

REFUGEE WOMEN RISING



Annual Report 2021-2022

Director's Statement, pg. 3

Year in Review, pg. 4

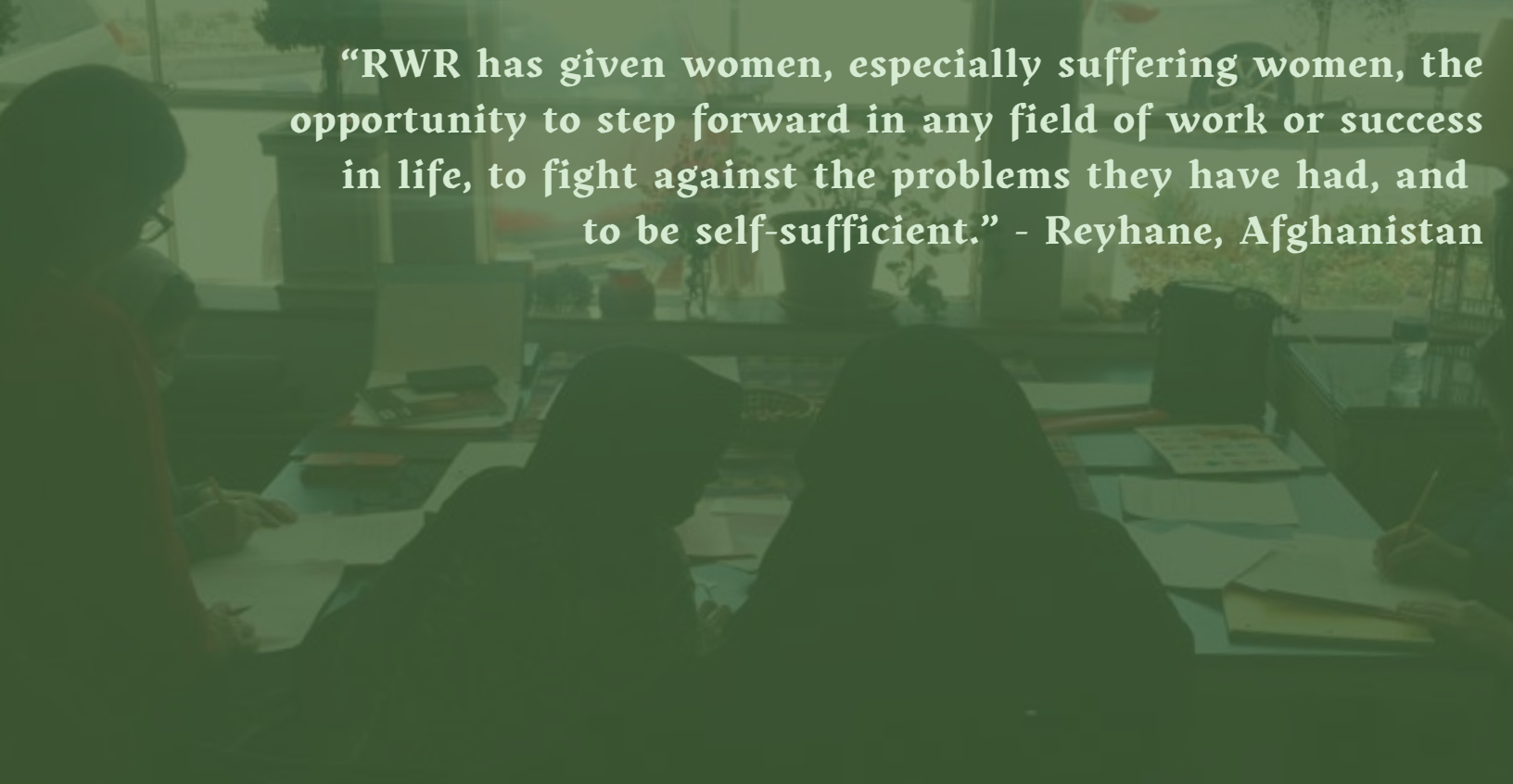
Welcoming & Community, pg. 5-6

Programs, pg. 7-12

In Gratitude, pg. 13-14

Financials, pg. 15

Our Team, pg. 16



“RWR has given women, especially suffering women, the opportunity to step forward in any field of work or success in life, to fight against the problems they have had, and to be self-sufficient.” - Reyhane, Afghanistan

MISSION

Through compassionate, culturally-sensitive programming and relationships, we collaborate with refugee women to further themselves personally & professionally

VISION

Reawaken refugee women's inherent human dignity.

