

2025 Annual Impact

REPORT



**THEIR STORY
IS OUR STORY**

Letter from the Executive Director

2025 marked the ten-year anniversary for Their Story Is Our Story (TSOS). As of the end of June 2025, more than **117 million people** have been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations, over **42 million of whom are refugees**. At the end of 2015, when this organization was founded, there were 65.3 million forcibly displaced individuals globally, of whom 21.3 million were refugees.

While this dramatic increase is discouraging, it cannot leave us daunted. If anything, it underscores how important this work is. We acknowledge that **we are fighting an uphill battle**. In today's political climate, refugee stories are often twisted or ignored. They're reduced to statistics, portrayed as national threats, or used to score political points.

The truth - the human, *nuanced* truth - gets lost, and when it does, we lose compassion. **We are here to share their truth anyway.**

At TSOS we don't answer to headlines or algorithms. We are guided by a simple conviction: **every person deserves to be seen, heard, and welcomed.**

2025 was a year of major realignment. On January 20, 2025, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program was indefinitely suspended by Executive Order. Formerly bipartisan programs that provided funding to organizations that helped recently arrived refugees rebuild their lives and legal aid for migrant children were terminated shortly thereafter. Threats of detention and violent tactics by ICE have spread terror through refugee and immigrant communities.

Most of these individuals already carry the weight of what they've left behind: trauma from past persecution, fractured families, homes they'll never return to, professions they loved, friends and relatives they may never see again.

At TSOS, we have always believed **stories are a form of justice**. When someone shares their experience of forced displacement, they claim their voice. And when we amplify that voice - through film, photography, writing, and advocacy - people listen. Hearts soften. Communities stand together. Perceptions shift.

That shift matters. Because when neighbors understand instead of fear...When policymakers see people, not politics...When a teacher knows what her student has survived...Rebuilding life from the ashes becomes *possible*.

Today, **sharing a story is an act of courage**. Join us in standing up for these remarkable individuals who do not have the luxury of giving up. Donate, volunteer, or simply "like, follow and share." It all matters.

Let's stand together. Now more than ever.

Kristen Smith Dayley

STORIES

We believe that personal narrative is one of the most powerful forces for change in the world. When someone shares their story, something shifts. Walls come down. Strangers become neighbors. The abstract becomes human. Our work is built on this belief: that the stories of displaced individuals, told in their own words, have the power to inspire action, build bridges, and move communities toward greater understanding and inclusion.

In 2025, we published 31 stories on our website. This year, that work took on new urgency as the political climate shifted dramatically and fear spread through immigrant and refugee communities across the country. The individuals who agreed to share their stories this year did so knowing the risks. We are honored by their courage and their trust.

Among the stories we shared this year, [Esther's](#) stands apart. A caregiver from Mexico who had built her life in the United States over 13 years, Esther was detained during a routine traffic stop when a police officer discovered she was undocumented. What followed, chains, detention facilities, inadequate food and water, and 40 days of confinement, is a story of survival in the face of a system that treated her as less than human. Esther chose to speak publicly because she promised the women she was detained with that she would not stay silent. "I am not the enemy," she told us. "We are human beings. We are not criminals." Her story is one of the most important we have ever published.



Kyrylo Burlaka and family

Not all of our stories this year emerged from the current moment. [Furaha](#), originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, spent 20 years in a refugee camp in Tanzania before resettling in Kentucky. Her description of camp life, "half prison," stays with you, as does her dream to one day own a house and plan for her children's futures. [Kyrylo Burlaka](#) left war-torn Sumy, Ukraine, after spending six months helping organize supplies and train soldiers in basic first aid before joining his wife and their newborn, a child who has never seen Ukraine, in Utah. [Yuliia Pylypenko](#) watched a bomb destroy her apartment building in Dnipro, then made a promise to herself: if she got out safely, she would continue helping others. Today she lives in Utah, where she works for the Utah Ukrainian Association and advocates for families still navigating the long shadow of war.

