



## Annual Report 2025



Across American tradition and virtually every faith tradition in the world, the admonition to love your neighbor stands as sacred writ, holy invitation and cultural mandate. Walking this path has always required good neighbors who are willing to live this belief by exercising the superpower of community to bring someone stuck on the outside to the inside and walk alongside them in the struggle. In return, our communities have been strengthened with bonds of love and expanded hearts and minds. And this reality has catalyzed growth, invention and a culture of responsibility to a purpose bigger than oneself. Most recently, we have witnessed this truth on full display in Minneapolis in countless heroic efforts to protect, serve and care for neighbors who have been targeted, detained, and deported without the due process in which we've always trusted.

This great American tradition has always been at the heart of WelcomeNST's mission to unleash the power of community to offer refuge to refugees and immigrants, and it seems to have taken on even more significance today. For this reason, WelcomeNST will continue to do what we do in 2026,

forming NSTs and matching them with families at risk; but, for the first time in our history, these families are at risk in our very own neighborhoods.

Today, we are doing this by forming Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) with neighbors and faith communities who want to add their solidarity and support to immigrants by being matched with a family or faith community of newcomers. The goal is to walk alongside families to help them to lawfully prepare for the possibility of immigration enforcement and to continue to thrive at this challenging time. WelcomeNST will provide training and support to NSTs.

President Jimmy Carter once said, "We've got to stop crying and start sweating, stop talking and start walking, stop cursing and start praying. The strength we need will not come from the White House, but from every house in America." We agree. Stay tuned!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth Davis-Edwards".

*Elizabeth Davis-Edwards, Founder and CEO*



# Our Board of Directors

This work is possible because of the dedicated leadership of WelcomeNST’s Board of Directors. Their strategic guidance, accountability, and belief in the power of community have been essential in shaping our impact and sustaining our growth. We thank them for their continued service and stewardship.



**Grant Bennett, Treasurer**  
*Board Member, CPS Technologies Corporation*



**Stephanie Southwick Cahoon, Secretary**  
*Writer and Artist*



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*CEO, Welcoming Initiative for Newcomers (WIN)*



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*Founder and CEO, Formative*



**Alham Saadat, Board Member**  
*Cross-Sector Leader*



**Larry Tobin, Board Member**  
*Director, The Shapiro Foundation*

# Community Impact at a Glance

Over the past year, against all odds, our community made a powerful difference—welcoming **220 refugees** with open arms and open hearts. This effort was fueled by an incredible network of **1,364 dedicated Americans who stepped up as active welcomers**, offering their time, compassion, and support. Momentum continued to build as **91 new Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs)** were registered—nearly eight each month—with a strong and meaningful focus on supporting Afghan SIV families as they began their next chapter. Together, these numbers tell a story of growth, generosity, and the superpower of community showing up when it mattered most.



## Charity Navigator Ranking

We’re grateful to share that WelcomeNST has earned a Four-Star rating from Charity Navigator, the highest possible distinction from the nation’s leading charity evaluator.

This rating reflects strong accountability, effectiveness, and stewardship—and it’s only possible because of the trust and support of our community. Thank you for being part of this work as donors, volunteers, and partners.



# What Welcome Looked Like for Families Arriving in 2025

## Insights from Survey Data and Team Reports\*

In a year when legal pathways to safety shut down at seemingly every turn and the ground kept shifting beneath our feet, WelcomeNST continued to form Neighborhood Support Teams to welcome newcomers (primarily Afghans with Special Immigrant Visas) into their neighborhoods, mobilizing 1,364 volunteers to form 91 Neighborhood Support Teams—nearly as many as the year before. And in 2025, against every odd, WelcomeNST reached a new milestone, welcoming our 1000th newcomer to the U.S.

These families arrived ready to work, learn, and move forward, even as legal processes slowed and timelines stretched. And when action was possible, it happened quickly. 100% of children welcomed through WelcomeNST were enrolled in school—often within days. Classrooms became places of routine and relief as children made friends, picked up English faster than expected, and began to feel at home.

