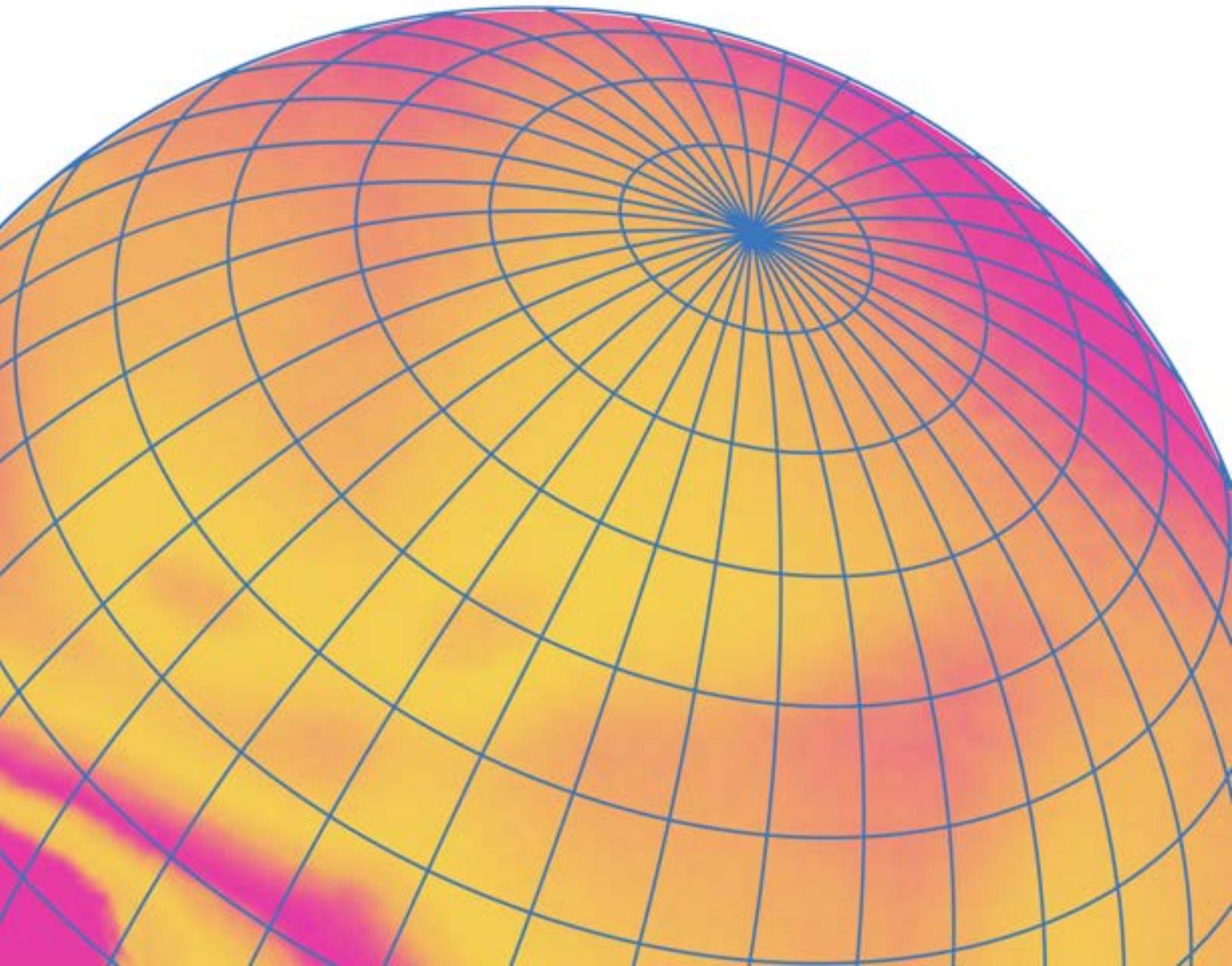




Community Asylum
Seekers Project

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



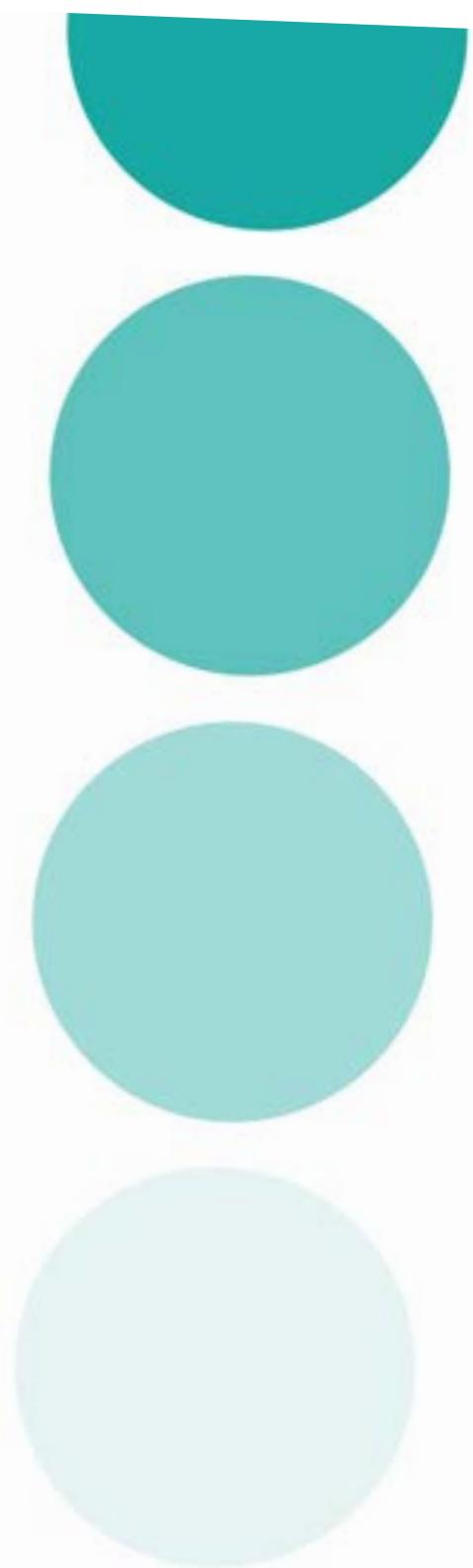




Photo Credit: Sandy Glaser



The mission of the Community Asylum Seekers Project is to cultivate a supportive community for asylum seekers in Southern Vermont, while fulfilling basic needs and accompanying them on their journey towards building a life in this country.

REFLECTIONS

In 2024, the Community Asylum Seekers Project experienced significant growth, expanding our client base, staff, and board. Under our new Executive Director, Liv Berelson, and newly hired Case Manager, Scott Aronowitz, we welcomed 21 new asylum seeker clients to our Southern Vermont community. Our donor and volunteer base grew and we strengthened collaborations with the statewide Vermont New Hampshire Asylum Seekers Network (VTNHASN), Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP), and immigration advocacy nonprofits from across the country. Throughout the year, we provided case management and legal support to 96 new and existing clients, while broadening language and legal access for the wider asylum-seeking community.

Throughout the year, CASP expanded legal and mental health support and strengthened pathways to client autonomy, responding to a lengthening asylum process and the need to make space for newly arrived seekers.. We celebrated the first clients completing their asylum cases and watched others step confidently into greater independence and full self-sufficiency after years of partnership. These moments were possible only because our volunteers, neighbors, and funders chose again and again to stand beside our New Vermonters. Your generosity, consistency, and courage are the backbone of this work. As we step into the next year, we do so bolstered by your trust and by the shared belief that every person deserves the chance to begin again in safety and community.

The close of 2024 brought a wave of policy shifts and uncertainty that rippled through the lives of asylum seekers and immigrants across the country. The asylum process is designed not to work. The asylum process is lengthy—even indefinite—confusing, bureaucratic, and devoid of federal support. Most of the general public is unaware of the difference between asylum seekers and refugees, including federal and/or state support, access to work permission upon arrival, and pathway to status. This confusion presents sometimes challenging implications for CASP as an organization, adding barriers to communications, fundraising, triage and sense of urgency, and mission-related programs.

REFLECTIONS

The asylum process will now only become harder. Even so, our purpose has never felt clearer. We continue to show up for each asylum seeker seeking safety here, guided by the conviction that protection from violence and persecution is a human right that cannot be erased by changing administrations or political tides. We are preparing ourselves and our clients to navigate what further changes may come with dignity and support. Part of that important work is advocating for and building the infrastructure and resources Vermont needs to meaningfully support new arrivals. Immigration advocacy organizations across the state are coordinating on funding, programs, and pushing for legislation that expands program eligibility and funds legal services for asylum seekers in Vermont.

