

2022



# ANNUAL REPORT

## International Institute of Akron

We enrich the vitality of community by helping immigrants achieve an empowered life with dignity, connection, and belonging



# About IIA

The International Institute of Akron is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in Akron, Ohio, for over 100 years. The heart of our work has always been to foster a sense of home for immigrants in our community. Our mission is to enrich the vitality of our local community by helping immigrants achieve an empowered life with dignity, connection, and belonging. We accomplish this by providing refugee resettlement case management, social services, employment services, education, language access, and immigration legal services to refugees and immigrants. Our because ALL people are treated with dignity and respect.



530 S Main St., Ste. 1762, Akron, OH 44211

# A Message From The Executive Director

I am pleased to share our 2022 annual report and the outstanding achievements our staff has made in serving refugees and immigrants. We are grateful for the continued support and generosity of our partners and donors, who have made it possible for us to provide vital services to refugees and immigrants in Akron and beyond.

This past year has been one of tremendous growth and accomplishment for our agency. Despite the challenges brought on by the recent and tumultuous world events that took place in Afghanistan and Ukraine, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to serving refugees and immigrants who have fled persecution, war, and other forms of violence in their home countries. Our dedicated staff members and volunteers have worked tirelessly to ensure that our clients have access to the resources and support they need to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.

Over the course of the year, we have assisted 191 refugees from five countries in their resettlement and integration processes, as well as hundreds of immigrants looking to improve their overall quality of life in Akron. Our services have included language instruction, job training and placement, legal assistance, social services, and more. We have also continued to advocate for policies that promote the rights and well-being of refugees and immigrants, both locally and nationally.

None of this would be possible without the support of our community partners and donors. We are grateful for the trust you have placed in us and for your ongoing commitment to our mission. We remain dedicated to serving the needs of refugees and immigrants in our community and to working towards a world in which all people can live in safety, peace, and dignity. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,



