



ASYLUMWORKS

Annual Report 2020



A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." I would argue the same is true for an organization.

2020 was a year of extraordinary challenge and controversy for AsylumWorks. We were not only called to care for asylum seekers during a global pandemic, but we did so against a barrage of anti-immigrant regulations that threatened to end asylum as we know it.

This was the year that reminded us that safety, family, and community are a privilege—not a birthright.

The desire to live without fear, to care for our loved ones, and to build a better future are deeply-rooted human needs that form the basis of our now nationally-recognized service model.

2020 was also the year that supporters, like you, answered our call for help in a big way. In a moment paralyzed by fear and intolerance, our community stood together to demand humanity and compassion. One by one, your individual acts of kindness, solidarity, and generosity remind us of a simple but powerful truth: *There is far more that unites us than divides us.*

With Gratitude,



Joan Hodges-Wu, MA, MSW, LGSW
Founder & Executive Director

WHO WE ARE

Recognized as a 2020-21 best-in-class nonprofit by the Catalogue of Philanthropy, AsylumWorks (formerly named the Asylum Seeker Assistance Project) provides holistic services and support for asylum seekers and their families living in the DC Metro region.

Our services are proven to help asylum seekers regain confidence and control of their lives. AsylumWorks clients are dramatically more likely to win their legal cases as a result of our services.

Drawing upon years of professional experience serving asylum-seeking survivors of torture, AsylumWorks has developed and refined a unique service model that leverages our relationships with external legal providers. Our core services include **trauma-informed social services, employment assistance, and community support.**



OUR MISSION

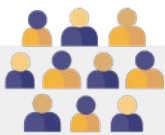
Through direct services, education, and support, AsylumWorks empowers asylum seekers to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose.



WHO WE SERVE

The DC Metro region is home to an estimated 50,000 asylum seekers. An asylum seeker is a person who has fled persecution in their home country and applies for refugee status from the safety of the US. It is not illegal to apply for asylum.

Many AsylumWorks clients became targets in their countries of origin because of their desire to have the same rights and freedoms Americans enjoy: democratic governance, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and the press, the right to assemble, and the right to petition the government among others. Largely ineligible for federal or state assistance, asylum seekers face many needs and challenges while they wait for their legal cases to be resolved. **In 2020, asylum seekers living in the DC Metro region waited, on average, more than three years before their legal case was heard.**



CLIENTS IN 2020

- 273 Adults
- 98 Children
- 42 Countries of origin



DEMOGRAPHICS

- 53% Female
- 46% Male
- 33% Arrived with children



REGIONS OF ORIGIN

- 63% Africa
- 16% S / Latin America
- 10% Middle East / N Africa
- 8% Asia
- 3% Europe



MOST REPRESENTED

1. Ethiopia
2. Cameroon
3. Nigeria



CURRENT RESIDENCE

- 44% Maryland
- 41% District of Columbia
- 15% Virginia



IDENTIFIED NEEDS

1. Employment
2. Immigration legal services
3. Support system in the US

“I feel like my life is also pending, not just the paperwork.”

KOKOBE, ETHIOPIA
AW CLIENT

YEAR IN REVIEW: COVID-19

Ineligible for government assistance and with few relationships to draw upon for support, asylum seekers have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. **By April 2020, nearly 70% of AW clients had lost their jobs and no longer had the means to buy food, pay rent, and purchase essential medications.** Equally troubling, many clients who had previously achieved self-sufficiency returned for assistance, further straining staff capacity.

OUR RESPONSE

While many nonprofits were forced to shut their doors, AsylumWorks stepped up to rapidly leverage our resources, volunteers, staff, and board members to address urgent needs in our community. After successfully adapting all client services to a virtual setting, our team:

- **Increased direct service staff hours** to handle increased client needs
- Launched our ***Friendly Neighbor initiative*** to reduce social isolation and promote meaningful connections between clients and volunteers
- Wrote and distributed **weekly newsletters** in English, Amharic, and Spanish to communicate accurate and timely information to help clients meet their needs amidst COVID-19
- Partnered with Campus Kitchen to deliver 410 **weekly meals** to clients and their families
- Raised nearly \$64,000 through our **COVID-19 Client Emergency Fund** to provide cash assistance to clients

OUR IMPACT

Despite an unprecedented year, AW's collaborative model rose to the challenge. In 2020:

- **77%** of clients found a new job within 6 months of program participation
- **88%** of client wellness goals were achieved within 6 months of intake
- **100%** of clients with cases that reached a final conclusion were granted asylum





HECTOR'S STORY

Hector is an asylum seeker from El Salvador who has a passion for physical education and youth development. After local gang violence threatened the safety of his three children (ages 9, 16, and 18), Hector was forced to send his family to seek refuge in the United States in 2017. Escalating violence forced Hector to flee in 2019. Hector was grateful to be reunited with his children, but their daily life was unsafe and unstable without the money Hector had sent to support them from back home.

When Hector came to AsylumWorks in mid-April, the odd jobs that he relied on to care for his children as a single dad had vanished with the pandemic. Meanwhile, state unemployment benefits offered little relief. When Hector first connected with his **Community Support Worker** (CSW), he was struggling to find a job and oversee virtual schooling while hastily searching for new housing amidst growing tension with his current landlord.

Hector's CSW quickly got to work and utilized the COVID-19 Emergency Fund to pay the security deposit Hector needed to move into a new apartment. His CSW also connected him to a **Friendly Neighbor volunteer** who helped him feel seen and heard. Hector and his family received weekly meal deliveries to subsidize what he could afford on his own. With the basics in place, Hector was able to focus his attention on employment and found a handful of short-term jobs to help pay the bills. Hector plans to participate in AW's job readiness training once his children return to in-person schooling.