Successes, Accomplishments, Major Wins:

- CASP's first asylum win! After nearly six years since beginning their legal process, a mother and her two children in defensive proceedings were granted asylum.
- The amount of time their case took is far from atypical—asylum cases can take as little as 4 months for those in ICE detention, to longer than 10 years for those who are non-detained.
- Collaboration with the Florence Project to receive unaccompanied minors aging out of Office of Refugee Resettlement custody and with the Transgender Law Center to receive LGBTQ+ asylum seekers requiring bond sponsorship and housing or relocation. In conjunction with these two programs, we were able to sponsor release from ICE detention for three asylum seekers and welcome six new people to Brattleboro.
- Working closely with local organizations such as ECDC, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation, and Vermont Adult Learning to provide employability and other social services to our clients. We continue to be a strong member of the VTNHASN network to collaborate and strengthen our mutual efforts in welcoming and supporting asylum seekers across the state. Read more on pg. 18.
- CASP, ECDC, and VAAP also partnered on two green card clinics, which saw local attorneys donate their time to provide limited legal assistance to refugees and asylees. VAAP and CASP partnered on an ongoing pro se asylum clinic with asylum seekers who are not CASP clients. Read more on pg. 18.

REFLECTIONS

- CASP ran an emergency fundraiser when a family of four arrived and was unexpectedly unable to access any services for which immigrants in their situation are usually eligible. This left the parents and preschool-aged children without housing, food, clothing, funding, or any form of support. With the support of our amazing Vermont community, CASP was able to raise over \$11,000 enabling us to take on the family for support.
- 4 children from Central America reunited with their parents already here in Vermont!
- CASP received another grant from the Ray Solem Foundation to run a two-year pilot program that enables clients to receive culturally competent therapy in their native language. Currently, we have six clients receiving therapy in Russian, Spanish, and English through this grant, none of whom had the opportunity to receive therapy prior. They report that it is very helpful to them, both in working through past trauma and preparing to speak about it at their immigration hearing.
- CASP also launched its pro se legal clinic in April 2024 and received funding for its expansion from the Vermont Bar Foundation through June 2025. Read more on pg. 19.
- CASP revamped its website, case management and email systems.

