

The logo for REP (Refugee Community Partnership) features the letters 'REP' in a bold, yellow, textured font. Below the letters, the words 'refugee community partnership' are written in a smaller, yellow, sans-serif font. The entire logo is surrounded by a circular arrangement of short, pink and purple lines, resembling a sunburst or a starburst effect.

**REP**

refugee community  
partnership

# 2020 impact storyboard

Language justice, over a quarter of a mil in direct financial assistance, massive Member growth, digital organizing, voter mobilization, in-home scholastic support, and rapid response news programming kept the RCP community intimately close during one of the most harrowing and high-stakes years we've known. And it ain't over.

# Table of Contents

01

Musings from Maddie

03

A Message from the Leadership Team

04

GROWTH

06

Language Justice initiatives

09

On language exclusion and healthcare access

12

Neighborhood Support Circles

14

Mutual aid and Neighbor-to-Neighbor Organizing

16

How We Did It: The Dollars

17

Gratitude & Shout Outs





# an offering

**It's 10:30am on a Friday morning, and as I sit here writing this, dear reader, I pick at my fingernail, nervous I won't be able capture the full throttle magnitude of last year. But, let me try.**

In May of last year, we were two months in to the viro-apocalypse. We had been grinding to the bone - on the phone 'round the clock with hundreds and hundreds of Members who had all lost their jobs at once. Employers weren't using interpreters to communicate with their employees; neither were their landlords, social service providers, or doctors offices. Others of us were on the phone with government staff and elected officials, reporting what was happening on the ground. Despite the moratorium, eviction letters pasted on front doors threatened RCP residents.

Then, George Floyd was murdered in the plain light of a Minneapolis Monday morning. The whole world erupted. As I prepared for an update to our Board of Directors, I thought about the inextricability between language oppression that threatens the health and safety of refugee and migrant communities, and the anti-Black-and-Brown racism that snuffed out Mr. Floyd. I thought about the historical arc of global colonization, and the utilization of a mono-English society to extinguish global cultures - much like how early Christendom erected churches on top of pagan sites of ritual, or Spanish friars built their monasteries on top of indigenous Mexico's ancestral places of worship, literally burying native ways of being, robbing entire continents of its people; and of people, their identities.

I thought about RCP communities, and how abandonment of native language cultures is demanded of migrant communities in order to survive daily life in the US (from finding work to securing housing to getting medical care). Domestic colonization functions today just as deftly and strategically as it always has. One imperative sociopolitical analysis



is Noel Ignatiev's "How the Irish Became White" [rest in power, Noel], which details how whiteness co-opts immigrant communities with promises of socioeconomic security through forced abandonment of native identities, to become allegiant to and guardians of identities and structures of domination. I think about the strategy of language extermination as a strategy of white supremacy ('supremacy' the socialized ideology, not 'supremacists' the people), and how colonization doesn't actually have to \*go\* anywhere anymore to extinguish global populations - our immigration system does it for us.

As we find ourselves in the wake of last year's monumental sociopolitical moment, it is deeply important that we make visible the ways in which language is weaponized to enforce anti-Black-and-Brownness - how language is utilized to protect an economic system of white superiority on the backs of poor and working class and communities of color. Without a political orientation to language, the exclusion, neglect, abuse, and erasure of Black and Brown peoples will continue to pile up. I give immense gratitude to the generations of revolutionaries, abolitionists, justice-makers, social movement organizers who lived the truth that none of us are free until we're all free, paving the way for those who stand on their shoulders today.

**Thank you for being here with us. We are stepping forward with clear eyes and fierce hearts.**

**With revolutionary love,**

*maddie*

# From the RCP Leadership Team



The work we do is hard. It's emotional. It requires a dedication to building and sustaining genuine community connection that goes far beyond a typical 9-5. We aren't martyrs, and we're not interested in praise - we do, however, want to convey what it means to be sustained by community.

We don't clock in, type at our desks, and leave everything behind at the end of the day (no shade to those who do!). This work lives at a cellular level. Our multilingual team did a monumental amount of work in the midst of a pandemic - we need to rest, and to recover, but sometimes, it simply isn't possible. We did more in 2020 than we have any previous year, working from our homes, from hospital waiting rooms, from the side of the road, and many places in between. This year has seen the largest growth of the RCP community both in number and also in spirit.