VALUES

**Empowerment ~ Intention
~ Lived Experience ~ Solidarity ~ Welcoming**

Director's Statement

Dear Friends,

The winter solstice is upon us—when darkness seems deep but in actuality daylight slowly increases. It is not unlike the last few years: darkness wildly disrupted the rhythm of life, but the light never fully extinguished. Globally, health suffered, but the human spirit triumphed, especially in Omaha.

For Refugee Women Rising (RWR), it was a time of rebirth, welcoming, and immense growth. We opened our first office (July 2021) at Joslyn Castle during the pandemic, and women came in droves. When women walk in our office door their eyes are alight with courage and hesitant hope; their spirits raging with pride and possibility. We are so lucky...



From our grassroots beginnings to our nationally recognized driver's education program, Refugee Women Rising plays a critical role in *the long welcome*--the holistic integration of refugee women in America as their lives are reawakened. In 2021/2022, we pivoted, cajoled and collaborated to best support and uplift refugee women. This meant intentional programming based on outcomes of multilingual, female-led listening sessions. The darkness didn't squelch RWR's efforts, but strengthened our human spirit.

I invite you to engage your senses as you continue reading. Envision yourself sitting with Bibi Morsal as she prepares to take her first driver's exam; observe Fatima as she writes her name for the first time; savor tea from around the world while cooking alongside Nadia; smell the savory *bakhoor* in our office while participating in a wellness workshop with Beatrice and Kalpana.

The year ahead is radiant with abundant opportunity. With you and for women, we will continue to fully engage the long welcome. In Gratitude & Solidarity,

Pam Font-Gabel

Year in Review



"...at RWR, I feel strong, even though it is sometimes hard.

I have support and can help others because our experiences are similar."

~ Mafuta, Dem. Republic of the Congo

In 2021-2022, Refugee Women Rising collaborated with 431 women from over 19 countries. We held:

- **15 conversational English Classes with cultural orientation**
- **11 formal Tea Times**
- **a scholarship award ceremony for 12 women, with individual awards from \$500 to \$2000, each woman choosing her further educational experiences**
- **six giveaway events for women and their families to shop essential items**
- **three HomeDish events**
- **two Eid potlucks plus a large delivery of curated Eid gifts for Muslim women**
- **two solidarity events with meals, which supported women in finding community and comfort in times of extreme stress**
- **eight art and wellness classes**

Operationally, we formalized our name change from Benson Area Refugee Taskforce to Refugee Women Rising, rebranded ourselves, and got a new logo!

We have come a long way from our grassroots beginnings and are anticipating even greater outreach through our driver's education and leadership-based cultural orientation. To do so, RWR pledges to nurture partnerships with other nonprofits to support self-determined changes in the livelihoods of refugee women.

Welcoming

Refugees and migrants have a high rate of exposure to traumatic events leading to relatively higher prevalence of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders.

~ World Health Organization



RWR serves a diversity of immigrant and refugee women. Our inclusivity celebrates women regardless of their education, homeland, income level, or literacy. In their homelands, women are often marginalized and without opportunities for intellectual, emotional and social growth. Without these imperative life skills, women are at great risk for isolation and depression. To empower women,

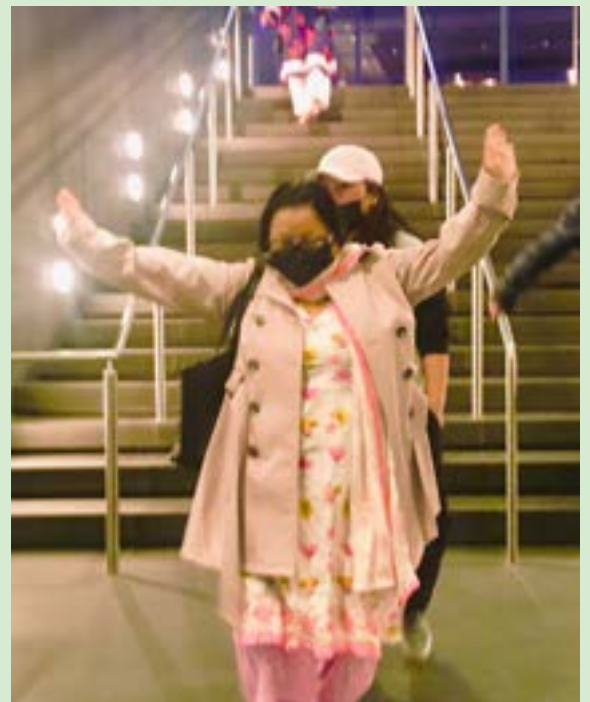
RWR believes in ***the long welcome***, which supports successful integration. Omaha

Performing Arts has been a significant source of social wellness for RWR's clients. Their goodwill encourages women to prioritize their mental well-being, reawakening their inner selves.



