



A Diverse America
is a Strong America

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021



On the cover: With stable housing, a job, and her petition for a humanitarian visa underway, Tessina is working to create a good life for her children.

FROM THE PRESIDENT & THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The twin crises in Haiti and Afghanistan have so consumed us that they tend to obscure earlier events in a tumultuous year. While the scale of these catastrophes has indeed been overwhelming, we should not forget that people fleeing violence, persecution, destabilized governments and the ripple effects of climate change arrive in our region year round. And no matter where they come from, HIAS Pennsylvania responds.

This past year, our staff continued to show unflagging dedication, concern for our clients, and creativity in adapting to a merciless pandemic. They did so while navigating a new virtual world that left them lacking the in-person support of their colleagues.

Shared moments helped keep us strong. Our ESL classes loved our Education program's virtual "Experience Philly" tour, replete with Tastykakes, goody bags, and live musical performances. World Refugee Day, held outdoors on June 20, exemplified our year's theme, "A Diverse America is a Strong America." So did a virtual Thanksgiving with our clients, as we enjoyed song and dance whose origins crossed continents.

Clients who passed new milestones created individual highs for all of us. We rejoiced when a client from Côte d'Ivoire, who thought his son had died in an attack on their village, was reunited with his now-grown child after 10 years. We applauded another client, whom we first met as a 14-year-old in a shelter, when she graduated from high school and received her green card on the same day.

Right along with staff, our wonderful volunteers showed their mettle. They tutored and mentored online, delivered food and essentials, and encouraged clients. One volunteer tutor wrote of a young student who, deprived of in-person kindergarten by COVID-19, achieved "an awesome success: He wrote his name!"

And you, our supporters, dug deep to strengthen the resources we needed like never before. We thank all of you – staff, volunteers, and supporters – from the bottom of our hearts.



Cathryn Miller-Wilson, Esq.
Executive Director



Carol Gantman, Ph.D
President of the Board

TESSINA'S STORY

MOVING COUNTRIES IS NOT EASY, I can tell you. I left Jamaica for St. Martin's to better my economic situation. Then in 2017, my four kids and I joined my brother in Philadelphia. Just two years later, high blood pressure killed him at 39 years old. That was so hard!

In 2018, I married a man I thought I knew. It turned out he was not a responsible person. Every time bills needed to be paid, we argued. Things got physical. He would pull out his gun and put it where I could see it. Then, he started pointing it at me. I got a restraining order, but that meant I lost the apartment because he was the main breadwinner.

That was a terrible time! My kids and I had nowhere to go and no money. I couldn't legally work because my husband had never filled out the paperwork I needed. But HIAS PA came through for me. Nicole, my HIAS PA case manager, worked with a community organization that helps people from the Caribbean. They found us an apartment and even helped us financially. I found a job in a bread factory. When COVID hit, though, the factory said we couldn't come to work anymore. I picked up little jobs when I could, like cleaning people's houses. Things turned around for the better when I began to take care of a lady three days a week.

I really do feel positive about the future. Now I have a legal work permit. Recently, I got my certified nursing assistant license, and now I am taking the prerequisites online for a Registered Nurse program. My four kids are doing tremendously. With a roof over our heads, they are more comfortable, and more playful. But Nicole is still on my speed dial. Anytime I need clarity, I call Nicole.

*"I really do feel positive
about the future."*



STEPHANIE, LAWYER

TESSINA WAS IN A TOUGH PLACE after she obtained a restraining order against her husband. He had never started the process of getting permanent residency for her in the US, so she did not have legal status. That was one of his first control techniques, promising her that he would do it as soon as they had done this or that. Of course, he never did. The decisive factor, though, was his use of a gun.

We helped Tessina file a petition under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which has a special provision for immigrants in her situation. If an immigrant has been threatened or abused by a spouse who is a US citizen or a permanent resident, that immigrant can petition U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for permanent residency without the spouse's knowledge. At the same time, Nicole – one of our case managers – worked with Tessina to find an apartment, because her housing situation was dire.

These clients' cases are pending for so long, and there is so much turmoil in their lives! Once Tessina's VAWA petition was filed, at least she could obtain legal work authorization. Since then, she has been filing taxes and receiving some benefits, but the processing time to gain permanent residency under VAWA averages around two years. Her kids' status is tied to hers, and her oldest daughter is applying to college. Will her daughter have legal status before she starts college? We don't really know for sure.

