



ITHACA WELCOMES REFUGEES

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHAIR OF THE BOARD

2025 was a notable year in IWR's history. On this tenth anniversary of IWR's founding, we celebrated our 226 refugee and immigrant partners who made a new home in Tompkins County over the past decade. Although some have moved to other locations, many of our new neighbors have remained in town. Including enrollment in our Global Roots Play School, we have served 419 people from 38 different countries – roughly 19% of the world's countries.

It was also a turbulent year for resettlement in the United States. It turned out that the suspension of refugee admissions to the US on Day One of Donald Trump's second presidency was only the beginning. We spent 2025 helping our partners overcome each new barrier to their safe residency, whether their immigration program was terminated, their ability to work was revoked, or they were charged large new fees to re-apply for work permits or new fees for each year their asylum application remains pending. Added to all of this, the rise in cost of living and cuts to social services have made the process of resettling even harder for the individuals and families we serve.

Grassroots support from this wonderful community made possible unprecedented levels of financial support for IWR's partners, some of whom needed help with all of their basic household expenses (e.g., rent, utilities, groceries) for several months while awaiting new work permits. We chose to provide this crisis support even though it caused a sizeable budget deficit for the year. Fundraising successes in 2024 allowed IWR to have cash on hand at a time when we needed this flexibility.

We had anticipated a decrease in new refugee and immigrant arrivals locally in 2025, but sur-

prisingly, we saw increased demand for our services. Overall, we partnered with 33 newcomers, compared with 27 the previous year. Some people were able to enter the US through a narrow set of pathways that, at the time, were still viable. Others relocated to Ithaca from American cities with less support, still determined to find a safe place to make home.

Times of struggle often come along with demonstrations of resilience, and we witnessed this time and again in 2025. IWR support has given people strength in resettling. One of our partners shared: "We continue to move forward with gratitude and hope, trusting that stability is just around the corner. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for walking alongside us."

During this year, our pride in IWR's accomplishments was mixed with anxiety over a slew of anti-immigrant federal policies. Still, we know one thing for sure: Ithaca is committed to being a welcoming place.



Casey Verderosa
Executive Director



Douglas Stayman
Board Chair

WHO WE ARE



Operational Staff

- ▶ Casey Verderosa, Executive Director
- ▶ Molly Alexander, Community Support Specialist
- ▶ Leigh Bacher, Programs Coordinator
- ▶ Kadhim Owayez, Housing and Food Security Coordinator
- ▶ Leila Wilmers, Development Director

