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NASHVILLE INTERNATIONAL
CENTER FOR EMPOWERMENT
ANNUAL REPORT



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Due to the lack of in person engagements leading to fewer opportunities for photographs, we chose to illustrate this year's annual report with imagery from previous years.





Within each one of us, is the future we envision while we weather the storm.”



In the early days of the emergent virus, staff and I gathered around our conference room to discuss CDC containment guidelines with the intent of keeping staff and clients safe while we continued to offer services. Last year’s challenges, successes, and our sudden pivot to work from home demanded a different type of urgency and resilience from NICE. As I look back, our thinking was dictated by an unexpected threat which demanded careful thinking, planning, and strategic goal setting without forgetting our community at large. In addition, widespread social unrest and inequality in our country brought us all together in search of a way to move forward, while maintaining awareness of a multiplicity of factors at the root of this issue.

In the face of COVID-19, NICE staff demonstrated an admirable capacity to adapt as we all gauged the evolving spread of the virus. I commend them for their perseverance. The first lesson we learned was that there was no perfect formula to deal with the situation. Conversely, an innovative approach was needed allowing for immediacy to continue serving our New American clients. Forced to rethink the way we offer services provided both an opportunity to innovate existing services and a sense of loss. Our organization’s ethos has been to walk the refugee journey through developing strong relationships. We asked ourselves: How can we achieve the same impact in lieu of in person services? Placing greater emphasis on collaboration helped restore those relationships severed by social distancing. In this context, the conditions allowed the social sector in Nashville to accelerate service delivery through joint funding opportunities, coordination, and humility. Institutions stayed strong by working together.

Months later, Nashvillians have continued to pledge support for the most vulnerable among us. The pandemic has revealed deep vulnerabilities, but it is also fair to note that our capacity to adapt and learn from each other has been unparalleled in recent years. **Our community is grateful for all our volunteers, partners, and funders who came together intentionally in this epochal battle against a raging pandemic.** In return, NICE is here for each and every one of you as a resource for your communities—we will continue to sustain a deeper commitment to equity, collaboration, as we rethink the way we operate. Within each one of us, is the future we envision while we weather the storm.

With gratitude,

Dr. Gatluak Thach
President/CEO

Celebrating 15 years

of NICE

As 2020 marked the 15th anniversary of NICE's founding, we are reflecting on the ways in which our organization has developed throughout the years and the employees that made this growth possible. A primary example of an impactful employee is **Aisha White, NICE's Immigration Services Manager**. Unable to legally work in The United States because her green card application was still pending at the time, Aisha joined NICE as a volunteer in June of 2009 after seeing an article in a local magazine requesting childcare workers. "I called and Gat answered the phone," Aisha writes of NICE's founder, Dr. Gatluak Ter Thach. "He and Sonrisa Trippe were the only 2 employees at that time. He told me his incredible story about his life and the Sudanese Center and I knew I had to get involved." At the time, NICE was known as the Sudanese Community and Women's Services Center, a name that accurately reflected the organization's services.

Aisha continues, "I told him I would come in to do childcare so I got in my car and drove there. He was so surprised because he didn't expect me to come the same day. I did childcare that first day for Sonrisa's son, Emmett." This was the beginning of Aisha's 15 year career at NICE, during which time she has served as a childcare volunteer, ESL teacher and financial coordinator. Aisha currently manages NICE's Immigration Department. When asked what motivates her to continue working for NICE, Aisha said, "I absolutely love my job at NICE. I get to help clients navigate the complex U.S. immigration system and become permanent residents and ultimately U.S. citizens. It is the most rewarding job."

