



# Taking Root: 10 Years of Welcome

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## Our Mission and Our Vision

The mission of the Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN) is to welcome and provide support to refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, and migrant workers living in, working in, and visiting Central Vermont.

Our vision is to build, in partnership with others, a vibrant, inclusive global community in Central Vermont, where refugees and asylum seekers find hope, engagement, empowerment, and a strong sense of belonging.

## In the Words of a New Vermonter

*My name is Ghazi and I am from Tunisia, North Africa. When I was no longer safe in my country, it was like I lost my roots. I had to leave but because of CVRAN, I found people who helped me grow new roots, grow new leaves. Because of CVRAN, I survived. Because of CVRAN, I can produce a new life.*

*CVRAN does not offer only material and financial support, they offer emotional and mental support. Today I feel safe. I have a home; I have work; I am a part of a community. Without their support, I could not have done it. Nobody can remake a life without support.*

Ghazi Jendoubi, first a new arrival and then a CVRAN Board Member  
December 2023, Unitarian Church, Montpelier

*Established in 2015, the Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN) is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Montpelier, Vermont*

*P.O. Box 917, Montpelier, VT 05602 website: [cvran.org](http://cvran.org)*

## How are you connected to CVRAN?

Are you:

- A New Vermonter, a new arrival, who has sought support?
- A wonderful volunteer?
- An artist or or prospective sponsor in the March Arts Marathon?
- A generous donor?
- An employer looking for workers?
- An official or concerned citizen looking for emergency help for someone else?
- Policy makers looking for input?
- Allied organizations looking for collective solutions?

CVRAN is now a well-known organization working with refugees, asylum seekers, and migrant workers. Many inquiries come in from all those people above. Would you like to know more? Would you like to connect? Would you like to tell a friend about this work? Go to our website:

[cvran.org](http://cvran.org)

## People served by CVRAN today...

**Speak 14 different languages:** Arabic, Dari, English, Farsi, French, Kario, Lingala, Luganda, Pashto, Portuguese, Quichua, Russian, Spanish, Swahili

**Fled their homelands for various reasons:** Government persecution, gang violence, torture, or mistreatment as members of a minority

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## Introduction: This Small Booklet

Read on to find how a small group of dedicated people have made a remarkable difference in other people's lives and in their own. Watch step-by-step as CVRAN work takes root and nourishes every person engaged: both the brave and resilient people who have fled horror and persecution in their own countries, coming here to start their lives anew, and also the people reaching out to them who make new friends, grow in unexpected ways, and end up with richer lives.

Most important to CVRAN are all those who have fled danger in other places to seek a new start here in Central Vermont. For their safety, many names and faces cannot be included here. These New Vermonters are the foundation of every page of this booklet and our purpose in existing, even when they are not seen in print.

## 2015-17 Establishing the Organization

*Refugee is in the title because at the time we were hoping to help settle Syrian refugees to live and work in Montpelier. We hadn't been thinking about supporting asylum seekers.*

*Pam Walker,  
Founding Member*

*The students in my class experienced quite a bit before coming to Vermont. It is so nice to hear that they felt that Vermont is a very welcoming place... A wonderful day, and a perfect way for my students to learn about more citizenship.*

*Corinne Johnson,  
English Language Instructor,  
VT Refugee Resettlement Program*

### 2015

Founded April 2015

Started hosting refugee visits to state capitol

Started welcome gifts of breadboards and knives

### 2016

President Trump elected: number of incoming refugees cut

Incorporated as non-profit with by-laws and officers

### 2017

Started tutoring migrant farm workers and giving them rides

Held regional gathering to explore working with asylum seekers as well as refugees

Attended first citizenship ceremony



Photo credit: Terry Allen



Photo credit: Terry Allen

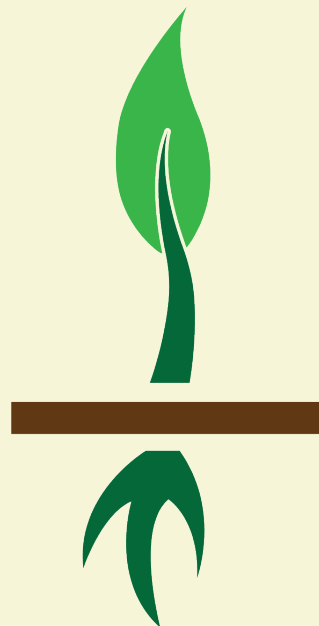
## The Beginnings Of CVRAN

*In 2015 about ten of us were seated in folding chairs in a circle in the basement of the UU church of Montpelier talking about the humanitarian refugee crisis and how we could help the many people facing war, famine, natural disasters and persecution. Our goal was to host refugees in our communities, as had been done in the past. Diane wanted to invite refugees from Syria to Montpelier, but Laurie Stavrand of Vermont Refugee Settlement in Burlington said that first there needed to be housing and jobs. Before those could be organized, newly elected President Trump instigated the Muslim Ban, so welcoming refugees to Montpelier had to wait. Instead refugees who were already residing in Chittenden County were welcomed to Montpelier, their state capitol, to meet the governor, sit in the gallery of the legislature, visit the state history museum and join in on a potluck meal.*

Wendy Dale, Founding Member



Photo credit: Terry Allen



## The Trajectory Of CVRAN

*CVRAN's founders wrote by-laws, elected a board, and incorporated as a non-profit. We began serving former refugees who were already settled in our state. This laid the foundation for the organization we have become. Our original goal of helping those fleeing persecution overseas to build new lives in our community came to fruition in 2019 when CVRAN welcomed our first asylum seekers, a family of four from South America. Since then, CVRAN has hosted numerous asylum-seeking families and individuals from Africa, South America, and Russia, supporting them with housing, education, job training, legal and medical assistance, as well as friendship, until they could become independent. In 2021 CVRAN began welcoming Afghan families who were fleeing the Taliban takeover of their country. These new neighbors enrich our local communities, bringing diversity of culture. They inspire us with their bravery and perseverance, sacrifices they have made for the well-being of their children, and their gratitude for an opportunity to begin anew.*

Diane Fitch, First President

# 2018 Focus on Outreach

## New Vermonters

Continued refugee statehouse visits, gifts  
Continued migrant tutoring

## Special Events

Organized panel: "Borders and Walls"  
Produced a play: "Que Noche Buena"  
Signed on to policies: fair and impartial  
policing and Montpelier as sanctuary city

## Building the Organization

Created tools for communication: mission  
statement, brochure, website, Facebook  
page, CVRAN banner



## Educational Outreach

**Borders and Walls:**  
*A Forum on Current Challenges for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrant Workers in Vermont*

June 15, 2018, 7 to 9 pm  
Unitarian Church of Montpelier  
130 Main Street, Montpelier, Vermont

In our communities new Vermonters who were uprooted from their own countries can face isolation, discrimination and racial harassment. Some fear arrest and deportation. But many people and local and national organizations are working to welcome new Vermonters and advocate for their rights. **Borders and Walls** is a forum to help create a deeper understanding of who these new Vermonters are, the obstacles they face, and what is being done to support them and keep them safe among us.

**Panelists:**

- Elizabeh Awadalla, student, Norwich University, former refugee from Sudan
- Community Leaders, Migrant Justice
- James Lyall, Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont
- Htun Sein, case manager, Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, former refugee from Burma
- Laurie Stavrand, Community Partnership Coordinator, Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program
- Susan Sussman, immigration case worker, office of Senator Patrick Leahy

**Moderator:**  
Reverend Joan Javier-Duval, minister, Unitarian Church of Montpelier

For more information: <https://bit.ly/2v1g1ch>  
Sponsored by  
**CENTRAL VERMONT  
REFUGEE ACTION NETWORK**

## Building An Online Presence

**CENTRAL VERMONT  
REFUGEE ACTION NETWORK**

Welcoming New Vermonters to Visit, Work, an

## Facebook

*If this were for an annual report,  
I'd mention that we now have 599  
followers. Who will be the 600th?*

Jessica Noyes,  
Facebook Editor,  
2018-Present

## Website

Ben Witte volunteered many volunteer  
hours beyond what we paid him to build  
our first website.

*The CVRAN team has always been effective  
in keeping content and the news feed current.  
Using the website to formulate and host years  
of successful online fundraising events, and  
seeing it so heavily used this way, has really  
made the work incredibly rewarding.*

Ben Witte  
Website Developer



## Volunteer Coordinators

*Around 2019 CVRAN started its direct service model and program as diasporas, caravans, and pressure on the borders intensified. Asylum seekers arrived in VT seeking shelter and supports. Other asylum seekers stuck in federal detention centers were looking for formal sponsorship as required before they could be released to family members or into a community setting. CVRAN started to develop a network of member volunteers based on paper-based application forms and a requirement to file criminal background checks. I took on the role of converting the volunteer application process from paper filings to a more automated system with online applications and filings. I developed policy and procedure manuals for the volunteer network.*

Dian Kahn

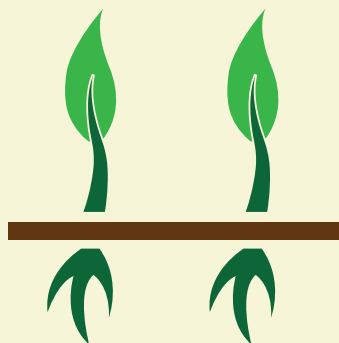
*In the Fall of 2019, I attended my first CVRAN meeting with Amy Ehlich in the basement of the Methodist Church in Montpelier. There were about 12 people present. It was mentioned that the organization was still looking for a new volunteer coordinator. I raised my hand, more or less jumping into CVRAN with both feet. I worked with Dian Kahn, the former volunteer coordinator, to become familiar with the volunteer database. I transferred it to a Google spreadsheet and worked with Mairead Harris to make it more manageable. It then became apparent that the information we were collecting from the online registration form needed updating, which in turn led to not only updating the online registration form but also eventually completely updating the website.*

