God, the Lord of the Worlds.

## Staff

Ali Dia  
Executive Director

Stara Rahmani  
Director of Operations

Will Caldwell  
Director of Education

Mike Sweis  
Director of Outreach & Community Engagement

Mousa Al-Sweis  
Operations Coordinator- Chicago

## Volunteers

Mahdy Amine  
Teacher

Erum Qureshi  
Volunteer Coordinator

Ariel Syuhadayana  
Hospitality Coordinator

Sara Rahmani  
Programs- Bay Area



## Staff Stats

### STAFF IN 2021

15 total  
6 full time  
3 part time  
6 volunteer

### NEWEST HIRES

Mousa Al-Sweis, Operations Coordinator- Chicago

### STAFF IN 2022

10 total  
6 full time  
4 volunteer

### STAFF IN 2023

9 total  
5 full time  
4 volunteer

“Ta’leef is my spiritual home. It is a place where my soul gets nourished, where I constantly meet amazing new people, and where I can be of service to those going through experiences that I myself have traversed. Returning to work at Ta’leef is a true honor and my heart yearns to keep building with this beautiful community!”

MIKE SWIES  
DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH

# VOLUNTEERS

God describes a group of noble companions in the His Book, “And they give food—despite their desire for it—to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, saying to themselves, “We feed you only for the sake of Allah, seeking neither reward nor thanks from you.”

We recognize the selfless service that the volunteers of Ta’leef give to be amongst those that God describes. The critical service that Ta’leef and its staff is able to fulfill would not be possible without the efforts of our extraordinary volunteers. Our programs and events are successful because of the work behind the scenes that the volunteers simply do for the sake of God and their service to the people.

Thank you to all of our amazing volunteers who served at Ta’leef this past year and helped make a difference behind the scenes!



The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “the best of people are those that bring most benefit to mankind.”

## Volunteer Stats 2022-2023

65	Number of Bay Area Volunteers
74	Number of Chicago Volunteers
30	Number of Consistent Volunteers
14,739	Number of Hours Volunteered
\$221,085	Economic Impact of Hours Contributed

“To be of service is to follow the path of our teachers. Those who love the Prophet (S) were in service to others, and that’s what I want to emulate. Ta’leef is the center of that; a place where I meet lovers of the Prophet (S), and a place where I can be of service.”

ARIEL SYUHADAYANA



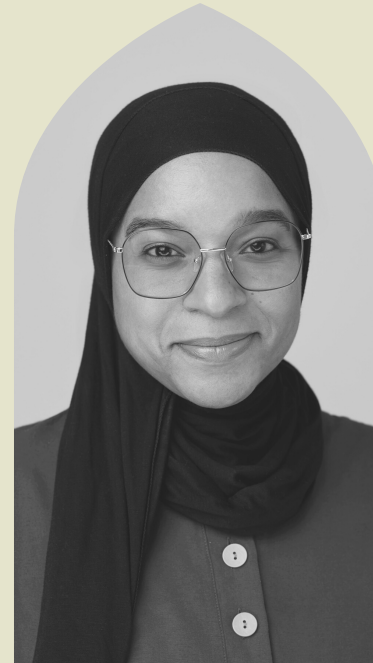
# MEET THE BOARD

That last few years have been a year of formation and transformation for the board at Ta'leef. We continue to grow as a Board and are looking forward to strategic board development in 2024.

## 2022-2023 highlights

- Regular monthly meetings of the Board
- Onboarding of 2 new board members in 2022-2023
- Development of multiple Board committees including finance, ethics, and strategic planning

The Board of Ta'leef is committed to oversight and support of the essential work of bringing people to the deen (religion) in the most beautiful of ways in the light of our Prophet's ﷺ way. We ask that you keep us in your prayers and support Ta'leef in the coming year in any way that you can. We also encourage you to visit our space and experience what makes Ta'leef so special to so many.



## Nikia Marie Bilal

is a lawyer, editor, and writer based in Chicago, Illinois. She currently serves as Manager of Programs at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) where she acts as a bridge between program staff and the development department to ensure compliance with large grants. A Chicago native, Nikia earned her B.A. in Communications from Loyola University Chicago and her J.D. at DePaul University College of Law. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, reading fiction, and practicing her very rudimentary skills as a djembe player.



## Naveed Mallick

was born and raised in Chicagoland. He has worked and lived in Chicago's near south side for over 20 years. Naveed has been practicing internal medicine and sleep medicine in multiple settings including the Cook County Health System, IMAN clinic, and in private practice. His current role is Chief of Medical Staff at INSIGHT Hospital & Medical Center, the first Muslim-led safety net hospital in the nation. His community work has focused on Muslim initiatives on the south side of Chicago and he has been attending Ta'leef since 2012. He is the proud father of four and is currently working on getting his table tennis game to the next level!



## Amzat Zeeshan Muhktar

Co-Founder and former BOD President of ILM Tree, an innovative Muslim homeschooling cooperative based in Northern California. He is an accomplished business and technology leader with 25 year experience in energy procurement, policy, and strategy. As a father of 3 young men, he is very passionate about engaging youth in religious and social activities. He believes that Ta'leef is an organization that strengthens the youth's attachment to Islam and connects them to the Muslim community.



## Dallas Wright

is a lifelong Chicagoan with years of experience in the city's nonprofit sector. While working to help support the mental health needs of South Side families, he earned an M.A. from DePaul University in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. He currently works at the Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3), where his research interests include gun violence reduction, public health, and incarceration's impact on psychological well being. Dallas is an avid basketball fan, and also enjoys spending his free time gardening and spending time with his daughter.



## Faria Abedin

lives in the DC area with her husband and three children. She brings years of nonprofit experience to Taleef's board from organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, and the Duke Islamic Studies Center. She holds a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Maryland and an M.S. in Computer Science from The Johns Hopkins University. She is co-founder of the Mizaan Retreat at Princeton University's Muslim Life program. Currently, Faria is working for Bayan Tours, an organization that coordinates travel experiences centered on Islamic history and heritage.





## Melissa Westbrook

became a member of the Ta'leef community approximately 7 ½ years ago when she first attended the Being Muslim classes at Ta'leef's Chicago campus. Since then, she has attended 5 Newcomer's Retreats, participated in many classes held by Ta'leef, became a volunteer, joined the Board, and in December 2021, went to Mecca and Medina with Ta'leef to perform Umrah. Melissa works in the private sector and is Senior Managing Director, Co-General Counsel and Head of Private Funds-Legal for Guggenheim Partners Investment Management where she has worked since moving to Chicago from New York in 2006. Melissa attended the University of Missouri, Columbia. After she graduated from college, she went on to attend New York University School of Law, where she graduated. She currently lives in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago with her three children.



## Ibrahim Bengali

is a native Chicagoan who now resides in the Bay Area with his wife. He has been committed to Ta'leef's work for over a decade, having served as a volunteer, volunteer coordinator, staff member, and consultant. Today, he combines this community building training with his experiences as a strategic business leader. Ibrahim works at Google as the Strategy & Operations Manager for Bard marketing. He previously worked as a Product Strategist for Meta and manager in Oliver Wyman's strategic healthcare consulting practice. He received his MBA from Wharton and undergrad from Northwestern. When not fueling his coffee addiction or exploring the Bay's natural wonders, he cherishes time spent with loved ones.