



kandelias

REMOVING BARRIERS TO IMMIGRANT
AND REFUGEE SUCCESS

Impact Report 2026



A message from our Co-Executive Directors

We don't think anyone would be surprised to hear that this has been a heavy year for Kandelia and the immigrant and refugee families we serve. Our students and families are afraid, and with good reason. People are dying in ICE custody and bystanders have been killed in the streets. Mass detentions and deportations, due process rights violations, and a constantly shifting legal landscape leave families uncertain about their safety and future in this country. The human suffering behind the headlines would take a toll on anyone.

Kandelia's deep roots in immigrant and refugee communities are one of our core strengths — 89% of our team are first- or second-generation immigrants or refugees. That gives our staff the trusting relationships essential to our work, and it means we go above and beyond for families navigating moments of life-altering crisis. It also means there's a personal toll — not just in supporting our students and families, but in watching our own friends and loved ones navigate systems and policies that seem bent on cruelty.

And yet, there is joy in our work. Kandelia's mission is to remove barriers to opportunities for immigrant and refugee communities, without compromising values, heritage, or ethnicity. At a time when many feel they need to hide their immigrant status in public, we get to work in spaces where cultural heritage is celebrated. We had the privilege of **celebrating 60 high school seniors** who proudly displayed the flags and symbolism of their home countries at graduation. We get the happy phone call when an asylum case is finally approved. We get to compare which fruits and herbs each country has, debate if we liked the new

Bad Bunny album, learn new words in other languages, and connect. The hard parts of our work are truly hard, but the people we serve are incredibly resilient, and we know how to seize our moments of joy.

At Kandelia, we have the privilege of interacting daily with students and families from over 20 different countries. Our nine person staff represent six countries alone. Our work is surrounded by the creativity, learning, and fun of diverse cultures coming together. Seattle is stronger and more vibrant because immigrants have made it their home.

The hard times can often overshadow the good — especially when the bad news is nearly constant on the news and in social media feeds. To protect our community, we can't always tell you what we're dealing with but we promise, there are good things happening too. In our programs, students are being kids. Parents are connecting. People are finding community and safety. We have loads to celebrate and feel good about.

Speaking of celebration — this year marks **50 years** of Kandelia serving immigrant and refugee families in Seattle. We're honoring this milestone with a fundraising gala on **May 6, 2027**. We hope you'll save the date and join us in celebrating 50 incredible years of resilience, connection, and hard-won progress for Seattle's immigrant and refugee communities.