Celebrating 15 Years of NICE

Similar to Aisha, NICE's **Refugee Self-Sufficiency Caseworker Bhuwan Nepal** joined NICE as a volunteer in 2012, where he worked as a Nepali translator for six months. Eventually, he was hired as a caseworker within the same department. Having come to the United States as a refugee himself two years prior, the work being done by NICE was particularly close to Bhuwan's heart. Initially resettled in New Jersey, Bhuwan recalls not being able to speak English very well at the time, consequently struggling to make the living transition. After beginning to attend church services in New Jersey, Bhuwan began to make American friends, allowing him to slowly develop his English and communication skills. Bhuwan reflects, "During my time in New Jersey, I would see a lot of refugees and immigrants like me struggling to understand the new environment because of the language barrier. Because of this, **I decided to work with a refugee agency where I could serve the people like me and assist them so they wouldn't need to experience the same difficulties that I faced in the beginning of my resettlement.**"

When considering the ways in which NICE has transformed throughout his time with the organization, Bhuwan notes the physical growth and expansion of the team. "Back in 2012, we only had 2-3 departments that were providing services to refugees and immigrants. As of now, we have more than 8 programs which constantly support the immigrants community. Our organization has grown in such a way that we have become the center for the community support system." Bhuwan goes on to state NICE's promotion of organizational diversity as a major change as well, with the team now being composed of individuals from an array of backgrounds. He believes that this change "is becoming a major bridge for supporting the communities of different backgrounds."

“**He told me his incredible story about his life and the Sudanese Center and I knew I had to get involved.**”

NICE's **Director of Self-Sufficiency & Employee Services Idah Boyer** also joined NICE as a volunteer back in 2009. Born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya, Idah was looking to give back in a way that made a difference in people's lives. She was soon hired as a full-time staff member. When asked about the biggest change she has seen during her time with NICE, Idah remarks on the transformation she has seen in the lives of NICE's clients, "I have been lucky to walk alongside quite a few of them and to observe the drive and resilience they bring along with them. Despite having experienced so much trauma, it has changed us as an organization because **it solidifies that belief that anything is possible if one is given a chance or an opportunity to better their lives.**" As such, this is the very thing that motivates Idah to continue working with NICE. "I am motivated by the clients we serve and I have learned many lessons both personally and professionally just by them being a part of what I do."

It is because of our incredibly dedicated employees, volunteers, and community members such as Aisha, Bhuwan, and Idah that Nashville International Center for Empowerment has been able to grow and thrive over the past fifteen years. We feel blessed to have such a diverse group of individuals make up our organization, enabling us to serve our diverse refugee and immigrant communities here in Nashville. **With their help, we will continue to ensure refugees and immigrants achieve their full potential now and for generations to come.**

