

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

**HEALING FROM THE
“SHADOW PANDEMIC” OF
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**



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Mission

Common Threads Project helps women and girls heal from the enduring psychological effects of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of war and displacement by building local capacity through training, launching scalable interventions, and furthering the field of trauma therapy.

Vision

We see a world where all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have access to high-quality psychological care. Full recovery gives opportunity for post-traumatic growth, including becoming strong advocates for a more just society.



What We Do

The Problem

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a global human rights violation with a profound and enduring impact. Women and girls are subjected to sexual assault, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, child and forced marriage, rape as a weapon of war, and more. In addition to physical wounds, there are invisible mental health consequences, and deep wounds of stigma, shame and social isolation. Without a chance to recover, victims may suffer from severe depression, lasting trauma-related distress, and other long-term consequences. When untreated, the legacy of trauma may be passed on to the next generation as well.

Our Solution

We build local capacity through training. Rather than placing cultural “outsiders” in our projects, we train, supervise and mentor local mental health providers to provide treatment, adapting CTP methodology for their communities. This helps ensure treatment is culturally appropriate, and that the intervention will last beyond our organization’s involvement.

We launch scalable interventions. Our projects provide a model of care that can be implemented on a larger scale. Over time, our partner organizations become centers of excellence, providing a model for new projects to follow.

We conduct careful program evaluation and work to further the field of trauma therapy by deepening the impact of interventions for survivors. We have developed a long-term treatment that is effective in reducing mental health symptoms, improving functioning, restoring dignity, developing bonds of solidarity, and empowering participants not just to survive, but to thrive.



[Click this image to watch a video about our work](#)

Letter From the Director

Dear friends of CTP,

For us, 2021 was a year of growth, challenge, and resilience. We were all called upon to be especially resolute through a second year of the global pandemic. Here at Common Threads Project, we have been responding to the concurrent “Shadow Pandemic” of violence against women and girls. Data from an extensive new [UN Women report](#) confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a **sharp increase in gender-based violence**. Women feel **more unsafe at home** and **less safe at public spaces, and are increasingly reluctant to seek help**. Two in five women said that COVID-19 has worsened their overall mental and emotional health. The need for the services we offer is more urgent than ever.

This Annual Report documents the strides we have made and the challenges we have faced in 2021 as we **help survivors recover, restore their dignity, their agency, and their futures**. Programs in Bosnia and Nepal have expanded to address the needs of domestic violence, sex trafficking, and adolescent survivors. Our partners formed circles for women and girls living in shelters, where meeting in-person for groups was possible even during lockdowns.

Local mental health staff have themselves faced unprecedented stress this year. Many of our facilitators in the field have been stricken with COVID; some have lost loved ones to the pandemic; and the demands of their work keep increasing as the need for psychosocial support surges in their communities.



“Our deepest human experiences—whether of love, terror, loss, awe, or despair—seem to defy words.”

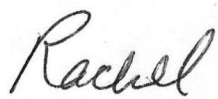
- Dr. Rachel Cohen

Without opportunities to cultivate their own wellness, frontline workers cannot continue to help others. In 2021, Common Threads Project's work in Bosnia exemplified our commitment to **caring for the carers**. With our long-term partner Žene sa Une, our faculty Cynthia Uccello and Catherine Butterly developed and implemented a specialized program for field staff working with survivors of gender-based violence. This comprehensive program for well-being and resilience has already made a big difference for the staff of ZSU and will continue in 2022. In Nepal, the local therapist team created their own staff circle for mutual support. They engaged in somatic exercises, art work, and sewed story cloths, just like all of our circles do. This became their lifeline during the time of COVID.

Closer to home: we were able to hold in-person experiential trainings for our new US projects, after several postponements that we weathered due to COVID precautions. In Seattle and New York, we have trained a strong cohort of facilitators who will soon begin healing circles in their communities.

We are proud of the progress we are making together with your help. This allows us to embrace 2022 with hope and determination.

