

# 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY REPORT

## PART ONE

WHY AND WHAT WE ARE DOING TO DATE

support for *“the beautiful game”*

### It Starts with the Shoes, Inc.

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## About *It Starts with the Shoes, Inc.*

### Introduction

In 2014 Jim Frank reached Withrow High School in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio to volunteer his time assisting the soccer coaching staff. He specifically chose this high school for its socio-economically disadvantaged student population.

Unbeknownst to Jim, the Withrow Head Coach for men's soccer at that time had already started a campaign to even the playing field for the players. Most of the players in the soccer program were and continue to be foreign born kids arriving in the US to escape from war-torn nations, violence-riddled countries, political persecution, or areas impacted by natural disasters.

Initially, the coaches had to adjust player substitution strategies based on shoe sizes shared among similar sized players. To not endure this dilemma again, a campaign to reach out for funding and/or shoe donations began. And it was successful, garnering enough to outfit the team with much needed equipment, uniforms, and personal gear for each player. The personal gear included PREVIOUSLY WORN shoes.

Initially, the used shoes were perceived as a great gift to solve the substitution issue and to provide players with the necessary equipment to be competitive. However, the used shoes created unanticipated stress on the players' lower extremities due to the shoes being shaped to the feet and gait of the previous owners/wearers.

Not wanting to endure another season where players became unnecessarily fatigued, the coaches implemented a voluntary off-seasoning conditioning and training program for the players.

So, with Coach Jim and the players committing so much time and effort to the program, the weakest link to success was no longer player commitment. It was the quality of shoes necessary to endure such a season-long commitment from each player.

As such, ***It Starts with the Shoes, Inc.*** was created to address these immediate and reoccurring needs with the hopes of growing beyond one school, one school district, one community or one region. It became OUR mission.

## Background

Since 2014, the year Coach Jim began volunteering, the United States has received the arrivals of 509,670 refugees per The Department of Homeland Security's 2023 Yearbook report on the flow of refugees and asylees. Of these, 21% have been from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 16% from Burma (Myanmar), 12% from Iraq, nearly 9% from Syria, and slightly more than 8% from Somalia. These five countries are just five of the more than seventy different nationalities that have been admitted to the United States in the last 10 years.

50% of all refugees and asylees were relocated in one of ten states with Ohio being one of them. Slightly more than 4% of refugees and asylees have been relocated to Ohio since 2014, which is approximately 20,000 individuals. The primary nationalities of the migrants relocated to Ohio include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Eritrea, Afghanistan, and Burma (Myanmar). These groups were placed in one of five counties, Cuyahoga (Cleveland), Franklin (Columbus), Hamilton (Cincinnati), Montgomery (Dayton), and Summit (Akron). These counties were selected for refugee and asylee resettlement due to their ability to provide essential support and services to help integrate refugees and asylees into their new communities.

Over the past decade, Southwest Catholic Charities and Refugee Connect have resettled and supported refugees and asylees in Cincinnati, Ohio from a diverse range of countries. Some countries of origin include:

1. **Democratic Republic of the Congo:** Many refugees have fled ongoing conflict and instability.
2. **Bhutan:** Particularly those of Nepali descent, resettled after years in refugee camps in Nepal.
3. **Syria:** Due to the Syrian civil war, many Syrians have found new homes in Cincinnati.
4. **Eritrea:** Eritrean refugees have been resettled in the area, often fleeing political persecution.
5. **Afghanistan:** Fleeing violence and instability in their home country.
6. **Burma (Myanmar):** Including ethnic minorities such as the Karen and Rohingya.
7. **Rwanda:** Many Rwandans have resettled in Cincinnati due to past conflicts and ongoing challenges.
8. **Vietnam:** Vietnamese refugees have been resettled in the area, often fleeing political persecution.

These countries represent some of the primary sources of refugees and asylees in Cincinnati. However, they are far from the only immigrants in need of support in our communities.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, some socio-economically distressed non-refugee and non-asylee immigrant populations include:

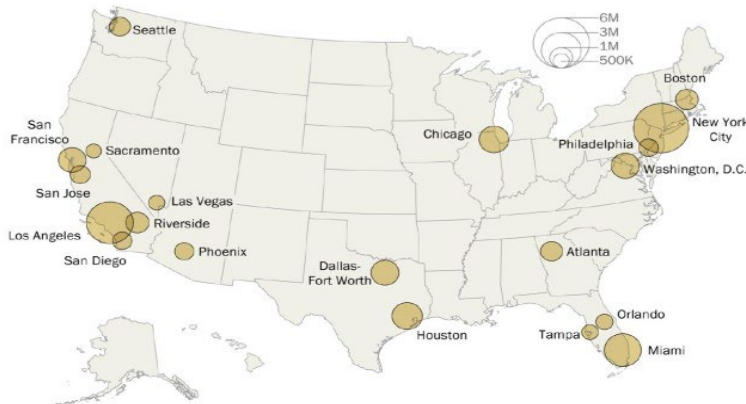
1. **Hispanic/Latino Immigrants:** Many face challenges such as language barriers, limited access to education, and employment opportunities. Nationalities include:
  1. Mexican,
  2. Guatemalan,
  3. Honduran,
  4. Salvadoran and
  5. Nicaraguan
2. **African Immigrants:** Immigrants from various African countries often encounter difficulties in finding stable employment and affordable housing. Nationalities include:
  1. Somali,
  2. Congolese,
  3. Eritrean,
  4. Sudanese and
  5. Liberian
3. **Asian Immigrants:** Certain Asian immigrant groups, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, may struggle with integration and access to resources. Nationalities include:
  1. Bhutanese,
  2. Burmese,
  3. Vietnamese,
  4. Nepalese, and
  5. Cambodian
4. **Middle Eastern Immigrants:** Immigrants from Middle Eastern countries may face socio-economic challenges, including discrimination and limited access to services. Nationalities include:
  1. Syrian,
  2. Iraqi,
  3. Afghan,
  4. Yemeni, and
  5. Iranian

These refugee, asylee and immigrant populations often require additional support and resources to overcome socio-economic barriers and achieve stability in their new communities.

If these refugee and asylee population numbers seem small, it is because they are relative to the total number of immigrants in the United States. As of 2024, 48 million immigrants now reside in the United States. Many of these at-need immigrants had the good life in their home countries, many attended private schools, owned land, and had professional certifications. But political unrest, ethnic conflicts and uprisings forced many with means to flee, leaving everything behind.