In Community,
Kristi and Tammy

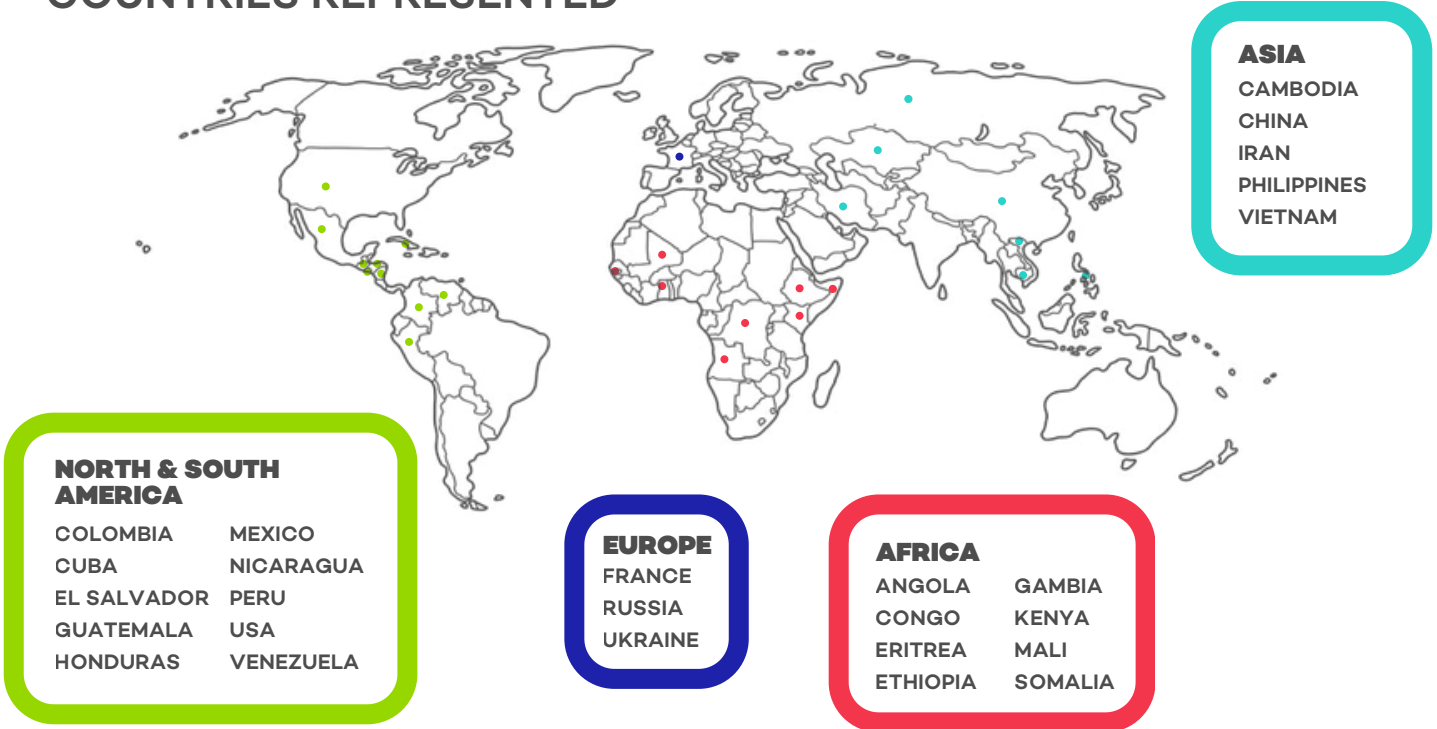
Kandelia's Programs

Kandelia's goal is for immigrant and refugee students to have equitable access and choice for educational and career opportunities. We serve students directly, strengthen their local family support network, and work to improve the systems that impact their lives. Our programs fall into two categories: Youth and Family Programs.

Kandelia's Youth Program operates out of Seattle World School, a school designed specifically to support recently arrived immigrant and refugee students and multilingual learners. Our program offers English classes, summer school, career exploration opportunities, job readiness training, mentorship, and barrier removal funding. Our Family Program provides English and digital literacy classes, self-sufficiency workshops, resource navigation support, and emergency financial assistance. These services help parents and caregivers meet basic needs while building the confidence and skills to navigate systems on their own.

Kandelia's team reflects the communities we serve. 89% of our team and 100% of our program staff are first- or second-generation immigrants or refugees, and 100% of our staff are bilingual or multilingual. All of our programs are designed around community input, are culturally responsive, integrate language support, center relationships, and build on participants' strengths. In total, our programs impacted 739 household members this year.

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED



Languages Spoken by Program Participants

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| • Amharic | • Indonesian | • Portuguese | • Swahili |
| • Chinese | • Khmer | • Polish | • Tagalog |
| • English | • K'iche' | • Russian | • Tigrinya |
| • Farsi | • Kunama | • Shona | • Turkish |
| • French | • Oromo | • Soninke | • Ukrainian |
| • Garifuna | • Persian | • Spanish | • Vietnamese |

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Kandelid's Youth Program serves students who are resilient, curious, and worldly. They also face a unique set of barriers. On top of the normal demands of high school, our students are adapting to a new language, culture, and education system. They often act as cultural navigators for their families, and many need to balance school and work to help support their families financially.

Enrollment at Seattle World School was lower this past year, which impacted enrollment in our Youth Program. While the total number of participants in our program decreased compared to last year, engagement remained high. More than a third of our students participated in multiple classes across our Youth Program. In addition to making progress towards educational and career goals, students find a sense of belonging in our program.

At a time when our communities are living with so much doubt and uncertainty, we're proud to offer a space where students can feel safe to show up as their full selves. Yes, our programs are focused on practical skills for accessing educational and career opportunities. But we also get to see students be kids: laughing together in our office, hunting for snacks, and being goofy. "We had great turnout for our youth after-school classes in November and December," says Gustavo, our Youth Program Coordinator. "Our Beginner and Conversation English class students had a Thanksgiving dinner, watched movies with discussions in English, and built gingerbread houses in the winter. Through it all, it was great seeing the kids just being kids and enjoying time together, especially since December was tough for many of them. This was a good chance to play, hang out, and laugh."



