

IMPACT REPORT 2024



CWS

Virginia



CWS Virginia has welcomed refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers from around the world to the beautiful Shenandoah Valley since 1988. Through partnerships with individuals, faith communities, and local organizations, we empower our newest neighbors to build new lives in peace and security through up to five years of service and support.

OUR MISSION

Church World Service is a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement and disaster.



OUR VISION

A world where everyone has food, voice, and a safe place to call home.



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTORS

From Harrisonburg to Winchester and with dispersed services across Virginia, CWS is creating a world where there is enough for all.

This isn't easy—it takes a lot of work, listening, compassion, and unwavering commitment. But we are encouraged every day by knowing you are right alongside us, making it possible.

We're excited to highlight these individuals and to share the work we've accomplished together through this report. As you flip through these pages, you'll find stories that remind us of the strength, perseverance, and valuable gifts they



bring to our communities. Their journeys are a powerful testament to our shared humanity and the importance of welcoming and supporting each other as we build brighter futures together.

We hope these stories inspire you as much as your encouragement and support inspire others. Together, we can continue making a difference.


Susannah Lepley
VIRGINIA DIRECTOR


Samar Jafri
WINCHESTER DIRECTOR



Miguel* grew up in a small Honduran village, raised by his grandmother after losing his parents. Her severe diabetes required costly treatments, and Miguel worked while attending school to support her. But life became even harder when robbers began extorting bus drivers, making it impossible for Miguel to get to school.

Faced with a tough decision, Miguel left for the U.S., hoping to improve life for both himself and his grandmother. His journey was grueling, packed into a car with other migrants for 15-hour stretches. After arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, he was detained in a harsh facility he described as “the worst part of the journey,” where the conditions were cold and the food inedible.

After two days, he was transferred to an Office of Refugee Resettlement shelter. There, caseworkers connected Miguel to a sponsor who lived in a big city, but he sought a calmer environment and moved to a quieter community, where he enrolled in a GED program.

We asked Miguel, “What do you want your message to be for the people who read this story?”

“I want other unaccompanied children to know that even though life can be hard, we should be grateful for being alive and keep on fighting for a better future.”

**Name changed for privacy reasons*

This journey is often difficult and traumatic, driven by the need to flee their homes due to war, persecution, or violence. Despite these challenges, they are resilient, determined and hopeful of a better life for themselves and their families.



Flee: Leave home country due to danger.

WELCOMING REFUGEES—CREATING A SAFE PATH TO THE *future*

Register: Apply for refugee status with UNHCR. Less than 1% referred for resettlement.

Approval: Approved by Department of Human Services and US Citizenship & Immigration Services. Application becomes a “case” assigned to CWS.

Screening: Undergo security, medical, and background checks.

Placement: Assigned near family or U.S. ties.

Travel: Flight arranged to the U.S. Arrive at the airport and met by CWS staff.



152
CHILDREN SERVED

21%
12 YEARS AND UNDER

79%
13 YEARS AND OLDER



[Click here for more information about our work with Unaccompanied Children](#)

431
TOTAL ARRIVALS

Through our Reception & Placement program, the CWS resettlement team provides initial welcome and core services to new neighbors within the first 90 days after arrival, empowering them towards self-sufficiency.

FEROZA'S STORY

Feroza navigated significant challenges to rebuild her life in the U.S. while inspiring everyone around her with her positive outlook. Originally from Afghanistan, Feroza grew up in a time when women and girls faced many restrictions. Yet, she seized every opportunity available, earning a university degree in Turkish language and literature. After graduating, she secured her dream job at a bank, quickly rising through the ranks thanks to her hard work. “I always tried to achieve my goals quickly and be a fast learner and never gave up,” Feroza said. **“I don’t fear losing because sometimes we lose and sometimes we gain, it’s life. But the main point is that we should never give up.”**

When circumstances brought her to the U.S., Feroza worried about starting from scratch, “You have many memories of a childhood, everything you grew up in that country, but you suddenly left and then moved to the other country and start from zero. It’s not easy. It’s very difficult. When I came to the U.S. I faced many difficulties, like I start again from zero.” She was unfamiliar with the language and everyday systems, but with support and encouragement from CWS, she was able to secure a job at a bank, continuing her professional journey.