Global Roots Play School Staff

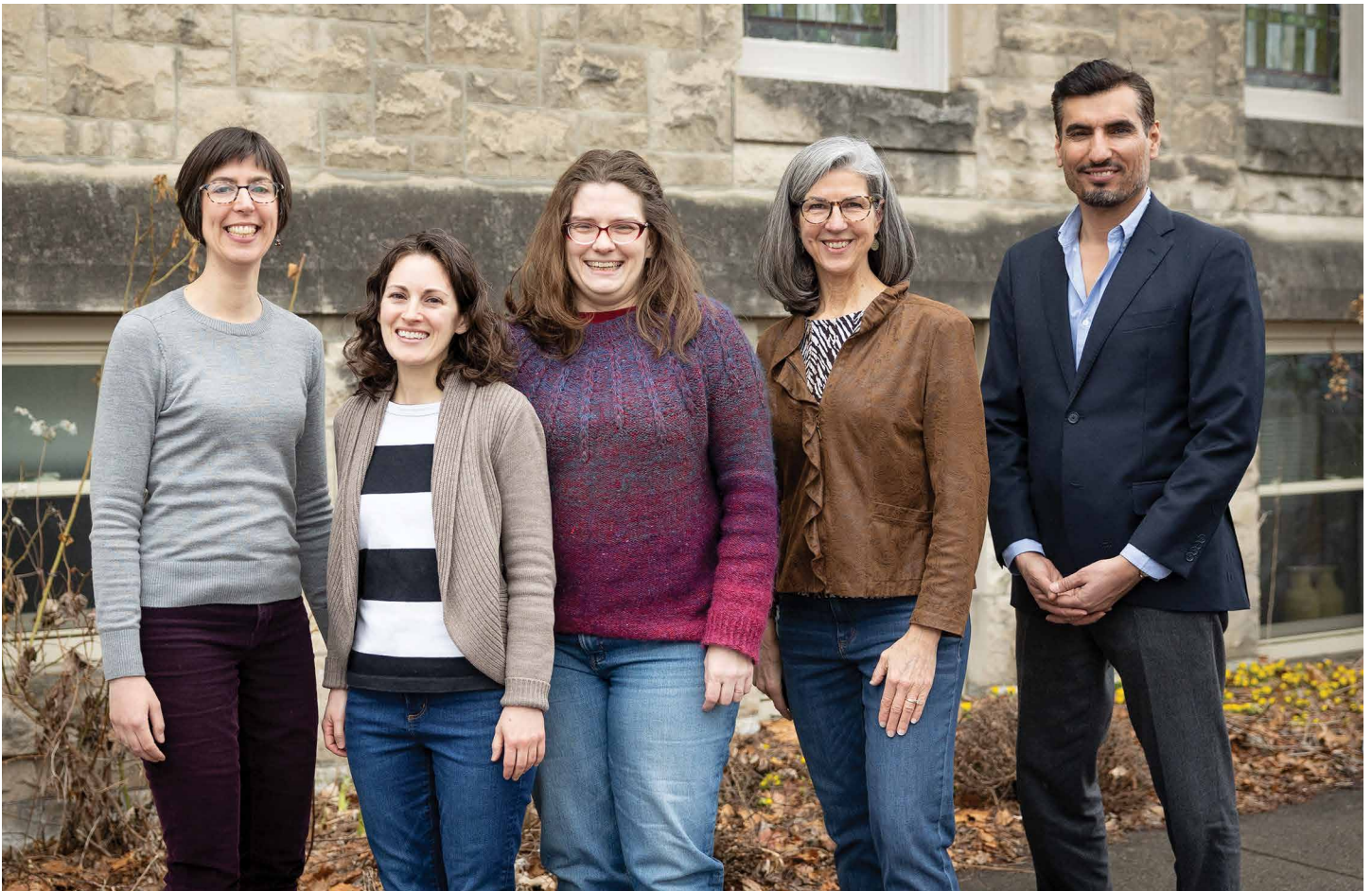
- ▶ Bronwyn Losey, Director
- ▶ Stephanie Muñoz, Lead Teacher
- ▶ Zahraa Aldelfi, Assistant Teacher
- ▶ Kiersten DeMarco, Assistant Teacher

Lead Volunteers

- ▶ Coert Bonthius
- ▶ Glen Robertson
- ▶ Ellie Stewart
- ▶ Wendy Wallitt

Board of Directors

IWR operates under the guidance of a board of directors, which comprised 11 members at the end of 2025. Their backgrounds span the non-profit sector, government, healthcare, academia and the arts. Several members have themselves experienced displacement. Contact us to learn more about IWR's organizational structure.



From left to right: IWR staff members Leila Wilmers, Casey Verderosa, Bronwyn Losey, Leigh Bacher, and Kadhim Owayez. (Photo by Jason Koski)

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Welcome Home

IWR's welcome to displaced families joining the community took many forms this year. In a tough housing market, we found safe, affordable accommodation for all who sought our help. Our volunteers teamed up to collect donated home items and carry out moves. When a single expectant mother arrived soon before her due date, an IWR volunteer created a baby registry and community members generously gifted 26 new baby items and \$185 for a diaper fund.

Seasonal transitions can also bring extra needs. At the start of the school year, volunteers created packs of supplies for 26 school kids and 1 college student in IWR families and 7 households were glad to receive warm winter gear through our coat drive as temperatures dropped.

- ▶ **13 households moved into stable accommodation**
- ▶ **304 home items donated by 100+ community members**
- ▶ **\$60,890 of housing aid provided**

Behind the scenes of each IWR welcome are the thoughtful gestures of individuals: a volunteer who gifted spices they had purchased from Greenstar's bulk aisle and packed in labelled jars; a local business owner who lets IWR store donated goods in their building without charge; a donor who took down their online sale posting of a bedroom furniture set and donated it instead to an IWR family.