Once in the United States, many realized their professional certifications did not translate to equitable qualifications for similar jobs in the United States, further creating a need for assistance. Federal benefits and aid are not provided to these new immigrants until they have maintained their LPR status for five years. LPR refers to Lawful Permanent Resident. This has resulted in state and local governments adapting and adjusting resources to handle the emerging influx of “international migration.”



Of the 48 million immigrants in the United States, nearly 10 million are unauthorized. ([See link](#)) Nearly half of all unauthorized immigrants live in either Texas or California while most of the remaining are living in Florida, New Jersey, Illinois, New York North Carolina, Georgia, Washington, and Arizona. [See link](#)

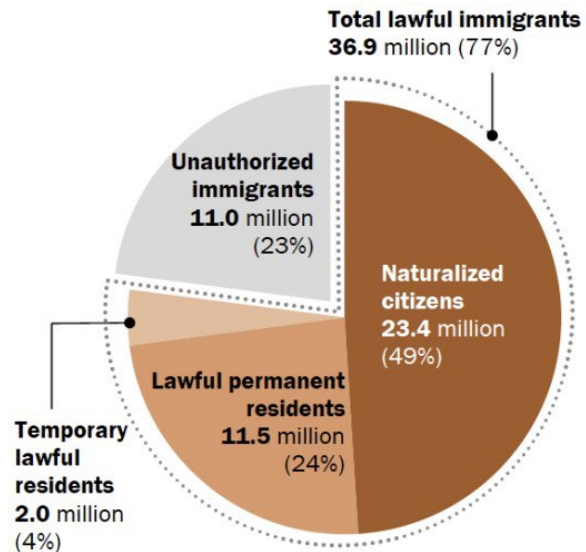
Figure 1: Metropolitan areas with the largest number of immigrants

Nearly one third of the 10 million unauthorized immigrants have permission to live and work in the United States and are temporarily protected from deportation. These three million unauthorized immigrants had at least one of these temporary legal protections:

1. **Temporary Protected Status (TPS):** About 650,000 immigrants have TPS. TPS is offered to individuals who cannot safely return to their home country because of civil unrest, violence, natural disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions.
2. **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA):** Almost 600,000 immigrants have DACA. DACA is offered to individuals brought to the U.S. as children before 2007 to remain.
3. **Asylum Applicants:** About 1.6 million immigrants have pending applications for asylum in the U.S. because of dangers faced in their home country. These immigrants can stay in the U.S. legally until they wait for a decision on their cases.
4. **Other Protections:** About 200,000 immigrants applied for special visas to become lawful immigrants as part of protection from human trafficking and other criminal activities.
5. **Recent Activity:** About 500,000 immigrants arrived under the protection of programs such as Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) and CHNV Parole (CHNV) which protects people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

Most of the immigrants (77%) are in the country legally. Between 1990 and 2007, the unauthorized population more than tripled in size from 3.5 million, and since then has remained steady averaging around eleven million. Current immigrant status is as follows:

1. 49% - Naturalized Citizens
2. 24% - Lawful Permanent Resident
3. 4% - Legal Temporary Resident
4. 23% - Unauthorized Immigrant



The top countries of birth for immigrants living in the U.S. are as follows:

1. Mexico at 10.6 million (4 million unauthorized)
  - a. representing 23% of all immigrants
2. India at 2.8 million (725,000 unauthorized)
  - a. representing 6% of all immigrants
3. China at 2.5 million
  - a. Representing 5% of all immigrants
4. Philippines at 2.0 million
  - a. Representing 4% of all immigrants
5. El Salvador at 1.4 million (750,000 unauthorized)
  - a. Representing 3% of all immigrants

The top regions of birth for immigrants living in the U.S. are as follows:

1. Asia 28%
2. Mexico 23%
3. Latin America
  - a. Caribbean 10%
  - b. Central America 9%
  - c. South America 9%
4. Europe 12%
5. Africa 5%
6. Middle East 4%

In Cincinnati there are 107,660 immigrant residents which represents 4.9% of the total Cincinnati Metro area population. These immigrants paid \$1.2 billion in taxes and represent \$2.9 billion in local spending power. Between 2020 and 2024, immigrants represented 98% of the population growth in the Cincinnati Metropolitan area. Per the Census Bureau, “Net international migration” was the primary population growth driver in metro Cincinnati. According to the George W. Bush Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio ranked number ten in the country for their immigrant-welcoming initiatives. Such welcoming initiatives include:

1. **Policies that expand opportunities:** Quality schools and universities; great environment for starting and building businesses; and housing supply growth and affordability.
2. **Policies that improve communications:** clear messaging from local leaders, dedicated information resources for immigrants; welcoming approaches in schools; support for foreign-born job seekers and entrepreneurs; clear pathways to naturalization and voting; and legal assistance.
3. **High Impact policies to help immigrants thrive:** English language programs; pathways to transfer foreign training and credentials; and refugee resettlement assistance.

The Cincinnati areas and the primary nationalities that have resettled there are as follows:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Westwood</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Mali</li> <li>b. Burkina Faso</li> <li>c. Senegal</li> <li>d. Cote’ d’Ivoire</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <b>Covington</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Guatemala</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. <b>East Price Hill</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Guatemala</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. <b>North College Hill</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Bhutan</li> <li>b. DR Congo</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. <b>Boone County</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Bhutan</li> <li>b. DR Congo</li> </ol> </li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. <b>Villa Hills</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Burma<br/>(Myanmar)</li> </ol> </li> <li>7. <b>North Fairmont</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Burundi</li> <li>b. Tanzania</li> <li>c. DR Congo</li> </ol> </li> <li>8. <b>Florence</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ethiopia</li> <li>b. Somalia</li> </ol> </li> <li>9. <b>S. Cumminsville</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Eritrea</li> </ol> </li> <li>10. <b>Lockland</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Mauritania</li> <li>b. Guatemala</li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
|---|---|

In 2024 alone, Lockland added 3000 Mauritians to its existing population of 3500 residents, further taxing community resources. The plight of the Mauritians in Lockland seems at odds with the notion that immigrants have \$2.9 billion in local spending power.

The recent arrival of the Mauritians is just that, recent arrivals. These immigrants must go through the arduous, time-consuming process of obtaining their LPR status which may take as long as five years, thus delaying federal assistance.