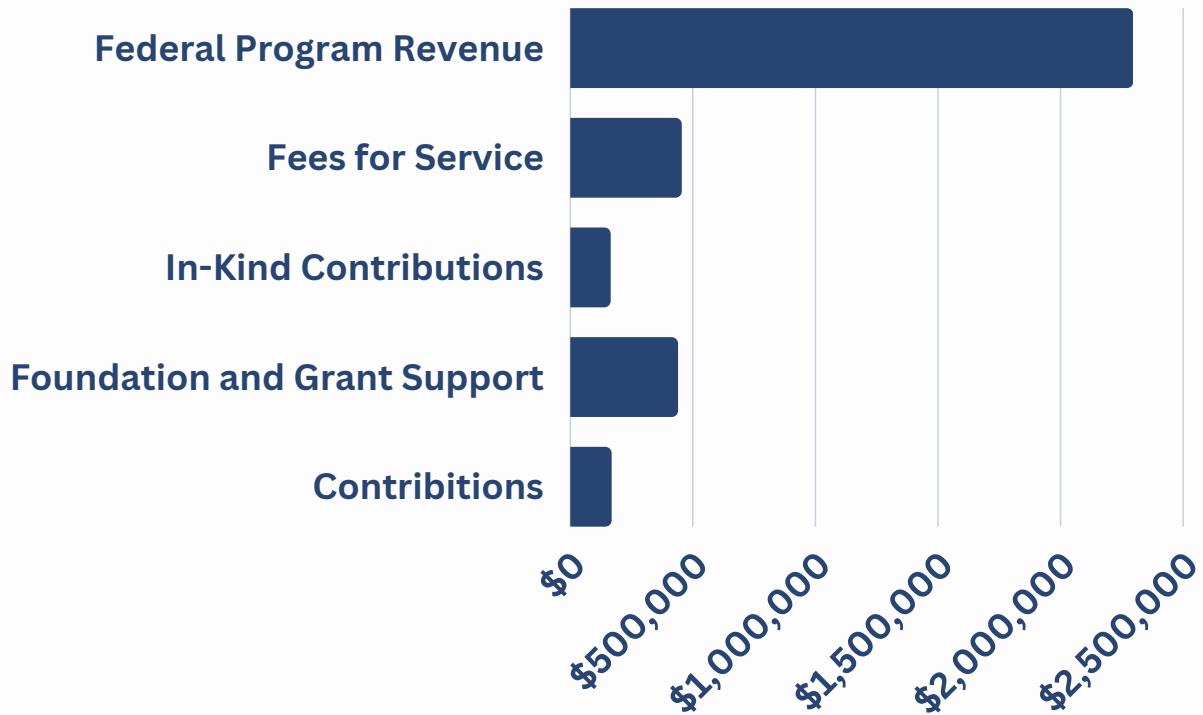
Madhu N. Sharma  
Executive Director



**Madhu  
Sharma** ””

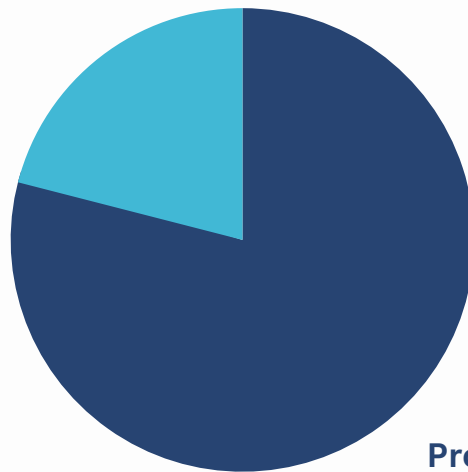
*We remain dedicated to serving the needs of refugees and immigrants in our community and to working towards a world in which all people can live in safety, peace, and dignity.*