Tessina is really remarkable to have come so far in such a short time. She was lucky that Nicole was available to help her, but she has also taken advantage of every opportunity offered to her.



“Tessina is really remarkable to have come so far in such a short time.”

NICOLE, CASE MANAGER

WHEN I FIRST WORKED WITH TESSINA, I checked in with her every day. I could hear the increasing desperation and hopelessness in her voice. Not only had she uprooted her life to immigrate, but now she had to navigate homelessness for herself and her children without documents or work authorization. She couldn't find an apartment without a credit score or proof she could pay her rent.

Fortunately, Airbnb has a program connecting individuals who want to provide free temporary housing for immigrants to nonprofits like ours. We were able to place Tessina in a rental for a couple of weeks. At the same time, I reached out to the nonprofit AFRICOM (the Coalition of African and Caribbean Communities). They connected Tessina to someone in their community who understood her situation and rented her an apartment. The organization even helped her with her early rent payments. During the pandemic, she found small jobs as often as she could, and we were able to give her some help through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.

Once Tessina's situation stabilized, we spoke less often. Recently, though, she called me, and I could hardly believe I was hearing from the same Tessina. This person on the phone was bursting with positive energy. She was self-confident and hopeful. All Tessina had needed was empowerment and encouragement. She is a strong, independent woman who will do what must be done to support herself and her children.

Clients like Tessina motivate me. I know that with a little support they will overcome really difficult situations. It happens again and again because HIAS PA clients are so amazing. I have never met such strong people.

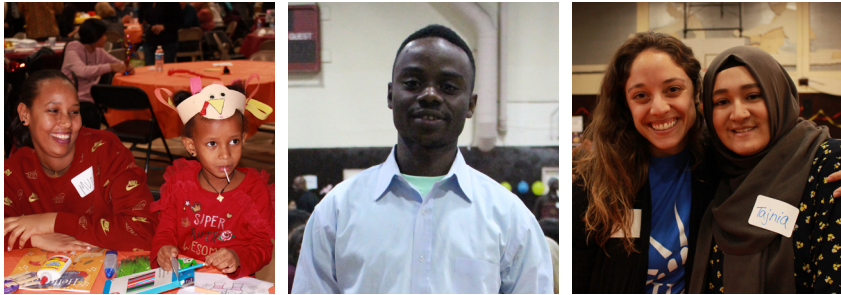


“All Tessina needed was empowerment and encouragement.”

IN 2020-21, 197 VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTED 23,211 HOURS SUPPORTING HIAS PA'S WORK.

IN 2020-21, HIAS PA SERVED:
4,114 clients from 127 countries, including,

- 132 survivors of torture.
- 506 survivors of domestic abuse.
- 319 victims of violent crime.
- 611 children and youth.
- 61 newly arrived refugees.
- 481 individuals newly granted asylum.



OCTOBER
HIAS PA begins representing immigrants detained at Pike County Correctional Facility, where few lawyers are available.

DECEMBER
HIAS PA's expert testimony helps convince Congress to extend the Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness (LRIF) Act. In light of the pandemic, this extension gives Liberian refugees more time and the chance to apply for permanent residency.

Among the 5,309 different legal services HIAS PA provided in 2020-21, our legal teams helped:

- 2,531 immigrants through legal consultations.
- 444 immigrants apply for citizenship.
- 125 immigrants apply for asylum.
- 892 immigrants apply for other humanitarian visas and other initial immigration status (including DACA).

JANUARY
For the first time since the Trump Administration closed DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) to new applicants in 2017, HIAS PA helps a client submit a first-time application. Once DACA status is granted, this client can finally apply for college.

MARCH
As President Biden opens the southern border to unaccompanied children seeking asylum, HIAS PA worked with 51 youth newly arrived in Pennsylvania in a ten-day period.

Among the 489 different social services HIAS PA provided in 2020-21, our social support teams:

- Resettled 61 refugees.
- Provided English language classes to 118 adults, children, and youth.
- Provided Immigrant Wellness case management and group programming to 53 immigrants.
- Delivered social support services to 352 immigrants.



