

2019 Annual Report



Making Kentucky
Home for Refugees



Mission

Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Inc. (KRM), a non-profit organization, is dedicated to providing resettlement services to refugees through faith- and agency-based co-sponsorship in order to promote self-sufficiency and successful integration into our community. KRM is committed to offering access to community resources and opportunities and to promoting awareness of diversity for the benefit of the whole community.

Vision

To compassionately welcome and serve the world's displaced people. To encourage the hope that lives within each human being by providing an atmosphere of hospitality, responsiveness, mutual respect, trust and tolerance. To be known for our reliability, resourcefulness, partnerships and comprehensive services.

Cover photo by Megan Resch

KRM Leadership

John A. Koehlinger, *Executive Director*
Mary Cobb, *Lexington Office Director*

Program Leaders

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Dragana Zaimovic, *Employment Case Manager*

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Photo by Gary Guthrie

Ongoing Service

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Despite tightening immigration restrictions, 2019 was a year of wide-ranging service for KRM. U.S. refugee admissions were capped at a record-low 30,000, with only a miniscule number of refugees from Muslim-majority countries being resettled. The following profile of Shaban and his family, from Syria, shows how this humanitarian retreat also deprives our country of the talents and gratitude for American freedoms that refugees bring with them. Embraced by Danville, Kentucky, Shaban is ever intent to give back to the community who welcomed him and his family.

Nevertheless, 2019 saw Kentucky rise to 6th among states in refugee arrivals. This was due to Louisville and Lexington's rank as major hubs for refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the country of origin for the largest number of refugees resettled in the U.S. in recent years. KRM resettled 641 refugees in 2019, an increase of 236 over 2018. Further, KRM assisted over 300 refugees (mostly Congolese) previously resettled in other states, who relocated to Louisville and Lexington. The conflicts in Congo and the rest of the Great Lakes Region of Africa have wrought violence and displacement impacting millions of people. Serving families from this region of Africa, including the large number of children who have survived adverse experiences, drew on our staff's in-depth experience providing trauma informed care. But amid the daily coping and adjustment struggles, some clients achieve remarkable success, as you will see in the family story of Aimee Ninahaza from Burundi,

who was a valedictorian at Jeffersontown High School and now attends Berea College.

The year 2019 saw more restrictions on asylum due process rights. This produced arbitrary and harsh treatment of families at our Southwestern border, stranding some in unsafe conditions in Mexico, while growing numbers were placed in U.S. detention facilities. Many Cubans joined Central Americans in seeking a better life in the United States. In 2019, over 400 Cubans were resettled through KRM Louisville after being released from detention. While border policy sought to preempt asylum claims, KRM's six immigration attorneys prevailed upon immigration judges to grant asylum protection under our domestic law to persecution victims from all over the world. This report shares the story of Josel Ivan and Jenny Lind, targets of political persecution in Venezuela.

Under our first Victims of Crime Act grant, KRM Louisville and Lexington each added a Victim's Advocate to support immigrant victims of crime. And 2019 saw 135 Kentucky businesses hire 605 refugees through KRM. Our volunteers maintained high levels of engagement, with faith-based and other organizational co-sponsorships of newly-arrived families remaining a notable feature, as in each year of KRM's 30-year history. All in all, 2019 reaffirmed the ongoing humanitarian need for KRM's work. We thank you for your response, as a KRM partner, to ensure that we can continue to meet that need.

John A. Koehlinger
Executive Director

Story Spotlight

MEET SHABAN

A man in a red jacket stands under the sloped archway of the KRM Lexington office. It's late in the day, most of the staff members have left for the evening, and those who hang around after hours work in the back part of the building. The man has brought a friend. They speak together in muted tones and wait patiently for someone to see that they've come.

"Hi?" one says. "My name is Shaban. I want to donate my car."

I can recall this story because it happened that I was the one who heard him call from the lobby. I saw him standing with his friend, eager to make the donation.

"This car was so special to me," he says, speaking English developed entirely during his three years in Kentucky. "It makes everything easier."

