

# SOUTH DAKOTA VOICES FOR PEACE



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IMPACT REPORT  
2020



## ***Our Mission***

South Dakota Voices for Peace builds power and enables healing in immigrant, refugee, and Muslim communities by amplifying their voices and working in solidarity with all who dismantle bigotry and racism.

## ***Our Vision***

We imagine a South Dakota that is diverse, inclusive and anti-racist.







## Letter from the Executive Director

**Resilience.** What 2020 taught us at SD Voices for Peace is that when tested, having a strong mission in combination with a team who is community-centered, innovative ideas can be implemented quickly.

**Strategic.** Our team are experts in immigration law and policy, community building, experiential training methods, educational curriculum development and world religions. We are the communities we lift: first- and second-generation immigrants and refugees, multilingual, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, agnostic and atheist.

**Confident Risk Takers.** Building SDVFP over the last 4 years was a risk in our community. Would we be able to garner community support to advocate for immigrants, refugees, and Muslims in our conservative state? Would we be able to thwart the efforts of the powerful Islamophobic network? Would our communities trust us? And the answers have always been a resounding YES.

It is our fine-tuned focus and flexibility which allows us to meet community needs which are unplanned. With the outbreak of COVID-19 at the Smithfield Foods meat processing plant in Sioux Falls, SD, it was our phones that rang with concerns of employees inside those walls. We organized. We brought together our close immigrant community activists to form the SD Dream Coalition. We co-organized a "car parade" and over a hundred cars drove back and forth in front of the plant with words of encouragement to the employees inside, and a message to shut down and implement emerging COVID-19 mitigation measures. The plant shut down for 14 days.

It was from desperate community member calls for resources (food, diapers, rent money, payroll protection for those who didn't qualify) that moved us to create SD's only Emergency Relief Fund for Immigrants (ERF). We were 2.5 staff people at the time, but we took a confident risk, based on strategic relationships we had developed, and had an outpouring of support to help. Raising \$1.2M in less than 6 months to help 1,700 immigrant-led households was possible because of our tireless teams' efforts.

Even with these daunting efforts, SDVFP continued to provide free legal services to Unaccompanied Minors from Central America and immigrant survivors of violence. We continued our efforts to educate our multilingual communities on the 2020 Census Count and registered them to vote.

**Community.** All of our passion is realized because of our immense community support. Thank you. Whether it's the \$5 donation from someone who believes in our impact or the "God Bless You, for your work," we will continue to think big and act boldly to lift the voices of immigrants, refugees and Muslims in South Dakota.

We are now a team of 9 and we are excited to continue that journey with your support.

Sincerely,

Taneeza S. Islam, Esq.\*  
Executive Director

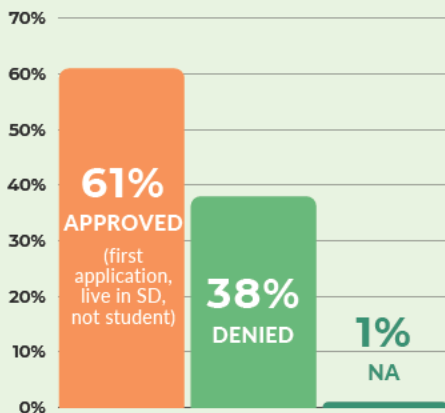
\* (licensed in SD and MN)

# COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Relief Fund for Immigrants in South Dakota

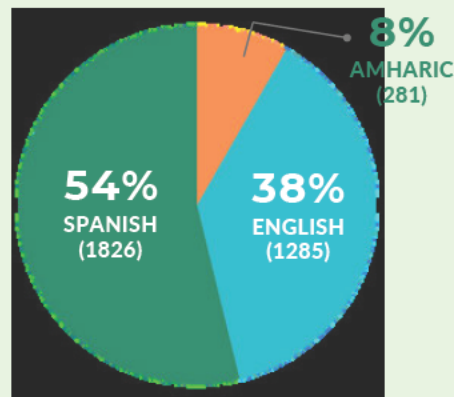
**SDVFP distributed \$932,000 to 1700 South Dakota immigrant households across the state.**

Between May 1, 2020 and February 1, 2021, nine SDVFP employees were dedicated to accomplish the SD Dream Coalition goal to give financial relief quickly to South Dakota immigrant households who were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The eight organizations, several of them immigrant-led, continued to meet weekly to identify and respond to needs, strategize, respond to global media inquiries and explore solutions.

