



kandelía

REMOVING BARRIERS TO IMMIGRANT
AND REFUGEE SUCCESS

Impact Report 2025



Big Picture

Co-Executive Directors Tamthy Le and Kristi Rallu share Kandelia’s direction

This has been a year of big changes for Kandelia. We kicked off the year with a staff retreat in the summer of 2024. We brought our team together to come to consensus on how we would adjust our programs to meet the community needs we identified throughout the spring in our listening circles. This led to some difficult decisions, and also some exciting new programs.

Based on Kandelia’s unique strengths, and the needs we heard from our immigrant and refugee students and families, we decided to center our programs around three core pillars:

- **language access**
- **educational resources**
- **employment & career opportunities**

For needs outside of these areas, we decided to make referrals to vetted partners with a warm handoff. We believe that the combination of strong direct service in a few key program areas and a robust network of partner organizations will enable Kandelia to make the greatest impact for our students and families. Details on how these changes have been rolled out across our Youth, Family, and Community Engagement programs are included in the following sections.

These changes were already underway before the seismic shift in political climate that is impacting Kandelia and every other group working with immigrant and refugee communities. Families that thought they’d reached the end of a long journey, who came to the U.S. seeking safety and a better life for themselves and their children, are now facing fear and uncertainty.

Our team has rallied. We’ve all had a crash course on immigration policy, and are working to stay up to date on ongoing changes. We hosted an immigrant rights workshop, distributed Know Your Rights cards in multiple languages, and organized consultations with immigration attorneys so families could understand their options.

We know that being a welcoming city for newcomers is not just the right thing to do – it also makes Seattle’s economy stronger and our community healthier and more vibrant. We are deeply grateful for our many partner organizations, donors, and volunteers who continue to share time, resources, and expertise to help support and protect our immigrant and refugee neighbors.

Kandelia’s Programs

Kandelia wants immigrant and refugee youth to have equitable access and choice for educational and career opportunities. We serve youth directly, strengthen their local family support network, and work to improve the systems that impact their lives. Our programs fall into three main categories:

- **Youth Programs**
- **Family Programs**
- **Community Engagement**

All of our programs are culturally responsive, integrate language support, center relationships, and acknowledge and build on participants’ strengths. In total, our programs impact over 600 individuals each year.