The reason there has been an increase in migration from West Africa and specifically Mauritania to Lockland is because knowledge of a new route through Nicaragua has spread across social media platforms. This route has become popular due to relaxed entry requirements in Nicaragua, allowing Mauritians to purchase low-cost visas without proof of onward travel. On January 23, 2025, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Benjamin C. Hoffman ended his memorandum titled *"Finding of Mass Influx of Aliens"*, with this statement:

*"I further find that an actual or imminent mass influx of aliens arriving at the southern border of the United States presents urgent circumstances requiring an immediate federal response. I, therefore, request the assistance of State and Local Government of all 50 states."*

This statement is more about state and local governments assisting the Federal Government in stemming the influx of immigrants, not necessarily supporting them once they arrive. Stemming the flow while we work to improve the quality of support is a start.

However, many Mauritians are fleeing state violence directed against Black citizens as tensions have escalated since the death of a young Black man, Oumar Diop, while in police custody, leading to aggressive government actions to crush protests. Mauritians have since fled their country, and are desperate to urgently resettle for this and several other reasons related to severe human rights abuses and socio-political issues:

1. **Ethnic Cleansing and Persecution:** Black Mauritians face ethnic cleansing and persecution. The government aims to create an Arab-dominated state, leaving Black Mauritians with limited rights and opportunities.
2. **Slavery and Apartheid:** Mauritania has one of the highest rates of slavery in the world. Black Mauritians are often subjected to slavery and apartheid-like conditions.
3. **Statelessness:** Many Black Mauritians who have lived abroad for decades are rendered stateless upon deportation. They face arrest, jail, and torture upon return.
4. **Economic Hardship:** The country's economic challenges and lack of opportunities drive many to seek better lives elsewhere.

Mauritians are not alone in their exodus toward the United States as evident in the Cincinnati communities with growing diverse international populations.



Each nationality has their own unique reason for fleeing their country, and for the U.S. Federal Government to sort through each of the reasons, ascertain and confirm these regional conflicts in all corners of the globe, has proven to be a time-consuming and arduous process resulting in a large backlog within the court immigration system.

Families arriving to the United States need immediate aid to assimilate to the norms of living in our communities. However, the assistance from the Federal Government is delayed pending approval of Lawful Permanent Resident Status.

Aid to individual families is not perpetual. Many of these families, once assimilated, begin contributing to the economy. It is estimated that foreign-born workers have paid an estimated \$405 billion annually in federal taxes, \$104 billion in state and local taxes and contributed an estimated \$13 billion to Social Security since 2017.

For families, the assistance delay affects the youth more. These five-year LPR delays can span entire high school tenures, creating added stress to immigrant families during a pivotal period in youth development. Nearly 40% of the 48 million immigrants are under the age of 18. There are approximately nineteen million children who have an immigrant parent, nine million of which are citizen children with non-citizen parents.

Cincinnati has several non-profits dedicated to assisting immigrants. Some notable ones:

1. **Cincinnati Compass:** This organization connects immigrant and international communities with resources and opportunities across the Cincinnati region. They focus on workforce development, small business support, social services, and more.
2. **RefugeeConnect:** They work to connect refugees with resources and support services to help them integrate into the community.
3. **Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio:** They provide a range of services to immigrants and refugees, including resettlement assistance, legal services, and community support.
4. **Su Casa Hispanic Center:** A program of Catholic Charities, Su Casa offers services to the Hispanic/Latino community, including education, health services, and advocacy.
5. **It Starts with the Shoes:** This organization initially provided shoes for high school-aged soccer players whose barriers to participate are/were the lack of appropriate equipment. The organization has grown to provide not just shoes, but also training, nutrition, transportation, and guidance to players and their families, often directing them to support services such as RefugeeConnect, LeSoupe, the Immigrant & Refugee Law Center or Valley Interfaith Community Resource Center.

These organizations play a crucial role in supporting immigrants and helping them build new lives in Cincinnati.

Coach Jim's connection to the immigrant community is firsthand and familiar. Seeing students on a near weekly basis, year-round, for the last decade has given him insight into the trials and tribulations and ebbs and flows of these immigrant families as they acclimate to our communities and, for some, navigate their way toward citizenship.

The variation of immigrant populations that Coach Jim has seen in Cincinnati, Ohio is in direct relation to the humanitarian emergencies seen around the world. Each wave of new immigrant populations that arrived in area schools can be attributed to corresponding worldwide human catastrophes and natural disasters. Most high school immigrants Coach Jim has seen since 2014 have been predominately African or Central American because of ongoing violence or civil war in these areas. However, occasionally, political persecution or natural disasters will result in a different group of immigrant arrivals.

These groups may be the Nepalese forced to resettle in 2015 due to earthquakes and the resulting mudslides, or the those from Myanmar in 2017 due to the persecution of the Rohingya people. Additionally, in 2019 the Syrians began arriving due to the genocidal behavior of the regime, and in 2020 the Tigray War forced Eritreans and Ethiopians to resettle elsewhere. Here are some of the worldwide humanitarian conflicts and natural disasters since 2013 that have led to immigration resettlements.

### 2013

- **Syria:** Continued conflict and siege warfare.
- **Central African Republic:** Sectarian violence
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Violence and gang activity
- **Philippines:** Typhoon Haiyan

### 2014

- **South Sudan:** Ongoing Civil War
- **Ukraine:** Conflict in Eastern Ukraine
- **Mexico:** Northern Triangle border violence and poverty
- **Serbian/Bosnia/Croatia:** Flooding in the Balkans

### 2015

- **Yemen:** Widespread escalated conflict
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Violence and poverty
- **Nepal:** Earthquake and landslides

## 2016

- **Syria:** Continued conflict and siege warfare
- **Nigeria:** Boko Haram insurgency
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Violence and poverty
- **Haiti:** Hurricane Mathew

## 2017

- **Myanmar:** Rohingya crisis
- **Somalia:** Conflict, drought, and food insecurity
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Continued violence and poverty
- **Caribbean:** Hurricane Harvey, Irma, and Maria

## 2018

- **Venezuela:** Economic and political collapse
- **DR Congo:** Ongoing conflict and Ebola outbreak
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Continued violence and economic challenges
- **Indonesia:** The Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami

## 2019

- **Syria:** Continued conflict
- **Yemen:** Ongoing conflict
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Persistent violence and poverty
- **Mozambique/Zimbabwe/Malawi:** Cyclone Idai

