

2021 Annual Impact

REPORT



**THEIR STORY
IS OUR STORY**

Letter from the Executive Director

2021 was a year of important “firsts” for Their Story Is Our Story (TSOS). At the outset of the year, members of TSOS worked with Georgetown Medical School and George Mason University to conduct a community-based learning program for first-year medical students focusing on the needs of refugees within the American medical system. In June we celebrated the opening of the Gamar Refuge Resources Center in Midvale, Utah, where TSOS has an office and conference space. Our community program liaisons dealt with the ongoing effects of the pandemic by conducting online interviews and organizing and participating in virtual events around the globe. That virtual work made it all the more rewarding to gather at Brigham Young University in October where we conducted our first two-day collegiate symposia, *Displacement Today*, and officially launched the Global Refugee Archive, where TSOS stories and other resources will be permanently housed and made available to the public. Internally we made a number of changes to bring additional strength and focus to our story production work, our social media content, and our advocacy efforts.

The year brought heartache too. On a personal level, the TSOS family was devastated when serious health challenges forced Sarah Wood to step down as our Executive Director, a role that I assumed in May 2021 knowing that I had large shoes to fill. On a global level, we are still haunted by images of the United States’ chaotic exit from Afghanistan and the knowledge that many of our allies who face great danger under Taliban rule are still there, hoping they too will be evacuated. Many of our volunteers have been and are personally involved in resettlement efforts for Afghan refugees, whether at interim vetting centers in other countries, addressing needs at army bases hastily converted into shelters for evacuated Afghans, or helping families get settled and acclimated to new homes in communities throughout the United States.

As of the end of 2020, there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. With the Afghan crisis and the unfolding war in Ukraine, these numbers have only grown larger. More than ever, we need individuals who are willing to educate and advocate on behalf of refugees and pave the way for integration in welcoming communities. At TSOS, we do this “One Story at a Time,” because we know that each number is an individual with their own hopes and dreams.

We’re happy to share the highlights of our year through our core pillars of Advocacy, Education, and Integration. There is a role for everyone in the work of changing the perception and reception of refugees worldwide. Thank you for being a part of our story!

Kristen Smith Dayley

Executive Director

Advocacy

The following are highlights from advocacy work in three regions conducted by TSOS volunteers in 2021. Additionally, volunteers had calls and meetings with 45 United States Senators and Representatives regarding the facilitated citizenship rules for newcomers. In this effort, TSOS partnered with We Are All America, Refugee Congress USA (RCUSA), and New Partners for New Americans (NPNA).

Montana

In March 2021, TSOS volunteers- in coordination with Missoula International Rescue Committee and Mormon Women for Ethical Government- advocated against the state legislature's rejection of federal funding earmarked for refugee resettlement. Letters were sent to 126 state senators which included the TSOS story of Mayor Wilmot Collins, who also personally testified before Montana's Budget and Appropriations Committee. Two OpEds were published in Billings and Bozeman newspapers stating that the legislature's decision would harm current resettlement efforts and future resettlement needs. When the Montana Legislature still rejected the funding, several Veterans joined the effort to advocate specifically for Special Immigration Visa recipients from the Afghan war, and agreed to sign onto a bipartisan amendment to the budget. This led to the refugee resettlement funding being reinstated by the Appropriations Committee with a vote of 12-6.

Phoenix

An ongoing advocacy project is in process in Phoenix, where TSOS is working with Lifting Hands International (LHI) on transitional housing proposals that would provide housing for area newcomers. The proposed plan uses COVID relief funding to provide the housing, with LHI overseeing management of the facility. TSOS has collected stories specifically about local housing needs to best advocate for the plan, which would provide better organized housing for refugees.



Maddie and Wilmot Collins (Mayor of Helena) came to Montana as Liberian refugees.

Advocacy (cont.)

Utah

During World Refugee Day (WRD) in June 2021, TSOS representatives spoke to several state legislators as well as corporate advocates in the Utah area. TSOS provided 60 minutes of virtual storytelling for the State of Utah Government Workforce Services virtual WRD week of programming, and staffed over 30 volunteers at the TSOS WRD event in Salt Lake City. At this event, TSOS ran three large tents and several smaller tents that impacted hundreds of attendees trying to learn more about advocacy for refugees.

A connection between Miss Utah Sasha Sloane and Utah Community Program Coordinator Shurooq AlJewari was formed at the WRD event and led to an ongoing working relationship in refugee advocacy. Sasha Sloane made the top 10 in the Miss American pageant and talked about TSOS at the nationally televised event. The two created a presentation for high school students to encourage young advocates who are ready to stand up as allies and advocate for newcomers.

