

2010

2020



THE REFUGEE RESPONSE



No 2 looking ahead
2019 Organizational Report

A MESSAGE from Paul Neundorfer & David Wallis, founders of TRR



Paul Neundorfer



David Wallis

In the midst of a blizzard in November of 2009, driving a borrowed minivan from Cleveland to the Bronx, we packed Thomas Kate, his young family and all of their worldly possessions into the van and returned to Cleveland.

We had met Thomas four years earlier when, as a Burmese refugee, he was surreptitiously studying at a Thai university where we both had professional ties.

We were immediately drawn to his commitment to learning and improving the schools in the 9 or so camps along the Thai Myanmar border. We became friends with Thomas and supported and visited the camp schools a number of times.

When Thomas and his family completed the resettlement process and were placed in the Bronx, we were there to support them.

The Refugee Response was granted 501c3 status at the end of 2009, but the organization was truly born in the midst of that snowy drive. We embraced a family that had been displaced by war and resettled to an unfamiliar world and brought them to Cleveland. We were focused on doing everything we could to smooth their transition. When Thomas and his family moved to Cleveland, they became part of an immigrant legacy that would become a defining force for TRR. Ten years later, the family owns a home in Lakewood, the children, now teenagers, are thriving in school. The family is at the center of a vibrant community of newcomers.

As we enter a new chapter in 2020, the organization has grown from serving several families to serving hundreds. Our programs are innovative and provide unique services where none existed before. We have seen first-hand how personal kindness can be transformative. This is at the heart of all that we continue to do. It defines our work. Our work recognizes the dignity of all those we serve and seeks to create hope that this new place can be called home.

Our early years of uncertainty challenged us. A decade later, we see the strength of the team we've built and all those now committed to this work. We are humbled by how profoundly we, as a community, met this challenge. Our commitment to the years ahead is no different than our initial commitment. We meet families where they are. We invest in families and communities. We take action where we can and we respond with a level of care and compassion that is durable and transformative.

As we celebrate "A Legacy of Welcoming," this year, we are connecting the history of immigration in Cleveland, to the work we do today. We hope you continue to support our work as we look forward to another 10 years of innovative and successful programming.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Neundorfer".

Paul Neundorfer, vice-chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Wallis".

David Wallis, board member

The Refugee Response is honored to have been named one of twenty five Cleveland City Champions for 2019, a list which was selected through community-member nomination.

Read about this award here: [City Champions.](#)



Mission Statement

The Refugee Response empowers resettled families to grow roots, supporting them in becoming engaged, self-sufficient and contributing members of their new communities.

Vision Statement

The Refugee Response will be a local leader and a national model for innovative programming serving resettled families, utilizing our strong bonds with the local resettled community and our deep understanding of national and global refugee trends. TRR will have an increased qualitative impact on the lives of those we serve by ensuring their voices, skills, experiences, and knowledge are at the center of our decision making.

Values

We believe in the importance of the resettled community and its unique contribution to the region and country. At the Refugee Response, we:

- ◆ Respect diverse cultures
- ◆ Provide high quality individualized education and personal support
- ◆ Utilize multiple program strategies to support family success
- ◆ Place the voices of resettled families at the center of decision making and programming
- ◆ Believe that our services, in collaboration with refugee families, promote a better quality of life for the entire community



53

Refugee Youth were served in the Home Mentoring Program over the course of 2019



92%

Of parents were aware of their child's academic performance after they attended Teen Response.

90%

Of students received two years of support with no gap in services provided.



100%

Of learners in the Adult Tutoring Program reported improvement in their English conversation skills.

45

Adult learners were matched with tutors for 2 hours, weekly tutoring sessions in English proficiency and self-sufficiency.



230

Ohio City Farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares sold to provide weekly boxes of organic produce.

33

Teenagers resettled to the US were enrolled in the Teen Response program at John Marshall High School, initiated in 2018.



46,700

lbs. of organically farmed local produce from the Ohio City Farm were grown with love, harvested and distributed for sales throughout greater Cleveland, OH.



MENTOR REFLECTIONS

"The most memorable moments were introducing Mohammad to seemingly simple activities: sidewalk chalk, paper snowflakes, using a tape measure, planting sunflowers ... His curiosity and joy were contagious."

-Laurel Beach, Mentor

"I just love this family. I am awed by their hard work, and their determination to ensure success for their children. I come away from our sessions having been uplifted by Aaron's wonderful sense of fun. I have learned just how supportive the Karen community is, and how proud the families are of their friends' accomplishments."

-Lindsay Graves, mentor



Aaron and Heary making "fruit pizza" with Mentor Lindsay Graves

HOME MENTORING

The Home Mentoring Program started in 2010 and since this time has been one of the foundations of our work.