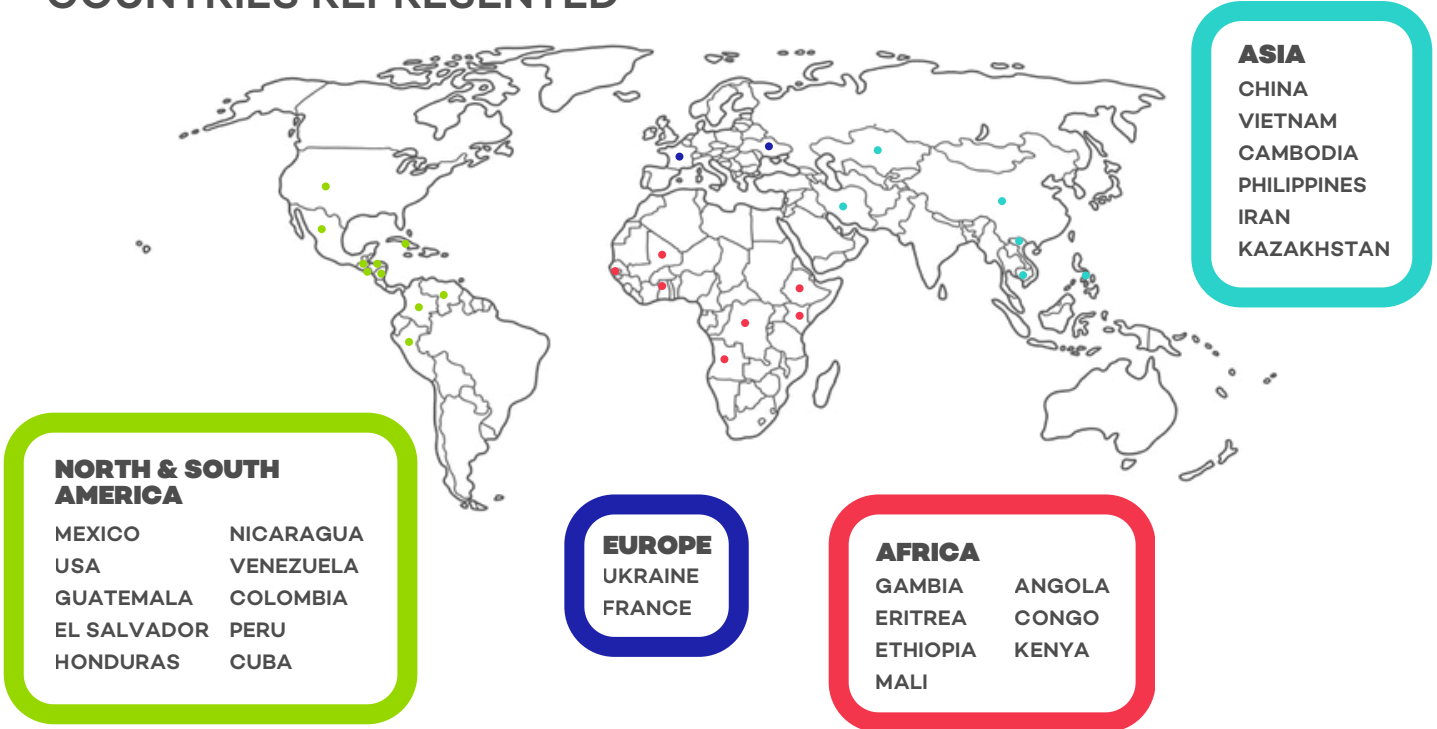
Kandelia’s Youth Programs operate out of Seattle World School (SWS), a unique school designed specifically to support the needs of recently arrived immigrant and refugee students. Classes include Summer School,

Student Success Coaching, various English classes, and Job Readiness Training that includes career exploration opportunities.

Kandelia’s Family Programs are mostly online, and are open to caregivers of immigrant and refugee middle and high school students across Seattle Public Schools. Programs include English and Digital Literacy classes, and workshops for navigating education, parenting, and daily life in the U.S. Workshop topics are developed each year based on input from caregivers.

Since 2019, our Community Engagement Program provided weekly, culturally relevant groceries to families. We have now sunsetted this portion of the program and are focusing on building our network of vetted referral partners for needs Kandelia does not meet through direct service.

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED



Languages Spoken by Program Participants

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

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Kandelias Youth Programs experienced some shifts this year. The 2024-2025 school year was the last year we offered athletics and enrichment activities as part of core programming. Winding down these parts of our work has enabled us to launch our Job Readiness Training classes and offer career exploration opportunities, which help equip students with skills for immediate employment (if that is their goal), and offer options to explore the range of career pathways open to them in Seattle. We've also launched Student Success Coaching, our mentorship program. Informal mentorship has always been part of our work, but this year we formalized the program and experimented with barrier removal funding to help students make progress towards their goals. Through surveys and listening sessions we've learned a lot about what students liked about these new programs and the changes they hope to see. As we begin year two, we're excited to implement these changes and continue building a robust offering of programs to help our students build skills for their future.



YOUTH PROGRAMS: THE NUMBERS

172 participants

161 total sessions

3,228 touchpoints

Beginner English

23 participants

60 hours of classes

English Conversation

35 participants

60 hours of classes

Piano/Guitar

18 participants

42 hours of classes

Boys and Girls Soccer

29 boys **23** girls

41 sessions **16** sessions

Student Success Coaching

12 participants

12 sessions

Driver's Education

27 participants

4 sessions

Job Readiness Training Series

Series included: Get Hired, Follow your Dreams, Interviews, Unlock your Academic Potential, Growth Mindset

22 participants

13 sessions

Career Exploration Field Trips

King County Wastewater Career Day, Woodland Park Zoo Career Day, World Relief Conservation Community Garden