Staffing and Board Updates

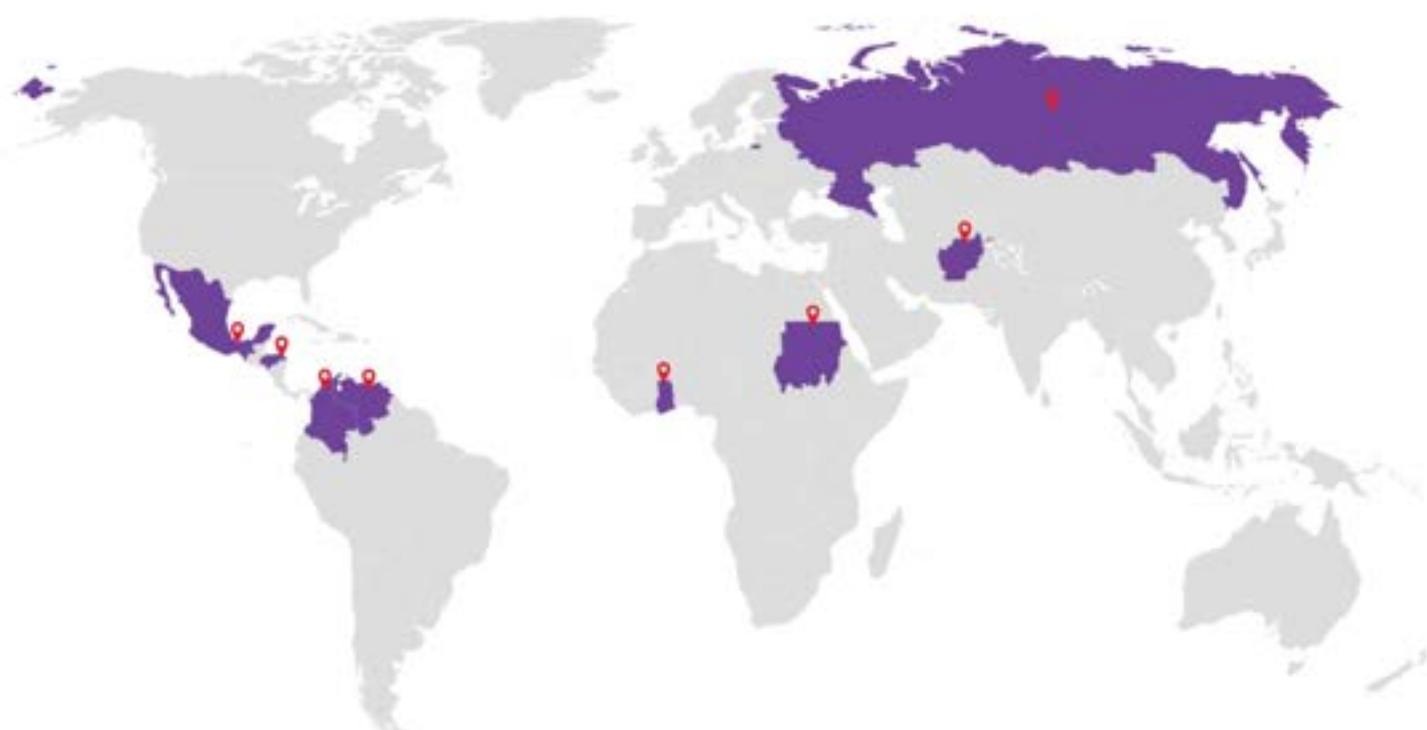
- CASP saw Ruben Garza leave the Board of Directors after the end of his 3-year term and welcomed a new Board member, Andres Jimenez. Andres has an extensive background in immigration law and works as the senior paralegal at American Friends Service Committee's Immigrant Rights Program. CASP is excited to have Andres join us and thanks Ruben for his passion, dedication, and commitment to CASP's mission.
- Welcomed two interns from UVM— Will Oliver and Maya de la Torre— who assisted with case management, interpretation, and legal services.
- We hired our current part-time case manager, Scott Aronowitz. Scott has a background with the PeaceCorps and the Boys and Girls Club and has volunteered with Afghan refugees in Brattleboro prior to working at CASP.

ACCOMPANIMENT

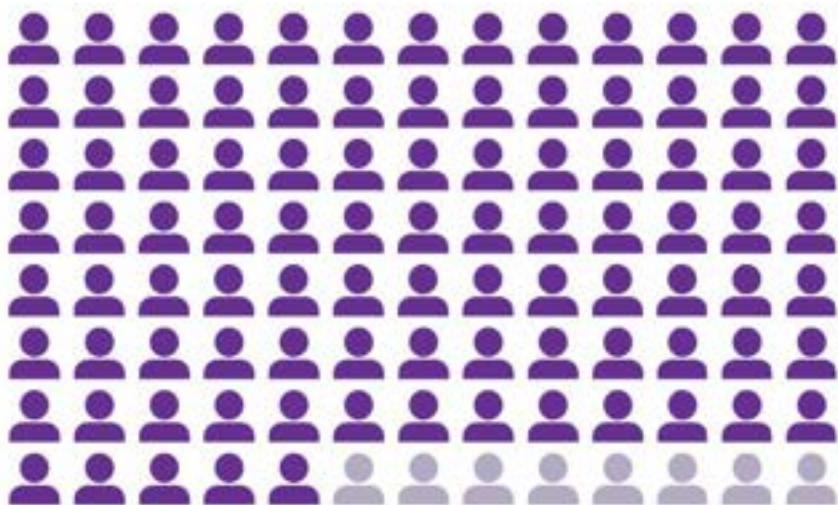
In 2024, CASP served a total of 96 asylum seekers living in southern Vermont, providing crucial support as they rebuild their lives. 3 of whom won asylum!! This is the first time since CASP's inception in 2016 that a CASP client has been granted asylum—emphasizing how important it is for asylum seeking families to be accompanied by CASP on their years-long journey towards asylum. We couldn't have done it without the support of our volunteers and contributors!!

