

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

common  
threads

PROJECT



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## Mission

Common Threads Project helps women, girls, and people of all genders 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,

We are celebrating 10 years of discovering the power of story cloths in healing work. At the start of 2013 our first circle of survivors stitched their experiences into arpilleras in Lago Agrio Ecuador. With your help, our programs have taken root and flourished as Common Threads Project worked with local partners to plant and nurture seeds in other regions. How many thousands of stitches have been sewn since then, as survivors make their way toward real and lasting recovery? To honor their work, we are proud to exhibit a collection of story cloths made by participants and facilitators in our programs. An event launch at the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund will take place in March 2023.

We found ourselves emerging into the light during 2022! It was a year of renewal and revitalization at Common Threads Project. Our program sites came buzzing into activity. By year's end, we had trained 25 more therapists in CTP methodology and served more than 200 new participants in transformative healing circles.

We experienced the joy of returning to the field and reconnecting with international and domestic teams. Last summer I was thrilled to be working in Nepal again with our dear Sajha Dhago colleagues and Director of Training Tally Tripp. In our midst was a trainee who had herself been a participant in one of our prior healing circles. Her story is a remarkable example of the journey from victim to survivor to agent of change and healer.



**Participants in sewing circles tell us that making something beautiful of a horrific experience helps them to transform the pain. A sense of mastery and pride can replace feelings of helplessness and shame.**

By Spring, several new circles were up and running in Nepal, serving youth, trafficking survivors, and stigmatized widows. In 2022, our first program aimed especially for persecuted LGBTQ people also launched in Nepal. Our partner taking independent leadership of the local project, as it becomes a Center of Excellence for CTP, is also a dream come true.

In Bosnia two local circles completed their CTP process. Our team went to Bihać to conclude the full Care for the Carers curriculum and facilitator training in July. It was inspiring for all of us to return to the field and connect more fully with beneficiaries, colleagues, and partners!

In New York, a CTP circle at Bellevue's Program for Survivors of Torture launched in May and concluded in December. New partnerships were formed with Sanctuary for Families and Sauti Yetu, whose staff participated in in-person experiential clinical training in October and November. We are delighted that Sanctuary for Families' healing circles have now begun!

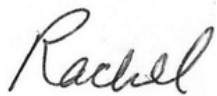
In the Fall of 2022, our Seattle partner Asian Counseling and Referral Services, began meeting with Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in their CTP circle. Although clients were at first reluctant to leave their homes after practicing COVID social distancing, they are thrilled to be together in person, connecting and feeling more resilient. Refugees Northwest are starting their circle for Afghan and Iranian refugee women.

I extend enormous gratitude to Lynn Hiestand for her extraordinary commitment to CTP. As our founding board president Lynn has more than fulfilled her commitment, serving as our leading officer for six years. We are delighted that she will continue as a board member for one more year. Founding board members Mary Matheron and Ann Blume will share the leadership as co-presidents of the board in 2023. We are grateful to trauma therapy expert and CTP champion Patty Bresky, who rotated off the board at the end of 2022. Patty is as committed as ever to our mission and will remain an important advisor on clinical issues. We are fortunate that Alex Aleinkoff joined the board in 2022 and will serve as its treasurer. In the office: Vesna Golic was promoted to Deputy Director, and Caroline Donnelly Moran joined the team as Administrative Officer. What a team!

Today we are stronger than ever at Common Threads Project. Our team is growing, our plans for the coming year are bold, and our community of supporters is astonishing. Because of you we are facing 2023 with great hope. Together we are making a difference, one stitch at a time.

It's because of you that this is possible.