Adults followed a similar rhythm. In 2025, 94% of adults welcomed by WelcomeNST enrolled in ESL, building the language skills needed to work, advocate for their families, and navigate daily life. 100% reported having reliable access to food.



Within six to twelve months, the shift was clear. Despite all the uncertainty: 90% of families reached economic self-reliance, and 84% were paying rent independently.

Housing was the turning point this year more than ever. Without credit history or U.S. references, securing a lease was the hardest step, and many families moved through temporary arrangements before finding something permanent. It took a herculean effort from NSTs to solve what seemed unsolvable. Once housing stabilized, everything else accelerated. Within six to twelve months of arrival, 100% of surveyed families had secured safe housing.

As always, it was the superpower of community that changed the game—good neighbors prioritizing others over self and throwing their lot in with those on the outside, then walking alongside them, helping to open doors and remove obstacles on their road to self-reliance.

This was not a small commitment. In the first few weeks after a family’s arrival, teams reported spending up to 25 hours per week collectively visiting, mentoring, and working with families. Volunteers described welcome as a part-time job layered onto already full lives.

Within the first few months, the picture looked different. Friendships had formed. Perspectives had shifted. What began as support had grown into something closer to kinship: “they’re like family to us now,” one team reflected. Families who once relied fully on their teams were now paying their own rent

and working steady jobs. Some made bold choices, relocating for opportunity or pursuing new certifications, signs that confidence and agency had taken root. As one team lead put it, “that’s when we knew the runway had worked.”

If 2025 taught us anything, it was this: Even, and maybe especially, amid uncertainty, local action delivers results. This work succeeded because people stayed, through slow progress and hard moments. Hope grew because neighbors simply kept showing up. And thanks to you, in 2025 and despite every effort to the contrary, welcome was still alive—held and practiced by everyday people.



\*Data Source: In September 2025, WelcomeNST conducted a survey of Team Leaders who had welcomed families 6–12 months prior. Starting in 2026, we will also survey adult family members using the evidence-based Self-Reliance Index (SRI), which assesses 12 domains of self-reliance for refugees and SIV families six months post-arrival.



# Year in Review: Highlights of 2025

## Rapid Pivot Amid Policy Shifts (Q1)

**January:** Following suspension of refugee resettlement and Welcome Corps, WelcomeNST pivoted to directly welcome Afghan SIV families in partnership with Task Force Argo (TFA).

**February:** New travel ban enacted (Afghan SIVs exempt). Pivoted to working with Community Sponsorship Hub (CSH) to continue welcoming Afghan SIV families. Began development of the Ambassadors of Welcome (AWE) platform, a national space for local advocates of refugees and immigrants.

**March:** Warned of impending cancellation of legal status for Ukrainians. Conducted intensive 1:1 outreach with NSTs who welcomed Ukrainians and other humanitarian parolees to support alternate legal pathways ahead of humanitarian parole expirations.

## Tools, Adaptation, Grassroots Growth (Q2)

**April:** Led the launch of AWE alongside key national partners and pivoted to support Haitian families impacted by Massachusetts shelter closures through the state's HomeShare program.

**May:** Massachusetts' HomeShare program closes. WelcomeNST immediately pivoted to work directly with Immigrant Family Services Institute (IFSI) in Boston to form NSTs to support Haitian families at risk of housing loss.

**June:** Continued to form NSTs for Haitian families. Launched *The Beacon*, our first-ever quarterly newsletter.

## Program Expansion and Major Funding (Q3)

**July:** AWE mobile app launched (iOS and Android). Received \$170,000 North East Humanitarian Services Grant from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the Sponsor Fund.

**August:** Welcomed our 25th Afghan SIV family of the year.

**September:** Launched *Connect & Lift* in Utah (alongside Utah Refugee Connection and IRC Salt Lake City) to form NSTs to support refugee families already in SLC but at risk.

Conducted Family Self-Reliance Survey, showing 90% of families who were supported for six to twelve months achieved economic self-reliance.