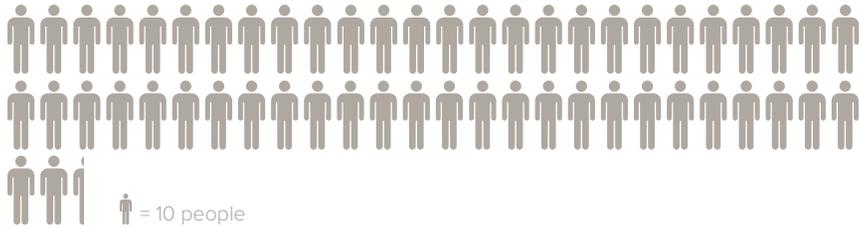
By the Numbers

1,527

Total served through NICE programs in 2020

542

Served in Adult Education



Number of Adult Education classes offered

44 English 6 Pre-HiSET 2 Citizenship Preparation 237 Pre and post tests given

57

Served in Youth Education



111

Employment

141

households served for COVID-19 Relief



139

Served in the Health Program

TOR-ICM	23
Elders	4
PC-ICM	37
Flu Shot Event	75

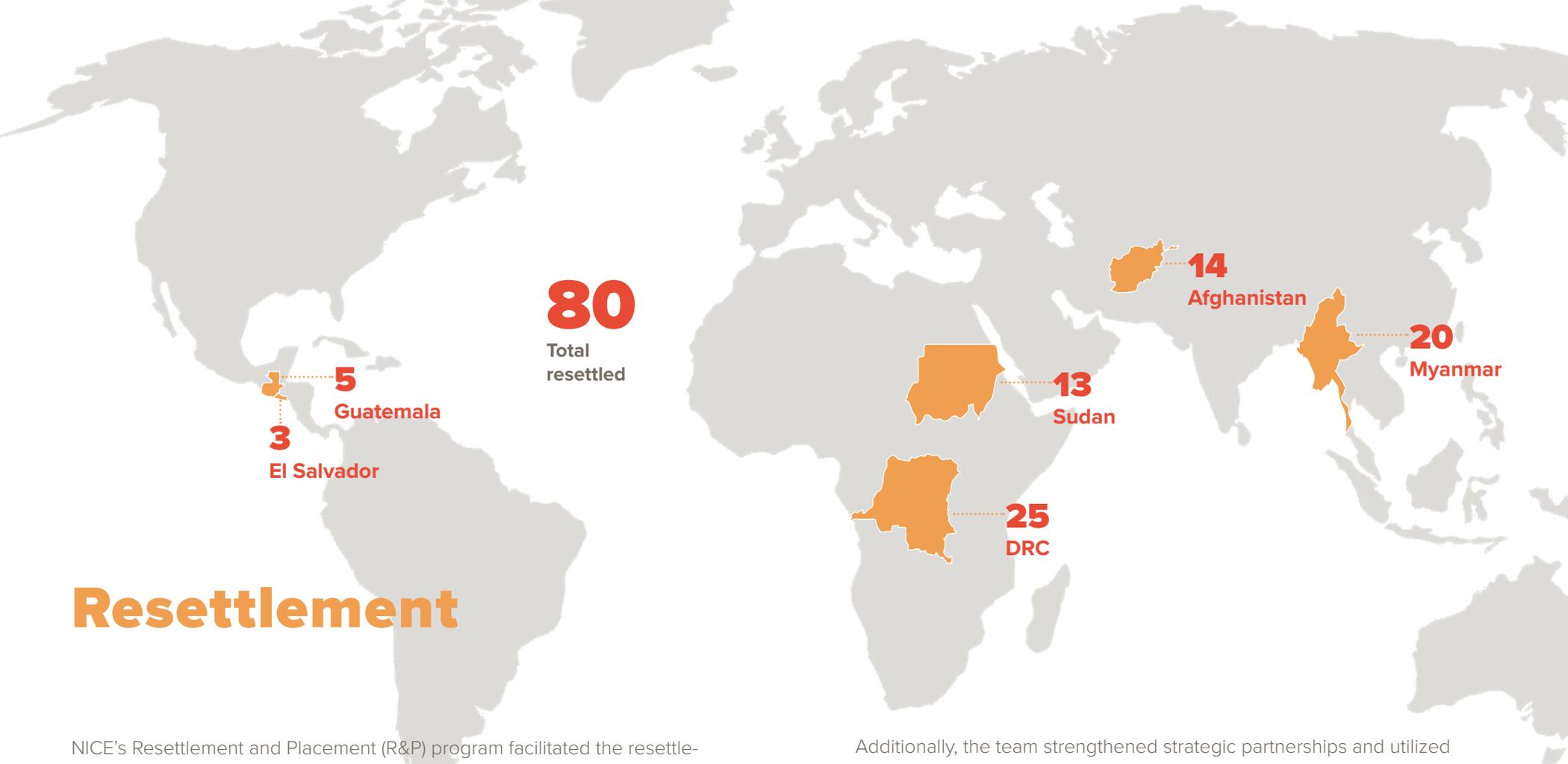
457

Clients served in the Immigration Program

524

Applications





Resettlement

NICE’s Resettlement and Placement (R&P) program facilitated the resettlement of 80 refugees from 6 different countries this year. Members of the R&P team offered assistance with housing, medical appointments, school registration, client transportation, and temporary financial subsidies. Due to increased cuts to the federal refugee resettlement program and the COVID-19 pandemic slowing the refugee resettlement process worldwide, NICE received a low volume of refugee arrivals in 2020.