MAY
After months of advocacy led by HIAS PA, the Philadelphia School District announces the hiring of bilingual counseling assistants (BCAs) who speak Swahili, Fulah, and Haitian Creole. Previously, out of the 85 BCAs in the District, only one could help families in languages spoken primarily by Black immigrants.

JULY
HIAS PA co-presents to a statewide conference of physicians on when and how to help immigrants file medical waivers for requirements on citizenship test.

HOW WE RESPONDED TO COVID-19
Since the beginning of the pandemic, HIAS PA:

- Provided \$800 cash grants to 204 of the most vulnerable immigrants through our Immigrant Emergency Relief Fund.
- Delivered 247 laptops and provided digital literacy classes so clients could attend school and access essential services online.
- Engaged 75 volunteers to provide 127 highly vulnerable clients with groceries and other necessities.

AUGUST
HIAS PA welcomes refugee families from Afghanistan who were endangered by a family member's support of the US.

SEPTEMBER
HIAS PA dispenses the 200th Immigrant Emergency Relief Fund grant to a client with health issues after contracting COVID.

DONORS

We gratefully acknowledge the support of our institutional and government funders and corporate and individual contributors whose support makes our life-saving work possible. Every effort is given to share an accurate and complete list. Please excuse us if we have made any errors. In the interest of space, we have only included donors who gave at the \$500 level and above. We are sorry that we cannot include the thousands of donors who supported our mission.

Please note that the following list only includes donors who donated between October 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021. If you donated after that date, your donation will be acknowledged in the next annual report.

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Ambassador Norm Weinstein and Board Members Caroline Kamesar and Dveera Segal pose with former Golden Door nominee Liliana Velasquez.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

DONATE MONEY

You can help immigrants build new lives in the Philadelphia region by making a donation at hiaspa.org/donate. You can also contact Ellen Freda, Director of Development, at efreda@hiaspa.org or 215-832-0940 about ways to give and fundraising opportunities.

DONATE TIME

Volunteers are critical members of the HIAS Pennsylvania team. Opportunities range from helping families resettle in the U.S. to teaching English and moving clients toward citizenship. Please go to hiaspa.org/volunteer to learn more.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Immigration policies are constantly changing. Learn more about the immigrants we serve by reading our updates, coming to our events, and exploring advocacy opportunities at hiaspa.org/the-issues.

**The financial statement for 2020-21, the period covered by this report, will be posted to: hiaspa.org/the-issues/resources/financials as soon as the audit is completed — usually in April. You may review the statement for 2019-2020 on the website now.*

HIAS Pennsylvania is the registered fictitious name of HIAS and Council Migration Service of Philadelphia; tax ID number 23-1405597. The official registration and financial information of HIAS and Council Migration Service of Philadelphia may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



LOOKING FORWARD

THE PANDEMIC MADE CRYSTAL CLEAR just how little we can predict our future. Will the outpouring of support for Afghan refugees lead more Americans to open their hearts to immigrants? Will our policy-makers come to know, as we know, that diversity is our strength? Will they change nonsensical laws and procedures that currently hinder new members of our community?

Unfortunately, we dare not project any of these positive developments, even as we work for them ceaselessly. Often in partnership with other organizations, HIAS PA will continue to advocate for rational immigration policies. Above all, we will continue to serve those who flee persecution, as we have done through wars, pandemics, and waves of nativism for almost 140 years.

A year ago, our Board approved a strategic plan that has guided us to integrate legal and social services so we can better meet each client's needs. In 2021-22, we will continue that work, which proved invaluable



during the pandemic. Our legal staff was able to call on our case workers to help with housing, food, and health crises for our most desperate clients. Our case workers found that sometimes small changes – a connection to a community organization that could supply free diapers, a meeting with a school counselor – could make a huge difference.

We hope that, with proper health precautions, we will be able to spend more time together in our beautiful new offices on Chestnut Street near, quite appropriately, the Liberty Bell. We will finally be able to confer with a colleague just down the hall and warmly welcome clients in person to continue building the relationships of trust that are so important to serve them well.

As we face whatever the future brings, we will need you with us. We hope you will always let us know how we can engage and inform you to sustain our teamwork.



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