IWR volunteers provided school supplies to 26 school kids and 1 college student. (Photo by Leigh Bacher)

Response Projects

IWR Response Projects give our refugee partners longer-term support with resettlement needs they identify. In 2025, our volunteer teams helped people find employment and English as a Second Language classes, enroll children in school, access transportation and healthcare, find food pantries, and overcome language barriers at appointments. Cultural orientation helped newcomers feel confident with home health and safety, personal safety, and identity protection. IWR's Community Support Specialist ran trauma assessments and referred partners for mental health support when needed.

- ▶ 115 people helped with longer-term resettlement
- ▶ \$10,075 of welcome cash provided
- ▶ \$27,375 of legal aid supplied
- ▶ 24 families and 22 individuals served

In 2025 IWR began new efforts to help our refugee partners stay safe and avoid crisis amid shifting federal immigration policies. We ran legally informed trainings and gave financial aid



Khurshid Hussainy graduated from Cornell in 2025 after resettling in Ithaca with support from IWR and Cornell's Scholars Under Threat program when she fled Afghanistan four years earlier. (Photo by Diana Ayubi)

to secure partners' immigration status going forward. When work permits linked to temporary federal programs were revoked, IWR's Crisis Fund helped families through the months until they received new asylum-based work permits.

"Dear dear friends, I would like to say THANK you for all of your help and support this tough times. Thanks from me, kids, my parents and husband. You gave us a hope that we would survive despite being in tight situation. I just want to tell you that your support saved me and my family in summer. We survived and felt ourselves good. I appreciate you are in my life."

–Recipient of IWR crisis aid, 2025

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS (CONT.)

Global Roots Play School

We welcomed children from nine regions of the world into Global Roots this year, bringing 13 languages to our classroom. Our trauma-trained teaching staff helped the children, aged 18 months to 5 years, feel at home, grow, and navigate new situations in a safe space throughout the school year. Their parents found

- ▶ 19 children enrolled
- ▶ 35 adult caregivers gained time and community

friends and support, as well as time for their needs. IWR's Community Support Specialist provided therapeutic play-based support and social skill building activities for the children, needs assessment and individual counseling for parents, and weekly parent support groups. We also piloted a 3-week camp in July, bringing joy and meeting summer care needs.

Fostering Friendships in the Classroom

At Global Roots, we believe children have the capability to form social bonds across cultures and languages because we observe it every day. In the mornings, one child loves to greet her classmates at the door with a hug. When one of the children came in one morning, she was busy and didn't see. The newly arrived child asked, "Where's my hug?" The usual greeter jumped up with an "Oh, I'm so glad you're here!" and ran over to give her one.

