

2023 - 2024



Annual Impact Report



**Kalamazoo
Refugee
Resource
Collaborative**

KRRC Contact:

Kalamazoorefugeecouncil@gmail.com

kalamazoorefugee.org

✦ A Message of Gratitude

As KRRC marks its seventh year, **we celebrate the resilience, courage, and contributions of the newcomers who inspire our mission.** What began as a grassroots effort to welcome refugees in Kalamazoo has grown into a Regional Community Collaborative **committed to creating spaces where every New American feels a sense of belonging and has the opportunity to thrive.**

This past year has been **shaped by the voices and needs of newcomers and those directly helping them.** Together, we have worked to expand programs that provide critical resources, foster community connections, and address the unique challenges faced by those building new lives in Southwest Michigan. **In partnership with over 50 organizations and countless individuals,** we have strengthened pathways for newcomers to celebrate their identities, pursue their goals, and contribute meaningfully to the community.

Looking ahead, **our focus remains steadfast: to listen, innovate, and create opportunities** that empower newcomers to overcome barriers and succeed on their own terms. **Thank you** for your continued support in helping us build a welcoming and inclusive community.

With gratitude,

Neena Marion
President & Founder
Kalamazoo Refugee Resource Collaborative

Our Team ✦



Neena Marion

President & Founder

Peter Dobek

School Engagement &
Navigation Coordinator

Katia Duoibes

Regional Community
Coordinator

Aamir Hasan

Échelle Program Director

✦ Kalamazoo Refugee Resource Collaborative creates partnerships to transform the experience of refugees, migrants, and immigrants from a life of uncertainty to a life of *freedom, equity, & security*

Kalamazoo is a community rich in resources where all people are empowered to be self-determining and to thrive in American Society.

This fiscal year, we actively worked with **40 local and 15 statewide partners** to plan programming and events supporting our community.



www.michigan.gov/ogm

KRRC honorably serves as one of five Regional Community Collaboratives (RCCs) through the Office of Global Michigan (OGM). Our area of purview is Southwest, MI.

Join our *newsletter*

to get involved and stay up to date on our resources and events



KRRC is a COLLABORATIVE

This year, **19 active local partners** participated in monthly Strategic Initiative Workgroup meetings. *One of our local partners had this to say:*



KRRC & OGM hosted the Annual Community Strategic Planning Meeting, bringing local collaborators together to identify shared goals for the upcoming fiscal year.

*"As an organization that receives funding to support all families with young children in our county, **we have really benefited from collaborating with KRRC** and being more intentional about how we can help make early childhood supports & systems more accessible to newcomer families. We have a lot of room for growth, but we are grateful for the new connections we have made and projects we have worked on together."*

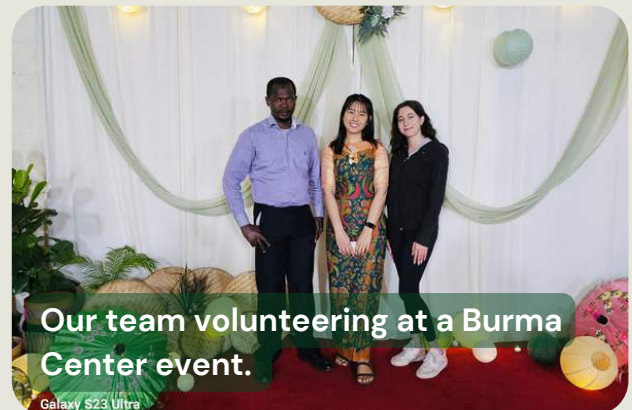


Newcomer Advisory Council brainstorming impactful topics for future media resource creation.

"I want to continue to work with KRRC because I get that feeling of 'Yes. I belong here'"

-Newcomer Advisory Council Member

KRRC works with a diverse team of community members with lived experience of displacement to help advise on programs and enhance our community engagement.



Our team volunteering at a Burma Center event.

Testimonial

Montaha ✨

An Emerging Young Leader

The day after I took my final nursing exams in Lebanon, I left to the US. I was shocked and confused to have my life change so fast. But here in my new country, I had to quickly start learning everything again – not just my education, but even basic things like how to use the bus or go shopping.

My case workers signed my family up for summer English class with KRRC. The teachers were so kind and helped me feel welcome. They didn't just teach us English – they taught us important things about life in America, like being on time and planning for the future step by step. Every day, I felt a little more hopeful.

