2020 was a challenging year for all of us. A global health crisis, a struggling world economy, and new constraints on work, school, business, travel, worship, and immigration put unforeseen pressure on all Americans, especially refugees and other immigrants, many of whom were just starting their lives here in the United States.

Our neighbors in vulnerable situations suddenly found it more difficult to find jobs, learn English, care for family members, enroll in school, find community support, maintain mental health, attain legal status, and more. As they have faced these challenges, they have done so with perseverance and determination. In days that have often felt dark, there have been so many stories of hope. With your support, families continue to press forward with life amidst uncertainty.

We want to share some of these stories with you. In this “Year in Review,” you’ll see a glimpse of the incredible impact immigrants are making as essential workers in the fight against COVID-19. You’ll read about the large number of people who have found hope through just-in-time support and financial assistance, and others who persist in learning English despite technology obstacles.

We see in you, our partners, this same perseverance and hope. Thank you for journeying with immigrant and refugee families this year, and helping to pave the way ahead with hope. Together in this spirit, we will continue to create communities of welcome all across Chicagoland.
Perseverance:
The Work Continues

A Letter from the Executive Director

When the clock changed from 2020 to 2021, I had a brief thought that we could leave all the ugly of 2020 behind and start new, or at least return to “normal” life. Perhaps you did, too?

But the truth is that many of our challenging realities remain the same as we progress through 2021. And yet, we know the incredible perseverance and hope that strengthened us throughout the last year remains and continues to grow.

This past year, the services you supported through World Relief were more vital than ever to help our neighbors persevere through job loss, illness, remote learning, loss of income, anxiety, and countless other challenges.

During times of national division and public health inequity, your investment has sent a message of welcome, a reminder that all people are made in God’s image. Your partnership made possible relief efforts such as emergency financial support and health education outreach, and countless churches responded to this moment, mobilizing food donations and volunteers through World Relief.

Even as we have been separated by distance and only connected through computer screens, countless volunteers have partnered with immigrants virtually to practice English, prepare for new careers, tutor youth, and just be present with each other. You have made it possible for people to come together in relationship at this critical time.

Thank you for being a part of such incredible impact this year. You have helped countless families persevere, and your partnership has ignited hope. On behalf of all of us at World Relief, thank you for joining with us in the story of 2020. May perseverance and hope remain in all of us in 2021.

Serving Together,

Susan Sperry
Executive Director

Read more stories of impact online on our blog.  
Visit our website at: chicagoland.worldrelief.org  
Follow us on social media: @wrchicagoland
A New Way to Help Students

Yoga during Homework Club helps high school students succeed during the pandemic

For high school students, Physical Education (P.E.) activities and requirements are not conducive for those living in apartment buildings, with large groups of people, or on busy streets. Most of the English Learners (EL) population in Aurora fit into at least one of those categories, and as a result many of them are failing P.E.

Together with the EL department at West High, a creative way was developed to address this issue during Homework Club. Brittany Hetzel, a World Relief staff member, is a certified yoga instructor. If students participate in her yoga class for one hour a week during Homework Club, they will receive credit for P.E.

The response? Students are loving it. While this was an unexpected turn for Homework Club this year, we are grateful for the creativity of our partners, volunteers, and staff to provide a welcoming space for high school students in the midst of a remarkably challenging year.

Responding to the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic created many daunting challenges for refugees and other immigrants this past year. Your partnership enabled World Relief to come alongside countless families and individuals during this challenging time. Below are three crucial ways we responded.

1. Leveraged Remote Technologies

As the world went from in-person to virtual overnight, many generous partners helped World Relief staff and many immigrants secure the technology needed to transition programs from in-person to virtual within a month of the pandemic’s initial closures. Platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, and WhatsApp, along with phone and text, became the pathways for refugees & immigrants to continue connecting with World Relief staff and volunteers. While not ideal, these remote connections created the pathways for vital services to continue uninterrupted.