YOUTH PROGRAMS: THE NUMBERS

143 total participants served

61 in English classes

After-school field trips:

Seattle Selfie Museum, Central Cinema, Museum of Illusions, Seattle Japanese Garden, Seattle Aquarium, Downtown Seattle Public Library

16 in Job Readiness & Career Exploration

42 in Student Success Coaching:

Resume building, job applications, scholarships, internships, Driver's Ed



Kandelid & Seattle World School Summer Academy

5 week program with meals and transportation covered

97 students participated

87 students completed the program with at least 80% attendance, earning credit toward graduation and a \$500 stipend

5 field trips included the Seattle Aquarium, Wing Luke Museum, SeaMar Museum, Kubota Garden, and Camp Long.

YOUTH PROGRAMS: THE STORIES

This year, we are excited to welcome a new Youth Program Manager, Kelebet, who brings a unique perspective to the role. As a former Multilingual Learner and a graduate of Nathan Hale High School, he understands firsthand what it's like to be a newcomer as a high school student in Seattle — an understanding that helps shape how he connects with students like MJ.

MJ, originally from Ethiopia, participated in Student Success Coaching and later joined our Resume Workshop. Through his conversations with Kelebet, we learned he'd been missing class regularly — not for lack of motivation, but because he had no reliable way to get there, which also kept him from being able to get a job.

Kandelias provided barrier removal funding that covered Driver's Ed classes and exam costs for this student and many others who needed the same support. We also helped coordinate exam scheduling for the Driver's Ed knowledge test.

Together, MJ and Kelebet set goals, helping MJ stay focused. This year he graduated from SWS, earned his driver's license, and today he's enrolled in community college and actively job searching.



YOUTH PROGRAMS - WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- Some families weren't comfortable with students staying after school and traveling home later, due to immigration enforcement fears.
- While Kandelias staff is multilingual, Oromo isn't one of the languages spoken by our team members. This year Oromo-speaking participants joined our program, but we weren't able to provide as much support for these students as we would have liked.
- Religious observances: During fasting periods, some students had to leave early, affecting their participation. We also didn't always have snacks that met their dietary restrictions, which is something we plan to improve on next year.
- In our second year providing Student Success Coaching, more students left our program with tangible outcomes like a polished resume, positive interview experience, or a professional LinkedIn profile.
- Next year, we're launching youth-led STEM career exploration events that will be open to multilingual learners from other Seattle high schools.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

As the political climate continues to be unpredictable for our families, our work with parents and caregivers matters more than ever. Kandelias remains committed to helping immigrant and multilingual parents and caregivers gain the skills, confidence, and resources to navigate their children's education and daily life, while reducing the burden on students to act as translators and cultural navigators for their families.

This year we saw strong enrollment and participation across our English and Digital Literacy classes as families seek to build the skills they need for school, work, and daily life. We launched new classes based on participant input, including an English pronunciation class and a Beginner English class for native Chinese speakers.



Our family self-sufficiency workshops included new topics requested by participants, covering everything from navigating the U.S. education system to financial literacy.

Kandelias's Family Program continues to serve caregivers across Seattle Public Schools. As Thu, our Family Program Manager shared, "Our program is still going strong! When we extended it for parents of other schools outside of Seattle World School, we reached more families to meet their needs."

FAMILY PROGRAMS: THE NUMBERS



200 total participants served

115 in English classes

36 in Digital Literacy classes

36 in Family Workshops

116 Barrier Removal

Holiday gift cards, winter essentials, financial assistance, digital and legal support

39 Resource Navigation

Housing, childcare support, food access, medical referrals, and job readiness training

FAMILY PROGRAMS: THE STORIES

Our workshops have never felt more essential. Families navigating life in a new country often arrive with urgent questions: What are my rights at work? How does my child's school system actually work? What are my legal rights? As our Family Program Manager shared, "Employers take advantage of language barriers, and of vulnerable communities who don't know their rights."