CASP's services connect clients to essential social and legal resources, facilitate community integration, and empower them to achieve independence and self-sufficiency. We provide one-on-one support for asylum seeker families, taking the time to focus on each asylee needs. Individualized support allows CASP to determine the level of client support based on new client needs, as well as organizational capacity and resources available. It helps us leverage our organizational resources and support more asylees on their journey towards building a life in the U.S.

Currently, we work with individuals and families from Afghanistan, Colombia, Ghana, Honduras, Mexico, Russia, Sudan, and Venezuela. Our clients are diverse in age, language, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, educational and socioeconomic level, politics, and needs.



CASP 2024 AT A GLANCE:



96

Total Clients
Served in 2024

Of the 35 asylum seeker adults and children who receive social services and legal support:

- **29** are women
- **11** are children
- **13** have asylum claims based on being LGBTQ+
- **18** are victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault
- **6** have been directly persecuted by the government for their political beliefs
- **3** have master's or medical degrees
- **4** were left disabled due to their persecution
- **8** are bilingual or trilingual
- **5** have children still in their home country

In 2024, you helped us welcome 21 people including a Russian transwoman who was in a migrant camp in New York City; a family of four from Afghanistan; and a LGBTQ+ family of four from Colombia.



21

New Clients Welcomed



8

Countries Represented



3

Asylum Cases Won



2

Clients Bonded Out
of ICE Detention



4

Children Reunited with
their Parents



8

Extended Family
Reunited

MEET OUR NEW CLIENTS

After leaving home around the age of 16 due to civil conflict and persecution, they flew to South America and walked through Central and South America for several months until they arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border and asked for asylum. They were placed into the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody and stayed in a shelter for unaccompanied minors until their 18th birthday. CASP sponsored M upon his release from the shelter and M flew to Vermont. They are now employed at a local business and enrolled in English Language Learner classes and courses to obtain their GED. M enjoys playing soccer, reading, and swimming with friends—many of whom are young African refugees supported by ECDC.

Another new arrival, C, is an Indigenous activist from South America who was repeatedly attacked and threatened with death in their home country due to their advocacy for land and water rights. They and their partner carried their children across the Darien Gap and through Central America before reaching U.S. soil and asking for asylum.

CLIENT JOURNEY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY



6 Clients receiving therapy



14 Clients received assistance in securing permanent housing



6 Clients received their work permits



7 Clients secured a job



7 Clients received their driver's learner's permit

EDUCATION AND CONTINUED LEARNING



1 Client graduated from College



1 Client graduated from Highschool



1 Client graduated from Kindergarten



7 Children enrolled in school



2 Adult clients enrolled in college or vocational training



9 Clients received English classes

WORDS FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Client's Story

One of CASP's clients, Frank*, was kind enough to share his story of migration with us about his long, arduous journey to CASP and the Brattleboro community. Frank is a Queer, Indigenous person from Russia who became visually impaired due to medical malpractice after he was born.



Photograph taken by client

His story is testament to the journey many asylum seekers take when coming to the United States, the kinds of obstacles they encounter, as well as friends they meet along the way. His ability to rise above the circumstances and make it to Vermont speaks to his determination and the importance of community-based global networks that made his journey possible. Frank's story begins leaving Russia. He crossed the border alone, and from there he traveled to a country in the Middle East and flew to Mexico. Along the way, he made friends and found companionship with fellow immigrants on their journey to start new lives outside their home countries.

Five months after he left his home country, Frank made an appointment with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and asked the Transgender Law Center's Border Butterflies Project** for help with the crossing. Frank then crossed the border into

the United States, where he was placed in a border jail under their custody. While in the border jail, Frank recounts:

It was scary because I didn't know when I would be able to leave. I slept on a yoga mat and used an emergency blanket. I didn't like the food because it was always cold. There were five showers in the facility, but only two of them were hot.

After several days in CBP custody, Frank was transferred to a detention center in California, which was “much nicer, with real blankets and hot food.” Frank was in detention for almost three months and he said it was hard to remember the amount of time that passed.

While in detention, he does remember becoming very sick. Frank was brought to the hospital in handcuffs and remembers how he felt being sick and not being able to



Photograph taken by client

move his arms. He shook his head and gestured to his hands as he told us what it was like to be in handcuffs the entire two days he was hospitalized—the numbness he felt in his joints and the inability to fully move while sick.