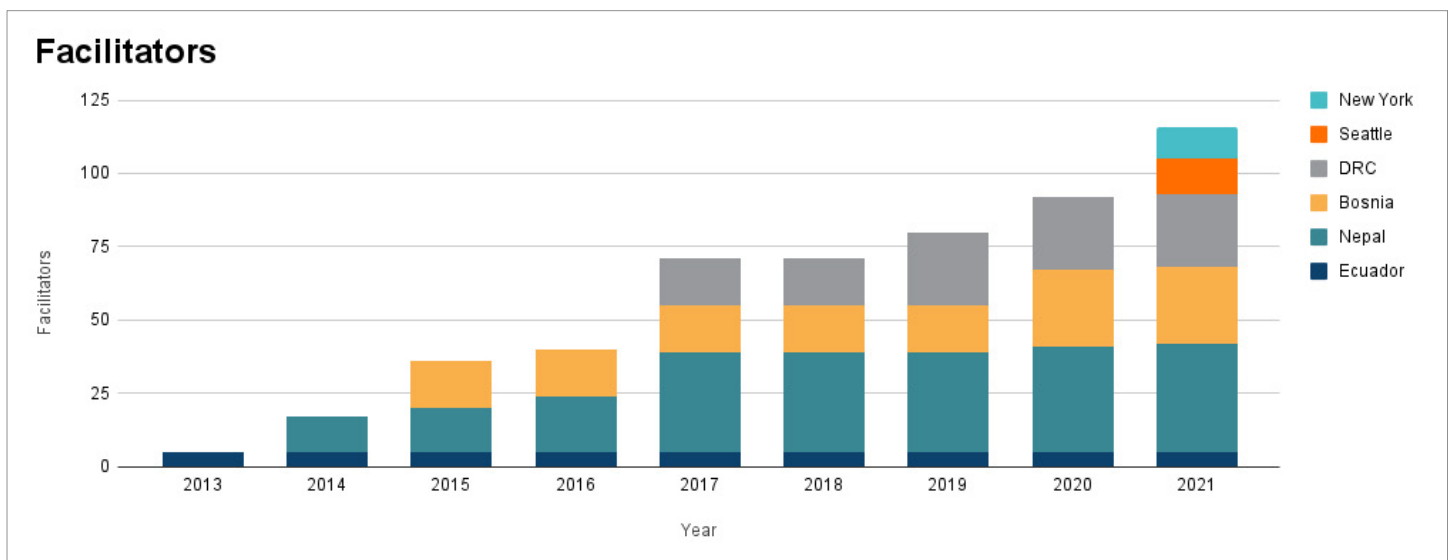
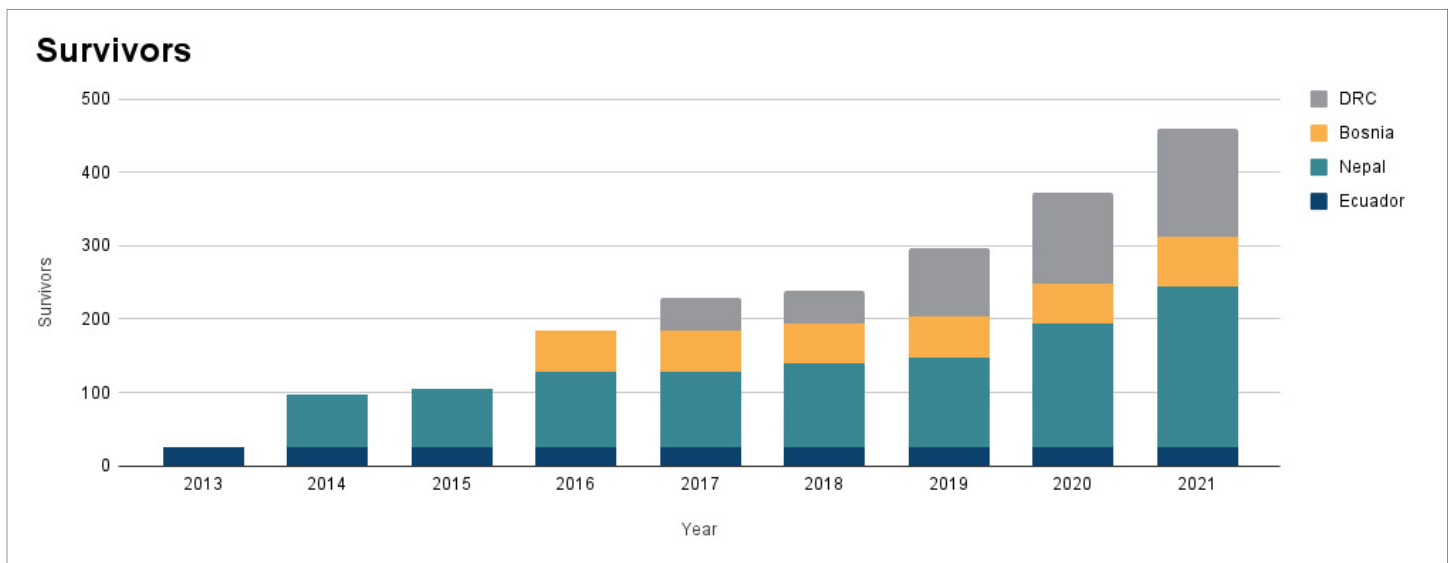
In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel".

