



TRR 2021



ANNUAL REPORT

2021 BY THE

Measuring
our impact

NUMBERS

368

New arrivals from Afghanistan received services from our Afghan Response Team, which helped with everything from food and household goods to school enrollment and long-term housing.

\$279,021

Was raised in donations and given to refugees as cash, vouchers or gift cards, humanitarian parole visa application fees, and a new home after a house fire.

\$401,040

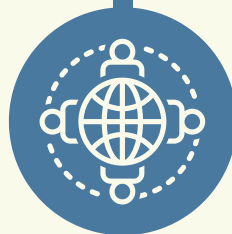
Was awarded to graduating Teen Response seniors in scholarships and financial aid as they head off to college.

78

Kids and teens were matched with virtual mentors and tutors who met with them over Zoom.

11

Immigrants and refugees serve on our Community Advisory Board.



670

Clients received services from The Refugee Response in 2021, whether it was help filling out a benefits application, mentoring, after-school soccer, or job placement.

5,326

Boxes of fresh produce sold through the Ohio City Farm Community Supported Agriculture program.

528

One-on-one in-person mentoring sessions were held at our Learning Lab.

26

Clients were connected to new employers.

395

Volunteers pitched in to distribute CSA shares, tutor kids and teens, coach soccer, staff our annual benefit, and much more. We're grateful to each and every one!

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

In 2021 our community was beset by twin global crises: the ongoing pandemic and the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. These issues are too large and complex for any one organization to address alone. This has meant that in 2021 collaboration and innovation was more important than ever. We have also reached more families with our programs than we could have imagined just a few years ago.

Two years into the pandemic, the impact of school closures on English language learners has come into focus. To help students recover lost ground while staying safe, our Youth Mentoring Program created an adaptive model with online mentoring and an in-person learning lab. To encourage social and emotional learning, we launched a summer camp with a student-led program called #Corner65, which now has a permanent home at The Refugee Response. Our education work has grown through partnerships with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Urban Community School and Cleveland's resettlement agencies.

We've also seen exciting growth at Ohio City Farm, our organization's flagship employment program. The number of members in our Community Supported Agriculture Program continued to grow, and we cultivated partnerships with local producers like Youth Bee Works, Killik Hot Sauce and Frayed Knot Farm. We are able to start the 2022 growing season with a minimum farm wage of \$15 per hour, a goal we have pursued for years.

In August 2021 we watched in horror as the Taliban took Kabul and tens of thousands fled the country while others were trapped in a dangerous and unpredictable circumstances. From August into 2022, The Refugee Response has worked with our partners to ensure that each arriving family was met with dignity and respect, and to ensure their basic needs were met.

Numbers alone can't capture the impact of our work. We focus on providing quality care and services to newcomer individuals, families and communities. This would be impossible without the strength, skill and compassion of the hundreds of volunteers and the thousands of individual donors who support us. Even more important are the newcomers who work alongside us and guide us.

We hope this report provides a picture of us as an organization and our incredible and resilient clients. We've included the stories of real people in our community, the challenges they've faced and their dreams and victories. We hope you enjoy it and thank you for all the love and support.



Patrick Kearns
Executive Director





#CORNER65

#Corner65 officially started in 2017 as a drop-in program with 30 refugee students seeking after-school extracurriculars and a safe space for them to adjust to their new life in Cleveland. After listening to their requests and what they wanted to see happen in their new community, the program now works with over 100 refugee students in Cleveland. The students told Program Director Becky Trout that they were looking for somewhere they could “just be kids and play without fear of not being accepted or bullied for their culture”. The students also expressed how difficult it was to get transportation and consent forms in their native language for programming within the community that already existed. With these barriers in mind, #Corner65 was born to bridge that gap.

Youth-led initiatives began to explore more of what their peers were asking for and how we could accomplish them together. We discussed the hobbies, talents, goals, and athletics they’d like to try out and become more involved with. One of the most vocal advocate #Corner65 students, Mayada Zakaria, shares a bit about her experience within #Corner65:

“I will be telling you about my experience and what I learned in #Corner65. I have been in #Corner65 for about 5 years. I have learned a lot of things, and I’ve figured out things that I did not know I could do. Did you know I learned most of my English from being in #Corner65? I’ve also learned how to paint and draw from #Corner65, because of the love and support. I’ve also done a lot of things I really wanted to do, which was to ride a horse and been to places that I never knew existed. They made me into this well rounded young teen. I tried new foods and activities. One of them was, sewing. Now, I’m getting better and better everyday thanks to #Corner65”

This past year Mayada has been painting with various types of paint techniques and selling her paintings to friends & family to either raise awareness or funds for specific causes she is passionate about. Mayada has shown leadership in #Corner65 from the very beginning. She exemplifies what it is to be a peer leader at the age of 12 years old. She has connected many of her friends to #Corner65 and we are very excited to see her growth as she grows with us from the very start as a program.



#Corner65 is a youth-led refugee program geared to spark creativity, community engagement, and overall health & wellness. #Corner65 provides important outlets for students to experience various activities the students themselves get to initiate.

#Corner65 became part of The Refugee Response after partnering on various programming throughout 2021. Being a part of The Refugee Response has been a tremendous encouragement to many of the #Corner65 kids as The Refugee Response was one of the first groups to welcome them to Cleveland.

