



AGAINST THE TIDE

# YOUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

Donor Impact Report, Fall 2024

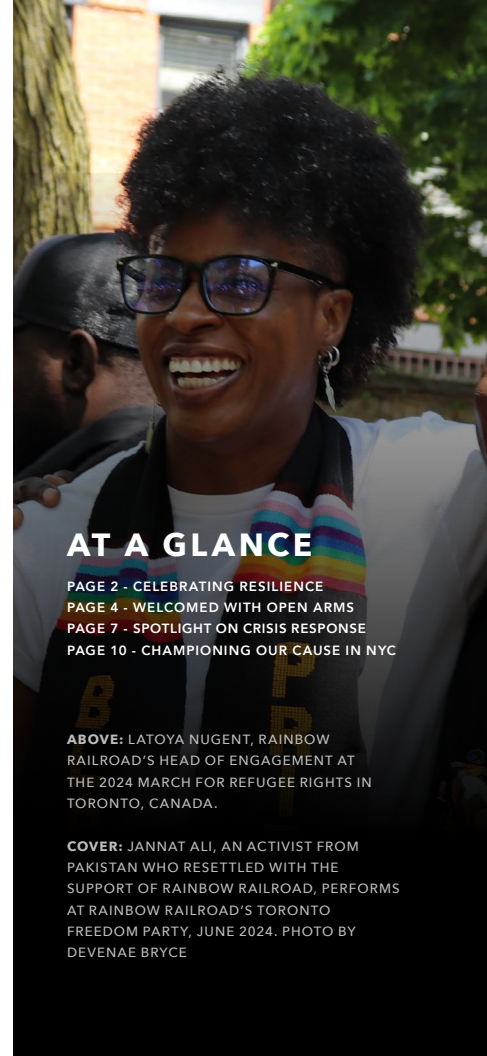
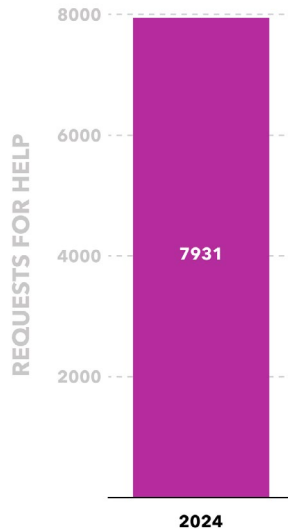




## CELEBRATING RESILIENCE: AN ONGOING JOURNEY FOR LGBTQI+ LIBERATION

Heading into fall, we are looking ahead to the rest of 2024, while reflecting on the recent Pride season. Pride is a time of both ongoing protest and dynamic celebration, showcasing the resilience and resourcefulness that defines our community.

The past few months have been challenging, with a rise in anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment and a surge in legislation targeting LGBTQI+ individuals in many parts of the world. We witnessed the impact of this on our work, fielding over 1,000 requests for help from at-risk LGBTQI+ people during Pride month and 7,931 total requests since January. This period also allowed us to engage, advocate, and gather with you, the members of our community who make our work possible.



### AT A GLANCE

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**ABOVE:** LATOYA NUGENT, RAINBOW RAILROAD'S HEAD OF ENGAGEMENT AT THE 2024 MARCH FOR REFUGEE RIGHTS IN TORONTO, CANADA.

**COVER:** JANNAT ALI, AN ACTIVIST FROM PAKISTAN WHO RESETTLED WITH THE SUPPORT OF RAINBOW RAILROAD, PERFORMS AT RAINBOW RAILROAD'S TORONTO FREEDOM PARTY, JUNE 2024. PHOTO BY DEVENAE BRYCE



In the lead-up to a critical election in the United States this fall, we are attuned to the high stakes for LGBTQI+ refugees. We are working to ensure that we sustain the critical progress that we have made in recent years, including our partnership with the U.S. government to relocate LGBTQI+ refugees through Welcome Corps.

In this report, we share Giovanni's story, in his own words. Giovanni resettled in Washington, DC, through the Welcome Corps program last year after facing community threats and violence in El Salvador. He is the first queer refugee to arrive in the United States under the Welcome Corps and Rainbow Railroad partnership, and I hope that, in reading his story, you will understand the importance of this programmatic milestone.

