



John R. Oishei Foundation

2018

An Inclusive Western New York Grantmaker. The John R. Oishei Foundation (Oishei) is among the largest general-purpose foundations in the Buffalo-Niagara region of Western New York State, awarding approximately \$15 million a year in grants. It seeks to promote economic vibrancy and quality of life in the area for all residents, from birth on. As such, it doesn't focus on any one community, but seeks to be inclusive of all of the region's culturally and racially diverse populations. Oishei seeks to maximize its impact using a range of strategies through five focus areas. In addition to grantmaking, it devotes its time, people, and networks to convening stakeholders around significant issues, leading and participating in collaborative initiatives, sharing knowledge, strengthening the capacity of area non-profits, and nurturing promising leaders. Oishei has just begun intentional work around developing a racial equity lens in the foundation's staffing, grantmaking, and trustee composition and governance. This approach is designed to ensure fairness in dealings with all people of color, including immigrants and refugees, and reflects Buffalo's racially and ethnically diverse community.

A Longstanding Commitment to Newcomers as Part of Integrated Grantmaking. Buffalo is about 6 percent foreign born and a major refugee resettlement destination. In recent years, it received 1,500-2,000 refugees annually until the recent restrictions significantly reduced the number of arrivals. Buffalo now boasts a refugee population of about 20,000, served by four refugee resettlement affiliates. It is also one of only two cities in New York State—New York City is the other—with its own Office of New Americans. Buffalo's population, which had been steadily declining for decades, has stabilized recently, in large part due to the arrival of refugees.

The Foundation views immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as integral to the make-up of the larger Buffalo-Niagara community and to the work Oishei supports to benefit the region. Quantifying the magnitude of the support is challenging since a vast number of Oishei's grantees across its program areas likely support refugee and asylum seeker populations indirectly or in a less targeted fashion. Food banks, health, education, workforce, and self-sufficiency programs are prime examples of this indirect or broad-based support.

In addition to this generalized integrated programmatic support, Oishei makes significant and more easily quantifiable direct project grants to support refugees and asylum seekers. In 2017, such grants totaled \$370,000, the vast majority of which was directed to Jericho Road Ministries to expand access to primary care on Buffalo's East Side and to Journey's End Refugee Services for office relocation. Two years earlier, Oishei's total support for refugee and asylum seeker populations reached \$700,000, and included two major grants. The first, an initiative the foundation played a critical role in shaping and scaling, was a \$400,000 grant to Legal Aid of Buffalo and Journey's End Refugee Services to launch a coordinated refugee and asylum seeker legal services project, providing culturally competent, trauma-informed continuum of care to 10,000 clients. The second was a \$200,000 grant to Catholic Charities for a refugee health clinic.

Oishei also participates in the Buffalo Refugee Roundtable Initiative, which facilitates cooperation with refugee resettlement and legal organizations, the City of Buffalo, and statewide advocates such as the New York Immigration Coalition.

A Laser Focus on the Evolving Needs of its Community. The foundation prides itself on being nimble and responsive to the evolving needs and unique challenges faced by the area's residents. For example, when the 2008 Great Recession hit, Oishei shifted its funding priorities to put a greater emphasis on basic human needs and self-sufficiency. Now, federal policies enacted by the new administration have heightened fear and anxiety in Buffalo's newcomer



JOHN R. OISHEI FOUNDATION



In addition to grantmaking, Oishei devotes its time, people, and networks to convening stakeholders around significant issues, leading and participating in collaborative initiatives, sharing knowledge, strengthening the capacity of area non-profits, and nurturing promising leaders.

community and challenged the sustainability of Buffalo's robust refugee resettlement organizations. Oishei has supported responsive efforts to the impacts of those policies on its community by assisting grantees seeking to adapt to new realities, raising awareness, and spurring collective action in partnership with other community stakeholders and area donors.

Specifically, soon after the first round of executive orders by the administration, Oishei convened the area's refugee resettlement agencies, their trustees, and staff, along with a legal expert to provide information and guidance. Oishei also convened legal service and community-based organizations, as well as area foundations and their trustees. The overarching goal was to understand the orders' local impact and fashion an effective and unified response. Top of mind is the need to help the frontline agencies address significant challenges to their sustainability given steep declines in refugee numbers while still meeting the needs of their refugee clients. Oishei, through its Philanthropic Support office, is working with the resettlement agencies to plan for the future in a strategic fashion, shore up their boards of directors, and engage in organizational development. Together they will discuss how strategic alignments across agencies from different networks and greater cooperation can be adaptive in this volatile and resource-constrained environment.



For additional information about Oishei's programs, see the Foundation's website, www.oishei.org or contact Oishei Vice President Larry Cook at lcook@oishei.org.