



SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT I

Reporting period: December 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024

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Executive Summary

This report details the progress and outcomes of the State of Vermont-funded Statewide Asylum Seekers Assistance Program (SASAP). The aim of SASAP is twofold: (1) support asylum seekers via small grants to member organizations of the Vermont Asylum Seekers Network (VASN) and (2) provide \$30,000 in funds to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the Vermont Asylum Seekers Network (VASN).

Administered by CVOEO, SASAP has awarded \$343,817 in small grants over the past eight months to the Vermont Asylum Seekers Network (VASN). The six organizations across the state work to help asylum seekers secure employment and achieve long-term residency in Vermont. VASN is comprised of the following member organizations:

- Bridge to Rutland ([B2R](#))
- Chittenden Asylum Seekers Assistance Network ([CASAN](#))
- Community Asylum Seekers Project ([CASP](#))
- Central Vermont Refugee Action Network ([CVRAN](#))
- Northeast Kingdom Asylum Seekers Assistance Network ([NEKASAN](#))
- Supporting and Helping Asylees and Refugees, Inc. ([SHARe](#))

Key Achievements:

From December 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, the Statewide Asylum Seekers Assistance Program provided critical support and services to **155** asylum seekers, comprising **72** unique families and benefiting **106** adults and **49** children. With the help of small grants, VASN member organizations provided the following **625** services:

Facilitating Employment

- Employability assessments helped **27 asylum seekers**.
- Training and job development programs helped **21 asylum seekers**.
- Vocational training and skills recertification assistance helped **11 asylum seekers**.
- Job placement services helped **27 asylum seekers**
- Job maintenance support helped **31 asylum seekers**.

Ensuring Housing Stability:

- Assistance in securing housing helped **75 asylum seekers**.
- Short-term housing support helped **24 asylum seekers**.

Promoting Self-Sufficiency:

- Communication and technology support helped **60 asylum seekers**
- English language instruction support helped **50 asylum seekers**.
- Interpretation and translation support helped **61 asylum seekers**.
- Legal referrals for asylum applications helped **107 asylum seekers**.

Enhancing Community Integration:

- Services related to social adjustment, such as community orientation and life skills, were provided to **57 asylum seekers**.

- Transportation assistance benefited **47 asylum seekers**.
- Day care support for children helped **25 asylum seekers**.

Building Network Capacity:

- Capacity building funds have been put towards the development of a VSAN website of shared resources. Once active, the domain name will be vtasylumsupport.org
- Capacity building funds have been set aside to develop a sustainability plan for VASN.

Successes and Challenges: The program has achieved significant successes, profoundly impacting the lives of asylum seekers by providing essential support across several areas. Notably, the program facilitated employment for many asylum seekers, delivering **117 services** that focused primarily on job maintenance, helping individuals achieve financial independence and support their families. In terms of housing stability, the program assisted **99 families** with short-term housing solutions and securing permanent housing, laying a crucial foundation for their new lives. To promote self-sufficiency, **279 services** were provided, including communication and technology support, English language instruction, interpretation and translation services, and legal referrals for asylum applications. Additionally, **130 services** were rendered to foster community integration, covering areas such as transportation, social adjustment, and daycare for children.

However, despite these successes, several challenges persist. Firstly, the increasing number of asylum seekers and the limited capacity of volunteer-run organizations necessitate a reassessment of current support models. These organizations, primarily staffed by paraprofessionals and retirees, struggle to meet growing demands and face difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers with specialized skills in case management and trauma-informed care. Systemic change may be required to shift from a predominantly volunteer-based model to one that incorporates paid staff, thus better meeting the needs of asylum seekers and enhancing organizational capacity.

In conclusion, the State of Vermont's investment in supporting asylum seekers has yielded significant positive outcomes, aiding 72 households in their journey towards self-sufficiency and integration into the community. Continued support and resource allocation will be crucial in sustaining and expanding these efforts, ensuring that Vermont remains a welcoming and supportive environment for all asylum seekers.