Applications were **approved or denied** based on preset criteria.



Applicants were able to submit applications in **one of three languages** with assistance as needed.



The average relief per household was **\$533**. With every relief check, a **letter** was sent saying:

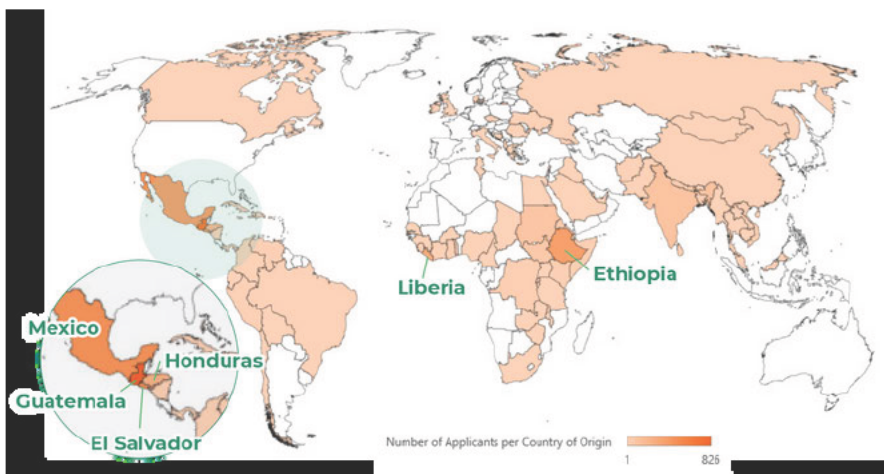
*"We believe that as South Dakota neighbors, we are in this together. Though the funds are limited, our care & efforts to work together are not. This is an opportunity to learn from & with one another & to inspire our spirits to do good."*

— ERF Staff

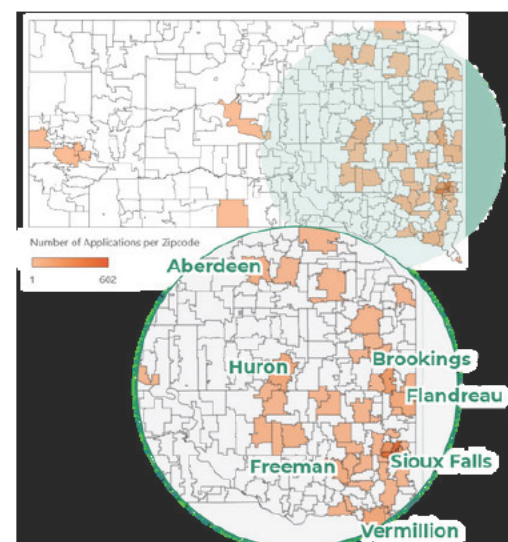
**Applicants emigrated from 93 different countries.**

Many of them were born in:

- Guatemala (24%)
- Mexico (13%)
- El Salvador (13%)
- Ethiopia (11%)
- Honduras (7%)
- Liberia (7%)



**Applicants' locations.**





*"I am a single mom with three children and I was not able to get assistance from other places. The money really helped me. I was able to pay bills, buy things I needed for my children, and take care of my kids. It is very hard to go through times like these without any family in the States and being the sole provider makes it more stressful. The help you gave really helped me get through this tough time and I felt like there was someone who cared about us."*

— Emergency Relief Fund recipient

Immigrants were often unable to access financial help because of inadequate access and other barriers. SD Voices for Peace helped remove many of those barriers that in turn built trust and friendships in communities across the state. The Emergency Relief Fund for Immigrants worked because we made efforts to remove language barriers and meet people in their communities where they felt safe and respected.