We are sustained by the heart nourishing support of RCP Members who are friends, family, and life companions. Just today before writing this, a Syrian father came into our office to plan out a Syrian lunch feast for the team. While we attempted many times to talk him out of it, he made it clear that this was deeply important to him - to be able to share his gratitude for not only the tangible support RCP has provided his family, but perhaps more importantly, the sense of family and community he got from RCP during a really hard year. He spoke to our staff through an interpreter telling us in Arabic, "For the first time in my life, I feel I have a family here in America." But really, we are the lucky ones.

Whether it's receiving an email from a Bridge Builder volunteer gushing that they are now the godmother of an RCP family's newborn, or an RCP Member notifying staff of a death in the family and asking us to come together and grieve with them, or a Member requesting us to be in the room for the birth of their second child because we were there for the first. It is these moments that bind us.

It's also the moments of deep frustration at a system that, day in and day out, invalidates, discriminates against, and harms the members of this community that keep us moving forward each day with a new fire to build initiatives that protect against institutional harm. We defend each other.

We are so grateful for the support of RCP Members, donors, and comrades in this work. We invite you to stick around with us for the long haul; for the joys, sorrows, heart breaks, and triumph. If there's anything this year has taught us, it is that there will be many more of all four in the years to come.

~ meagan, daniella, katy, and maddie

# When the pandemic hit

we dropped everything and became a rapid response network, working 'round the clock. Watching the world shift to virtual communication and tele-service delivery, we all knew that language exclusion would widespread job loss, potential displacement, COVID exposure, and near total exclusion from public dialogue about the ensuing pandemic.



The following is a sketch-out of the beautiful problem solving, community organizing, neighbor-to-neighbor mutual aid, and institutional interventions that kept the RCP community closely knit, holding each other up amidst the convergence of not one, not two, but three global pandemics (read: systemic racism, environmental collapse, and novel virus)

“

Societally, English improficiency is, historically and presently, a tool used for the political and economic exclusion and exploitation of migrant and refugee communities, and true multilingual environments are not possible so long as the American racial hierarchy is maintained and perpetuated through the structural organization of language and power. Without a language justice approach, English language dominance, as a pillar of white supremacy culture, will continue to function as the axis of power in our health care systems. A power analysis must be applied to language access and its interventions, otherwise language inaccess will continue to thrive, embedded discreetly in policies, practices, and protocol, and reinforced by cultural dominance, systemic racism, and accent biases.

”

-maddie

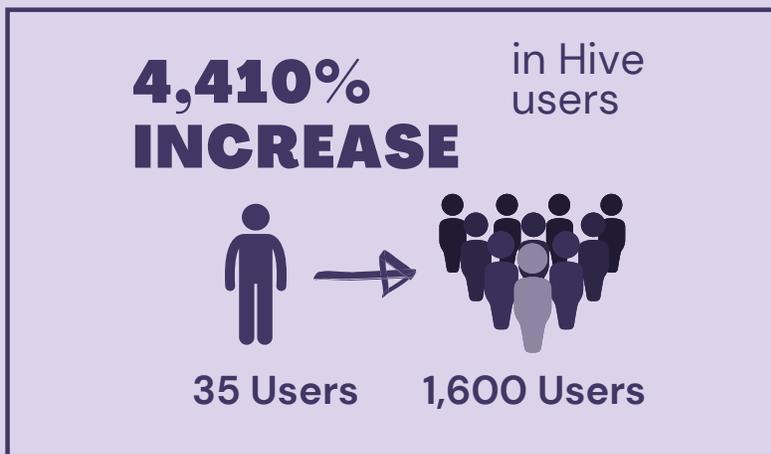
language justice

# Democratizing access to critical resources by pairing language access + relationship-based support through

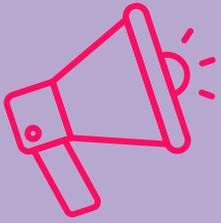
## the Hive

In 2020, we hyperfocused on **The Hive**, our digital organizing environment that we scaled up for rapid response work, where we are democratizing access to public information by converting everything from national news to emerging health guidance to vaccination information to changes in government mandates, into direct-to-user updates in their primary language. **Our interpreters convert information into mp4 audio files in 10+ languages, and hosts live Q&A sessions with Members.**

