



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Together We Build Belonging.



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A note from our Founder

Elena's Light was created when I arrived in Connecticut with almost nothing and saw how difficult it was for other families starting over.

I built this organization to make the path easier, uplift women, and ensure no one faces resettlement alone.

In 2025, as uncertainty and pressure continued to grow for refugee and immigrant communities across Connecticut, our commitment remained steady. We worked to sustain our core programs while responding to new needs in ESL, community health, advocacy, and legal navigation.

Through partnerships with resettlement agencies, universities, health systems, and local organizations, we helped women build confidence in daily tasks, reduce isolation, and access opportunities with dignity. We also advanced our research engagement work to ensure community voices guide real solutions. This work is possible because of our staff, volunteers, interns, supporters, and the families who trust us.

Thank you for standing with us. It means the world.

Founder & Executive Director



Our Story

Inspired by her journey as a refugee from Afghanistan, Fereshteh has dedicated her career to advancing education, health, and empowerment for immigrant families. Under her leadership, Elena's Light has provided vital support and opportunities to underserved women and children.



Vision

We envision a community that respects and celebrates diversity and provides equity of opportunity to all members.



Mission

Our Mission is to help build brighter futures for refugee and immigrant women and children.





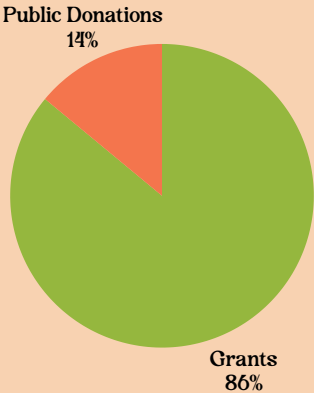
Financials

In 2025, Elena’s Light received \$261,065 in financial support, including \$224,981 in grants and \$36,084 in donations.

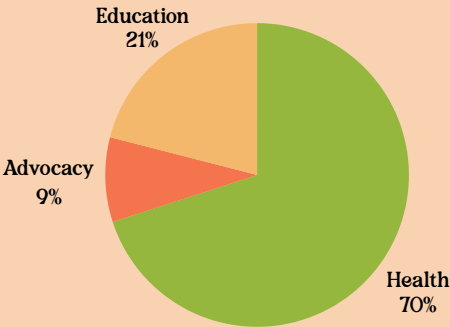
Of our total expenses, 81% supported program services, 17% supported essential administration, and 2% supported marketing and outreach.

Health initiatives represented our largest area of investment, followed by our English program and advocacy efforts.

Where our funding came from



How our funds were used to serve clients





Board of Directors



Jaden Harris
Board Chair



Dr. Tricia
Ryan



Dr. Alaaddin
Ibrahimy



Dr. Trudy
Milburn



Naveed Saifi



Ben Haldeman



Leslie Koons



Dr. Chris Rominger



Lina Rozbih

Advisory Panel



- Dr. Preethi Varghese-Joseph
- Dr. Camille Brown
- Marta Moret
- Nooreen Reza
- Atafa Tajik
- Ahmed M. Badr
- Dr. Julia Rosenberg

Team Leads

- Rishika Khanna
- Melanie Torres
- Alev Baysoy
- Nishah Jaferi
- Rebekah Sookdeo
- Sahar Hareer
- Yuanyu Chen
- Fereshteh Ganjavi



*40 incredible interns joined our team from
35 universities including Yale, UConn,
University of New Haven, SCSU, UCLA, Brown,
NYU, Harvard, and Boston University.*



ESL Program

Our ESL curriculum is customized based on each client's needs, designed for refugee and immigrant women who have recently arrived in the United States with little or no English proficiency.

Delivered virtually, our one-on-one lessons do more than teach English.

They reduce isolation, foster connections, and strengthen students' confidence, supporting their mental well-being and long-term success.

As we continue to grow, our curriculum evolves alongside the women we serve, guided by the belief that learning English is about more than language; it's about creating connection and opening doors to new opportunities.



- 72 students educated
- 66 volunteer ESL tutors
- 7,000+ hours of one-on-one instruction



- 20% of student found jobs after graduation
- Nearly all students reported increased confidence

Permit Prep Course

This course prepares students for the Connecticut DMV permit test and driving exam.

Our 7-week DMV Permit program are taught in English, Pashto, and Dari, creating a supportive space where every woman can learn, ask questions, and move forward without fear.



- 100% passed the practice test scoring 90% on average
- 28 women completed the program, through 28 lessons
- Our Spring cohort was made possible in partnership with Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services
 - Our Fall cohort was made possible with an anonymous sponsor

Advocacy

Our advocacy work in 2025 focused on ensuring that families have the knowledge, visibility, and support needed to navigate life in CT with confidence.



Through our efforts, we:

- *Strengthened access to legal education and resources*
- *Engaged policymakers at local and national levels*
- *Created platforms for immigrant and refugee voices to be heard*

Since launching in 2021, our Know Your Rights Series has become a cornerstone of our advocacy work.



In 2025, we expanded this initiative through a series of 6 online sessions developed in partnership with local lawyers and nonprofit organizations.



- *Over 400 participants attended or watched recorded sessions*
- *Programs were delivered in Arabic, Pashto, and Dari, tailored to the needs of our clients*
- *Topics included legal rights, navigating systems, and community resources*

Kabul Press Conference

In 2025, Elena's Light hosted a press conference reflecting on the ongoing impact of the Fall of Kabul, bringing together over 30 community members, local leaders, and advocates.

The event created an important space for visibility, dialogue, and public awareness around the challenges facing Afghan and refugee communities.

Elected officials, including Senator Richard Blumenthal and Mayor Justin Elicker, joined community voices to highlight the urgency of continued commitment to welcome refugees, especially Special Immigrant Visa holders.



Health



Refugee families often face significant health challenges due to cultural, linguistic, and structural barriers that limit access to healthcare. Engaging refugee communities in research initiatives is essential to addressing these challenges effectively.

In collaboration with faculty at the Yale School of Medicine, we are leading a project funded through the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI).

This project seeks to improve healthcare access by fostering partnerships between refugees, researchers, and clinicians to develop patient-centered comparative clinical effectiveness research.



Youth Programs



Our Speaker Series was created to spread awareness and shed light on the positive advocacy work done in the community.

This year, we introduced a new initiative called the Youth Speaker Series. In collaboration with the Youth Speakers Lab, we created a curriculum that coaches sixteen students (K-12) to share their own stories and become confident public speakers.



Community-Led Impact



Lighting the Future Awards Ceremony

The Lighting the Future Awards Ceremony honors individuals making a difference in Connecticut's immigrant communities who are building a more inclusive future where everyone can thrive.

Hygiene Donation Drives

Our health and donation teams collaborated to distribute essential household and hygiene items to families across New Haven.

These drives help families meet immediate needs and reduce financial strain during resettlement.



In 2025, we hosted six donation drives to serve 1,000+ refugees and immigrants.



Get Involved

Together, we can ensure that every refugee family in Connecticut receives the support, stability, and opportunity they deserve.

Your partnership helps refugee families find safety, connection, and opportunity in Connecticut.

Donate

Your contribution today builds the next steps of our work.

Visit elenaslight.org to make a donation.

Volunteer

We're always excited to add more volunteers to help us welcome refugee families.

Visit elenaslight.org/volunteer to apply.



Thanks to our Partners:





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