Our Impact to Date

Since our pilot project in 2012, Common Threads Project has reached 460 women, and is projected to reach several hundred additional survivors of SGBV in future projects within the next two years.

These graphs show the number of survivors and facilitators we've had at CTP over the years. In 2021, we worked with 50 new participants and two new facilitators in Nepal, 25 new participants in DRC, and 13 new participants in Bosnia. 11 new facilitators were trained in New York, and 12 were trained in Seattle.



Curbing the Impact of the “Shadow Pandemic”

What’s happening on the ground?

Our partnerships in Bosnia, DRC, and Nepal continued on in 2021, despite challenges brought on by COVID-19. We also began developing new initiatives in Seattle and New York, our first domestic projects.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Our partnership with Žene sa Une in Bihać, Bosnia has pressed on with important healing work happening in their Common Threads circles. They have been responding to a significant rise in domestic violence in the region since the start of COVID 19. In 2021 Žene sa Une launched a new Common Threads circle for women living together in their safe house shelter. With excellent local facilitators, supervision and training from CTP faculty Catherine Butterly and Cynthia Uccello, participants have made significant progress in finding their strength throughout these difficult times.

In response to the intolerable levels of stress within our partner organization and with support from a USAID CARE-GBV grant, Catherine and Cynthia co-created a comprehensive program for staff care and resilience with Žene sa Une. This program continues into 2022, prioritizing wellness and comprehensive care for all ZSU staff who work with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and with refugees.



Democratic Republic of the Congo

In Kavumu, DRC, our team finished two Kamba Moja (Common Threads) circles in 2021 despite the many challenges brought on by the spread of COVID-19 and increased violence in the region. One circle was adapted for teen survivors, from aged 13-17, who focused on positive coping and mutual support. Because of their developmental needs, with young survivors it is important to emphasize resilience and strength rather than centering the healing on processing past trauma. Kamba Moja circles held a beautiful celebration of the completion of Phase II at the end of 2021, pictured here. Participants proudly shared their individual and collective story cloths and spoke powerfully about the ways that the Kamba Moja circle had helped them recover and thrive. In Kamba Moja style, there was singing and dancing too!



Nepal

Miraculously, despite high levels of COVID cases and frequent quarantine measures, five new Sajha Dhago circles took place in Nepal in 2021. These included two teen circles, accomplished in partnership with Asha Nepal and Kumudini, two local organizations serving girls who have been rescued from sex trafficking, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Because the girls live together in safe homes, it was possible for facilitators to meet them in person through the months of COVID lockdown.

Adult women who have been subjected to domestic violence, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence gathered in two different healing circles in the Nepali towns of Bhaktapur, and Chandragiri. They developed trust, learned coping skills, supported one another, made story cloths, and progressed through two phases of Common Threads recovery.

The pandemic struck Nepal very hard, infecting most of our facilitators, participants and their loved ones. The stress became overwhelming for staff who were called upon to provide care everywhere they turned—at home, at work, and within the community.

If they were to have any remaining capacity to care for others, they needed to care for themselves first. Sajha Dhago leader Jamuna Shrestha introduced a staff care circle, where the clinical team of 10 met for mutual support throughout the year. They engaged in art activities, relaxation exercises, breathwork, made story cloths, and found strength in deepening their bonds with each other. They met in person when the lifting of restrictions allowed, and met virtually when COVID was surging.



Seattle

Our efforts in Seattle are taking place in partnership with Mother Africa, Asian Counseling and Referral Services (ACRS), Somali Family Safety Task Force (SFSTF), and Refugees Northwest. Following several postponements related to COVID-19, we were able to hold in person, experiential facilitator training in Seattle in October 2021. This CTP capacity building would enable therapists who are immigrants and refugees themselves to become facilitators of Common Threads circles in Seattle. It was an extraordinary experience for all. Among the twelve trainees, at least ten languages were represented. The therapists hailed from Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Korea, Somalia, Kenya, Vietnam, Cambodia, and China. They brought openness, creativity, positivity, and a broad range of clinical skills and diverse perspectives to this first training. Working on their own personal narratives and creating their own story cloths has allowed these practitioners to envision and plan how they can adapt the Common Threads Project methodology for their own communities. They also created close bonds of understanding and mutual support across cultures and organizations. The training of facilitators is generously supported by Seattle Rotary Clubs along with a number of private donors.