Kathie O'Connor

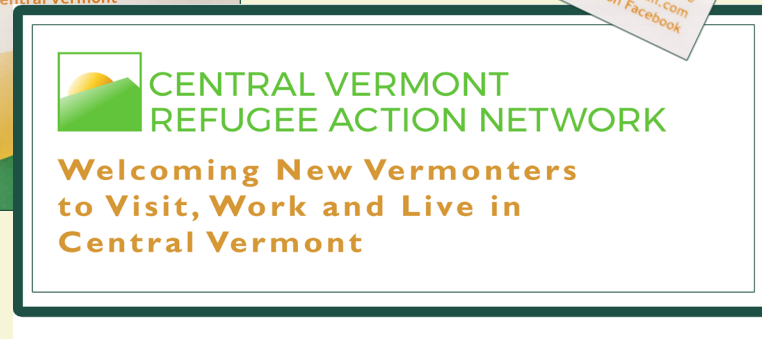
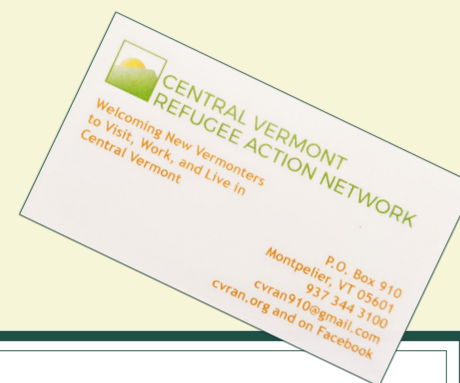
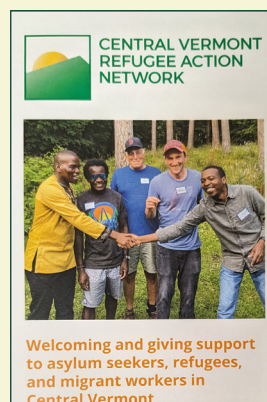
## Tutoring Migrant Workers

*I began teaching English in 2019, but once COVID hit, I pared back to essentials (shopping and transportation) only. Helping the farmworkers has been fun. Over several years I have worked with three in particular, helping with transportation to the bank, grocery store, or medical or dental appointments, or a clothing store. They work very long hard days, and I'm glad to have been of some support to them while getting an opportunity to practice Spanish.*

Abby Colihan, Tutor



## New Print Materials



# 2019 Expanding CVRAN's Reach

*From the beginnings of our Asylum Support Network, CVRAN has been a leader and a vital and vibrant partner, giving of its time and energies to help lead and sustain a strong collaboration statewide, in order to have a stronger voice on behalf of asylum seekers and all immigrants. Thank you!!*

Jan Steinbauer,  
Facilitator, VTNH ASN

## New Vermonters

First asylum family of four welcomed  
Refugee visits and tutoring continued  
Worked with border organizations to find new people

## Special Events

Mexican Consulate Sponsorship begun  
"Responding to the Humanitarian Crisis at Our Borders," an online panel, organized  
"Courage & Compassion at the Southern Border," an in-person panel organized

## Building the Organization

Sought support of church and social justice organizations  
Ben and Jerry's Grant won

## Collaboration

Co-founded Vermont-New Hampshire Asylum Support Network (VT-NH-ASN), a network of asylum groups  
Grant opportunities began through the network such as "Giving Tuesday"



## Hosting First Family

*When I first joined CVRAN it consisted of about a dozen people looking for ways to help new Vermonters in Rutland and Burlington. But truthfully there wasn't much we could do. All that changed in 2019 when we heard about CASP, a similar organization in Brattleboro that was offering housing to refugees and asylum seekers. We were very excited by this idea. A short time later we learned of a family of four from South America who'd been staying in a homeless shelter. Perhaps we could take them on. As it happened I had a large empty finished attic with a bathroom. I talked to my husband and he agreed we should offer it. About a month later the family moved in. The daughter was registered at Montpelier High School, the son at Union School, and the parents got busy with English language instruction, long-postponed medical care, and cooking spicy meals every night in our kitchen. This pattern of local families hosting continued for two or three years, but worked best if there was a separate apartment in a family home.*

Amy Ehrlich





## Our Mission

We aim to strengthen community-based organizations across Vermont and New Hampshire that welcome and support asylum seekers by fostering collaboration, sharing best practices, building capacity, raising public awareness, and advocating for policies and funding that support our collective work.

## Participating Groups

- CVRAN Central VT
- CVOEO Champlain Valley
- NEKASAN Northeast Kingdom
- CASAN Chittenden County
- B2R Rutland
- SHARe Upper Valley
- RAASS Randolph
- CASP Brattleboro
- PROJECT HOME Keene, NH

**CVRAN was a founding member of this critically important organization!**

## Programs That Reach Out to the Public

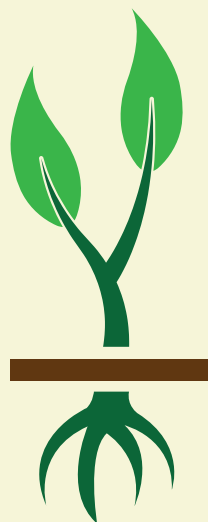
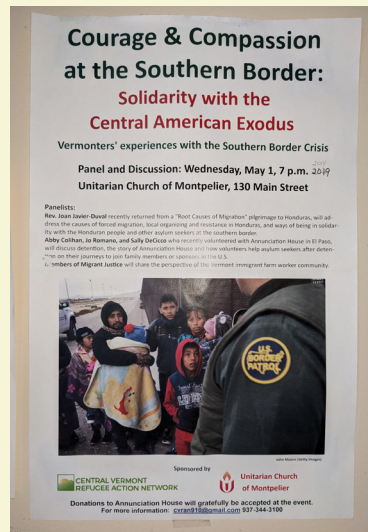


Photo credit: Terry Allen

**The consulate's 2025 visit served... and issued...**

- 140 Mexicans
- 88 passports
- 22 IDs
- 17 birth certificates
- 4 dual nationality papers

## Mexican Consulate

*In September, 2018, Joseph Gainza, Katie Kramer, and Jessica Noyes, representing the Central Vermont Farmworkers Coalition (CVFC), spoke at a CVRAN meeting with a unique proposal. Their organization had one remaining annual project, organizing a visit from the Mexican Consulate in Boston, to serve Mexican workers on Vermont's dairy farms. Would CVRAN "adopt" that event?*

*CVRAN member Peter Thoms joined the organizing committee and, beginning in July, 2019, CVRAN has hosted the Mexican Consulate each year, except during the 2020 pandemic. Vermont Legal Aid, UVM's Bridges to Health, and Migrant Justice provide services to attending farm workers. The event continues to be essential and is also a significant social event for the farm workers and their families who come. We look forward to hosting successful consulate events in coming years.*

Jessica Noyes and Peter Thoms



Photo credit: Terry Allen



Photo credit: Terry Allen

# 2020 Hunkering Down

## Context

Pandemic Begins  
 Zoom Meetings, e-votes used for first time  
 Annual Meeting held outdoors  
 Mexican Consulate & a fundraiser cancelled

## New Vermonters

Continued hosting family and searching for more

## Special Events

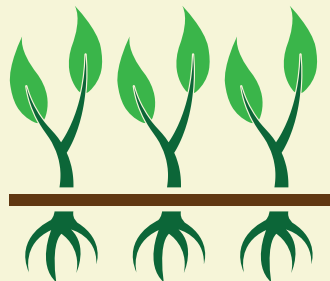
Planning for launch of March Arts Marathon  
 Fall Gift Raffle held

## Building the Organization

Website redone  
 Understanding of client service needs refined

## Collaboration

Giving Tuesday Grant received through Vt-NH-ASN



## What Services Will Newcomers Need?



**Dear Potential Host Family,**  
 Spring 2020

Welcome aboard to this important work of providing a safe home and hope for an individual or a family fleeing very difficult times in their home country. Many of our arrivals undergo care through our detention centers or wait on the border for a host to welcome them. You will be making a very big difference in their lives if you can offer your space and friendship so that they can begin a new life free of fear and danger.

**What does it involve to be a host?** You and your family would welcome a person or persons into your home for at least a three-month period. You would be that person's introduction to living in the United States, including practicing English, sharing meal times, introducing your guest to the joys and pleasures of your life, having some quality time together, and even helping to recruit. Our organization (CVRAN) would come back in your space and talk to you about what levels of supports you might need, including financial reimbursement, recipe evenings or workshops, possible furniture for the bedroom, a chance to talk to other hosts, or access to translation if needed.

**Meanwhile CVRAN would be setting up all sorts of supports for this new arrival.** We have teams of people who arrange for legal support, educational opportunities, medical appointments, shopping needs, social opportunities, and more. Although these new arrivals cannot work until they get their permits, often six months down the line, they are usually very interested in getting started in their new lives in important ways.

**Let us know what interests you.** The more hands and shoulders we can find, the more people we can help. If you like the idea, but want to get your feet wet more slowly, you could offer to provide recipes for a weekend, take one of our guests on a field trip, or even drive over for dinner. We work in teams to welcome each person. There are many other ways to support the dinner. We work in teams to welcome each person. There are many other ways to support the dinner. We work in teams to welcome each person. There are many other ways to support the dinner.