Introduction

The State of Vermont has long recognized the importance of providing comprehensive support to asylum seekers, who face numerous challenges in their pursuit of safety, stability, and self-sufficiency. Unlike refugees, who are granted legal protection and support before arriving in the United States, asylum seekers must navigate the asylum process independently and do not have access to the same federal resources. To address these needs, the State established the Statewide Asylum Seekers Assistance Program (SASAP) to deliver targeted aid and resources to this vulnerable population. Administered by the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), SASAP assists asylum seekers in navigating a complex array of legal, social, and economic barriers.

State funding plays a pivotal role in this initiative. By allocating financial resources to SASAP, the State of Vermont ensures that a network of local organizations—the Vermont Asylum Seekers Network (VASN)—can provide critical services across the state. These funds support a wide range of services, including housing assistance, employability assessments, vocational training, and job placement, all aimed at helping asylum seekers achieve self-sufficiency and long-term residency in Vermont.

As administrator of this grant, CVOEO developed a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a small grant-making program for Vermont’s Asylum Seekers Assistance Network organizations. Six organizations applied and were awarded grants totaling \$343,817 to support resettlement and employment services for those seeking asylum:

Bridge to Rutland (B2R)

- Based in Rutland and serves the Rutland County area in Southwest Vermont. B2R received a subgrant of \$54,300. While primarily focused on Rutland County,

Chittenden Asylum Seekers Assistance Network (CASAN)

- Based in Essex Junction and primarily operates in Chittenden County. CASAN received a subgrant of \$72,250.

Community Asylum Seekers Project (CASP)

- Based in Brattleboro and provides support to Windham County in Southeast Vermont. CASP received a subgrant of \$53,560.

Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN)

- Operates out of Montpelier and serves the Washington, Orange, and Addison counties in Central Vermont. CVRAN received a subgrant of \$58,000 and has the highest numbers of asylum seekers served.

Northeast Kingdom Asylum Seekers Assistance Network (NEKASN)

- Based in Danville and serves Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans County in Northeast Vermont. NEKASN received a subgrant of \$51,780. NEKASAN has a unique relationship with Border Patrol, assisting with temporary housing and transportation for individuals processed and released at the border.

Supporting and Helping Asylees and Refugees, Inc. (SHARe)

- Located in Norwich and covers Windsor County in Southeast Vermont and extends support to Grafton County, in neighboring New Hampshire. SHARe received a subgrant of \$53,927.

The long-term goal of providing these resources is to ensure a welcoming environment where asylum seekers become self-sufficient, employed, and maintain long-term residency in Vermont.

To further enhance the network's capabilities and long-term viability, CVOEO was granted an additional \$30,000. This funding will enable VASN members to craft comprehensive strategies and action plans aimed at strengthening the network. With these funds, a website has already been established, and the remaining budget will be used to engage an organizational development consultant. This consultant will guide the network members through a structured process of strategic planning, offering training and support to ensure the network's growth and sustainability. Additionally, VASN members will actively participate in identifying and prioritizing the consultant's activities to address the network's most pressing needs.

Objectives

The primary objective of the subgrants provided through SASAP is to empower local organizations within the VASN to deliver essential services and support to asylum seekers. These subgrants are strategically aimed at addressing the immediate and long-term needs of asylum seekers, ensuring that they have the necessary resources to integrate into their Vermont communities and build stable, productive lives.

The overall goals for supporting asylum seekers through these subgrants are:

- **Facilitating Employment:** Providing vocational training, job development, and placement services to enhance employability and secure stable employment for asylum seekers.
- **Ensuring Housing Stability:** Offering various forms of housing assistance, including securing temporary and long-term housing solutions.
- **Promoting Self-Sufficiency:** Assisting asylum seekers in becoming self-reliant through comprehensive support services such as language instruction, social adjustment programs, and legal referrals.
- **Enhancing Community Integration:** Supporting asylum seekers in their social and cultural integration into local communities, fostering a welcoming environment where they can thrive.
- **Building Network Capacity:** Strengthening the organizational capacity of VASN members through targeted training and sustainability planning, ensuring the long-term viability and effectiveness of the support network.