# Financials



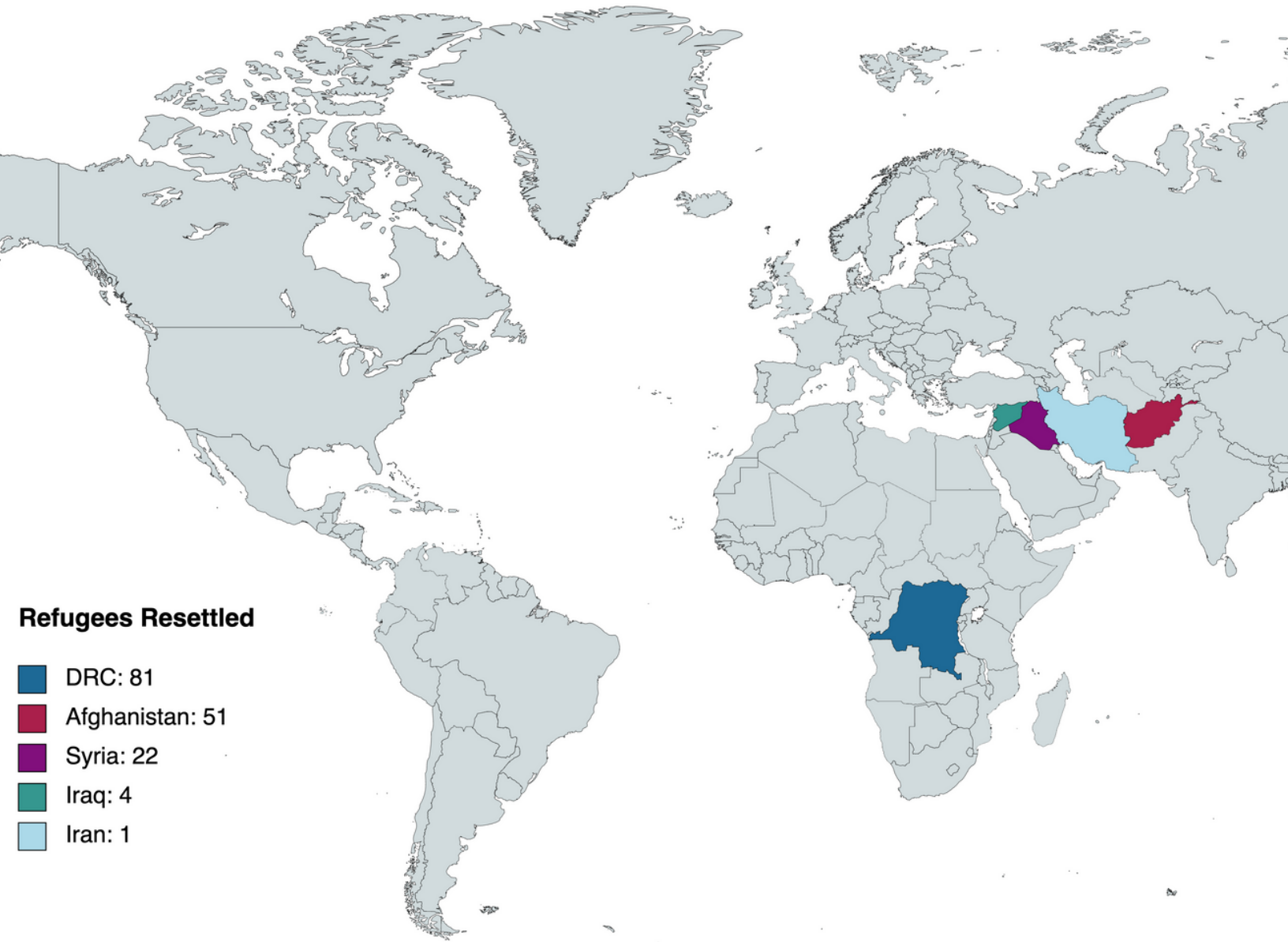
**Total 2022 Revenue: \$3,452,191**

General and Administrative Expenses  
21%



Program Expenses  
79%

**Total 2022 Expenses: \$3,001,690**



**Total Refugees Resettled: 191**

# Refugee Resettlement

## Refugee Resettlement Program

In 2022, the Refugee Resettlement Program of IIA provided vital assistance to a total of 191 individuals hailing from Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In addition, the team also worked tirelessly to aid several individuals from Ukraine who had been forced to flee their homeland due to the devastating aftermath of Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, and who sought refuge in Akron.

To ensure that these Ukrainian clients received the necessary support, the Resettlement team secured funding from IIA's national affiliate, USCRI. This financial backing allowed the team to provide additional case management services, enabling clients to access crucial healthcare facilities, public benefits, reliable transportation, affordable housing, and other essential services that facilitated their resettlement and integration into their new community.



86

Women Served



105

Men Served



88

Children Served

## An Improved Quality of Life

On November 14th, 2022, IIA was notified about a family of 7 from the DRC arriving in 3 days. Their teenage daughter was identified with significant physical impairments; she had sickle cell disease, which caused her to have hip issues and walk with a limp. In addition, she was also hearing impaired and never received education on formal sign language, so she had only developed a separate form of nonverbal communication with her family. Once notified, an IIA case manager and housing specialist sprung into action quickly to find proper housing to accommodate the child's disability. The case manager also took the family to the ER immediately after arrival upon recommendation from the medical escort that traveled with the family to ensure that no further medical complications arose after travel.

Due to the substantial limitations that the daughter dealt with, her case manager worked diligently to connect her and her family to all the healthcare providers she would need to improve her quality of life. Within the first month after arrival, the case manager connected the client with a social worker in the hematology department at Akron Children's Hospital, who assisted the family with arranging medical transportation to appointments and navigating the hospital system. The case manager also helped the family schedule a hearing test for their daughter, referred them to the Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board, coordinated the family's health screening appointment at the International Community Health Center (IHC), and scheduled her an appointment for SSI benefits. The family's case manager also worked with Akron Public Schools to ensure the daughter can receive an education that accommodates her limitations. Although she is still in communication to help the family, the IIA resettlement case manager worked hard to ensure that the appropriate connections and referrals were initiated during the first 30 days after their arrival so they could access the necessary care and assistance as quickly as possible.