Due to the recent surges of COVID-19, subsequent training was held virtually, and launch of the 4 circles had to be postponed until the partner agencies are able to host in-person treatment for survivors. We are pleased that the next two months should see the start of an Afghan women’s circle at RNW, a Cambodian circle at ACRS, and an African women’s circle at Mother Africa.



New York

Our New York City project launched in October 2021 in partnership with Bellevue Hospital's esteemed Program for Survivors of Torture (PSOT) and City University of New York's Psychological Clinic. We held an experiential in-person training led by CTP's Director of Training Tally Tripp, and Executive Director Rachel Cohen. Trainees included a cohort of doctoral students in the Clinical Psychology program at City College of New York, graduate students in Expressive Arts Therapies at New York University, as well as two university faculty senior clinicians. During the Delta and Omicron surges, we have continued the training online.

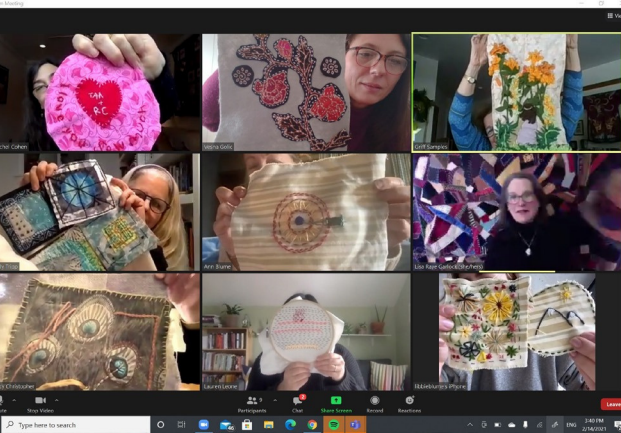
Dr. Nisha Sajani from NYU and Dr. Adeyinka Akinsulure-Smith, will co-facilitate a circle of refugee and immigrant women, with the NYU trainees at PSOT. Graduate students at CCNY will lead a circle of SGBV survivors at City University's Psychological Clinic. CTP is grateful to be the recipient of an Arts and Mental Health grant from the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, which supports our NY project.



Advancing the Field of Trauma Recovery

Sharing our Experience

Adapting quickly to our new digital way of life, our Staff and Faculty shared the work of Common Threads Project in many different international contexts at webinars, conferences, and symposia throughout the year.



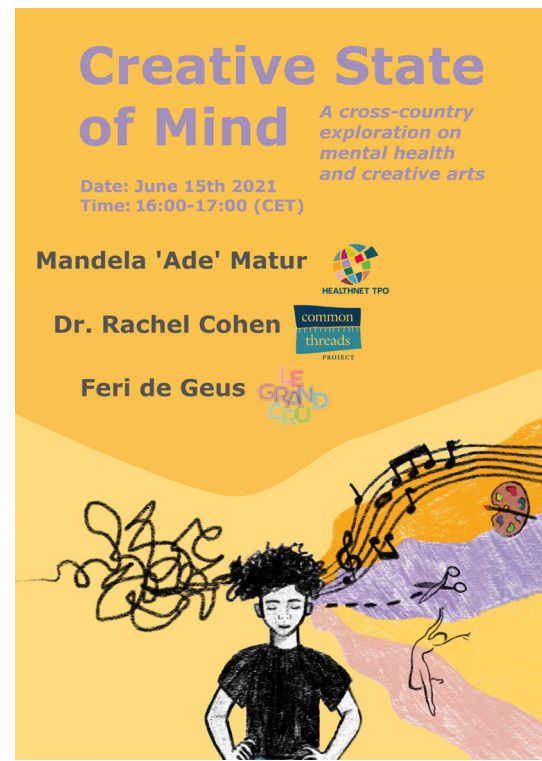
In February, CTP offered a special series of online experiential workshops called the Sunday Sampler series. Art therapy faculty Lisa Garlock and Tally Tripp led a group of CTP supporters in sewing and art activities to give a taste of creative activities in our healing circles.

On March 31, Ecole Normale Supérieure, in France, hosted a virtual panel of experts on art and humanitarian action that included a presentation on Common Threads given by Rachel Cohen.



On April 24 and 25, Webster University in Geneva hosted a conference on Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, organized by CTP's Catherine Butterly.

On June 15, Rachel Cohen spoke at the Creative State of Mind webinar, hosted (virtually) by HealthNet TPO in the Netherlands. She discussed how creative arts promote healing through programs such as CTP.