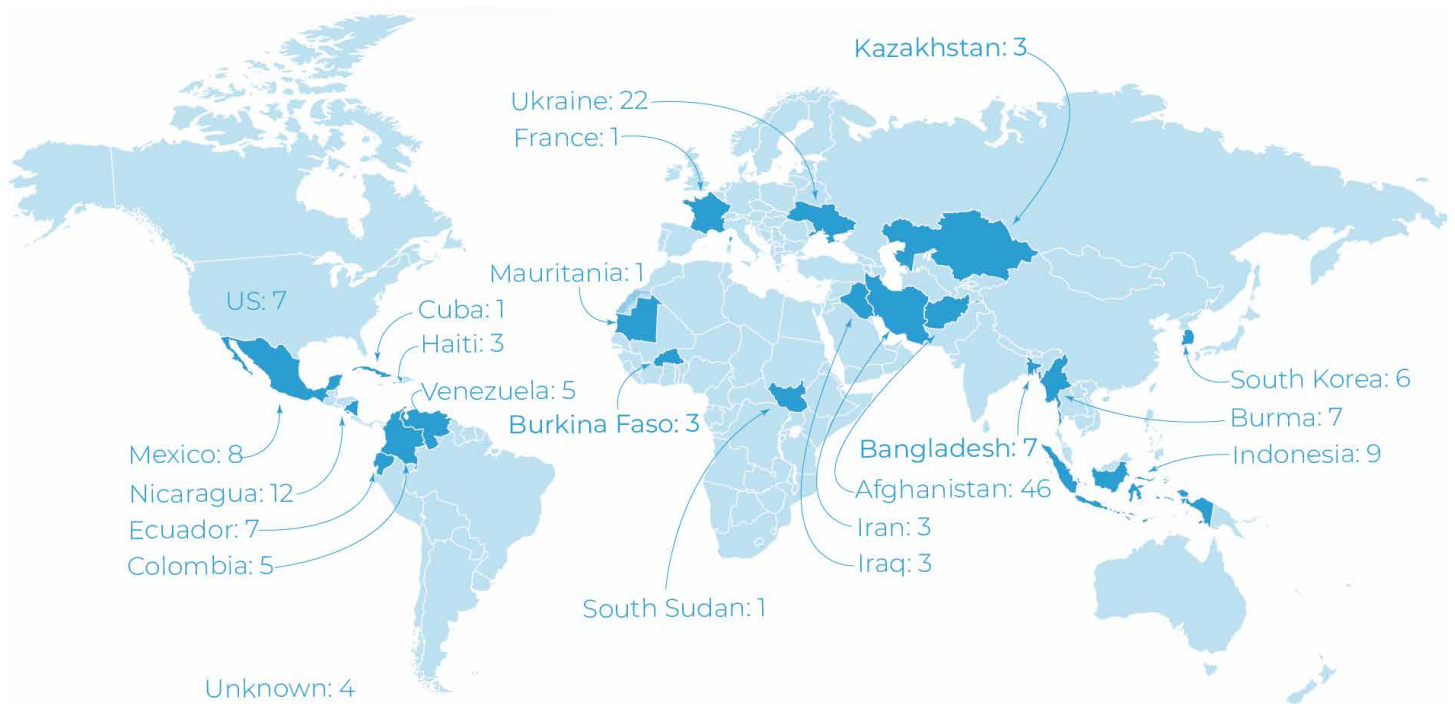


Children play in the classroom at Global Roots Play School. (Photo by Jason Koski)

PEOPLE SERVED

▶ 164 people served (43 families and 22 individuals)

Countries of Origin



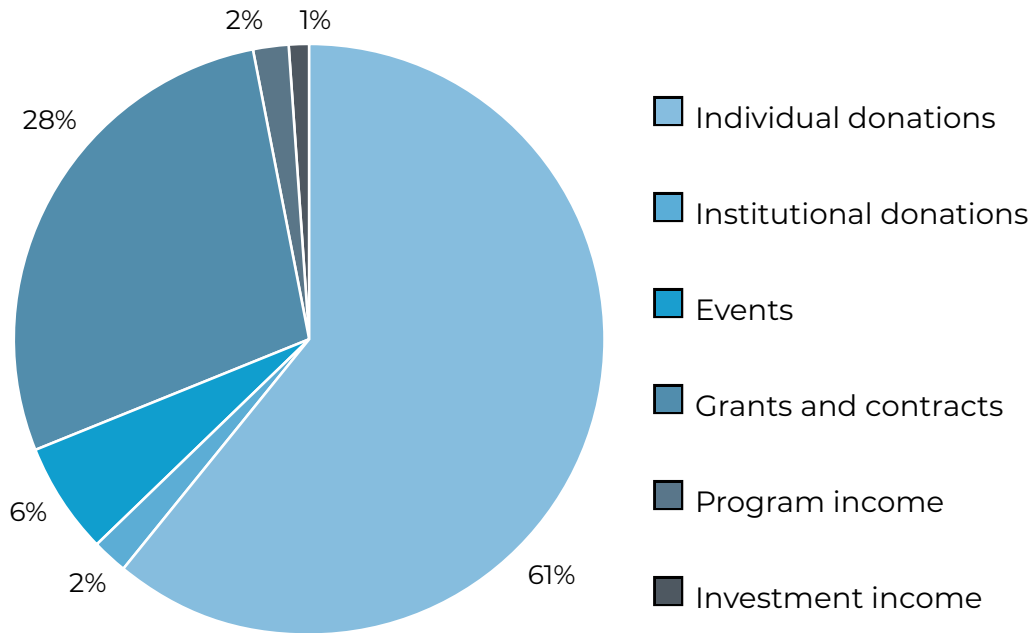
Languages spoken:

