

2023 Annual Impact

REPORT



**THEIR STORY
IS OUR STORY**

Letter from the Executive Director

Stories.

In a world awash with information, stories are perhaps the most powerful and yet underutilized tool for advocacy. Stories spark connection, foster understanding, and broaden our perspective. With global crises on every side, personal stories remind us that we are not powerless and we can each play a role in helping those displaced by circumstances far outside their control.

In 2023, Their Story Is Our Story (TSOS) began conducting story-gathering trips again - something that we had not been able to do since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We began deliberate collaborations with resettlement agencies and other organizations to highlight the important work they do, the challenges they face, and their impact. And we explored our interconnectedness as we focused on “Connected Communities” that foster strength, resilience, and provide opportunities for individuals and families to thrive.

My shortest explanatory statement for our work is this: “We share stories to move people to act.” For the last several years, TSOS has worked with Georgetown University School of Medicine and NOVA Friends of Refugees to provide a community-based learning program for first-year medical students. Over the last year and a half, those students have worked with us to interview foreign-trained medical professionals to better understand the many barriers that prevent them from practicing medicine when they come to the United States. This effort led to the creation of the Refugee Physician Advocacy Coalition, a group of over 20 nonprofit and medical institutions in the DC, Maryland, and Virginia area.

At the end of 2023, members of this coalition prepared legislation that would permit foreign-trained doctors to obtain a provisional license that can be renewed after two years if an individual is serving in a medically underserved area or can be converted into a full, unrestricted license with the demonstration of certain educational and experiential qualifications. As I write this letter, I am thrilled to say that this legislation passed EVERY committee and both chambers of the Virginia legislature unanimously, without a single “no” vote. In our highly polarized political climate, sometimes it feels like we can never find agreement, but VA HB 995 is evidence that this is not true. This legislation provides a pathway that will benefit doctors, patients, and communities in ways we cannot yet appreciate.

And it all started with a story.

Kristen Smith Dayley

Executive Director

“No one chooses to be a refugee. We all deserve to have a home and to be safe.”

-Hangama Amiri

STORIES

Through storytelling, we navigate the complexities of the world around us, finding the inspiration to drive impactful change.

In 2023 we published 21 new stories. In collaboration with Georgetown Medical School, we conducted interviews with Afghan doctors who fled their homeland. Ensuring anonymity, we captured their narratives, showcasing both their exceptional skills in Afghanistan and the hurdles they encounter reintegrating into the American medical field. These accounts spurred collaborative efforts to streamline pathways for practicing medicine in the US.

Teaming up with By Women for Women, we continued highlighting the experiences of Ukrainian refugees, whether they remained, like Katya, or risked separation to flee, like Seyi's family. Catholic Community Services (CCS) joined forces with us, offering insights into their myriad programs supporting refugees upon arrival in the US. Sara Ingabire shared her journey from foster care to employment with CCS, while Abdu Wali Kakaie utilized their legal services to reunite with his wife.

We also delved into the stories of refugee volunteers like Aws, who, despite a decade of limbo in Turkey, dedicates his time to serving the local LGBTQ refugee community. We also encountered refugees excelling in their new homes, such as Jahan Ara Rafi, an Afghan artist using her craft to depict the struggles of Afghan women. Volunteers also shared their stories, inspiring others with initiatives like the bi-annual refugee baby shower organized by a dedicated team.

Refugee stories continue to inspire empathy, drive advocacy, and foster connections across borders, reminding us of the resilience, courage, and contributions of displaced individuals striving for a better future.



From left to right: Heidi Collins, Sherianne Schow, Mursal Shukoori, and Robin Peterson during the Arizona story gathering trip.

EDUCATION

In 2023, TSOS's education initiatives soared with our comprehensive spring and fall internship programs, welcoming a diverse group of participants ranging from US-based students to international applicants from countries as varied as Ethiopia and Azerbaijan. The addition of refugees broadened the educational experience, infusing it with a wide array of perspectives. Under the new leadership in Fall 2023, the internship director and team skillfully balanced a critical academic approach with the practical, hands-on experience that has been a hallmark of the internship program. Participants engaged deeply with critical readings on narrative pedagogies and refugee emergencies, under the guidance of seasoned professionals and refugees themselves, nurturing a nuanced understanding of global displacement challenges and the role of storytelling in healing and advocacy.