In gratitude and solidarity,

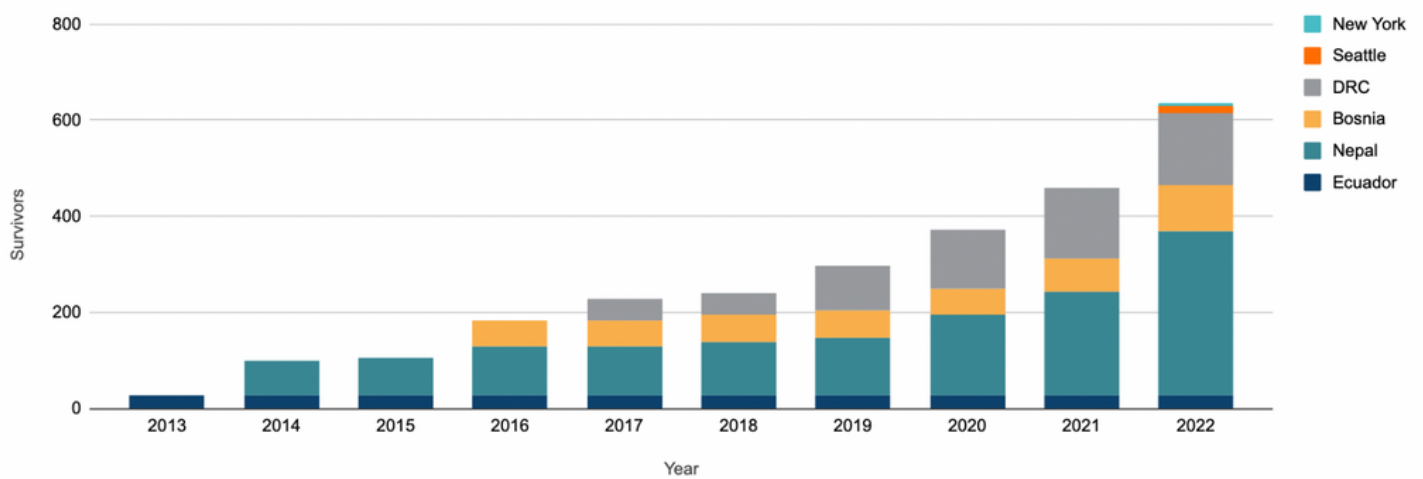
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel".

# Our Impact to Date

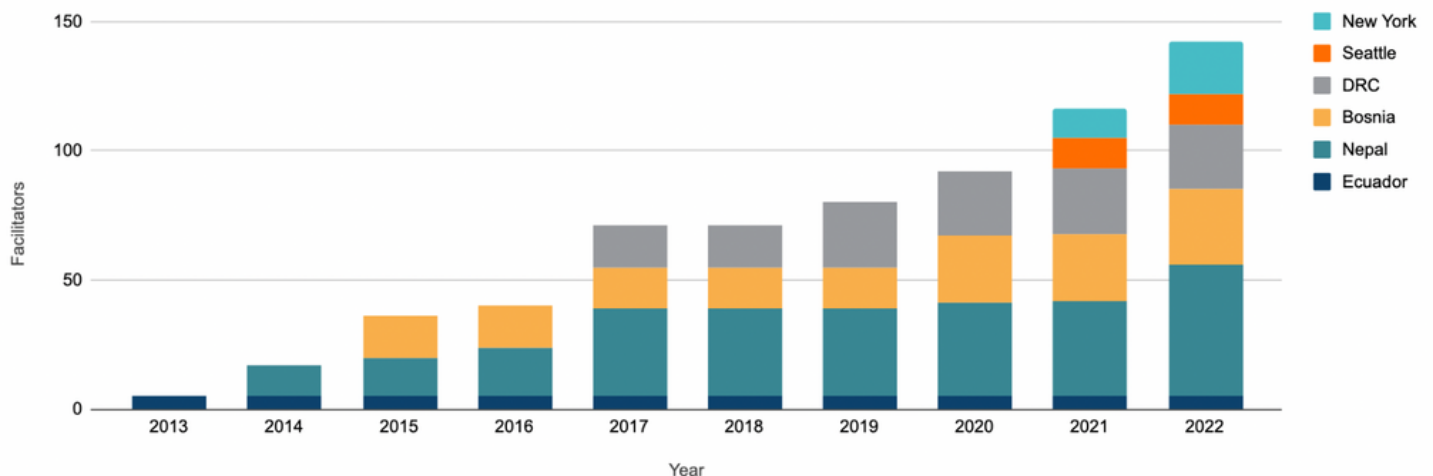
**Common Threads Project has reached 614 survivors of SGBV and is projected to reach several hundred additional survivors in future projects within the next two years.**

These graphs show the number of survivors and facilitators we've had at CTP over the years. In 2022, we worked with 175 new participants and 26 new facilitators.