The Refugee Response Home Mentoring Program provides one-on-one mentoring to over fifty refugee students in Cleveland, Ohio. The Refugee Response pairs each refugee student with a volunteer mentor from the community to provide meaningful academic and acculturation support to their student. Students spend two hours once a week after school with a mentor over the course of two academic years before completing the program.



Naila Paul

Director of Education

Mentors spend time developing a relationship with the student and the family to better understand their individual needs and priorities for support, and submit monthly reflections on students' progress. Mentoring takes place primarily at the student's home, with opportunities to plan excursions of cultural and educational value to the student.

In the past year, The Refugee Response has invested in greater and more thoughtful engagement with clients and families that we serve within the Mentoring Program. This has furthered the organization's ability to explore strengths and challenges voiced by the community, ensure our programming continues to respond directly to their needs, and explore new avenues and partnerships for what lays just beyond the bend. This year has also focused not only program outcomes, but also more regular monitoring of relationships and practices within each and every mentoring pair to ensure the program delivers consistent and high quality services to all our youth.



PARENT PERSPECTIVE

"Mwisa's confidence and openness has grown so much since the mentors started coming. Before, he was shy and reserved. Now, he is not scared of other people and is good at making friends."

-Buni Albert, father of mentee

(right) Tessa and Safa at the Library

Students enrolled in the Home Mentoring Program had real results in meeting or exceeding their OELPA* growth targets.

**OELPA is the Ohio English Language Proficiency Exam and is used to measure the English language development of non-native speakers*



68%

Of students paired with a mentor for one year met or exceeded their OELPA growth targets



72%

Of students paired with a mentor for two years met or exceeded their OELPA growth targets

41%

Of students paired with a mentor for 2 or more years exceeded their OELPA growth targets.

ADULT PROGRAMMING

Tutoring

In early 2018 the adult tutoring program started with 20 Afghan women who were matched to a tutor, this quickly expanded to reach 40 women by the end of the year. In 2019, 45 learners were enrolled in the program, each matched one-on-one with a tutor who provides support for a minimum of two years. Learners work towards individual development goals, like gaining citizenship and passing a drivers license exam. The program was expanded to reach clients from additional refugee communities including adult Karen individuals.

"Malali is an excellent student and asks for more homework! I've never had any student (ever) ask for more homework."

- Adult tutor Gwendolyn

"I'm very happy that my tutor helped and brought me a lot of materials for the citizenship test, which I passed."

- Basmeena, mentee of Jacquelyn GUSDANE



Tutor Marilyn working with adult learner Hsee Moo.

In 2019, 4 learners passed their U.S. Citizenship Exam.

Young Adult Employment

The employment program has two target populations. The primary target group is young adults above the age of 18 who are enrolled in CMSD high schools and will not graduation before they age out of eligibility. This group faces particular challenges to accessing employment that can put them on a career trajectory. The program includes in-school training, after school hospitality skills training, internship placements and employment placement. The secondary target group are those individuals who have moved to Cleveland as secondary migrants and are seeking employment services. Priority is given to those who have been in the U.S. for under five years. In 2019:

- 8 young adults were placed in part-time positions.
- 15 young adults received weekly trainings on job preparedness, interview skills, and resume writing.
- TRR solidified partnerships with 5 local businesses to provide employment opportunities for youth.



Dawa Tamang working at Xinji Noodle House

"Having a job means I can save money towards college. When I graduate, I want to study criminal justice, so that I can be a translator for my people when they are in court."

- James, a student participating in the Young Adult Program

TEEN RESPONSE

"Before, I didn't do homework. I didn't understand anything. Now I come to Teen Response for help with homework and my grades have gone up."
-Teen Response student



Launched in 2018, the Teen Response program currently serves 33 resettled teens enrolled in CMSD's John Marshall High School, delivering personal and academic support to students who have dealt with a wide range of traumatic circumstances, inconsistent education, and other emotional and socio-economic obstacles. Teen Response seeks to educate these newcomer youth and their families on key milestones towards successful high school graduation, while providing exposure to a range of educational and career paths for their future. Teen Response challenges students to explore their interests and aspirations, interface with professionals and employers, and gain greater awareness of resources for charting their own journey forward.

There was a **44% overall increase** in the number of parents who were aware of their child's performance in school since they attended Teen Response.

"Before the Teen Response Program, Ohio did not feel good to me. Now it feels like home."

-Teen Response Parent

Cartography is a play which shines a light on immigrant stories and uses maps to illustrate the migration of families around the world. The project, directed by Kaneza Schall and written by Christopher Myers, came to Cleveland in April and September to conduct a workshop at John Marshall High School with Refugee Teens enrolled in the Teen Response program. Members of the project worked with students to validate their experiences and empower them to tell their stories. *Cartography* was performed for students enrolled in Teen Response in November, who were then given the opportunity to offer their input on the project.