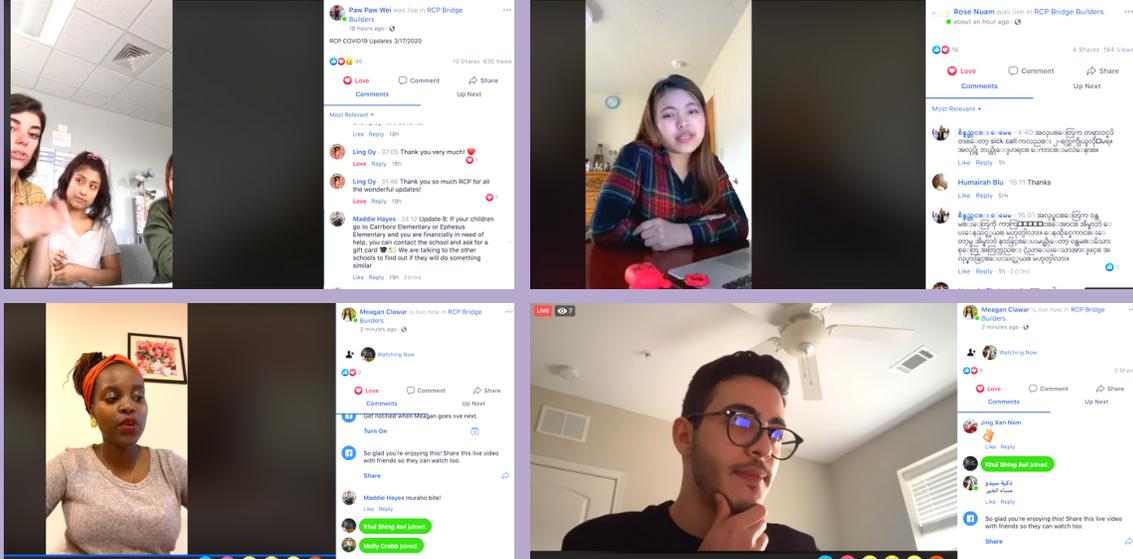
The Hive is interactive, where users can reply to any message to receive one-on-one support from RCP staff and interpreters in their primary language. Here, 1,600 users worked with staff and interpreters to attend appointments, access resources, and stay up to date on local, regional, and national news



Users reported that The Hive was their primary source for emerging news about the pandemic, community news, and communications from local government.



# RCP'S WEEKLY COMMUNITY NEWS DESK



Every week, RCP staff and interpreters took to Facebook Live to hold what became the RCP Community News Desk, where RCP interpreters shared local, regional, and national news, as well as community updates like school closures, vaccine clinics, recent government mandates, and emerging Covid safety practices, and viewers could ask questions, and receive answers, in real time in their language.

## Languages

Karen  
Burmese  
Kinyarwanda  
Arabic

## Viewership

From 100 to  
600+  
overnight

The COVID shut-down meant all service providers moved to virtual platforms, significantly worsening language and tech barriers, at a time when access to services was most critical. We pivoted our multilingual team into a rapid response team of Community Interpreters, matching them with Hive users for for one-on-one, personalized support on demand.



**4,500 HRS**

**PERSONAL INTERPRETATION & ACCOMPANIMENT**

One-on-one support in the user's primary language was available at all times, to any resident of migrant and refugee communities across the region.



**2000**

**CRITICAL APPOINTMENTS ATTENDED**

from medical appointments, to housing lease renewal interviews, to DSS and other public assistance appointments, to parent-teacher meetings, that were otherwise inaccessible due to language and tech barriers



Virtual voter education series in preparation for one of the highest-stakes Presidential elections of our time

## How It All Began *from Asif, founder of RCP*

In 2011, as an undergraduate teaching assistant for a service-learning course, I planned a refugee outreach event and catered a dinner large enough to host 50 people, to get to know my refugee neighbors. However, only three people showed up. Humbled, I abandoned my preconceived ideas and reached out to refugee individuals to sit down one-on-one and listen. I will forever remember one particular encounter when I was introduced to a family who happened to speak Bengali, my native language. As soon as I knocked on the door the whole family greeted me, and upon learning that we could speak together in Bengali, they broke down and hugged me, calling me the "younger brother" they were praying to meet. They fed me the most delicious meal, although a bit too spicy for my taste, and after dinner, family photo albums came out. As we looked through mementos, they shared their story of how they had to flee the military and live as refugees in their native land, before they were eventually resettled here. As I listened, I heard them describe their current struggles of facing eviction notices, having electricity turned off, or tolerating severe pain due to healthcare barriers in the same tones as the horrors they had faced in their native country.