This year our Workers' Rights workshop, held in partnership with Centro Rendu, was a highlight. Gaugdy, our Family Program Coordinator, shared a mother's story that stood out to her. The mother experienced a workplace accident in her first few weeks at her new job. She was unable to work for a few days due to the accident and when she brought this concern up to her employer, they refused to cover medical costs or compensate for lost wages. After participating in our workshop she understood her rights, and Kandelia helped support her as she advocated for herself.

Her story is not unique. In the weeks following our workshop, several families reported employers now honoring rest periods, sick leave, and vacation time. These are lasting changes that allow our families to build the knowledge and confidence needed to advocate for themselves.

As Gaugdy put it, "When people know their rights, they can make informed decisions, defend themselves, and build a future with greater security and dignity."

WORKSHOPS

- How to use Canva
- CPR Training and Certification
- Digital Navigation
- Financial Literacy
- Guiding Good Choices (Youth Mental & Behavioral Health)
- High School & Early Childhood Education
- Know Your Rights
- The Source (Using Seattle Public School's online communication tool)

CLASSES

- Digital Literacy
- English Conversation
- English for Beginners 1 and 2
- English Pronunciation
- Intermediate English



FAMILY PROGRAMS - WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- Unpredictable work schedules, especially during events like the World Cup, often keep caregivers from attending classes. We're exploring schedule adjustments to remove this barrier.
- With 20+ languages spoken at Seattle World School alone, language access is always a challenge. We previously offered home language support only in Spanish and Vietnamese. This year, adding a Chinese language instructor allowed us to serve more caregivers.
- We're building partnerships to extend support beyond our programs — referring families to Literacy Source, and partnering with Renton Technical College for free classes and campus visits with language support.
- Lack of awareness of labor and immigration rights continues to be a theme that comes up every year.

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH OUR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE NEIGHBORS

At Kandelia we always listen closely to what our participants need and this year, that meant responding to constantly changing immigration policies and enforcement practices with expanded support across our Youth and Family Programs:

1. **Know Your Rights Training:** Workshops helping families understand their rights and prepare for interactions with immigration enforcement.
2. **Yellow Cards:** A carry-anywhere resource that translates legal protections into simple, clear language, such as the right to speak with an attorney or to decline entry to a private home without a judge-signed warrant.
3. **Navigation support:** Staff help families access trusted and vetted community resources to meet a wide range of needs.
4. **Safety planning:** Connecting parents and caregivers, regardless of status, with attorneys to provide one-on-one support to designate someone to hold temporary parental rights for their children in case a caregiver is detained or deported.
5. **Legal consultations:** Providing families with connections to legal advocates for urgent legal questions.

BEFORE ANSWERING ANY QUESTIONS, I WANT TO TALK TO AN ATTORNEY. I will not speak to anyone, answer any questions, waive any of my legal rights, or consent to any search of my person, papers, residence, or property until I have first obtained the advice of an attorney. **I DO NOT GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO ENTER MY HOME, UNLESS YOU HAVE A WARRANT SIGNED BY A JUDGE.**

ANTES DE CONTESTAR CUALQUIER PREGUNTA, QUIERO HABLAR CON UN ABOGADO. No voy a hablar con nadie, contestar ninguna pregunta, renunciar a ninguno de mis derechos legales, o consentir al allanamiento de mi persona, papeles, residencia, o propiedad hasta que primero haya obtenido el consejo de un abogado. **YO NO LE DOY PERMISO DE ENTRAR A MI HOGAR A MENOS DE QUE TENGA UNA ORDEN PARA ENTRAR FIRMADA POR UN JUEZ.**

6. **Emergency financial support:** Direct assistance for families who are experiencing financial strain due to unexpected events or circumstances.
7. **School volunteers:** Volunteers from Bethany Presbyterian Church came every day while school was in session to keep our community safe.
8. **Staff training:** Ongoing legal rights education and training on how to respond during an ICE raid, understanding shifting immigration policies, and more.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: BY THE NUMBERS

- **146 students** participated in Know Your Rights training during social studies classes at Seattle World School, learning their rights and practicing phrases they can use if they have to interact with immigration enforcement.
- **16 families** participated in Know Your Rights training, and **5 families** completed an Immigration Safety Plan to protect their loved ones in the event of an emergency separation.
- **35 school staff and community professionals** participated in an ally-focused training designed for those who work closely with immigrant and refugee students.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