By achieving these objectives, SASAP aims to create a robust support system that not only addresses the immediate needs of asylum seekers but also lays the foundation for their long-term success and contribution to the state of Vermont.

Section 1: Demographic Data

1.1 Total Served

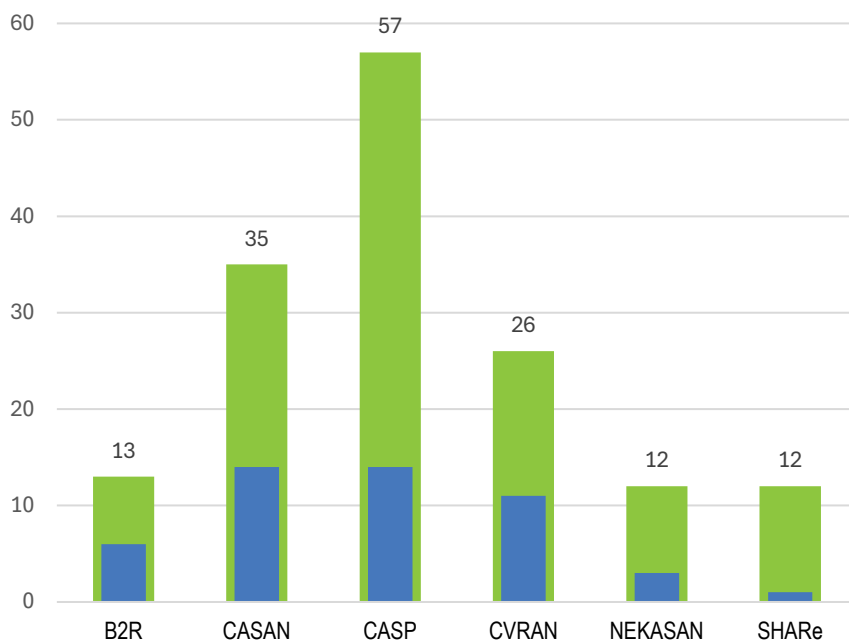
During the reporting period from December 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, a total of **72** households were served by the six VASN member organizations. These households consisted of **106** adults and **49** children.

Table 1: Total Served by VASN (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)

	# of Households	# of Adults	# of Children	Total
B2R	5	7	6	13
CASAN	15	21	14	35
CASP	29	43	14	57
CVRAN	9	15	11	26
NEKASAN	6	9	3	12
SHARe	8	11	1	12
Total:	72	106	49	155

The table above and the figure below provides a detailed breakdown, illustrating the composition of adults and children in the households served by each VASN member during the reporting period.

Figure 1: Distribution of Adults & Children Served (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)