When Shaban, his wife Basema, and their two small children arrived in Danville, Kentucky, after fleeing the war in Syria, their co-sponsors organized an elaborate volunteer-led rideshare system. For months, community members provided transportation to English classes, grocery stores, and medical appointments. It became clear that driver's licenses and car keys for Basema and Shaban would be more sustainable. A sturdy used sedan was donated, and the family relied on it for three years.

The newly-gained independence allowed Shaban the opportunity to continue the profession he started in Syria and accept his dream job at Bob Allen Body shop. He works there still.

"I'm lucky," he shrugs, setting the keys to a silver Nissan on the countertop between us. "I make good money and buy my own cars. Now I give."

A few months later, I call the family. Over the phone, they sound distant. They put me on speaker so I can hear the children, whose laughter is joyful and wild.

"Those are my kids," Shaban says of his son Khaled and daughter Lian. "They're crazy. All day they're like this."

Shaban's voice becomes dreamy as he describes delicately-preserved memories of walking down the steps at Bluegrass Airport and into the sea of people congregated there. A consortium of Danville groups and individuals had approached KRM a few months earlier, hoping to be involved in the resettlement process for Syrian families. When arrival night came, the town showed up. Basema and Shaban could've been sent anywhere. They had no connections in America, no say in their assignment to Kentucky. As they reflect the improbable luck of coming to Danville, their gratitude is palpable.

Shaban's love for the community is evident in every moment he recalls the volunteers who showed his family kindness, taught them English, and took the children trick or treating for their first Halloween. It is this kindness that Shaban references when he speaks of his decision to give back.

"People were so good to us," he said. "I told Mary, [KRM Lexington Director,] when I can, I will give it so it can go to someone who really deserves it."

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Photo by Emily Warren

Story Spotlight, continued

The family’s earliest memories in Kentucky are mostly happy, but Shaban’s voice grows quiet as he recalls an incident from their first month in the country.

“The first house was really bad,” he says. “Not the house, the neighbors. I don’t know if this word is good—but, racist.”

Someone in the neighborhood, after seeing Basema in her hijab, fabricated a story that Shaban was hurting his wife. Police went to the apartment on three different occasions, each time they knocked in the night when the family was sleeping, resurrecting memories of the persecution they had fled.

“In Syria, everyone is afraid of police,” Shaban says. “We felt scared... like we can’t stay there.”

After trouble with the neighbor, a Danville doctor offered to let the family stay in a duplex he owned close to the body shop. By the end of the year, Shaban and Basema had saved enough money to buy the duplex. Homeowners now, they dream of becoming citizens; like all refugees, they will be eligible to apply for citizenship after five years in the U.S.

After our conversation, Shaban invites me to his home to see the family. It’s the time of COVID, so we decide to meet briefly and at a distance. I bring the cloth facemasks they’ve requested from the agency. Driving through Danville, it’s easy to fall under the allure of the small town. The streets are quiet and wide. Magnolia trees stretch over the wrought iron gates that hold them back from the road, their blossoms the size of boxing gloves. The family is waiting on the lawn. Beside them is the

*“We love this small town,” Shaban says of Danville.
“I can’t forget this town. They make us family.”*

Officers concluded the neighbor’s reports to be unfounded.

It would’ve been understandable for the family to consider leaving Danville, perhaps to move to a larger city with a larger Syrian community. Shaban can’t stomach the thought.

“We love this small town,” he says. “Everywhere you have good people and bad people. I can’t forget this town. They make us family.”

red brick house positioned against a cavernous sky. “I remember your face,” Shaban laughs. “I didn’t recognize you on the phone.”

Basema and the children wave. Khaled meanders shyly between his parents. His sister holds clover flowers she’s collected from the yard.

“Soon we will be five,” Basema whispers, her eyes glinting in the sun. “We have a baby coming in July. Another girl. She will be a citizen.”