We also shared the story of [Shamsa](#), who grew up in Kansas City after her family fled Somalia to Kenya and then to the United States. Home, she told us, is wherever she feels connected and safe, and for her, that means being close to her mother, the woman who made sure none of her children were left behind. [Ram Poudel](#) left Bhutan at age seven and spent nearly two decades in a refugee camp in Nepal, eventually resettling in Kansas City, where he now serves as a Resettlement Manager at Catholic Charities. His son once asked him where home was, and he had no answer. Today, he helps hundreds of families find theirs. And [Deeba Raine](#), an Afghan student who made her way to Western Kentucky University after the fall of her government, carries the weight of a country's worth of girls who were not given the same chance. "Resilience," she writes, "is that hope. It is that light."

Together, these 31 stories span continents and countries, conflict zones and refugee camps, detention facilities and college classrooms. Each one is proof of what becomes possible when someone is given the space to be heard.

"I am not the enemy. We are human beings. We are not criminals."

-[Esther](#), from Mexico

EDUCATION

Education is central to how TSOS grows its impact. By investing in the next generation of advocates, researchers, and storytellers, we ensure that the mission of amplifying refugee and immigrant voices extends far beyond our core team. Our internship program is where that investment takes shape: a place where students and recent graduates from around the world gain hands-on experience in advocacy, story production, and nonprofit leadership, while deepening their understanding of one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of our time.



The Spring 2025 internship ran from March through May, bringing together interns across six tracks: Advocacy, Archive, Education, Nonprofit Management, Research, and Story Production. Advocacy interns supported the Refugee Physicians Advocacy Coalition through research, blog writing, and grant writing. Archive interns wrote reflective descriptions of interviews to help Global Refugee Archive visitors conduct meaningful research and advocacy. Education interns worked on developing K-12 curricula using multidisciplinary approaches to engage students with the realities of the global refugee crisis. Nonprofit Management interns assisted with program coordination, volunteer engagement, and fundraising operations. Research interns drafted briefs, publications, and thought leadership materials, while Story Production interns learned transcription, editing, and story preparation for publication and advocacy use. Fourteen interns successfully completed the Spring 2025 program.

Shamso

The Fall 2025 internship ran eight weeks from October through December across three focus areas. Advocacy interns supported public communications for the Refugee Physicians Advocacy Coalition through policy research, blog writing and editing, and LinkedIn content creation. Story Production interns transcribed and edited interviews, working with TSOS's Associate Director to organize narratives for future projects. A newly introduced Program Development track placed interns directly with the Executive Director to research new programs and potential nonprofit partnerships, and to build plans and templates for proactive storytelling training and mentoring initiatives, work that feeds directly into TSOS's programming vision for 2026. The program concluded with interns presenting final deliverables synthesizing their contributions across all three tracks.

ADVOCACY

Storytelling and advocacy are inseparable at TSOS. The stories we collect do not simply live on a website; they travel into legislative chambers, classrooms, newsrooms, and directly to anyone with a phone and a willingness to listen, challenging the narratives that reduce refugees to statistics or threats. By partnering with nonprofits and academic institutions, we work to ensure that the people behind the headlines have a seat at the table where decisions about their lives are made.

One of the most tangible expressions of that work is the Refugee Physicians Advocacy (RPA) Coalition, a TSOS project dedicated to removing barriers to medical career pathways for international physicians. Many of the physicians in RPA's network fled persecution, conflict, or

violence to rebuild their lives and careers in the United States, only to find that their credentials, training, and experience were not recognized. They face significant barriers to re-entering the profession they trained for, and the termination of federal resettlement support in early 2025 made that path steeper still. RPA exists to dismantle those barriers.

In 2025, the Coalition continued to grow and deepen that work. RPA began the year with 132 international physician clients and closed 2025 with 160, steady growth reflecting the trust that foreign-trained medical professionals are placing in the Coalition's programs and the word spreading across the global medical community.

One of the Coalition's most significant milestones this year was the launch of its peer mentorship program. In the fourth quarter alone, 24 mentoring relationships were initiated between practicing physicians and international physician job seekers and residency applicants, each committing to meet at least twice per month over six months. An additional 11 mentors were paired specifically with candidates preparing for the 2026 residency match cycle. The program also supported mock residency interview sessions, CV and personal statement reviews for eight candidates, and a "Pathways to Residency" series hosted by RPA Co-Founder Dr. Sarah Kureshi. We are deeply grateful to the volunteer physicians who gave their time and expertise: Dr. Natalie Gospodinoff, Dr. Sejal V. Bavishi, Dr. Elise Morris, Dr. Patricia Back, and Dr. Sara Tariq.

