



YOUR BOARDING PASS:

# RAINBOW RAILROAD

ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR:

# 2017

DEPARTURE:

## State-Sponsored Persecution and Discrimination



SCAN HERE TO:

# TAKE ACTION

WHAT WE DO:

## SAVE LBGTQI LIVES

REQUESTS IN 2017:

# 1,151

LIVES SAVED IN 2017:

# 206

ARRIVAL:

## To a life free from persecution



## 2017 WAS ANOTHER

transformational year for Rainbow Railroad. In 2016, we were endowed with an investment from the Upside Down Tree Foundation allowing us to scale up operations to help more people. We immediately went to work, establishing a three-year strategic plan that would steadily increase the number of people that we could help annually — starting with 100 people in 2017 — by April, we'd made significant gains towards our first-year goal.

Then, the crisis in Chechnya happened.

Like you, I was horrified when I first heard reports of hundreds of LGBTQI people being targeted by a state-sponsored campaign to entrap and torture gay and bisexual men. We decided to act after learning an organization managed to set up safe houses for those able to flee. I visited the region and interviewed people in hiding — like Khalid, whose story is highlighted in this report.

We didn't realize the crisis would make international headlines. We just saw an opportunity to help.

Our response was possible thanks to the financial support of thousands of people around the world.

In 2017 we helped 206 people from 18 countries — double our original target. We also learned that Rainbow Railroad has the unique ability to intervene in crisis situations, which unfortunately continues to happen frequently.

So, where do we go from here? Was this unprecedented support a one-time event? Can we maintain this pace? Ultimately, our decisions are fuelled by the over 1,200 requests a year that keep climbing.

This is why, together, we must keep going — there are too many lives at risk.

Thank you for your support.



## THE IDEA BEHIND OUR WORK

is simple: help LGBTQI community members facing risk anywhere in the world by finding them a path to safety.

We are often congratulated for being pioneers when in fact there is nothing original in what we do.

Historically, a long tradition of movements have helped people escape persecution: the Underground Railroad, from which we took our name; the Sanctuary movement, and the many heroic acts performed during the Holocaust by people who risked their lives to help Jews and others at risk.

We are very proud that Rainbow Railroad, on behalf of our community, now takes its place among those movements. And we are equally proud to be part of a community that values the work we do and has supported us with generous financial aid and volunteer hours.

In light of our remarkable growth, our board and staff met late last year to map out a plan for the next few years. We were ambitious in charting goals to raise more funds so that we could respond faster and more effectively to LGBTQI people fleeing persecution. Your support has given us the confidence to be ambitious.

Given the growing extent of homophobic and transphobic persecution worldwide, it is easy to feel as if nothing can be done. But history teaches us otherwise.

We can point to more than 400 members of the LGBTQI community who found safety because of our efforts. These people are true heroes because they refuse to submit to prejudice and hate.

You give them hope.





## RAINBOW RAILROAD USA

was formed as an entity to support the work of Rainbow Railroad just before the American presidential election, which ushered in an administration that has since pursued policies that threaten the gains of the LGBTQI community. At that point, we felt that Rainbow Railroad's USA movement, which was designed to help those around the world, would suffer for support as Americans turned their focus to the threat from within.

Our fears could not have been more unfounded.

In 2017, LGBTQI Americans and their straight allies responded with an overwhelming groundswell of support by raising awareness and by donating and organizing events that helped draw thousands of people to the cause from coast to coast. We saw incredible acts of kindness in the wake of our intervention in Chechnya, among them a passionate supporter whose Facebook fundraiser raised over \$250,000 from nearly 10,000 donors.

The history of the USA leading change in challenging times with passionate, action-focused movements such as ACT UP, ensures that once again the United States will be a viable option for LGBTQI people seeking safety because of state-sponsored persecution.