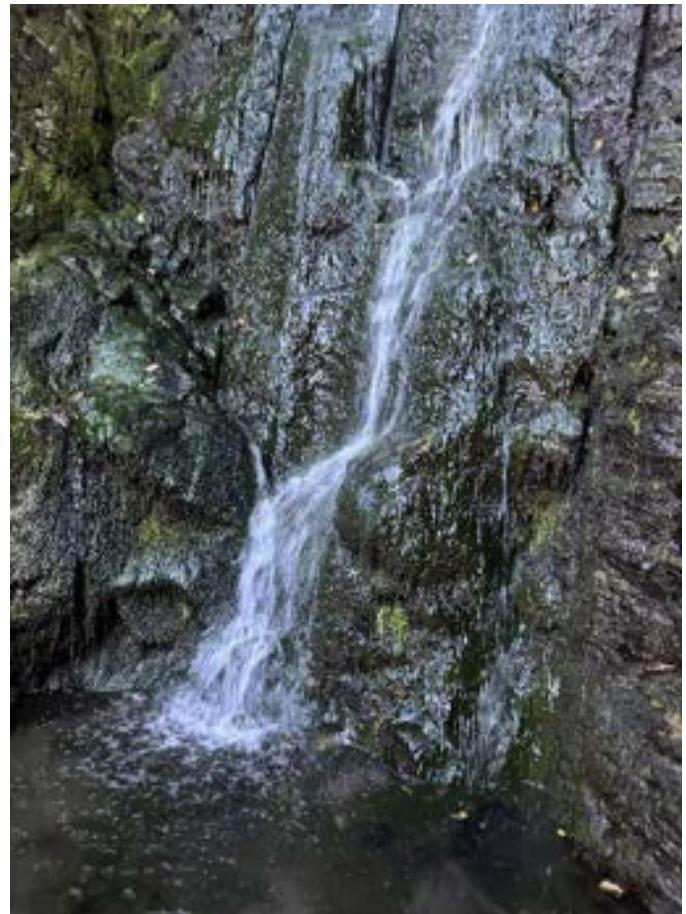
It was through Border Butterflies that Frank was finally connected with CASP. CASP agreed to sponsor his bond for release from detention and his bond was granted! Frank recalls:

when I was released I didn't believe it. I had made friends and they told me I was going to be released, and I thought they were joking… I took all of my stuff [toiletries] and I left some stuff for my friends.

Once out of detention, Frank flew from California to New York and bused up to Brattleboro, Vermont. In Vermont, Frank was welcomed by CASP. “CASP has supported me in every stage. They’ve supported me with housing, food, and obtaining a [Russian-speaking] psychologist,” he says, “the people here are really kind” and with community help I’ve been able to volunteer, become a student, and take English classes.” CASP helped him settle into the Brattleboro community and with the organization’s support he just received his work permit!

Frank’s story is a powerful testament to the long and often arduous journey asylum seekers endure in their pursuit of safety and hope in the United States. This is just one story of many that make up the CASP network and emphasizes the power of community in helping asylum seekers navigate the increasingly bureaucratic immigration system. Frank said:

It is important [to support asylum seekers] because people get scared what can happen to them in Russia and other countries, and they...need support. Also, people facing challenges in a new country, and if they can get support, they can become self-sufficient and happy living in a new country. It is good for people who are around them, and it makes people more connected within society.



Photograph taken by client

One of things Frank has found most surprising about Vermont is that there are so many trails that anyone can access. He loves hiking and camping with friends. One day he hopes to visit the National Parks.



Photograph taken by client

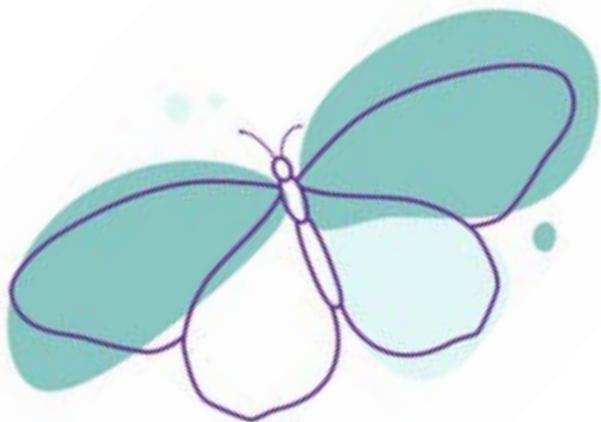
*Name anonymized for client's safety.

**The Border Butterfly Project is a coordinated coalition response to the crisis of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers at the U.S. southern border. Learn more here: <https://transgenderlawcenter.org/border-butterflies-project/>

VOLUNTEERS

CASP is a volunteer-powered organization. Our volunteers are essential to keeping CASP running and leveraging our impact and reach within the asylum seeker community. Volunteers are our roots—deepening community connection and supporting each one of our clients on their journey to self-sufficiency. Many of our clients have 4-5 volunteers providing support on how to navigate day-to-day life from grocery shopping to learning how to drive to family dinners. A HUGE thank you to our 100+ volunteers within our growing network.

To learn more and sign up to volunteer with CASP, visit here:
<https://caspvt.org/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-sign-up-form/>



Elayne Clift, a beloved volunteer shares the following experience:

"I support a family from Afghanistan. It makes me happy to accompany them if they have health-related appointments since I worked in public health. Everyone needs an advocate in those situations, and they are so grateful."

”



“I volunteer - giving driving lessons, mostly - because it's a small way I can help build my community. Solidarity, or mutual aid, builds a community I want to live in, a community that works for all of us.

I feel I am teaching people who have gone through a lot already to be here - often because of bad things our taxes have done - and the least I can do is give a little time to at least make this one part of their lives go easier. For better or worse at this time a drivers license is a necessity. Not having one is a barrier to them. I want them to feel welcome here, they enrich our community, and I want them to thrive and stay here - that's selfish I guess, but good selfish! I want them in my community”

Bert Pichard, Volunteer

”



“I have been working as a community partner with CASP for almost a year now, and my ability to do my job has been greatly enriched by the work that CASP is doing in our community.

Without CASP, their staff, their donors and their legal supports, I don't know what the family we have worked with together would have done. I am grateful every day for the work that CASP is doing, and it has been truly a joy to work with them and alongside them”



Daniel McNamara, Community Partner

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

One of CASP's core strategies is to increase statewide service coordination. Building collaborations and partnerships locally, and with state and nationwide networks, helps us leverage impact, advance purpose, and provide more support to our clients.

