



STRONGER TOGETHER

YOUR ROLE IN BUILDING SAFER FUTURES

Donor Impact Report, Fall/Winter 2025





OUR COMMUNITY TRANSCENDS BORDERS: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SOLIDARITY

The world feels increasingly uncertain. From violent conflict and rising authoritarianism to the growing rollback of human rights, many people are navigating instability and fear. For LGBTQI+ people, this reality is especially urgent. Around the globe, queer and trans individuals are facing escalating persecution, criminalization, and forced displacement. These overlapping crises make Rainbow Railroad's work more necessary, and more challenging, than ever.

And yet, in the midst of these challenges, there is hope. Each story in this report is a reminder of what becomes possible when we come together in solidarity.



AT A GLANCE

- SECTION 1 - OUR COMMUNITY TRANSCENDS BORDERS
- SECTION 2 - CHARLIE'S JOURNEY TO SAFETY AND SELF-DISCOVERY
- SECTION 3 - COMMUNITY ACCESS FUND RECIPIENT
- SECTION 4 - BUILDING CONNECTIONS



In this report, you will meet Charlie, a young non-binary person who was forced to flee Russia with their partner after being targeted for who they are, and now uses their voice to empower others as a queer refugee ambassador. Their journey, marked by courage and resilience, illuminates the stakes of our work and the impact your support makes possible. This personal story is a testament to the transformative power of intervention.

That transformation is not possible without you. In these pages, we are proud to highlight the generosity of Cory Schisler, a supporter whose commitment has fueled vital work. This story is an inspiring reminder that individual acts of solidarity ripple outward, creating change for countless others.

Solidarity also extends beyond direct relocation. Through our Community Access Fund, we support grassroots groups working on the frontlines of displacement. This fall, we are spotlighting the Migrant Support Collective, an organization focused on supporting migrants detained under the immigration system in the United States. By resourcing

community-led responses, we are working towards a holistic vision of collective liberation and care.

Despite the crises dominating headlines, we remain steadfast in our mission. Every time we provide support, whether by moving someone to safety, providing emergency financial support, or empowering local organizations, we chip away at a system designed to keep LGBTQI+ people in danger. Together, we are proving that solidarity transcends borders, and that hope can flourish even in the most difficult circumstances.

As you read this report, I invite you to hold onto that hope. Thank you for standing with us, and with LGBTQI+ people everywhere, at a time when your support matters more than ever.

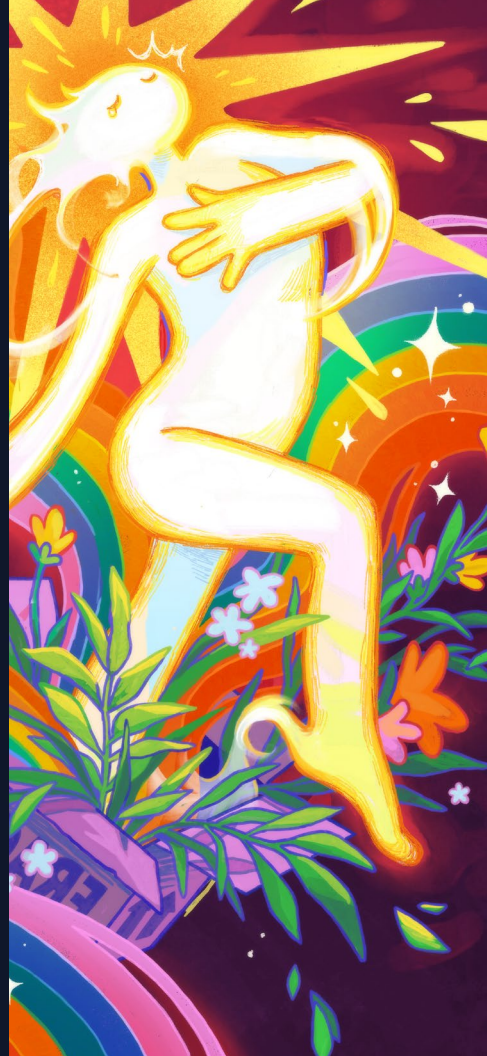
Latoya Nugent
Head of Engagement
Rainbow Railroad



"AFTER THE DARKEST NIGHT COMES
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SUNRISE."