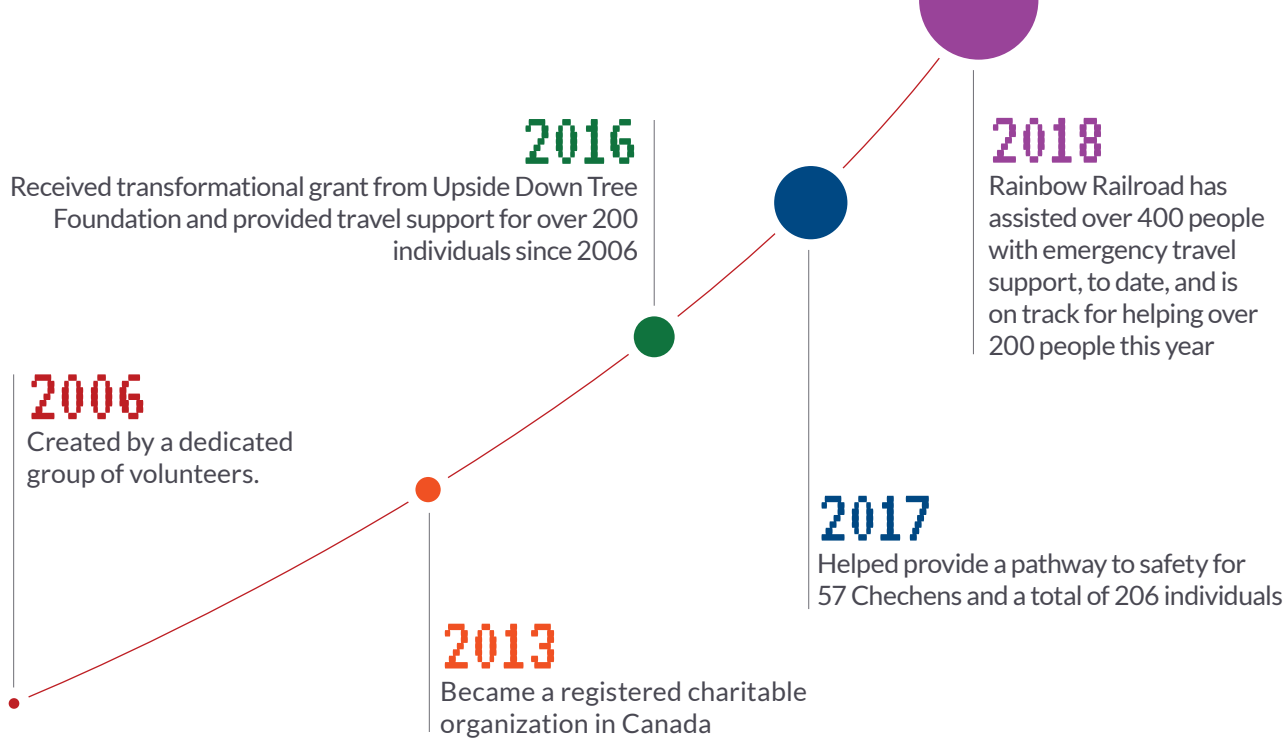
Rainbow Railroad teaches us that in an era where there is talk about building walls and fortifying borders, what's clear is that Americans' generosity and passion for liberty is still unbounded. From the LGBTQI person facing danger, to the human rights defenders on the ground, to the donors who contribute, to the people who help resettle newcomers — we're more connected than ever before.