## Participants



## Facilitators



# Program Sites 2022

## Nepal

Sajha Dhago's new and veteran facilitators have begun new healing circles and continue to use their expertise to help survivors process the unspeakable.

Throughout 2022, Sajha Dhago led 10 circles with more than 150 participants. These circles included many firsts: the first co-ed healing circle at **Nawa Asha Griha**, a residential school for at-risk teens and the first LGBTQ+ circle. This past year, Sajha Dhago helped marginalized widows, victims of domestic violence, sexually exploited teens, and persecuted members of the LGBTQ+ community. The impact extends not only to the participants of each circle, but their families and communities, too.



## Center of Excellence Sajha Dhago Nepal

The team in Nepal has exemplified our goal of effective capacity building, adapting the program for their communities, developing a high level of expertise over time, and taking full leadership of the program. Under the leadership of Jamuna Maharjan Shrestha, the therapists have formed an independent non-profit, Sajha Dhago, bringing healing circles to more women and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

**The seeds we planted together in 2014 have been nurtured carefully and have grown into a flourishing garden of healing.** The Nepali clinical team has led more than 20 circles for women and girls since that time, planning six new circles for 2022. Exemplifying our goal of effective capacity building, the local team has adapted the program for their own communities, developed a high level of expertise over time, and are now taking full leadership of the program. Sajha Dhago will continue to carry the work forward, training other clinicians in the region, and expanding the program to serve more survivors.

CTP founder Rachel Cohen, CTP director of training Tally Tripp, and veteran therapists Sita Lama, Indira Pradhan, and Jamuna Shrestha conducted two intensive clinical training courses in June. Notably, this new cohort of trainees included former program participants who are now becoming facilitators themselves.



Learn about one special moment from a training in Nepal





# Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2022, we continued the healing circles with women at **Žene sa Une's** safe house shelter and launched new circles in May. The excellent team of local facilitators, with training and supervision by CTP faculty Catherine Butterly and Cynthia Uccello, helped bring healing to women in the shelter.

## Care for the Carers

To support Bosnian staff who work ceaselessly on the front lines every day, Cynthia and Catherine also led a comprehensive staff wellness and resiliency program with ZSU, begun in 2021. This program brought important changes for staff, allowing them to be effective in their highly demanding work. Only when staff have the skills to prioritize their own coping and address secondary trauma can they be available for helping others.

In July the CTP team made a site visit to Bihać to see the program in action and meet with facilitators, participants, and leaders at ZSU. It was a meaningful opportunity to confer in person with our partner and to learn about the work they are doing with survivors. During this visit our faculty also held training and supervision sessions for ZSU healing circles facilitators.



# Ecuador

**Federación de Mujeres de Sucumbíos** was one of the first partner organizations in the efforts to develop what would become Common Threads Project. Those seeds have since taken root, and now their anti-violence work uses storycloths to heal and speak in public spaces.

## Story Cloths At a Vigil and Community Protest in Ecuador

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women people from all over the province gather to sew all night, making a cloth in memory of the victims of femicide. Anyone passing by is invited to join the action in which women make their suffering and courage visible through the art of stitching. They amplify women’s voices and break the silence around sexual violence.

Their work is a testament to the long-term, rippling impact of effective capacity building. One trainee and one training can go on to change others’ lives, not just her own.

At FMS, we see a window into the future. The seeds we sowed in 2022 — in Nepal, Bosnia, and the US — will similarly grow in future years. As each partner localizes the CTP methodology, adapting it to the needs and vision of their organization and context, these seeds will take root and produce new sprouts.



## New York

In 2022, we began new partnerships with two path breaking organizations in New York. **Sauti Yetu**, Swahili for “Our Voice,” works to mobilize low-income African immigrant women to strengthen their families and communities. **Sanctuary for Families** provides services to survivors of gender-based violence across the city, supporting nearly 10,000 individuals each year.

In fall 2022, we conducted experiential clinical training to prepare facilitators at both of these organizations. Healing circles at SFF will start in February and March 2023.