KARIBU CLE: CMSD SUMMER CAMP



As we launch into 2022, the #Corner65 students are thrilled to make new friends with more new arrivals and create additional programming with The Refugee Response. One of our #Corner65 participants, Heri Ramadhani, reminisces about summer camp at Thomas Jefferson this past summer:

"I remember one time in the summer, it was another day of playing soccer at the camp. We were playing in a little tournament of four teams and the last two teams get to play in the final. We played our hearts out with so much passion it was amazing. #Corner65 helps us meet all these new people, and enjoy these awesome memories. It means so much to me, we make lots of friends and get to have fun together."

With Heri's involvement in our #Corner65 soccer program he has been able to obtain a full scholarship to St. Edwards High School. While Heri is succeeding in his academics and soccer career at St. Edwards, he still remains a leader within our program and will be serving on our Youth Advisory Council in 2022.

The camp, Karibu CLE, was run as a part of CMSD's Summer Enrichment Program. The Refugee Response operated a drop-in menu of soccer and art therapy programming for Cleveland's refugee students at Thomas Jefferson's Newcomer Academy for 8 weeks during the summer of 2021.

Besides offering an outlet for health and mental wellness for students, the summer camp focused on building soccer skills and expression through new artistic outlets. For soccer, we partnered with Force Sports and Lakewood High School's varsity girls team. For arts, staff members from The Refugee Response joined in to lead comic-drawing workshops, dance classes and more. Art therapy sessions were run by a local licensed art-therapist, Rebekah Chilcote.

Karibu CLE served as a pilot for #Corner65's operation at The Refugee Response. After a successful summer providing extracurricular wellness programming to over 100 of Cleveland's refugee students, #Corner65 has officially joined The Refugee Response in 2022.

YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM

The Youth Mentoring Program helps Cleveland-area resettled refugees in grades K-8 develop a foundation for academic success through consistent, individualized mentoring that is mindful of their social-emotional well-being and bolstered by proactive engagement with students, parents, mentors, educational and community institutions. Students are paired one-on-one with a mentor they meet with for two hours a week over a two-year period, either over webcam from their homes or on site at our Learning Lab. Mentors help students navigate school assignments, strengthen core competencies in academic English, reading, and math, and develop routines and attitudes that support meaningful learning. Program staff also check in regularly with parents to address educational access barriers, bridge communication gaps, and connect them to resources.



Mentor J.B. Bergin (left) and student Adnan use folding cootie catchers in a speed round of a getting-to-know-you Q&A game on the first day of fall semester at the Learning Lab.



Sead (left) and Safa (middle) lead a yoga session outside with staff member Mohammad outdoors at the Learning Lab.

Since the Learning Lab was launched in 2020 on the Urban Community School campus, the program has developed exciting ways to engage students in social-emotional learning and creative self-expression and enrichment. In 2021, the Learning Lab hosted sessions three days a week, serving 33 students in person. This space, hosted on the Urban Community School campus, has grown into a collaborative community where everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner. Students, mentors, and staff take turns leading activities from art workshops and outdoor sports to meditation.

62

CHILDREN SERVED

528

LEARNING LAB SESSIONS

993

VIRTUAL MENTORING SESSIONS

772

HOURS OF VIRTUAL MENTORING ACTIVITY

100%

OF STUDENTS RECEIVED CONTINUOUS SUPPORT THROUGH 2021

420

CHECK IN CALLS MADE TO PARENTS

THE FIGHT TO GRADUATE

Mohammad's education was getting back on track in 2020. He arrived in the US in 2016 after spending three and a half years as a refugee in Jordan. Back home in Syria, he had attended a special school for students with sight impairment, but he wasn't able to continue studying in Jordan.

At Thomas Jefferson International Newcomers' Academy, where he started school in Cleveland, things were good, he said. The Refugee Response had connected him to an Arabic-speaking mentor, as well as the Cleveland Sight Center. Learning a new language was hard, but he said he was getting the help he needed to learn with his disability.

Then Covid hit.

Suddenly, all Mohammad's classes were online. With his sight disability, he couldn't figure out how to turn on the computer, navigate the online platforms, or use virtual classrooms. His education came to a standstill.

When our Youth Mentoring Program first opened its in-person Learning Lab for refugee students in fall 2020, Mohammad was one of the first students invited to attend.

His first mentor at the Lab was Amanda Hudock, a teacher by profession. She said she started volunteering at the Learning Lab during the pandemic while she was out of the classroom. Overcoming both a sight and language barrier was a challenge, but the pair made it work. Amanda helped Mohammad access his online classes. They used braille flash cards, and with a magnifying glass and heavy markers, Mohammad could practice reading and writing visually. When Hudock had to stop volunteering after six months, a Refugee Response family liaison, Nahla Abuhamdi, stepped in to keep working with him.

In the spring of 2021, at the end of what he had hoped would be his senior year, Mohammad still didn't have enough credits to graduate high school. He had simply missed too much school during the pandemic.

Mohammad thought about leaving high school to try for his GED instead. Nahla explained that the GED exam can be difficult to pass for English-language learners, and reminded him how hard he had worked already to finish high school. Mohammad said he decided to stick it out for the sake of his family. That meant attending two months of daily summer school.



Mohammad proudly holding his diploma on graduation day.

When the summer session started, Mohammad would get up, get ready, and wait for his school-provided transportation to arrive. For two weeks, the transportation never showed up.

"I was bored," Mohammad said. "I was like, 'Why isn't this happening?'"

As soon as Nahla found out, she worked with Khwater Nayef, the school district's Refugee Services Coordinator, to sort out Mohammad's school transportation. After that, he attended summer school daily.

Finally, at the end of the summer session, Mohammad attended his graduation ceremony. His family wasn't able to be there, but, he said, "I was so happy. I was so proud of myself."