CHARLIE'S JOURNEY TO SAFETY AND SELF-DISCOVERY

When Charlie (he/they) left Russia with their partner and three pets, they didn't know if they'd ever find a place to truly call home. But after navigating years of uncertainty, multiple countries, and nearly ten temporary homes, they found refuge in Toronto, Canada. And with it, a chance to build a life grounded in joy, creativity, and queer love.



"I'm not sure I'd be able to get where I am now without Rainbow Railroad's support," they say. "It was also something I couldn't allow myself to even hope for. I truly believe in miracles now."

Charlie's resettlement journey was anything but easy. "It was pretty stressful for a neurodivergent couple with three pets," they laugh. But even through the instability, job loss, and emotional toll, they found unexpected gifts: new friends, hard-won strength, and a deeper bond with their partner. "All the hardship only bonded me with my partner more. I wouldn't want to do it again, but I'm so happy I lived through it."

After years of hiding, fear, and flight, they're reclaiming joy as a radical act. "I'm on a journey to bring all my fun back," Charlie shares. Art has always been central to his life, but years of living in a climate of fear and suppression dulled both his creative joy and sense of worth. Now, safety has given him the freedom to express himself fully and reconnect with his passion and identity.

Today, Charlie is settling into Toronto life – making friends, exploring the city, and attending many art

events, "I wish I had time to go to them all," he says. Charlie is also getting serious about his own art projects, sharing "it's a very exciting journey."

Charlie is grateful to be staying connected to the Rainbow Railroad community, as it is helping him learn how to express himself, share his story, and begin supporting others. Charlie's outlook for their future is hopeful, sharing, "after the darkest night comes the most beautiful sunrise."

To the donors who helped make their journey possible, Charlie offers heartfelt thanks:

"You are wonderful and magical, you literally changed someone's life. Please take care of yourself and remember to rest well."

Charlie's story is a reminder that safety is more than survival – it's the foundation for living authentically, building community, and dreaming again. Because of your support, people like Charlie can rebuild their lives with dignity, hope, and purpose.



COMMUNITY ACCESS FUND RECIPIENT

MIGRANT SUPPORT COLLECTIVE:
CARING FOR COMMUNITY BY
PROMOTING AUTONOMY AND DIGNITY

"We dream of a world where care is collective, borders are abolished, and our people are safe, housed, and celebrated."

That vision guides Migrant Support Collective (MSC), a recipient of Rainbow Railroad's new Community Access Fund, which funds grassroots initiatives meeting the needs of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees in the U.S. and Canada. Based in the U.S., MSC supports migrants in immigration detention.

"We're building towards work that we know will have lasting impact," said Michelle Velazquez, Advocacy Director. "The Community Access Fund is helping us grow programs that LGBTQI+ migrants need: initiatives like access to affirming reading materials, mental health support inside detention, and opportunities for creative expression through art and storytelling."

Originally launched as Books for Migrants, the project grew from the power of books to combat isolation behind bars.



“We take a dual approach to solving the issues that detained migrants face through a combination of direct services and advocacy.”

The CAF is helping them to expand multiple initiatives:

- A trauma-informed, multilingual mental health resource library for LGBTQI+ migrants in detention.
- Pen Pal and Library Programs providing educational materials and connection.
- Art as Advocacy, a storytelling project to amplify detained voices.

A new Data Transparency Initiative, gathering and sharing evidence about detention conditions.

“This funding makes a meaningful difference by enabling us to expand based on the needs and feedback from detained

migrants,” shared Mimi Christikawa, Design & Digital Communications Director, estimating that at least 50 LGBTQI+ migrants will benefit directly from this phase.

A Deeper Kind of Impact

Receiving this grant provided validation for their work.

“This is our first grant as a newly fiscally sponsored organization,” Mimi shared. “At a time when funding can be difficult to access, and as detention expands and migrant rights remain under attack, this support is critical.”

The trust-based, low-barrier approach was especially meaningful.