(right) Cast members from *Cartography* with students from the Teen Response program.



90% of students report that they feel better about their future since attending Teen Response.

92% of parents are aware of their child's academic performance after they attended Teen Response.

Community Engagement

2019 saw huge strides in TRR's continuous efforts to actively and creatively engage with our community.



Noah Toumert, TRR's Creative Content Developer, has been producing short, animated videos to inform our clients on topics such as how to navigate parent-teacher conferences, and summer safety tips. These videos are an ongoing project, and will be translated into our clients' home languages.

Watch the informational videos as they are released at our [Youtube channel](#).

TRR took part in hosting the Great Lakes Conference in November, an initiative of the Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland, of which TRR is a proud member. The conference featured speakers, like Cleveland's own Loung Ung (right), and hosted attendees from across the U.S. Presentations and lectures were aimed to inform and connect with those working with the refugee resettlement process.

[Watch Loung Ung Speak at November's Conference.](#)



This year, the Ohio City Farm had the pleasure of hosting Angelina Jolie for a visit to the farm. Ms Jolie is a close friend of 2019 REAP the Benefit keynote speaker, Loung Ung. While visiting the farm, Ms. Jolie reconnected with TRR's own Thomas Kate, pictured here, who served as Ms. Jolie's translator during her visit to a refugee camp in Northern Thailand where Thomas was living at the time.

[Read the article about Ms. Jolie's visit here.](#)

The Ohio City Farm was founded in

2010 in partnership with Ohio City Incorporated, Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority and Great Lakes Brewing Company.

As one of the largest and most productive urban farms in the nation, the Ohio City Farm welcomes thousands of visitors each year and stands as a successful model for mission driven businesses.





Michael Bartunek
Senior Farm Manager



Lar Doh
Ohio City Farm Manager



FOUNDED IN 2010 the Ohio City Farm is powered by the Refugee Response and is located in the historic Ohio City Neighborhood in the near West Side of Cleveland, Ohio.

In 2018 the Ohio City Farm transitioned from a program model to a for-profit business with a robust social mission. Triggered by the loss of federal funding in late 2016, a new vision for the Ohio City Farm was fully implemented in the 2018 growing season. A farm advisory board was established, comprised of professionals in the farm, food and non-profit worlds.

Several infrastructure improvements were made in 2019 to allow the farm to streamline production and work with increased efficiency. Some of these improvements included:

- Retrofitting one of the existing hoop houses into a heated greenhouse, allowing for a significantly extended growing season.
- Installing WiFi at the farm.
- Thanks to obtained funding, placing and refurbishing two new shipping containers for secured storage.
- Beginning construction on a new 30' x 72' hoop house which will be completed in the Spring of 2020.

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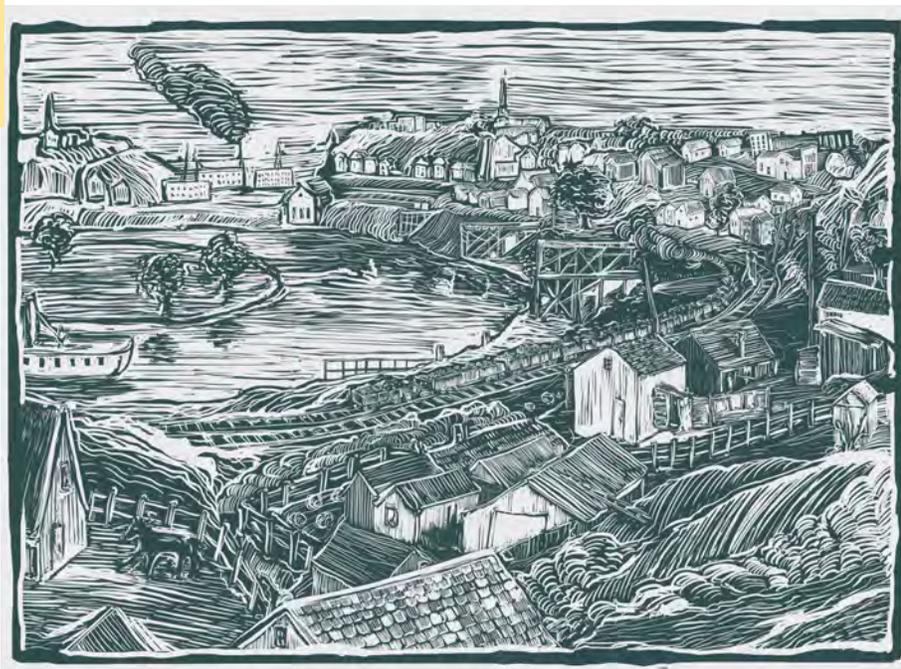
Kate Santos

David Wallis



A Reflection on 10 Years

I distinctly remember the excitement in the city and Ohio City when the Farm started. The front page of the Sunday Plain Dealer with the horses tilling the soil created a huge buzz. Much of it centered around, “Who were these people? And, what is going on?” Plus, it was just very cool.