We could not support our clients without our local, state and nationwide partners. They cultivate a community of support for asylum seekers—providing essential services such as food, legal, housing, medical, employability assistance, as well as education, outreach, and training related to immigration. This included free vaccine and dental clinics, researching country conditions for asylum cases, workforce development, English language learning, forensic medical evaluations, monthly fresh produce, connecting LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in detention with CASP, and providing free or subsidized housing.



LEGAL & GREEN CARD CLINICS

We recognize that the need for legal assistance is far greater than CASP's capacity. In 2024, CASP collaborated on launching two legal clinics:

- A pro bono legal clinic—funded by the Vermont Bar Foundation and in conjunction with Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP)—to provide limited legal assistance to asylum seekers who are not CASP clients and need legal representation to help them file their asylum or work permit application. Since the clinic's inception, CASP has helped **36** people file their asylum applications, work permit application, or motion to change venue. **3** of our clinic participants had been in Vermont for **3-4** years without filing their asylum or work permit application, simply because they did not know how or who to go to for help. Another had her first court hearing in Texas scheduled for two weeks after she was due to give birth and would have had to travel with a newborn after a high-risk pregnancy or receive an order of removal in absentia. The clinic filed a motion to change venue for her, and her case was rescheduled for six months later in Massachusetts.
The legal clinic promises to serve as CASP's entry into a more prominent role statewide and is already attracting the attention of state agencies and government officials.
- A pro se green card clinic—fundraised for by ECDC and in conjunction with the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) and VAAP.—focused on refugees applying for lawful permanent resident status (also known as a Green Card) once present in the United States for at least one year. As federal funding for legal services was primarily focused on Afghans and Ukrainians, other refugee populations in Brattleboro, including but not limited to the DRC, Eritrea, Yemen, and Venezuela, struggled to find legal assistance for their green card applications. With VAAP providing legal insurance and supervision, ECDC, CASP, and several volunteer attorneys from the community worked together to create training materials and a sustainable clinic model.

In 2024, two green cards clinics assisted approximately **34** refugees and asylees in filing their green card applications.

Thirty-nine Asylum Seekers received Legal Orientation and Know Your Rights Support from the Pro Se Legal Clinic



2
Pro Se Green
Card Clinics

5
Pro Se Legal
Clinics



Fig 01: Legal Clinic Impact Overview

The clinics are open to anyone and go beyond CASP's direct services to our own clients, supporting the whole community. Key to both initiatives is recruiting qualified attorneys experienced with immigration law, which are in short supply locally. CASP's Executive Director, Liv, volunteered her time to run the clinics and support pro bono lawyers. CASP also created two pro se manuals to enable people to file their asylum or work permit application on their own. They were published in both English, Spanish, and French and were distributed to various nonprofits that serve immigrants throughout New England. Together with VAAP, CASP presented to the Vermont Bar Association on the intersection of immigration law with other fields of law and how to properly advocate for and represent immigrant populations.

At the end of 2024, the priority was to file as many asylum and work permit applications as possible before the change in Administration. The clinic successfully filed 17 asylum applications before Inauguration day.



Legal Clinic supported attendees from six countries.

VERMONT & NEW HAMPSHIRE ASYLUM SUPPORT NETWORK

In 2020, the Vermont-New Hampshire-Asylum Support Network (VT-NH-ASN) was formed to support asylum seekers through the sharing of best practices, information about asylum seeker placement and needs, legal information, and joint fundraising. CASP is one of eight community-based organizations across Vermont and New Hampshire who work with asylum seekers and are part of the network. The network works together to advocate for state policy changes and funding, as well as support one another in our shared mission.

Between 2020 and 2024, VTNASN navigated welcoming asylum seekers to VT and NH during a pandemic; explored becoming separate tax-deductible nonprofits; worked together and with other groups to expand pro-bono legal representation; participated in government education and advocacy at the local, state and federal levels; and received two significant grants. In 2024, VTNASN and the Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP) co-sponsored a symposium that brought together 400 leaders in asylum support from around the state. The network continues to strengthen and offer support to member groups. As the laws and requirements for asylum seekers change, the network is a valuable information sharing resource.

LEARNING TOGETHER

The “solidarity, not charity” philosophy guides CASP’s work. The organization reinforces these philosophies through training, organizational norms, guiding principles, and continuous learning (and unlearning). Accompanying asylum seekers requires us, staff and volunteers, to continue learning with asylum seekers. This year you made it possible for us to spend time learning and teaching one another. Here are some highlights from our learning sessions in 2024:

- CASP’s Board of Directors participated in a day-long anti-racism training with the Collective Liberation Lab
- Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP) in coalition with CASP, the Vermont New Hampshire Asylum Seekers Network, and Vermont Law School held a “Immigration 101-Know Your Rights” public education consortium for community organizations.
- CASP & VAAP taught a Continued Legal Education at the Vermont Bar Foundation about the overlap of immigration law with civil, criminal, and family law. Two of the attorneys were interested in representing asylum seekers.
- Collaborated with UVM’s Latin America Department to run a Migrant Studies course that teaches graduating seniors how to research and write country conditions for asylum cases. The course was overseen by Dr. Olsen, Latin America expert and Associate Professor & History MA Graduate Director at the University of Vermont who has served as a country conditions expert in asylum and Convention Against Torture cases. An asylum case cannot be granted without supporting country conditions; CASP and VAAP provided case summaries for this course and submitted the resulting research as supportive evidence in our clients’ asylum cases.
- CASP & Windham World Affairs Council co-sponsored the “Migration from the Northern Triangle: There are Here, with Dr. Sarah Osten. The talk addressed how U.S. policy and intervention in Central America has led to the exodus we see today. More than half of CASP’s clients come from this region and we welcome them while recognizing the reasons they have been forced to leave their countries behind.
- A Night of “Latingrass” with Larry & Joe: bringing attention to the status of asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees through music
- Visited local schools, churches, and rotary clubs to talk about immigration, family separation, and asylum seekers
- Collaborated with partner organizations to connect asylum seekers with computer classes, English classes, and construction classes.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