The results were tangible: four RPA candidates successfully matched to residencies in the 2025 cycle. Twenty-three more are actively applying for the 2026 cycle with the full support of RPA's mentorship, coaching, and application resources behind them.



Yuliia Pylypenko and family

Professional development expanded substantially in 2025. The RPA Foundational Practice Competencies Task Force co-developed a Medical English and Cultural Competencies Course in partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Global Education Office to support internationally trained physicians transitioning into the U.S. healthcare system. In July, VCU offered the course to its first cohort of six participants, with \$200 stipends provided by the Asian American Center of Frederick, Maryland. The course will be redesigned in a modular format for a broader re-launch in Spring 2026. In May, RPA co-hosted a career pathways event with Upwardly Global and Virginia Career Works at Inova Health for 42 candidates; two were hired and three received interviews. Discovery meetings were also held with Nova Community College's Allied Health workforce development office to explore short-term certification tracks for international medical graduates (IMGs).

On the community and resource-sharing front, RPA's Access and Engagement team activated a series of WhatsApp groups to connect physicians in its network, reaching 122 participants by year's end. Georgetown University School of Medicine's first-year medical students contributed to a resource library supporting professional development for IMGs, and the Georgetown Community Based Learning program is developing educational resources covering topics from United States Medical Licensing Examination preparation to residency pathways and career exploration, to be shared with the network in February 2026.

Legislatively, 2025 was a year of persistent, hard-fought advocacy. RPA representatives attended Virginia Board of Medicine meetings in January, May, September, and October, working to shape the rules governing the state's provisional license for internationally trained physicians, the landmark legislation TSOS helped bring to passage in 2024. When the Board proposed in May to limit the license to those with no more than two years out of practice, a figure that would have excluded nearly everyone in RPA's network, the Coalition organized a sign-on letter with 36 partner organizations and returned to the Board. Through sustained advocacy, RPA pushed the restriction to four years out of practice by September, and continued pressing further. At the October 30 full board meeting, with supporting testimonies from three partner organizations, RPA advocated for a rule mirroring Minnesota law, allowing those who practiced 60 months within 12 years to qualify. The Board moved the rule to allow those practicing 12 months in the preceding seven years, a step forward, though not yet where it needs to be. TSOS and RPA are committed to continuing this advocacy until the rules are finalized. The provisional license is expected to be active in 2027.

The RPA also expanded its media and research presence in 2025. Six blogs were published. Senior Director Brandi Kilmer appeared on The IMG Academy podcast in August. Executive Director Kristen Dayley and Brandi Kilmer were jointly featured on The Refugee Archive podcast in November. Two significant publications are also pending: a policy brief co-authored with Georgetown University titled "Unlocking Virginia's Physician Workforce: How International Medical Graduates and Refugee Physicians Offer Benefits to the Health Care System," and a qualitative research article, "Voices of Resilience," accepted by the Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies (JIRS) and expected to publish in 2026. RPA also hosted a Know Your Rights information session featuring Professor Emily R. Chertoff, providing

physicians in its network with essential legal guidance during an especially precarious time for immigrant communities.

This work is powered entirely by volunteers. Despite applying for three grants in 2025, RPA received no external funding and continues to operate on donated time and expertise alone. The need for resources to help offset re-licensure and re-certification costs, significant financial barriers for international medical graduates, remains urgent.

INTEGRATION



Integration is not a program. It is a practice, one that shows up in every story we tell, every partnership we build, and every volunteer who shows up to do the work. At TSOS, integration happens when the communities we serve and the communities we work within begin to see themselves in each other.