Mohammad is thinking about the next stages of his life. He says he wants to go to college. Someday, he hopes to work with computers and teach other people braille. Nahla, the family liaison who stuck with him throughout the process, is confident he'll succeed.

"Mohammad is a hard working man and he has a bright future in front of him," she said, adding, "To be continued!"

"I joined Teen Response my first year in high school and also my first year in Cleveland, Ohio. I was in 9th grade and was a weak student and did not believe in myself. Also, I was not that good at English. After joining the Teen Response program and meeting with Ms. Emma I feel I change from a weak student to a strong student. TRR helped my siblings find jobs in the summer. Also, TRR helped them in school to graduate from high school. I became braver and started to become one of the honor students at John Marshall High School. Teen Response changed my life and other students' lives for the better."

- Shahd Alkhilif (Teen Response Student)



Teen Response students lift each other up after falling during an ice skating outing. Photo by Kaitlin Walsh.

TEEN RESPONSE

Teen Response was initiated in 2018, with the goal of supporting resettled families by assisting students in navigating their current high school experience and challenging them to define and pursue pathways towards educational and career goals. The program is currently based out of John Marshall High School and is a collaboration between The Refugee Response and CMSD's Multilingual Multicultural Education Office. The program provides crucial after school tutoring, counseling, career exposure and interactive learning experiences to 35 resettled refugee students as well as their parents/guardians, allowing the students to be more successful in both school and life during and after high school.

35

TEENAGE REFUGEE STUDENTS ARE CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN TR AT JOHN MARSHALL HIGH SCHOOL

24

STUDENTS SECURED PAID SUMMER JOBS AT LOCAL CLEVELAND BUSINESSES

100%

OF TR SENIORS GRADUATED FROM JOHN MARSHALL HIGH SCHOOL

100%

SENIORS WERE ACCEPTED INTO POST-SECONDARY ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS.

\$401,040

AWARDED TO TR SENIORS IN SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID AS THEY HEAD OFF TO COLLEGE

20

TR STUDENTS MATCHED WITH VIRTUAL TUTORS

FLEEING AFGHANISTAN

In September 2021, Meena was supposed to be starting her senior year at John Marshall High School. She was supposed to be seeing her friends again after visiting family all summer. She was supposed to be meeting new peers in Teen Response.

Instead, she was in hiding, fearing a knock on the door by the Taliban.

Meena, a refugee from Afghanistan whose father had worked for American troops, went back to Afghanistan in June for a happy event: her sister's Nazila's wedding.

But on Aug. 15, the Afghan president fled the country, and the capitol city fell to the Taliban. Like many Afghans, the family feared they could face retribution for their father's work with the Americans. Most Afghan refugees in the US enter with Special Immigrant Visas, which are only available to the families of people who worked with the US military. Having an American green card could mark them for execution.

The first night after Kabul fell, Nazila said most of the family wept.

"A lot of people knew that we came from the USA, so we could not go out," Nazila said. "We got scared."

For help, the family called Emma Vogel, the head of The Refugee Response's Teen Response program. Emma jumped on the case, calling all the lawmakers she could think of, as well as the State Department and volunteer groups.

Every day, she heard from Meena and Nazila's father, who was still in Cleveland.

"Between Aug. 15 and Aug. 31 it was pretty much 24/7 I was talking to the family and talking to the State Department," Emma said.

But the State Department was prioritizing evacuating US citizens. Green card holders like Nazila and Meena were lower down on the list.

"Lots of times [U.S. government officials] contacted us," Nazila said. "They said, 'Just wait, we are going to contact you.' We were waiting for them for almost one month, but nobody called."

Meanwhile, the family's situation became worse and worse. They heard that the Taliban was going door to door in the neighborhood where they were staying, looking for people with ties to America, so they snuck away to another house. Then, most of the family fell ill with fevers.

Another Taliban scare made them change homes again. Their money for food began to run out.

Suddenly, after almost four months in hiding, the family got their chance. They applied for visas to Pakistan and were approved. From there, everyone could go home to Cleveland - except Ali. Because he and Nazila had just married, he didn't have a US green card yet.

The family borrowed thousands of dollars from a relative to buy tickets to Islamabad. To reach their flight, they had to navigate Taliban checkpoints and airport security.

"I was nervous," Nazila said. "I thought, 'Maybe we cannot go back to Cleveland. Maybe something is going to happen.'" But once they boarded the plane, she realized, "Everything is OK. We can go back home."



Nazila and Meena's family as they prepared to leave Kabul for Pakistan. Photo courtesy of family.

The family's four-month ordeal was finally over.

When they reached home, Emma said, "They had been traveling for 45 hours to get from Kabul to Pakistan to Turkey to Chicago to Cleveland, and they still wanted me to come over for dinner as soon as they landed. They had a whole feast."

But Nazila couldn't share the rest of her family's joy.

"Let me tell you the truth," Nazila said. When they arrived in Cleveland, "my mother, my sister and brother, they were happy, but I wasn't happy. I was thinking about my husband. I was scared for him."

Now, the family is working on picking up where they left off. The Refugee Response used donations raised to support Afghan refugees to help the family repay the cost of the tickets. Nazila, who wants to be a dentist, plans to resume her studies at Tri-C in the spring. Meena is catching up on the school she missed and getting back on track to graduate with help from Teen Response.

Ali is still in Afghanistan. Nazila speaks with him regularly. The last time they were on the phone, he told her he was terrified. As Nazila talked about him, she broke down in tears.

MULTILINGUAL CONTENT CREATION



The Multilingual Content Creation program was established to provide educational information to refugee families in their language built on community expertise and experience. Our creation process is built around expert partners and community feedback.