"Mekdes" used to work at Smithfield Food Processing (Sioux Falls). She has two children, a two-year old and a one-year old. Her husband and she worked shifts and the kids went to daycare before the pandemic started. Due to Smithfield being a Covid-19 hotspot, the daycare closed. Daycare closure was a recurring issue for families and daycare workers. Mekdes decided to quit her job and take care of the kids. Her husband kept working even though he did not feel safe but felt that they didn't have much of a choice of whether or not to work. Mekdes expressed that her husband has been isolating himself from her and the kids to keep them safe. She expressed that this was very difficult over the months. When I let her know she was approved for relief funds, I could hear the relief in her voice. It was one less thing to stress about. (June 2020)

"Bhim" lives with his wife and he has two children. When the pandemic started, he was working at Smithfield Food Processing Plant. He got COVID working there, then the whole family got it from him. It was severe for his wife who was hospitalized. He then started working at Grand Prairie Food Processing. He reported that he did not feel strong enough to work. He said his energy and capability has not been the same since he recovered from COVID. Bhim did not speak much English but I could hear it in his voice the toll this pandemic has taken on him and his family. He felt relieved as I let him know he was approved for relief dollars. (August 2020)



Most applicants are **employed in these fields:**

 **Commercial Cleaning**

 **Agriculture**

 **Meat Processing**

 **Construction**

 **Residential Cleaning**

 **Food Services**

Emergency funds went towards these **urgent needs:**

 **Rent**


 **Food**

 **Utilities**

 **Transportation**

 **Child Supplies**

 **Childcare**

 **Medical Care**

**SD Dream Coalition** included:

- African Community Center
- Bienvenidos a Brookings
- Caminando Juntos
- Mujeres de Fe
- The Naomi Project
- Que Pasa Sioux Falls
- SD Voices for Peace
- Unity Ethiopian Association

## Mobilizing Communities: Education, Advocacy, and Civic Engagement

### ***Grassroots Coalition Building, Education and Action Program.***

After the police murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and a series of unjust police actions against Black youth in Sioux Falls, we formed the South Dakota Coalition for Justice & Equity (SDCJE) together with local criminal justice reform stakeholders. To educate local communities on these issues, we hosted a live-broadcast forum for young BIPOC adults who grew up in Sioux Falls to speak about their experiences.

Since its formation, SDCJE has met regularly to compile research and strategize across four areas of impact on criminal justice reform: independent review of police misconduct complaints, legislative reform, community education, and police training review.



**South Dakota Voices for Peace's education and action program, Cohort of Courage, equips participants with knowledge, strategies, and a network to effectively counter racism, bigotry, and Islamophobia in the state of South Dakota through direct action.**





## ***Immigrant and Muslim Civic Action: Get Out the Vote, The Peoples' Count.***

2020 was the year of the U.S. Census count, and South Dakota was one of 3 states without a Complete Count Committee. Neither the state nor the city of Sioux Falls budgeted for Census education or outreach. Immigrant and BIPOC communities are undercounted on the Census, and we knew that in order for our communities to get proportional federal funding and representation, we needed to encourage everyone to respond to the Census. We formed The Peoples' Count SD, a coalition of over a dozen organizations and community advocates, to provide Census education and translated information in Amharic,

Arabic, English, Kunama, Nepali, Spanish, and Swahili. We ramped up our civic engagement work during the 2020 General Election season with bilingual voter registration drives. We also assisted new citizens with registering to vote and requesting absentee ballots. Because absentee voting was a new process for many people, we created and distributed multilingual instructions on voting absentee, in-person voting, and early voting by mail. We also produced Know Your Rights videos for voters in Amharic, Arabic, English, Oromo, and Spanish.