For more information about our Central Vermont Refugee Action Network, look us up on our website [www.cvrn.org](http://www.cvrn.org). If you might have a spare bedroom and an interest in making a big difference in a person's life, email us via the contact on the webpage. We are based in Montpelier, but have volunteers and host families in other towns in Central Vermont. You could be one of them.

Spread the word!  
 Rachel Walker Caspell, [rcaspell@gmail.com](mailto:rcaspell@gmail.com)  
 President, Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN)



## We worked at planning!

*A support team, medical appointments, social engagements, English lessons, drivers' licenses, help with housing...*

*Each family or individual hosted by CVRAN has a designated team of volunteers, with a team leader. Volunteers often have specific areas of responsibility: medical, education, transportation to shopping. The team members provide friendship and introduce new arrivals to American life and community activities. They identify and address our new neighbors' needs and goals.*

Diane Fitch



Mary J. Reardon:  
*Yo Soy Un Robot*



Jean Vissering:  
*Marshfield Brook*

## CVRRAN'S MARCH ARTS MARATHON IMAGINED

*In October 2020 I approached CVRRAN to propose that I would write a poem a day and find sponsors who would donate to CVRRAN. My idea was modeled on the (CNA) Center for New American's annual fundraiser, "30 poems in November." A CVRRAN committee immediately formed, and we invented CVRRAN's March Arts Marathon: a daily arts practice in March, (any creative endeavor welcomed) with the artists finding sponsors who donate to CVRRAN and receive e-mail images, writings, videos or recordings of the artist's daily work. Ben Witte developed and continues to refine the computer programming and computer support that makes the marathon possible.*

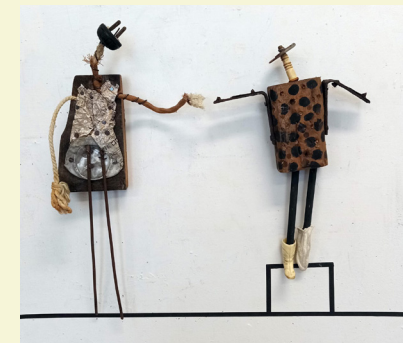
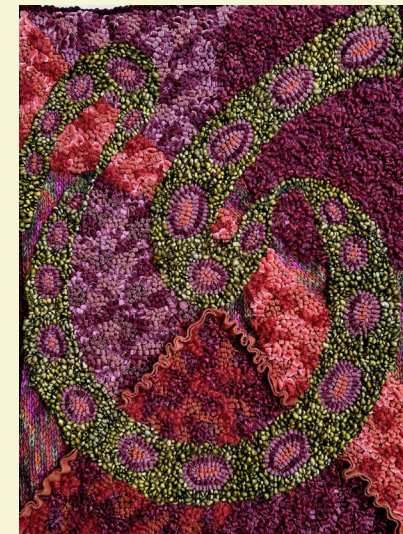
*In March 2021, much to everyone's astonishment, we had forty participants in our inaugural March Arts Marathon and together we raised approximately \$46,000. We had picked March because we knew Vermonters most need structure, community and activity in March, but we couldn't have anticipated that 2021 would be the first full year of the pandemic, when the artists and our donor friends and relations were hungry for joy, connection and a way to contribute. By 2025, our 67 March Arts Marathon artists would raise approximately \$82,864 with more than 1000 sponsors. In the first years, this was CVRRAN's only financial base.*

*Each March Ben Witte creates two beautiful online gallery shows of our participants' work, and those shows continue to be available on the CVRRAN website to inspire all of us.*

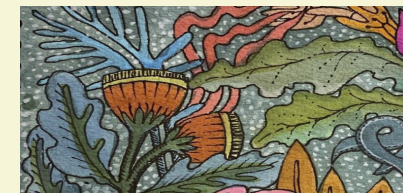
Nicky Morris,  
Creator & Coordinator of the March Arts Marathon



Marie LaPre Grabon:  
*Turtle Trails*



Janet Van Fleet:  
*Interaction 1*



Fiona Davis:  
*The Chromatics*

# 2021 Many New Arrivals

## Tunisian Dinner



## Programs

**Online Program**—*Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Immigrants in Vermont: Present Realities and Steps Towards a Brighter Future*

**Panel**—*Bridging Continents: The Life & Experiences of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Central Vermont*

## Context

Pandemic Continues  
Newcomers must quarantine for ten days  
Benefit meal became a drive-through

## New Vermonter Arrivals

Five Afghan families come to Montpelier  
One Afghan family formally taken on by CVRAN

New individual asylum seekers come from Africa and South America

## Special Events

Much outreach: churches, clubs, radio  
First annual picnic

Tunisian Dinner Benefit, organized & cooked by a New Vermonter  
Mexican Consulate resumes

First March Arts Marathon  
Two programs (see sidebar)

## Building the Organization

Started governance by Leadership Team  
Started Car Fund

## Collaboration

Just Food Hub helps raise money for CVRAN

## Many Types of Contributions



(Left) Sue Morris of Just Food Hub comes to CVRAN meetings to help fundraise by selling Equal Exchange products (Right) concert/donation event at Christ Church, Montpelier



## Website Committee

*In early 2021, Rachel Cogbill and I formed a website committee, which, in addition to Rachel and myself included Mairead Harris, Laura Barnes, Jeremy Hankins, and Ben Witte (CVRAN website manager) with Rachel as the Chair. Mairead and Laura were employed in the tech field and their input was essential as was Ben's in both the development and implementation stages. Laura designed the new homepage while Mairead and I updated the volunteer registration form and the volunteer spreadsheet. Rachel and I updated the website text and Rachel did most of the photos. We all worked on the donor page. The new website was up and running in Spring, 2022, and not a moment too soon. The number of volunteers signing up and the number of website "hits" continued to increase in ever greater numbers. So also did the online donations.*

Kathie O'Connor



## CVRAN's First Afghan Family

*The (CVRAN family) team has varied over the years, but they got right down to work, meeting each Sunday over Zoom to figure out the week's tasks, and often connecting with the USCRI (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants) Family Friends for the 4 other Afghan families who moved to Montpelier at the same time, building a network that bridged CVRAN and USCRI interests in unexpected ways. Some of these early team members even went on to become family friends for a second wave of Afghan families.*

Wendy Dale

## New Leadership Team

*It took three of us—Priscilla Fox, Lucy Wollaeger and me—to take over from Pam and Diane and keep CVRAN on a forward trajectory. Among the accomplishments of CVRAN during our tenure as its leadership team was the establishment of a relationship with USCRI where CVRAN promised its aid in helping a specified number of Afghan refugee families with housing, education and socialization. That promise led to today's community of ten Afghan refugee families in Montpelier. With help from Dinah Yessne, CVRAN identified unmet needs for asylum seekers, discussing "equitable" versus "equal" levels of support. CVRAN also established closer ties to NEKASAN (North-east Kingdom Asylum Seekers' Assistance Network), leading to our two organizations collaborating to support an asylum seeker. Through a generous donation, CVRAN established a fund to help asylum seekers and refugees purchase their first car. Both the car fund and the summer camps fund for children have been widely successful and are models for other asylum and refugee support groups.*

Hope Crifo

## Car Fund Begins

*You are not giving a car;  
you are giving hope  
in humanity!*

Ghazi Jendoubi



**First CVRAN  
Annual Picnic**  
*Cornhole winner anyone?*

# 2022 New Arrival and New Committees

*The generosity of people is amazing. The young people helped us organize with social media and new, fluent ways of raising money. We raised \$150,000 in a couple of weeks!*

Steve Dale,  
Affordable Housing  
Committee

## New Vermonters: Total 23

Two individual asylum seekers welcomed  
Three Spanish-speaking families welcomed  
One refugee family continues  
Involvement with all Afghan families continues

## Special Events

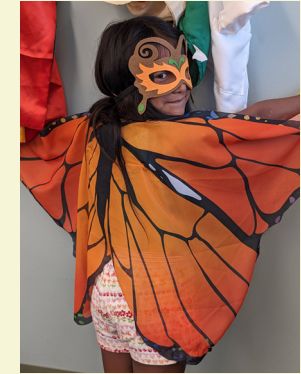
Mexican Consulate visit moves to Bethany Church  
Outreach events held at churches, clubs, etc.  
Affordable Housing fundraising campaign swings into action

## Building the Organization

Changed governance to one president and board  
New committees formed: finance, affordable housing, website

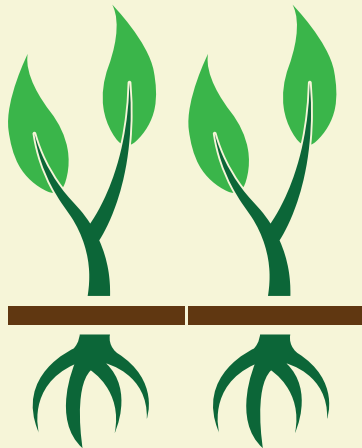
## Collaboration

Vt-NHASN brings in two-year Canaday grant money for all its member organizations, including CVRAN!



“The team is like a 2nd family to us.”