# Employment Services

## Employment Services Overview

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February of 2022, the United States implemented the United for Ukraine program, providing a temporary pathway for Ukrainian citizens and their families to come to the United States. While individuals from Ukraine could not access our resettlement program services through United for Ukraine, IIA assisted by helping 31 newly arrived Ukrainians find employment to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Additionally, IIA's employment services team worked with individuals from Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help 145 refugees find employment in Akron and Summit County. By offering job training, career counseling, and other resources, we helped 145 individuals find employment to build their lives in their new communities.

## Growing Confidence as a Leader

In March 2022, the International Institute of Akron (IIA) facilitated the employment of a woman from Afghanistan at Main Street Gourmet as a Cookie Packer. Initially, the client was timid and apprehensive about her proficiency in English. Nonetheless, she demonstrated her eagerness to learn by enrolling in Main Street Gourmet's English classes, and attended every session to improve her language skills. The English instructor reported to Main Street Gourmet how the client exhibited remarkable perseverance in learning English and how she was a standout student in the class.

As the client became more self-assured in her English-speaking abilities, she felt more at ease conversing with the staff at Main Street Gourmet without needing interpretation assistance. She has now become one of the most valuable members of her team and takes the initiative to ensure that her colleagues remain focused and productive throughout the day. Her colleagues look up to her and for her guidance and encouragement.

The client's hard work and dedication have paid off, as she recently purchased a car and obtained a driver's license. She aspires to become a backup line lead at Main Street Gourmet one day. The success story of this determined individual highlights the transformative impact of providing opportunities and support to individuals striving to build a better future for themselves and their families.



**145**

**Refugees Employed**



**30**

**Partner Employers**

# Social Services

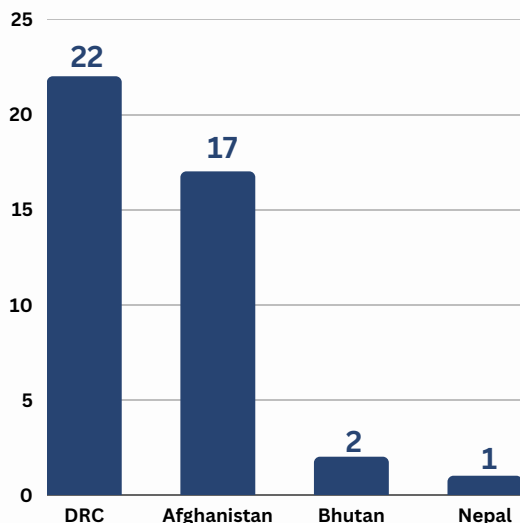
## Social Services Overview

In 2022, IIA's Social Services team saw increased enrollment for intensive case management services from the Congolese and Afghan communities. People from these populations faced barriers to integration due to trauma and cultural and linguistic barriers.

The Social Service team worked to meet these needs by forming vital partnerships with community partners such as Portage Path and DeVita Akron Renal Center, and Locust Pediatrics.

Additionally, Case managers worked with families from Afghanistan on health education for pediatric care. They began using grant funding to get needed items for kids, such as play pens, books, and toys to help meet critical developmental markers.

In total, the Social Services Program served 42 individuals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal



## Serving the Entire Family

In 2022, the Social Services team worked with a large Afghan family consisting of eight children and an expectant mother. One of the family's sons, who was four years old, was taken to Locust Pediatrics by his case managers due to apparent sight issues.

After medical examination, the family received the disheartening news that their son had no vision in his left eye. The doctors initially speculated that the child might have contracted malaria from a military base. However, after surgery, it became clear that the cause was a rare genetic disorder. In constant communication with IIA's social services team, the doctors have planned a second operation, hoping to restore the child's vision soon.

The Social Services team has provided comprehensive support to the family to enhance their overall quality of life. The children have received pediatric care, and the expectant mother has received prenatal care. The family has also secured a new home, and the father's brother has been connected with a reputable trade school to learn a valuable trade.