10 participants

3 sessions



2024 Summer School

5 week program with meals and transportation covered

100 students participated

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

5 field trips included Ballard Locks, Duwamish Long House, Museum of Flight, Northwest African American Museum, and Bainbridge Island

YOUTH PROGRAMS: THE STORIES

Laura was a 12th grade student this past school year. She expressed an interest in auto mechanics and enrolled in classes alongside her studies at SWS. However, she began doubting her ability to succeed because she was the only woman in the class. Gustavo, Kandelia’s Youth Program Coordinator, talked with Laura about his own time working in auto mechanics and some of the successful women he worked with in that field. After lending her some of his own workbooks and encouraging her to keep attending her classes, she decided to stick with it. Throughout the year, Laura came to Kandelia’s office to tell Gustavo about the things she had learned, get help with her homework, and share how much she was enjoying the class. A few days before her graduation from SWS, Laura shared an invitation with Gustavo to make sure he would be there. Each student was given the opportunity to say a few words about their high school experience and plans for the future. In her speech, Laura thanked Gustavo for all his support and encouragement, sharing how much it meant to move her towards her goal of becoming an auto mechanic.



YOUTH PROGRAMS - WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- Field Trips are an effective way for our students to learn, engage with class material, and get to know Seattle.
- We continue to see that stipends, food, and relationship building are key factors to success in terms of program engagement.
- Career exploration opportunities are most successful when Kandelia is able to collaborate with host organizations to ensure the needs of our multilingual students are met.
- While the need for mentorship is clear, students need more guidance on the ways Student Success Coaching can support them.
- Older students and those closer to graduation are often the students working more hours, and are often unable to fully participate in our programs. We'll continue working to remove barriers for these students.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

This year Kandelia expanded eligibility for our Family Programs to caregivers of immigrant and refugee middle and high school students across Seattle Public Schools. This opens our services to more caregivers, and helps ensure caregivers of middle school students are aware of Seattle World School as an option as their students enroll in high school. Families from 17 different schools participated in our program this year.

FAMILY PROGRAMS: THE NUMBERS

117 participants **1,151** total sessions **1,888** touchpoints

CLASSES

- English for Beginners 1 and 2
- Intermediate English
- English Conversation
- Digital Literacy
- Social Meeting on Zoom

WORKSHOPS

- The Source
- Know your Rights
- Canva
- Guiding Good Choices
- High School and Early Childhood Education
- CPR



FAMILY PROGRAMS: THE STORIES

Many of the families in our programs face difficult legal circumstances: pending cases with long delays, rapidly changing immigration policies, and a lack of support to understand how changes might impact their family. The current political climate has brought increased fear and uncertainty, and we’ve received many requests for help with lawyers or reliable information so families could make safe decisions for their loved ones. However, the specialized organizations we initially turned to no longer had the capacity to take on new cases, so we looked for alternatives. Kandelia provided 175 “red cards” to students and families with information about their legal rights in case of interaction with immigration authorities, and organized informational workshops on how to prepare for different immigration situations. We also organized an event at SWS to bring in lawyers who provided free consultations for our families. Thanks to this event, concrete and hopeful progress has been made. One mother was able to start the visa application process for her daughter. Another woman obtained legal representation for her court hearing. A few people were able to begin the process of obtaining their work permits.



FAMILY PROGRAMS - WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- So much of the success of our Family Programs is due to the deep relationships and trust built between staff/instructors and program participants.
- These relationships mean we are often the first point of contact when our families need support, including areas in which we're not experts. In response, our Community Engagement Program is developing a network of referral partners, vetted for accessibility and culturally responsive services, that can help meet family needs.
- Families continue to need support in additional languages. While our multilingual team can communicate in the home language of over 70% of our participants, additional support will always be needed. Our instructors have begun using subtitles in languages they don't speak themselves in order to ensure classes are as accessible as possible for all participants.
- We've seen the value in cross cultural learning opportunities for families and their students and hope to provide more in the coming year.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Kandelias Food Access Program was established to meet urgent food needs in 2019 and has grown since. In alignment with Kandelias strategic plan and core focus areas, we have made the decision to sunset our Food Access Program and in June of this year we held our last food distribution day. Starting this fall, we are shifting the focus of our Community Engagement Program to resource navigation. Resource navigation is often a challenge for newcomers because of language and cultural barriers, and lack of familiarity with local resources. In the current political climate, families can be hesitant to access resources for fear of drawing attention to themselves. In our Community Engagement Program, Kandelias staff will meet with families to identify strengths and barriers to meeting their basic needs. Together, they will create a plan to access resources from vetted partners. A staff member will check in with families regularly until needs have been met or resources are no longer needed.