An asylum seeker



## Finance Committee

*The Finance Committee was formed from a group of volunteers in late 2022 in order to provide financial oversight and advice to the Board of Directors. At that time, CVRAN's finances were growing, and the needs of the refugees and asylum seekers in our area were growing as well. Don Welch, who had just taken over as Treasurer, brought the know-how to transition from the cardboard box of receipts and statements he had received to a (second) computer based system. Assistant Treasurer Edwin (Drex) Godfrey greatly helped the transition.*

*In October 2023, Joyce Manchester became treasurer, and, with the Finance Committee, has overseen increasingly complex financial responsibilities, including planning for paid employees, benefits, and monitoring various grants.*

Joyce Manchester, treasurer



## Affordable Housing

*In late 2022 Steve Dale and Steve Klein appealed to CVRAN for help in finding housing for two large Afghan families. Their state rent subsidies would be running out at the same time their leases would be up for renewal in six short months. It was critical to act soon. While CVRAN had primarily provided housing with host families in the past, CVRAN now needed to find rentals for newer arrivals, especially the larger families. The Affordable Housing Committee (AHC) was formed. The members were Steve Dale, Steve Klein, Hope Crifo, Kelly McCracken, Sarah Hoffman, and me as Chair.*

*The committee accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time. The AHC soon started a fundraising campaign in order to support housing needs. The first campaign was to raise \$350,000, a huge amount for CVRAN, but they met their goal in three months.*

*CVRAN was then able to partner with an angel investor in purchasing a house one of the families had been renting. The family moved into the house in 2023.*

*CVRAN partnered with Downstreet Community Development to purchase and renovate a large house in Montpelier. The renovation was expensive. CVRAN had to raise an additional \$150,000, which we were successful in doing. Another of our large families moved into the house in May 2024. Downstreet owns the house and CVRAN has a master lease with them.*

*CVRAN partnered again with Downstreet to renovate a 4-unit apartment building in town. Downstreet raised the funds and CVRAN worked with them on the renovation. In May 2025 four CVRAN families moved into the beautifully renovated building. Downstreet owns the building and CVRAN has a master lease with them.*

*The AHC continues to work with Downstreet, local landlords, and others to find housing for its New Vermonters, both families and individuals.*

Kathie O'Connor, AHC Chair

## 2022: New President

*"CVRAN was no longer run collectively by its members at monthly meetings. There was too much happening. It was important to divvy up the work.*

*Who was involved in the website? Did the website need changes? Who was going to help get the March Arts Marathon off the ground? Could there be a committee? How about finding housing for new asylum seekers and working with host families? Each of these tasks and others took a committee and the committees needed to report somewhere.*

*Each person was asked to define the dimensions of the task in which they were involved, and say where we needed to go. The treasurer, for instance, said we needed much better systems to track donations and an accounting system. The volunteer coordinator did not want to manually input information from the website. These needs led to improvements in the website, making it more interactive.*

*All these changes were reported to the board and there were often long discussions as we figured out policies and finances. The hardest part always was figuring out how many new arrivals we could take on and how.*

Rachel Cogbill,  
CVRAN's new president

# 2023 Growing to Meet the Need

*The role of the Committee to Recommend New Arrivals is to identify asylum seekers and refugees who are the best fit with our local communities and with the resources CVRAN has to offer, and to then make recommendations to the CVRAN board.*

Diane Fitch, Chair

*Their warmth and joy in life, despite the challenges of their life stories, were so inspiring.*

Liza Earle-Centers,  
Direct Service Coordinator  
for Spanish Speakers

## Context

Devastating July flood impacts housing/jobs

## New Vermonters

Six new asylum seekers welcomed  
Joined vigils at ICE office check-ins  
Offered summer camp scholarships  
Organized summer reading program  
Purchased van for family use

## Special Events

Hosted Panel: "Introduction to CVRAN"  
Hosted "Gathering for Service Providers"  
First house purchased  
Held New Neighbor Picnic, at North Branch  
Mexican Consulate moved to Bethany Church...now 88 passports issued!  
March Arts Marathon grew  
Spoke at many outreach events

## Building the Organization

First part-time staff hired  
Committees created to recommend new guests and find interim housing  
Digitized records to post on the Cloud  
Website recreated, website editor added

## Collaboration

VT legislative outreach and meetings with Senator Welch and staff along with VT-NH-ASN  
Grant through VT-NH-ASN from state



Monthly meetings, a time to hear from everyone



Introduction to CVRAN drew 80 participants to the Montpelier Senior Center



Senator Peter Welch seeking background information on asylum seekers from VT-NH-ASN, including CVRAN



## Summer Reading Program

*It was Hope Crifo who approached me in the Spring of 2023 about starting a summer reading program for the children of the refugees and asylum seekers we were serving in Montpelier. With Sylvia Fagin, who worked with new English language learners at Union Elementary School, we developed a system of matching preschool and elementary school-age children with willing volunteers who acted as reading partners, meeting once a week in each child's home. Sylvia supplied the books from the Union School Library and I added some art supplies and games to book bags for each child. Some of the reading partnerships continued through the winter months and still continue to this day. Next summer will be the fourth year of CVRAN's summer reading program, now ably headed up by Paige Gebhardt.*

Amy Ehrlich



Outreach as far away as Stowe Community Church, one of many events at clubs, radio programs, and other churches

A GATHERING FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

# ASYLUM SEEKERS

LISTING BARRIERS  
SHARING STORIES  
BRAINSTORMING  
SOLUTIONS

Wednesday, October 25th, 2023  
12—2:30 p.m.  
Steele Community Room  
Waterbury Municipal Offices  
28 North Main St., Waterbury

RSVP (See Email Link)

SPONSORED BY CVRAN  
(Central Vermont Refugee Action Network)  
advocating for the needs of asylum seekers  
with the support of The Canaday Family Charitable Trust.  
One of other similar events around the state under the umbrella of  
the Vermont-New Hampshire Asylum Support Network

## Community Discussion On Asylum Seeker Issues

*Rachel and I co-coordinated an important regional conversation, coordinating a one-day conference in fall 2023 that brought together educators, health professionals, and social services providers who were working with asylum seekers from Washington, Lamoille, and Chittenden Counties and even state-wide. Really good connections and ideas came out of that day that I think continue to this day.*

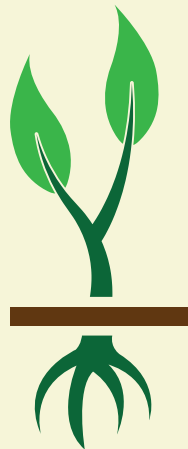
Liza Earle-Centers,  
First part-time staff and  
Direct Service Coordinator  
for Spanish Speakers



# 2024 Surging Ahead

*As of our tenth anniversary, 13 of the adults in families supported by CVRAN had full-time jobs and were responsible for paying most, if not all, of their families' bills.*

David Stapleton,  
Chair, Jobs Committee



## Context

President Donald Trump puts sweeping anti-immigration policies into effect; fear increases.

Immediate CVRAN push to take on new people before borders close

## New Vermonters

Six new asylum seekers welcomed and one refugee

Two asylum cases won

One CVRAN family taken into custody and later released

One parent put in lengthy detention

All original Afghan families in long-term affordable housing

## New Special Events

Vermont Bar Pro Bono Award given to our pro bono attorney Seth Lipschutz

Second and third houses purchased and renovated in partnership with Downstreet

New American Symposium held

## Building the Organization

2nd part-time staff employed

1st asylee board member added

Committees for Media and Jobs, plus Website Editor added

Strategic Planning Sessions held

## Collaboration

"Symposium on New Americans" with VT-NH-ASN

"Tips for New Vermonters" written for VT-NH-ASN website

Housing and Education Bills with Migrant Justice

**Advocacy**—CVRAN and VT-NH-ASN members lobby with Migrant Justice for education & housing



**Asylum Party**—Celebrating the first asylum case won. Additionally lawyer Seth Lipschutz wins Pro Bono award and New Vermonter Ghazi Jendubi joins CVRAN board



Photo credit: Terry Allen



**Symposium on New Americans**—VT-NH-ASN co-sponsors full day of panels with Vermont Asylum Assistance Project and others... CVRAN member Pam Walker honored for idea; CVRAN member Hope Crifo on panel



Client released here after extended detention



AnnaRose Jenisch, second part-time staff and volunteer coordinator



Yolanda Bansah wins National John Lewis Youth Leadership Award while serving as CVRAN volunteer coordinator



Vermont Bar Association Pro Bono Award to Seth Lipschutz

## 2024 Strategic Planning

*When a non-profit organization approaches its tenth year, it's at a point where it needs to grow, or shrink we were told. Typically, the original founders, inspired to do everything—to live and breathe the organization—are ready to move on or at least do less. Indeed we had been having trouble filling their shoes: for a while we had neither a vice president nor a secretary. The only people willing to be team leaders were people who were on the board. The need to welcome immigrants was great, but CVRAN people power was missing.*

*Enter the Strategic Planning Process. Mary Braun and Paul Costello and community members joined us in trying to re-envision our organization. After many meetings, some controversy, and much soul-searching, we decided on three goals: hiring an executive director, raising money to pay for the executive director, and charging a nominating committee to find us strong leaders.*

*Within three and one-half months, these were all accomplished. We had an executive director, held our first very successful fall fund-raising campaign, and lined up new officers and board members. Not only did this strategic planning help us, but sister organizations in the state followed our model.*

Rachel Cogbill  
CVRAN President



# 2025 Surging Ahead in Difficult Times

*Downstreet's partnership with CVRAN reflects the best of who we are as a community—opening doors and creating permanently affordable homes so refugees and asylum seekers can put down roots, rebuild with dignity, and contribute to the place we all call home.*

Angie Harbin, Director, Downstreet Housing & Community Development

## Context

Anti-immigrant president blocks immigration, limits rights, increases detentions, cuts social supports, raises fees