2. Leaned on Church Partners and Volunteers

Even during a time of great discomfort and uncertainty, World Relief church partners and volunteers stood strong as the foundation for our work and the reason our mission is possible. More than 1,000 volunteers served virtually, and more than 300 churches partnered to provide aid, raise awareness, or mobilize their congregations. One prime example of this vital support was in the multi-church commitment to deliver food and supplies to immigrant families in need last summer.

3. Provided Direct Emergency Assistance

Through many generous public and private partners, World Relief was able to provide over $655,000 in financial relief to immigrant families in need throughout Chicagoland. This relief helped with rent payments, financial emergencies, career trainings to re-enter the workforce, DACA renewal application fees, and other basic needs.

Who We Served in 2020

6800+ Immigrants

Who came from 122 Countries

Visit our new website.
Scan the QR code.

Volunteer with World Relief
Learn how on page 9
Providing Care During Crisis

As needs increased, so did support

The United States began 2020 with a historically low refugee resettlement goal. By the end of March, refugee resettlement had come to a complete halt after the spreading pandemic made travel to and from the U.S. nearly impossible. Thankfully, these restrictions changed in July and a small number of refugees began to be admitted to the U.S. again. World Relief was ready to welcome them.

While the number of new refugees remained low, the needs among refugees & immigrants in our communities rose, and World Relief Chicagoland served more people in 2020 (over 6,800) than in recent history.

When people think of World Relief, they often think about the life-changing impact of refugee resettlement. Yet this is only part of the story. World Relief Chicagoland offices also serve immigrants who have already relocated to the United States and now seek services like English language learning, job counseling, citizenship assistance, or legal aid.

Throughout the year, thousands of refugees and immigrants reached out to World Relief for vital services, including support for basic needs & help navigating U.S. systems. As with so many people, the pandemic had interrupted dreams and created unforeseen obstacles. World Relief came alongside them to navigate these barriers.

Our COVID-19 infographic in 1 of 5 languages

Helping People Through Crisis

500+
K-12 students assisted in virtual learning transition

197
Total Devices and Hotspots Distributed

$273k
To help 227 households with rent & utilities

$655k
In COVID-19 Relief Provided

More than 100 winter hats, gloves, scarves, and cards were given to children ages 5 and under

The Duty to Inform

For many refugees and immigrants, breaking news in the United States can lead to confusion, fear, and anxiety. Language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of access to trustworthy news sources can make it incredibly difficult for an immigrant to understand the implications of what they’ve read, heard, or viewed. This is especially troublesome when the news has a direct impact on their lives or the lives of their families. World Relief has always made it a priority to inform our clients of relevant news and to be a source for further explanation or context. This past year, we helped clients navigate information on COVID-19, DACA, the 2020 census, an election season, and more. Within days of the first COVID-19 lockdowns, we built and went live with a COVID-19 information web page, translated into multiple languages.

Holiday Warmth For Over 100 Children

Having young children can be a challenging season of life for anyone, especially with the added struggle of living in a new culture with language barriers and social divides. When compounded by loss of income and lack of resources caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the families served through World Relief have faced significant challenges this year.

For the winter season, World Relief invited community partners to collect or donate children’s hats, gloves, and scarves as part of a winter clothing drive. The items would be paired with a winter coat and would then be distributed to refugee and immigrant children.

In response, a local Girl Scout made the clothing drive part of her annual service project and helped collect enough hats, gloves, and scarves for more than 100 children.

Thanks to this generous outpouring of support from the Girl Scout, along with many other church groups and volunteers, the quantity of donations exceeded World Relief’s highest expectations. Winter hats, gloves, scarves, and coats were given to more than a dozen infants, two dozen toddlers, and one hundred kids ages 3–5, totalling over 140 children served!

Thanks to many volunteers, the majority of the clothing donations were paired with handwritten cards that were then given to the children and their families as a way to help encourage and show solidarity during the holidays.
Virtual English Classrooms

COVID-19 didn’t stop World Relief English classes. Thanks to the hard work of department heads, teachers, and volunteer tutors, classrooms were moved online within weeks of the pandemic lockdowns. To help students adapt to their new remote learning realities, teachers and tutors conducted online tutorials and provided direct support over phone, email, and text.