This past year, Dr. Adeyinka Akinsulure-Smith, Dr. Rachel Cohen, and student interns Akhila Khanna and Sophie Zhao led a healing circle at **Bellevue Hospital’s Program for Survivors of Torture**. They welcomed women from Cote d’Ivoire, Rwanda, Jamaica, Nepal, Guinea, and other refugee communities for a long-term recovery and resilience program. **In the circle, participants found a place for connection, mutual support, and identifying their strengths.** Often, they found themselves singing soulfully as they engaged in sewing together. A next healing circle at PSOT is planned for early 2023.

Throughout the process of launching this first US circle, we’ve been constantly learning. Each place and its context is different, as are the consequences of conflict we address. The deepened understandings we’ve gained this year will continue to feed our programs going into the future.



Hear from NY circle  
facilitator, Dr. Adeyinka  
Akinsulure-Smith



## Seattle

On the other coast, our first Seattle CTP circle began in November 2022. The participants are from Cambodian and Vietnamese communities – survivors of war, gender-based violence, and displacement. Sukonthea Ok, Sophorn Thoam, and Phuong Thi-Ngoc Nguyen, counselors at **Asian Counseling and Referral Services**, are facilitating this healing circle. Participants have formed close bonds of support and are enjoying learning to stitch and do artwork.

The circle at **Refugees Northwest** for Afghan and Iraqi refugees will begin in April 2023.

David Bulinda, a mental health clinician in Seattle, tells about his experience of CTP methodology in the following interview. He describes his training with us and what he most values about Common Threads Project’s approach to working with survivors.



Hear David tell about his experience of CTP methodology



# Advocacy and Awareness Raising

## Webinars

Throughout 2022, we hosted a series of three webinars, highlighting the work of our partners and celebrating what we've accomplished together.

### Nepal

On May 5th we hosted *Empowerment & Sustainability: Celebrating Sajha Dhago in Nepal*. This webinar featured local program teams and participants from the circles to discuss the work they have been doing together. During the webinar a participant of the healing circles showed her story cloth and described her journey of healing.

If you were unable to attend this webinar, you can check out some highlights [here](#).



## Empowerment & Sustainability



## Celebrating 10 Years of Story Cloths

### Ecuador

We had the chance to watch an extraordinary presentation about our partner, the Federación de Mujeres de Sucumbíos, a network of over a hundred women's groups in Ecuador.

Amparo Peñaherrera Sandoval shared the powerful healing and activism that they have been doing on behalf of victim-survivors of sexual and gender based violence. The audience was shown a very moving video of the vigil for victims of femicide that FMS held on 25th of November - International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The ways in which FMS has integrated arpilleras (story cloths) into every aspect of their work is breathtaking! If you didn't have a chance to join us, or you'd like to be inspired again, please watch [here](#).

## Bosnia

Our project in Bosnia began in 2016 to address the needs of survivors long after the Bosnian War in which tens of thousands of women suffered systematic sexual violence. Tragically, the aftermath of the Bosnian war can still be felt more than 25 years later.

Our inspiring partner organizations, participants and facilitators have been affected by the difficult economic situation, political instability, influence of huge migration movement and continued trauma in their region. The reports from the field indicate an increase in gender based violence.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, already pervasive rates of domestic violence have steadily risen. Žene Sa Une is committed to addressing these complex issues every day. We stand with them to offer programs of psychological support so that women can find their strength and reclaim their futures.

At our webinar *Partnership for Healing Invisible Wounds*, our keynote speaker Reem Alsalem, United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls its causes and consequences, and CTP faculty members Cynthia Uccello and Catherine Butterly addressed these important topics. Facilitators of ZSU showcased their tireless work in building communities of care and networks of support for women. You can view highlights from the webinar [here](#).



## Partnership for Healing Invisible Wounds: Bosnia

## London Exhibition

In November, we shared an exhibition of healing circle story cloths in London at the international **Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative** conference. The meeting brought together more than 800 survivors, advocates, diplomats, and researchers to work on strategies for the future.

The CTP exhibit included the work of survivors from DRC, Nepal, and Ecuador, inviting viewers to recognize not only their pain but also their strength and courage. Many thanks go to Caroline Donnelly Moran who curated the exhibit and represented CTP at the conference, and to dedicated CTP supporters Amanda Haran and Neil Butler for helping with the installation.