## New Vermonters

- Three new refugees and three new asylum seekers added
- Green cards and asylum status achieved for some
- Four families move into renovated Randall House
- Many accompanied to ICE check-ins
- Organized special English class for Afghan women
- A student starts at CCV, another gets nursing degree
- Created stipend for attending English classes
- SNAP Relief Grant Program implemented
- Subscribed to interpretation service Boost Lingo

## Special Events

- Held "Know Your Rights Trainings" for each team
- Participated in Waterbury Volunteer Fair
- Sponsored Mexican Consulate
- Joined in VT Afghan Alliance Community Forum
- Annual picnic held at North Branch Nature Center
- Film showing benefited CVRAN
- Hosted vision clinic
- Executive Director speaks at Hands Off Rally

*Our families were thrilled to move into their new apartments in the four-unit building CVRAN renovated with Downstreet. Each apartment has a new kitchen and new bathroom, and its own washer and dryer. Both the children and adults are enjoying their special community within the building.*



Kathie O'Connor,  
Chair Affordable  
Housing Committee



Passing the torch



Isabelle Tibi, new part-time coordinator of direct service and of volunteers



**Legal Stances:** Support at ICE check-ins

# 2025 continued

## Building the Organization

New president, new board members, new e-mail coordinator all begin work

Half-time direct service/volunteer coordinator hired

Office in Bethany Church rented

Monthly newsletter begun

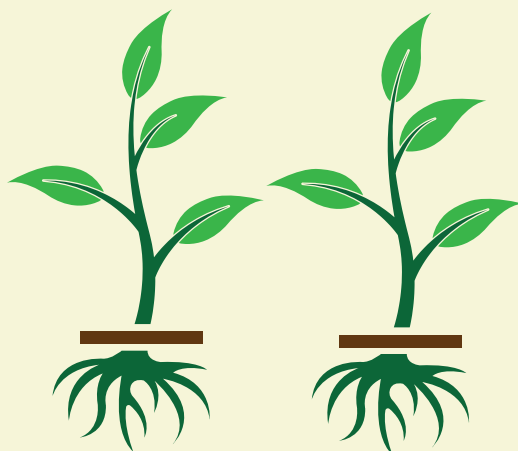
CVRAN purchases additional car for client use

Fundraising and grants pursued

## Collaboration

Joined with Just Basics to add halal meat to Food Shelf

Lobbied for Education and Housing bills with Migrant Justice



*As we step into 2025, we do so with deep gratitude for the work that has brought CVRAN to this moment. This year marks a period of both transition and growth as we carry forward our mission of welcoming and supporting our newest neighbors in Central Vermont. Thanks to crucial grant funding and generous donors, CVRAN has been able to expand existing resources and introduce new ones. Our volunteers remain at the heart of all we do, and their steady, compassionate work brings CVRAN's mission to life.*



Executive director message from Ali Zenie, pictured here taking a shift tabling at the Hunger Mountain Coop



Executive director Ali Zenie speaks at rally

I do not wish to speak with you, answer your questions, or sign or hand you any documents based on my 5th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution.

I do not give you permission to enter my home based on my 4th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution unless you have a warrant to enter, signed by a judge or magistrate with my name on it that you slide under the door.

I do not give you permission to search any of my belongings based on my 4th Amendment rights.

I choose to exercise my constitutional rights.

*These cards are available to citizens and noncitizens alike.*

Know-your-rights training for each family and team

## 2026 and Beyond: Into the Future

*CVRAN has grown and adapted so much in its first decade; we must keep that flexibility and focus for the next decade and beyond. We will continue to provide fundamental support and assistance to all the New Vermonters we work with while also striving to focus on our vision to collaborate, to build an inclusive community, and to help New Vermonters thrive.*

*There is no denying that this year has brought many unwelcome changes and challenges, and we have to prepare for this to continue. Federal decisions have left many families anxious about their future. We will do all that we can to keep them safe and to help them feel safe and welcome in the face of increasingly harmful policies. This means adapting quickly when new threats arise—communicating clearly, raising and allocating funds to cover new gaps, collaborating with partners, and offering consistent information and support to volunteers and New Vermonters.*

*Our team is committed to meeting urgent needs while building long-term pathways toward stability and inclusion. It is hard work, and is only possible because CVRAN's volunteers, staff, and board show up every day to build a community of compassion and support.*

*We couldn't be prouder of the work that's been done so far, or more energized to keep it going into the next decade.*

Kelly McCracken,  
Board President  
January 2026



# Why CVRAN?

## The Relationships

*I am inspired and grateful every day to witness the connection and community that is built at CVRAN. I love to see volunteers engage in all different ways to welcome and assist New Vermonters. The relationships bring so much value to our lives.*

Kelly McCracken  
CVRAN President 2026

### Someone To Have Your Back

One new Vermonter said that she has friends in other states who are afraid to leave their houses. She told them they need to find an organization like CVRAN which has their backs and looks out for them. Without CVRAN she said she would have been afraid to leave her house too.



## The Need

*These people are desperate for a safe life for themselves and their children. They are desperate for a job, any job, which will help their families back home who are without enough food or medicine. In another era, it might have been your ancestors after the potato famine, during the Holocaust, or crossing the border from Quebec to find work.*

Rachel Cogbill,  
excerpted from a  
2023 President's Letter



## Our Future

*We stand hand-in-hand with all of our new Vermonters and vow to work together to form a more peaceful, just, and democratic society. Our immigrants are our future just as they have been since this country was founded.*

Kathie O'Connor  
Vice President 2025

## Support Along the Journey

*I'm writing to share some fantastic news: I have officially received my asylum approval notice from USCIS. This milestone would not have been possible without your unwavering support and the incredible help I've received from CVRAN throughout this journey. I am deeply grateful to each of you for your time, encouragement, and presence during key moments, including my biometrics appointment, asylum interview, and numerous support meetings I held with you...Thank you all again for everything. I truly appreciate your continued support and that of the broader CVRAN team, as I now begin the next phase of my journey.*

Anonymous

# Appreciating CVRAN's Leaders

## Diane Fitch, Founding President Cum Laude!

The CVRAN Board greatly appreciates all the good work of Diane Fitch. A founder of our organization ten years ago, and a vital part of us ever since, Diane has been a key to each step of CVRAN's growth. She and others had the vision to be pro-active in helping migrant workers, asylum seekers, and refugees in Central Vermont. In the first years, Diane helped plan educational programs and outreach events and was often the van organizer and driver bringing Chittenden County refugees on statehouse and Vermont History Museum tours, with a chance to meet the governor.

Diane was CVRAN's president for seven years, with a collaborative and inclusive model that pulled in many new members and allowed for experimentation and growth, which happened very rapidly once we started hosting families in 2019. She was a team leader for multiple people, and was often the person who found those we would help, whether by corresponding with groups near the Mexican border or



receiving telephone calls from those in need. Diane has always been a consistent and generous proponent for helping those directly escaping danger.

Even when she was no longer president, Diane would see the need for certain work and form a committee to address it. She has served wonderfully on the board: Nominating, the Committee to Recommend New Guests, the Interim Housing Committee, the Bylaw Change ad hoc Group, the Strategic Planning Group, and many more. She has also served as secretary, organized the materials on Next Cloud for us, run the email announcements,

rerouted messages that came in through the website and acted as our archivist when any questions of history came up. Our CVRAN community has benefited greatly from her generous and wise presence. We wish her well in the next steps of her life, and value the model she gives us all about discerning when it is time to step forward and when it is time to step back, or even when needed, a combination of the two!



## Pam Walker, Board Stalwart

The CVRAN Board wishes to recognize the invaluable work of Pam Walker, one of the early founders of CVRAN. She has been immensely involved over the last 10 years of our existence, and together with Diane Fitch was a primary leader for the first seven years, most often serving as vice-president. Pam was also a part of founding the collaborative of similar regional organizations, the Vermont New Hampshire Asylum Seekers Network.

During her many years at CVRAN, Pam helped bring Chittenden County refugees to the statehouse to meet the governor and see the state legislature in session. For several years she tutored a migrant worker who became a Migrant Justice leader. She was a team leader for our very first resident family of four, and been a warm friend to all subsequent arrivals, as well as often again a team leader. She has embraced and warmly mentored all in the organization: having teas at her house, employing newcomers, or accepting donations of furnishings and clothing dropped



off on her porch for later distribution. Her connections with each individual continue long after that person or family has “graduated” or moved on. She only states the best about everyone. Her outreach includes speaking engagements about CVRAN, and writing brochures and the history of CVRAN. Not one to rest on her laurels, in the last several months, Pam has once again taken on the role of team leader for a newcomer.

Pam believes strongly in advocacy, having been involved in Migrant Justice trainings, campaigns and demonstrations, and showing up at the legislature to support bills. She conceived of the idea of having an educational event to involve policy makers and stakeholders in a discussion on immigration which came to fruition. This summer she was honored as the originator of the idea for a very successful Symposium for New Americans, held at the Vermont Law School, which drew in hundreds of participants.