I love being involved in my new community. At KRRC's World Refugee Day, I painted children's faces while my family helped serve food and set up tables. I also helped translate with First Day Shoe Fund for children in the schools to get fitted for new shoes.

One of my proudest moments was speaking at the KRRC Refugee Film Festival. I shared my story about coming from Syria. It felt good to see that people really cared about us and wanted to understand our experiences.

I'm still working toward my dream of becoming a nurse through the MSU IMPART Alliance Direct Care Worker Certification program. This is my first step to get back into nursing. I am learning everything I knew in Arabic but in English.

When I first came here, I needed lots of help. Now I help others! Every time I help translate for a new family or volunteer at an event, I remember how it felt when I first arrived. I'm proud that I can now make my community stronger by helping others, just like people helped my family when we needed it most.

Montaha speaking as a panelist at the 1st Annual Kalamazoo Refugee Film Festival

Services Overview

127

Newcomers directly served in 2024



Programs

Description

Metrics

Echelle Program

Provision of trained graduate level tutors for in-person classroom support for newcomer students at KPS

- 10 students received credit for Algebra-I and 3 students for Algebra-II
- 60+ students served by 5 tutors
- 410+ tutoring hours over 8 months

English, Employment & Empowerment Summer Program

A pilot program inspired by an identified need and strategic priority by community leaders

- 12 students for 5 weeks-5 days-5 hours
- 7 Local partner collaborations
- 3 Field Trips

World Refugee Day Celebration in Bronson Park

Large collaborative effort to celebrate the cultural diversity of New Americans

- 3 hour event with 150+ guests
- 14 partner organizations tabling
- 4 different cultural performances
- 2 orgs provided in-kind donations

1st Kalamazoo Refugee Film Festival (an annual event)

Screened 3 different refugee-focused films over 3 days with panel discussions after each

- 96 Guests over 3 days
- 9 panelists from 5 different ethnic communities

Community Workshops

Hosted two different informational and support sessions, each w/ 20+ participants

- **Nov.'23:** Rental Assistance Workshop
- **Sept.'24:** Naturalization Workshop in collaboration with USCIS

Echelle Program Supporting Teachers & Students

"The Kalamazoo Refugee Resource Collaborative tutors have a big impact on multilingual success at Phoenix High School. They support teachers and engage with students. They manage small group instruction, organize materials and are integrated into daily planning. They model positive relationships and goal setting. They support students who are struggling in content areas like math, science and English Language Arts. Our KRRC supports are also assisting teachers by modeling critical strategies like SLOP and other best practices. Overall, I see them having a positive impact on our students and community."

Mr. Ryan LaBudda
KPS Newcomer Transitions Coach
 Kalamazoo Public Schools

KRRC provides **tutors for in-class as well as after-school ELL and math support** to students in the **Newcomer Program at Kalamazoo Public Schools**

Tutor Shoutout: *Iryna!*

At KRRC, we are driven by stories like Iryna's. **She first connected with us as a newcomer from Ukraine herself, supporting her mother in our summer English, Employment, and Empowerment program**, where her enthusiasm and dedication stood out. As a member of KRRC's tutoring team, Iryna embodies our mission of fostering belonging and **helping newcomers to be "all that they can be."** Learn more about her work in her own words:

"My main priority is to make learning as effective and enjoyable as possible for each student, especially those who are just beginning their journey in a new linguistic and cultural environment. I pay special attention to the first days of new students' learning. I carefully observe the challenges they face and provide additional support. For example, I help organize subject folders, guide them in using the computer, and register them in all necessary educational programs. In addition, I actively help students prepare for tests and exams. Together, we review key topics, complete additional exercises, and practice skills needed for successful test completion. This helps reduce their stress and improve their performance."

-Iryna



Tutor Iryna and KPS teacher Ms. Ottesen wearing matching outfits during high school Spirit Week!

Education & Workforce Development Programing

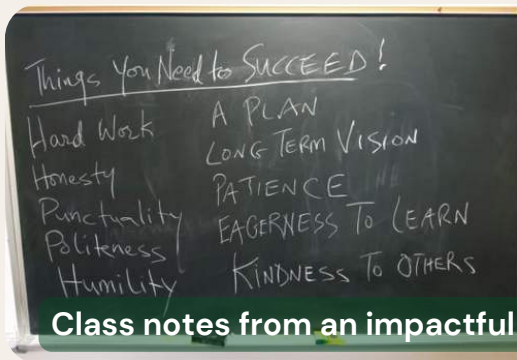
We offer new arrivals a five-hour, five-day, five-week (aka '5-5-5') orientation and English immersion class **during June-July, a period when no other ELL programs are offered.** Students are provided **meals and bus passes** to help encourage attendance.