## 2020

- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** Global healthcare crisis
- **Ethiopia:** Conflict in the Tigray region
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Persistent violence and poverty
- **Australia:** Bush fires

## 2021

- **Afghanistan:** US withdrawal and Taliban takeover
- **Haiti:** Earthquake and political instability
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Continued violence and economic instability
- **St. Vincent and the Grenadines:** La Soufriere Volcano eruption

## 2022

- **Ukraine:** Russian invasion
- **Ethiopia/Eritrea:** Continued conflict in the Tigray region
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Continued violence and economic instability
- **Pakistan:** Flooding

## 2023

- **Sudan:** Conflict and political instability
- **Syria:** Continued conflict and siege warfare
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Continued violence and economic instability
- **Malawi:** Cyclone Freddy, widespread flooding, and landslides

## 2024

- **Gaza:** Conflict and political instability
- **Myanmar:** Continued conflict and intentional displacement
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Continued violence and economic instability
- **Somalia:** Conflict, drought, and food insecurity

## 2025

- **Gaza:** Conflict and political instability
- **Honduras/El Salvador/Guatemala:** Continued violence and economic instability

As evident in the list above, preventing conflicts and disasters that cause migration, and resettlement is an arduous task that will not end any time soon. What we can do here in Cincinnati, however, is tend to these new arrivals and simultaneously repair our ailing communities by developing self-sustaining enclaves or havens that provide the needed support, infrastructure and amenities for immigrants and ailing communities to both thrive.

This proposal aims to establish funding platforms that address removing obstacles for student athletes and immigrant families while revitalizing communities in need of economic redevelopment. Coach Jim's distinctive blend of professional expertise and philanthropic efforts positions him uniquely to conceptualize and implement a solution that offers a civic response to the population growth challenges in Cincinnati. A thorough understanding of the history of ISWTS and its beneficiaries will assist donors in appreciating the legitimacy and future potential of these platform initiatives.

## Beneficiaries

Coach Jim did not intend to become immersed in Cincinnati's immigrant community when he began his foray in to high school sports. He simply chose to offer his experience and talents to those who otherwise could not afford such guidance.

Upon receiving the word that his soccer assistance would be welcomed, Coach Jim met then Withrow Coach Tyler Barrott on the grass soccer fields in what Coach Jim refers to as the back forty for his first day of training along with several other first time volunteer coaches. Initially, he thought the players' confusion was due to the unfamiliarity of coach speak or soccer lingo. Coach Jim would take the players who appeared confused aside and explain things in simpler terms and quickly realized that the English language comprehension was the primary barrier, not just the jargon. It was then that Coach Jim, at 50 years of age, realized he would need to rely on his forty plus years of playing experience to augment his verbal instructions with physical demonstrations. The need to demonstrate while coaching was a perfect fit for Coach Jim and the student-athletes who comprised of various levels of English language understanding. Having a new audience in which to demonstrate his soccer skills brought new energy to Coach Jim's soccer passion. The more frequently he demonstrated, the better his game improved. So, in helping others, Coach Jim helped himself and returned to playing soccer for seven more years, until the age of fifty-seven, in a Men's Over-30 League. During these seven years, Coach Jim had the opportunity to inform the soccer community, neighbors, family, friends, educators, and colleagues of the plight of high school aged immigrants in the city of Cincinnati. Here are some of their personal stories as experienced by Coach Jim.

*Note: The names of student athletes in these stories have been changed to maintain their anonymity.*

### ABDOUAMA

Abdouama was in his junior year in school when I met him. He was excited and eager to tell me what he wanted to do in America. I sensed that he did not have many people willing to listen to him as he often spoke in a hurried stutter when speaking English. He had mentioned to me that he was a much stronger player in his home country of Cote d'Ivoire. He was having difficulty adjusting to the turf and speed of the game as it was much different than the dirt fields on which he played growing up.

When I met Abdouama, he had just received a used, "new to him," pair of soccer cleats and we were three weeks away from the first match of the season. At this point in Coach Jim's tenure, all practices were on grass fields, but matches were played on the turf field.



After the first game, Abdouama complained of sore lower legs, and I replied that playing on turf will take some getting used to. As the season wore on, the complaints continued, and his play suffered. Weeks passed, and Abdouama's lower leg pains persisted to the point he reluctantly asked not to play in a game where the team was already suffering from low roster numbers. Upon arrival to support the team from the bench, he saw the low roster numbers and offered to play. After the game, he was in so much pain that he asked to be taken to the doctors. I said, "call your parents." He said his father was working out of state multiple time zones away on a long-term job assignment, and his mother was working the evening shift while his younger brother was home watching their youngest sister.

So off to urgent care we went since he was in such acute pain. We checked in and waited for the hospital staff to call. When it was determined that Abdouama was not yet eighteen, he could not authorize his own treatment, and nor could I. We had the nurses call his mother at work, but had to wait for a translator to arrive since his mother did not speak English. A French translator was called in on the assumption that those from Cote d'Ivoire spoke French. She spoke truly little French. The translator spoke in French to her and what little she understood, she became frantic, assuming the worst. Abdouama heard his mother's anguish through the phone and spoke to her in Dioula, their cultural language. Abdouama relayed her approval for treatment, but the care center could not except the translation via a minor, so no treatment was provided, but an informal diagnosis stated it may be shin-splints and suggested rest. A devout Muslim, Abdouama openly prayed for his own healing during his five daily Islamic Adhan calls for prayer.

A few days after Abdouama's hospital visit, I invited my son to come watch me play indoor soccer, and as it turned out we were short players, so I asked him to play. Unprepared to play soccer, my son borrowed my extra pair of soccer shoes. Immediately after the game, he complained of sore shins and said to me, "your shoes are wacked!"

I soon learned more than I needed to know about supination and pronation of the feet and ankles. My wife and son had pronation, while I had supination. As a result, when my son wore my shoes broken in to my supinated gait, it created extreme discomfort when he wore them with his pronated feet. This was the Ah-Ha moment! Is this what ailed Abdouama? Thereafter, ISWTS only accepted new or slightly worn used shoes.

Abdouama became the first recipient of ISWTS shoes. After a brief period of rest and gradually resuming training with running shoes, I procured a new pair of soccer shoes for Abdouama. He then resumed full training and participated in games, finishing the season without pain in his shins. His teammates and coaches unanimously voted him as the Most Improved Player of the Year. The impact of a new pair of shoes on Abdouama's performance and confidence was significant.