For a city that often spends lots of time talking and planning and talking and planning – it was both shocking and inspiring to see an organization just dive in and do the work. Why talk about a farm when you can create one? The Farm immediately became a neighborhood anchor. For years, I worked in a building adjacent to the farm and would often go the Flying Fig Market for the best salads or sandwiches for lunch. One day I was asked to wait, as the kale was literally on its way over from the farm! I told the farm worker who brought the greens, Lar Doe, that I knew one of the founders, Paul Neundorfer. His face lit up as I watched a huge smile take over. He said simply to me, “Paul is my family.” “Mine, too,” I said.

Over the last few years as I’ve become directly involved with Refugee Response, I’m even more impressed with the workings of the Farm. It is not only a cherished mainstay in Ohio City, but an impressive example of opportunity meeting market demand while being an important part of the work we do with the community we serve. Our restaurant partners are advocates and champions and our CSA patrons have become a critical revenue stream that supports the many way we serve our families. The Farm is also home to the most beautiful benefit in town. There is not a more gorgeous evening in Cleveland than our REAP event, where we celebrate the vision that created this special place and our ongoing commitment to innovation and hard work that makes it thrive.

- *Ann Zoller, Chair of the Board of Directors*

The above artwork was created by Nikki Mokrzycki. It depicts Cleveland's historic Irish Town Bend as it would have looked in the 19th century; this site is the present-day home of The Ohio City Farm.

REAP the Benefit—Feed the Land



Over 500 guests were in attendance for this year's annual benefit, 20 restaurants served dishes featuring produce from the Ohio City Farm, and over \$100,000 were raised! The Key Note Speaker and Guest of Honor was Loung Ung, bestselling author, activist, and co-screenplay writer of the 2017 Netflix Original Movie *First They Killed My Father*, directed by Angelina Jolie and based on Ung's memoir of the same name. "First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia" has been integrated into many high school and university curriculums, and was the recipient of the 2001 Asian/Pacific American Librarians' Association award for "Excellence in Adult Non-Fiction Literature."

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to every supporter who attended this event, the local businesses who donated their goods and services, and all of the sponsors who helped to make REAP the Benefit 2019 such a success!



A Message from Executive Director Patrick Kearns



Patrick Kearns

Dear Friends,

We are releasing this annual report during a time of uncertainty and challenge that has impacted the lives of people across the world. It is already apparent that our work and response to the needs and dreams of the families we serve will be vastly different in 2020 from previous years. The challenges we are seeing now in employment, food security, veracity of information and access to education will most likely continue and to evolve in ways we cannot now anticipate.

As an organization we have immediately responded to this current crisis. We have aligned resources to address the unemployment and food security needs of families, we have directed our content development to create high quality and highly accessible information on the current crisis in a wide variety of languages and we have strengthened partnerships to provide innovative and immediate responses. We will continue to respond, so the families we serve do not once again have to experience the fear of instability. By holding true to our principles of team work, honest communication and empathy the Refugee Response will continue to be a trusted broker and friend in the community.

We will continue to be here, not only to support and advocate for the families we serve but also, for the restaurants and the local food industry that we are so intimately a part of. 2020 is the tenth anniversary of the Refugee Response and the Ohio City Farm. Over this time, the Ohio City Farm has been supported by so many local chefs and restaurants who are now facing an unprecedented challenge. These chefs and restaurants are a part of what makes this city so special. We know these current challenges will fade and we look forward to another decade of providing fresh local food.

The current crisis is a clear reminder that in this line of work we have a different bottom line. Our work is measured by how we support families during normal times and times of great uncertainty. We will continue to respond and will always put those we serve at the center of our decision making.

In friendship,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'PK' with a flourish.

Patrick Kearns, Executive Director

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Aline Musimbi

Agricultural Worker



We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the following friends and supporters who made 2019 our most successful year to date!

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We greatly appreciate each gift given in support of the Refugee Response and the Ohio City Farm, and we have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this listing. Please notify Patrick Kearns, Executive Director, of any inaccuracies or omissions at (513) 410-5194.

We regret any errors.

Thank you.



We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to all of our 2019 CSA Members who help keep the farm running, as well as Urban Community School, all the members of the Refugee Services Collaborative, and Catholic Charities for their continued support and partnership.

We also would like to acknowledge the dynamic and important partnership found in the many Cleveland restaurants we are connected to; you are invaluable to our farm, our young adult employment program, and to our community in general. Thank you for all your hard work.