In an interactive component to the exhibit, attendees were invited to contribute to a collective fabric collage, giving them a taste of the story cloth process and opening a space for creative reflection.



## Articles, Publications, Conferences

In 2022, Rachel published a chapter in *Groupwork with Refugees and Survivors of Human Rights Abuses : The Power of Togetherness*. This work adds to the conversation about community-based approaches to healing, putting CTP's approach in conversation with other groupwork practitioners working across the globe.

In September, Jamuna and Rachel led a presentation at the **Sexual Violence Research Initiative** forum in Mexico. The presentation, "When words are not enough: co-creating an effective program for SGBV recovery in Nepal," highlighted the remarkable collaboration achieved by Sajha Dhago and Common Threads Project.

Our Director of Training, Tally Tripp, led a workshop in Lithuania at the **16th European Arts Therapies Conference**. Her talk, "The Fabric of Memory: Story Cloth as a Healing Tool for Trauma," explored the profound impact story cloth making has in the healing process. She led workshop participants through the steps of creating their own story cloths so as to understand how this process works first hand.



Read Rachel's book chapter on CTP's approach to groupwork





# Healing the Wounds of Persecution

## LGBTQI Communities in Nepal and Ecuador Join Healing through Story Cloths

In our June training, Sajha Dhago and CTP trained mental health staff from organizations serving the LGBTQ+ community in Nepal. These partners advocate for equal rights, livelihoods, economic empowerment, representation, protection, and equal access to public and private services for members of the LGBTQ+ community. The first healing circle for sexual and gender minorities began meeting in the fall.

In Lago Agrio, Ecuador, our partner, Federación de Mujeres de Sucumbíos, does inspiring work in support of the protection and rights of the LGBTQ+ in their community. Earlier this year, they held a “Dressed for Resistance” campaign for the rights of transgender women in Lago Agrio.



Adapting the language of arpilleras (story cloths) a group of trans women designed and embroidered dresses that told their personal stories of persecution, suffering, recovery and triumph. Their shame transformed to pride in a fashion show in which they could feel free to be fully themselves in these story-dresses. The program featured an exhibition, autobiographical videos, and presentation.

We are proud that CTP's first two project sites, in Ecuador and Nepal, are making great strides to address the needs of LGBTQ+ survivors, who are often subjected to severe forms of sexual and gender-based violence and persecution. Common Threads Project is committed to doing more outreach and intervention to address the psychological suffering that queer people have endured.



# Together We Make a Difference

## Our Community of Support

In 2022, our Common Threads Project network of support grew in important ways:

We are fortunate to have received grants this year from the **Oak Foundation**, **Together Women Rise**, and the **Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund**.

Our small team relies on skilled volunteers who give of their talents and time to further our work. Kudos to **Barbara Crane**, **Amanda Haran**, **Mary Luke**, **Mary Matheron**, and **Isabella Whitney**.

In recognition of her superb leadership, **Vesna Golic** was promoted to CTP's Deputy Director.

**Caroline Donnelly Moran** has strengthened our team immeasurably as Administrative Officer.

**Alex Aleinikoff** joined our board to make official his role as a long-time champion of CTP.

Appreciating that the process of healing requires continuous tending, **The Action Collective** sustains our work with donations we can count on every single month:

Sam Aleinikoff, Caroline Johnson,  
Amy McGregor-Radin, Susan Pfeifer,  
Laura Shannon, Sari Weisenberg, Daniel Gibson,  
Cynthia Grguric, Lucy Christopher Lichtig,  
Deborah Shulman, Ira and Kay Abrams,  
and Elisabeth Sears

Enormous gratitude to **our board of directors** for their hard work and generosity in 2022:

Alex Aleinikoff, Ann Blume, Henrietta Johnson,  
Lynn Hiestand, Mary Matheron, Maureen Brotherton,  
Patty Bresky, Patty Friedman, and Sone-Seeré Burrell

We look forward to welcoming **Mary Luke** and **Cynthia Pacutho** to the board in 2023.