## KHARY

I met Khary during my first year of coaching and he was already a senior. He was a talented player, always smiling and with real speed. He had a great attitude and always asked questions about how to get better at the outside midfielder position. I instructed him that if he retreated to his defensive position when his teammates turned the ball over, that would make him a great teammate. Soon, he started complaining that all he was doing was running up and down the pitch.

I asked him how he should fix that problem. He said that he needed his teammates to be more deliberate with their possessions. “Exactly,” I said, “tell your teammates what happens when they turn the ball over.” I emphasized the frequency of turnovers by yelling “run, Khary, run” or “look at Khary go!” and the team quickly realized how sloppy they had become with their possessions. After graduation, Khary reached out to receive additional training in preparation for a tryout with the upstart USL team, FC Cincinnati. Coach Jim funded Khary’s and others’ tryout fees. Though none of the players made the team, the experience led to Coach Jim’s continued involvement in their post-graduation lives.

## RAMOUD

Ramoud was a first-year student when I met him. Not just any freshman, but quite possibly the smallest 14-year-old I had ever met. Thin, lithe but gregarious. And he had a superpower. He was fluent in several languages, most of which were from the multi-lingual areas of Eritrea. But his English was excellent. Ramoud was able to communicate with me and was very receptive to coaching, and opinionated. He frequently asked, “why are we doing this coach, why can’t we do it this way?” During his sophomore year, he had earned the respect of the upperclassmen for his tough-as-nails playing style despite his size and was nominated to be a team captain for the last few remaining matches. He was a team leader in his junior year, confidently mentoring new arrivals from his country.

## MOHEEN

One such arrival was Moheen, another thin, diminutive Eritrean. Moheen was shy. He mostly understood English when spoken to him, but he lacked the confidence to speak it. He relied on Ramoud for much of his communication. So much so that as coaches, we put Ramoud and Moheen side by side in the back line on the pitch. Hearing the coaches instruct the team and then hearing Ramoud translate immediately improved Moheen’s comprehension confidence. But as hard as we tried, we could not get him to speak in English often. His primary method at getting his point across was with hand gestures and facial expressions. A deeply religious young man, after graduation Moheen chose to become a church leader at his Eritrean Orthodox Church, a church with which I had the unfortunate occasion to become all too familiar by attending two student funerals.

## ZARAH

Zarah was the sister of one of the young men I coached and an avid soccer player herself. She was popular in school among not only the immigrant population, but also the larger school population as well. Zarah had unexpectedly passed away while home alone. Poor access to communication, transportation, and medical care led to a very preventable death for a seemingly healthy young lady. The high school and Eritrean community were devastated.

After the funeral, as Zarah was quickly whisked away and repatriated back to Eritrea, the community gathered in a cultural celebration. The amazing vocal display of grief from the women as a sign of respect toward the family along with the community provided Eritrean food was a unique experience in which I was humbled to be included.

That second funeral? It was Khary's. Khary was shot and killed by his own brother while defending his parents from his brother's drug-fueled rage aided by his proximity to a known neighborhood crack house. So once again, I attended the cultural celebration of life, and my familiarity to them and their customs endeared me to their community. Many elders thanked me for taking the time to spend six hours with their people. I was imbedded in to the immigrant community.

## IRAHABIB

Irahbib was a freshman when I first met him. He was not a part of the soccer team his first year, nor was he his second year. Having seen him hanging around the soccer players, I asked him why he did not play soccer. Irahbib had a growth spurt, and his growth was not limited to his height. He had put on some weight. He was embarrassed but also frustrated. He, too, mentioned how strong of a player he was back in his home country.

His frustration boiled over in the classrooms, affecting his behavior, and further alienating him from others at school. Teachers labeled him a troublemaker with one even going as far as to say if there was ever a mass-casualty incident, Irahbib would likely be the cause. I doubled down on my outreach toward him. Family commitments also limited his availability to participate in sports. I encouraged him to come when he could and that we would get him eligible to play.

He finally attended a training session. He clearly displayed the necessary talent to compete but lacked the stamina and fitness to be effective for any extended period in a match. Overtime, we came to the decision that he would be our super-sub. We would put him into the match at a point where his size and skill were needed for a brief period of time. Typically, these would be for defending or executing set piece free kicks and the immediate

aftermath of securing or maintaining possession. Irahbib found purpose, something that had been missing for him.

He finished his junior year and returned for his senior year and fully embraced his role with the team. Irahbib's standing with his family had not changed. He still had commitments to watch his younger siblings while his parents worked, so he participated at practices and training sessions when he could. These family commitments still took priority over games as well. But when he did attend, he knew his role and was actively excited with the anticipation of going into the match every time a referee blew the whistle for an infraction. Here Irahbib was, in a soccer uniform, on the bench, happy, involved, included.

About midway through Irahbib's senior season he suffered a high ankle sprain which ended his senior season. As the season continued, I saw less and less of him, but one Friday I caught up with him and asked how he was doing. He said he was frustrated that he could not rehabilitate his ankle because he did not have the time or access to a stationary bike. He could not use the ones on campus after school because he had to hurry home to watch his younger siblings. Months later, long after the season was over, I ran into Irahbib again, and he was showing signs of deeper frustration. I suggested he needed to find a way to stay active to burn off that pent up energy. I decided to lend him a spinner bike which he took to enthusiastically, as did other members of his family.

One day after he had graduated, he called me feeling a bit down. He asked if I had some time to meet with him. "Of course," I said, "What do you have in mind?" He wanted to talk and maybe get something to eat. I had just the right idea. I picked him up and took him to the marina to go on a boat ride to a riverside café for lunch. The café was just across the river from the marina, but somehow it took three hours to get there as we cruised up the river and back. Me at the helm on the way up, and Irahbib at the helm on the way back. I saw some familiar faces on the river and introduced Irahbib to fellow boaters. I could tell he was in awe and enjoying himself. Eventually, we ended up at the café for lunch, returned the boat, and drove back to his house. As he got out of the car, he turned to me and said, "Thank you Coach, I feel American now."

## DION

Dion was a junior when I first met him. He was a troubled kid, short tempered and always threatening harm to others. His family fled from the violence in DR Congo. Data such as birth certificates and medical records rarely survived rebel raids on hospitals and city halls. So, when Dion arrived in the US without his documentation, Dion was assigned a birth date of January 1 of the year he was born. His family knew he was born in August.