“Rainbow Railroad made this grant accessible to small organizations like ours

by making the application and reporting processes so easy and intuitive!” explained Beck Sroczynski, Community Engagement & Program Director.

“It’s easy to underestimate how difficult it is for small organizations to apply for grants,” they said. “Rainbow Railroad is living out its values by ensuring that it is distributing money in an equitable way.”

Local Support and Systemic Change

For those looking to support LGBTQI+ migrants in their own communities, they offer clear advice:

“Start by listening to the needs that migrants in your community are naming,” Michelle urged.



They also stress the importance of challenging systems:

“Ask yourself: Is your city or state funding detention or deportation? Where are the immigrant voices in the spaces you are a part of?”

MSC’s work is a reminder that even within systems designed to dehumanize, creativity and connection can thrive. With Rainbow Railroad’s support, they’re building the foundation for change.

Their hope is simple, but radical: that one day, this work will no longer be necessary. Until then, they remain committed to showing up for LGBTQI+ migrants with care, consistency, and a call for justice.



BUILDING CONNECTIONS:

HOW CORY SCHISLER FOUND
MEANING IN RAINBOW RAILROAD'S
MISSION

Cory (he/him) first learned of Rainbow Railroad's mission to help LGBTQI+ individuals get to safety through his friendship with Julian Morris, Vice-Chair of Rainbow Railroad's USA Board of Directors. What struck him most was how the organization uses its resources in "creative, lasting and transformative ways." The more he learned about the many programs which Rainbow Railroad uses to help at-risk queer people, the more he saw how urgently needed this work is today.

"I've been exposed to many LGBTQI+ nonprofits over the years," Cory shared, "but as [Julian] described the work of Rainbow Railroad, I felt a profound reaction to the real, tangible impact on individual lives."

A San Francisco-based hospitality entrepreneur, Cory has built his career around creating spaces where people can connect over a meal. That commitment to building community has always given his



work meaning, and it's one of the things that inspired him to co-host a fundraiser for Rainbow Railroad in June 2025 at Izzy's Steaks & Chops. He recently led the reintroduction of the restaurant, and wanted to make it into a place where people could connect over shared values.

"To me, it goes beyond serving our regular guests – it's about using these spaces as platforms for community and causes larger than ourselves," said Cory, "Our dinner with Rainbow Railroad was a powerful example of that."

Throughout the evening at Izzy's, he felt proud watching people connect with one another over their interest in the mission, share their reasons for being there, and most of all, open themselves to the stories of Rainbow Railroad's work.

For Cory, supporting Rainbow Railroad is about more than just philanthropy; it's about solidarity. "Supporting this

cause lights me up and gives my time here on earth profound meaning," he shared. The stories of Rainbow Railroad's work have become a regular part of his everyday conversations in both social and professional circles. His involvement has also magnified his recognition of the privilege of living in a community where who he is and who he loves are never questioned, which fuels his commitment to helping others find their path to living fully and authentically.

That commitment is also driven by his belief that Rainbow Railroad is uniquely positioned to respond to crisis situations affecting LGBTQI+ individuals around the world. He describes it as a "boots-on-the-ground" organization that provides urgent, life-changing assistance. What inspires him most is the range of Rainbow Railroad's programs and partnerships, operating across so many geographies with determination and care.

"What makes Rainbow Railroad's work extraordinary is that it cuts through this complexity, simplifying the path to safety for those in urgent need." Cory explained.

Looking ahead, Cory is optimistic about Rainbow Railroad's resilience in the face of shifting politics and increasing threats. "The courage of those they help, paired with the determination of the team behind them, makes me believe that progress is not only possible but inevitable," he shared.

That hope also drives his encouragement for others to get involved and find creative ways to support the organization, by sharing their time, talents, passions or access. As Cory affirmed, "Each of us has the ability to devote energy to this cause, and every contribution matters."



When Cory hosted his fundraiser in June 2025, Rainbow Railroad had received just over 9,000 requests for help from at-risk LGBTQI+ individuals around the world, since the start of the year. By the time of this writing in September, that number has already climbed past **15,000**. If you're inspired by Cory's story and are interested in organizing a fundraiser of your own, or attending one in a city near you, reach out to us at donations@rainbowrailroad.org.



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