The course provides essential tools for employment readiness and English education to newcomers rebuilding their lives in Southwest Michigan. We work with several partners to execute this such as **KVCC, KPL, MichiganWorks!, Goodwill, MSU IMPART Alliance** & more, to **connect students to workforce development and higher education opportunities.**

Participants were encouraged to have a long-term approach to their career goals and not to feel discouraged as they face the challenges of settling down in a new country and culture.

"There was a lot of advice on how to be successful in the USA, and what you need to do for this. There were a lot of motivational conversations that will help with employment and planning your life."
- Student, July'24

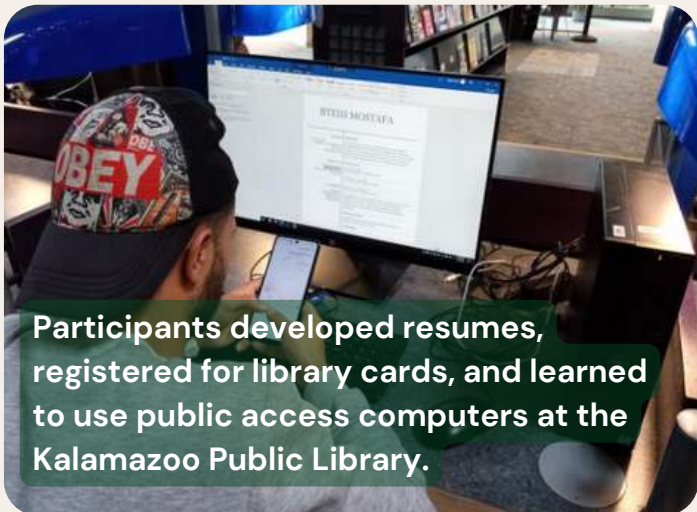
"I started to be able to read and to understand. I also learned how to use computers. I made progress this summer thanks to this program. I am grateful and would do it again."
- Student, July'24



Class notes from an impactful lecture



70% Attendance Rate



Participants developed resumes, registered for library cards, and learned to use public access computers at the Kalamazoo Public Library.



Dr. Aamir Hasan teaching a vocabulary lesson.

Of the 12 students this summer, three young women enrolled in the **Direct Care Worker certification program through MSU IMPART Alliance** where they attend weekly online classes. KRRC staff provided language and tech support, **helping them gain the confidence to work independently** as the program progressed.

Celebrating Kalamazoo's Diversity!

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer declared **June 2024 as Immigrant Heritage Month in Michigan**. To celebrate this important proclamation, KRRC hosted a community gathering on **June 20th, a day designated by the United Nations & proclaimed by the state of MI as World Refugee Day**, to honor refugees around the globe. Our celebration featured performances by **Les Clay, El Concilio, and Abel Muñoz**. Thanks to donors **Bethany Christian Services and Midtown Market**, attendees enjoyed food, music, and dance.



*"It was an honor to be able to listen to newcomers in our county **share their experiences** in a panel discussion following the film. I have no doubt our county's support will increase as **we increase awareness about newcomers' experiences and the ways they enrich our communities.**"*

-Event Attendee

The Kalamazoo Refugee Film Festival as a Platform for Global & Local Stories

The festival closed with a screening of the Canadian film 'Alone', followed by a panel discussion and Q&A. **Fayo Feto, Director of the Michigan Immigrant Youth Conference**, shared her family's refugee journey and her work supporting immigrant youth. **Epiphanie, recently arrived from the Central African Republic**, shared her arduous experience of displacement and also reflected on the positive impact of participating in **KRRC's summer English, Employment, and Empowerment program** that she attended with her younger sister. **Festival Director Dr. Vincent Desroches** led these moving discussions, highlighting both challenges and triumphs within the newcomer community.



Empowering Paths to Citizenship

Our dedicated legal partners—**MIRC, ILJM, HCRLAW, IIMD, Miller Johnson** along with the special attendance of **USCIS**—supported by KRRC workgroup members and statewide collaborators— came together to create an impactful and well-received event at the **Kalamazoo Public Library**. With a presentation by USCIS and consultations provided by **seven expert volunteer attorneys, 18 participants received one-on-one consultations**, taking meaningful steps toward completing their N-400 applications and resolving personal case questions.