This would later affect his eligibility to play soccer his senior year as he was considered too old based on his assigned birth date. An appeal was filed and after lengthy review rules

were revised to allow his participation. This is the kind of missing documentation that also prevented his parents from immediately obtaining jobs they had certifications to perform, but without the documents, they were unable to prove their competency.

Dion received his early education beneath trees while hiding in the woods to avoid school raids by rebels kidnapping children to convert into child soldiers or brides. Dion, having witnessed these abductions, was influenced by the power of the gun threat. He would mimic these threats in school. Extensive counseling and participating in soccer began to modify his behavior. It is a struggle that Dion continued to deal with well after graduation.

Dion's family was placed in North Fairmont by Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio's resettlement services. The neighborhood had a high crime rate, and gunfire was often heard near Dion's apartment. When discussing this, Dion shared, "Coach, I am scared. I would rather be back in DR Congo."

### SABI

Sabi was a senior when I first met him. Later in his senior year, he experienced an ACL tear that ended his season. The severe injury required an EMT response and transportation to the hospital by ambulance. Sabi's younger sister, who was in the crowd, accompanied him to the hospital. Due to the coaching staff being short on personnel for that game, my attendance was necessary to guide the rest of the team through the remainder of the game and post-game protocols.

As part of the post-game protocols, the coaches were required to stay on campus until all players had been picked up. Many players used the city bus service to travel home after the games. Long game delays, such as the one during which Sabi was injured, caused additional challenges for most players, as these delays resulted in players missing the 9:39 pm bus. The next bus arrived 23 minutes later, which was too late to catch the 10:30 pm bus downtown. Missing the downtown transfer bus often led to players arriving home after 12:30 am. Many of these players, some as young as fourteen, also participated in the school nutrition program. These players needed to wake up at 5:00 am to catch the return bus trip back to school in time to receive breakfast before classes began.

On the night of Sabi's injury, the last player left campus at 10:20 pm, approximately 2.5 hours after Sabi went to the hospital. At 10:30 pm, I informed my wife that I was going to the hospital to check on an injured player. Upon arrival, I requested to see Sabi and was informed that he was still waiting for a parent to arrive. After identifying myself as Sabi's coach and engaging in discussions with the hospital staff, I was eventually allowed to see Sabi in his hospital room. Since his arrival, Sabi's treatment consisted of rest, ice, compression, and elevation (R.I.C.E.). Without being able to contact a parent, Sabi did not receive any medication for pain relief.



I inquired about why a parent had not been contacted, and the hospital staff explained that both parents worked at the same location 30 minutes away, with transportation provided by their employer. The employer did not permit both parents to leave their shifts, did not provide alternative transportation other than the scheduled one after their shift ended, and did not allow the parent to stop work to answer the phone call informing them that their son was in the hospital.

Appalled, I called the employer and offered to pay for transportation. Met with resistance, I explained the severity of their son's injury which did not compel the immigrant-owned company to release Sabi's parents from work even to take the phone call. Not until I suggested that I would call the police to transport Sabi's parents did the owner finally release his parents to take the phone call. The employer eventually, "because I am a good man," he said, offered to provide transportation for Sabi's parents.

While waiting for Sabi's parents to arrive, I asked Sabi and his sister if they had anything to eat. They had not. Now near midnight, and the hospital cafeteria closed, I rushed to McDonalds, bought a dozen hamburgers, and returned in time to be greeted by Sabi's parents. Confused as to why I was offering a bag full of hamburgers, I explained that I was Sabi's coach and that his children had not eaten since 3:30 pm, nine hours earlier, and that there was enough food for the parents too. Soon after, I left Sabi in the care of his parents, and returned home at 1:45 am, a full 12 hours after I left home to pick up the team's pre-game meals.

The summer after Sabi graduated, he reached out to see if I would accompany him to buy a car for his family. I asked why his father could not. He said that although his father was a businessman back in Burundi and Tanzania, he lacked the English skills and the nuances of negotiating with car salesmen. I jokingly said he was not alone, that many Americans also lack the negotiating skills when dealing with car salesmen. As we drove to the used car lot, I informed Sabi that I would not co-sign a loan or provide a down payment. He understood and only wanted me there to guide him through the process.

Sure enough, the car he wanted was called a bait car. It was priced low to get buyers on the lot. When Sabi insisted that that car was all he could afford, the salesman stated that the car literally did not run and had no engine. We turned our eye on another vehicle, and discussed financing, warranties, returns and so forth.

The salesman was reluctant to answer many of the questions we asked. I said, "look, do you want to sell us a car or not?" Looking me square in the eye, his reply was, "I will sell you guys a car; I just won't sell him a car unless you co-sign." The loan amount was for less than \$1000. Sabi was putting 80% down on a very used old car. Sabi and his father bought a car the next weekend elsewhere. Sabi was the only one in his family with a driver's license at the time.

## GARCIA

Garcia participated in soccer sporadically in his four years of high school. Garcia's attendance however was poor at best. Garcia was an American citizen with non-citizen immigrant parents who primarily resided in El Salvador. To be able to stay with family in the United States Garcia had to work for his relative's businesses. This frequently conflicted with his school commitments.

In early 2000's, Garcia's mother visited relatives in Atlanta when she was nine months pregnant with the intention of giving birth while in the United States. This was and continues to be a frequent practice among immigrants to obtain "birthright" citizenship for their children per the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Garcia was raised in El Salvador, then returned to the U.S. for high school. Garcia struggled in high school since his "local" family did not prioritize school but rather emphasized his obligation to work for the family. As such, Garcia's grades suffered to the point that he was ineligible to play his senior year. Once his eligibility was gone, his attendance dropped dramatically. Garcia soon disappeared from school and never graduated. The educators assumed that he began his life as a laborer in trades without a completed high school education.

Hamoud - After three years of living in worn-torn Baba Amr, Syria, Hamoud and his six siblings and parents, fled barefooted from Syria to Jordan under the cover of darkness dressed in black and flanked by Syrian rebels as they escorted them out of the country during the government's siege warfare against its own citizens. While spending two years in Jordanian refugee camps, his family was finally approved for relocation to the U.S. Arrangements took another 16 months before they boarded a plane to Cincinnati.