Photo by Derek Feldman

Welcoming New Kentuckians



1,389

People welcomed

36%

Children under age 18

961

People resettled as refugees, asylees, or special immigrant visa holders

364

People resettled through Cuban entrant or parolee program

KRM VOLUNTEERS

We have many volunteers who help make the work we do at Kentucky Refugee Ministries possible.



Photo by Nina Greipel



23

Co-sponsor teams



444

Active volunteers

18,060

Volunteer hours

Community Co-Sponsors Show Welcome

Thank you to the following co-sponsor partners who welcomed families that arrived in fiscal year 2019 (October 1, 2018 through September 30, 2019)

Louisville Metro Area:

- Second Presbyterian Church
- Beargrass Christian
- Calvary Episcopal Church
- Christ Church United Methodist
- Crescent Hill Baptist
- Deer Park Baptist Church
- Grace Hope Presbyterian Church
- Grace Immanuel United Church of Christ
- Highland Presbyterian
- Louisville First Seventh Day Adventist
- Middletown Christian
- Middletown Seventh Day Adventist
- Northeast Christian
- Springdale Presbyterian
- St. John Lutheran Church
- St. Stephen United Church of Christ
- St. Thomas Episcopal

Lexington Metro Area:

- Southern Heights Neighborhood Group
- Ohavay Zion
- Sociologists for Women in Society - Bluegrass
- KRM Lexington Advisory Board
- Crestwood Christian Church
- KIVU Association

Interpreter Services:
Increasing Language Access



271

Interpreters available
for hire through KRM

75

Languages
available

150

Interpreter customers/
business partners



Photo by Megan Resch

Immigration Proceedings and the Critical Need for Attorneys:

“Immigration proceedings are held in the immigration court, which is under the Department of Justice. It’s not part of the judiciary, it’s under the executive branch. It functions somewhat similar to a criminal court. The defendant in criminal court would be like the respondent in immigration court, and they’re charged with something. They’re charged with being removable from the United States, and they have a chance to put forward defenses. There’ll be a judge who works for the Department of Justice and there’ll be a prosecutor or an attorney from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) who acts as a prosecutor.

The difference is that they’re not entitled to an attorney at the government’s expense, so while they have a right to be represented, if they cannot afford an attorney one will not be provided for

them. It is extremely difficult to win an asylum case or any type of immigration benefit within immigration court without an immigration attorney. It’s very technical. Even if you do believe that you’re going to be killed or persecuted in your home country, there are so many elements of the law you have to meet.

It’s particularly unfair for children. I’ve represented children as young as 18 months in deportation proceedings, and even those clients are expected to represent themselves if they do not have an attorney. There can be no due process and there’s no possibility of a fair trial when you have an experienced ICE attorney whose goal it is to deport you, and you’re a child who is unrepresented.”

– Sarah Mills, senior immigration attorney, KRM Louisville

Immigration Legal Services



- 65 Humanitarian (e.g., asylum, unaccompanied minors, Deferred Action for Child Arrivals)
- 153 Family reunifications
- 665 Citizenship

- 941 Other (e.g., consultations or employment documents)
- 338 Permanent residency

2,162 Total immigration legal services

Story Spotlight

MEET JOSEL IVAN AND JENNYLIND

“Right now we have spiritual peace, we have mental peace,” says Josel Ivan, sitting in the dining room of his home in Louisville. He and his wife Jennylind and their three children, Christian, Elena, and Hector, have won their asylum claim after fleeing Venezuela.

“The demand for our services has grown exponentially,” explains Sarah Mills, senior immigration attorney in KRM’s Louisville office. “That’s a combination of several different things. There’s

been a lot of changes to regulations and some immigration laws. That has led to people feeling insecure and wanting to naturalize or get permanent residency. Also, there’s been increased ICE enforcement, which has led to more people placed into deportation proceedings. Then there’s an increase in the number of people from Central America and other countries as well who are coming to the U.S. Mexico border. Some of those people end up in Kentucky.”