On June 23, at the International Conference on Culture, Health, and Wellbeing– Arts in Healing (held virtually) Rachel Cohen, Jamuna Shrestha, and Amparo Peñaherrera gave a keynote presentation on Common Threads Project in Ecuador and Nepal.

On November 14, the Metropolitan Museum of Art held The Future is Unwritten: Healing Arts, a symposium. It was sponsored by New York University Arts in Health, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the World Health Organization. A short film about Common Threads Project was premiered at the event.



Together We Make a Difference

Our Common Threads Family Grows

In 2021, we were gratified to weave new board members, volunteers, supporters and staff into the greater Common Threads Project fabric.



Sone-Seeré Burrell, MA, MS became a board member of CTP in 2021. Sone-Seeré is a visual artist, mental health counselor, art therapist, and story cloth maker living in Richmond, VA. Her personal art journey has been extensive, as she engages in creative expression as a community muralist, quilter, commissioned portrait artist, and live painter for events. Sone-Seeré brings an appreciation for the vital role of creative arts in the healing process to her engagement with CTP.



Henrietta Johnson, MS joined our board in 2021. Henrietta is a Senior Vice President in the Client Fraud Protection Technology group at Bank of America, where she has worked for 13 years. She is multi-lingual and multi-talented, accomplished both in the corporate and non-profit sectors. Henrietta is dedicated to mentoring girls and young women in the STEM sector, assuming leadership roles in Girls Who Code and Black Girls Code. Whenever she has a chance, Henrietta makes time for creative pursuits– including sewing and textile work.



Profound gratitude goes to **board member Mary Matheron**, who volunteered to fill critical staffing gaps during challenging times in 2021. Mary dedicated herself to keeping CTP afloat in a variety of ways. She put her considerable organizational skills to use overseeing our development efforts, advising and implementing the end of year campaign, managing data sets, devising new systems, creating spreadsheets, tracking donations and more. So much for retirement– volunteering for CTP has become a full-time job! Says Mary: “No one told me that retirement would be so exhausting!”

Mary is one of the founding board members of Common Threads Project. Now retired, Mary held a variety of leadership fundraising positions at three of the top U.S. law schools: the University of California Berkeley, Yale, and Georgetown University. In between stints at Georgetown and Yale, Mary served as a consultant on leadership giving to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In addition to her work with CTP, Mary serves on the Board of an educational entity devoted to the empowerment and personal growth of women and girls.



Tally Tripp, MA, MSW, LCSW, LICSW, ATR-BC became the **Director of Training** at Common Threads Project in July 2021. She has been working with CTP as a trainer and faculty member since 2017. Tally is a board certified Art Therapist and Clinical Social Worker who brings over 40 years of clinical experience and 30 years of graduate teaching to her position. Widely recognized as an expert in somatic, expressive, and experiential approaches for the treatment of trauma, Tally has provided training and consultation across the US as well as in South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, eastern Croatia, Italy, and Ukraine.



Vesna Golic, MA has become Common Threads Project's **Senior Advisor for Strategy** in 2021. Vesna specializes in the implementation of community approaches in assisting refugees, from grass-roots level to international programs. She has been involved in assisting refugees since 1995 when she coordinated humanitarian aid and psychosocial programs in the former Yugoslavia. From 2000-2006 she served as a Director of Group 484 - an NGO in Serbia that promotes the rights of forcibly displaced people. From 2008-2013, Vesna led community development programs in Australia with resettled refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and Asia. She formed and led a capacity development program for NGOs serving refugees in Malaysia in association with UNHCR.



Ruwanthika Geeganage was a **Volunteer Social Media Coordinator** for Common Threads Project in 2021. As a Digital Marketing Specialist, she provided terrific professional advice to our communications team. We met Ruwanthika through our partnership with the United Nations Spouse Association, a valuable supporter of Common Threads Project. We are deeply thankful for Ruwanthika's many hours of volunteer service.

In collaboration with a development consultancy, The Madera Group, we have increased our capacities for fundraising and communications, which will enable us to increase the organization's resources in the year ahead.

Looking Ahead to 2022

From Strength to Strength

We're pleased to be starting 2022 on good footing, with much on the horizon for all of our projects. We're optimistic that we are getting past the constraints imposed by COVID-19. As the Shadow Pandemic of violence against women continues to rage, we're committed to providing opportunities for healing and empowerment to countless women and girls who deserve to thrive.

In **Bosnia**, our team of experts will continue to supervise circles for victims of domestic violence. During the summer of 2022, they will provide additional training for Bosnian facilitators so that the local program can continue to be properly staffed and meet the needs of the community. The collaborative program with Žene sa Une on staff wellness will also continue, in order to strengthen those who are working on the front lines of the Shadow Pandemic.