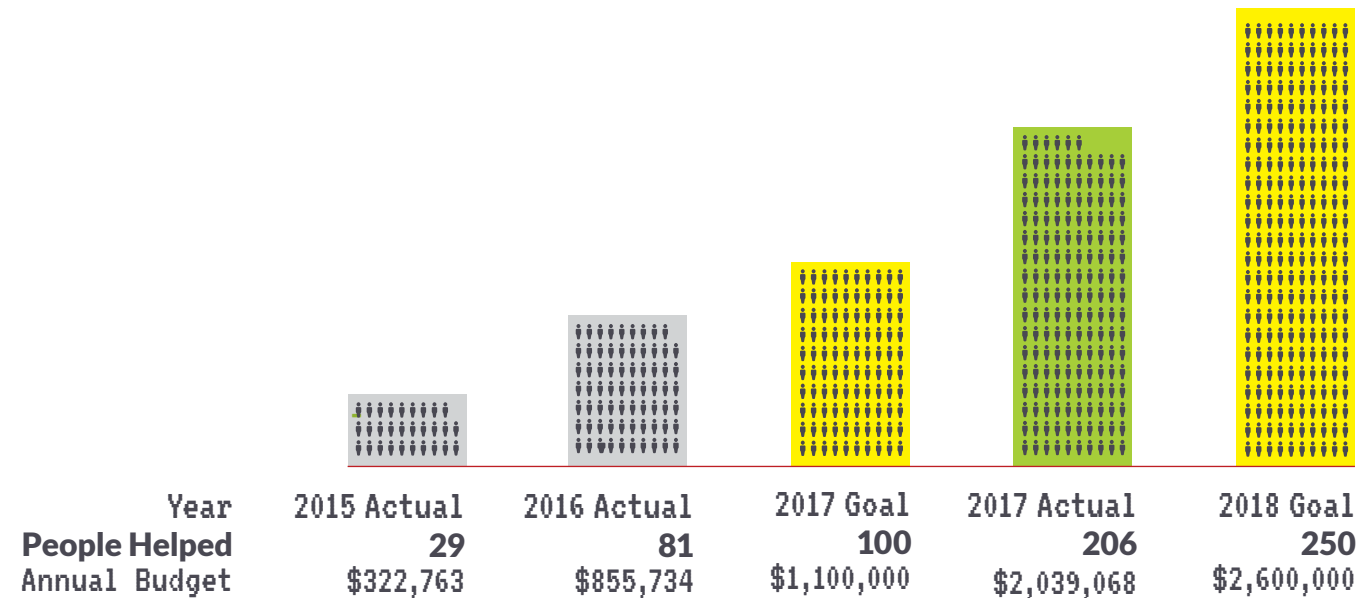


Journey

# OUR GROWTH & CHANGE



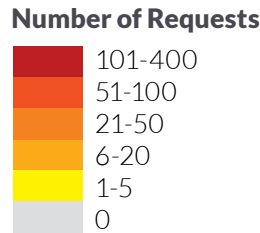
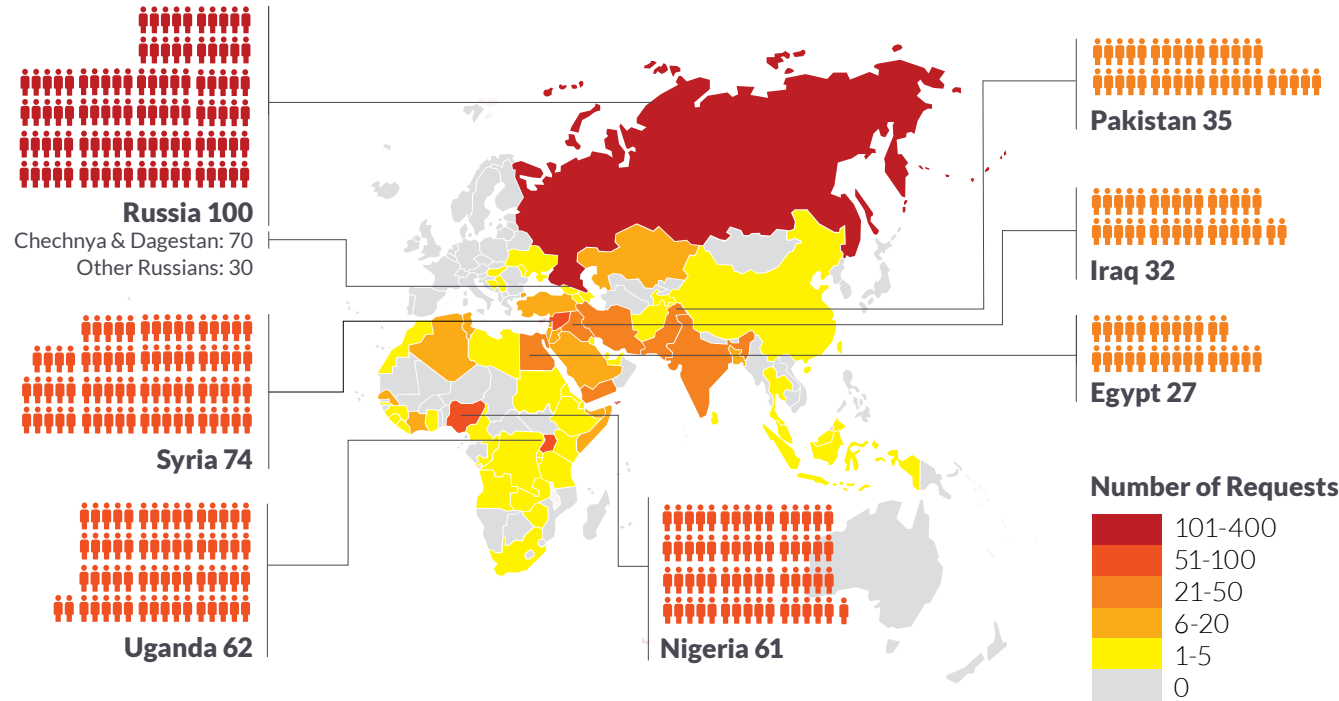
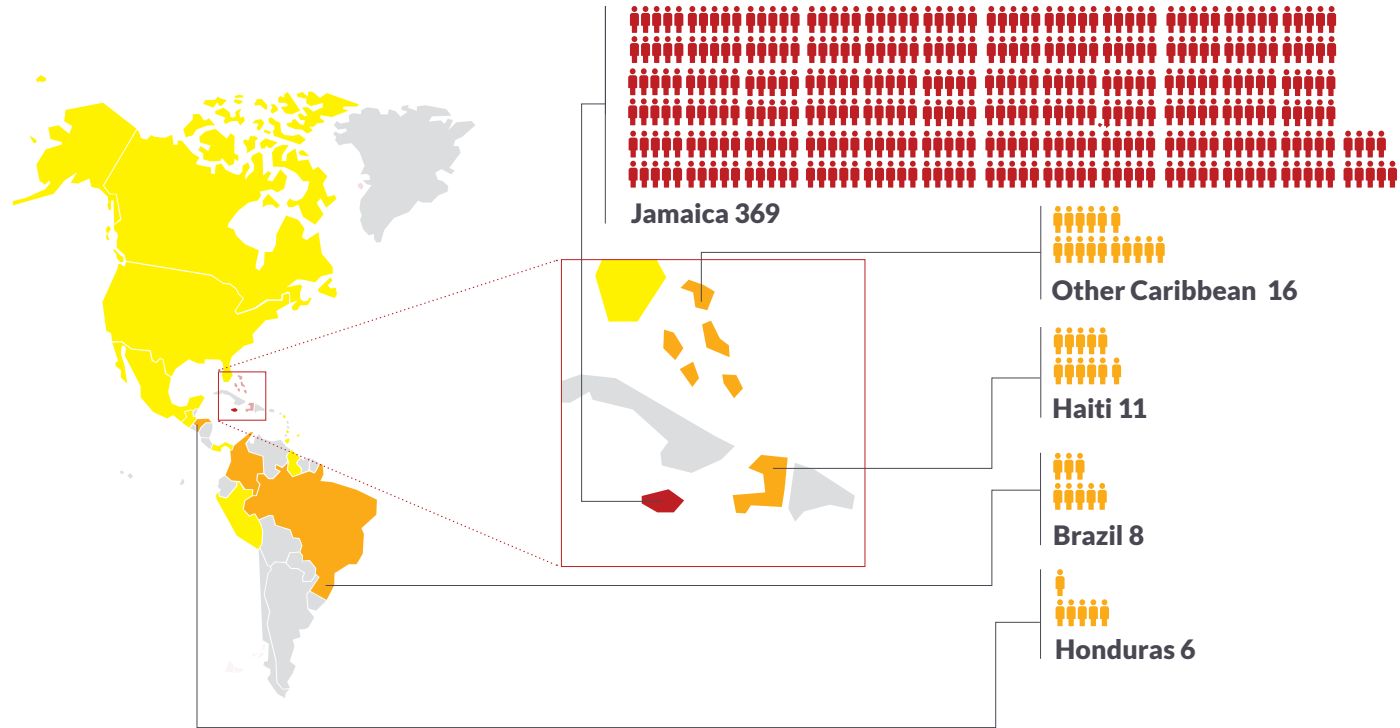
## BUDGETS & PEOPLE BROUGHT TO SAFETY



10

Requests by Nationality

1151 REQUESTS FROM 34 COUNTRIES



11





### I GREW UP IN BARBADOS.

It is a beautiful island nation. But it has a dark side. From about the age of nine, I realized that I was different than others. When I turned 16, my mom passed away, and life began to get way more difficult for me as an LGBTQI person. I ran away from home and ended up living on the streets. It was rough!