Learn more about English Classes. Scan the QR code.

In response to the pandemic, we offered a total of 47 English classes completely online.

Learning English is the First Step

Thanks to World Relief English classes, refugee twin sisters were able to secure dream jobs in the medical field. They now work on the front lines against the pandemic.

After fleeing religious persecution in Iran, refugee twin sisters, Hana and Sona, quickly secured their first jobs stateside as factory workers for Home Depot. But despite their good work performance and high praise from their supervisor, the sisters were eventually let go from their jobs because neither spoke English well enough.

“Our supervisor liked our work,” says Sona, “But we couldn’t pass our English test.”

That’s when a World Relief volunteer and good friend to the sisters decided to help out by referring Hana and Sona to World Relief Chicagoland’s English language learning classes. The sisters eagerly enrolled and then worked tirelessly to learn the material.

“We were working days and nights to learn English,” says Sona. “I was sleeping 2–3 hours per day just so I could have enough time to improve.”

After years of hard work, Sona and Hana learned the English necessary to return to school and pursue their dreams of working in the medical field.

Sona now works as a respiratory therapist, and Hana works as a phlebotomist. They both work with COVID-19 patients daily.

According to the sisters, many more refugees and immigrants will achieve their dreams in the United States if given the same chance to learn.

“We need more free English classes like the ones at World Relief,” the sisters explain. “It’s hard to find free classes, even if you’re willing to attend class after work hours. More classes need to be available for refugees. With more English classes available, refugees are more likely to be a success. Their success will then motivate others who are happy to see their example. But learning English is the first step. It’s always the first step.”

English Learning in 2020

445
Learned English through World Relief’s Online Classes

2100+
Hours of English Tutoring Provided Virtually
Helping Clients Save

In 2020, World Relief Chicagoland relaunched the Individual Development Account (IDA) Program. The program helps refugees and asylees save towards an important life goal by matching dollar-for-dollar the money they save, plus providing financial education along the way. Participants in the program have used the money saved to buy a home, start a business, further their education, and more. According to many participants, their goals wouldn’t have been possible without the help of the program.

The Tun Family’s Dream Comes True

Thanks to hard work, financial planning, and the World Relief IDA Savings Program, the Tun family (pictured left) successfully closed on their first home in early October 2020. While part of the program, the family saved $4,000 in a very short time. They also completed over 46 hours of financial education, including home buyer education and housing counseling with World Relief’s partner HOME DuPage.

“Without the IDA program and World Relief’s help, we would not have been able to buy a home so fast,” the couple explained. “The program was very helpful for us. We wished to have our son’s first birthday in our new home and now it’s possible. We have a big yard, and we can make a playground for our son. Thanks to World Relief and the IDA Savings Program, we achieved our goal.”

Creating Career Pathways

New training programs led to significant wage increases in 2020

Working to provide necessary job training for refugees and other immigrants took on new importance and urgency in 2020. COVID-19 job loss had disproportionately affected industries that employ the highest percentage of immigrants (e.g. hospitality). In response, World Relief’s employment team partnered with businesses to secure employment for new immigrant job seekers, as well as for individuals who suddenly found themselves unemployed or under-employed due to the pandemic. Thanks to new initiatives like the Career Pathways program, job seekers were given the training necessary to find work for the first time, or once again. Last year, suburban participants in the Career Pathways program secured jobs at an average wage of $16.56 per hour, and the top 20% of placements averaged over $40k per year—a 12.6% increase from 2019. World Relief Chicagoland provided job counseling to 649 clients, 55 of which received more than $355k in grants for training in IT, health sciences, and CNC manufacturing.

649
Received Job Counseling

247
Different Companies Hired World Relief Clients

Give career pathways to refugees and immigrants.
Scan the QR code.
What Happened with DACA?