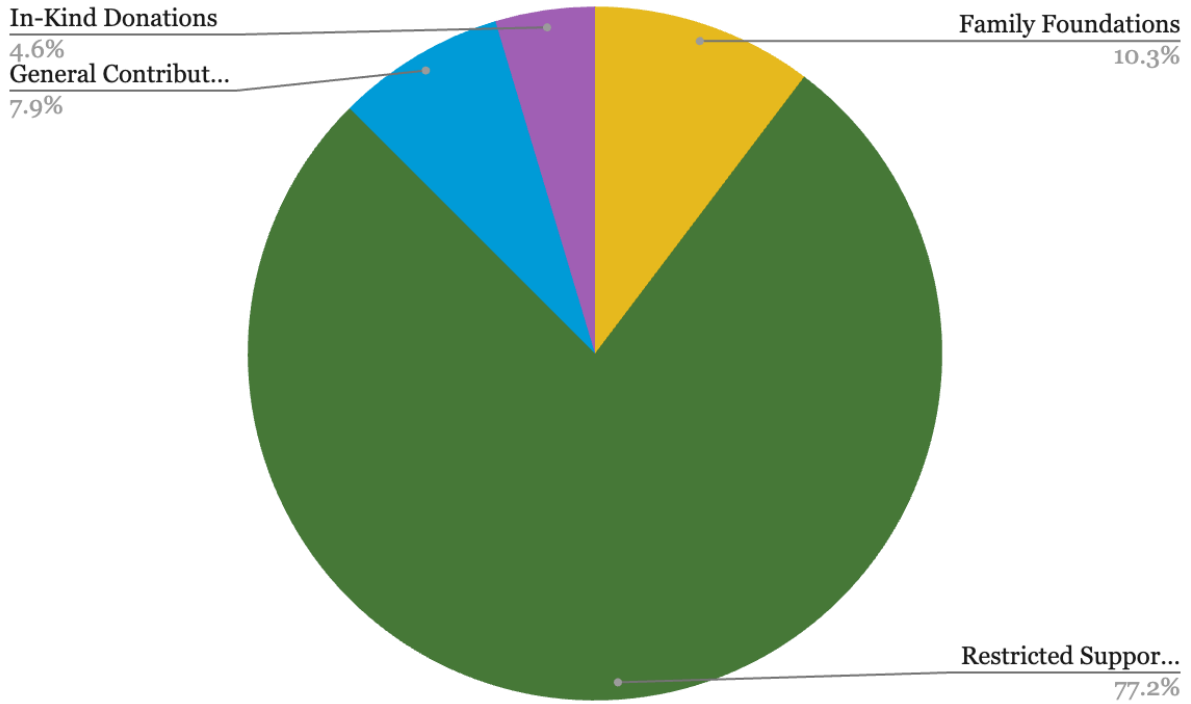
In 2025, our integration efforts looked different than in previous years. Rather than operating structured community programs, our volunteers embedded themselves directly into TSOS's core work, contributing to Story Production, Marketing, and other organizational initiatives. This shift allowed us to deepen the quality and consistency of our output while keeping volunteers meaningfully connected to the mission in ways that matched the urgency of the moment.

Ram Poudel

At the same time, our volunteers continued to cultivate relationships with nonprofit organizations in their local areas, laying the groundwork for future partnerships that will allow TSOS to extend its reach into new communities. These conversations are ongoing, and the connections being built today will shape the collaborative work we are able to do in the years ahead. Integration, for us, has always been a long-term commitment, and one we intend to honor.