Refugee Women Rising welcomes with human dignity and...

- ...intentionality
- ...listening
- ...conversation
- ...positive touch
- ...safe environment
- ...culturally competent hospitality
- ...humor
- ...vulnerability
- ...listening
- ...honoring women's choices



Community

Refugee Women Rising thrives for and with Omaha's diverse community. We foster experiential opportunities that engage physical, mental and emotional wellness, alongside practical and life skills.



World Refugee Day 2022



co-hosting (with refugee leaders) the first East African Women's Party



RWR holds space for women experiencing personal devastation such as ethnic genocides and the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. These private events, with RWR staff and professional therapists, offer nourishment of body, mind and spirit.



Film Streams Community Collaboration



RWR Director Pam, welcoming the Vice President of South Sudan, Madame Rebecca Nyandeng

Driving Education



RWR's driving education program was born out of pure community ask--and we are uniquely suited to provide it. It marries workforce development with holistic wellness. Through empowered peer teaching, women share knowledge, build cultural and life skill competencies and gain stable employment. Driving affords women freedom and benefits the livelihoods of families and community as well.

“I have seen how difficult it can be for women to learn to drive and it is difficult going places on the bus when they have small children; I would like to help them have this skill.”
~ RWR Driving Instructor Bayan, Syria



RWR provides scholarships to certify women to become state-certified driving instructors. When a *student* enrolls in our free program, she receives:

- hours of hands-on instruction through our contracted instructors
- multicultural safety workshops with the Omaha Police and Fire departments, and Safe Kids Nebraska
- AAA workbooks, textbooks and safety multilingual manuals
- interpreters as needed
- the cost of a newly acquired driver's license is included
- AAA car safety kit and a gasoline gift card

Financial support of our program is granted by AAA Auto Club Foundation, AAA NE and The Omaha Community Foundation.

HomeDish



Our in-person HomeDish culinary experience was hit hard during the COVID-19 pandemic, HomeDish dinners evolved to be "to-go" and pivoted to outdoor events in the gardens of Joslyn Castle, where our office is housed. In this way, we were able to celebrate Somalia, Afghanistan, and multicultural Eid events.



Through special tea gatherings, Eid gifts, culinary classes and more, HomeDish changed with the times. In the year ahead, we will bring back our acclaimed dinners, partner to offer women formal culinary training and engage in pop ups events.

RWR Reinvests in Women



We consistently utilize women's talents by including their leadership in our programming. Classes and workshops are taught by women from diverse ethnicities; we patronize immigrant-owned markets; our female interpreters are community-based; we support HomeDish chefs by buying their catered foods for programming.



Tea Time

“Tea Time is so comforting and has helped us get to know each other better...It helps us to respect each other’s opinions and share the culture and languages of our countries together.” - Mariam, Sudan



At each Tea Time, one of RWR’s clients shares her passion or talent with others. Women learn from one another, creating a sense of connectedness. This minimizes isolation as well as fostering resilience. At these events, over 10 different ethnicities can be represented at a single time. Each Tea Time is unique, but always involves specialized tea and global foods. Former Tea Times have included bread baking, knitting, mindfulness, storytelling, art and music (voice and instrumental).

Temple Israel has partnered with RWR, hosting special events and with transportation assistance. Additionally, RWR partners with Omaha Public Library, to help women and their children get library cards, books & attend multilingual story time.





Practical English Class

RWR has developed a class that is practical, can be used in daily interactions, and incorporates cultural orientation. This class was a response to women's ask for more opportunities to learn English. It is led by a former Afghan refugee and supported by assistant teachers, many of whom are former ESL instructors.

Practical English helps women confidentially integrate. We use holistic methodologies to support women at any literacy level whether it is learning their contact information (many learned to write their name for the first time in Latin script!), how to use currency, complete a college application or sign a lease.

Students include women from Venezuela, Burundi, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan.