During Fall 2020, we launched our first Cohort of Courage education and action program to help counter hate at the grassroots level. Cohort of Courage: Faith Leaders trained 21 faith leaders who represented 7 Christian denominations across South Dakota to be guides in their faith communities against Islamophobia, racism, and bigotry. Upon completion of the program, attendees were offered small stipends and assistance to build projects or coalitions aimed toward addressing bigotry and racism at the community level. Our first cohort produced the Faith & Justice Collective of the Black Hills, and a leadership program at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls.

Cohort of Courage is an education and action-oriented networking program for educators, faith leaders, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) youth in South Dakota who want to learn to effectively respond to Islamophobia, racism, and bigotry in their communities and workplaces. Program partners include the Doris Duke Foundation; the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign and Faith Over Fear; ReThink Media; and the South Dakota Synod, ELCA. Our inaugural cohort program was sponsored by the Doris Duke Foundation.

# Immigration Legal Services and Client Data

*Providing South Dakota's only free immigration legal services to unaccompanied children from Central America seeking refuge in the US and survivors of violence.*

Every year, thousands of children from Central America trek the journey from their home countries in order to escape gang violence and persecution with the hope of seeking safety and opportunity in the US. They live with sponsors—often family members—in the US, and need legal representation because they are in immigration court proceedings.



## CLIENT STATUS ELIGIBILITY

### Unaccompanied Minor Cases

- 13 eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)
- 10 eligible for asylum
- Some eligible for both SIJS and asylum
- Some eligible for U.S. citizenship
- 1 work authorization obtained
- 3 work authorizations pending

### Office on Violence Against Women Cases

- 4 eligible for U visas
- 4 eligible for VAWA
- 2 eligible for asylum
- 1 client received approved VAWA and obtained Lawful Permanent Status for herself and her family

Data from the Office of Refugee Resettlement shows that from 2014-2020 nearly 600 unaccompanied minors from Central America have been released to sponsors living in South Dakota.

Motivated by the need to provide these children with legal services so they could one day become U.S. citizens, a group of South Dakotan women raised \$200,000 to launch SDVFP's free immigration legal services program in November 2019.

We had 36 active client cases in 2020: 26 unaccompanied minors and 10 survivors of violence. We referred 13 intakes out to the Naomi Project, The Advocates, and Kids

in Need of Defense (KIND) in Maryland.

All but 1 of our clients are in immigration court proceedings. Our staff monitors all court dates, first appearances, submits address changes, collects evidence, translates Spanish documents in-house, and connects clients to basic-needs services such as food, clothing, shelter, and mental health counseling.

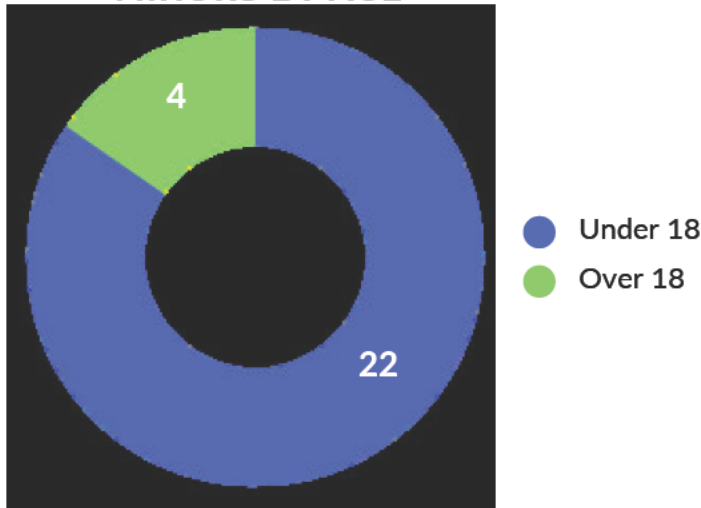
In order to provide survivors of violence with wholistic services (safe shelter, food, counseling), we work in collaboration with the South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault (SDNAFVSA), SDNAFVSA includes Call to Freedom, Children's Inn, and the Compass Center.