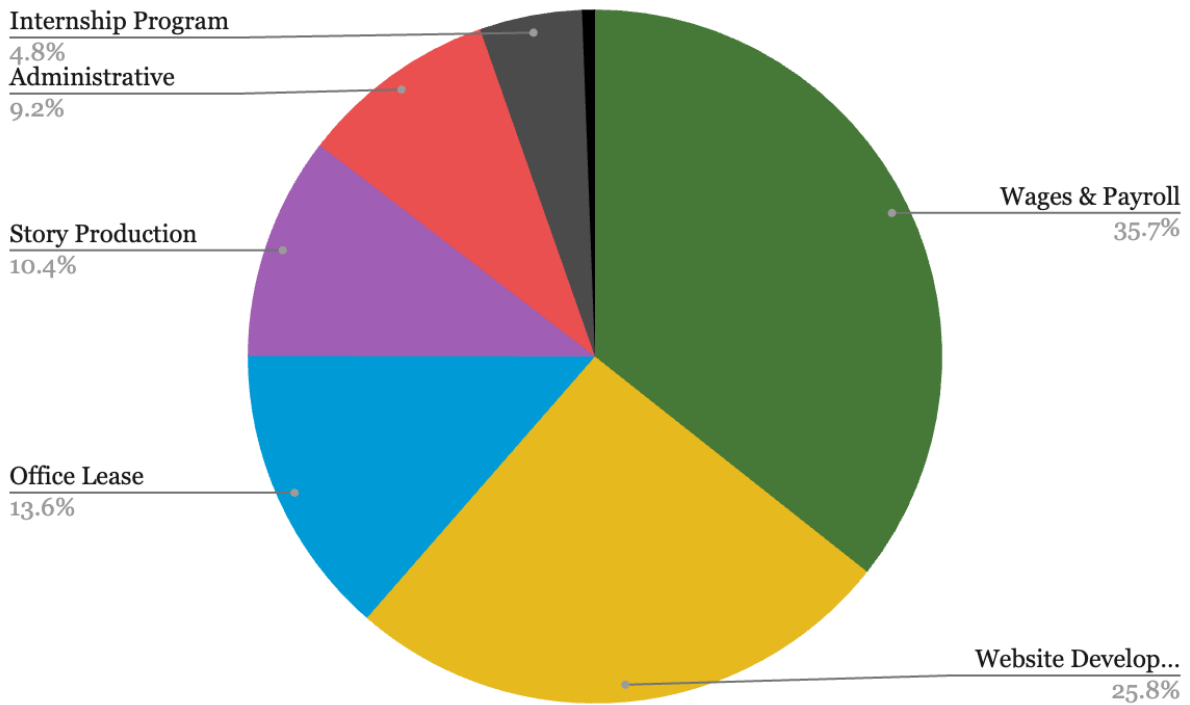
FINANCIALS

2025 REVENUE



TOTAL	\$194,290	
Restricted Support - Story Production	\$150,000	77.20%
Family Foundations	\$20,000	10.29%
General Contributed Support	\$15,290	7.87%
In-Kind Donations	\$9,000	4.63%

2025 EXPENSES



TOTAL	\$83,731	
Wages & Payroll	\$29,856	35.66%
Website Development & Maintenance	\$21,564	25.75%
Office Lease	\$11,400	13.62%
Story Production	\$8,708	10.40%
Administrative	\$7,703	9.20%
Internship Program	\$4,000	4.78%
Other Program Expenses	\$500	0.60%

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

Looking Forward

2025 was TSOS's tenth year, and it was also our most challenging. The political headwinds facing refugee and immigrant communities are real, and they are not abating. But ten years of this work has taught us something important: the stories are stronger than the politics. They always have been.

To meet this moment, TSOS is proud to announce the launch of two new programs in 2026:

StoryShield trains immigrant families to create firsthand, phone-based video stories that document their community contributions and the ties they have built in their new homes. In a climate where deportation can happen without warning, to caregivers on their way to work, to parents dropping children at school, to people who have lived here for decades, StoryShield ensures that no one disappears without their story being known. If someone is detained or deported, their story becomes a tool for raising public awareness, for rallying community support, and for reminding the people around them of exactly who they are and what they mean to those who love them.

StoryRise empowers immigrant young adults and allies to become ongoing advocates through the power of their own lived experience. Participants receive mentorship, storytelling training, and editing support to help them produce content that is impactful, ethical, and authentically their own. Through StoryRise, the next generation of storytellers will build empathy, shift public perception, and carry the mission of TSOS forward in their own voices, reaching audiences and communities we could never reach alone.

Together, StoryShield and StoryRise deepen and extend what TSOS has always believed: that stories are a form of justice. When someone shares the truth of their experience, they reclaim their voice. And when that voice is amplified through film, photography, writing, and advocacy, hearts soften, communities open, and policy begins to shift.

The world needs more spaces where refugees and immigrants are seen as neighbors, contributors, and friends rather than problems to be solved. TSOS will keep building those spaces, one story at a time, for as long as the work is needed. We are ten years in. We are not finished. And we are grateful, beyond words, for everyone who has made this work possible.