A generous grant that CTP has just been awarded from Together Women Rise will support advanced clinical training for additional staff and provide funding **to initiate six more healing circles in Nepal** the coming year. Several of the current circles who have completed the formal program will continue as self-led groups, following a process of empowerment and independence for participants. Similarly, the clinical team in Nepal has reached a level of proficiency that they are about to take full responsibility for the program and become their own autonomous Nepali nonprofit. Together, we will be celebrating this milestone with Sajha Dhago in 2022. Sajha Dhago will be a center of excellence for spreading this approach in the region. Together, we will be celebrating this milestone with Sajha Dhago in 2022. Sajha Dhago will be a center of excellence for spreading this approach in the region.

In **DRC**, we are developing plans for the **continuation of Kamba Moja** in partnership with the Panzi Foundation. We hope to continue critical strength and resiliency work with young teens and their babies, as well as adult survivors in Bukavu and surrounding areas.

In **Central African Republic**, in partnership with the Denis Mukwege Foundation, we will offer a training initiative for brand new psychosocial staff, called "Trauma Basics." This course is designed as foundational for all those who work with trauma survivors, so that they develop a thorough understanding of the neurobiology and psychosocial consequences as well as basic trauma treatment principles. We have come to appreciate that this foundational learning is often needed before trainees are ready to take on the Common Threads Project methodology.

In the US, **the first CTP healing circles will launch in New York and in Seattle in Spring and Summer of 2022.** Stay tuned for the next steps...

"Sometimes I am kidding that after each session here I feel like I have wings."

- A participant in a Bosnia CTP circle

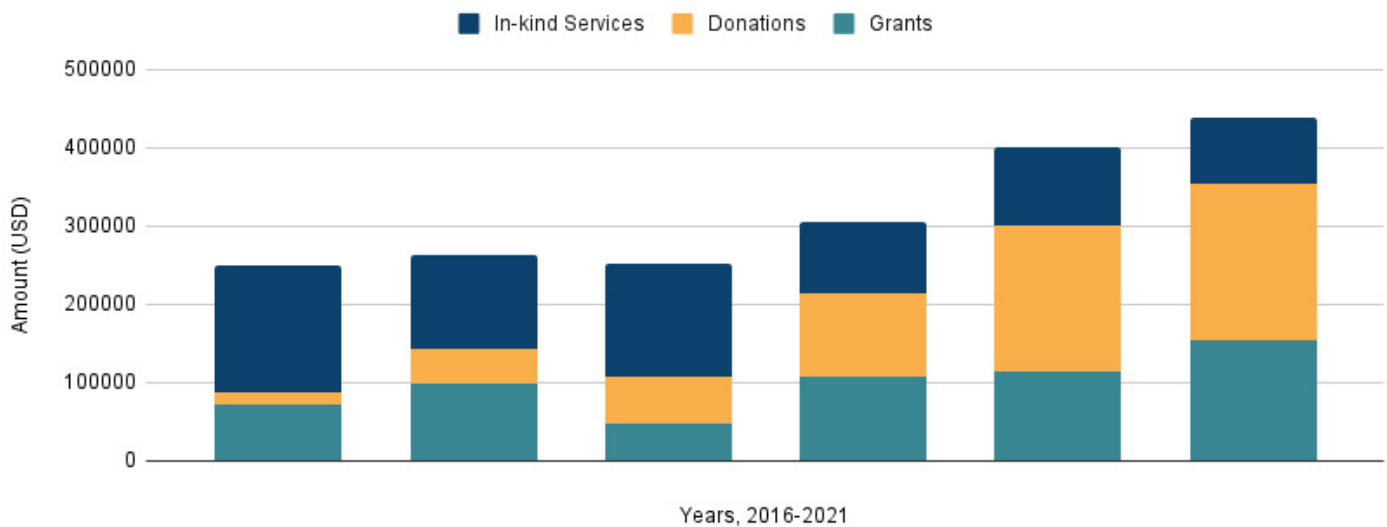
In September of 2022, we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of Common Threads first Project, when Rachel went to Ecuador. She set out for Lago Agrio with an idea to explore with an intrepid team of local feminists at Federación de Mujeres de Sucumbíos. Soon they were making arpilleras (story cloths) to express what words could not. Little did they realize at the time that this would become an effective methodology for helping survivors recover from of sexual violence and displacement both in Ecuador and in several other countries.