Despite this, **our team stayed incredibly busy supporting the refugee community through this difficult year.** Resettlement and Placement caseworkers assumed further responsibilities assisting with community members’ rental/utility needs, providing personal protective equipment, and preparing newly arrived refugee children for virtual schooling.

Additionally, the team strengthened strategic partnerships and utilized community resources to tackle pandemic-related challenges. By working closely with the local Social Security Office, **caseworkers were able to eliminate delays that were preventing new refugees from receiving their social security cards**, a necessary document for employment in the U.S. Caseworkers reached out to multi-lingual members of our staff and community regularly due to a higher number of texts and phone calls with new refugees needing translation assistance.

Jules, a refugee from Rwanda, was resettled by NICE in 2020. He recounts his resettlement process with NICE as “really good” despite the pandemic. Jules says “NICE was great at following up day to day and they gave me everything I need.”

Health

It is vital that refugees receive adequate healthcare in order to achieve their full potential. While the pandemic prevented the execution of several community events, **our Health team was still able to serve 139 clients and administer 75 influenza vaccinations.** Our Intensive Case Management (ICM) program offered culturally and linguistically competent services that provided clients with case management, access to medical/mental assistance services, social adjustments, COVID-19 testing, knowledge of the U.S. healthcare system, and health screening and referrals. Our clients include people who are elderly, people with disabilities, survivors of violence and torture, and those experiencing psychological issues stemming from living through war and conflict. Due to the pandemic, our case managers continued their efforts through both virtual and socially distanced appointments. **Our Health team also supported mental health referrals and provided clients with financial assistance and services including referrals for English as A Second Language classes and job placement.**

Employment

NICE's Employment Program focuses on removing barriers to employment for its refugee clients by building relationships with local employers who can offer job opportunities that will lead to self-sufficiency.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, companies have experienced downsizing and even closures for a multitude of reasons, including the high risk of the virus spreading among workers in industrial warehouse environments. When new refugees arrive in the United States, they are required to reach self-sufficiency within 90 days, which usually necessitates securing gainful employment. New refugees often work in jobs that have been qualified as high-risk during the COVID-19 era. **In 2020, the NICE Employment team places 111 clients in segments including meat packing, hospitals and shipping/warehousing.**

Due to the high-risk nature of these industries, **NICE implemented a COVID-19 safety protocol for employees and clients,** utilizing recommendations from the Tennessee Office for Refugees and the Centers for Disease Control. This included providing Employment clients with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and training regarding COVID-19 risks and preventative behaviors.



Youth Education

As the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in school closures and the implementation of a virtual schooling process, NICE made critical program adjustments to continue offering high quality services to school-aged children. **In-person services were suspended and replaced with virtual learning opportunities that include both synchronous online instruction and asynchronous learning opportunities.** Some of these opportunities include the implementation of the reading platform LightSail Education to allow students access to reading instruction and assessments remotely, the creation of a 1:1 mentorship program to assist with virtual schooling, and an increase in youth-specific case management services.

In 2020, NICE was able to serve 57 students across our Afterschool, Youth Mentorship, School Enrollment programs. This year, NICE has learned that families need intensive digital literacy assistance. Some families are not able to turn on devices, let alone log in or participate effectively in virtual programming. **Mentorship and case management support have proven immensely beneficial.** NICE plans to incorporate both digital literacy skills and blended learning opportunities into future programming. Additionally, NICE has started using Edmodo as a social media platform for hosting discussions, turning in assignments, and engaging students when away from the classroom. The agency plans to continue use of the social media platform to generate interest and engagement.

As part of our expanded Office of Refugee Resettlement services, NICE was able to reconnect 8 new refugee families to their new school here in Nashville. With NICE's assistance, these students may have fallen through the cracks as Metro Nashville Public Schools and its community partners focused on the transition to virtual schooling.