As part of the two-day “Displacement Today” symposium that TSOS hosted by Brigham Young University’s Kennedy Center for International Studies and the Harold B. Lee Library, TSOS launched its Global Refugee Archive, and offered students and community members opportunities to learn and discuss issues around forced displacement through multiple presentations by scholars, artists, educators, attorneys and humanitarians, as well as roundtable discussions and question and answer sessions. TSOS leaders introduced our curriculum to teachers attending the Model UN conference at Brigham Young University and spoke in classes to help students understand the refugee crisis and how to become advocates for refugees and newcomers. Two of our directors also published a paper entitled “Their Story Is Our Story Because We Were Strangers: The Relevance of Exodus 22:21 and Leviticus 19:33-34 in Refugee Awareness Work,” which was presented at the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium.



On the left: Tours given with Shurooq AlJewari for Corporate Advocates and Utah State Representatives at the Gemar Refugee Resource Center. *On the middle and right:* Sasha Sloane and Shurooq AlJewari – preparing their classroom presentations on becoming allies and advocates for newcomers.

Education

In 2021, TSOS hosted 10 new interns as part of our internship program: 6 Podcast interns and 4 Archive interns. Interns receive training in a professional software suite, mentorship in project management, and hands-on experience in writing, editing, and story production. 95% of interns reported an increased knowledge of a particular software at the conclusion of their internship. 90% of our Archive team is staffed by past interns. To date, TSOS has had 50 individuals complete the internships, and 42% of our interns have a refugee background.

Integration

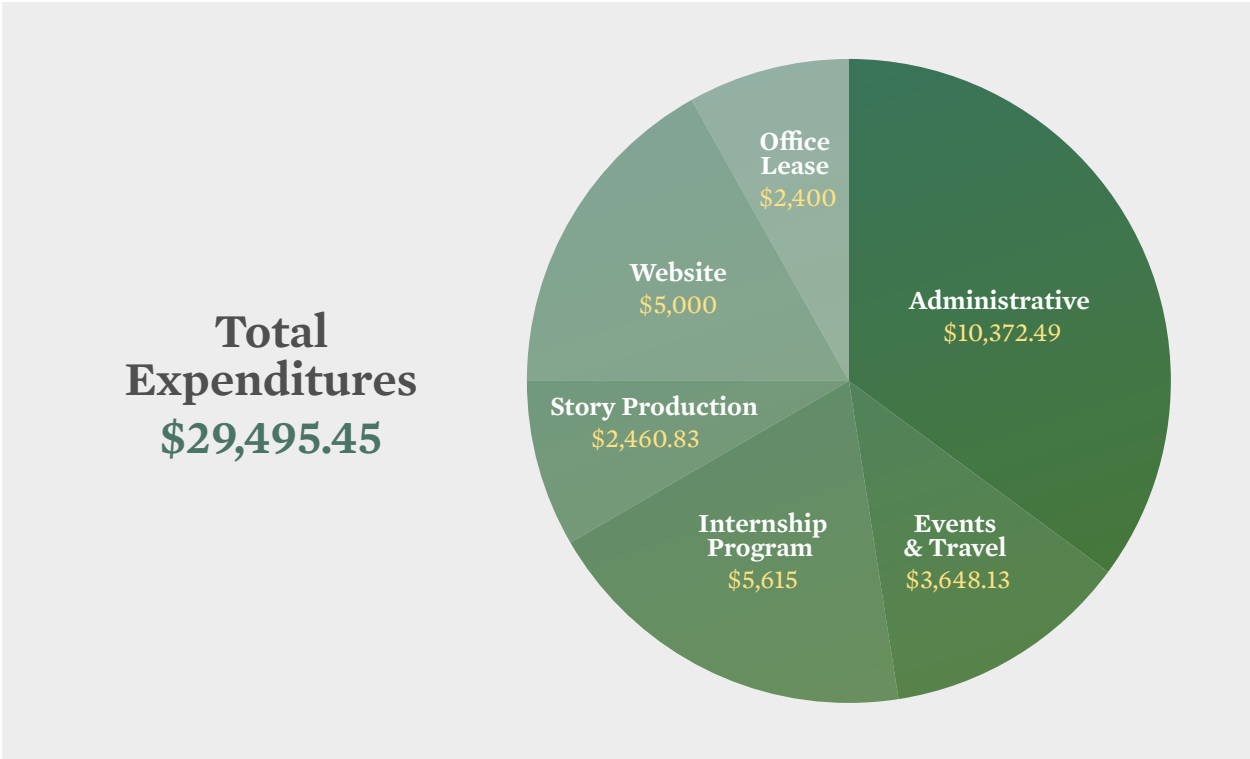
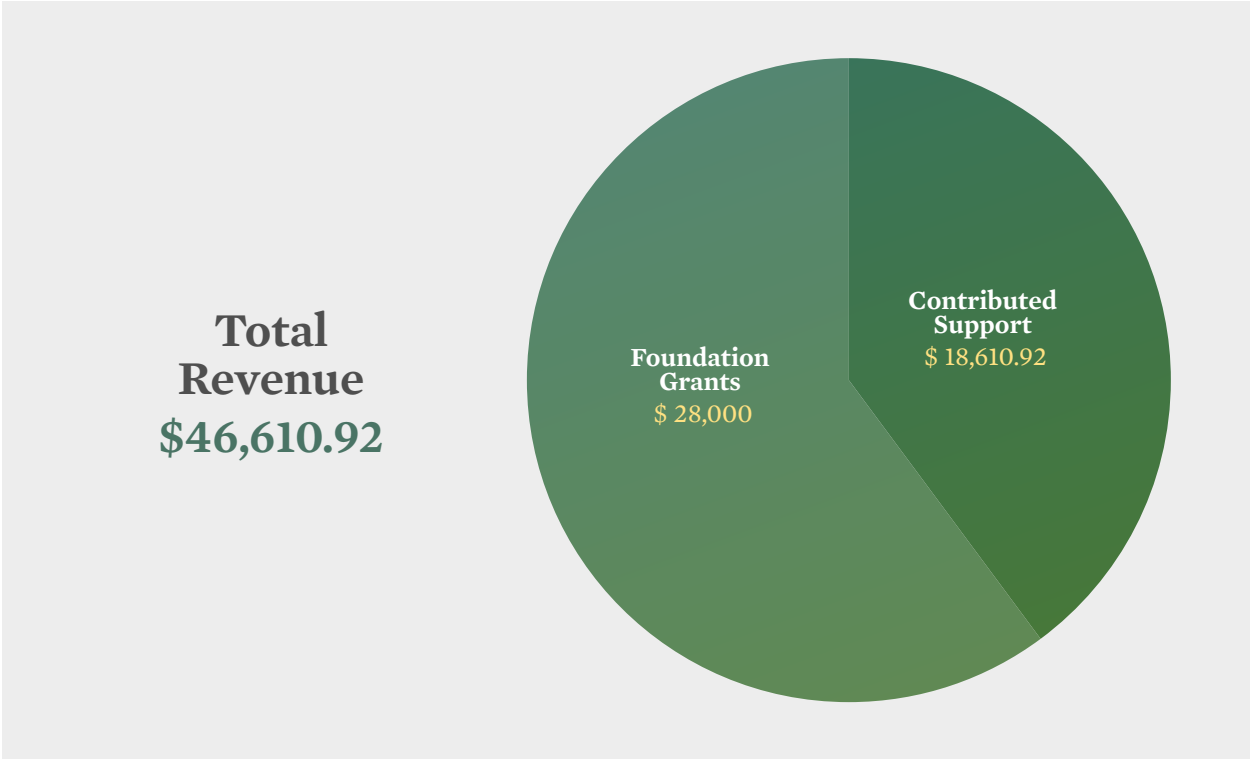
Through engaging in support of refugee integration in local communities, Community Program Coordinator (CPC) teams build networks that provide opportunities for collecting and sharing stories to educate, advocate, and actuate integration. Our volunteers are active in their own communities in welcoming and supporting displaced populations. In 2021, TSOS added Community Program teams in California and Utah, each led by former refugees, bringing our total to 20 CPC locations. A new CPC was also named in Italy, formerly a refugee from Nigeria.