# Looking Ahead to 2023

There are important plans ahead for 2023. In addition to growing our current program sites, we are gearing up for work with **Ukrainian refugees who have fled to Poland**. Our first priority is to offer training for aid workers to manage their current stress so that they can continue to do the heroic work they are undertaking.

We'll start with a Care for the Carers program designed for psychosocial counselors who are not only assisting large numbers of trauma survivors, but at the same time coping with their own hardships, war experience, and displacement. As the crisis situation stabilizes, it will be time to introduce a full CTP methodology for long-term trauma treatment.

With our partner **FMS in Ecuador**, we will be reviving activities at the site where CTP first began in 2012. The **Nepal** project will continue to grow in 2023. We will be adding to our US presence with a program based in **Washington DC**.

To ensure that we are pursuing our mission effectively and wisely, CTP will be undertaking a thoughtful **planning process** in 2023. It will be a time to reflect on where we have been and how to create the best path into our future.

In March, *Stitch by Stitch: The Fabric of Healing* will launch in New York. This **exhibition of story cloths** drawn from all our program sites is hosted by our generous supporters at the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. Viewing the story cloths is an opportunity to bear witness to the journey of survivors in our healing programs, and to stand with them in solidarity.



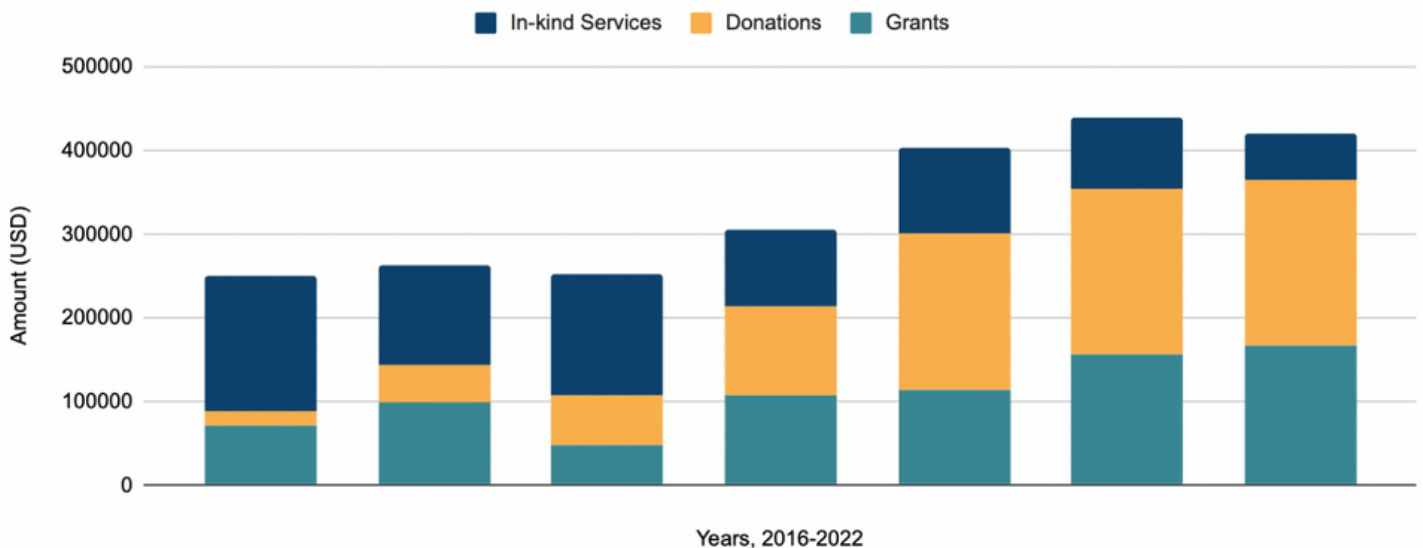
**Displaying a story cloth allows for the possibility of bearing witness that can be an important element of the healing process in human rights abuse. Those who see the story cloth can affirm “I hear you, I believe you, I stand with you.”**

# Financial Report

Common Threads Project total resources were \$420,439, including \$166,307 in grant donations, \$198,332 in individual donations, and \$55,800 in in-kind services. In comparison to last year, grant donations increased by \$11,082 and our number of monthly donors tripled. Our grant donors were Laurie Tisch Illumination Fund, Together Women Rise, USAID (with Žene sa Une) and OAK Foundation.