- ▶ Arabic
- ▶ Bengali
- ▶ Burmese
- ▶ Dari
- ▶ English
- ▶ French
- ▶ Haitian Creole
- ▶ Indonesian
- ▶ Karen
- ▶ Kazakh
- ▶ Korean
- ▶ Pashto
- ▶ Persian
- ▶ Russian
- ▶ Spanish
- ▶ Ukrainian

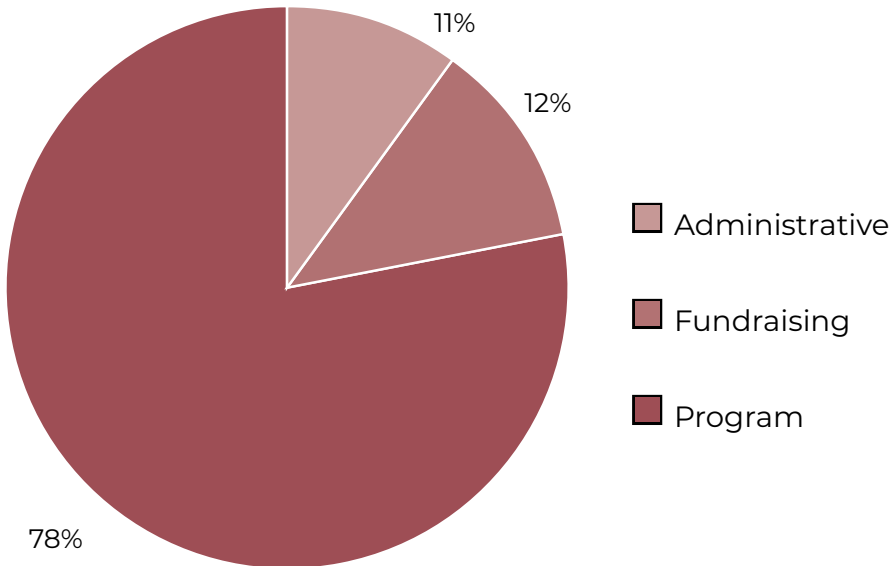
FINANCIAL REPORT

▶ Total revenue: \$430,228
▶ Total expenditure: \$465,918

Revenue by Type



Expenses by Type



OUR COMMUNITY: VOLUNTEERS

IWR has always been dependent on a core volunteer contingent. This year too, volunteers played vital roles in each of our programs and in cross-program efforts.

► 73 active volunteers

Welcome Home volunteers gathered, stored, and distributed donated items and moved families into new apartments. Response Teams helped refugee partners with wide-ranging hurdles as they settled. Volunteers at Global Roots Play School helped care for children in the classroom throughout the school year. IWR volunteers also found housing, gave rides, interpreted, helped with events, designed graphics, wrote about and photographed our work, tabled, and fundraised.



A special touch from a Welcome Home volunteer preparing an apartment for a family to move in. (Photo by Leigh Bacher)

In the spring, we welcomed new volunteers with orientation and team-specific trainings and held a volunteer appreciation event. Thank you to everyone who has given their time, energy, and skills!

Volunteer Spotlight: Susan Tarrow

Since IWR's earliest days, Susan Tarrow has given her time and skills through a variety of voluntary roles as well as making monetary donations, helping people who are experiencing hardship as they resettle



Susan Tarrow (Photo by Gail Cashen)

in the area. Having retired from a career as a linguist at Cornell, she began interpreting for French-speaking refugees and helping families with a range of resettlement hurdles as part of an IWR Response Team.

Finding your feet in a new country where you don't speak the language or know how things work, with few starting resources or networks, can be a long uphill battle. "I'm very proud of the refugees who really make it here in quite a short period of time," Susan reflects.