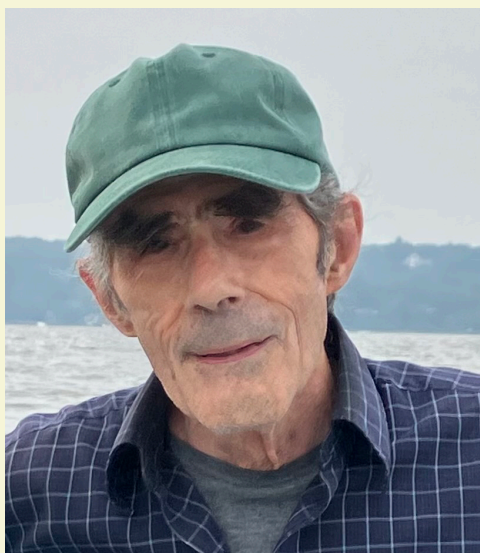
## Peter Thoms, Ten Years of Involvement... and Counting

Peter Thoms was one of those setting the scene in the early days of 2015 before we dreamed CVRAN would become a key Vermont organization. The first circle of people interested in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to Vermont gathered in April in the Unitarian Church of Montpelier, where he was an active member. As the group grew and chose a name, Lou Cherry and he registered the nascent organization as a Vermont non-profit, and then as a 501 3(c) group, the Central Vermont Refugee Action Network. When the first treasurer retired, Peter took a turn at that role for a couple of years.

A significant aspect of Peter's contributions to CVRAN is that it has spanned the first decade of our history. In the early days, when CVRAN was unable to welcome its own refugees because of the Muslim ban, Peter joined with others in welcoming refugees from Chittenden County to the Vermont seat of government.

Peter stepped up in a major way when there was a request for CVRAN to take over hosting the annual visit of the Mexican Mobile Consulate from Boston. Dedicated people were needed to help organize the venue where migrant farmworkers from Mexico, often with their families, could receive needed documents.

Peter—coordinating with Jessica Hurd Noyes, Katie Kramer, and Edisa Muller—took on the responsibility of finding a venue and then being a liaison with two churches (first Bethany and later Christ Church), working through the physical and institutional arrangements for that event. Peter is not one to showboat; he prefers complimenting, complementing, and en-



couraging others. When asked to pose for a photo at the end of a long day, he invited the whole consular staff into the photo, and then put himself into the back of the group!

Peter always notes how the structure of the organization works. He reads minutes, letters, and timelines, and remembers them. One of his favorite moments was an annual meeting, a giant circle of chairs on Wendy and Steve Dale's lawn, just as CVRAN was considering how to reorganize. "The creative energy," he said, "was palpable." Another treasured moment was when Ghazi celebrated receiving asylum with a party of 75-80 people at the Old Labor Hall in Barre.

In the last two years, Peter has appreciated connecting with a nine-year-old boy from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Brazil through CVRAN's Summer Reading Program. Picture the two of them riding their bikes on an excursion to some local spot like the Farmer's Market, the Statehouse, or the History Museum. Then see them getting a slice of pizza at Positive Pie, eating on the City Hall steps, talking to passersby, and Peter introducing his young friend to many of them.

Peter is still thinking of the big picture. "What faces CVRAN in the future?" he wonders. "Will political pressures curtail people and activities? Will getting asylum be harder?" As he speaks, he is relinquishing some commitments. Perhaps he will model for all of us not only how to work hard, but also how to pull back when need be. We thank you, Peter, for your many contributions!!

## Appreciating Walter and Lois Liggett

Walter and Lois Liggett were among the founding members of CVRAN. Lois remembers Peter Thoms saying, "I'm thinking of starting a group." For a long time, earlier CVRAN meetings were in the basement room of their Methodist Church, folding chairs gathered in a circle of 15 or so people in the big room, or later on the comfy chairs and couches of the library, and they were the connectors to the rest of the church. For many years, Walter was the CVRAN treasurer, a job to which he was well suited having been a professional statistician for the National Bureau of Standards. Lois portrayed her role as "listener" and one really must add the word "advocate" with her sharp grasp of the details and her clear perspective on what might be done. They were a part of the founding steps of CVRAN: incorporation as a 501(c)(3), complete with a mission statement and bylaws, and an exploration of how to reach out to whatever international groups possible. The two were faithful attenders at almost every CVRAN meeting, even when the pandemic forced us to Zoom meetings during COVID. Later when failing health made any activity difficult, Lois and Walter still prioritized coming to our monthly public meetings. At summer CVRAN picnics, these excellent gardeners might come with bags of basil and other vegetables to share among those attending. When someone had a pressing need for financial help, there might be quiet murmurs and a generous gift.

One of Lois's fondest memories is of the days before CVRAN was able to welcome immigrants to our own area, when we played the role of inviting Chittenden County refugees for an official welcome to the capitol of our state, complete with a tour of the statehouse while a session was in progress, and a chance to meet the governor (as well as good food and a tour of the history museum). Lois says, "It



was amazing to watch the Nepalis interacting with the governor, so thrilling to see the looks on their faces that said, "I can't believe this is happening to me!"

A personally life-changing event for Walter and Lois and also for many in our organization began with what looked like a simple request. On World Refugee Day, 2017, as Walter remembers it, then CVRAN president Diane Fitch repeatedly announced a USCRI request, "there's a guy coming to Norwich who needs a mentor" and Lois and Walter responded to the need of this Sudanese refugee who had a scholarship to attend Norwich for one semester. Walter tutored Eltayeb on his English essays that had sometimes harrowing themes such as "How to Drive Across the (Libyan) Desert."

Although Eltayeb never became the electrical engineer he imagined, he did become an American citizen, in a ceremony attended by many from CVRAN, and then went on to found MobiTech, the very successful phone and electronic store on Main Street in Montpelier. "He can do anything with electricity," says Lois. In a sense, Eltayeb was the first of the many people sponsored by CVRAN before we knew what to call it. Lois remembers that Eltayeb "put us in touch with the war in Sudan, showing us pictures and videos so we could relate as if we were there, and we understood." Eltayeb went on to put many others of the Montpelier community in more direct connection with the realities in Sudan, organizing a large event to raise money for the first elementary school ever in his home community. Eltayeb has also shown us all the magnificent generosity and sense of responsibility taken on by the first immigrant in a family to come here, and the great difficulties of navigating our immigration system for even his wife and parents. Walter and Lois see Eltayeb as a part of their multi-cultural family.

## Wendy and Steve, An Amazing Duo

Wendy and Steve Dale have been pillars of CVRAN. How did they get involved? As Steve explained, "At one time, many Americans did not see a refugee crisis or worry about people from other countries in our midst. They didn't worry that our immigration system was broken. That changed radically after 9/11. Muslims became targeted. In New Jersey, Indonesians who had lived and worked for two decades in the U.S. were suddenly rounded up. Through our son, Seth, a frontline advocate for the Indonesians, we became acutely aware of this humanitarian crisis, one affecting families so deeply." Wendy started thinking about what could be done here in Vermont. Just as she was wondering, she heard of a Social Justice Committee on immigration being formed at the Unitarian Church, and the community was invited. Wendy joined this group at its first meetings, and now ten years later is still one of CVRAN's most deeply involved volunteers. Her husband, Steve, has become equally immersed.

### Wendy

Wendy has had many roles in these first ten years of CVRAN. Organized and energetic, she carries off complicated tasks. In the days of bringing Chittenden County refugees to Montpelier, she hosted tours of the Vermont State History Museum and organized potluck lunches for them at different churches. She inspired different denominations to help fund welcome gifts of knives and breadboards for those recently arrived. Wendy laughs, "I gave Capitol Kitchen a lot of business in those days, and they gave us a good rate." As CVRAN secretary, she took minutes for the CVRAN meetings and kept them tidily in a three-ring binder. Just ask Wendy when some motion passed, and she could find it in the books. Wendy made sure we were not only organized, but also warm and welcoming. It was she who organized a welcome reception at the Methodist Church for our first Montpelier family and helped introduce them to the area. Wendy organized the first CVRAN picnic up at Hubbard Park complete with a hand-lettered welcome with every new Vermonter's name on it, the popular game cornhole, and huge piles of vegetables being given

away by Walter and Lois Liggett. The second CVRAN picnic was organized by Wendy at the North Branch Nature Center, including a nature walk and a potluck of international food. Most important of all Wendy seems to know everyone in Montpelier and is able to tell stories about New Vermonters that engage us all, and soon we have become CVRAN volunteers.

### Steve

What about Steve? His idea was to stay in the background, but that didn't last long. At first he taught several people how to drive and helped them get their licenses, a big step for each of these new folk. Then he took on helping new Vermonter Ghazi organize a dinner to benefit CVRAN. Ghazi wanted to "give back" to CVRAN, and he was an excellent chef, but what about all the organizing details? After countless meetings and tastings to work the details out, the dinner was a rousing success (despite being held during the pandemic) with a hundred dinners distributed drive-by style around the Senior Center.

### The Arrival of the Afghans

In 2021, however, both the Dales lives were about to change. When CVRAN responded favorably to an inquiry from USCRI about settling Afghan families in Montpelier, the board learned there was a family from USCRI moving into a house on Pinewood Drive, right behind the Dales house. Would the Dales be interested in being the official host family CVRAN promised, or in USCRI terms "the family friends"?

Wendy resigned from being secretary of the board, and the Dales together took on this family who spoke no English and had six children. Within a week, the Dales found a team to work with them: Hope Crifo, Sara Lisnianski, Rachael Grossman, AnnaRose Jenisch, Kathie O'Connor and Lennette Boner. Imagine the first week or so after the family's arrival. Wendy got out the masking tape and wrote each each child's down to post on their shirts. She organized a play group in their basement. The Montpelier Schools couldn't take in the



children yet, because of COVID protocols, but ESL instructor Sylvia Fagin gave the children tours and took them to the playground where they could take turns announcing their own names into a microphone. Steve and the boys of the family built a bridge over the brook between their two houses. The Dales are full of stories that show exploration of this new world: one of the boys proudly capturing a skunk or at another time a snapping turtle, various family members arriving at their doorsteps unannounced, one of the family sons throwing the opening pitch for the semi-pro Lake Monsters in Burlington. The children now have become fluent in English and are doing well in school and have many friends in the community. They are in and out of what they see as their "grandparents" house, and the Dales consider all of them extended family. The surrounding neighborhood has extended an amazing welcome to the family with birthday party invitations, rides to team practices for many sports, company at summer camps, later contributing in a major way to

fundraising to purchase the house where this first family now lives.