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Education & Integration



- 702 Adult students enrolled in ESL classes, including Family Center
- 335 Children enrolled in public school systems*
- 101 Students participating in summer 2019 programming (Summer Youth Program, Teen Boost and Connect programs, Adventure Camp, Basketball Camp)
- 115 Driver’s education students

- 40 Elder program students
- 39 Students enrolled in GED or higher education programs*
- 73 Participants in college & career readiness program*
- 390 Citizenship class students
- 64 mothers, 89 children Family Center mothers and children enrolled*

*Calendar Year 2019 figures. All other figures are Fiscal Year, October 1, 2018 - September 30, 2019



Photo by 750four Productions



Photo by 750four Productions

“You can think of an asylee really the same as a refugee,” Mills explains. “The only difference in an asylee and a refugee is that a refugee is granted that status before they come into the United States and an asylee is granted that status in the United States either by an immigration judge or a USCIS officer.”

In order to qualify for asylum, a person has to prove that they will face persecution in their home country based on one of five protected grounds: race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

As a result of his involvement with a group called Voluntad Popular, Josel Ivan was attacked and hospitalized by several members of a pro-government group. “I did my job, was doing my regular things and occasionally I did volunteer work,” he says. During this heightened political turmoil in Venezuela, Josel Ivan was targeted for further intimidation by the Secret Police.

“They hit me, they threatened me that they were going to take me to the army, that they would incarcerate me,” he says. “You need to understand, I was a police officer in Caracas so I wasn’t afraid. That wasn’t going to scare me that easily. Something did happen though that really scared me. They went to my house and they took my wife.”

Jenny lind was kidnapped and interrogated about Josel Ivan and his location. She was later released. “My biggest fear was not for me, it was for my family,” Josel says. “I told my wife, ‘Listen, we need to leave.’”

Even though they feared for their safety, the family considered staying since Jenny lind was receiving medical treatment.

“It was a big decision,” she says. “Either stop everything and stay in Venezuela to get my treatments for chemotherapy or come here.”

They decided to leave for the United States.

As enforcement rules change, more asylum seekers have been detained at the border. That wasn’t the case for Jenny lind and Josel Ivan, who were able to fly to the U.S.

“Some people are detained for up to a year,” Mills says, “and they have to do their entire asylum case in detention. That makes it very hard to win your case. Rates for asylum in detention are much lower for pretty obvious reasons. It’s very difficult to get an attorney, to gather evidence, to talk to witnesses.”

If someone is allowed to leave the detention facility, their challenges continue, Mills explains. “They’ll have an ankle monitor, they’ll be tracked by ICE, and they’re placed into deportation proceedings,” she says. “They still have to fight their case, and they have to do that being brand new immigrants to the United States.” This situation is becoming more commonplace for people fleeing Cuba as well since the “wet foot, dry foot” policy ended in 2017. In recent years, Cubans made up about half of KRM’s clientele in Louisville.

For Josel Ivan and Jenny lind, they were able to find KRM and meet with an attorney.

“It’s so vivid in my mind,” Josel Ivan says. “Reading: KRM, if you are here and you need help, this is where to come.” They needed assistance with their asylum claim.

KRM’s immigration legal services are open to anyone that needs a low-cost immigration attorney. “We can work with people who are undocumented, people seeking asylum, and any immigration status in between,” Mills says. Although services are not limited to refugees, more than half of the legal team’s clients are former refugees.

For asylum claims, Mills explains, “The burden is on the immigrant to prove that they meet each element of the law, and it’s extremely difficult to do that without representation because you need to put together country conditions reports, you need witnesses, you need to gather evidence, we write a brief for them. For us, that can be between 60-80 hours of work each asylum case.”

To help, some law firms offered pro-bono asylum support to KRM clients. “There’s not a lot of places you can go for low-cost legal services in this state,” Mills explains. KRM offers legal services through the Lexington office, too. Clients sometimes travel two to three hours for their appointments with attorneys and legal representatives.

Even though they received help, Jenny lind and Josel Ivan acknowledge how challenging their experience has been in Kentucky.

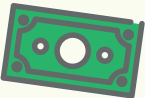
“It’s not easy to leave everything behind and start from zero,” Josel Ivan says.