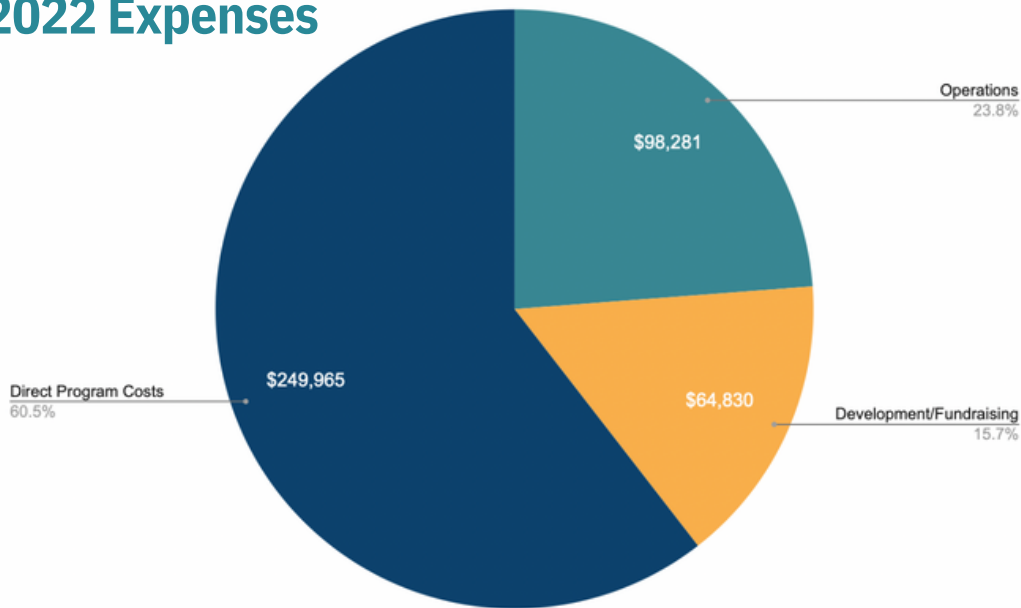
Expenses in 2022 totaled \$413,076, including \$249,965 in direct program costs.

## Year-to-Year Comparison of Resources



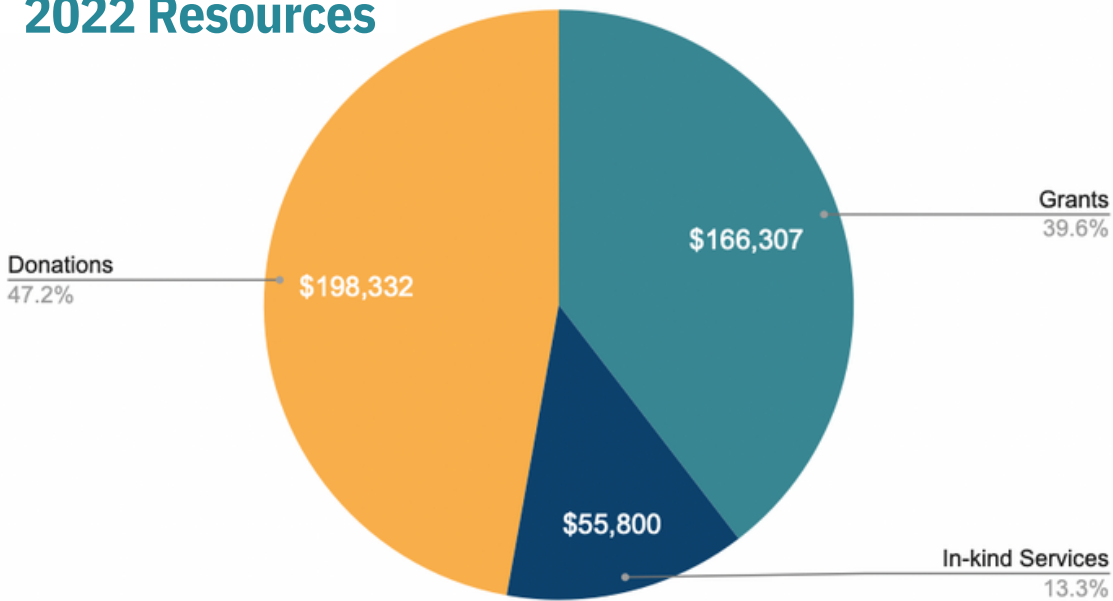
	<u>Grants</u>	<u>Donations</u>	<u>In-Kind</u>	<u>Total</u>
<b>2016</b>	\$71,000	\$17,100	\$162,673	\$250,773
<b>2017</b>	\$98,726	\$45,455	\$119,057	\$263,238
<b>2018</b>	\$48,000	\$59,799	\$143,815	\$251,614
<b>2019</b>	\$108,188	\$104,894	\$91,050	\$304,132
<b>2020</b>	\$113,587	\$187,227	\$100,986	\$401,800
<b>2021</b>	\$155,225	\$198,526	\$86,240	\$439,991
<b>2022</b>	\$166,307	\$198,332	\$55,800	\$420,439