Once in Cincinnati, Hamoud and his brother enrolled at Withrow. They were adaptive learners, excelled in school. Through the English Language Learning program, Hamoud found out about the Withrow Soccer Program and begged his father to allow him to play. Soon after he joined the team, Hamoud quickly learned the rigors of participating in the soccer program, particularly the late night, (and sometimes early morning) returns home. This schedule upset Hamoud's father and resulted in Hamoud being removed from the team. Hamoud really wanted to stay on the team and asked me to talk to his father.

After a brief discussion about the rigors of the soccer program, we collectively agreed to have Hamoud play on the JV team which would allow him to be done by 7pm, and his father would arrange for someone to pick Hamoud up after the JV game. Hamoud's father believed his children's education was more important than participating in soccer. He frequently repeated the phrase, "Al-ilm yarfa byotan." This loosely translates as "Knowledge raises houses," a common saying in Syria. Hamoud intends to be a dentist.

Dozens of teens and young adults - work for Amazon distribution where employees are locked in and restroom breaks are timed, all under the premise of lost prevention and productivity.

Willem - pursued Bio-Medical Engineering to design prothesis for those whose limbs were severed by rebels in the Burundi conflict.

Yabi, Ibra, Dabou and Sasou - founding organizers of a U-23 Soccer Club

Khalid - 3-sport star, obtained track scholarship to college.

Josef and Luci - siblings accepted into private college.

Mayo - obtained his Class "C" coaching certification.

Javier - works as an assistant restaurant manager.

Mamou - obtained a soccer scholarship to college.

Sanou - works as an associate in a grocery store.

Madu - security staff at a private reform school

Ahmed - works customer service at an airport.

Bari - returned to his native country to marry.

Abi - moved to France to complete college.

Fasi - works as a company IT programmer.

Mboya - coaching at a private high school.

Hassan - moved to France to play soccer.

Mahmoud - became class salutatorian.

Duri - obtained his referee certification.

Seng - moved to Spain to play soccer.

Rashid - police academy candidate.

Nadeen - married a U.S. citizen.

Jamir - married a U.S. citizen.

So many more .....

## Current Impact

Over the past decade, It Starts with the Shoes has made significant impacts on individuals, families, teams, schools, and communities. With an appropriate vision and resources, It Starts with the Shoes can further its influence by addressing the needs of at-risk immigrant communities through an initiative-taking approach to immigration in Southwest Ohio.

Coach Jim has expanded from providing training at one high school to supporting seventeen schools across fourteen districts, five cities, and two states. In the last ten years, ISWTS has estimated that Coach Jim has impacted 1800 teenagers and their families by providing shoes, equipment, nutrition, and training with the help of donors, volunteers, teachers, and other organizations.

The educators involved with ISWTS have played a pivotal role in identifying student needs, guiding students to seek assistance, and advocating for ISWTS by sharing their positive experiences. Additionally, volunteers have also contributed by promoting their involvement with ISWTS. These volunteers include community members, soccer families, teenagers, peers, educators, business leaders, and coaches that have given their time to assist in nutrition acquisition and distribution, shoes and equipment donation drives, soccer skills camp and training, refereeing games, and transporting students home from late games and team activities.

One such volunteer is Megan, a teen student from a nearby private high school that approached Coach Jim with an offer to help. After a brief discussion on what that help could be, Coach Jim asked Megan if she would be able to prepare post-game snack packages for the two schools Coach Jim trains. Megan's efficiency led to increased willingness to do more, and she began to source and acquire the snacks using donated funding. This led to the decision to provide pre-game snacks to the opponents of the two schools Coach Jim was training.

These pre-game snack offerings to the opposing schools became a great introduction of our mission to support those soccer teams in need. Newly aware of our mission, these schools began requesting shoes and invited Coach Jim to assist their young coaching staff with their in-game management on days when distributing shoes to the team's players.

Coach Jim's connection to the soccer community and the community at large has enabled the mission to grow via cash donations and time given. Former elementary school classmates and high school adversaries stepped up to volunteer to referee games during ISWTS provided tournaments. Current and former neighbors offered to distribute team pre-game meals and post-game snacks. Teachers offered to stay late after games to provide rides home or volunteered to coach in an ISWTS funded annual winter indoor

futsal league and indoor soccer sessions. Coaches offered to provide training during ISWTS funded summer camps and pre-season practices.

Coach Jim's soccer teammates, family, friends, neighbors, grade school classmates, high school classmates, college classmates, professional colleagues, recipient school alumni, team opponents, and area foundations have been huge financial supporters through ISWTS donation drives that led to the distribution of:

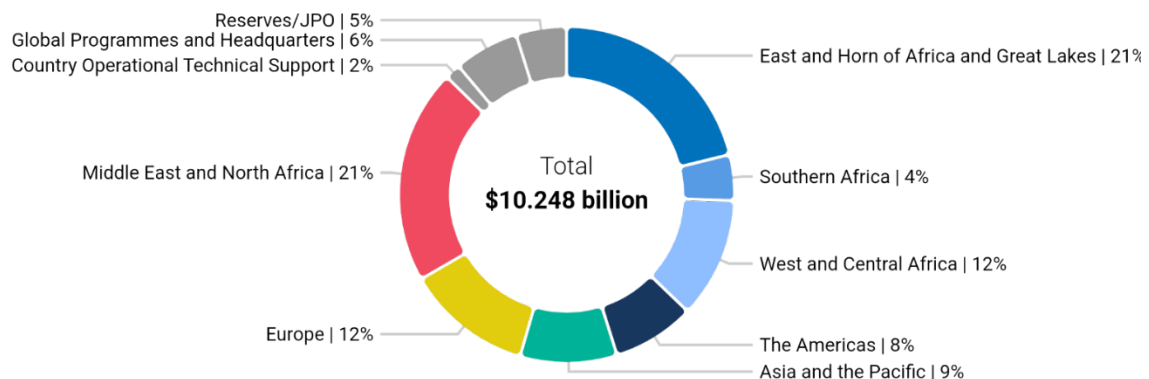
- 6500 Individual Post-Game Snacks
- 2500 Individual Pre-Game Meals
- 2000 Estimated Student Transportation Miles
- 1800 Student Athletes Supported
- 750 Pair of Shoes
- 300 Pair of Shin Guards
- 230 Individual Post-Game Meals
- 180 Thank You Letters
- 120 Practice Pinnies
- 110 Unique Donors
- 100 Percent Volunteer Effort
- 80 Training Cones
- 76 Individual FC Cincinnati Game Day Experiences
- 17 Teams Supported
- 14 Goal Nets
- 12 ISWTS Certificate of Appreciation Player Awards
- 11 Coaches Supported
- 8 Summer Soccer Camps
- 7 Volunteer Appreciation Events
- 6 Winter Indoor Futsal Sessions
- 5 Pre-Season Soccer Tournaments
- 4 Team Banquet Meals (another 100 meals)
- 3 Sponsored Men's U-23 Club Soccer Seasons
- 2 Spring Indoor Soccer Seasons
- 1 Post Summer Camp Group Outing
- 0 Paid Staff