The program was further augmented by the Thought Leadership category, designed to foster in-depth research and advocacy with a broader academic and professional reach. Interns received extensive training in professional software, project management, and essential skills for research, writing, editing, advocacy, and story production. Their efforts culminated in significant contributions, including blog posts, social media content, interview transcriptions, legislative toolkits, and executive summaries curated by interns in each category, demonstrating the impactful nature of these educational pursuits. The Fall 2023 cohort was particularly notable for the willingness of refugee participants to share their migration stories, thereby enriching TSOS's collection of narratives. Alumni of the program were presented with opportunities for ongoing involvement, ranging from volunteer positions to mentorship, with program leaders providing essential support through references and recommendations. This comprehensive approach not only emphasized TSOS's dedication to education as a pivotal element of empathy and support for the refugee cause, but also showcased the profound impact of combining academic rigor with practical application in addressing the complexities of the global refugee crisis.

For the second consecutive year, TSOS presented at the Idaho Conference on Refugees in February 2023. This year we focused on Invisible Barriers to Belonging in policy and law, access to affordable housing, and securing fulfilling and sustaining employment. In April, members of TSOS were invited to present at The College of Wooster in Ohio in an event hosted by the school's English, Digital and Visual Storytelling, Music and Political Science departments.

In partnership with Nova Friends of Refugees, TSOS continued its work with Georgetown University School of Medicine's Community Based Learning program for first-year medical students. Continuing the work that was begun in 2022, TSOS trained students in interviewing techniques and co-led additional interviews with foreign-trained physicians who had been forced to flee their home countries. The information gathered over the course of both years led directly to creation of the Refugee Physician Advocacy Coalition, which works in the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland area to assist refugee physicians in re-entering their medical careers.

TSOS presented at ECDC's 2023 National Conference in August along with other members of the Refugee Physician Advocacy Coalition to discuss their collaborative work with the hope that similar initiatives can be implemented in other states to capture the skills of refugee physicians and help ease the national shortage of medical professionals that the United States is facing.

In addition, TSOS was invited to participate in the first conference held by SHERR (Supporting Higher Education in Refugee Resettlement) in Maryland in October 2023. SHERR is an initiative sponsored by the U.S. State Department and other governmental organizations to look at ways that U.S. colleges and universities can support resettlement and improve newcomers' experiences and outcomes.

ADVOCACY

Throughout the year, TSOS actively engaged in advocacy efforts, collaborating with prominent organizations such as JRS (Jesuit Refugee Services), Veterans for American Ideals, Human Rights First, LIRS (Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service), NPNA (New Partners for New Americans), Church World Service, and We Are All America - Refugee Congress USA. This collaboration led to a total of 21 meetings with US Senators and Congressmen, amplifying voices and advocating for refugee rights at the highest levels of government.

Additionally, TSOS focused on legislative advocacy by creating a comprehensive toolkit, including updates to the Afghan Adjustment Act, the Mental Health Equity and Access Act, the Newcomers Transitional Education Act, and measures for the protection of asylum applicants and working asylum seekers. Notably, TSOS also championed the International Medical Graduate Act, advocating for temporary licensure policies and mentorship for board examinations.

Furthermore, TSOS facilitated leadership training and management of Changemakers chapters across various universities, including the University of Utah, Boise State, Arizona State, Utah Valley University, Brigham Young University, and Utah State University. These chapters played pivotal roles in advocacy efforts, partnering with organizations like RPA (Refugee Physicians' Advocacy), Emerald Project, One Refugee, and Catholic Community Services for Utah World Refugee Day activities and advocacy initiatives.

In line with its commitment to storytelling, TSOS conducted story interview training sessions, engaging over 50 interns and students from institutions such as George Washington University Medical School, Brigham Young University, Utah State University, University of Utah, and Utah Valley University. Furthermore, TSOS organized a story gathering trip to Arizona, collaborating with Arizona State University Changemakers chapters and conducting interviews with advocacy teams such as Jews for Justice, Somali American United Council, and organizers of Baby Showers for Refugees.



***From left to right:** Kort Myers, Elwaad Samatar, and Edman Samatar. Leaders in the Arizona State University Changemakers Campus Chapter.*

In 2023, TSOS also fostered coalition partnerships, particularly with RPA (Refugee Physicians Advocacy), advocating for international medical graduates through professional coaching, board exam mentoring, and policy changes aimed at employment placement and licensure. Through these multifaceted efforts, TSOS continued to champion the integration of refugees, making significant strides in advocacy, storytelling, and community engagement.