**As a first generation immigrant,** I moved to the US at the age of 13. Their stories reminded me of the struggles my own family initially faced: finding jobs, paying rent, and accessing healthcare. In particular, I recalled instances where highly inadequate (and often no) language access was granted to my family members as they relied on me to interpret many sensitive issues. However, the continuous trauma of the refugee experience was both wholly unfamiliar and striking, and I didn't know how I, a mere undergraduate student, could possibly help. I felt as though I didn't have much to offer, but I also felt an obligation to my refugee neighbors who were yearning for connection and struggling in isolation. Simply being invited in their homes, and being able to speak freely, meant everything. As I continued visiting the families and sharing space and time together, it became a sacred experience for me as well.

Next year, in 2012, I gathered a group of students and community members to launch a "committee" which I named Refugee Community Partnership (RCP). "Community partnership" is a core value that we continue to uphold along with active listening, team-building, and amplifying voices, particularly of refugee women and youth. Rather than charity, we emphasized solidarity, and designed trauma-informed interventions to address social determinants of health. Later, when I started medical school, fellow volunteer leaders stepped into leadership positions as I transitioned out of my staff role to RCP's Board. It is thanks to them that RCP is now the flourishing community it is.

**Through my years within and beyond RCP,** I had the privilege to train and work as a medical interpreter. This experience exposed me to the tremendous burden interpreters face, including lack of support to the point where many interpreters burn out and leave the field, further exacerbating language access problems. In medical school, I observed how health care systems largely failed to address structural shortcomings and socially-determined health needs of marginalized patients and their families. Using my experiences as a medical student at UNC School of Medicine and board member of RCP, I designed a "healthcare hotspotting" collaboration between UNC medical students and RCP to serve refugee communities with chronic unmet social and health needs. Through this pilot project, professional in-person interpreters from RCP acted as peer support, cultural brokers, and advocates for non-English speaking patients with chronic health issues, in the doctor's office and beyond, and helped them manage and understand their conditions. The results were truly inspiring, as illustrated in the hotspotting highlight below.



My neighbors identified lack of adequate interpreters and language services as one of the most challenging aspects they face when trying to navigate the healthcare system. As future clinicians, we are given intensive training on best communication and interaction practices to provide patient-centered care. Yet, when it comes to refugee patients, providing and arranging interpreters to uphold those same principles become a nuisance as we have shockingly normalized relying on phone interpreters to be an acceptable method of communication to interact with patients when they are at their most vulnerable moments of life. Only if we would stop and ask refugee patients in the health care settings, like we constantly do in RCP, would we know the many instances where the phone (or video) interpreters provided highly inadequate interpretation, or even worse, did not fully interpret without any accountability whatsoever.

**RCP addresses the urgent need for people-centered models** that reduce health disparities and address systemic inequities, reframing language inaccessibility as a product of language injustice. Since limited English proficiency patients cannot share their feedback on the quality of services, and thus traditional metrics further perpetuate inequities. RCP breaks down barriers by centering patient voices, having done years of deep relationship building, strategizing with, sitting beside non-English proficient patients at their homes, and accompanying them to health appointments. We recognize how critical a language broker's role is to diminish the highly lopsided power dynamics when using inadequate language services. I believe RCP's language accompaniment model is the future of creating genuine trust with our refugee and immigrant neighbors, and can extend far beyond health care and include our social services, legal, business, and other mainstream services.

**Someone I will never forget is Hafsa**, a middle-aged Arabic-speaking woman with multiple visits to the local Emergency Department due to severe diabetes. When our student hotspotting team, along with a professional medical interpreter from RCP, entered her public housing apartment for the first home visit, she and her teenage daughter greeted us with nervous smiles. She became tearful when she learned that an interpreter would be accompanying every visit, telling us of her growing anxiety of having to rely on her daughter to interpret for her. She explained how horrible she used to feel as a mother having to rely on her daughter to communicate at the grocery store, the bank, or even the hospital. When we asked her if she was ever offered interpreters in any of those places, she looked down with a smile and answered with deafening silence.