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is a United States immigration policy that provides a temporary status for some eligible individuals—also known as Dreamers—who were brought to the U.S. as children. Once they receive DACA, these young adults receive a renewable two-year period of protection from deportation and become eligible for a work permit in the U.S.

On September 5, 2017, the U.S. government announced that it would end the program. Then on June 20, 2020, the Supreme Court ruled in a 5–4 decision to continue the program, and on July 28, the previous administration filed a memorandum against the ruling. This proved to be an incredibly frightening and anxiety producing time for many DACA recipients and their families. So, to help ease those feelings of uncertainty and fear, World Relief and its partners advocate for just immigration policies that respect both the dignity of all human beings and the needs of our country and community.

On January 21, 2021, President Biden signed an Executive Order that protected and restored the DACA program to the original 2012 version. While DACA remains available now, these Dreamers still await a legislative solution that will allow them to fully contribute to the country they call their home.
Mission Mobilization

World Relief church partners put mission into action

Jesus House Chicago Church has been a blessing to the people who have come to World Relief for assistance both before and during the pandemic. Last summer, Jesus House donated crates of food to World Relief’s Chicago office to be distributed to refugee and immigrant families in need during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

World Relief Chicagoland’s church and volunteer engagement teams then coordinated the distribution, packaging, and delivery of the generously donated items to families across the city. And thanks to the dozens of volunteers who braved the pandemic to safely deliver these much needed items to recipient doorsteps, many refugees and immigrants—including some who were elderly, infirm, or at high-risk for COVID-19 complications—received necessary aid without leaving the safety of their own homes.

According to Jesus House’s Pastor, Emmanuel Oladipo, “It’s a serious time of need, and as a church, we are responsible for developing our community, and one way to do that is to provide support.”
Building Health

From refugee to volunteer health advocate

Angela Jalloh has dedicated the last twenty years to paying forward the same kindness that she received as a newly arrived refugee to the United States two decades ago. As both a Registered Nurse and a World Relief Volunteer Health Advocate, Angela now uses her medical expertise to provide professional and compassionate support to refugees and other immigrants in need of health assistance.

“The good World Relief does is endless,” Angela explains. “They have changed the lives of so many people that are going through so much personal transition. The employees are so dedicated, and so caring, and they really want to make the world a better place.”

In her role as a Volunteer Health Advocate, Angela works hard to help immigrant patients overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of a proper diagnosis, including language barriers, patient anxieties, and confusing financial obligations.

“I am there to help the patient comprehend,” says Angela.

“It’s such a great feeling to have a positive impact on someone else’s life. In my mind, it’s what we should all be doing. We should all care for each other. I wish I could do more. I just want to fix all the problems, but I know that everything takes time. But we’ll get there. We’ll get there.”

Join us to walk alongside refugees and immigrants in your community

From English classes and citizenship clinics to mentorship and tutoring after school, there are so many ways to build relationships and show welcome to refugees and immigrants in your community. Bring your gifts, abilities, and interests, and World Relief will help you use them to walk alongside these families and individuals as they rebuild their lives in the Chicago region.

To learn more, visit: chicagoland.worldrelief.org/volunteer

The Volunteer Experience Goes Remote

In response to the pandemic, volunteer training and support went digital

World Relief Chicagoland offers a variety of volunteer opportunities that exist across seven essential program areas, including English language learning, children and youth support, citizenship assistance, career mentoring, and more. But when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Chicagoland region to work remotely, our volunteer engagement team had to get creative in order to continue offering these services during lockdowns and social distancing.

In response, the team transformed these volunteer opportunities into virtual opportunities available online, meaning volunteers could train for their role via the internet and then assist their refugee and immigrant neighbors from the safety of their own homes by using new teleconferencing tools. The best part: the people they serve would continue to benefit from the vital support during a time in which many need it most. Even with this change to the volunteer experience, more than 1,000 people have served alongside immigrants and refugees this year.

Volunteer Health Advocate, Angela Jalloh
Thank You!