“I enjoy English class a lot and I feel that I have learned there because the teachers really teach practically without too many grammar rules.

I appreciate the affection and time that RWR dedicates to us.”

~ Zuleyma, Venezuela

Art Workshops

Roughly half of our Tea Times involve the arts, as women have requested more opportunities to gather and network, which positively affects their mental health.

These creative ventures help process emotions and fight anxiety, which are common issues most immigrant women face. At these workshops, RWR highlights the influence of the environment on holistic wellness, while women mutually benefit from each other's talents, facilitating integration of cultural orientation and relationship building.



**"In class, I am not alone.
With other women we
learn together and
can be ourselves."
~ Somia, Sudan**

Former art workshops included drumming, dancing, pottery painting, gardening, journaling, watercolor and acrylic painting, photography, dot mandalas, and the fan-favorite: knitting.

Our Art Workshops would not be possible without our generous partnership with Great Plains Theatre Commons.



Scholarships

Education through self-determination has always been a priority for RWR. We support refugee women to flourish and pursue their aspirations. This past year, we awarded scholarships to women from Sudan, South Sudan, Nepal, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. They will pursue various vocations including real estate agent training, nursing, law school, English language classes, information technology, and driving certification.



“I have my Venezuelan degree in business administration. My greatest motivation is to learn and contribute something for this country...RWR inspires me and makes it possible to study at the university. Completing the intensive English course will give me the opportunity to enter an American university.” - Yohanna, Venezuela



In Gratitude: Our Partners & Funders

RWR's unique and valuable work wouldn't be possible without community support.

The generosity of foundations and individuals alike make our life-changing programming possible. With sincere gratitude to: **Mutual of Omaha,**

The Further Foundation, Weitz Family Foundation, The Sherwood Foundation, Tyson Foods, Omaha Community Foundation: Fund for Omaha & Community Investment Fund, AAA NE and AAA Auto Club Foundation.



Over the past fiscal year, RWR connected with 44 local community groups including:

Benson First Fridays
Bethany Health Christian Services
of Northwest Iowa
Buoyant Family Services
Christ Child Society
Creighton University: Storytelling
Project & Heider College of Business
Eat N Talk Africa
Families in Action
Film Streams
Gifford Park Neighborhood Association
Great Plains Theatre Commons
Hanscom Park United Methodist Church
Hello Neighbor Network
Hera Digital Health
Holy Family Community Center
Joslyn Castle & Gardens
Less the Agency
Lutheran Family Services
Mayor's Office: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
NE Appleseed
Nebraska Aid for Afghan Refugees
SHARE Omaha

New Life Family Alliance
Nonprofit Association of the Midlands
Omaha Performing Arts
Omaha Public Library
Omaha Public Schools
Omaha Refugee Taskforce
Omaha Together One Community
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium
PayPal
Refugee Empowerment Center
Restoring Dignity
Saint Paul UMC ~ Benson
St. Andrew's UMC
St John's Parish
Temple Israel
The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-Day Saints
The Furniture Project
UNMC MUNA Box Project
UNO: Center for Afghan Studies
& Community Engagement Center
Yates Illuminates
Youth For Greater Good

Thank you አመሰግናለሁ mahadsanid ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါသည်
 اشكرك merci धन्यवाद ခອပໃຈ متشكراً



"Some of RWR's best practices are educating refugee women on the social, legal & cultural aspects in the USA. We promote their knowledge and personal skills, embracing their self-confidence."

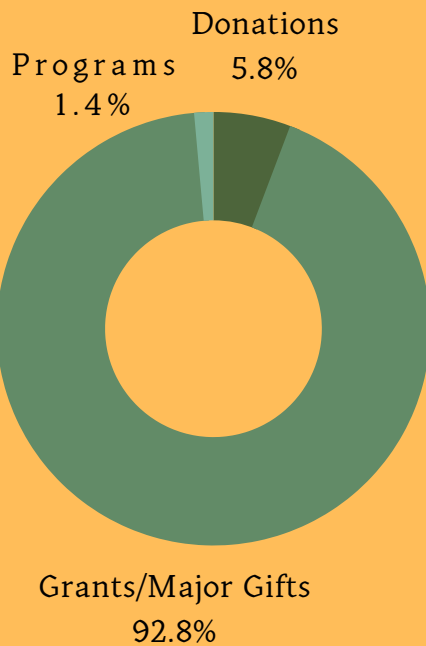
Hadeel Haider RWR Board Member & former Iraqi refugee



