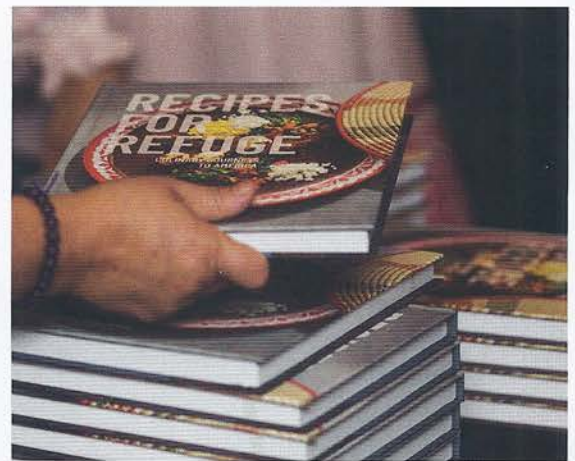




giving back

By Eileen Concannon

ReWA staff speak dozens of languages and dialects and are members of the immigrant and refugee communities they serve.



Produced by a dedicated crew of volunteers, including professional photographers, food stylists and editors, this cookbook makes the perfect gift for the foodies in your life. All proceeds go to support ReWA.

# Refugee Women's Alliance – 2021 Is a New Beginning

I am a child of immigrants. My mother arrived in 1940 with one suitcase, leaving a family who could no longer feed her. My father arrived the same year seeking employment, was drafted into the U.S. Army, and served in North Africa, Italy, and Germany. Both relied on uncles who had immigrated before them to provide a room, food, and some direction. And in return, both worked hard, gave to those less fortunate, and made sure their children received the education never possible for them. Both paid their dues in large and small ways and were forever grateful that their good fortune had brought them to this country.

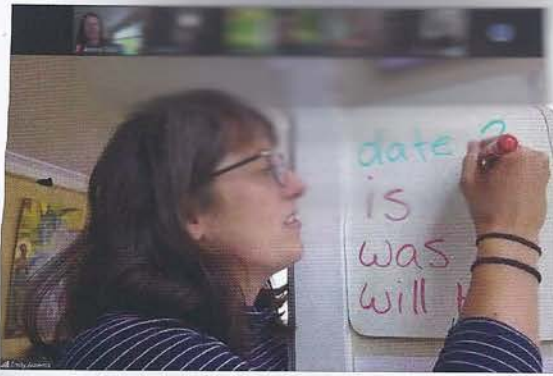
I was naturally drawn as a volunteer and board member to Refugee Women's Alliance, a Seattle-based organization that helps to support immigrants and refugees in the Puget Sound area. ReWA addresses the immediate and ongoing needs of resettled people with programs focused on housing, employment, vocational training, domestic violence, learning English, citizenship and immigration legal services, behavioral health, youth tutoring and mentoring, childcare, and education. In 2019, these programs directly served almost 3,000 individuals, benefitting an estimated 12,000 family members. ReWA's staff and volunteers, located in Seattle, SeaTac, and Kent offices, welcome resettling people from all over the world, in recent years the majority from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Ukraine, Eritrea, and Afghanistan.

For decades, Washington State has been a leader in welcoming the "humanitarian flow" of resettling people, accepting more refugees than almost any other



ReWA's staff and client fashion show, showcasing traditional dress from dozens of countries, is a highlight of the annual gala.

state. A "refugee" as defined in the Refugee Act of 1980 is a person outside of her or his nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or affiliation with a social organization. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees initially screens individuals to determine whether they qualify as refugees, and then refers them to the United States and several other countries. These individuals are then intensely scrutinized, undergoing detailed background checks, screenings, and



ReWA's ESL classes, which reach hundreds of immigrants and refugees each year, have moved online since the pandemic.

interviews, often under difficult circumstances. The process usually takes about two years and in recent years, longer. If admitted to the United States, a refugee must apply for a green card within one year and is eligible for U.S. citizenship in five years.

Worldwide, currently, there are 26 to 30 million refugees with less than one percent of the number of displaced people resettled to one of the 37 current resettlement countries annually. In FY 2020, the United States resettled only 11,814 people, the lowest number in 40 years. By October 1, the President, in consultation with Congress, decides the

maximum number of refugees to be accepted the following year. With a change of administration, President-elect Biden has pledged to return to our previous position of leadership in this regard and "set the annual global refugee admissions cap to 125,000 and seek to raise it over time." Since the nation's resettlement program was essentially dismantled in the last four years, it will take time to rebuild the required infrastructure. But the need is serious and immediate. There are an estimated 120,000 refugees in the pipeline, some of whom have waited for years for entry into the U.S. In addition, thousands of Iraqi men and women who worked for the U.S. military are awaiting placement. In 2020, only 123 Iraqis were resettled out of an allotted 4,000 "slots."

In October 2020, ReWA celebrated its 35th year by hosting an online fundraising virtual gala. During the week, we learned about ReWA's critical work and heard from clients who had benefited from its many programs. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting people virtually whose lives have literally been transformed because of ReWA. As we told our gala guests, any donation will make a difference: \$100 funds a utility assistance program; \$250 provides emergency shelter for a family of four for three days; a gift of \$500 provides a semester of ESL classes to enable a refugee to find employment.

We invite you to learn more about ReWA and join our growing international family. You would be more than welcome! [www.rewa.org](http://www.rewa.org).

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