

# APPRECIATION REPORT 2021



**BRIDGE**  
REFUGEE SERVICES, INC.  
DIGNITY • HOPE • OPPORTUNITY

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since 1982, Bridge Refugee Services continued to welcome refugees in East Tennessee even during the corona virus pandemic. COVID-19 with other stressors tried to slow us down, but together with your commitment, dedication to welcome new neighbors, tenacity, and perseverance, we went through 2021 strong. My deepest condolences to you who lost your loved ones because of COVID-19 or other reasons in 2021. We are incredibly thankful to our donors: we could not make it without your generous cash and in-kind donations, volunteers' hours, prayers, referrals, and your notes of encouragement. Our partnership with the Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), the Tennessee Office of Refugees, the Hamilton and Knox County School systems, the Department of Human Services, Cherokee Health systems, local government institutions and many other community partners continues to be fruitful. We developed a strong relationship with the Furniture Ministry in Knoxville. Faith-based/inspired organizations and individual families welcomed Afghan parolees in Chattanooga, Cleveland, Clinton, Farragut, and Knoxville. Airbnb was a great partner in the effort of resolving the housing problem.

The Board of Directors approved 10 positions to reinforce case management, volunteer management, capacity building and integration as well as administration and bookkeeping, and that made a difference in supporting our incredible staff. Refugee stories were liked and your engagement on social media and participation in the World Refugee Day celebration were remarkable and appreciated. Receiving the 2021 Danny Mayfield Champion for Change Award from Community Shares was very uplifting and encouraging on my side.

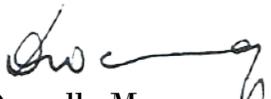
Three big challenges to refugee self-sufficiency that keep us awake and where we need more of your support are availability of affordable and transitional housing, transportation, and childcare.

We saw opportunities arising in the middle of the pandemic. Our organization received \$60,666 from the federal government to assess our institutional capacity and outreach to potential community resources willing to support refugees both in Knoxville and Chattanooga. The willingness to support refugees in East Tennessee was confirmed by hundreds of organizations contacted by our contractors. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints provided a grant of \$32,000 to conduct a housing study. Three Cubed administered interviews with landlords, Bridge's clients, and staff from EMM network.

What are three things you can you do next?

- \* Please refer to us any community partner you may know who is willing to support our mission: our goal is to pair up a Community Assistance Team with a new refugee family.
- \* Advocate for language access in all public and private services in Chattanooga and Knoxville. Please also encourage your children, grandchildren, your friends and family members in school to learn foreign languages fluently so they can use them in any career of their choice.
- \* Engage in resolving the housing and childcare problem by investing or advocating for funding resources in those sectors.

Thank you again for your support to our mission and being welcoming champions. I look forward to continuing partnering with you and serving our clients.

  
Drocella Mugorewera  
Executive Director



## REFUGEES PLANT SEEDS FOR TOMORROW

As the days grow warmer, Luhasa Mukanire looked forward to getting her hands back in the dirt.

Luhasa was one of several refugees growing leafy greens and vegetables across Knox County through New Ground, a gardening program launched in partnership with Beardsley Farm in Knoxville and with support from many individual donors and volunteers.

“Here, I grow up some lenga lenga (amaranth) and some cabbages and okra,” she said. “I like my garden because I get to eat some fresh vegetables.”

More than 20 Bridge families tended more than seven community garden plots following the successful pilot program with Beardsley Community Farm.

“The idea grew from the desire of some elderly men who had farmed back in the Congo and really wanted to grow food again here in Knoxville,” said Amanda Parker, who helped launch the program for Bridge.

Luhasa, also from the Congo, said she grew vegetables in a home garden before she fled the war-torn country. Since resettling in Knoxville, she dreamed about being able to grow greens and other food from her homeland as a way to stay connected to her African roots.

“I appreciate Bridge for this idea, because I usually think about the garden every day maybe since I came here,” Luhasa said.

Having the gardens to cultivate, water, weed and harvest during the COVID-19 pandemic also provided refugees with a way to safely socialize outdoors and remain physically and mentally fit.

Bridge distributed supplies – African hoes, garden boots, seeds, and plants – to refugee families interested in participating this year. Beardsley provided tilling and connections to plots near where refugees live. 2021's locations included Knoxville Botanical Gardens, Dr. Walter Hardy Park, Parkridge Community Garden, the Stop N Go Gas Station on Brooks Avenue, and the grounds of various client homes.

“When I want to show people a good example of how to grow your own food,” said Adam Caraco of Beardsley Farm, “I point to a refugee garden.”



## TECHNOLOGY HELPS REFUGEES CONNECT

“The digital divide in refugee and immigrant communities was something that really came to light last year.”

In 2021, thanks to private donations and a digital literacy course made possible through a partnership between Bridge and Tech Goes Home Chattanooga, six refugees who previously had little to no experience with technology began joining Zoom meetings and sending emails with ease on devices they proudly owned.

“The pandemic has opened people’s eyes to the scope of what is digital inequality and, if folks aren’t connected, how that can impact their lives,” said Sammy Lowdermilk, Tech Goes Home’s program director.

“As a refugee, there are so many roadblocks that you encounter just by being a refugee, but having to also encounter those technology roadblocks can be challenging...Any time we can help our immigrant and refugee community adapt to their new surroundings, we’re happy to do so.”

Lowdermilk worked with Bridge staff to design an eight-week course for six refugee clients, teaching them how to use their new laptops. The course covered skills such as how to operate a computer, how to send and receive emails, how to join a Zoom meeting, and basic internet safety. They also learned how to use Google maps, a skill particularly helpful for those who do not own a vehicle and rely on public transportation to move about the city.

“We tried to pick the topics that were most relevant to the daily needs of our clients,” Mask said. “We framed each lesson as, ‘How this will be useful in your life – how you can use it to communicate with your children’s teachers in school or apply for a job.’”

Four refugees from Sudan and two from the Congo participated with the help of interpreters who spoke Arabic and Swahili. Bridge staff supplemented the curriculum with translated resources available online and hosted the course at an outdoor pavilion at the apartment complex where the refugees live to allow for safe learning.

Many used the skills to begin digital virtual ESL tutoring and to apply for a library card online.

Thanks to supporter generosity, participants got to keep their computers free of charge after the program concluded.