## 2022 Expenses



Direct Program	\$249,965
Development/Fundraising	\$64,830
Operations	\$98,281
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$413,076</b>

## 2022 Resources



Grants	\$166,307
Donations	\$198,332
In-Kind Services	\$55,800
<b>Total Resources</b>	<b>\$420,439</b>

# 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 and wide. From those in our circles in Bosnia, Nepal, and the US, to our trainees around the world, to our staff in Brooklyn, we thank you for your role in maintaining the impact of Common Threads Project in 2022.



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

Joseph H. and Florence A. Roblee Foundation



## We could not do any of this without our extraordinary family of donors:

Kay and Ira Abrams  
Adeyinka Akinsulure-Smith  
John Aleinikoff  
Sam Aleinikoff  
Shoshana Aleinikoff and Nathan Kittle  
Gloria Allen  
Kaye Anderson  
Claire Angel  
Lavinia Awosanya  
Ann Banks and Jon Grossman  
Lea Basile-Lazarus  
Jessica Bauman and Ben Posel  
James Becker  
Ann Blume  
Jane Botchie  
Daniel Bradlow  
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Mary Briese Matheron  
Maureen Brotherton  
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Rachel Cohen and Alex Aleinikoff  
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Barbara Garlock  
Katherine Gekas  
Daniel Gibson

Jonthan Graber  
Cynthia Grguric  
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Beth Krug  
Ruth Lammert-Reeves and Roger Reeves  
Jackie Leopold  
Phyllis Lerner  
Blair Levin  
Linda Lewison  
Mary Luke  
Stephanie Lynn  
Neg Mahmoodzadegan  
Luisa Marino Garcia  
Priscilla McEnroe  
Eileen McGinn  
Amy McGregor-Radin  
Doris Meissner  
Joyce Migdal  
Leslie Montroll  
David Morel  
Laura and Peter Orser  
Dawn Parness  
Susan Pfeifer  
Mary Phelan

Rebecca Potter  
Anne Proctor  
Susan Puritz  
Pam Pym  
Nancy Reder  
Elizabeth and Jonathan Roberts  
Sarah Rosengaertner  
Rhonda Rubin  
Linda Kanefield and Norman Schneider  
Elisabeth Sears  
Sara and Cary Sennett  
Laura Shannon  
Jane Shapiro  
Mark Shapiro  
Martha Sherry  
Amy Shevrin and Joseph Kohane  
Deborah Shulman  
Nancy and Norman Silber  
Karen Simon  
Sandipman Singh Basnyat  
Sue Smith  
Thomas Smith  
Debra Snider  
Ruth Sorenson  
Jane Steinberg  
Kelcey Stratton  
Cynthia Stroum  
Sue Sullivan  
Jori Swartz  
Susan Talalay  
Karen and Nils Tcheyan  
Betsy and David Teutsch  
Denise Thal and David Scobey  
Richard Towle  
Tally Tripp  
Elizabeth Trosman and Larry Samelson  
Meg Tufano  
Susie Turner  
Linda Wagner  
Sari Weisenberg  
Catalina Woldarsky  
Albert Wong

*Working together one stitch at a time,  
transformation is possible.*