**Total Refugees Enrolled: 42**

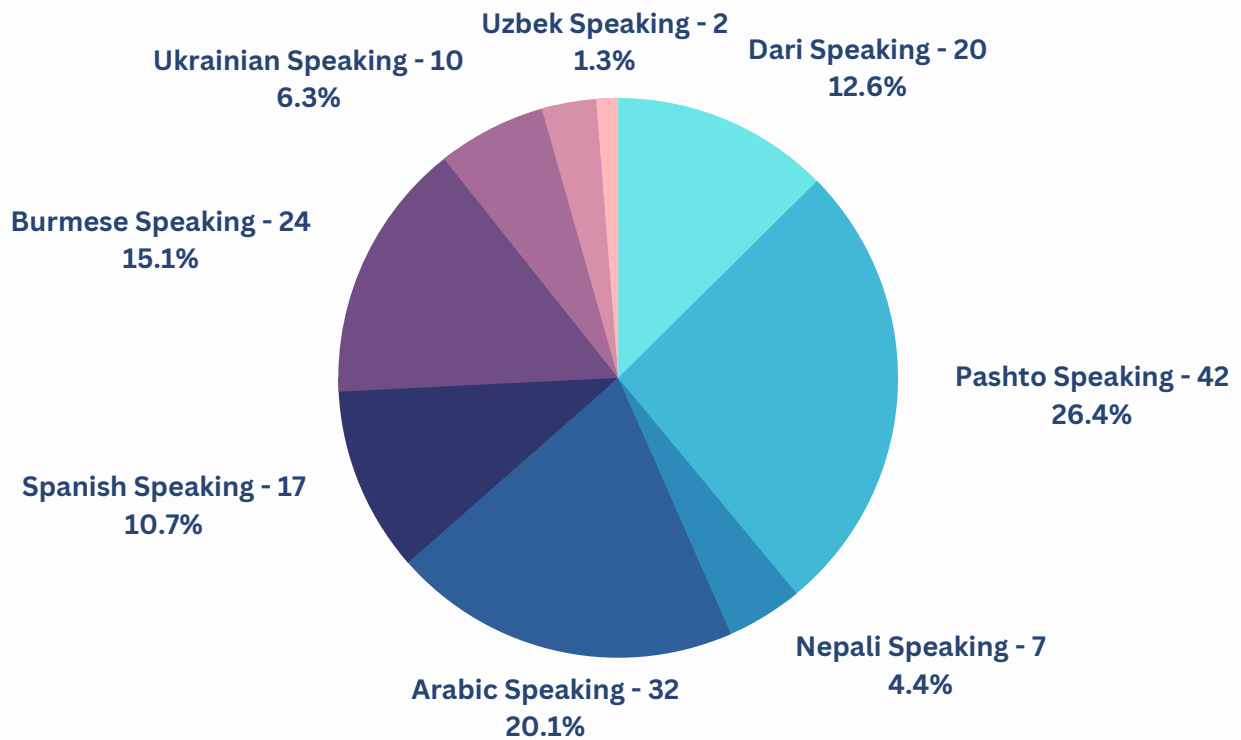


# Education – English as a Second Language (ESL) Classes

English as a Second Language (ESL) classes is vital in assisting immigrants in their integration process.

Obtaining English language skills opens the door to new employment and education opportunities for immigrants.

In 2022, IIA enrolled 186 students in ESL classes. These students are originally from 19 different countries, speaking 12 different native languages.



**Total Immigrants Enrolled in ESL Classes: 186**

# Education –

## Finding a Sense of Safety

In 2022, an Afghan mother, and her three small children, were on their way home from IIA. Two of her kids with hearing deficiencies were following her, and she was carrying the youngest child. As she was walking from one street to another in search of her home, she soon got tired and realized she was lost. She began getting nervous and wanted to call her husband, but she didn't have a phone to contact him. Her nervousness and frustration increased as she could not reach home even after walking for an hour. The young children began crying due to hunger and tiredness, and the mother's arm soared from holding her little one for a long time.

Her husband arrived home from his night shift work, but could not find his wife and three little children. He was confused by the uninformed disappearance of his family members. He finally called one of his Afghan friends, but he, too, could not get a clue about her whereabouts. Acknowledging the seriousness of the case, he called 911 and informed them about the loss of a young mother and three little children. Police officers immediately responded to the call and began looking for the lost family. Finally, they found the mother with her children, but the police could not communicate with them because of the language barrier. Finding her in a distinct cultural dress up, they thought she would speak Arabic and arranged for an interpreter to interpret for them. But the Arabic interpreter could not understand the Dari language. When the police officers dropped the lost mother and her children at IIA, there was a big sigh of relief. Ultimately, her husband was contacted and came to IIA to bring them home.