FOOD ACCESS BY THE NUMBERS

634 individuals served **2,020** food bags distributed **\$101,000** of food distributed

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: THE STORIES

This past year, former youth program participant, Patrick, reached out to Kandelias about volunteer opportunities. Patrick participated in Kandelias youth programs in 2014 after moving to Seattle from Kenya. Through Kandelias programs, Patrick felt a sense of belonging and grew his love for work that gives back. When we reconnected, he was completing his degree in Community Environment and Planning at the University of Washington, with plans to work in urban planning to improve his community. Patrick returned to Kandelias to help with our weekly food bag distribution this winter, giving us the opportunity to reconnect with him. We're fortunate that we get to hear from many of our previous participants each year through volunteering, events, and community connections.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- Access to food remains a need within our community, but Kandelias core focus areas, skillsets, and physical space limitations mean that we are not the best organization to provide this direct service.
- Our Food Access Program has allowed Kandelias to form connections with many families, and begin to learn more about their other needs.
- Families can benefit from case-by-case assistance and support connecting to resources. Kandelias has the relationships and trust needed to make these connections.



EVENTS

ROOTS & ROUTES: OUR STORIES, OUR FUTURES

This April, Kandelia invited our program alumni, together with key stakeholders, donors, and community partners, to join us for a new event called Roots and Routes: Our Stories, Our Futures. Alumni shared their experiences, joys, challenges, and the kinds of community support that made the biggest impact in their transition to life in the U.S. We're excited to offer this event each year, giving our partners and supporters the opportunity to better understand both the need for and impact of Kandelia's work.



KANDELIA'S MLL GRADUATION CELEBRATION

On May 31st, Kandelia held our first annual Multi-Lingual Learner (MLL) Graduation Celebration for high school graduates across the Seattle Public School District. This was a free event with food, performances, resources, professional portraits, and more, all in celebration of the hard work and dedication of our MLL graduates and their families. We got a bit rained on, but we still had the best time with everyone who came out and joined us. We hope next year, you'll join us too!



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: BETHANY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Bethany Presbyterian Church (BPC) has partnered with Kandelia for almost ten years. The group first got involved in 2017 when several members signed up to volunteer in our programs. Since then, BPC has supported Kandelia in countless ways. This past year alone, the church has volunteered at our events, made donations, lent us tables and chairs for our graduation celebration, donated school supplies, and provided opportunities for us to come and share more about our work and community. We are so grateful for the community at BPC and all the ways they continue to show up for our students and families.

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



WSDOT



Bethany Presbyterian Church



Puget Sound Energy



Community Health Plan of WA



Seattle Credit Union



Express Credit Union



Sheng Yen Lu Foundation



International Community Health Services



Southeast Seattle Education Coalition



King County Metro



Columbia Bank

Huge thanks to the many volunteers and donors who supported Kandelia this year. Special thanks to the following partners who collaborated to make our programs a success!

- Central Community Church
 - Centro Rendu
 - Colectiva Legal del Pueblo
 - The Food Bank at St. Mary's
 - Jack Straw Cultural Center
 - King County Wastewater Treatment Division
 - Neighborhood House
 - Northwest Education Access
- Rainier Valley Food Bank
 - Rave Foundation
 - Seatown FC
 - Seattle Parks and Recreation
 - Seattle World School
 - The Service Board
 - Storytellers for Change
 - World Relief Western Washington



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