In 2021, our focus was health content and regional/local partnerships to increase our expertise and reach. We started the year with a Covid-19 vaccine testimonial campaign during which we taped dozens of testimonials from vaccinated community members, and ended the year forming partnerships for an educational healthcare access campaign for Cleveland's young refugees. Special thanks to Catholic Charities Migration & Refugee Services for partnering on the vaccine testimonial campaign. See Tom Mrosko, Director of Migration and Refugee Services receiving a vaccine pictured left.



Over the summer we piloted a summer content program at Thomas Jefferson, where we taught students photography and social media graphic design. This in-school programming has continued with our assistance of the Youth Mentoring Program's Refugee School Impact program.

40

TRANSLATED EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS PRODUCED

500+

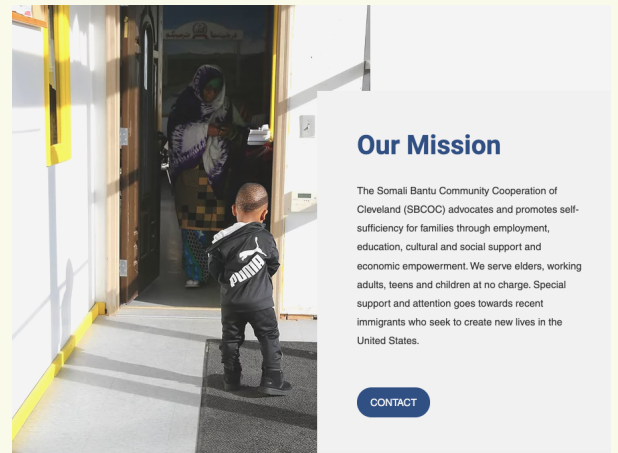
HOURS OF VIDEOS WATCHED ON THE REFUGEE RESPONSE'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

16

COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD WHERE OUR CONTENT WAS WATCHED

SOMALI COMMUNITY CENTER OF CLEVELAND

In our continued work to empower and uplift Cleveland's refugee community, the Content Program spent the end of 2021 helping the Somali Community Center of Cleveland build a website with pathways for digital fundraising. The leadership of the Center are running community programs and have a big vision for the future of their community. Our work supporting their mission with content and fundraising expertise is designed to help them thrive for years to come. In 2022 we will assist more of Cleveland's refugee communities in this way.



OHIO CITY FARM



5,326

CSA BOXES DISTRIBUTED DURING THE 2021 SEASON



MORE THAN \$3600

OF PRODUCE DONATED THROUGH THE FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM AT MAY DUGAN CENTER



6

FULL-TIME JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR FORMER REFUGEES



Ohio City Farm, one of the largest contiguous urban farms in the United States at nearly six acres, provides fresh, local and healthy food to Cleveland's under-served residents, boosts the local food economy, and educates the community about the importance of a complete food system. In 2021 our team of six full time farmers (all former refugees from Burma, Bhutan, and the Congo) and three part-time staff had another impressive year of growth.

In addition to serving over 250 members through our 20-week CSA program, we extended our growing season to include a new 6-week fall extension to the CSA for 50 members and offered our first-ever flower shares in partnership with Frayed Knot Farm. We opened a new online farm store to sell some of our shelf-stable and value-added farm stand favorites for the holiday season, as well as handmade throw pillows from The Refugee Response's Afghan Craftswomen Program.

We received two USDA grants in 2021 that will allow us to complete some much-anticipated small infrastructure updates as well as plan for larger projects as the farm gains a new neighbor in the future Irishtown Bend Park, slated to open in 2026.

Our resident pollinators also upgraded their home, courtesy of redhouse studio architecture. The new bee barn, pictured at right, was built using mycelium bricks and the inside contains renderings of famous refugees from around the world.



Ramat Wiley, CSA member and owner of local Adun Spice Co., filming at Ohio City Farm. Photo by Colleen Dodge.

THE FARM IN FOCUS

This past year brought spotlights and changes to Cleveland's largest urban farm. Pictured above, CSA member Ramat Wiley's local business Adun Spice Co. was featured in a Key Bank advertisement airing nationwide and filmed partially here at the farm with picturesque views and a great cameo from our team member Aline. The whole team had fun with a morning of filming alongside Ramat.

Pictured to the left, Independence Excavating and the DiGeronimo Companies generously donated labor and materials to update the farm's entrance and wash/pack area with poured concrete, new drainage, lighting, landscaping and a fresh coat of paint. The new concrete entry ramp makes the farm accessible for wheelchair users and other visitors with mobility limitations and the updated vegetable washing station is easier to clean and more user-friendly for our whole team. Thanks to everyone on the DiGeronimo team who lent a hand!

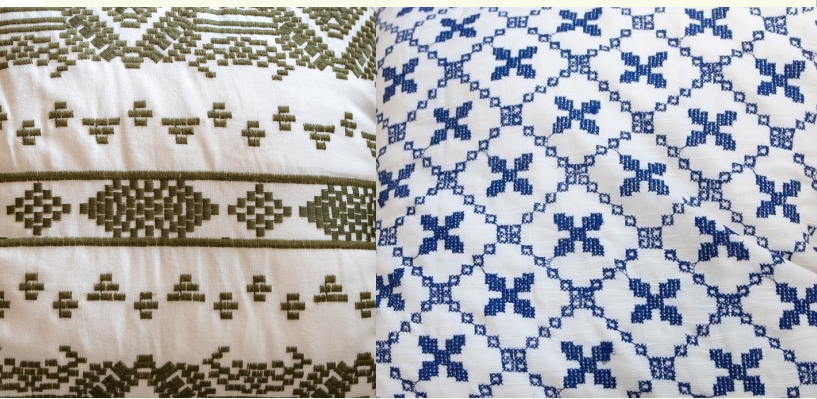
Near the end of our season, we were thrilled to welcome friends and supporters into our gates as TRR's annual benefit event returned once again to the farm with incredible food, music, and community spirit. We look forward to our 2022 season with gratitude.