For the adults, moving to the US has been more complex, Steve says. All of the men in the Afghan families are employed and have their driver's licenses. They love the fact that their children are getting a great education and greatly enjoy living in a safe and supportive community. However, they miss their families back home and feel compelled to provide financial support. They all continue to work at sorting out the challenges of living in a very different culture.

### Affordable Housing

What could make the move to Montpelier most successful over the long-term? Steve and Wendy and the other USCRI family friends wanted to make the housing situation secure. Steve became a founding member of the CVRAN Affordable Housing Committee and did yeoman work on raising funds and networking with agencies and landlords in order to assist all 5 of the original Afghan families to find housing. Subsequently "the Steves" (Steve Dale and Steve Klein) worked to find even more housing for new incoming Afghan families. Then these amazing fundraisers added a new project to address the needs of the asylum seekers. (See the Affordable Housing Committee.)

### Gratitude

For the Dales, this whole experience with their special family and the larger Afghan community has been transformative. They appreciate the fact that Montpelier has been welcoming and generous toward these newcomers. They love the fact that their community is becoming more multicultural. They have a new extended family living next door with whom they interact every day. And in addition, through the seven children, they have come to know many wonderful families in the neighborhood.

As for CVRAN, we can literally say, "We couldn't have done this work without you!" As Hope Crifo writes, "Some of the many roles filled by Wendy and Steve Dale: friend, teacher, baker, advocate, advisor, bridge builder, seamstress, costume designer, fundraiser, property manager, driver, neighbor and, above all, grandparents extraordinaire.

## The Omnipresent Hope Crifo

Hope Crifo has been one of the backbones of CVRAN. She must have filled almost every role in the organization, with energy and vision: from president to school transportation; driving instructor to grants manager; liaison for Afghan interests to direct service coordinator; and the list could continue!

At a meeting, Hope will sit quietly in the background, listening, and then come out with an insightful question or an offer to deal with a much needed task, perhaps a task no one else can do. She is good at getting things done! No wonder she ended up being a co-president of CVRAN along with Lucy Wollaeger and Priscilla Fox during a major transition. In 2021-2022, this trio helped reorganize CVRAN into a new format, one with a strong board, in response to CVRAN's rapid growth. Having served on multiple boards outside CVRAN, Hope had ideas about how our structure should work. She has also been a key instigator of programs: further connection with Afghan families, the car fund, the camp fund, and the summer reading program.

Hope also has always been a go-to person for CVRAN finances with her strong background in banking. She has worked with each treasurer, served on the finance committee, and helped build team budgets. When CVRAN received a portion of a state grant it was Hope who told us what expenditures might qualify for reimbursement, it was Hope who did the accounting, and now Hope who is also a manager for grants to the statewide consortium. When CVRAN was purchasing its first house along with an angel investor, it was Hope who volunteered to be the liaison with the lawyer and the bank. When there was a need for housing for large Afghan fam-



ilies and later for asylum seeking families, and the Affordable Housing Committee was formed, Hope became a key member in finding funding, and organizing housing opportunities, including working toward the co-acquisition of houses.

From 2022-2024, Hope served as the CVRAN direct service coordinator, another position in which her practicality and generosity shone, as she worked on everything from finding rentals in a tight housing market, entry level jobs for workers new to the American job market, phone plans and driver's licenses for adults, summer camps

for children, insurance and tax advice, all the way to shoveling snow on someone's walk. Even now when Hope is no longer formally the direct service coordinator, she continues to be indispensable on multiple family teams. Promises to children come first in her book, and in cases when several families have been desperate for temporary housing, she will offer to give over her home to a family for weeks. She is welcomed and hugged by many, even in cases when she has to point and gesture with the translation app in hand, a broad smile on her face. Her warmth and help translate beyond language.

Hope is known not only within CVRAN, but among our many connecting organizations. For a person who doesn't enjoy meetings, she has been to a lot of them as an advocate and liaison for refugees and asylum seekers with organizations such as RISP Net, the Afghan Alliance, USCRI, and the Vermont-New Hampshire Asylum Seeker Network. She is everywhere. Thank you, Hope!

## Rachel Walker Cogbill, Pivotal Leader

Rachel Walker Cogbill became involved in CVRAN in 2016, beginning with baking cookies for a welcome event for refugees from the Burlington area. Over the last nine years, she has been involved in many aspects of the organization. Her relative proficiency in Spanish has proven helpful in assisting migrant workers and asylum seekers. She has provided short-term emergency housing and readily responded to emergency middle-of-the-night drives and crises. Rachel represented CVRAN, along with Hope Crifo and Pam Walker, on the Vermont-New Hampshire Asylum Seekers Network, our two-state consortium of like organizations, and had a key role with them in supporting bills in the legislature, helping create a website for assisting asylum seekers in the region, and planning an impactful community event to assess the needs of asylum seekers and how to meet them.

As first Outreach Coordinator, then Board Member, and then President, Rachel strove to uphold the work of many people in the CVRAN community: the board, staff, volunteers, and new neighbors. Rachel helped transform the website, spearheaded a CVRAN history, set up standards for annual reporting, organized and facilitated meetings at all levels, coor-



dinated the strategic planning process, and wrote and spoke often in public. She was a team leader for asylum seekers, including a Tunisian man, three Spanish-speaking families from Ecuador and Venezuela, and a young Colombian and a Tunisian family. She also served on other teams, finding joy and solving challenges along with the new neighbors. She quickly develops lasting connections and has been a rock to so many to whom she offers help and friendship.

During Rachel's nine years at CVRAN, she watched as the two separate branches of CVRAN were merged, Zoom replaced most in-person meetings, wrap-around support was developed, new committees were created, the number of families served mushroomed, and the volunteer base more than doubled. Rachel oversaw the hiring of our first-ever staff, at first two part-timers, and now a new executive director. Under her wise and visionary leadership over the last three years as President, CVRAN has continued to grow into an effective, respected, and well-known community organization that ably serves our local refugees and asylum seekers. We salute you, Rachel. You have been a pivotal leader in CVRAN's success and evolution.

## Kathie O'Connor, Visionary Organizer

Kathie O'Connor will be missed as a CVRAN board member and vice president. She has contributed so much to CVRAN since entering her first meeting in the Trinity Church basement, and walking out with the role of volunteer coordinator. She likes to organize and get things done. Starting with both organizational skills and a personal touch, she revamped and formalized volunteer engagement with an accessible database, streamlining background checks, and posting a volunteer handbook on the website, which she wrote with others. She championed a fresher website, pulling in some younger people with strong technological skills, syncing the website sign-up forms with the volunteer data tables, and making sure financial donations fed automatically into the treasurer's database.

Once something was up and running, Kathie moved on to new projects, playing an incredible role in the Affordable Housing Committee as chair, fundraiser, donor tracker, and contract



manager for two houses. During her time with this committee, three dwelling agreements were negotiated with combinations of an angel investor, the local housing agency Downstreet, and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (the statewide administrator of federal housing funds). These three dwellings are a huge legacy now and for the future. As of June 1st, they will provide homes for a total of six families or 30 people.

In the last two years, Kathie has also taken on the role of vice president, and has been team leader for two separate individuals. She has been instrumental in helping develop a strong incoming board with her role on the nominating committee and then helping envision the future of the organization on the strategic planning committee. While she is now stepping down from the board, we happily expect to see her often in our future CVRAN work and will be glad to again hear her describe how CVRAN work is so rewarding. One of her phrases, said with a big smile, is "And everyone loves the children."



## Seth Lipschutz, Tireless Commitment

How could an organization dealing with immigration get along without a lawyer? Who can decide how valid a potential client's asylum case might be? Who can do "credible fear" interviews and document stories of trauma and escape? Who can follow the new neighbor's case step-by-step through the maze of applications, federal databases, and legalese to the finish? CVRAN is incredibly lucky to have had a pro bono lawyer step up for these myriad tasks, building a culture of trust, saving tens of thousands of dollars that many other organizations have to shell out, and allowing us to grow and take on more new people.

As a young man, Seth Lipschutz began his career as an activist and labor organizer. Thanks to an inspired Vermont law, he was able to apprentice to become a lawyer, training on the job with Vermont Legal Aid in Burlington. Working as a public defender out of the Defender General's Office in Montpelier, he became the first in the state to specialize in "crimmigration," defending immigrants with criminal charges about to be deported. These green card holders from places such as Bosnia, Iraq, Somalia, and the DRC were incredibly grateful to him for preventing them from being sent back to countries they sometimes didn't even know. One man literally kissed his feet.

When Seth retired in 2019, what was more natural than to step further into the immigration world, working with CVRAN and NEKASAN to support the asylum-seeking process? Seth says he is not a creative person; he does not write, draw, or make music. His art is his analytical mind, and he puts it to use. Much of his expertise has been self-taught, although there have been mentors along the way, such as Erin Jacobsen of the Vermont Legal Clinic or, later, Jill Martin Diaz of VAAP, an organization designed to support pro bono legal work. Being fluent in French also helped; his name circulated,



and work poured in. Occasionally, he has been able to welcome other interested lawyers or even high school students to join him, but Seth's work is largely independent. His philosophy? Help immigrants achieve their goals. "Sometimes," he says, "I can make a difference."