As we delved into Hafsa's health needs, she shared a large folder filled with after-visit summaries, unfiled "charity care" applications, and unfilled prescriptions. When we asked what prevented her from taking the prescribed antibiotics or connecting with a primary care doctor, it was evident that there were several overwhelming barriers besides financial costs. Trust was built, she shared that she had stopped going to her primary care doctor after a phone interpreter who spoke the wrong dialect yelled at her, and told her she would die soon if she did not start taking her unfilled medications. She felt hopeless and defeated. She was also uncomfortable

with being assigned a male clinician for intimate care, based on her cultural and religious practices as a Muslim. Afraid, traumatized, and unable to afford costly care, she had stopped engaging with healthcare altogether.

**After home visits that rebuilt trust** through non-judgmental listening, Hafsa felt empowered and began engaging with her health in all domains of her life. She re-established primary care with a better understanding of her disease process and drastically improved the management of her diabetes. She became optimistic about her ability to manage her health and expressed interest in leading support groups to assist others in her community to improve their health. Additionally, her trauma appeared to be mitigated by the presence of an in-person interpreter, so we recommended a systems-level change with her clinic to use in-person interpreters whenever possible. After 6 months of care, Hafsa's diabetes was well under control. She also reported feeling better psychologically and physically, less lonely, and more hopeful for her family's future.



Daniella, Rose, Paw Paw, and Julia have been building an incredible blueprint for community-owned language accompaniment. More on that in 2022!

# Neighborhood Support Circles

With schools closed, RCP kiddos were left without access to education. Language barriers, low technology literacy, and essential worker parents meant students were excluded from the virtual learning platforms being swiftly rolled out by educators. After receiving calls daily from parents wanting support keeping their child engaged in education, RCP pitched "Neighborhood Support Circles" to the Town of Chapel Hill. With an awarded \$300,000, RCP created small COVID safe pods of kids run by a Provider from their own community that focused on providing childcare and scholastic support to 102 kids.



## NEWS

A year into the pandemic, refugee and immigrant families face ongoing struggles

For non-English speaking families, the pandemic amplifies educational barriers

'COVID-19 is a really great example of these gaps in the system' — How coronavirus impacts refugee education



Sasha Schroeder  
August 11, 2020



“ As parents who do not speak English, we can't help our kids in the way we want. With this program, my kids are no longer behind on school assignments and are finally on track. The provider helps them understand and explains the activities that the teacher gives out. The provider helps them read better, and I can see that my kids' grades are going up.



**32** community members worked with

**102** kids every day, earning

**\$75,000** in income amidst widespread job loss



# MAJOR SHOUTOUT

to **Sarah Viñas** with the Town of Chapel Hill for being such an incredible advocate for language access and badass ally for grassroots orgs, and to **Paw Paw** and **Rosy Moo** who responded to an intense SOS moment by organizing with families and their neighbors into this incredible grassroots initiative in a matter of days



# Direct Financial Assistance & Mutual Aid

When the pandemic hit, hundreds of Members - many of whom are domestic and service workers - lost their jobs. We had only one thing on our mind: how were we going to help families continue to pay rent, utilities and food costs? Through grants, donations, and collaborations with mutual aid organizations and local government we were able to distribute hundreds of thousands of dollars in financial support.

**\$208,753**  
**IN CASH ASSISTANCE**  
**TO 410 HOUSEHOLDS**



distributed to families who were blocked from government assistance in response to widespread job loss from COVID-19, which threatened families' ability to pay rent and bills, and put food on the table.

This effort has prevented 70+ evictions - grassroots mutual aid is SO IMPORTANT, ya'll!



**A typical moment at RCP lol: Paw Paw and Meagan pick up a freshly butchered cow donated by a local farmer, and join up with families to figure out just how well plastic bags will hold up against 500 lbs of animal**

Juana, a single mom of two and resident of Durham, worked her whole life in the cleaning business. When the pandemic hit, her kids' school closed, her work hours were cut, and she found herself without enough income to make rent and utilities each month. During her search for financial support, she heard about RCP from some neighbors, and reached out to RCP with her eviction notice in hand. With the cash donations that local residents were making to RCP, RCP made an immediate payment for the full value of her overdue rent and her utility bills, effectively avoiding eviction and ensuring her kids would be able to continue their virtual learning. Juana's family was able to receive this support twice throughout the pandemic, allowing Juana to focus her limited funds on covering the other essentials like food, personal care and her children's education. Juana joined RCP's HiveLink network to stay up to date on other sources of financial and food assistance. She has since become a very active member of the group referring her family and neighbors to join RCP, too!