She is passionate about sharing positivity and empowering others, especially women, to embrace independence. “If we are self-reliant, we can believe ourselves, we can do everything. When we transfer positive energy, actually we receive positive energy. At least we can transfer positive energies by smiling, by saying good words, it can help us to be confident, to make someone else confident.”

Feroza lives a life of gratitude and she emphasizes gratitude to the countries that welcome refugees. “I thank them for giving us the opportunity to come to the U.S. or to other countries. It’s nice of them and they provide the opportunities, they give to us to live safely.”

After the initial resettlement period, CWS Virginia continues to work to empower our new neighbors and ensure that we help them strive for self-sufficiency and success. We offer a range of different programs for newcomers to help address the special challenges of rebuilding a new life in a new country.

From ongoing career support services to support for families and students to empowering clients who have vulnerabilities or special needs, we continue to walk alongside refugees in this journey of welcome.



After a long journey from Syria to Jordan in 2012 and finally to the United States in 2022, Abdul's story is a testament of commitment and self-sufficiency. With only \$70 in his pocket when he arrived, he now provides for his family through determination and hard work.

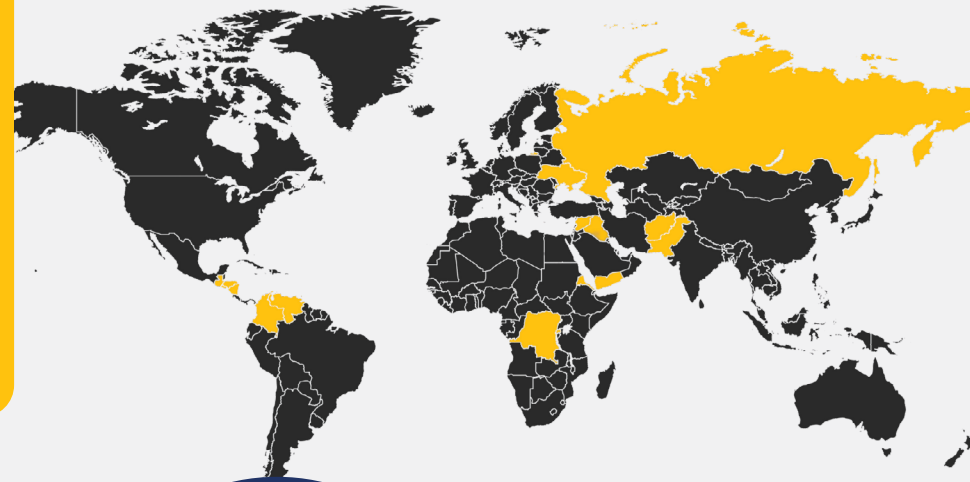
After arriving in the U.S., Abdul found an employment opportunity with UTZ through Facebook. Because this job required a driver's license, he studied, went to the DMV, and passed the test on his first try. With his own route now, he continues to support his family and build a better future. "If you want to be independent, self-sufficient, you can do it. You can fail, or you can be successful. I choose to take the risk to be self-sufficient because I want it," he said.

The transition to working life in the U.S. was not easy. Back home, work hours were typically from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., with early mornings reserved for prayer. Adjusting to the early morning schedules in the U.S. and the fast-paced lifestyle was a challenge. "It was so strange in the beginning, but I went through it. I faced all the changes in my life, and I made it through."

Abdul uses every opportunity to learn and grow. He's teaching himself English, picking it up quickly because of his outgoing personality. "I do everything myself, and I want to help myself to know everything. If I need help, I ask, but if I don't need help, I just go ahead and do what I want to do," he said.

He hopes his story will inspire others to choose self-sufficiency and pursue their dreams, no matter the challenges. **"This is a country of opportunity, it is up to you to take these opportunities."**

WHERE ARE OUR NEW NEIGHBORS FROM?