ADULT EMPLOYMENT

The Refugee Response's Adult Programming seeks to build refugees' capacity for self-sufficiency and community engagement through increased language competency, cultural exchange, and employment opportunities. In the wake of the pandemic, the Adult Employment team continued to link refugees to employment through resume writing, case management, job-training, and partnership building. In particular, the team focused on finding employment opportunities that were not just "any job," but that aligned with clients' career goals.

Some, like M, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, learned carpentry through a position with a construction company. He was able to couple his learning at Tri-C with his on-the-job training, where he's now paid over \$20/hour. M says learning to build houses is a "dream come true," and he's helped recruit other members of the Congolese community to join his construction team.



AFGHAN CRAFTSWOMEN

The Afghan Craftswomen Program was founded by a group of Afghan women who wanted to find ways to use their creativity and earn an income while still caring for their children at home. The collective continued to create new designs and products in 2021. For the summer, they sewed and sold decorative cloth flower pots, and for their winter collection, they created six different throw pillow designs.

In addition, The Refugee Response partnered with resettlement agencies to start a new program: Meals on Arrival. Meals on Arrival provides hot, culturally appropriate meals to recently arrived refugees, so that refugees' first meal in Cleveland tastes of home. The group was also contracted to cook 90 Thanksgiving meals for newly arrived Afghan families. As a result, over 179 new arrivals received meals with food from their home countries.



Waisuddin's first month in Cleveland was filled with uncertainty.

"The only thing I knew about Cleveland was what I googled in Afghanistan" he laughs. "I knew the cost of living is cheap, that you get lots of snow, and that the winter isn't as cold as Kabul."

After arriving, he and his family stayed with friends and in AirBNBs as they searched for apartments. They watched as Kabul fell to the Taliban just two days after they arrived, and they worried for their families back home. On top of that, Waisuddin knew he needed to find a job.

"I wanted something where I could grow and get promoted," he said. "But at some point, I thought I would take any job. I assumed I'd have to start at the ground level, just so I could pay rent."

In September, the Adult Employment Team at TRR linked Waisuddin to a job fair at Great Lakes Cheese Company (GLC). After he told the company about his past experience as a manager, translator, and high school teacher, he was hired on the spot.

Now, Waisuddin works in Talent Development, where he manages interns for the company. He says the position utilizes skills from his past roles in Afghanistan. "Back home, I always loved working with youth," he says. "I taught high school and managed a hostel, and taught youth chess and soccer. I really enjoying messaging with the interns and helping them grow."

And while he was initially nervous about working in a corporate environment, he says he's found a home at GLC.

"I thought I'd be the only Muslim or foreigner there," he said. "But it's incredibly diverse. There are Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and people from all different backgrounds. My manager has given me a lot of confidence, and is good at explaining things I don't know."

Best of all, he says there's opportunity for him to grow. He hopes to use GLC's tuition reimbursement program to pursue a master's degree in human resources. In the meantime, he wants to use his position to hire more Afghans, and develop upwardly mobile career pathways for other refugees.

AFGHAN RESPONSE TEAM

The Refugee Response's newest team was created in October in response to the increased need for services for Afghan refugees. With over 650 (as of this report) Afghans arriving in Cleveland, normal channels of assistance for refugees were quickly overwhelmed.

Our Afghan Response Team focused first on the most pressing needs: affordable housing and household goods. We worked with the existing refugee community, resettlement agencies, and local landlords to identify new sources of affordable housing, and located 14 apartments and housing units where new arrivals could live.

Meanwhile, our Afghan staff members reached out to new arrivals to provide support and advice, and to learn about pressing needs. The Refugee Response donation store - hosted in Nehemiah Mission and stocked by generous donors - provided dishes, winter coats, bedding, food, and appliances to over 90 families in two months. In addition, we partnered with the Islamic Center of Cleveland and Salaam Cleveland to distribute over \$35,000 worth of food vouchers and fresh food boxes to families.

Finally, we've provided education support for newly arrived families. Our Teen Ambassador works on-site at Thomas Jefferson Newcomer's Academy three times per week to provide in-classroom support and tutoring to 10 recently arrived Afghan students. Our team has also partnered with resettlement agencies to fast-track school enrollment for families, helping to enroll 10 new families and introduce them to the American education system.



TRR and Cleveland's Afghan community welcomed over 350 newcomers on Thanksgiving weekend



Demonstrations in Cleveland against the Taliban takeover in August

368

AFGHAN
INDIVIDUALS
SERVED

\$35,000

WORTH OF FOOD
VOUCHERS
DISTRIBUTED

90+

FAMILIES WHO
SHOPPED AT
OUR FREE STORE

HUMANITARIAN PAROLE LEGAL CLINIC



When the Taliban took over Kabul, Afghanistan on Aug. 15, 2021, the futures of tens of thousands of US citizens, green card holders and Afghan nationals who worked with or alongside US operations were in jeopardy. The Refugee Response, with our partners at Global Cleveland and Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services of Greater Cleveland, rapidly mobilized to offer a legal clinic on Aug. 23rd to help Afghans living in the Cleveland area apply for humanitarian parole on behalf of family members in Afghanistan. Thanks to a groundswell of community support, we raised \$193,685 to offset the Humanitarian Parole application fees, which were \$575 per person. We were able to fund 337 applications. Over 350 Afghan community members attended the clinic, filing over 600 applications. The Refugee Response staff and volunteers continued to provide support through text banking to help more community members file humanitarian parole applications and connect with the legal team at Catholic Charities. Ultimately, our coalition helped people file more than 1,000 visa applications.