## Strategy and Movement Reach (Q4)

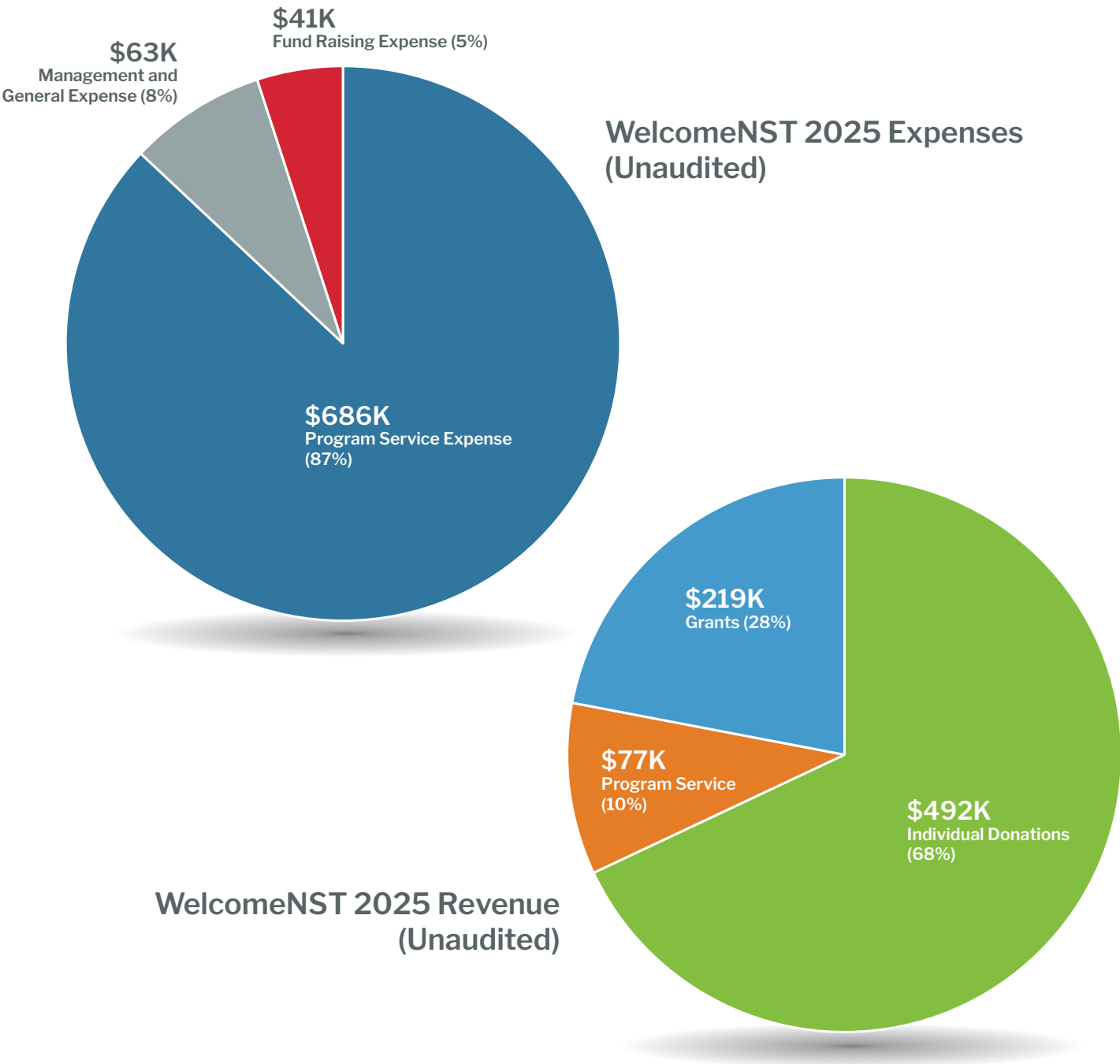
**October:** 2026 refugee ceiling announced at historic low (7,500). Held leadership retreat to set 2026 priorities.