REVENUE

DIRECT PUBLIC SUPPORT	\$91,754.25
GRANTS (UNRESTRICTED)	\$42,034.98
GRANTS (RESTRICTED)	\$21,500.00
OTHER INCOME	\$9,874.83

TOTAL REVENUE

\$165,164.06

EXPENSES

PAYROLL EXPENSES	\$59,674.32
DIRECT ASYLUM SEEKER SUPPORT	\$58,598.37
CONTRACT SERVICES	\$15,265.80
FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT	\$10,908.00
OPERATIONS	\$13,857.61
INSURANCE	\$1,885.76
BUSINESS EXPENSES	\$7,655.87
UNCATEGORIZED EXPENSES	\$843.53

TOTAL EXPENSES

\$169,924.26

NET INCOME (OR LOSS)



-\$4,760.20

BALANCE SHEETS DEC 23 & DEC 24



TOTAL ASSETS	\$147,782.74
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$3,989.85
TOTAL EQUITY	\$143,792.89



2024 DONATIONS TO CASP

The bulk of the donations we receive come from our neighbors and community members. **46%** of the total money we raised in **2024** came from individual donations. Being funded by our community keeps us sustainable and accountable. We are honored by the ongoing support of our friends, neighbors, houses of worship, and local businesses.

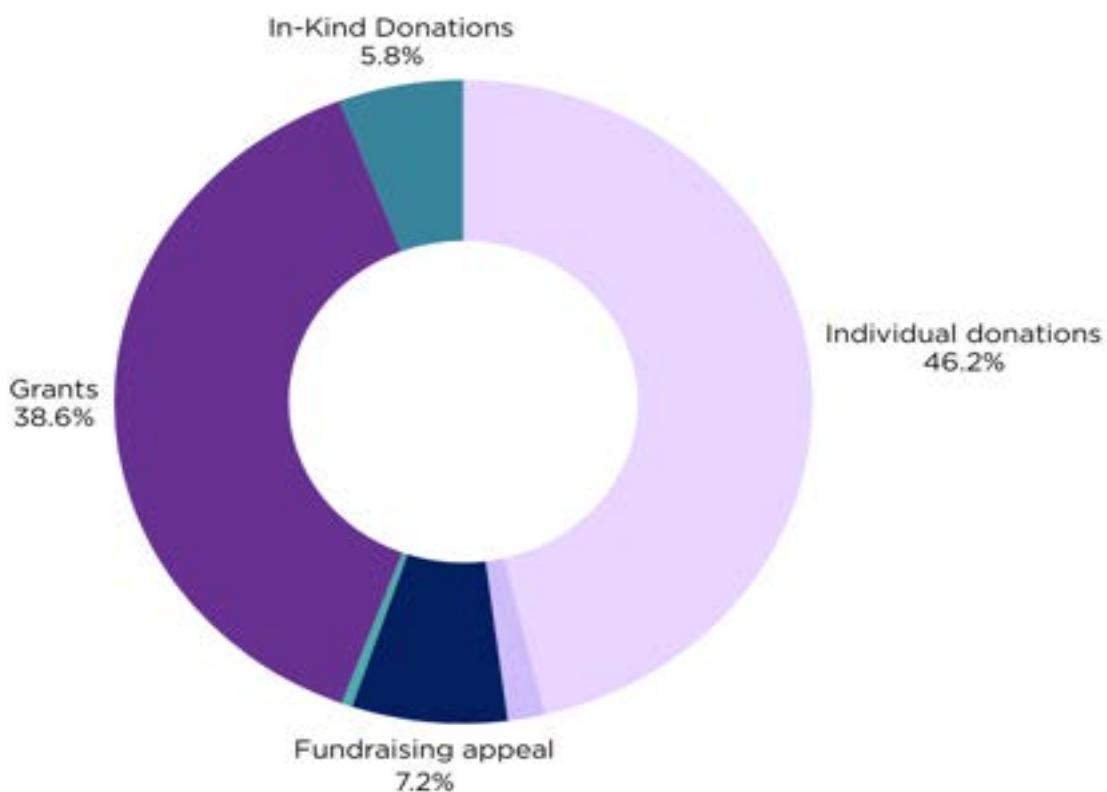
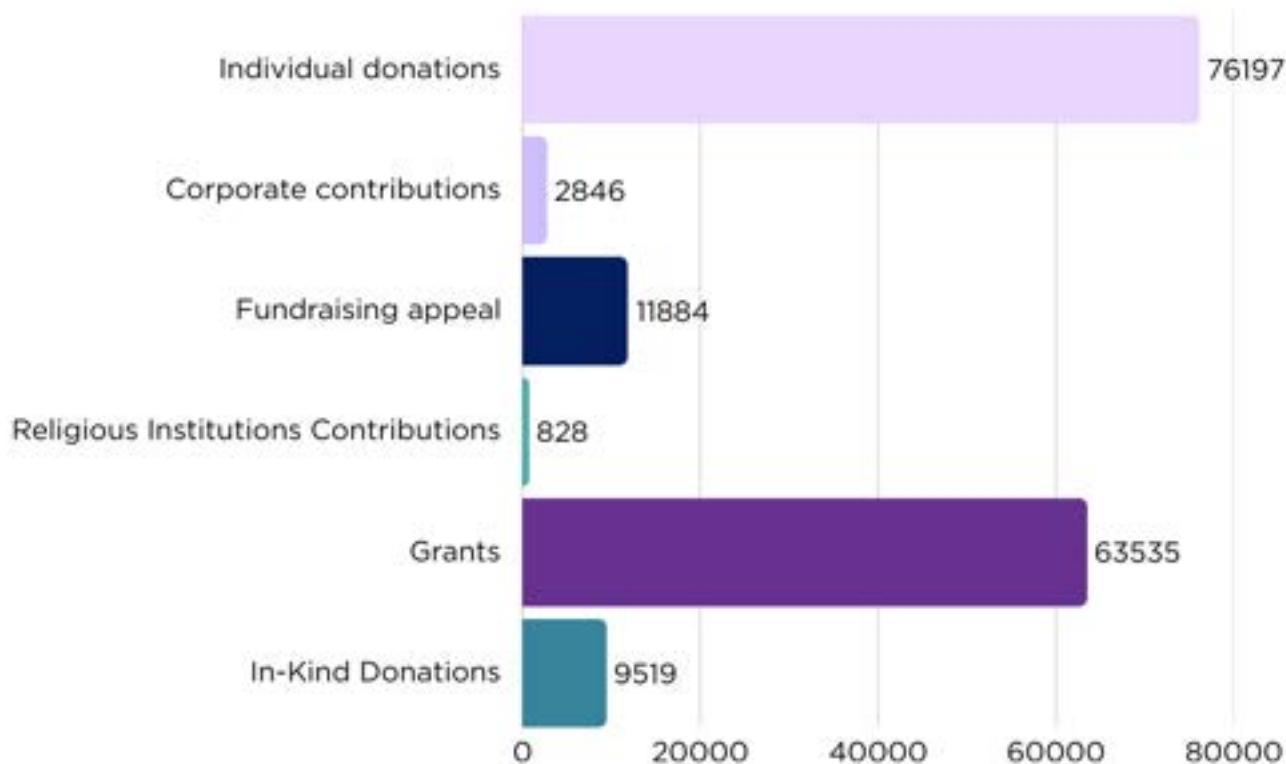
From Retreat Farm's food truck event and Dosa Kitchen donating their tips for the month to CASP to talks held by Brattleboro Unitarian Universalist congregation and the Sunrise Rotary Club—we are so appreciative of the creative ways our community continues to support us! Your donations have covered wraparound services to new arrivals, emergency housing needs, case management staffing, legal fees, funds to launch a legal clinic, culturally competent mental health services, and so much more!