REAP THE BENEFIT 2021

REAP the Benefit 2021 "Making it Home" was held at Ohio City Farm on October 3rd.

Each year The Refugee Response hosts an annual benefit to raise critical funds to support our operations, showcase the work of the organization, highlight Cleveland's amazing resettled community and to have a one of a kind evening. For the first time this year our event took place solely on the farm's grounds, overlooking the cityscape from the banks of the Cuyahoga River. Our 2021 benefit was a fully vaccinated event with over 500 guests in attendance.

This year, in light of the effect COVID-19 has had on the restaurant industry, we hired caterers rather than asking businesses to donate their services. Longtime supporter Karen Small from Flying Fig catered our VIP reception along with chefs from our partners at Great Lakes Brewing Company. Our caterers for the main event represented some of Cleveland's numerous immigrant communities. These immigrant-owned businesses brought our guests food from China, Burma, Afghanistan, the Ukraine, the Horn of Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Latin America.

The evening also featured a photo exhibit from some refugee youth photographers who took part in a photography training with TRR staff. These images captured Cleveland from their eyes over the course of a challenging and changing year in their lives.

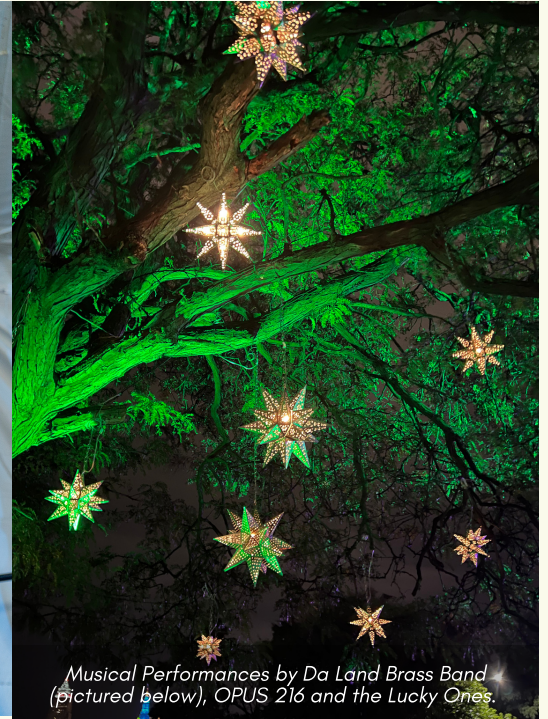


KEYNOTE SPEECH

Sabzina Muhibzada, a graduate of our Teen Response program, gave the evening's keynote speech. Sabzina spoke about the difficulties and discrimination she's experienced as an Afghan living in Northeast Ohio, and the importance of embracing Cleveland's many newcomers.

"Even though everyone is different we need each person to make Cleveland a wonderful place," she said. "Please welcome people from Afghanistan and find ways for them to feel at home here. I am glad that The Refugee Response is trying to help people from Afghanistan. Please remember that the people coming here from Afghanistan just want to come to the United States to protect their family. They want to live a normal life here in Cleveland and be safe."

Sabzina Muhibzada, during her 2021 REAP the Benefit speech



Musical Performances by Da Land Brass Band (pictured below), OPUS 216 and the Lucky Ones.

KEY TO OHIO CITY FARM AWARD

The Refugee Response was honored to award this year's Key to the Farm to Khwatar Nayef, the Refugee Services Coordinator and Cleveland Metropolitan School District's Multicultural Multilingual Office.

Khwatar goes above and beyond to connect refugee students and their families with health care, financial support and legal aid when necessary. Her advocacy for students has sparked new programs that have flourished in CMSD and the community. These include our Teen Response Program and Karibu CLE, our summer soccer and art therapy camp launched this year. Ms Nayef is also a member of The Refugee Response's Community Advisory Board, a group of dedicated and passionate leaders from Cleveland's refugee and immigrant communities who help The Refugee Response identify gaps in services and find ways to meet these needs.

Since 2018 (with the exception of 2020) The Refugee Response has awarded the Key to Ohio City Farm to a recipient at our annual benefit. The award is to recognize the contributions of amazing individuals in the Cleveland community who have dedicated themselves to the service of others, especially Cleveland's newcomer populations.

Our first key to Ohio City Farm was presented to Mr. David Dombroviak to celebrate support for newcomers and the environment. In 2019 the Key to Ohio City Farm was presented to author, activist, filmmaker and entrepreneur extraordinaire Loung Ung, a refugee from Cambodia who settled in Cleveland. Her international best selling memoir *First They Killed My Father* was developed into a film produced by Netflix and available globally.



16

HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVED SUPPORT

17

APPLICATIONS FOR SNAP, MEDICAID, OR CHILDCARE APPROVED

2

FAMILIES APPROVED FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE

CLIENT ADMIN SUPPORT SERVICES

Though 2021 brought some brief periods of relief from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Client Admin Support Services (CASS) team saw another year of uncertainty and hardship for many of the families we serve. Amid an environment of ever-changing job security and CDC protocols, our team was honored to be able to help members of the refugee community gain some peace of mind by securing SNAP, Medicaid, and Childcare benefits for them and their loved ones. This ensured these families did not need to worry about where their next meal would come from, that they were able to receive medical care knowing that they have health insurance, and to seek out or keep job opportunities without the barrier of expensive childcare.



PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

LETTER FROM CLEVELAND'S CONGOLESE COMMUNITY

I, on behalf of the Congolese Community of Greater Cleveland appreciate you and your organization on the effort and collaboration in working with our Congolese Community here in Cleveland. I am always pleased to see how you and members of your organization (The Refugee Response) work with families in my community with love and passion, I couldn't envision a better organization to collaborate with than The Refugee Response. I personally thank you for assisting our community mentally and financially in 2021. Our community was hit hard last year and as we struggled financially to raise money for funerals of our member, you and your organization were always there to assist without hesitation, and I am grateful.

As we begin this new chapter of 2022, I look forward continuing our collaboration and strengthening the relationship of The Refugee Response and the Congolese Community of Greater Cleveland. Days ahead might not always be bright but with our collaboration, we can and will continue to improve the lives of not only Congolese but the whole Refugee Community of Greater Cleveland. I know Covid has limited us from doing a lot of things but, I strongly believe this chapter will also pass and we will get out to living our normal lives.

On behalf of the Committee, we want you to know that we really value and cherish your dedication toward serving the refugee and immigrant communities. Thank you for always being there for us and giving this community your best.

Sincerely,
Mayele Degaule Ngemba
President

CRISIS RESPONSE SIFA'S HOME



Just after 3am on April 20th, 2021, a fire tore through Sifa Nsimire's home in Cleveland's East Side. Sifa and her seven children are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and arrived to Cleveland eight years ago. The mom and her adult kids worked for years to buy their first ever house and watched as their hard work and dreams went up in smoke. That same day The Refugee Response launched the Sifa Fund to help raise money for the family to get back on their feet and have a roof above their heads. From April to May the Sifa Fund raised \$30,930 with The Refugee Response contributing an additional \$5,000. The family received 100% of the money raised. This funding has allowed the Nsimire family to stay in temporary housing and at the same time to purchase a permanent home that is being repaired and upgraded. New furnaces, heating ducts, electric systems and water pipes have all been installed. The family has done all of the other finishing work themselves, from painting the exterior and interior of the house, putting in dry wall, repair and stairs and laying in all new flooring. After the meters are installed the family will be able to move into their home after a long effort to make this a reality.

"From my heart I say thank you to those who supported us. It gave us hope after a terrible time. We would not be able to have our home without you." Sifa Nsimire.



Sifa Nsimire and her children Elia (left) and Precious (center) in front of their new home.

REFUGEE SERVICES COLLABORATIVE

The Refugee Services Collaborative (RSC) was formed in 2013 and since that time The Refugee Response has been a proud member. The challenges of the past year have shown that now more than ever there is a need for collaboration.

Involvement in the RSC includes participating in a number of structured collaborative activities annually. Membership in the RSC also includes high level coordination of services and programs across the sector. This coordination allows for individual organizations to become sector leaders in areas of unique strength while also allowing for intra-agency referrals of clients based upon the particular needs of clients and the variety of programs across member agencies.

In 2021 principle activities included the completion of a study on secondary immigration, the provision of emergency assistance to clients from the Greater Cleveland Covid-10 Rapid Response Fund and the commissioning of a local immigrant and



refugee led non-profit, Smart Development, to work on short and long term housing needs in the Greater Cleveland area for refugee newcomers. This work was generously supported by the John and Peggy Garson Family Foundation.

The RSC will continue into 2022 with special events, such as celebrating World Refugee Day as well as broad based and far reaching collaborative efforts to address the highest number of new arrivals to the area in decades.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Thanks to incredible community support, The Refugee Response exceeded its fundraising goals for 2021 by 66%. We received more grant funding than expected, with some old partners increasing their donations and some new partners supporting us for the first time. We also received the most donations from individual private supporters in our 11-year lifespan as an organization. Private donations to our general support fund were triple what we anticipated in 2021.

The largest unexpected stream of funding we received was in earmarked donations to our Afghan Response fund. In the days after the fall of the Afghan government, people and organizations donated nearly \$200,000 to pay fees for humanitarian visa applications, which Afghan refugees in Northeast Ohio were scrambling to file for family members still trapped in Afghanistan. On Aug. 23, we hosted a legal clinic with Catholic Charities, Global Cleveland and Urban Community School where The Refugee Response covered the application fees for 337 people.