***The unfathomable violence that children in Central America face is pushing parents to send their children on the treacherous journey to the southern border in the United States.***

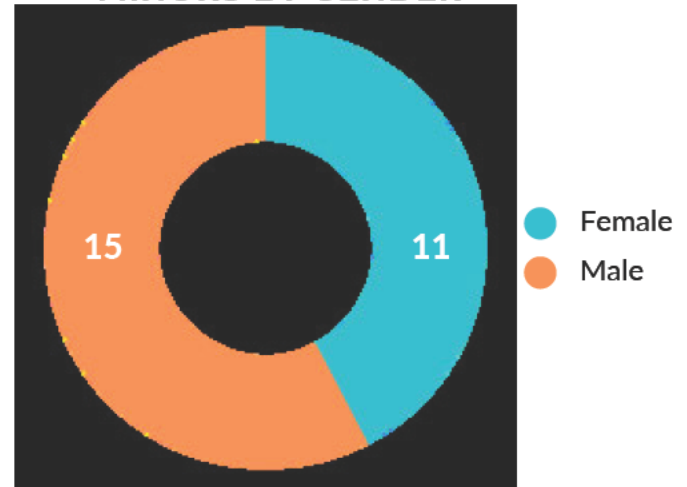
On March 20, 2020, an emergency regulation implemented the use of a U.S. health law commonly referred to as Title 42, which allowed Customs and Border Protection to reject anyone seeking asylum on the basis of public health and limiting spread of COVID-19 into the US. However, the US used this to indiscriminately turn people away from the border and back into Mexico without being given a chance to apply for asylum — even while maintaining overcrowded conditions in detention facilities and failing to test detained people for COVID-19.

**UNACCOMPANIED MINORS BY AGE**

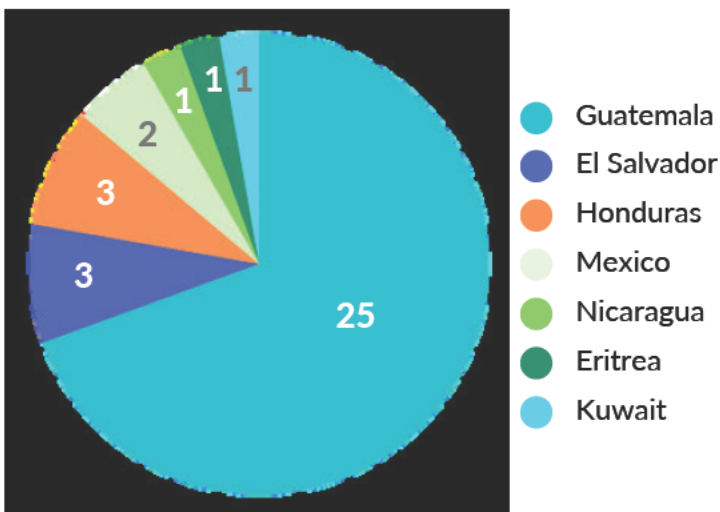


\* Youngest client 6 years old, oldest 19

**UNACCOMPANIED MINORS BY GENDER**



**COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, ALL CLIENTS (36)**



# South Dakota Voices for Peace 2020 Financial Report

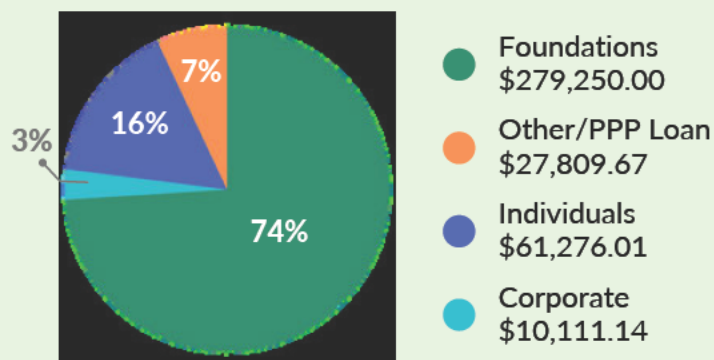
South Dakota Voices for Peace (SDVFP) financial report shows organizational growth from 2017 to 2020 to support our on-going programs such as legal services, education, civic engagement and coalition building. In addition, we raised \$1.2 million to support COVID-19 rapid response Emergency Relief Fund for Immigrants in South Dakota (ERF) and Outreach, which we administered separately. Seventy-seven percent of funds raised for the ERF were directly distributed to immigrant-led households across South Dakota.