Breakdown of Funds:

30 recurring donors with range from **\$10** to **\$150** per month.



TOTAL DIRECT PUBLIC SUPPORT = \$91,754.25!



Crosby-Gannett Fund



Vermont Plank Flooring



AJ MUSTE FOUNDATION
FOR PEACE + JUSTICE



Akc Fund Inc

Winooski Parents & Students Project



Town of
Brattleboro
VERMONT



Human Services Review Committee

Ray Solem Foundation



Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity



VERMONT BAR FOUNDATION



Canaday Family
Charitable Trust



THE THOMAS THOMPSON TRUST

A special thank you to Vermont Wide Plank Flooring for generously providing CASP's office space in Brattleboro and to our 2024 monthly sustaining donors! Hailee Galandrak-Cochran, Sali Taylor, Diane Kemble, Kathleen Michel, Francie Marbury, Tiea Zehnbauer, Ana Mejia, Samba Diallo, Mary Oeser, Joan Karp, Kathryn Casa, Heidi Watts, Judy Coven, Gil Rosenberg, Jon and Susan Joyce, Deborah Maynard, Gail Hoover, Gina Caputo, Corey Selover, Kathryn Parlin, Judith Yogman, Jill Newton, Keil Mueller, William Ploog, Melissa Trainor



SCAN HERE TO DONATE

LOOKING AHEAD

With the results of the November 2024 election we know that CASP will need to step up its support of asylum seekers in ways we may yet not be able to imagine. We are up for the challenge!

Our 2025 plan highlights include-

- Conduct a needs assessment with our clients so that we can learn from their courage and resilience.
- Strengthen our collaboration with other immigrant support organizations, sharing resources and information and joining together in advocacy work at the state level.
- Host a Know Your Rights training for the public in January to share strategies for ensuring our immigrant community stays safe while demanding fair treatment. These trainings will also educate the wider community as to how they can support this vulnerable population.
- Establish an emergency fund for unanticipated and unprecedented needs under the new Administration.
- And be on the lookout for the Arts Marathon, an exciting fundraiser that will support all of this work!

We recognize that great challenges lie ahead. Although we cannot know exactly what these challenges will be, our commitment to support for asylum seekers, who risked everything to get here, is stronger than ever. Thank you for being part of this community of support!

STAFF & BOARD



Liv Berelson
Executive Director



Scott Aronowitz
Case Manager



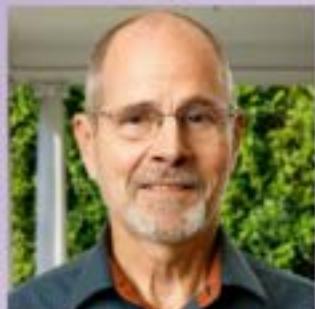
Francie Marbury



Hallie Boyce



Timm Harris



John Hatton



Andres Jimenez



Celestin Nkusi Ntaganda



Rachel Worthington



Will Zentmyer



PHOTOGRAPHY:
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