They pushed through. They were able to work, their children were able to attend schools, and Jenny lind was able to continue her medical treatment here.

“So today,” Jenny lind says, “I can give thanks for life to a lot of people. I received my chemotherapy and my surgery. It’s very important to give thanks to all these people.”

The immigration legal services team in Louisville and Lexington are ready to fight for their clients, Mills says. “I believe the need is only going to grow; again, with increased enforcement and with more people all over the globe seeking asylum, there’s going to be a need for experienced immigration practitioners.”

Employment Achievements



605	Job placements (part- and full-time employment)	153	Employer partners
\$12.06	Average hourly starting wage	82%	90-day job retention rate

Story Spotlight

MEET AIMEE

“My name is Aimee Liesse Ninahaza. I am 18 years old. I am standing in front of you tonight to tell my story.” From the 2019 KRM Global Gourmet stage, a soft but powerful voice rang out strong and clear. “I believe everyone deserves a chance to pursue a higher education,” she said. Aimee, an eighteen-year-old former Burundian refugee, was, on this momentous September evening, being honored along with nine of her peers with an academic scholarship from KRM to support their higher educational pursuits.

Educational excellence had fueled Aimee’s determination long before coming to the United States. Aimee grew up in Bujumbura, Burundi, a place full of insecurity, with her family. When she was ten years old, her father, Severin, a member of parliament, got caught in the middle of some of the political struggles occurring in the country. For the sake of his own safety and that of his family’s, he fled to Kenya, leaving Aimee, her mother, Pascaline, and siblings Evrard, Fleur, Chretien and Beline in Bujumbura.

“It seemed as if hope was shattered,” Aimee shared, remembering those difficult years. With Severin away, Pascaline had to work two jobs to provide for the family. “For me and my siblings, even school didn’t feel safe,” Aimee shared. “Violence and gun shots were prevalent. We never knew exactly who pursued my father or if we were also in danger. Even in the face of fear, I didn’t lose hope, and I kept on believing our situation would change.”

While her father was in Kenya, Aimee and her siblings were “inspired to work even harder in school to make him feel better about being apart

from us. I worried about him being alone in a foreign country, so I did the best I could in school and at home so that he wouldn’t worry about me. By challenging myself to do well in school, I earned a place in the best school in Burundi. My positive attitude had served me well. I never lost hope that we would see him again.” Severin was separated from his family for four years. He was able to secure a visa to come to the United States. He began working diligently to get his family to Louisville. Finally, on May 22, 2014, their family was reunited through Kentucky Refugee Ministries. “You can imagine how relieved and happy we felt after being separated for four years,” Aimee shared. KRM helped Aimee and her siblings enroll in school soon after their arrival. “Coming to the United States opened doors to new opportunities. I continued challenging myself to work towards a better future. I learned English very quickly and continued to pursue my interest in science. I was proud of my academic achievements and my daily growth.”

Aimee also had other passions she began to pursue once coming to Louisville. Having danced since a young age, her dream was to form a dance group with her younger sister, Fleur. Out of this dream, Club Seruka, a traditional Burundian troupe, was born. Aimee’s desire to build community inspired her to meet and recruit other Burundian and Congolese young women for the group. Under her leadership, the troupe became well-known in their local community, and they regularly performed at weddings, community meetings, as well as events in other cities. Aimee and Fleur became part of KRM’s arts and culture programming, performing at a number of KRM Live events throughout the city. Aimee and her older

Continued on page 20



Photo by Megan Resch

Story Spotlight, continued

brother Evrard were some of the first students to participate in KRM’s Super Saturday College and Career Readiness Program when it launched in 2014. This program provides college experiences, educational preparedness workshops, and ongoing academic and vocational support to aspiring refugee and immigrant students. Aimee participated in the Super Saturday Program throughout her high school years, despite other school and eventually, part-time job commitments. She became a leader amongst her peers and continued to excel academically. This year, her senior year, she became one of Jeffersontown High School’s valedictorians and received the honor becoming

one of the Kentucky Lottery’s Outstanding High School Seniors. Aimee was accepted into Berea College receiving a full tuition scholarship. She is majoring in chemistry and French, with plans to attend pharmacy school. In her spare time, Aimee continues her passion of dancing through participating in a Berea College troupe through the African Student Union and volunteers at local schools and nursing homes.