I was constantly discriminated against because of the way I dressed. One time, I was hit by a car, on purpose, to make me feel afraid of living.

When I tried to rent an apartment, the landlady said she wouldn't take me as a tenant because kids lived in the area and a person like me shouldn't be allowed to live near children. This constant abuse really took its toll on me.

**I was constantly discriminated against because of the way I dressed.**

After connecting with Rainbow Railroad, I had new hope that there could be a way out. Rainbow Railroad worked out the details for me to leave in August 2017.

When I got on a plane for the first time, and arrived in the UK, it was overwhelming! I'd never been around so many people. I was linked with people and resources to help me deal with the depression and anxiety that was so bad.

In November, I had a formal interview to process my claim for asylum. Today, I have safe housing, am receiving medical care and therapy, and can actually dream of finding a woman to be my wife. I'm so grateful to the team at Rainbow Railroad for making this possible.





## WHEN THE COUPLE ARRIVED

in Toronto from war-torn Syria in 2016, Toronto's Pride festivities were in full swing. Two years later, now safe and happy together downtown, the couple recall the glorious moment they arrived in Canada thanks to Rainbow Railroad.

"It was such an amazing time to arrive here. Everything was so beautiful," Tarek says. "We came from a place where we were closeted, to here, in Canada, where gay people are completely open and walking around."

The couple met in Syria and managed to keep their relationship a secret, Mazen says. "Gay is illegal there. So we stayed hidden. We pretended to be just friends, never together in public."

**We decided to leave so we can live our life and be together.**

Although it was extremely difficult to leave their families, they made the decision to get out of Syria. "There was nothing for us there. We have no rights. We are always in danger. So we decided to leave so we can live our life and be together."

When they were connected to a Rainbow Railroad Private Sponsorship Team, they got a call from their team who told them there was an apartment waiting for them in Toronto.

"There were ten people on the team, and they were all waiting at the airport holding a welcome sign in Arabic when we arrived," Mazen says.

"We are all still friends, even though the sponsorship is done. We are family. They are all so great."

Mazen and Tarek say they are so grateful to Rainbow Railroad for making it possible for them to have a life together.





## THE WORLD BEGAN TO HEAR

about the horror that was unfolding in Chechnya through news reports by Elena Milashina and her colleague Irina Gordienko in Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* in April 2017. After weeks of investigating and gaining the trust of sources, the journalists uncovered evidence that gay men were being detained, tortured, and even killed in an anti-homosexual purge.

Rainbow Railroad immediately leapt into action, partnering with the Russian LGBT Network, which had set up safe houses in Russia for people who managed to escape. “It was the most stressful time,” Khalid said.

“I was paranoid about everything. I couldn’t be certain that it wasn’t some kind of trick; if the people helping me were somehow working with the police.”

**Toronto, a welcoming city, where my sexual orientation doesn’t matter. I’m free!**

“Tell them I’m free! I’m able to live my life. I’m so thankful to be able to live in Toronto, a welcoming city, where my sexual orientation doesn’t matter. I’m free!”

Rainbow Railroad was able to bring 57 Chechens to safety, many arriving in Canada.

“Rainbow Railroad arranged for my transportation and upon arrival I have received support from COSTI Immigrant Services and been connected with The 519, and these organizations have been key to helping me thrive as a newcomer. I have safe housing, I’m learning English, working part-time, and enrolled in a program studying marketing. Please let everyone know I’m so grateful for their help!”





## HER LIFE CHANGED AFTER

she began volunteering for Rainbow Railroad. Last summer she helped translate the stories of gay men who escaped persecution and torture during the horrific anti-homosexual purge in Chechnya — an experience that left a deep and lasting impact.