Financial Report

Common Threads Project total resources totaled \$439,991, including \$155,225 in grant donations, \$198,526 in individual donations, and \$86,240 in in-kind services. Grant donations increased by \$41,638 thanks to our new donors: Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, The Roblee Family Foundation, Seattle IV Rotary Club, Poulsbo Rotary Club, Kingston-North Kitsap Rotary Club, and Rotary Club District 5030 who enabled us to start new programs in New York and Seattle.

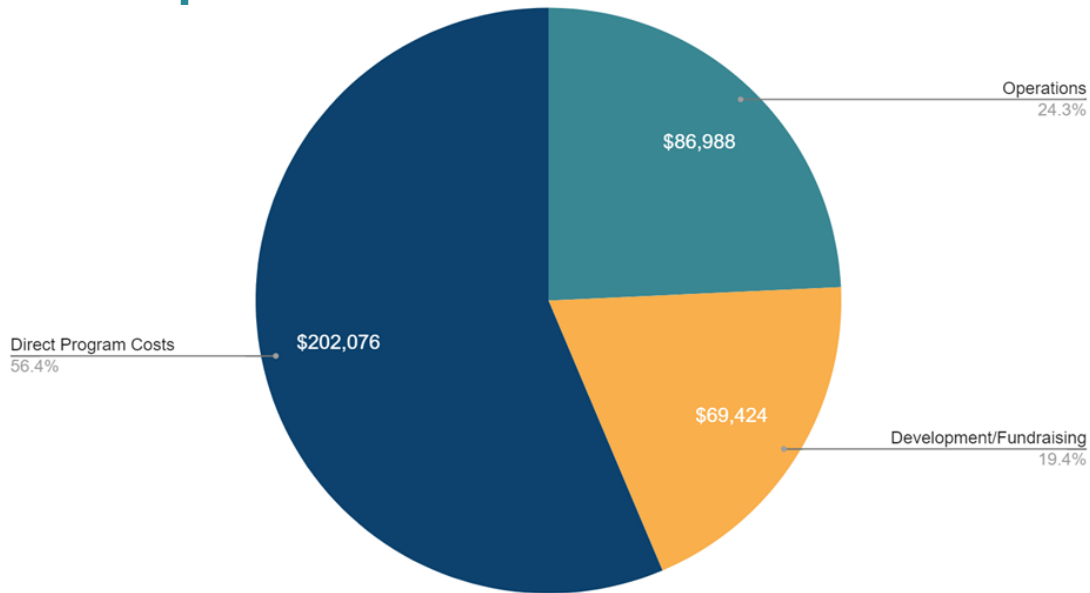
Expenses in 2021 totaled \$272,124, including \$135,836 in direct program costs. In-kind services contributed an additional \$66,240 to program costs and \$20,000 to fundraising and development. Additional funds have been set aside for increased program costs expected in 2022 when more Common Threads Project groups will be able to meet again.

Year-to-Year Comparison of Resources



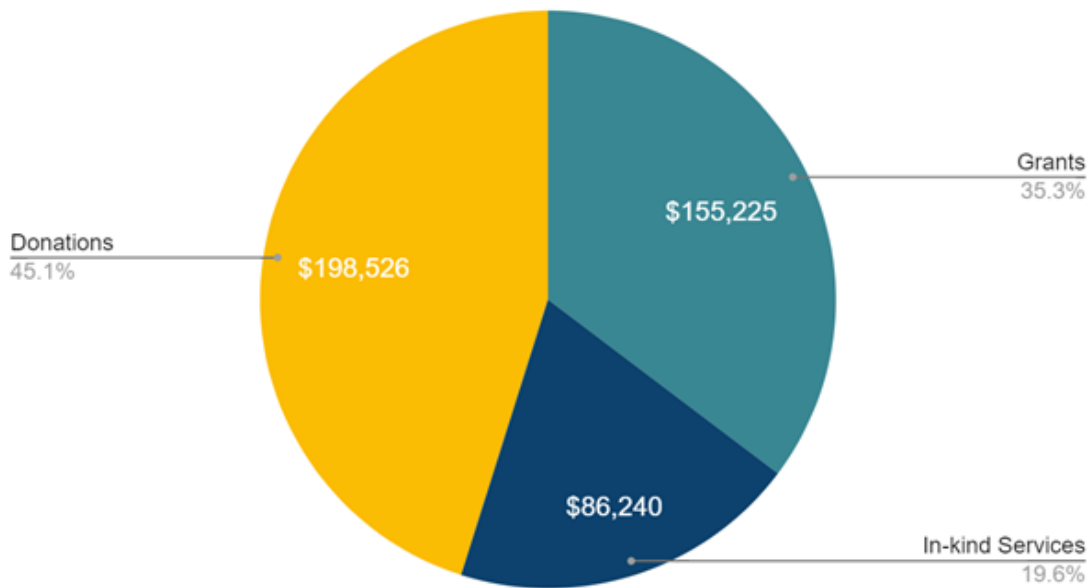
Grants	Donations	In-Kind Services	Total
2016 \$71,000	\$17,100	\$162,673	\$250,773
2017 \$98,726	\$45,455	\$119,057	\$263,238
2018 \$48,000	\$59,799	\$143,815	\$251,614
2019 \$108,188	\$104,894	\$91,050	\$304,132
2020 \$113,587	\$187,227	\$100,986	\$401,800
2021 \$155,225	\$198,526	\$86,240	\$439,991