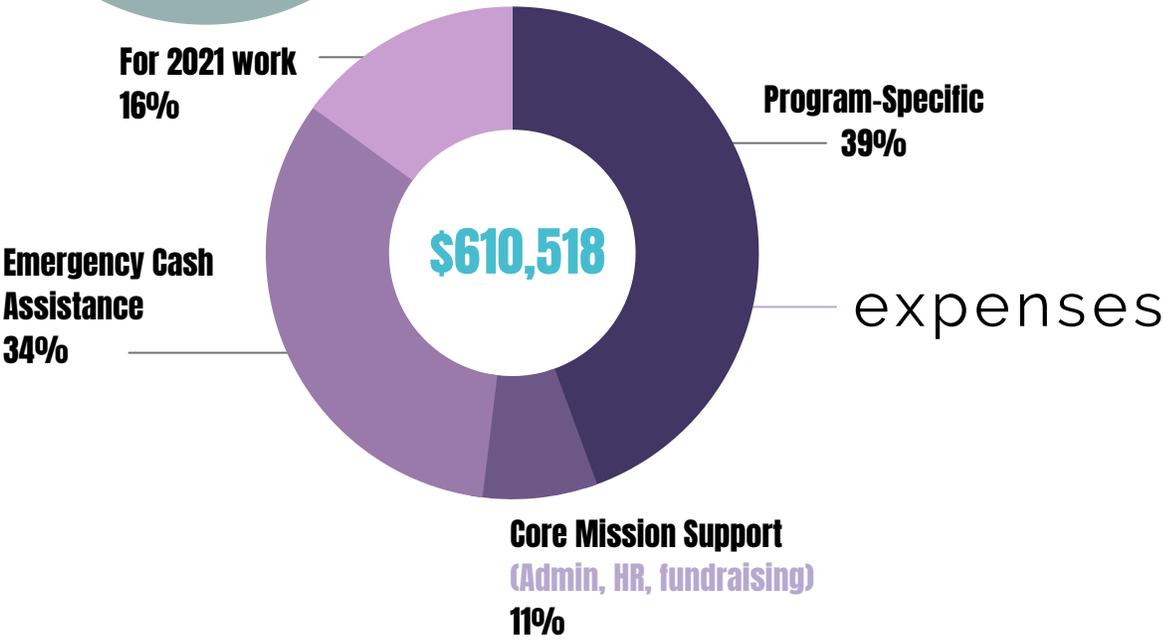
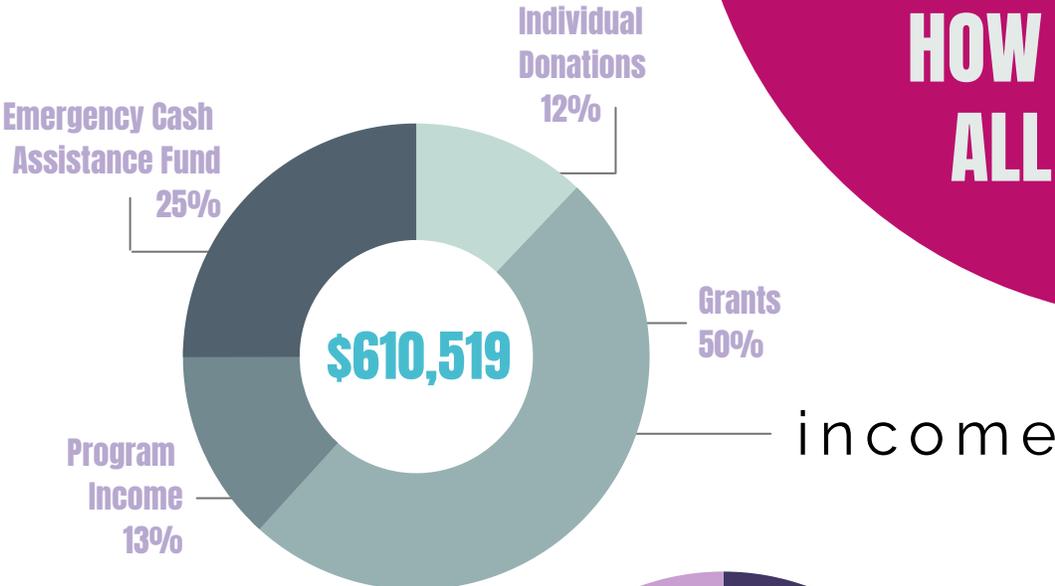
# Neighborhood organizing forever