A modest man, Seth has not kept track of the number of people whom he has helped. Now he guesses perhaps 100 individuals, varying from two-hour consults to those whom he has assisted over the years, along with their families. The number 100 may be an understatement, as he hardly ever denies requests for help. CVRAN can only work with a limited number of families, but even those it must turn away have often gotten help from Seth. He has

worked on pursuing divorce papers from Venezuela when other lawyers declared it impossible to get paperwork from a country blocked by US sanctions. He has corresponded to obtain "country condition" papers that establish the context for someone's asylum. He has traveled to New York City to counsel someone through his hearing before the immigration judge, and celebrated the asylum that came through months later. He has tried so hard to get a legal U.S. citizen's wife accepted into this country and helped out multiple cousins along the way. He has accompanied people to their ICE check-ins and worked hard to get people out of detention on bond... a few samples of what he does beyond the routine paperwork. CVRAN's Hope Crifo says, "Seth Lipschutz should teach the world how to listen! His patience, respect, and compassion are in evidence in each client interaction, no matter how difficult." In 2024, Seth was awarded the Vermont Bar Pro Bono Attorney of the Year award. CVRAN is proud and grateful to have had Seth Lipschutz working with us. One of the people he helped, Ghazi Jendoubi, says of Seth, "If I had to describe Seth, I would say he is my hero."

# It Takes a Village 2010-2025

So many of you have added your pieces large and small to the work of CVRAN. Each and every one of your contributions is woven into the fabric of this work. It clearly has made a difference for the New Vermonters we assist. It brings us that much closer to our vision of building a vibrant, inclusive global community right here in Central Vermont. We cannot name all of you, but here are some of the key roles that were filled by various volunteers and a few paid staff over the first 10 years. We currently number more than 260 registered volunteers and a village full of others who have helped in so many different ways. Whether or not your name is on one of these lists, we thank you.

## FOUNDING MEMBERS

Margaret Blanchard  
Mary Alice Bisbee  
Lou Cherry  
Wendy Dale  
Diane Fitch  
Jean Jersey  
Fran Krushenick  
Lois Liggett  
Walter Liggett  
Joan Murray  
Barbara Ploof  
Peter Thoms  
Pam Walker

## OFFICERS *Presidents & Vice-Presidents*

*2015-2020*  
Diane Fitch &  
Pam Walker  
*2021*  
Hope Crifo, Priscilla  
Fox, Lucy Wollaeger  
*2022*  
Rachel Cogbill  
*2023-2025*  
Rachel Cogbill &  
Kathie O'Connor  
*2025-.....*  
Kelly McCracken &  
Juan Vistro

## SPECIALIZED ROLES

*Pro Bono Attorney*  
Seth Lipshutz  
*Direct Service  
Coordinators*  
Hope Crifo  
Liza Earle-Centers  
AnnaRose Jenisch  
Yolanda Bansah  
Isabelle Tibi  
*Email List  
Coordinators*  
Diane Fitch  
Alex Sigrist

## TEAM LEADERS

Lennette Boner  
Rachel Cogbill  
Hope Crifo  
Wendy Dale  
Steve Dale  
Caitlin Dreschler  
Justin Dreschler  
Liza Earle-Centers  
Amy Ehrlich  
Diane Fitch  
Sarah Hofmann  
Jeanne Keren  
Kenrick Kite  
Susan Koch  
Sarah Lisniansky  
Joyce Manchester

## HOSTS

Reed Cherington  
Hope Crifo  
Amy Ehrlich  
Hankins Family  
Lynn Gedanken  
Linda Gray  
Miriam Hansen  
Joan Kahn &  
Shaun Stephens  
Brigitte Savard &  
Timo Bradley  
Barbara &  
Sara Scotch  
Carla Siegle  
David Stapleton &  
Joyce Manchester

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Margaret Blanchard  
David Book  
Lou Cherry  
Rachel Cogbill  
Hope Crifo  
Emma Ottolenghi  
Wendy Dale  
Diane Fitch  
Priscilla Fox  
Edwin Godfrey  
Sarah Hofmann  
Ghazi Jendoubi  
Jean Jersey  
Pelin Kohn  
Lois Liggett  
Walter Liggett  
Joyce Manchester  
Kelly McCracken  
Joan Murray  
Jen Myers  
Kathie O'Connor  
Eilis O'Herlihy  
Rebecca Plummer  
David Stapleton  
Eli Toohey  
Juan Vistro  
Pam Walker  
Don Welch  
Lucy Wollaeger  
Dinah Yessne

**OFFICERS, CONTD.**

*Executive Director*  
Alison Zenie  
  
*Secretaries*  
Wendy Bolles  
Wendy Dale  
Diane Fitch  
Jean Jersey  
Barbara Ploof  
Angela Shambaugh  
  
*Treasurers & Assistant Treasurers*  
Renee Ancel  
Walter Liggett  
Joyce Manchester & Edwin Godfrey  
Jen Myers  
Peter Thoms  
Don Welch & Edwin Godfrey

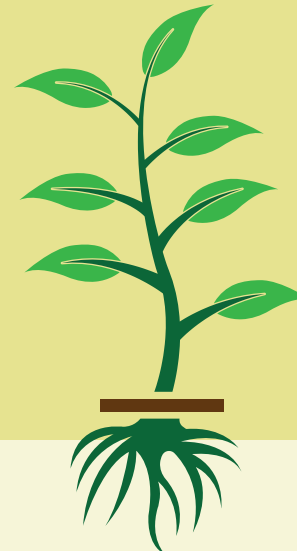


**SPECIALIZED ROLES**

*Facebook Coordinator*  
Jessica Noyes  
  
*March Arts Marathon Coordinators*  
Nicola Morris  
Adam Evans  
Jenn Anthony  
  
*Mexican Consulate*  
Peter Thoms  
Jessica Noyes  
Katie Kramer  
Edisa Muller  
  
*Summer Reading Program*  
Amy Ehrlich  
Sylvia Fagin  
Paige Gebhardt  
  
*Volunteer Coordinators*  
Hope Crifo  
Liza Earle-Centers  
AnnaRose Jenisch  
Isabelle Tibi  
  
*Website Editor*  
Angela Shambaugh

**TEAM LEADER, CONTD.**

Deb Markowitz  
Paul Markowitz  
Kathie O'Connor  
Monique Signorat  
Jamie Spector  
David Stapleton  
Judy Walke  
Pam Walker  
Dinah Yessne  
Emily Sloane  
  
*Farmworker Friends*  
Rachel Cogbill  
Abby Colihan  
Sara Lisniansky  
Pam Walker



**COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Kathie O'Connor, *Affordable Housing*  
Diane Fitch, *Committee to Consider New Arrivals*  
Diane Fitch, *Interim Housing*  
Don Welch, *Finance*  
Edwin Godfrey, *Finance*  
Joyce Manchester, *Finance*  
Kelly McCracken, *Fundraising*  
David Stapleton, *Jobs & Education*  
Nicky Morris, *March Arts Marathon*  
Rachel Cogbill, *Media*  
Angela Shambaugh, *Media*  
Peter Thoms, *Mexican Consulate*  
Rachel Cogbill, *Outreach*  
Dinah Yessne, *Outreach*  
Rachel Cogbill, *Website*

**CVRAN Leadership  
Structure 2025**

*Executive Director*

*Officers*

President  
Vice-President  
Secretary  
Treasurer  
Assistant Treasurer

*Board of Directors*

*Direct Services &  
Volunteer Coordinator*

*Committees*

Affordable Housing Committee  
Committee to Recommend  
New Arrivals  
Executive Committee  
Finance Committee  
Fundraising Committee  
Workforce Development  
Committee  
Legal Assistance  
Media & Website Committees  
Mexican Consulate  
Planning Committee  
Nominating Committee  
(ad hoc)

## Working Together With CVRAN

### Networks

Vermont-New Hampshire  
Asylum Support Network  
Migrant Justice  
US Committee for Refugees &  
Immigrants (USCRI)  
Association of Africans  
Living in VT (AALV)  
Vermont Afghan Alliance (VAA)  
No One Left Behind (NOLB)  
Refugee & Immigrant Service  
Providers Network (RISPNet)  
Vermont State Refugee Office

### Legal Services

American Civil Liberties Union  
(ACLU) VT  
VT Law School and the  
Center for Justice Reform  
Vermont Asylum Assistance  
Project (VAAP)  
The Mexican Consulate of Boston

### Education & Training

Montpelier-Roxbury Public Schools  
and other local schools  
Central Vermont Adult Education  
(CVAE)  
Community Colleges of Vermont  
(CCV)  
Champlain Valley Office of  
Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)  
Capstone Community Action  
Vermont Language Justice Project  
Vermont Student  
Assistance Corporation  
Turtle Island  
Youth First Mentoring  
North Branch Nature Center (NBNC)  
The Family Center of  
Washington County  
T.W. Wood Art Gallery

### Medical Services

Central Vermont Medical Center  
UVM Health Network Clinics  
Bridges to Health  
Peoples Health & Wellness  
Connecting Cultures

### Food Support

VT Food Bank  
Local Food Shelves  
Hunger Free VT  
Just Basics, Inc  
CSA shares from local farms

### Housing

Downstreet Housing &  
Community Development  
Vermont Housing &  
Conservation Board  
City of Montpelier

### General

Local Libraries, Food Co-ops,  
Restaurants, Montpelier Senior  
Center, Local Employers  
Many, many funders  
public and private

**Together, we provide housing, legal services, social services, education,  
job training, advocacy and so much more for the people we support.**