Helping immigrants and refugees rebuild safe, sustainable lives in Denver.
In this issue...

1  Welcome
2  Director's Statement
4  ACC's Impact in Stories
11 ACC's Impact in Numbers
13  Financials
14  2020 Events
15  Get Involved
16  Thank You!
Mission:
ACC's mission is help refugees and immigrants rebuild safe, sustainable lives in Denver.

Vision:
ACC's vision is to be an integrative center of multicultural exchange where community members feel a sense of belonging and actively contribute to an inclusive society.

Values:

Empathy
We offer friendship, compassion, and understanding to individuals from all communities.

Integrity
We consistently exhibit honest and just actions that affirm our promises.

Belonging
We foster security and trust by building welcoming and diverse communities based on relationships of reciprocity.

Imagination
We are committed to creative pursuits that exceed the status quo.
Like every organization, business, service provider, family and individual around the world, ACC felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, the challenges we faced during the year are not what made 2020 unique for our nonprofit. Rather, it was the way ACC staff, interns, volunteers, donors and partners responded to those challenges that sets the year apart.

ACC moved from in-person to remote service provision seemingly overnight. Staff learned new ways to communicate, meet and collaborate with colleagues and community members. They found safe ways to serve and support refugees and immigrants who were disproportionately affected by the financial and health-related fallout. And, as the number of community members contacting ACC seeking help increased, ACC staff, interns and volunteers set their work plans aside, formed emergency support teams and adjusted their job descriptions accordingly. It was amazing to watch their passion for ACC's mission, and their love for this community overcome each challenge they faced.

ACC donors came through as well. Families and individuals who had the means, gave generously so that ACC could help other struggling families with paying rent, keeping food in the house and connecting to income supports. Grantors and program funders provided temporary leeway in how grant funds were spent, allowing ACC to address the unforeseen needs.
Partnerships were formed to share resources and magnify impact. Most notable was Ruby’s Pantry, a supplemental food collection and delivery effort that resulted from the collaboration of Ruby’s Market, Lutheran Family Services, Project Worthmore and ACC. Hundreds of individuals received much-needed food and personal supplies through this partnership during the period covered by this report.

But the real stars of 2020 were our refugee and immigrant neighbors. In spite of a global pandemic, the unrest experienced in our country and community shedding light upon the racial inequity that exists and divisive political rhetoric surrounding immigration, they continued to thrive, to improve their lives and to contribute to the social fabric of our community.

My hope is that you are inspired as you review the achievements shared in this report. Be inspired by the people, like you, who simply came together during challenging times and worked for the good of others. Be inspired by the perseverance and resilience of the refugees and immigrants reflected in the numbers. Be inspired by our opportunity to join hands in this life-changing work.

Ron Buzard, Managing Director
ECDC African Community Center of Denver
Ntwali “Tony” Bisimwa first came to the East Colfax Youth Center (ECYC) during the OnTrac College Program in the summer of 2019, and he made quite an impression on the staff and students. Tony made friends right away as he is a natural leader. He has unlimited energy, an unwavering vision. Tony always takes the time to help the many people he meets on his journey, no matter where it takes him.

From the beginning, Tony had a mission - to attend college and become a doctor. Tony had only been in Colorado since November 2018 and right away he stood out. He qualified for the IB Program at Hinkley High School, took a college class at UC Denver, became leader in his church and school all while driving his family members over 400 miles a week to their jobs and back.
In his senior year Tony continued his college application work through ECYC. He worked diligently in the College Advising Program, becoming an outstanding member of the 10-week Ambassador Leadership Scholarship Program. He came to ECYC's After-School Tutoring Program when his schedule allowed and often helped other students with their homework. He is always a positive member of any group.

Tony was accepted to the University of Denver with both merit and need-based scholarships and grants and enrolled in the fall of 2020. He wants to be a doctor and he knows the difficulties and challenges inherent in that plan. He is a very committed undergraduate student and is thrilled to be attending DU and involved in all the STEM programs and opportunities. He has the traits of a STEM scholar; his interests are long-standing and sincere. He is constantly questioning the world around him and follows up with active, creative and independent research.

During the ECYC Summer Melt 2020 Program Tony helped to recruit new high school seniors to College Advising and the Ambassador Program 2021. Tony is committed to education not only for himself, but helps other students have opportunities.
Tony is one of those rare students who has not only overcome incredible hardships during his life, but realizes the importance of making a difference, no matter where he finds himself. Tony shares his story with grace and humility. Tony is the refugee example of perseverance without rancor. We work with students with difficult stories from all over the world. Tony stands out in that group, as well as here in the United States.

Tony and his family spent the better part of their lives dealing with shooting, shelling, bombing, disease, family separation and death. His family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo and then waited almost six years in Uganda to come to Colorado. They continued throughout this time to believe that their long road would lead to a better life. Now that he is here, he is making it count, every day.

"I am learning to share hope to the people who have lost it because of the circumstances that they are in. I was there. I saw it and felt it. There is a better, brighter, and safer future at the end of the tunnel."