Through your partnership, over 6,800 refugees and immigrants in vulnerable situations had access to vital services they needed in 2020. Your trust and investment in this work created the environment for welcoming and just communities to form despite the limits caused by COVID-19. Your partnership led to over 1.8 million in private support, exceeding the budgeted amount for last fiscal year. Your generosity is making a difference in our community at this critical time. Thank you for your trust, financial partnership, and the impact you are having on our immigrant neighbors!

### Fiscal Year 2020

**Total Income**: $7.23M

**Total Operating Budget**: $6.89M

#### Income

- **Earned Income**: 4.5%
- **CARES Act**: 7.8%
- **Gift-in-kind**: 9.7%
- **Public Grants**: 55.8%
- **Private Funding**: 22.2%

#### Expenses

- **Program Expense**: 79%
- **General Admin**: 18%
- **Fundraising**: 3%

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We Bring You this Broadcast

The 2nd Annual Global Gala was scheduled to take place in April of 2020, but with only a few weeks to go before the event, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened to the point of statewide closures. An in-person event was no longer a possibility. But rather than shut down the event completely, World Relief Chicagoland’s Development Team worked tirelessly to reinvent the gala for the video conference age.

Available to stream live on Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube, the Virtual Global Gala attracted hundreds of viewers from multiple states, and included inspiring stories and performances from refugee speakers and musicians. Keynote speaker, Mawi Asgedom, and refugee singer/songwriter, Ephraim Bugumba, were a few of the highlights from a magnificent evening.

Thanks to the many who donated, World Relief Chicagoland raised $168,700 from the event.

Thanks to generous donors, World Relief raised $168,700 during the 2020 Global Gala.
Testimonials

A few words from refugees and immigrants who you helped in 2020

“If I know someone who is in a problem like me, I want to show them to World Relief. World Relief is the right place for immigrants. I am very excited about the future because now I am very comfortable to live in the United States, to live in Chicago. Thank you to the partners of World Relief!

Subira, World Relief Client, Chicago Location

“Thank you to every person that is involved with World Relief activities, because you are the ones that transform lives. World Relief staff cannot do it in absence of volunteers, partners, and everyone who is willing to donate to help immigrants and refugees. Without your support, I could not be where I am now. Thank you!”

Jerome, Former World Relief Client, Aurora Location

“World Relief Immigration Legal Services was with me every step of the way on my journey to becoming a United States citizen. They were always so helpful, and it was a real pleasure working with them to achieve my dream. Thank you to the wonderful lawyers. Thank you for all the emails, phone calls, and consultations. Thank you for all your advice. You have been a real blessing to my family and me.”

Jesus, World Relief Client, DuPage Location

Thank You, Foundation Partners

- Andrew & Alice Fischer
- Charitable Trust
- Chicago Bar Foundation
- Chicago Community COVID-19 Response Fund
- Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley
- DuPage Foundation
- DuPage Medical Group
- Charitable Fund
- Fox Valley Grantmakers
- COVID-19 Response Fund
- G. Carl Ball Family Foundation
- Gerald A. & Karen A. Kolschowsky Foundation
- Glen Ellyn Infant Welfare Society
- Illinois Bar Foundation
- Illinois Immigration Funders
- Collaborative
- Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois
- NKC Family Foundation
- Tyndale House Foundation
- Welter Foundation
- Wheaton Franciscan Sisters Ministry Fund
- W.P. & H.B. White Foundation

Help create change that lasts

There are many ways to walk alongside our immigrant friends and neighbors

World Relief Chicagoland is working to create “change that lasts” for refugees and other immigrants in Illinois, and we can always use more help. World Relief’s mission depends on the partnership of volunteers, churches, employers, schools, communities, businesses, foundations, and individual donors. Our work would not be possible without all these groups working together. So, as you can see, there is no one way to help. There is no one way to walk alongside our immigrant friends and neighbors. That choice is up to you.

To learn more, visit: chicagoland.worldrelief.org and choose one of the many options under the menu selection “Get Involved”