

Spotlight Report

ON WHO WE CAN SERVE AND HOW
IN A RAPIDLY SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

Issue 12 | September 2025



A Message From the CEO

How do we make sure immigrants feel truly welcomed?

It starts from the moment they arrive—when we meet them at the airport or at our offices and let them know we are here to help—but it doesn't end there. Welcome is not only about beginnings. It's also about making sure that our newest community members can participate fully in American life. It means ensuring that those who have joined us from other countries have full access to our schools, workforce, parks and open spaces, and civic institutions; that everyone is fed, feels safe, included, and at home here; and that newcomers are able to contribute and thrive.

Welcoming work is always important and meaningful, and only feels more so in challenging times. Vulnerable families—and organizations like ours, who serve them—are navigating the federal suspension of the refugee admissions program, severe restrictions on asylum, the closing of numerous humanitarian immigration pathways, and a travel ban impacting people from many countries around the world who are in danger. We're seeing



these policies tear apart families and shatter lives.

IINE and our community are fortunate that we can help in concrete ways, and at such a pivotal time in history. We have an opportunity to live out our nation's best ideals—of diversity, of welcome, and of inclusivity. We also have the opportunity to continue to evolve our services, shifting to a model that will rely even more deeply on community partnerships and private philanthropy. Resettling newcomers has always been about coming together, and we're excited to deepen our connections going forward.

In that spirit, we want to share our vision at this stage and invite you to join us in shaping the future of refugee and immigrant support in New England.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey Thielman". The signature is stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being large and prominent.

Jeffrey Thielman, President and CEO

What's Changing in Immigration Policy

It's important to note that **U.S. immigration policy is very much in flux**. Since January, multiple executive orders on immigration have been signed, challenged, and are now being battled out in the courts.



One thing that's devastatingly clear is that humanitarian immigration is being dramatically reduced.

At least in the near term, it appears that far fewer refugees and immigrants will be allowed to enter the country, and far fewer asylum seekers will be admitted at the border.

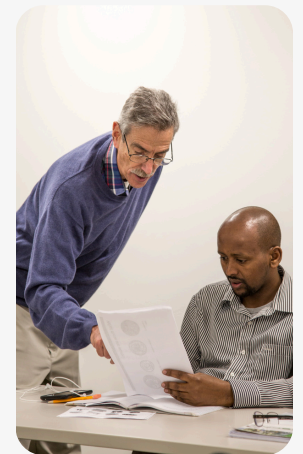
Further, for the past two years, many immigrants fleeing life-threatening country conditions have been admitted to the U.S. through **temporary protection programs that are now being revoked despite worsening conditions**. Working with IINE Immigration Legal Services, some of IINE's clients are applying for more permanent legal statuses, or citizenship when eligible. Tragically, many are not finding alternative protections because of the intentional constricting of protective pathways. In a true bait and switch, they are losing their legal rights to live and work in our communities which, ironically, have come to depend on their labor, taxes, and broader contributions.

Who We Are Serving Today

There are thousands of families and individuals who need IINE's support, including:

- Families losing status who are hungry and in danger of homelessness
- Working refugees and asylees who need additional language and workforce skills to achieve self-sufficiency and whose federal benefits are now at risk
- Refugee youth and children
- Other immigrants with stable legal status, such as permanent residents

IINE is focusing on helping families and individuals who are losing their immigration status to remain fed and housed, and helping those with stable status to grow deeper roots, gain language and career skills, and progress towards their goals.



How We Can Serve Them

IINE has a unique service model that includes immediate support at arrival—greeting people at the airport, setting up their first apartments, making sure they have access to food and healthcare, and helping them get their first jobs—and longer-term and deeper support so they can fully integrate into their communities. Here's what that can mean:

- **Resource Centers:** establishing community-integrated walk-in centers at which immigrants can find support for basic needs
- **Children and Youth Development:** deepening our services for children and youth mentoring programming to build generational support and a strong foundation for life in the U.S.
- **Advanced English Support:** Teaching English proficiency sufficient not just to get an entry-level job but to earn a GED or pursue higher education
- **Upskilling:** Providing skills training designed to help move adults beyond entry-level jobs and into careers in high-demand industries such as healthcare and manufacturing
- **Legal Protection:** Helping as many people as possible obtain legal permanent residence and citizenship
- **Advocacy:** Increasing our efforts to advocate at the city, state, and federal levels for funding and protections—and enlisting your help



1,376

Current refugee clients in need of long-term support

341

Current youth clients receiving support, including educational, mentoring, and more

336

Clients IINE has filed Green Card applications for in 2025

254

Clients on our waitlist to receive Green Card application assistance

With Ongoing Support, a Young Refugee Builds a Brighter Future: **Atefa's Story**

When the Taliban retook control of Afghanistan, Atefa, her mother, and three brothers escaped their home, resettling as refugees in Lowell in 2022. As the eldest sibling, Atefa quickly took on adult responsibilities. She became her family's interpreter and spokesperson at doctor's visits and school appointments – all while balancing learning an entirely new culture and language.

At first, school was frustrating for Atefa. In Afghanistan, she had already begun college, but her high school transcripts were among the many possessions she had to leave behind, and without them, she had to begin her American education as a freshman at Lowell High School. Still, she stayed focused and determined. For support, she went to nearly every tutoring session provided by IINE's Refugee Youth Mentoring program, bringing her brothers along to make sure they progressed as well. That year, Atefa earned honors recognition for her grades.

During her junior year, Atefa began exploring the college application process. When IINE's Youth team advised her to join extracurricular activities to stand out, she became a student ambassador, helping fellow newcomers adjust to life in Lowell. Her leadership and service led to her acceptance into the National Honor Society in her senior year.

That summer, Atefa went back to her IINE mentors for guidance, and they suggested volunteer work. In addition to working, participating in school groups, and helping her family, she began



giving back to support other IINE clients. She delivered fresh produce and packaged goods to families, provided interpretation, and peer-tutored fellow refugee youth.

Atefa's relentless dedication was rewarded when she was accepted to four colleges! She chose the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she will study civil engineering starting in the fall of 2025. As she prepares for this next chapter, she continues to reach out to the IINE Youth Team for guidance on class selection, financial aid, and housing.

"Atefa's journey shows the lasting impact of the Refugee Youth Mentoring program," says Isabelle Goes, IINE's Youth Program Manager. "Her academic success, leadership, and service to her community show how hard work and support can lead to a bright future. She is a strong example for other youth and a reminder of the potential within every newcomer."

How You Can Help



Donate: With diminished federal support, IINE increasingly depends on our community. Your donation helps refugees today and invests in a welcoming future.



Advocate: Our leaders need to hear from you that supporting refugees and immigrants remains a priority and we all have a role to play in helping to shape public opinion in our communities. Visit our website to learn more about current advocacy calls-to-action and volunteer opportunities.



Join Us: Our Leadership Council members are important ambassadors for IINE's work and clients. If you are interested in becoming more deeply involved in supporting refugees and immigrants, please reach out to Alexandra Weber at aweber@iine.org.

Leading with Resilience: Adapting Our Work to Meet the Moment

VIRTUAL TOWN HALL
OCTOBER 1, 2025
4-5 PM



International
Institute of
New England

Register for our upcoming town hall webinar on Wednesday, October 1 at 4 p.m. to hear from IINE senior leadership and learn more about how we are preparing for the year ahead.

Register for the Webinar