Hector and his family continue to struggle but he credits AW with the tremendous progress they have made. Hector often speaks about how his faith in God guides him through each day. He draws inspiration from his children's achievements in school. One of his goals is to coach his son's soccer when it is safe to gather again. AW will continue to work with Hector and his family until they are ready and able to stand on their own two feet like they did back home.

FIGHTING TO SAVE ASYLUM

In early 2020, AsylumWorks served as an *amicus curiae* (“friend of the court”) in two federal lawsuits challenging a new fee schedule from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—including, for the first time in US history, a fee to apply for asylum. Our team provided compelling clients narratives to illustrate the hardships involved in paying these fees, particularly for asylum seekers without work authorization.

We continued the fight into the summer. Alongside 502 immigrant-serving organizations, AsylumWorks helped mobilize communities to submit public comments opposing new regulations that would end asylum as we know.

On December 23, 2020, we took our most significant step yet with the filing of *AsylumWorks vs. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)*. Our federal class-action lawsuit will challenge anti-asylum regulations significantly delaying—and in many cases outright denying—work permits for asylum seekers.

A heartfelt thanks to the **National Immigrant Justice Center** for spearheading this lawsuit. Thanks also to **Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP**, the **Center for Gender & Refugee Studies**, and **Kids in Need of Defense** for providing co-counsel. We are also grateful to **Tahirih Justice Center, Community Legal Services of East Palo Alto**, and the 14 courageous individuals who have joined us as legal plaintiffs.

As of the publication of this annual report, our case remains pending.



Read our Executive Director’s op-ed in the Washington Post



Why are work permits so important? Meet Asuquo.





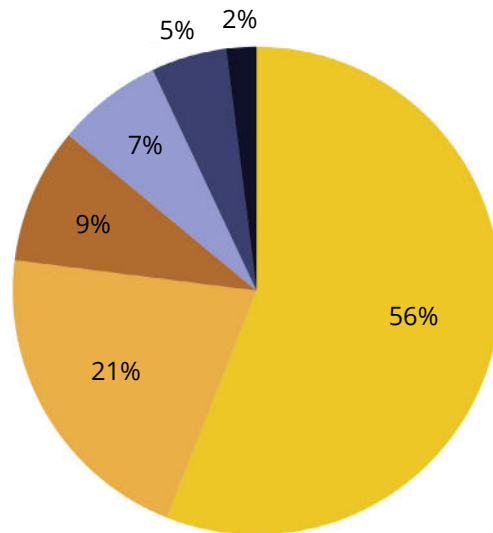
FINANCIALS

AW's budget grew by 53%, a substantial number, in the past year. In 2021, we will serve an even greater number of asylum seekers, expand the breadth and depth of our services, and continue to build new partnerships to amplify our work.

INCOME

\$552,181.05

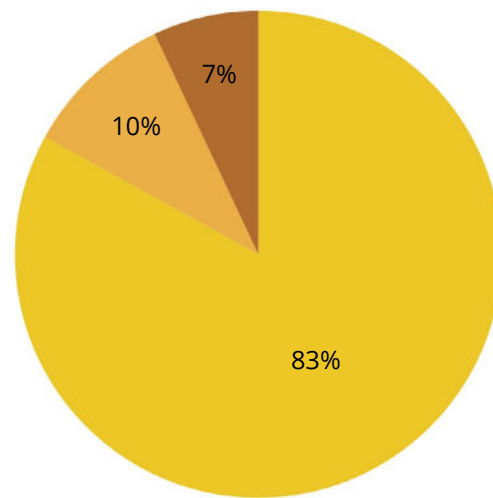
- Government
- Individual
- Board
- Foundations
- Corporate
- Other



EXPENSES

\$570,610.82

- Program
- Operational
- Fundraising



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NEW DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT



Pascal Masuba, Sr. Associate, Knowledge Innovation and Technology, Chemonics International

Pascal is an international development professional, thought leader, and emerging creative designer with over 7 years of experience in the nonprofit sector; advocating for women and children, and designing and implementing countrywide knowledge management and social innovation projects in Sierra Leone, Bangladesh and the United States. Pascal is a former AsylumWorks client, a proud He4She advocate, and the 2017 recipient of the Rice Award for Leadership and Innovation, awarded by the Society for International Development.



Alex Slater, Founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Clyde Group

Alex believes in bringing creativity and imagination to public affairs through effective storytelling. He has been on the founding team of three respected media and public affairs firms and brings a passion for social justice and equitable healthcare. A strong leader and creative force, Alex has been awarded four "Pollies" and two "Tellie Awards" honoring his leadership in public affairs and campaign management, and was most recently named to PRWeek's 2016 "40 Under 40" list.

SUPPORTERS

Gifts of \$10,000+

Cindy Hallberlin and
Joel Kanter
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Fifer in Honor of
Lauren Catron Fifer

Gifts of \$5,000+

Derek Fong
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Wendell Wu
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Gifts of \$1,000+

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Gifts of \$1,000+ (Continued)

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Gifts of \$500+

Alistair Crooks
Alpha Kappa Alpha
Sorority Incorporated,
Xi Omega Chapter

Gifts of \$500+ (Continued)

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Gifts of \$250+ (Continued)

Michelle Palmer
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Dr. Ming Sheng Wu
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Tania Ponomarenko

In-Kind Support

Alpha Kappa Alpha
Sorority Incorporated,
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CAIR Coalition
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*A list of donors who gave
less than \$250 can be
provided upon request.*



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