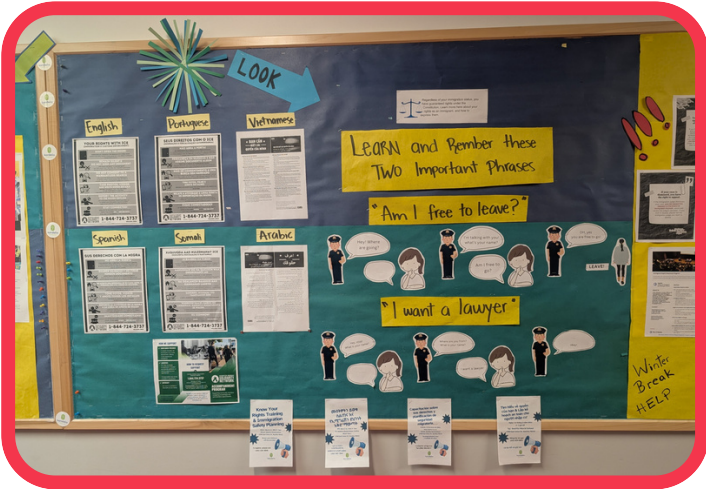
THE STORIES

When one mother reached out to Kandelia, she had one thing on her mind: her daughter's graduation.

She was facing a deportation order, and more than anything, she wanted to be there to see her daughter walk the stage at graduation.

Kandelia connected with the family's school to build a plan that would allow her daughter to finish her coursework, graduate on schedule, and ensure her mother could be there for the milestone.

Moments like this point to something bigger: the trust families place in us. When someone feels safe enough to share something this personal and ask for help, that's not something we take for granted. It's something that we've built over time, together, through partnerships with schools, legal advocates, and community allies.



"Parents tell us, 'We really feel like Kandelia is part of our family.' That means a lot to hear," says Gaugdy, Family Program Coordinator. "It tells us families feel supported when they need it, and we get to celebrate what they're achieving, too."

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



At a time when our whole community has had to rally to keep our immigrant communities safe, some partners have gone above and beyond. Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC) has been a vital partner to Kandelia as they brought critical Know Your Rights education directly to our students, at school, and in languages they understood.

In February, LCYC attorneys Taylor Faranda, Joanna Morales, and Katie Heldt spent a full day at Seattle World School, leading five sessions for 146 students during social studies classes. They covered everything from constitutional rights to immigration enforcement, and gave students the chance to practice the phrases that matter most: "I wish to remain silent," "I want to talk to a lawyer." — until they felt confident saying them. Students left with safety plans, red and yellow cards, and real tools for navigating uncertain moments.

"Kandelia has created a unique way of offering Know Your Rights training for both students and families where trust and safety are built around authentic relationships and the needs of the families come first," said Joanna Morales. "

For many students, this was the first time they'd ever had direct interaction with an attorney. In addition to practical tools they were able to see diverse, multilingual professionals giving back to the community.

We're deeply grateful for partners like LCYC, who show up with both expertise and heart, empowering our students during unpredictable times.

Huge thanks to Kandelia's sponsors, partners, and volunteers!

Thank you to the many sponsors who made Kandelia's events and programs a success this year!

**Arcora Foundation**

**Seattle Credit Union**

**Columbia Bank**

**Seattle Education Association**

**Community Health Plan of WA**

**Sheng-Yen Lu Foundation**

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**Southeast Seattle Education Coalition**

**International Community Health Services**

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**Kaiser Permanente**

**WSDOT**

Our work is not possible without our community of donors and volunteers. Special thanks to the following partners who collaborated to make our programs a success!

- Bethany Presbyterian Church
 - Central Community Church
 - Express Credit Union
 - King County Metro
 - King County Wastewater Treatment Division
 - Legal Counsel for Youth and Children
- Legal Support Partners: Dori Cahn, Katie Heldt, Joanna Morales, Karen Gilbert, Jay Stansell, and Taylor Faranda
 - Medic One
 - Seattle Driving Academy
 - Seattle Parks and Recreation
 - Seattle World School





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AND REFUGEE SUCCESS

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