We are also closely monitoring a number of crisis situations for LGBTQI+ people around the world. We're highlighting our current response in Russia, as we work with regional partners to respond to the increasing requests for help following last year's Supreme Court decision.

It is also crucial to recognize the unwavering support of our donors. New York City-based supporters Stephen Brockman

and John "Doc" Willoughby have helped set the standard for that support. I hope that reading their story will inspire you and your continued dedication to our work.

We have been successful at creating more resettlement pathways for at-risk LGBTQI+ individuals, and the coming months will be pivotal in utilizing these pathways so that we can assist more individuals with relocation this year. Your investment at this critical juncture will directly impact the lives of many at-risk LGBTQI+ people who now have a pathway to safety because of our advocacy. Read on to discover the latest developments and see the direct impact of your support and partnership in our fight for LGBTQI+ liberation.

Latoya Nugent (she/her)  
Head of Engagement  
Rainbow Railroad



WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS

# GIOVANNI'S STORY OF COURAGE AND COMMUNITY

Giovanni is a gay man who resettled in Washington, DC, as part of the Welcome Corps program last year, after suffering community threats and violence in El Salvador.

Through Welcome Corps, Giovanni was able to resettle with the help of a Community of Care. Communities of Care are made up of volunteers who receive training and support from Rainbow Railroad.



ABOVE: GIOVANNI AT A BASEBALL GAME WITH MEMBERS OF HIS COMMUNITY OF CARE, WHO SUPPORTED HIS RESETTLEMENT IN WASHINGTON, DC



## A JOURNEY OF RESETTLEMENT IN HIS OWN WORDS

*On June 20, World Refugee Day, Giovanni delivered the following remarks to policymakers and community members at an event at the Embassy of Canada to the United States in Washington, D.C.*

My name is Giovanni, and today, I stand before you as a testament to hope, resilience, and the boundless possibilities that can arise from a second chance.

I was the first refugee to arrive here in the United States under the Welcome Corps and Rainbow Railroad partnership, and it is an honor to share my journey with you.

On November 16, 2023, I stepped off a plane at Dulles International Airport, leaving behind a life filled with fear and uncertainty in El Salvador. The moment I arrived, a flood of emotions washed over me—joy, relief, and a profound sense of gratitude.

**ABOVE:** GIOVANNI (THIRD FROM LEFT) ARRIVES AT THE AIRPORT AND IS WELCOMED BY RAINBOW RAILROAD SENIOR ENGAGEMENT OFFICER KENDRA FRITH (RIGHT), AND MEMBERS OF HIS COMMUNITY OF CARE, JASON BELLO AND JUSTIN CONIARIS (FROM LEFT).

Tears streamed down my face as I was greeted by my incredible Community of Care. Staff from Rainbow Railroad were there too, embodying the spirit of compassion and support that has carried me through this journey.

The United States, and particularly our nation's capital, has welcomed me with open arms. I have experienced a level of acceptance and freedom here that I could never have imagined back in El Salvador.

Learning English was a crucial step in my new life, and with the support of my community, I not only learned the language, but also pursued a dream I had long held: to work in the medical field.

Recently, I achieved a milestone I once thought impossible—I became a Certified Medical Assistant. This accomplishment is more than a personal victory; it is a symbol of what can be achieved when someone is given the opportunity to thrive.

In El Salvador, such a dream would have remained just that—a dream. Here in the U.S., it became a reality. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to Welcome Corps and Rainbow Railroad.

I celebrate not just my journey, but the journeys of millions of refugees around the world. I celebrate the courage to seek a better life, the strength to overcome unimaginable obstacles, and the hope that guides us all.

Thank you for supporting the LGBTQI+ refugee community. Together, we can continue to make a difference, one life at a time.

*To learn more about Communities of Care, and how you can support an LGBTQI+ newcomer in your community, visit [rainbowrailroad.org/volunteer](https://rainbowrailroad.org/volunteer).*



SPOTLIGHT ON CRISIS RESPONSE

# AN UNSTABLE LANDSCAPE

FOR LGBTQI+ RIGHTS

Last year saw another record high in forced displacement due to regional conflicts, wars, gender-based violence, climate crises, and legislative changes. LGBTQI+ populations are particularly vulnerable in these situations, whether directly targeted or indirectly impacted by broader societal instability.