It Starts with the Shoes has accomplished all of this with donations of less than \$25,000 annually, material in-kind value of approximately \$2,000 annually, and no more 2500 hours of volunteer time annually. These first ten years of ISWTS were focused on primarily allowing Coach Jim to continue coaching with the necessary support to keep those at risk on the soccer field. Even with our support, too many students are forced to leave the game to assist in their families' efforts to deal with their initial resettlement challenges brought on by the government and NGOs' focus on quantity, not quality. Too many families are being resettled with large budgets to get them into our communities, but with extraordinarily little direct financial support once they arrive as per the Federal Budget Data.



## Budget Data

The Federal Government provides funds for immigrants, refugees, and asylees for incoming individuals and families, and for others who remain abroad. Outgoing funds paid by the United States Federal Government to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) amounts to approximately \$2 billion annually. The U.S. contributions represent approximately one fifth of the \$10.248 billion budget for the UNHCR.



The UNHCR currently assists more than 120 million people across 130 countries that have been forcibly displaced because of persecution, conflict, or violence. The first arrangements provided by UNHCR are refugee camps set up during emergencies to alleviate the effects of displacement. These are intended to be temporary facilities built to provide immediate protection and assistance to people forced to flee. Once a person or family becomes a refugee, they are likely to remain displaced for many years. These camps provide basic needs such as food, water, shelter, medical treatment, and other basic services during emergencies. What the UNHCR does:

### 1. Emergency Relief Efforts

- a. Rapid Response
- b. Survival Needs
- c. Health and Nutrition
- d. Safety Net

### 2. Cash Assistance

- a. For providing dignity of choice
- b. For supporting local economies
- c. For rent, food, clothing, medicine, and other essentials

### 3. Education

- a. Tool of empowerment
- b. Reduce exploitation
- c. Prevents child marriages and soldiering

#### 4. Innovation

- a. Data and technology to unlock insights
- b. Solutions for global displacement challenges
- c. Improving humanitarian interventions

The average length of time that refugees spend in camps varies depending on the crisis. In protracted refugee situations, displacements can last for five years or more. Nevertheless, some refugees may spend decades living in camps and it is common to see entire generations growing up in camps. Many people associate refugees with those living in these camps.

However, 78% of refugees live in cities across the world. While urban locations offer more opportunities to live an autonomous life, they also pose major challenges as refugees are often forced to share housing accommodations or live in non-functioning public buildings, collective centers, slums, or other types of substandard living conditions.

These are the living conditions Coach Jim has seen in his ten years of supporting at-risk teenaged immigrant soccer players in Cincinnati. In these distressed housing areas, the school districts are also often distressed. With limited resources, these districts are forced to hire the minimum necessary to “leave no child behind.” These poorly allocated resources are only perpetuating the dependency of support for an entire new population in our communities.

The \$2 billion sent to United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) was intended to support refugees in or near their place of origin to avoid relocation to the United States. However, when relocation within the United States is decided, even more funds are allocated. The U.S. refugee program is funded primarily through these three federal agencies:

1. U.S. State Department
  - a. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)
2. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
  - a. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
3. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
  - a. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

PRM, in 2024 spent \$3.4 billion to support various initiatives including overseas assistance, resettlement services, and integration support with the goal to ensure that refugees receive the necessary resources and support to rebuild their lives and integrate into their new communities. This funding allocation primarily goes to local non-profits, not directly to the families in need. These organizations are challenged to support as many individuals as possible, therefore housing, education, and employment services are budgeted for volume, not quality.

ORR, in 2024 spent \$2.2 billion to support cash and medical assistance, social services, and targeted assistance grants to organizations like Catholic Charities of Southwestern Ohio. This funding is used for agency programs to help refugees integrate into their new communities, access healthcare, education, and employment services.

USCIS, in 2024 spent \$700 million to support refugee and asylee processing. This is in addition to the processing fees paid by the applicants. There is no line item for this in the annual budget report, so funds were whittled from the following agencies:

1. Health and Human Services,
2. Homeland Security,
3. Defense Department,
4. Justice Department,
5. FEMA,
6. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, and
7. Customs and Border Protection.

Again, this is the experience Coach Jim has been subjected to in his ten years volunteering. Many of the players at the schools Coach Jim supports are from families newly arrived in the United States. They are placed in low-income housing and encouraged to enroll in underfunded public schools and education programs and wait for their status to be processed.

The current U.S. response to global immigration is, in practical terms, a **\$7.6 billion resettlement aid package gridlocked in the U.S. by an unbudgeted \$700 million portal** to process applications that would alleviate most immigrant applicant dependence on perpetual aid. And conversely, expedite denials and deportations of those not suitable for permanent relocation in the United States.

Many of the student athletes Coach Jim supports are from families who, tired of waiting for “their portal to open,” eventually find the private means of support and matriculate to other school districts and neighborhoods by obtaining financial aid from local cultural centers, churches, schools, clubs, or organizations. It is this period of “indeterminate circumstances” that refugees, asylees, and newly arrived immigrants need the most assistance. This assistance, if timely, would prevent immigrants from pursuing “unauthorized” alternatives to remain in the country.

***It Starts with the Shoes, Inc.*** proposes to address these aid needs by establishing a series of Platforms under the banner of Global Dawn™. The premise of Global Dawn™ is to improve the quality of aid provided to refugees, asylees and newly arrived immigrants to prepare them to be productive members of society, require them to adhere to a “Give Back Pledge,” and provide them short-term basic income guarantees.

Many of the Infrastructure Platforms are far from “shovel-ready” and exists only in concept form. These platforms have yet to obtain the necessary designs, permits, approvals, planning, and funding, but they are identified as vital next steps beyond the continued support of our Program Platforms.