- Dem. Republic of Congo
- Yemen
- Eritrea
- Rwanda
- Russia
- Ukraine
- Guatemala
- El Salvador
- Honduras
- Colombia
- Iraq
- Afghanistan
- Syria
- Pakistan
- Venezuela
- Nicaragua

329
JOB PLACEMENTS

CWS Employment Specialists work closely with new neighbors to understand their educational and employment history, as well as career goals, providing job orientations and workforce readiness programs. These 329 jobs represent first jobs, skill upgrades, and second jobs in manufacturing, agriculture, warehouse industries, and more.

187
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT,
CAMPS, MENTORING,
& SUPPORT SERVICES

114

completed Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolee cases, providing support and assistance to families seeking safety.

100%

of clients in our Matching Grant Program were self-sufficient at 180 and 240 days.



Through partnerships with **Village to Village** in Harrisonburg and **Valley Haven** in Winchester, we set up 136 houses, each furnished with approximately \$2,900 worth of essentials like new beds, furniture, and supplies. Together, we transformed these houses into welcoming homes.



The Laugh and Learn class, organized by Valley Program for Aging Services (VPAS), is a valuable program designed for our older clients. This class combines physical movement and exercises with fine motor crafts and social interaction. Participants not only acquire new skills, such as conversational English, but also experience reduced stress, improved mood, and better balance to prevent falls.



Why is bus training important for our clients? Here's the scoop from the Integration Specialist: **"It's important for our clients because they're entering a new community. We teach them how to use the bus, so they are able to do things like go to doctor appointments and do some grocery shopping by themselves. the goal is to become more self-sufficient."**



Enhanced Integration classes provide clients with both informative and engaging lessons. For example, CWS Health Liasion led a discussion about how healthcare in the United States works and what clients can expect when scheduling and attending their doctor's appointments. Following each topic, clients participated in interactive English lessons to practice using related vocabulary.

IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES

Immigrants and refugees have many complicated and expensive legal hurdles on the path to protection, citizenship, and reuniting with their families. CWS Virginia's Immigration Legal Counseling staff provide low-cost legal advice and representation to refugees, asylum-seekers, and other immigrants in the Shenandoah Valley.



Originally from Congo, Esther endured unimaginable loss and hardship before finding safety in the United States. After years in a refugee camp in Burundi, she arrived in the U.S. in 2019, determined to rebuild her life.

Once in the U.S., she dedicated herself to learning English and overcoming her fears to build a new life. "If I hide myself, I'm never going to learn, and I'm never going to improve," she said. Esther is now the primary caregiver for her grandfather, managing his medicine, doctor's appointments, and daily needs. At the same time, she attends school every day to continue improving her English. Her determination paid off when she applied for citizenship and passed the test on her first attempt.

Her next goal is deeply personal: to reunite her family. Esther and CWS legal staff are working to bring her nieces and nephews from Congo to the U.S. They are currently alone without care, and she dreams of creating a safe environment for them.

Esther remains positive, always smiling and full of laughter, she faces every obstacle head on. "Okay, I can do that. If not this time, next time I can do that," she often says.

Through her hard work, she is not only creating a brighter future for herself but also striving to reunite her family and give them the same opportunities.



123
FAMILY REUNIFICATION
CWS legal staff can provide assistance to those wanting to reunite with their families by bringing them here on family-based immigrant visas.



606
LEGAL CONSULTATIONS


CWS Legal Staff members are accredited to practice Immigration law before the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Immigration Courts.

CASES COMPLETED

**47**
ASYLUM APPLICATIONS

**95**
CITIZENSHIP

**411**
GREEN CARD

**216**
WORK PERMITS

WE'RE SO THANKFUL FOR OUR *volunteers!*

CWS Winchester hosted a Thanksgiving luncheon to express our heartfelt gratitude to the volunteers who have been the backbone of our work since the office first opened. Their support has made such an impact, helping us welcome, drive, and uplift the refugees and immigrants in the community. One volunteer shared during the event, **"We feel really blessed. Getting to know the families, I find, is really wonderful."**



Steve and Marie, a retired middle school math teacher and high school English teacher, share a passion for helping refugee children adjust to life in the U.S. through tutoring. "I was happy to have a way to try to help these brave families who are trying to make a better life in such a foreign environment," Marie says. "I really admire their grit and determination to make things work, no matter what happens." Steve adds, reflecting on a Congolese family who persevered after a tragic loss.