General Resource Navigation

23

Resource referrals
completed

KRRC maintains regularly scheduled programming, but through connections with the community and partners, we also assist **individuals who approach us ad hoc seeking information and help**. Our staff actively works to **provide support and/or refer them to the appropriate resources**.

Reach us on Facebook
@KalamazooRefugee or by email at
Kalamazoorefugeecouncil@gmail.com

"I learned different beautiful things from all the speeches. I can't choose one among them. I will never give up on what I learned, and I will always follow the knowledge."

-Kalamazoo Youth



Students and KRRC staff with keynote speaker Dilli Gautam from the Office of Global MI.

MI Immigrant Youth Conference

KRRC was honored to serve as a one of the statewide planning committee members & sponsors for this event.

Donations

KRRC transported **14 youth aged 18-22 from 2 different colleges and 1 high school** to Detroit in September 2024. Newcomers from across the state came together to participate in workshops, forge meaningful connections, and embrace the celebration of their unique identities.

KRRC Education Director, **Dr. Aamir Hasan**, gave an inspirational keynote speech to conclude the event.



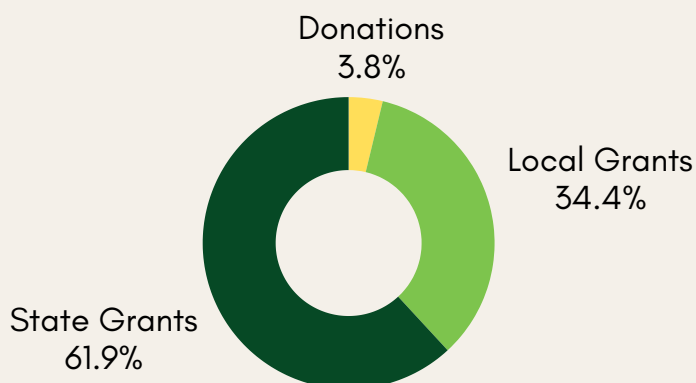
Attendees dancing to diverse traditional music during the lunch break—a highlight for many Kalamazoo participants.

"I attended Empowerment which is hosted by MIARC. I learned that it is important to finding and being myself and we do not have to try so hard to fit in the community/new culture."

-Kalamazoo Youth

Learn more at <https://www.miyouthconference.org/>

Financials



Annual Funding

\$3928

Individual Donations

\$7027

Corporate Donations

\$100K

Local Grants

\$180K

State of MI Grants

300

Volunteer
Hours

Charitable Fund

KRRC manages dedicated charitable funds that provide direct support to community members, with candidates referred through our local resettlement agency partners.

During 2024, our support made a meaningful difference in the lives of **six families/individuals** through **financial assistance for legal fees, rent assistance due to medical emergencies, and a special welcome grant** that helped a student find safety after fleeing war.

Every gift, no matter the size, makes a direct impact on local families seeking safety and stability. Join us in creating a welcoming community for all – **donate today!**



www.kalamazoorefugee.org/donate

Kalamazoorefugee.org

Thank you to all our
collaborators for your

generous support

Our Esteemed Collaborators:



KRRC staff connecting with KPS families at the 'Embracing Cultures' Celebration, sharing upcoming programs and resources.

- Bethany Christian Services
- Care Collective of Southwest MI
- Catholic Charities
- Church World Services
- Communities in Schools
- Refugee Friend's Store
- DHHS
- El Concilio
- Empire Beauty School
- First Day Shoe Fund
- Great Start Collaborative
- Gryphon Place
- Human Civil Rights Law Center
- Immigration Law and Justice Michigan
- Kalamazoo College
- Kalamazoo Community Foundation
- Kalamazoo Islamic Center
- Kalamazoo Literacy Council
- Kalamazoo Metro Transit
- Kalamazoo Public Library
- Kalamazoo Public Schools
- Kalamazoo Softwave Therapy
- Kalamazoo Valley Museum
- KRESA
- KVCC
- KYD Network
- Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
- Michigan Immigrant Youth Conference
- Michigan Works!
- MSU Impart Alliance
- Open Roads
- Public Media Network
- Samaritas
- Shawarma King
- Solid Grounds Campus Ministries
- The Burma Center
- The Office of Global Michigan
- Western Michigan University

and many more!

Kalamazoorefugee.org