OUR COMMUNITY: SUPPORTERS

Partners

- ▶ Catholic Charities of Tompkins and Tioga
- ▶ Family and Community Development Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension
- ▶ Finger Lakes ReUse
- ▶ First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca
- ▶ Friendship Donation Network
- ▶ GO Ithaca
- ▶ Ithaca Children's Garden
- ▶ Ithaca Murals
- ▶ Mama Goose & Jillian's Drawers
- ▶ Open Doors English
- ▶ Opus Ithaca School of Music
- ▶ St. Paul's United Methodist Church
- ▶ Tompkins County Public Library
- ▶ Tompkins Learning Partners
- ▶ Trinity Lutheran Church
- ▶ Wide Awake Bakery

Funder Organizations

- ▶ City Federation of Women's Organizations
- ▶ Community Arts Partnership of Tompkins County
- ▶ Community Foundation of Tompkins County
- ▶ Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County
- ▶ J.M. McDonald Foundation Inc
- ▶ Legacy Foundation of Tompkins County
- ▶ Park Foundation
- ▶ Tompkins County Tourism Program
- ▶ United Way of Tompkins County

Fundraisers

- ▶ Barbara Behrmann

- ▶ Bethany Christian Campus Church
- ▶ Bhangra at Cornell
- ▶ Burns & Kristy, Sommers & Manning, and Carlos Gutierrez
- ▶ Cedar Cabin Sangha
- ▶ Church of the Epiphany
- ▶ Cornell Chavurah
- ▶ First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca
- ▶ First Unitarian Society of Ithaca
- ▶ Patrick Lynch and Ronke Ilegbusi
- ▶ Philoptochos Society of St. Catherine's Greek Orthodox
- ▶ POLIS Cornell
- ▶ Presbytery of Geneva Lyons
- ▶ St John's Episcopal Church
- ▶ The Sophie Fund in partnership with RI-SEUP Cornell, Cornell Circle K, Pre-Professional Association Toward Careers in Health – PATCH, and Alpha Phi Omega – Gamma Chapter
- ▶ Young Professionals CNG at Cornell
- ▶ Yvonne Fogarty and Debbie Benzer

Business Sponsors

- ▶ New Delhi Diamonds Restaurant
- ▶ Sunny Days of Ithaca
- ▶ Visions Federal Credit Union
- ▶ Wegmans
- ▶ Wide Awake Bakery

Individual Donors

The generosity of donors of all backgrounds across the community helped carry us through this year! Our gratitude goes out to every one of the 313 individuals and couples who contributed funds to IWR programs.

"What does it mean to use love to create a better world for more people? There are practical, hands-on, affordable things that we all can do to make that a reality."

–Mihal Ronen, IWR supporter

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This year's community picnic marked our 10th anniversary, and the IWR spirit shone bright, despite the burdens of our current political climate. A pre-picnic workshop offered information for refugee partners on navigating the healthcare system. The main event saw a full pavilion enjoying food and music together, joining in lawn games and crafts, and painting ideas for our community mural project.

The event was supported by New Delhi Diamonds Restaurant, Visions Federal Credit Union, Cornell Cooperative Extension, musicians Rick Manning and John Simon, speaker Travis Winter from Cornell Health, and muralist Hugo Medina.

IWR's first community mural project aims to celebrate the newcomers and spirit of welcome that make our community the vibrant place it is. In partnership with Medina and



IWR Executive Director Casey Verderosa spoke on a panel during a screening of a film produced by local documentarian Thomas Hoebbel, entitled "Are We There Yet?" (Photo by JR Clairborne)

Ithaca Murals, we gathered input from local residents with lived experience of displacement, as well as the wider community, for the design of the public artwork on the exterior of 314 W State St, Ithaca.

"I believe the mural is going to be a lot about people coming together. It doesn't matter who they are, their background, where they came from, what's important is they're making a connection," Medina said.

IWR staff increased outreach activities in the community in 2025 to broaden discussion of current challenges for refugees and immigrants among us and share information about ways to help. We took part in event panels and gave talks at school classes, university events, film screenings, religious community gatherings, and professional network groups. We are grateful for these opportunities to contribute to conversations that relate to our mission.



Home-cooked dishes were shared at the community picnic. (Photo by Kristin McCarthy)



**ITHACA
WELCOMES
REFUGEES**

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