When the Orange County Emergency Housing Assistance Fund opened its application, RCP hit the ground running (literally!) to spread the word and get as many community members as possible connected to these critical funds. The team divided up phone tree lists, sent audio recordings out in the Hive in boat loads of different languages, and teamed up with RCP Members who were eager to support one another. One member, Ingrid, went above and beyond. Ingrid used her personal Facebook to spread the word and assisted neighbors in her mobile home park and friends from church in gathering the appropriate documents to apply to the program. She knew the (very legitimate) fear some felt about applying for this funding due to their immigration status and was able to speak to folks on a personal level to assure them it was safe. With her efforts alone, 35 families were able to receive EHA funds and avoid eviction. When the vaccines rolled out and RCP started its vaccination effort, she alone signed up 85 community members to be vaccinated. She talked to them about the safety of the vaccine, explained that it was free, and confirmed for them that it was available regardless of immigration status.

**You're amazing,  
Ingrid!!!**



# HOW DID RCP DO ALL OF THIS?!



**Gratitude to donors who scrapped convention and moved money out the door fast to boots-on-the-ground:**

- ✦ RCP MEMBERS & VOLUNTEERS WHO GAVE \$, TIME, AND ENERGY
- ✦ EVERYDAY FOLKS WHO WROTE CHECKS & SWIPED CARDS
- ✦ NORTH CAROLINA HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION
- ✦ TRIANGLE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
- ✦ RODDENBERRY FOUNDATION
- ✦ UNITED WAY
- ✦ EMERGENT FUND
- ✦ STROWD ROSES
- ✦ SOUTHERN VISION ALLIANCE

# A Moment of Deep Gratitude

Every year we find ourselves misty-eyed thinking about our incredible RCP team-turned-family. This year pushed us all to our max, tasking us with running our most intense year of support in a virtual world while simultaneously tackling our own fears and anxieties around the global pandemic. We want to take a moment to shoutout some truly amazing members of our squad for the ways they showed up in 2020.



## Rose Nuam

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During COVID, as RCP's primary Burmese interpreter, Rose kicked it into high gear; she was making audio recordings on the fly, hopping on Facebook Live at a moment's notice to field SOS questions and ease panic; all while also being a full-time student.



## Paw Paw Wei

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Mid-pandemic, Paw Paw could be found hauling 2,000 diapers in her dad's truck to the office for distribution, on Facebook live describing how to access Pandemic EBT, or talking on TWO phones at once interpreting between teachers and parents.

**We are nothing without this incredible team of staff, Members, interpreters, and volunteers. We are forever indebted to the amazing work they put in each day to build and strengthen the RCP community.**

# Thank you to the rock stars who gave a whole freakin' lot to help the RCP community survive 2020



**Every single RCP Member, who organized their neighbors, facilitated distribution of food and other critical goods to neighborhoods who needed it, sent messages of encouragement, kept us laughing with hilarious memes, and checked in on each other. And for generally making it through 2020. That's a monumental achievement.**



**From the staff & intern squad: Paw Paw Wei, Rose Nuam, Katherine Ward, Ree Ree Wei, Meagan Clawar, Madison Hayes, Daniella Runyambo, Khin Cho, Elizabeth Godown, Khin Cho**



**RCP Interpreters, who devoted a ton of time and energy to using their multilingualism to keep RCP communities in the know during peak global chaos**



**All-star Volunteers: Andrea Eisen, Christy Tate, Sienna Zuco, Lydia King, Annabel Steiner, Patrick Hance, and Jamie Rohe**



**RCP's Board of Directors, especially Board Chair Zuzana Fedorková Love who spent countless hours supporting and counseling Maddie during an extremely difficult year, and Patrick Mateer and Daniel Pomp for being our on-call financial advisors during unprecedented uncertainty**



**Community comrades: Mariela Hernandez, Courtney McLaughlin, Katie Harrison, Susan Clifford, Sarah Viñas, Marlowe Crews, Amy Prentice, Tony Macias, Kelsey, White, and Steve Grant**



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