Ever since that incident, the young mother joined IIA English classes and committed to learning English to avoid such happenings in the future. Her husband was thrilled that she could begin learning English for herself. She was enrolled in IIA's 1A class, the pre-literacy level. The young mother did exceptional work in each session, and went on to move to another higher level. Soon she reached the highest level of IIA's classes, the 1D class. Recently, she passed her driving permit test and is practicing hands-on driving skills classes now. She is determined to obtain her driver's license and start a new job as soon as possible.

## Driving Class



**11**

**Clients Enrolled in Driving Training Classes**

IIA's Education Department made significant strides in helping refugees, and immigrants become more independent and self-sufficient in 2022. One such accomplishment was the implementation of a driving program, which aimed to provide immigrants in the community with the opportunity to obtain their driver's licenses. This program proved to be immensely successful, with a total of 11 individuals from Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo enrolling in the driving classes.

The driving program helped to address a critical need in the refugee and immigrant community, as many individuals lack the means to obtain a driver's license, which limits their ability to access employment, education, and other essential services. In 2022, eight of the 11 individuals who enrolled in the driving program passed their driver's test, thus allowing them to access greater opportunities and improve their overall quality of life.

# Education –

## Afghan Refugees School Impact (ARSI) program



**55**  
Mentor Visits



**8**  
Afghan Boys Enrolled



**16**  
Families Served



**10**  
Afghan Girls Enrolled

### Mentor Spotlight: Lida Ahmadi

Lida Ahmadi worked for two years to obtain her visa to move to the United States. Around the time she was ready to leave for her new journey, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and changed everything. During the evacuation of Afghans who previously worked with the U.S. military and had to leave their homes for safety, Lida worked as an interpreter at the airport with the U.S. Marines. She assisted dozens of Afghans in evacuating the country until she and her family took the last flight to the United States.

Lida's family was resettled by a refugee resettlement agency in Michigan, while Lida was sent to Akron and was resettled by IIA. She let her resettlement case manager know that she was interested in working as an interpreter for employment. IIA recommended that Lida should go to ASIA Inc. for interpreter training, which led to her being hired to work as a case manager at their agency.

Shortly after, Lida was asked to work part-time at IIA as an advisor and mentor to Afghan youth through the Afghan Refugee School Impact Program (ARSI). In this role, she works with young Afghan girls to help them adjust to U.S. culture. Lida currently works with ten girls between the ages of 11 years old to 17 years old in this endeavor.

"I was really happy to accept this job because I wanted to do something for Afghan females because they were going through a lot back in [Afghanistan]," Lida said. "They sacrifice everything for their family, and they never share things to their family, like what they want, and they hide everything within themselves. I was really happy to help them. I was really happy to be their mentor."

Every weekend, Lida takes her mentees to the Akron Public Library or different coffee shops around Akron to work on homework, socialize, and discuss what it's like living in their new community. Knowing how vital learning English is to succeed in their new home, Lida and the girls work on English language skills, like learning the ABCs. Sometimes the young girls feel discouraged because they don't know English, which keeps them from wanting to attend school. However, Lida knows that the more they practice, the more comfortable and confident they will be using English.

At first, Lida was nervous to start mentoring because her mentee's families were from different tribes back in Afghanistan. The nerves quickly dissipated when she went to her first mentee's house and met the father of the family, who was kind and happy to have Lida working with his daughter. When Lida was introduced to his daughter, the girl was very shy. Lida told the young girl "not to think of her as a manager but as a best friend and older sister." After that, Lida's mentee began opening up about her struggles adjusting to her new community, and now asks Lida to visit her daily.