When reflecting upon her expectations for the future, Aimee shared, “My greatest hope, whatever I do, is that I be of help to others.”



Photo by Gary Guthrie

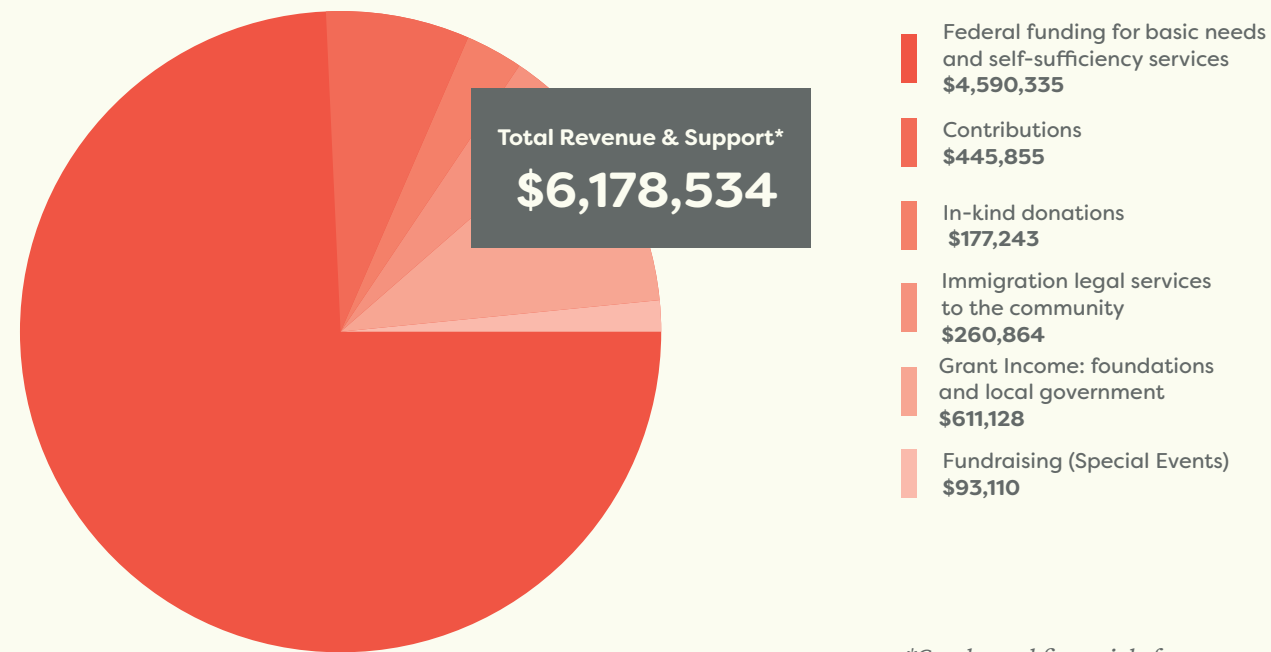


Photo by Christine Gosney

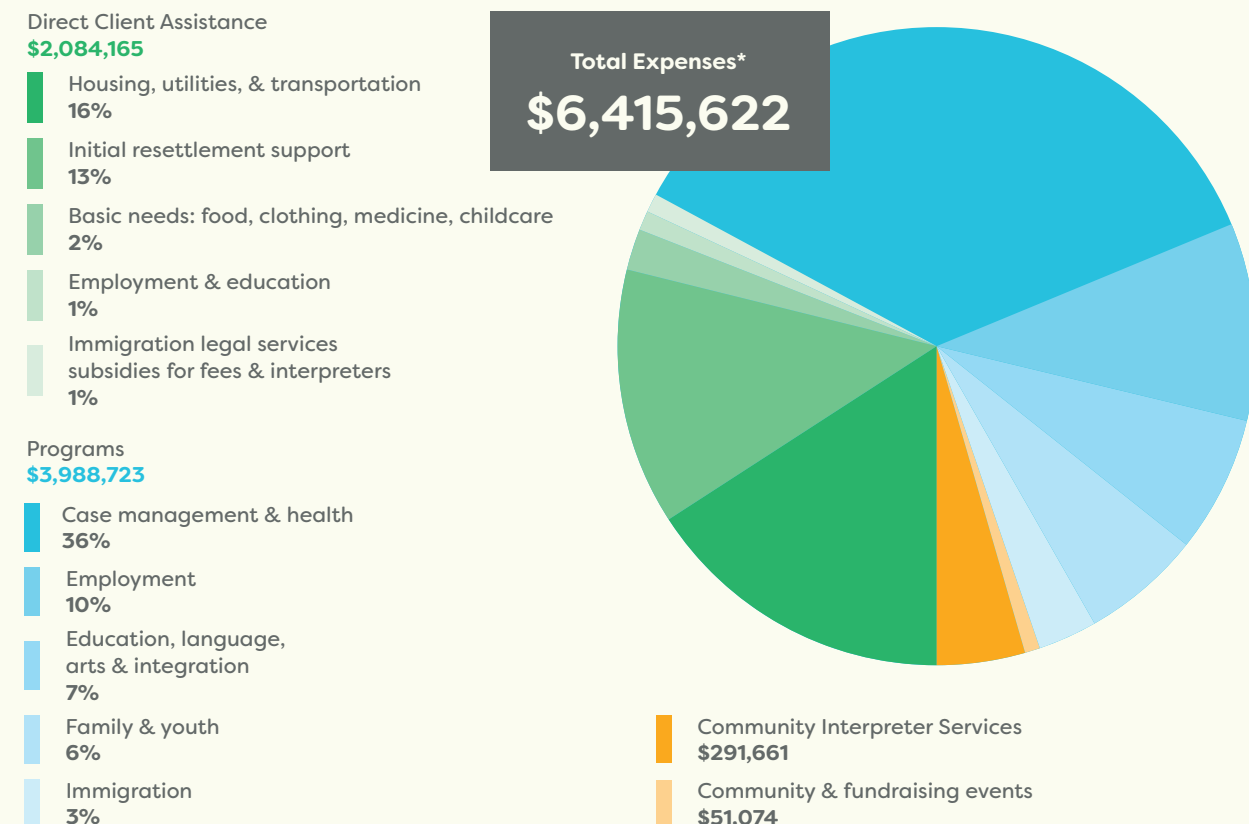


Photo by Mary Cobb

Income & Expenses



**Condensed financials for year ending September 30, 2019.*



Funders & Grants

Our National Resettlement Agency

Church World Service

Government Funding Partners*

Kentucky Office for Refugees
 Louisville Metro Government: External Agency Fund and Community Development Block Grant
 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Program Grants from Foundations and Institutions*

Blue Grass Community Foundation	Islamic Relief USA
C. E. and S. Foundation	Kentucky Bar Foundation
Community Foundation of Louisville	Kentucky Colonels
Cralle Foundation	Lift a Life Foundation
Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky	Louisville Bar Association
Fund for the Arts	Metro United Way
Gheens Foundation	National Partnership for New Americans
Humana Foundation	

**Funds received in fiscal year October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019*



Photo by Megan Resch

KRM Partners

Thank you to the donors and supporters who joined us on the journey in 2019.*

Transformation Partners: \$25,000 or more

Anonymous

Jane and Wayne Parker

Hope Partners: \$10,000 - \$24,999

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Community Christian Church

Peter Rutledge
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Empowerment Partners: \$5,000 - \$9,999

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Marksbury Family Foundation
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*Donors who gave during the 2019 calendar year, January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019

Resilience Partners, continued

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Presbyterian Church
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Middletown Seventh-Day
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Jenny Miles
Christina Milner
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Peace Partners: \$500 - \$999

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