Our Community Programs teams participated in World Refugee Day events in Arizona, Georgia, Kansas City, and Utah. Our Europe teams hosted their own virtual World Refugee Day event. The Story of Our Journey was featured live in Utah and virtually in Washington D.C. in connection with WRD. Community Program relationships resulted in 11 first-hand refugee stories, the Diaries of Afghan Women series, and a collaborative project with Georgetown University School of Medicine, NoVA Friends of Refugees, and Catholic Charities to help newcomers understand how to visit the pharmacy in the United States.



*Creating “Welcome Rocks” at
World Refugee Day*

Financials



Looking Forward

As we move forward into 2022, TSOS will be focused on becoming a self-sustaining non-profit organization. We will continue building a deep and rich repository of stories and other resources, and expand our audience through compelling media and presentations. By engaging more people in this important dialogue we will create fellow refugee advocates as we work for better and more welcoming immigration policies.

Our team will be creating tool kits and an index of advocacy resources on various policy subjects. Additionally, we will attend conferences, share stories and white papers, engage the media, and work with corporate stakeholders to advocate for refugee-friendly policies.

For education, we look forward to an exciting partnership with Instructure, which will allow more educators access to our K-12 curriculum.

In order to improve integration, we will expand the reach of our CPCs through social media training and personal web pages, allowing them to create blog posts, video diaries, and provide relevant local updates in order to better engage with their communities.

As we make changes and improvements to internal processes, our aim is to provide a strong foundation for these main pillars of our work, keeping refugee voices at the center of everything we do.