“I’m so proud to have acted as an interpreter for all the Chechen refugees that came to Canada. I’m also so grateful for everyone who supports Rainbow Railroad, which makes it possible for them to do this important work.”

As a lesbian from Georgia, one of the Russian Caucasus, Lily followed reports of the crack-down closely, and was surprised to find that Rainbow Railroad was based in Toronto. “I wanted to help. So I contacted Rainbow Railroad and offered to translate.”

**I’m so proud to have acted as an interpreter for all the Chechen refugees.**

“It was profoundly personal for me to volunteer and be a translator for these men. Russia is an extremely homophobic place,” she says.

“Given the chaos in the world today, and the rise of right-wing movements around the world, which often manifest in very homophobic ways, Rainbow Railroad is a triage point for people.”

There were even reports of Chechen police instructing parents to kill their own LGBTQI children and dispose of the bodies or the authorities would do it for them, according to survivor stories.

“How do you navigate that kind of society as a gay person?” she asks. “There’s no way to escape.”





## 2017 ARRIVALS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

 Jamaica	122	 Barbados	2	 Haiti	1
 Chechnya	57	 Bahamas	2	 Egypt	1
 Iraq	4	 Yemen	1	 Bangladesh	1
 Trinidad	3	 Morocco	1	 Armenia	1
 Syria	3	 Libya	1	 <b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>
 Uganda	2	 Jordan	1		
 Nigeria	2	 Honduras	1		

## STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

In 2017, Rainbow Railroad's strategic advocacy and network-building allowed us to be more responsive than ever to LGBTQI requests for aid.

Our three-year strategic plan, finalized in January 2017, provides a thorough overview of Rainbow Railroad's commitment to develop our organization's internal processes.

The strategic plan has allowed us to identify the new tools we require in order to grow

as an organization, build up our resources to address our needs, and help as many people as possible escape persecution.

The plan ensures that our organization's exponential expansion continues, and allows us to build upon our established connections within our organization and community to create lasting resources in order to help more people.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



**1:Deepen**  
and Broaden  
Current Services



**2:Expand**  
Reach New People  
With New Tools



**3:Build**  
The Capacity to Meet  
the Organization's Needs





**JUST THREE YEARS AGO,** we were at Rideau Hall in Ottawa accepting the Order of Canada, the country's highest honour. There we were, surrounded by people who have done these amazing things. We pick drapes for a living. So we thought right at that moment, we really need to step it up. So we did.

A friend of ours told us about Rainbow Railroad and what they do. This is an organization that is saving lives. You make a donation, and you get a direct result. And that was really compelling for us.

So we hosted a fundraiser here last year. Kimahli and two survivors came to speak, and it was so heartfelt for everyone here. We like to connect our clients and vendors to things we're interested in.

**Most people have no idea. They're shocked to hear the situation for gay people in other countries.**

When people hear about the work that Rainbow Railroad does — the basis for that work — they're appalled and horrified. Most people have no idea.

They're shocked to hear the situation for gay people in other countries. The violence is extreme. They're beaten, sometimes executed. We both feel so lucky. We came from loving families and it wasn't a big deal. We didn't have big hardships compared to that, and because we're successful, we can set a positive example and help. Rainbow Railroad is a cause that is really dear to our hearts. Here is a grassroots organization making a difference, doing incredible work.

**George Yabu and Glenn Pushelberg are international design stars based in Toronto.**







**AS A LEADING HIV FUNDER,** the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF) is strongly committed to responding to the changing needs of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. We couldn't be more grateful to be recognized by EJAF.

In 2017, EJAF renewed their grant support to Rainbow Railroad to \$75,000 USD. Their philanthropy and partnership allow us to address the shocking discrimination and barriers experienced by LGBTQI people in the Caribbean.

To bring LGBTQI people to safety, we continue to partner with institutions that recognize the intersection of civil and human rights, equality and health care. In this shared space, we are making the world a safer place.