INTEGRATION

In 2023, TSOS embarked on a new Community Program in Ohio. TSOS also continued forging partnerships in Washington D.C., particularly with the Georgetown University School of Medicine (GUSOM) Foreign Trained Doctor initiative. We interviewed 10 refugee doctors, fostering collaborative endeavors with the Refugee Physicians Advocacy Coalition. This partnership aims to establish career pathways for refugee physicians. After interviewing refugee doctors and learning the barriers they face in returning to medical careers, TSOS co-founded the Refugee Physicians Advocacy (RPA) Coalition alongside Georgetown University School of Medicine and Nova Friends of Refugees, to expand career pathways for foreign-trained doctors. In partnership with Upwardly Global, World Education Services (WES), Lutheran Social Services National Capital Area (LSSNCA), REACT DC, and other collaborative organizations, RPA works with healthcare institutions and lawmakers to develop relevant re-training programs and changes to state licensure to leverage refugee IMGs' skills to fill existing gaps in healthcare worker industry.

Our involvement also extended to Idaho, where TSOS presented at the Idaho Conference on Refugees, followed by participation in the OneRefugee Conference, focusing on championing refugee students' access to post-secondary education and professional skills development. Volunteer efforts remained integral, with our team in Texas collaborating with Team Brownsville to support immigrants seeking asylum. Similarly, in the UK, our partnership with Refugees in Hotels saw Alice Hearne collecting over 1200 bags of sweets for Eid celebrations for refugee children awaiting housing.

In May 2023, our Arizona Story Gathering Trip facilitated interviews with 20 refugees and volunteers. World Refugee Day in June saw TSOS volunteers participating in events across multiple cities, including Salt Lake City, Utah; Washington D.C.; Boise, Idaho; Phoenix, Arizona; and Kansas City, Missouri. Additionally, TSOS hosted a live broadcast featuring a panel discussion on pertinent refugee issues.

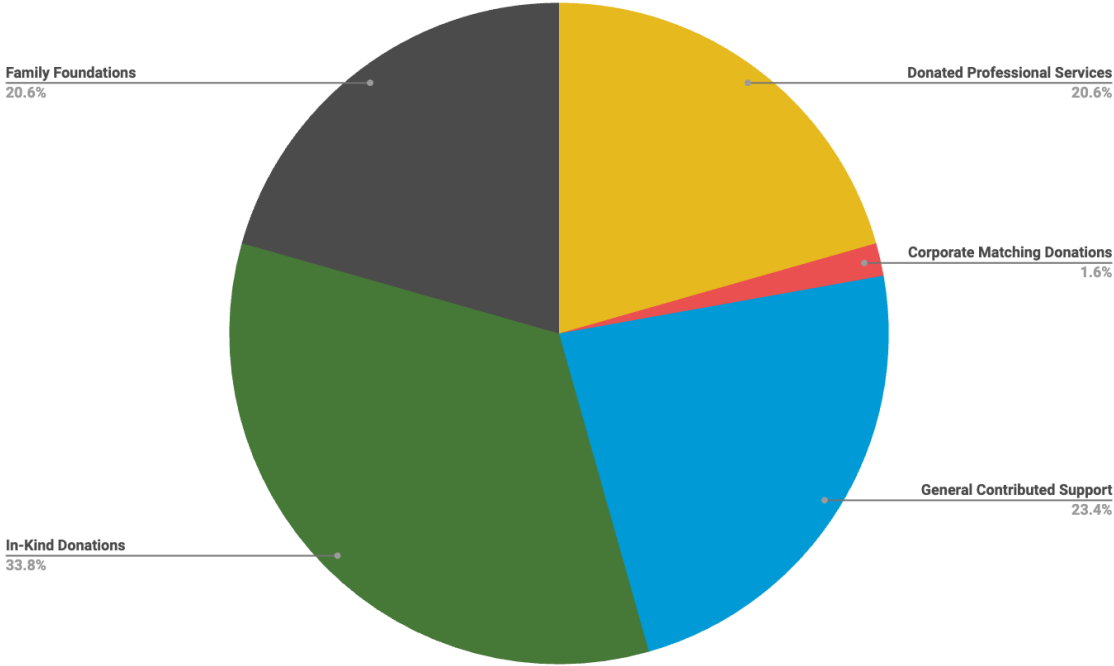


***In the photo:** Their Story is Our Story volunteers, Shurooq Al Jewari (left) and Sherianne Schow (right), at the World Refugee Day event in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.*

Our collaborative efforts persist in fostering connections with forcibly displaced individuals seeking to share their personal journeys. We've come to value the significance of storytelling through blogs, both in spotlighting the work of our partners and in conveying our own perspectives.