# Legal Services

In 2022, the world began recovering after a global pandemic, and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees worldwide began voluntarily resigning from their jobs, known as the Great Resignation. IIA's legal department dealt with turnover as a result of this global trend, making 2022 a year of rebuilding for our legal team.

IIA hired and trained new talent to take on the responsibility of the growing number of immigration legal cases that arose in Akron in 2022. During this massive rebuilding phase, IIA rendered immigration legal services to a total of 526 immigrants residing in Northeast Ohio.



**89**  
Citizenship Cases



**110**  
Adjustment Cases



**116**  
Family Petitions/Reunifications



**39**  
Court Cases



**26**  
Asylum Cases



**185**  
Other Humanitarian and Entitlement Benefits  
(e.g., Employment Authorization, DACA cases, Temporary Protective Status, etc.)

## Fighting for Reunification

In 2022, IIA's legal team worked with an Afghan family who came to the U.S. during the country's evacuation after being overtaken by the Taliban. This family consisted of a father, a mother, seven children, and one adopted child still in Afghanistan.

The father had worked as a security officer for the U.S. military in Afghanistan since 2005 and was eligible for a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV). After much hard work from IIA's legal team, we were thrilled to receive the news that the family was approved for asylum status on July 28, 2022. However, there were still many challenges to overcome, including obtaining humanitarian parolee status for the adopted child in Afghanistan. Despite these challenges, our legal team has remained committed to reuniting the family.

In the meantime, we have taken a holistic approach to supporting the family's mental health needs. Separation from a loved one can be traumatic, so IIA's legal team referred the family to our social services program so that they could begin receiving additional needed support.

**Total Cases: 526**

# Interpretation & Translation

## Interpretation & Translation Service Overview

In 2022, IIA continued to serve not only our clients but also the broader community through our interpretation and translation services. We recognize that language barriers can be a significant obstacle for many individuals, including immigrants and refugees when seeking access to essential services and resources.

Our agency provides interpretation and translation services to community organizations, healthcare providers, educational institutions, and other service providers in our area. Our team of professional interpreters and translators works closely with these organizations to ensure that their services are accessible to individuals with limited English proficiency.

Our interpretation and translation services play a vital role in promoting equity and social justice by breaking down language barriers and helping to build more inclusive communities. By serving our clients and the broader community, we aim to positively impact the lives of all individuals in our area, regardless of their language background.

## Bridging Barriers

In 2022, IIA took a significant step towards assisting the Afghan community in bridging the language barrier by hiring a staff interpreter fluent in Farsi/Pashto. Since joining the organization, this interpreter has been an invaluable asset to IIA's Social Services Program, providing interpretation services for clients during home visits, counseling sessions, and doctor appointments. Additionally, the interpreter has played a crucial role in supporting IIA's Afghan Driving Classes, providing interpretation services both in-class and during hands-on driving sessions.

Furthermore, the interpreter has also supported IIA's ESL classes and Cultural Orientation programs, and has been instrumental in helping Afghans applying for their green card, providing interpretation services for IIA's legal department.

Thanks to the interpreter's tireless efforts, IIA has successfully bridged the language barrier, thereby enabling clients to receive the necessary support and resources they need to thrive. The interpreter's presence has been a key factor in facilitating client success and ensuring that IIA remains a welcoming and inclusive community resource.



## 3627

### Interpretation Requests Filled



## 655

### Translation Requests Filled

# Volunteer & Intern Contribution



**17**  
Volunteers



**2204**  
Volunteers Hours Contributed



**10**  
Interns



**2268**  
Intern Hours Contributed

## Volunteer and Intern Contribution Overview

At the International Institute of Akron, volunteers and interns play a vital role in our mission to support refugees and immigrants in Northeast Ohio. In 2022, we were fortunate to have 17 volunteers and 10 interns who contributed their time and energy to our organization.

In 2022, volunteers and interns combined dedicated 4,472 hours to IIA, providing valuable assistance to our staff and clients. Our volunteers worked in the donation room, sorting and organizing donated items and helping to distribute them to clients. We also had volunteers who served as ESL teachers, providing language support to our clients. And our interns worked alongside our resettlement and employment teams, supporting clients in navigating the resettlement process and accessing essential services.