From helping one family identify American currency and teaching phonics to another family focusing on the alphabet and reading basics, Steve has seen all the children grow in confidence. "It didn't take long for the kids in my first family to start reading the books to me, with me just helping on words that gave them difficulties."

Marie helped a Ukrainian family ease the youngest daughter's nerves about starting school without knowing English. They practiced common first-grade expressions like 'Line up quietly at the door' and 'Get out a pencil' to make her transition easier. She also helped the children practice opposites, rhyming words, and vowel sounds. They learned English expressions for time and the U.S. map using images of the states. "It all helps to reinforce what they are working on in school. The teachers at school are doing the hard work; we are just supplementing and reinforcing," Marie explains. Steve adds, "It is a joyful challenge to try to help these kids learn, one that I would fully encourage you to take on."

"It is so rewarding when they are out in the yard excitedly looking for my arrival and they say they missed me," Marie says. "My family surprised me with a cake and flowers for my birthday, and the father was happy he got home from work early so that he could personally thank me for helping his children. **These are the rewards of tutoring, besides just seeing the kids happily adjusting to our country.**"



12,403
VOLUNTEER HOURS

Interested in
VOLUNTEERING?

CWS Volunteers are flexible, patient, kind, and always ready to lend a helping hand. Scan the QR Codes below to learn more.

For **CWS Harrisonburg** click [here](#) or visit cwsharrisonburg.org/volunteer

For **CWS Winchester** click [her](#) or visit cswwinchester.org/volunteer

At CWS, we're always in need of dedicated tutors to support school-aged children through our youth tutoring program, a vital part of our VRSAP grant. Families have the option to receive tutoring, and JMU's Every Campus a Refuge (ECAR) program has stepped up in a big way, with two classes now requiring students to tutor weekly.

Tutors make a lasting impact—not just on kids but entire families. Some parents even join in to learn English. At a Thanksgiving event tutors shared how much they had learned from families, and families expressed how welcomed they felt in Harrisonburg.

How you can be part of the
WELCOME

- **Volunteer**- tutor students, teach adults English, get a group together to complete a household setup, or assist at the front desk. There are many ways to get involved that fit every skillset and time commitment.
- Encourage your employer to learn about the benefits of **hiring refugees**. Refugees are authorized for employment the moment they arrive in the United States and do not need visa sponsorship.
- **Rent to refugees**. Families are eager to establish themselves in our community. Landlords can partner alongside them by contacting CWS to learn about the benefits of renting to our new neighbors.
- **Organize a donation drive** for hygiene products, diapers, household goods or gift cards which help newly arrived families settle into their new home. We will work with you to support a donation drive.
- Set up a **recurring donation**. Making a financial gift is the most effective way to help CWS Harrisonburg and CWS Winchester. Your funds will go where they are most needed, helping us continue to build community for new Americans. Money raised in the Shenandoah Valley stay in our community. Visit cwsharrisonburg.org/donate or cswwinchester.org/donate.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Your support for emergency and flexible funding helps CWS to respond swiftly and effectively to crises of all scales- whether it's helping a local family in need, addressing the impacts of a pandemic, or providing relief to those displaced by global conflict.

STAY IN THE LOOP!

Click [here](#) to stay up to date by signing up for our Newsletter!

\$51,000
IN-KIND DONATIONS

Generous in-kind donations support newcomers in rebuilding their lives and making a home in the Shenandoah Valley.

Click [here](#) or visit cwsharrisonburg.org/donate

Click [here](#) or visit cswwinchester.org/donate



Thank You for being part of our
**WELCOMING
COMMUNITY**



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