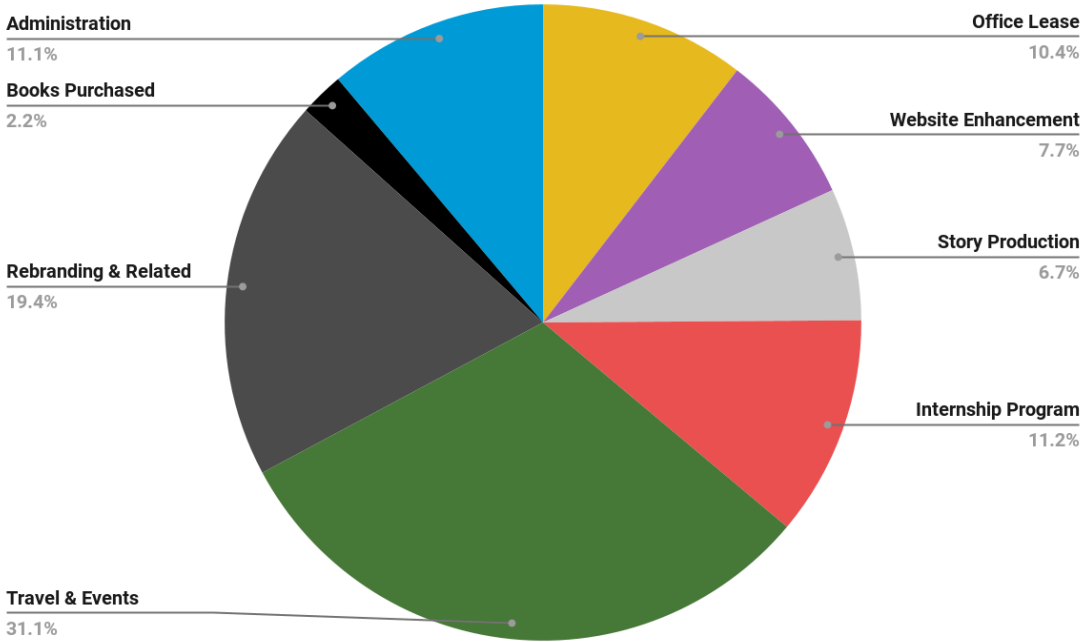
FINANCIALS

2023 REVENUE



TOTAL	\$96,921	
General Contributed Support	\$22,695	23.4%
Family Foundations	\$20,000	20.6%
Corporate Matching Donations	\$1,513	1.6%
In-Kind Donations	\$32,712	33.8%
Donated Professional Services	\$20,000	20.6%

2023 EXPENSES



TOTAL	\$103,466	
Administration	\$11,526	11.1%
Travel & Events	\$32,151	31.1%
Website Enhancement	\$8,000	7.7%
Story Production	\$6,952	6.7%
Internship Program	\$11,600	11.2%
Office Lease	\$10,800	10.4%
Rebranding & Related	\$20,115	19.4%
Books Purchased	\$2,323	2.2%

The Annual Report and Form 990 for this year and previous years can be found on our [website](#).

Looking Forward

As we advance into 2024, our dedication to sharing refugee stories remains at the core of our mission and organizational focus. In January 2024, we will embark to Kansas City for a story gathering trip. This trip will provide us with invaluable insights into the experiences and aspirations of refugees and displaced persons in the region. Through interviews, we will amplify their voices, shedding light on their resilience, struggles, and triumphs.

A key priority for the coming year is to materially reduce the time required for our story production lifecycle. By streamlining processes and leveraging technology, we will enhance our ability to swiftly capture, produce, and share compelling refugee narratives. This efficiency will enable us to reach a wider audience and foster greater understanding and empathy.

We are excited about the potential collaborations with esteemed organizations such as Lifting Hands International (LHI), Refuge Bowling Green, and HIAS. Together, we will amplify the voices of refugees and displaced persons, raising awareness of their experiences and advocating for their rights and dignity on a global scale.

Our commitment to empowering "Changemakers" college campus chapters remains unwavering. These chapters will play a crucial role in amplifying refugee stories within their communities, driving awareness and advocacy efforts that promote inclusivity and compassion.

Every story we share in the year ahead will carry a focused message that highlights the resilience, courage, and humanity of refugees. Through powerful storytelling, we will challenge stereotypes, dispel misconceptions, and foster empathy and solidarity with displaced populations worldwide.

Central to our vision for 2024 is the continued growth and strengthening of our organization. By expanding our reach and impact, we will amplify the voices of refugees, ensuring that their stories are heard and honored.

As we look ahead to the opportunities and challenges that await us in 2024, we do so with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to our mission of sharing refugee stories that inspire empathy, understanding, and action.