**Their philanthropy and partnership allow us to address the shocking discrimination.**

EJAF knows all too well that homophobia and transphobia fuel the HIV epidemic. And, tragically, parts of the Caribbean remain some of the most homophobic and transphobic places in the world. Identification as LGBTQI

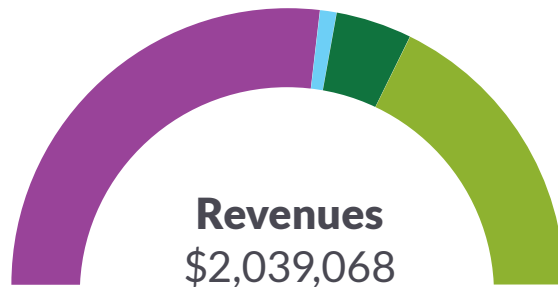
or as an HIV+ person significantly increases an individual's risk of death. Moreover, this risk often means violent death by state-sponsored assassination, mob violence, or preventable deaths due to discrimination and lack of access to life-saving treatment.

We are thankful to EJAF for their relentless, compassionate, and strategic philanthropy, which enabled Rainbow Railroad to assist people in danger in 2017.

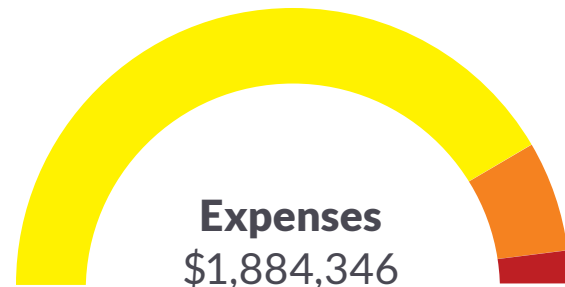




## RAINBOW RAILROAD CANADA 2017 FINANCIAL SUMMARY



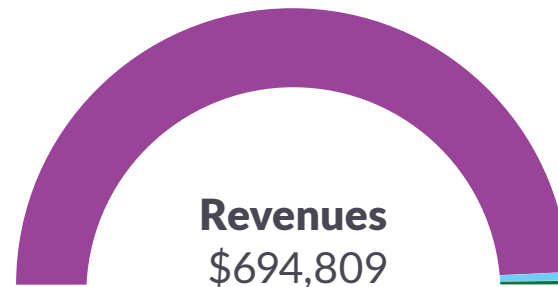
General Donations	\$1,095,521
Events	\$39,862
Deferred & Other	\$181,407
Grants	\$722,278



Programming	\$1,415,984
Fundraising	\$327,715
Operating & Administrative	\$140,647

\$154,722 surplus currently used to support helping more people in 2018

## RAINBOW RAILROAD USA 2017 FINANCIAL SUMMARY



General Donations	\$684,864
Events	\$6,956
Other	\$2,989



Programming	\$303,552
Fundraising	\$22,302
Operating & Administrative	\$21,404

\$347,551 surplus currently used to support helping more people in 2018



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## CANADIAN DONATIONS

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### \$100,000+

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Rainbow Railroad USA  
Upside Down Tree

### \$50,000-\$99,999

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Elton John AIDS Foundation  
Glenn Pushelberg  
George Yabu

### \$25,000-\$49,999

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Adam4Adam            Daniel McCarthy  
Andrew Beckerman    Steven Spencer

### \$10,000-\$24,999

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BCF LLP                    Dean & Jamie Powers  
CIBC                        Yabu Pushelberg

### \$5,000-\$9,999

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R. Todd Appleton  
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Blenkin  
Ashleigh Shier  
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Andrew Swart  
TELUS  
Christopher Wallace

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## CANADIAN DONATIONS

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### \$1,000-\$4,999

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Arshad Ahsanuddin  
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Connie & David Anderson  
Wesley Andreas  
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Laurie Arron  
Blake Avery  
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### \$1,000-\$4,999

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### \$100,000+

Network for Good

### \$25,000-\$49,999

Broadway Cares / Equity Fights AIDS

### \$10,000-\$24,999

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Walter Cain  
Fantastic Natural Cosmetics Ltd  
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### \$5,000-\$9,999

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## AMERICAN DONATIONS

### \$1,000-\$4,999

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Chrystia Freeland,  
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## Thank You

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