For example, while working with Biregeya Rukiragaye, a student at McMurray Middle School who has received academic intervention through Khan Academy, LightSail Education, and virtual programming, Youth Education staff learned that two of his younger siblings, Bella and Prince, had not heard from their respective schools since March. **Our staff were then able to update the students' contact information with the school, acquire laptops for each family member and secure a hotspot for the family.**

Additionally, the youngest Rukiragaye daughter, Sonia, recently turned 5. Youth Education staff were able to support the family in collecting immunization records and enrolling her in school. **Sonia now has everything she needs to participate in her first year of schooling, which will be delivered virtually.**



Adult Education

As a result of both the 2020 Nashville tornado and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic, NICE's Adult Education program has acted strategically to continue offering high quality programming that supports integrated English language instruction. Beginning in March of 2020, the program suspended all in-person activities. After discussions that included program administrators, support staff, and teachers, NICE decided to reduce the number of classes offered, increase class sizes, and offer programming entirely online. **Courses now include both synchronous virtual instruction and asynchronous activities to boost learner success.** Using this method, NICE was able to offer 44 English, 6 Pre-High School Equivalency Test (HiSET), and 2 Citizenship Preparation classes.

Workforce preparation was further integrated into these programs with specialized workshops available online.

At the start of the pandemic, pre and post testing students posed a major challenge, as standardized tests were not fully available online. Initially, programs were allowed to remote test, but only at a "one to one" ratio, which proved to be riddled with technical issues and incredibly time consuming. **Now, NICE has implemented a process for safe and responsible in-person pre and post testing in small groups.** Despite initial challenges, NICE was able to issue 237 pre and post tests over the course of the year.

As a result of the pandemic and subsequent pivot to distance education, **NICE invested in learning management systems to support classroom instruction.** Thanks to these learning management systems, NICE was able to retain students seeking their High School Equivalency Degree all the way to the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) for the first time. Since beginning this new program, 3 students have registered for the HiSET "At Home" test using state-issued vouchers. NICE hopes to continue the growth of this program in the future by increasing long-term investment in these learning management systems.

In 2020, NICE strengthened relationships with postsecondary and vocational training partners. Partnering with Nashville State Community College, NICE is creating a business administration training certificate that will target New American entrepreneurs. Working with the McGruder Center, NICE has created an English literacy program for immigrants aspiring to a career in banking. With increased funding from the TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development, NICE will hire an additional full-time resource to further the reach of our workforce programming.

Immigration Services

NICE's Immigration program assists clients by filing immigration forms, providing interpretation, consultation, conducting immigration case follow-ups, and public notarization. **Despite the uncertainty posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, NICE was able to assist 457 clients in filing 524 total applications.**

The team was also able to stay on top of frequent changes to immigration policy that occurred throughout this politically tumultuous year. **This success would not have been possible without the hiring of a new staff member, Rose Bagwire, and the added help of Samantha Jenkins, NICE's Administrative Assistant.** Samantha stepped up by providing additional assistance to the department as they received an unprecedented number of clients filing new applications.



I'm registered
to vote.
Are you?

COVID-19 Relief

Among New American communities, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the vulnerabilities of working low paying, high risk, and often unstable jobs. High numbers of refugees and immigrants have lost jobs, been furloughed, or have been unable to work for periods of time due to illness.

To address this, **NICE distributed over \$216,000 of direct financial assistance through a United Way COVID-19 Fund and Federal TN CARES Act funding in October-December of 2020.** This assistance helped 141 families in Middle Tennessee who were financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to cover housing-related costs. One of the biggest challenges the NICE staff faced in allocating this funding was the inability to do in-person outreach into our communities. Issues with digital literacy and language barriers made accessing the online application platform a challenge for many of the community groups NICE typically serves.