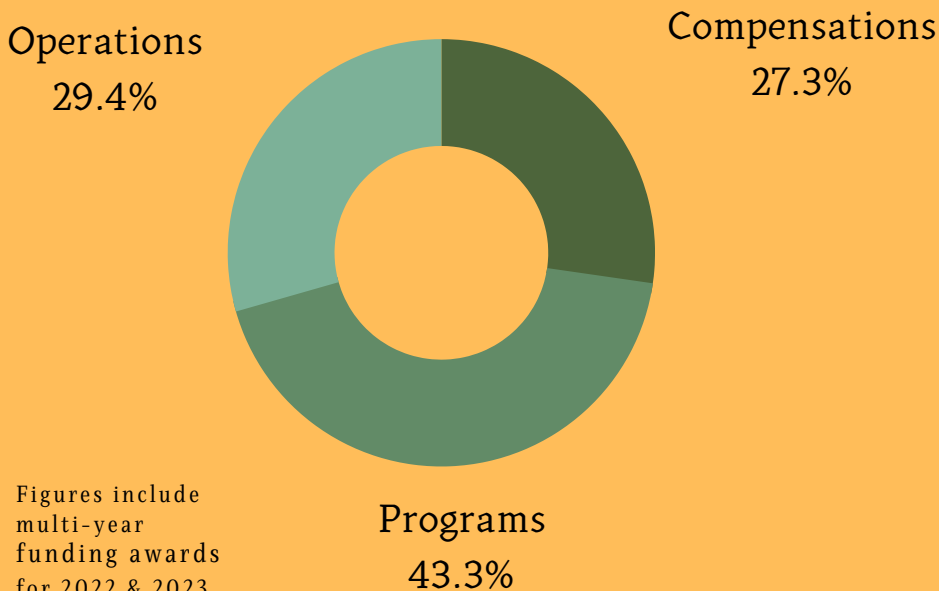
Financials

FY 2022

Revenue \$262,493



Expenses \$147,136



Figures include multi-year funding awards for 2022 & 2023.

Social Media

RWR's Facebook reach was over 1300 unique users (increase by nearly 22% from previous years), and an additional 302 Facebook Page followers,

Instagram was revitalized. In the past year, it had over 800 unique profile visits, and 350 new Instagram followers.

WhatsApp is the preferred social media among our refugee and migrant populations. On this platform, we regularly connect with 200+ refugee and migrant women.



Our Team

Executive Board

Janet Gilcrist, Chair
Jeremy Roose, Vice Chair
Claire O'Kane, Treasurer
Huda Ahmed, Member
Daniela Antonlinez, Member
Betsy Garbacz Rawson, Member
Hadeel Haider, Member
Pam Font-Gabel, Executive Director

Staff

Pam Font-Gabel, Executive Director
Darayu Boltaeva, program consultant
Bayan Koukeh, driving instructor (contractor)
Maryam Amini, driving instructor (contractor)
Nadia Bessembinders (contractor)

HomeDish Committee

Huda Ahmed	Darayu Boltaeva
Mary Carollo	Nadia Bessembinders
Maria Fernandez	Colleen McQuillan Johnson
Amy Rouse	Hannah Young

Cultural Ambassadors

Laila - Bedor - Aisha - Amna - Fatima - Agnes - Alem - Amina - Mazaree - Latifa
Arezo - Mariam - Shazia - Najia - Reyhane - Hadeel - Tamana - Tahera - Nyabuay
Agnes - Neela - Mirza - Gul Shan - Maria - Zulemaya - Marwa - Jamila - Neatrice
Shrijana - Deborah - Salima - Madina - Nyarial - Mehnaz - Mahlet - Bertha
Zeinab - Samira Tahmina - Mahasin - Betty - Tooba - Rheine - Egbal - Evelyn
Sahar - Marzia Faeda - Dina - Yohana - Magda - Emily - Elizabeth - Jawaher
Somia - Fatima Purni Rai - Kalpana - Hafiza - Yebu - Sulekha - Rachele - Hadil
Samjana

Mission

Through compassionate, culturally-sensitive programming and relationships, we collaborate with refugee women to further themselves personally and professionally

REFUGEE
WOMEN
RISING

Follow us on
Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn
@refugeewomenrising
EIN: 83-1039125



Refugee Women Rising
3902 Davenport St.
Omaha, NE 68131
531.232.2167