2021 Expenses



Direct Program Costs \$202,076
 Development/Fundraising \$69,424
 Operations \$86,988
 Total Expenses \$358,491

2021 Resources



Grants	\$155,225
Donations	\$198,526
In-Kind Services	\$86,240
Total Resources	\$439,991

Thank You!

For Taking Us Into the Future

This year, support from individuals and foundations reminded us that the impact of Common Threads Project is seen and understood by a community that reaches far beyond the women and girls we work with. From those in our circles in Bosnia, Nepal, and the DRC, to our trainees in New York and Seattle, to our staff in Brooklyn, we thank you for your role in maintaining the impact of Common Threads Project in 2021.



Seattle IV Rotary Club
Poulsbo Rotary Club
Kingston-North Kitsap Rotary Club
Rotary Club District 5030

Joseph H. and Florence A. Roblee Foundation



Common Threads Project would like to thank each and every donor who makes the work we do possible. Your support allows us to implement projects around the globe that provide services to women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Thanks to these donations, new projects will be launched in the coming years to provide extra support in the wake of the “Shadow Pandemic” of violence that has accompanied the COVID-19 crisis. This year’s donors include:

Sam Aleinikoff
Shoshana Aleinikoff and Nathan Kittle
Gloria Allen
Cory Amron
Marilyn Anderson
Sara Anderson
Todd Anderson
Gael Baboulaz
Jessica Bauman
Shelli Bank and Michael Rosenzweig
James Becker
Nell Beckerman
Susan Bernstein
Kare Bladergroen
Ann Blume
Daniel Bradlow
Patricia A. Bresky
Kathleen Briese
Kelly Briese
Elizabeth Briese-Ludwig
Heather Brooke
Maureen Brotherton
Graham Brown
Indigo Bunting
Tina Cervin
Joanne Check
Rachel Cohen and Alex Aleinikoff
Eileen Coen
Barbara and Steve Cohen
Barbara B Crane
Alice Crary
Sarah Cummings
Kath Delaney
Robert Dyer
Deborah Edwards
Noreen Edwards and Mark Metz
Barbara Eisold
Paula Ellman
Ed Emerson
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Mary Ruth Follett
Lucile Freeman
Patricia Friedman
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Lisa Garlock
Katherine Gekas
Teresa Ghilarducci
Theresa Gillis
Jessie Glason and Steven Glason
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Beth Krug
Ruth Lammert-Reeves and Roger Reeves
Martha Leader
Catherine Ledyard
Carol Levin
Debra Fried Levin
Kelly Levin
Susan Levy
Mary Luke
Stephanie Lynn
Larry Magid
Neg Mahmoodzadegan
Joann Marner
Mary Briese Matheron
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Amy Oppenheimer and Jennifer Krebs
Jonathan Parker

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Sarah Richards
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Marcia Liberson and Herbert Salomon
Griffen Samples
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Norman Schneider
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Jane Shapiro
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Amy Shevrin and Joseph Kohane
Nancy Silber and Norman Silber
Karen Simon
Sue Smith
Thomas Smith
Ruth Sorenson
Miriam Steele
Michael Stein
Jane Steinberg-Michahelles
Bernice Steinhardt
Kelcey Stratton
Analisa Swan
Jori Swartz
Susan Talalay
Karen Tcheyan and Nils Tcheyan
Betsy Teutsch and David Teutsch
Denise Tordella
Diana Trifoso
Tally Tripp
Elizabeth Trosman and
Larry Samelson
Susie Turner
James Walker
Dennis Walto
Melina Watts
Barbara Webber
Helen Weld
Helen Wilkinson
Chris Winters
Catalina Woldarsky
Sophie Woollen
Cathleen Zehring