Rainbow Railroad's Crisis Response Team plays a critical role in monitoring and responding to global crises affecting LGBTQI+ individuals. This work demands vigilance and adaptability, as crises can escalate quickly. Currently, we are monitoring several situations, including ones in Palestine, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Iraq.

Tracking, monitoring, and responding to crises involves collaboration across multiple departments. Alongside the Emergency



Travel Support Team and the Intake Team, the Crisis Response Team assesses risks, collaborates with local networks, and develops long-term support strategies.

Although the work of the Crisis Response Team can be very urgent, responding to a crisis requires ongoing resources and support.

## **CRISIS IN FOCUS: OUR RESPONSE IN RUSSIA**

On November 28, 2023, Russia's Supreme Court ruled that the "international LGBT movement" is an "extremist organization,"

jeopardizing all forms of LGBTQI+ rights activism in the country.

Rainbow Railroad has been closely following this crisis and is coordinating with the Russian LGBT Network (RLGBTN) and the Crisis Response Group (SKSOS), two partner organizations with whom Rainbow Railroad has worked since the emergency relocations from Chechnya in 2017.

Late last year, we provided emergency funds to support the implementation of contingency plans and strategies to ensure organizational stability, to establish an emergency relief fund to assist the organization's team members facing state-enabled persecution, and for the creation

of a rapid response fund to address urgent needs for LGBTQI+ individuals in Russia.

We are also exploring new ways to leverage international bodies to amplify the concerns of partner organizations. This includes the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC), an intergovernmental body of governments dedicated to the protection of the rights of LGBTI persons. In May, Rainbow Railroad facilitated the direct participation of partner organizations at the ERC's International Diplomacy thematic group to provide an update on the situation.



**This year we have also facilitated 14 emergency relocations for Russian LGBTQI+ persons at risk.**

We continue to work with partners on the ground in Russia to identify opportunities for support.

Monitoring and responding to crises requires flexible funding that can be leveraged quickly when a situation emerges. We rely on consistent support from our community in order to be responsive as needs arise. We hope you will continue supporting Rainbow Railroad so we can continue to respond to crises impacting LGBTQI+ people globally.





# CHAMPIONING OUR CAUSE IN NYC

## SPREADING AWARENESS AND IMPACTING LGBTQI+ LIVES

**S**ince Rainbow Railroad's inception, philanthropic support from our community has been the lifeblood of our work. New York City-based supporters Stephen Brockman and John "Doc" Willoughby have helped set the bar for this type of support at a local level.

Stephen and Doc's support of Rainbow Railroad first began during the resettlement of 70 Chechen men targeted by state

**LEFT: JOHN "DOC" WILLOUGHBY (LEFT) AND STEPHEN BROCKMAN**  
PHOTO BY MICHEELS/TOBIAS



violence in 2017 and 2018. The human-centered approach to our work resonated with them both. “There was something very moving in understanding the money that would be given – along with the grass-roots contributions of so many others – was directly impacting the lives of specific vulnerable individuals,” Doc explained.

As a kickoff to Pride season earlier this year, Stephen and Doc hosted a gathering of their community at the New York offices of TenBerke architects, where Stephen is a principal. The cocktail reception featured Rainbow Railroad Board Chair Caleb Goodman and Staries Azura, a newcomer recently resettled to New York through

Rainbow Railroad. Both highlighted the importance of growing our community in key metropolitan areas.

**Stephen shared, “In raising support for any cause, people respond best to those they know and trust. With the TenBerke reception, we wanted to offer that to Rainbow Railroad.”**

That trust bore fruit, with the TenBerke event garnering some 60 new first-time donors as well as invitations from attendees to further engage around New York-area corporate, media, and post-secondary institutional partnerships.

We are deeply grateful to Stephen and Doc for helping spread awareness and for their own generous financial support over the years.

Conversations are underway with supporters for possible additional events in Chicago and Toronto later this year and we hope to share them with you soon.

*If you are interested in hosting an event or would like to be informed when one is held near you, please contact our Senior Development Officer, Jasmine Ford at [jford@rainbowrailroad.org](mailto:jford@rainbowrailroad.org).*



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