Tony Bisimwa
Michelle Lasnier, a longtime volunteer with the African Community Center, planned to open Ruby’s Market in Platt Park in March of 2020. The artisan bazaar, which grew from a market booth she initially ran for ACC, would sell handcrafted goods, art, and food from members of the local refugee and immigrant community. But when COVID-19 halted commerce across the city, the very vendors she was partnering with were suddenly out of work, unsure of how they would continue to support their families. Michelle responded by transforming Ruby’s Market into an emergency supply pantry.

Together with ACC and Lutheran Family Services (LFS), Ruby's Market recruited volunteers to get much-needed supplies to the community. The initial need was so great that in the first week, Michelle had to completely restock with supplies three separate times. By December 2020, emergency pantry volunteers had delivered $84,435 in food and toiletries to 176 refugee and immigrant families--a total of 503 people!
By partnering with Ruby's Market, ACC and LFS have been able to get supplies to community members relatively quickly. ACC compiles lists of families in need, and coordinates distributions of high-need items such as diapers and household cleaning supplies, which are not covered by food stamps. Each package also contains important health and safety information, as well as details about other nearby food pantries, in the appropriate language. Volunteers bring the supplies directly to each family's home; they call when they arrive and leave the packages outside their front doors. Throughout the last year, ACC has coordinated deliveries of perishable foods as well, and when the ongoing health situation prevented ACC from hosting its annual Refugee First Thanksgiving celebration, Thanksgiving meals were delivered to families, too!

"I care about this community. Food — it's just a bridge between cultures. Getting a package, even if you're not talking to the person who drops it off, helps you know you're loved, and you know we're wanting you to be taken care of."

Michelle Lasnier
ACC's Impact in Stories

We Made This

Written by: Tarsha Miller, We Made This Program Lead

COVID-19 lockdowns presented both challenges and opportunities for We Made This, an integration program for refugees that provides 12-week introductory and intermediate level sewing classes, psychosocial development and art therapy, and economic opportunity through hands-on production. Following the suspension of in-person programming in March 2020, We Made This participants quickly pivoted to mask design and production, working in partnership with other regional artisans and the Colorado Hospital Association to provide masks to rural hospitals throughout the state. By the summer, seven participants successfully graduated from the program, and since then, We Made This staff have since continued to provide sewing training and social connection opportunities through an innovative asynchronous online platform.
ECYC's Ambassador Workshop concluded at the end of March. This annual program was held entirely on Zoom this year. Although we missed seeing students in person each week, we still had a wonderful ten-week workshop! Each Thursday from January 14th through March 18th, students met to participate in workshops on building leadership skills, conflict resolution, communication, public speaking, and bias awareness.

This year 19 students graduated from the Ambassador program and were each awarded a $1,000 scholarship to the school of their choice. Students also had the opportunity to apply for the Ambassador Scholarship, a full-ride needs-based scholarship to any college in the state of Colorado. The winner of this scholarship will be announced in May!

We are so proud of each of our students and are excited for them to pursue their future plans!
ACC welcomed 178 new community members in FY 2020, and served a total of 1,239 community members!
129 volunteers worked over 7,500 hours providing direct service, along with 24 First Friends serving 81 newly-arrived refugees.

**ACC's Impact in Numbers**

$3,700 in Uber rides for community member appointments to required services like doctors, Social Security, and intensive case management.

100 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) applications serving 245 people; 64 Low-Income Energy Assistance (LEAP) applications serving 166 people.

Individual donations directed toward emergency assistance totaled $132,570.92, and the value of total in-kind donations provided for new arrivals was $40,348.

Over 130 initial unemployment benefits applications, with ongoing biweekly filings, gig unemployment and stimulus eligibility assistance.

Emergency rental assistance for families who had lost employment amounted to more than $47,300.

129 volunteers worked over 7,500 hours providing direct service, along with 24 First Friends serving 81 newly-arrived refugees.

**193 Jobs Secured**

**$15.03 Average Starting Hourly Wage**

**92.6% of jobs were retained for at least 90 days from start date**
ACC Denver is a branch of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC). Reception and placement activities that ACC conducts are paid for, in part, through financial assistance provided by the Department of State through ECDC. ACC also receives funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Offices of Refugee Resettlement via ECDC and the Colorado Refugee Services Program, a division of the Colorado Department of Human Services.

Due to the FY 2020 Presidential Determination, as well as to the travel restrictions put in place during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there was a drastic reduction in U.S. refugee admissions, which has a direct impact on resettlement budgets.
2020 Events

1st Annual Run for Refugees

While COVID-19 upended ACC's in-person events, it provided an opportunity to get creative with our approach to community involvement! In lieu of our annual gala, ACC raised funds in October 2020 by hosting a virtual 5K run/walk, the first annual Run for Refugees. Together with ECDC headquarters in Virginia, ACC supporters ran in the location of their choosing (some participants were as far away as the UK and Germany!) to show support for ACC and for continued refugee resettlement. The second annual Run for Refugees is coming up in June 2021--we hope you'll join us!
Get Involved!

Volunteer
Donate
Intern
Advocate
Sponsor a Family
Become a First Friend
Run for Refugees

Find opportunities on our website:
www.acc-den.org
Thank you to our donors!

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and many more foundations, organizations, companies, and individuals.

You make our work possible.

Thank you!
The African Community Center of Denver is a program of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization engaged in social service, humanitarian, and educational activities.