## INCOME - GENERAL, EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

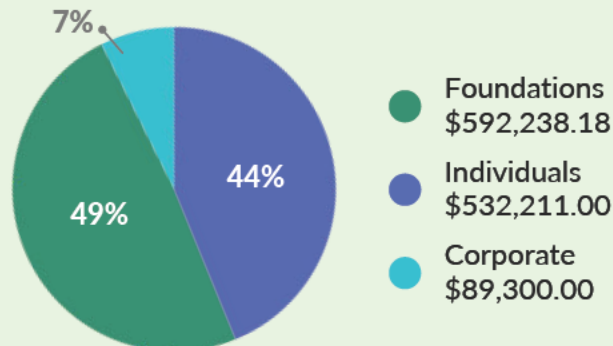
INCOME	2020 GENERAL	2020 ERF	2019	2018	2017
Grants & Contributions	\$300,662.16	\$1,213,749.18	\$157,933.62	\$117,407.86	\$23,550.00
Other — PPP Loan	\$27,809.67	\$0.00	\$80.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Income	\$328,471.83	\$1,213,749.18	\$158,013.62	\$117,407.86	\$23,550.00

## SOURCES OF INCOME

### General, Non-COVID-19-Related



### COVID-19 (Emergency Relief Fund)





## COVID-19 & EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND RAPID RESPONSE

	AMOUNT	%
Restricted for Relief Distribution	\$931,748.18	77%
Funds for Administrative Support	\$282,000.00	23%

## EXPENSES - GENERAL, EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

EXPENSES	2020 GENERAL	2020 ERF	2019	2018	2017
Program	\$116,935.49	\$1,045,639.80	\$50,595.60	\$7,406.67	\$0.00
Support	\$22,505.62	\$33,758.43	\$7,786.16	\$3,574.67	\$43.20
Total Expenses	\$139,441.11	\$1,079,398.23	\$58,381.76	\$10,981.06	\$43.20

## PROGRAM & SUPPORT DISTRIBUTION

	PROGRAM	PROGRAM %	SUPPORT	SUPPORT %
General	\$116,935.49	84%	\$22,505.62	16%
COVID/Emergency Relief Fund/Outreach	\$1,045,639.80	97%	\$33,758.43	3%

## NET ASSETS - GENERAL, EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

NET ASSETS	2020 GENERAL	2020 ERF	2019	2018	2017
Assets	\$400,265.96	\$104,089.39	\$230,691.91	\$129,933.60	\$23,506.80
Liabilities	\$3,861.08	\$2,347.03	\$1,126.45	\$0.00	\$0.00
Net Assets	\$396,404.88	\$101,742.36	\$229,565.46	\$129,933.60	\$23,506.80

# From South Dakota Voices supporters for their kindness, donors, and

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Dr. Musheera Anis Abdellatif  
Dr. Fathi Halaweish  
Dr. David Kapaska  
Mayor Mike Levsen  
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## Awards & Acknowledgements

2020 Muslim  
Advocates' Muslims  
Making Change Award

## In Kind Donations

First Congregational Church  
Central Bank (ERF)



**for Peace, thank you to our  
and thank you to our grantors,  
d sponsors.**

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for Immigrants in SD**

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**It's official —  
SD Voices for Peace  
is a registered 501c3  
charity with the IRS!  
Thank you Spirit of  
Peace UCC for being  
our fiscal sponsor for  
three years!**



**Thank  
you!**





***sdvfpeace.org***

***605-782-9560***

***info@southdakota  
voicesforpeace.org***

***PO Box 600,  
Sioux Falls,  
SD 57101***



***@sdvfpeace***