Our ability to serve the refugee and immigrant communities at the level we do directly results from the invaluable assistance our volunteers and interns provide.

## IIA Volunteer Goes Above and Beyond

Jerry is an exceptional volunteer who has significantly impacted IIA in 2022. He took on the responsibility of coordinating donations with Trinity UCC to provide refugees with clothing, ensuring that everything was a proper fit for each individual. Since working with Trinity UCC to provide donated clothing to newly arrived refugees and immigrants, Jerry has provided our clients with over 100 bags of donated clothes. He has gone above and beyond, dedicating 557 volunteer hours to this critical task.

Jerry's commitment to our mission has been an inspiration to our staff and other volunteers. His tireless efforts have ensured that our organization can provide essential clothing items to refugees, helping them to adjust to their new environment.





# Community Outreach & Donations

When the community rallies together to support IIA, our mission, and our clients, the entire Akron and Summit County region is strengthened. In 2022, we were humbled by the incredible outpouring of support from our community, which helped us further our work of empowering refugees and immigrants to achieve their fullest potential.

One such example of the power of community support occurred in Hudson, where a coalition of organizations including the First Congregation Church of Hudson, Hudson City Schools, Hudson International Women's Club, Hudson Kiwanis, Hudson Rotary, Western Reserve Academy, and Garrett's Mill Diner raised an impressive \$50,000. Their collective efforts enabled IIA to purchase a much-needed new van, which has allowed us to provide safe and comfortable transportation for newly arrived refugees and immigrants.

Another inspiring initiative came from Christ Church Episcopal, also located in Hudson. A team of dedicated individuals within the church worked tirelessly to raise \$5470 through the church's collection efforts, which was used to purchase new laptops for IIA's classrooms. These laptops have been instrumental in helping refugee and immigrant families learn English, providing them with the tools they need to thrive in their new communities. We are deeply grateful for the unwavering support of our community, and we remain committed to working together towards a brighter, more inclusive future for all.



# Social Media



**@InternationalInstituteofAkron**

**3,700 page likes**

**4,000 followers**



**@ii\_akron**

**178 Followers**



**@iiakron**

**1,090 Followers**

# Thank You



The International Institute of Akron team would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for your support in 2022. Your generosity has significantly impacted the lives of those we serve.

Thanks to your donations, we provided critical services to refugees and immigrants in our community. With your support, we could provide them with essential items such as food, clothing, cleaning supplies, toys, and more. You have helped us create a welcoming and inclusive environment for refugees and immigrants, where they can feel safe and supported as they rebuild their lives in a new country.

Your commitment to helping refugees and immigrants is truly inspiring, and we are proud to be part of a community that cares so deeply about those in need. Your donations and volunteer work have helped us continue to provide essential services to the communities we serve, and we could not have done it without you.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to each and every one of you who contributed to our cause, including individuals, organizations, businesses, and foundations. Your support has made a real difference in the lives of refugees and immigrants in our community, and we are deeply grateful for your kindness.

We hope you will continue supporting our efforts in the coming years as we build a more welcoming and inclusive community for all. Thank you once again for your generous support.



# Thank You

IIA would like to extend a special thank you to all religious organizations that helped us carry out our mission in 2022. From raising funds for laptops to donating food, cleaning supplies, and clothes, our work would not be possible without your continued dedication to helping refugees and immigrants in the Akron and Summit County community.

Thank you to the following groups:

- Bethany United Church of Christ
- Christ Church Episcopal
- Dominican Sisters of Peace
- First United Methodist Church
- Medina Presbyterian Church
- Our Lady of Victory
- St. Vincent DePaul
- The Bath Church UCC
- The Remedy Church
- True Worship Church
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent
- Westminster Presbyterian Church
- First United Methodist Church
- Fellowship of Copley
- Holy Family Parish
- Hudson First Congregational Church
- Trinity United Church of Christ
- Riverwood Chapel
- Harmony Springs Christian Church
- Greek Orthodox Church
- Westminster Presbyterian Church



# Foundation Support



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