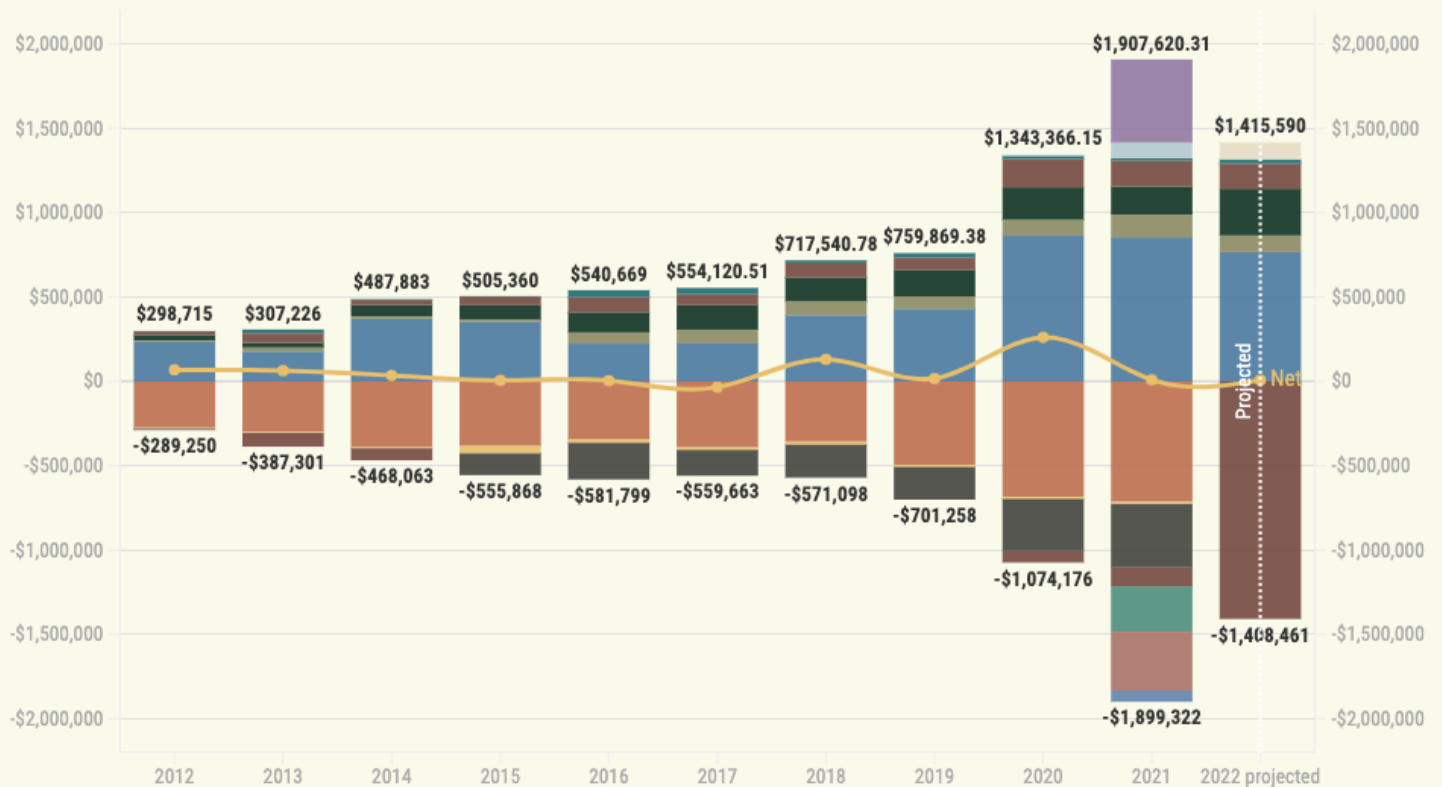
Donations continued to pour in as Afghan refugees began arriving in the U.S. The additional \$195,000 in funds raised allowed us to add and shift staff positions to organize donation drives, support Afghan kids as they enrolled in and adjusted to school, and connect new arrivals to long-term housing and rental assistance.

The organization is in a strong financial position going into 2022. We ended 2021 with roughly \$400,000 in cash reserves – an essential buffer to ensure continued operations in case of an unexpected shortfall. This amount would be enough to keep our programs running for nearly five months. In the spring, we expect to move into our new offices, which were financed by a capital campaign in 2020. Moving into a fully financed building will free up funds that would normally be used to pay office rent for programming instead. With two new U.S. Department of Agriculture grants awarded for 2022, Ohio City Farm is also poised for new infrastructure investments and growth.

Refugee Response income and expenses

Our income has more than doubled in the past two years. Much of the unexpected funding was dedicated to our Afghan crisis response efforts. We were also able to pay for our new offices, which will open this spring.

- Net
- Grants
- Individual donations
- Program income
- Annual benefit gross income
- Corporate contributions
- Other
- Program expenses
- Professional fees
- Operations
- Uncategorized expenses
- New income stream
- Afghan support fund
- Afghan response
- Purchase of new office
- Other direct aid



COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

The Community Advisory Board (CAB) gives members of Cleveland-area refugee communities a voice in The Refugee Response's programming. Launched in 2020, the CAB meets every month to discuss ways refugee community members can work with The Refugee Response and other refugee-serving agencies in the Cleveland area. CAB members all come from refugee or immigrant backgrounds.

The CAB's first year focused on relationship building, idea sharing, and learning. Members formed bonds and connected with staff members from The Refugee Response and community partners. The CAB formed focus groups to examine important issues such as refugee access to healthcare. Reflecting on her first year as a CAB member, Melaak Rashid said,

"Representation of my community and the sharing of ideas among such a diverse talented pool of volunteers has made me feel my community will forever be heard and listened to."

CAB members met with representatives from USCRI and UsTogether to inform them about mutual aid available from refugee-led groups, and to make sure new arrivals can reach out to them. The CAB is also collaborating with Sami Ahmad from Ibn Sina Clinic and other refugee community leaders to launch projects improving refugee access to healthcare, including vaccination pop-up clinics, community health fairs and a healthcare informational campaign. In October 2021, The Refugee Response committed \$25,000 it received from the Anisfield-Wolf Memorial Award to the CAB. The group is exploring ways to invest the funding into refugee communities.

In 2022, CAB members said they are looking forward to:

- "[Being] connected more with other CAB members,"
- "Connecting more with the refugee community...,"
- "[Getting] better at execution of plans," and
- "Diving in deeper on how... CAB members can make short-term and long-term impact[s] through CAB."



Khwater Nayef



**Ikenna
Ogwuegbu**



Melaak Rashid



Sakhi Faiz



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