Despite these challenges, NICE staff put forth a major effort to do outreach in their own communities and provide necessary translation services to applicants throughout the process. One applicant referred by a NICE staff member had been sick with COVID-19 and in a coma for several months, while receiving financial support from members of the Kinyarwandan speaking community. Our staff's language skills enabled the applicant to provide all the necessary documents to receive the additional support they needed while still recovering from illness.

One of the major impacts of the COVID-19 relief program was to prevent homelessness in Middle Tennessee, as all funds allocated went to support rent and utility payments. One single woman working in the hotel industry had her hours cut due to decreased business during the pandemic. When **she applied for funds from NICE, she was at risk of eviction. Thankfully, she received the funds she needed to stay in housing.**

It cannot go without mentioning that NICE met weekly with a coalition of agencies throughout this project to share best practices, including TIRRC, Conexion Americas, The Hispanic Family Foundation, Siloam Health, Metro Public Health, Catholic Charities, Needlink Nashville and the Martha O'Brien Center. NICE hopes to continue to collaborate with these partners should more COVID-19 relief aid become available for disbursement into communities. While our successful allocation of these funds shows our organizational ability to act in crisis, we are always hoping to improve our ability to reach the most vulnerable in our communities, specifically refugees and immigrants.

One World, One Dream 2020

In 2020, NICE found innovative ways to continue serving our refugee and immigrant community--from working remotely as a staff, to moving our education programs online. Our annual benefit, One World, One Dream, was similarly innovative. Rather than gathering as usual at Woodmont Hills Church, NICE staff and supporters were invited to gather virtually to celebrate NICE while staying safe.

This year's virtual event featured music, a silent auction, guest speakers and an opportunity to learn Bollywood and Salsa dancing from Vanderbilt University student dance clubs. The event was catered by Gigamunch, a meal subscription service that allowed guests to discover Ethiopian cuisine from their own dinner tables. Guests meals were crafted by a local Ethiopian chef, and delivered right to their doors the day of the event. Notable speakers at the event included Dr. Tsehaye Tferra of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) and Nashville City Councilman Fabien Bedne. Despite changes that were made to the event to accommodate social distancing guidelines, **our supporters of NICE were able to come together and raise over \$18,000 to support refugee and immigrant communities in Nashville.**

The NICE Neighborhood

The NICE Neighborhood is a group of dedicated individuals committed to empowering Nashville's refugee community by donating monthly. By joining the NICE Neighborhood, **these individuals make a commitment to be a supportive neighbor to newcomers in our Nashville community.** NICE Neighbors ensure that their New American neighbors can thrive in Nashville by lending a helping hand. In turn, they are brought closer to New Americans in the Nashville community by receiving updates and personal communication from those they have supported. **We are happy to say that the NICE Neighborhood grew exponentially in 2020!**

Meet the NICE Neighbors

Amanda Adams	Carolyn Heinrich	Delani Pecchioli
Timothy Brewer	Laura Henkhaus	Fletcher Prouty
Rebecca Cotton*	Martha Henley	Shawn Reilly
Neil DeCrescenzo	Sharon Kozy	Peyton Smith
Andrea Flores	Samantha Lee	Isabelle Speed
Yancey Gregory	Kathy MacLachlan	William Stout
Leah Hashinger	Sarah Mickle	Heather Wilson
Lucy Davis Haynes	Jonathan Niconchuk	

Analysis of Operations



ENTITY	INCOME	% OF TOTAL
Federal	\$510,168	23.8%
State & Local Gov't	\$1,137,536	53.1%
Foundations	\$303,158	14.2%
Individuals	\$55,040	2.6%
Program Revenue	\$95,170	4.4%
Organizations	\$40,980	1.9%
Total Income	\$2,142,052	100.0%



ENTITY	INCOME	% OF TOTAL
Program	\$1,871,638	89.1%
Admin & Fundraising	\$228,219	10.9%
Total Expense	\$2,099,857	100.0%

Funders





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