**November:** Received a \$66,500 Humanitarian Services Grant from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the Sponsor Fund in the U.S. West area. Teams continued mobilizing for Afghan SIVs arriving in the DC/MD/VA area. Held info sessions with partners to recruit more NSTs to welcome more families before the door closed.

**December:** In response to escalating federal restrictions and uncertainty, continued mobilizing NSTs to welcome and support refugee and immigrant families. Donors responded with the strongest support in WelcomeNST's history, allowing teams to provide housing, legal aid, and essential resources to families in need.

# Financial Overview: WelcomeNST Remains 100% Privately Funded

WelcomeNST is pleased to report that our 2024 audit was completed with no findings or recommendations. This outcome reflects our organization's effective internal controls and commitment to maintaining high standards of accountability and quality.







## The leap that Pam almost didn't take this year in Virginia

Pam had always been willing to help. Leading was different—and it nearly stopped her before it began. She describes herself as someone prone to overthinking, wanting to understand every detail before saying yes. When the opportunity to start a team arose, she hesitated. She worried she wasn't ready. Then, slowly, a team appeared.

A 19-year-old named Aiden clicked on a volunteer listing and decided to say yes. Around the same time, Pam was asked again about starting a team. This time, knowing she wouldn't be alone. Their skills complemented each other in a way that felt more like fate.

Before training was even finished, they were matched with a family. The early weeks were intense. Housing was uncertain. Systems were confusing. Everything felt urgent. But the team stayed close, eventually securing an apartment that allowed the family to live near their relatives.

Somewhere along the way, Pam noticed something changing in herself. At first, she says, she was in love with the idea of helping. But as she watched Razia take step after step forward—making appointments without knowing how she would get there, trusting a door would open when she arrived—Pam found herself learning alongside her.

What began as helping had become something deeper. "I love them," she said. Not the work. Not the mission. Them. Her voice caught. Tears came. "They're my friends."

## New neighbors and new beginnings in Oregon

They said yes before they knew how it would work. With barely a week's notice, a small team in Oregon was matched with the Arkawazi family, who had fled Iraq after the father's military service alongside U.S. troops made their home unsafe.

The first days blurred together—jet lag, unfamiliar food, new routines, and questions no one yet knew how to answer. Neighbors signed up to drive the family to Halal markets. Groceries appeared. Welcome became shared, responsive, human.

Housing quickly became the hardest hurdle. Hours were spent on the phone, hearing no again and again, racing against temporary

arrangements—until one landlord finally said yes. An apartment followed, then beds, furniture, a donated van, and help to cover the early months of rent. When the children walked inside, one looked around and said quietly, "This is a very nice house."

Not everything moved quickly. Paperwork delays slowed employment, and progress required patience. But step by step, the family found their footing—children enrolled in school, basketball practices began, and English lessons started around the kitchen table.

What began as sponsorship became friendship. The Arkawazi family found neighbors. The neighbors found themselves changed.



## Watch how it all began...and why it lasts.

From a simple idea in 2021 to a national movement today, these videos show how community-led welcome changes lives—on both sides of the door of welcome.



### The Origin Story of WelcomeNST

The origin story of WelcomeNST—how an urgent moment sparked a bold vision and positioned us as a leading actor in the evolving landscape of private, community-led refugee resettlement in the U.S.

[Watch the video >](#)



### NST: The Superpower of Community at Work

Learn about the Neighborhood Support Team (NST) model—a community-powered approach that enables everyday neighbors to directly welcome newcomer families seeking refuge.

[Watch the video >](#)



### Meet Behishda!

Meet Behishda! She's a baker, a straight-A college student and an Afghan who was welcomed to the U.S. with her family by a private group of Americans she'd never met. And then, they changed each other's lives.

[Watch the video >](#)

## Be part of what comes next!

As we look ahead to 2026, we invite you to join what's unfolding. Whether you're ready to get involved, start a Neighborhood Support Team, or support this work financially, your engagement helps ensure that welcome remains possible—especially when it's needed most.



[WelcomeNST.org](#)