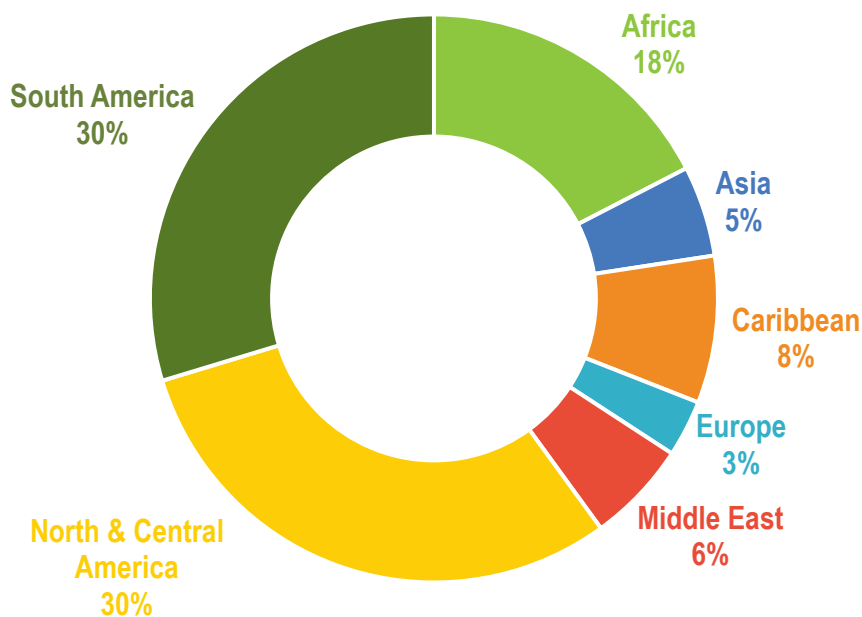
1.2 Countries of Origin

VSAN member organizations provided services to asylum seekers from a diverse range of countries. The table and figure below illustrate the breakdown of their countries of origin. Overall, the largest groups represented are from North and Central America (47) and South America (46). The largest number of asylum seekers from any single country came from Mexico, with a total of 21 individuals, followed by Honduras, with a total of 19 individuals. By collecting and analyzing these figures, SASAP will be able to identify trends or changes in future reporting periods.

Table 2: Distribution of Asylum Seekers by Country of Origin (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)

	Countries	Total
Africa	Congo (6), Democratic Republic of Congo (6), Uganda (5), Benin (4), Angola (2), Cameroon (1), Ghana (1), Senegal (1), Sudan (1), Tunisia (1).	27
Asia	Afghanistan (4), Nepal (3), China (1).	8
Caribbean	Haiti (8), Cuba (4), Trinidad & Tobago (1).	13
Europe	Ukraine (2), Russia (2), Turkey (1).	5
Middle East	Yemen (8), Iran (1).	9
North & Central America	Mexico (21), Honduras (19), Guatemala (2), El Salvador (4), Nicaragua (1).	47
South America	Colombia (14), Ecuador (13), Peru (11), Venezuela (8).	46
	Total:	155

Figure 2: Country of Origin by Region (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)



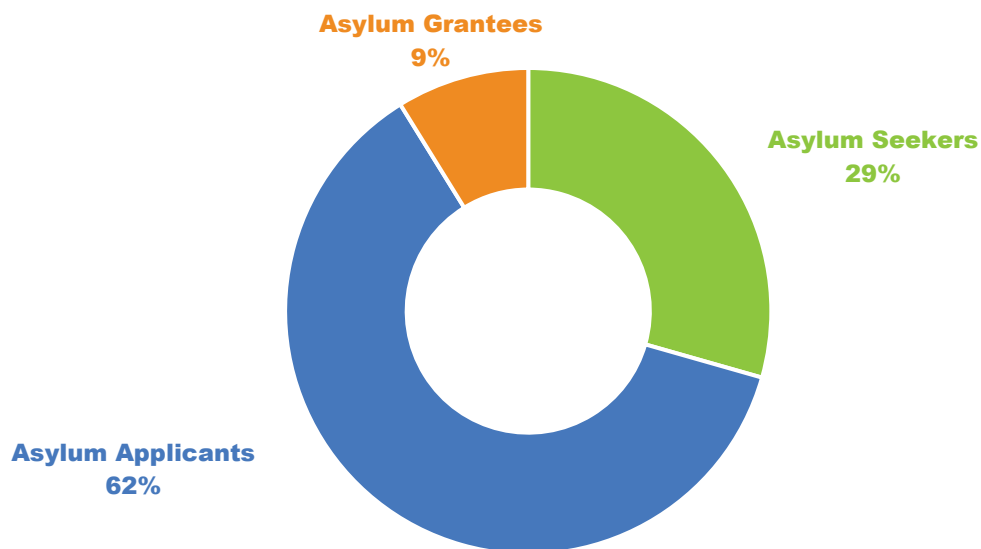
1.3 Asylum Status

Asylum seekers served by VASN are classified into three statuses based on their stage in the asylum process:

- An **Asylum Seeker** is someone who has fled their home country and is seeking international protection but has not yet formally applied for asylum.
- An **Asylum Applicant** is an individual who has formally submitted an asylum application and is awaiting a decision.
- An **Asylum Grantee** is someone who has officially been granted asylum.

The figure below represents the distribution of these statuses among the people served by VASN during the reporting period, highlighting that the vast majority who received services were Asylum Applicants.

Figure 3: Distribution by Asylum Status (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)



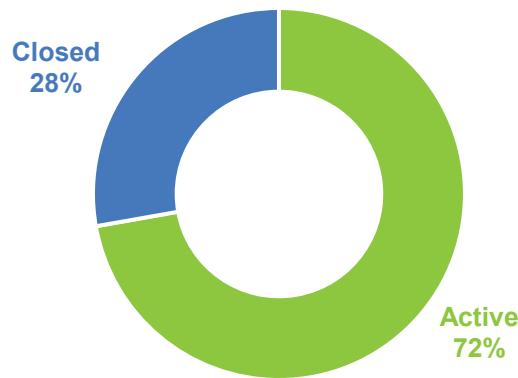
1.4 Participation in SASAP

Asylum seekers served by VASN are classified into three categories based on their current assistance status:

- **Active:** These are individuals who are currently receiving assistance from VASN.
- **Pending:** These are individuals who are awaiting assistance. However, due to limited resources VASN member organizations have been unable to support new asylum seekers in this category.
- **Closed:** These are individuals who are no longer receiving assistance.

The figure below represents the distribution of these statuses among the asylum seekers served by VASN during the reporting period, highlighting that **72%** of the cases are Active, while **28%** are Closed. Notably, there are no Pending cases, indicating the network's full capacity in providing services.

Figure 4: Distribution by SASAP Participation Status (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)



In the Northeast Kingdom there is a micro trend of asylum seekers leaving the state and later returning to Vermont. Here are some of the key factors:

- **Employment and Housing Instability:** Many asylum seekers face challenges in securing stable employment and housing. For instance, one couple returned to St. Johnsbury after a job opportunity they had hoped for fell through. NEKASAN provided them with support, including covering rent until new employment was secured.
- **Healthcare and Special Needs:** Access to adequate healthcare is a critical issue. Some asylum seekers have had to leave the area temporarily for medical treatment or other health-related reasons.
- **Social and Cultural Integration:** Asylum seekers often face social isolation and stress due to cultural and linguistic differences. The supportive community environment provided by NEKASAN and the sense of belonging they offer can draw individuals back. This is particularly important for those who may have left the state to seek more diverse social or cultural environments but return for the supportive community they initially found.
- **Family and Social Networks:** Family ties and social networks play a significant role in the movement of asylum seekers. In some cases, individuals return to areas where they have family members or other connections who provide additional support and a sense of community.

These factors are just a few examples of the complex and often interrelated challenges that asylum seekers face, which can influence their movement and engagement with support services

Section 2: Support Services and Outcomes

2.1 Facilitating Employment

In the reporting period, VASN provided **117 support services** aimed at facilitating employment for asylum seekers. These services included employability assessments, training and job development, vocational training and skills recertification, job placement, and job maintenance.

Table 3: Employment Services Rendered (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)

	B2R	CASAN	CASP	CVRAN	NEKASAN	SHARe	Total
Employability assessment	0	6	14	4	3	0	27
Training & job development	2	3	7	2	6	1	21
Vocational training & skills recertification	0	1	5	2	2	1	11
Job placement	1	5	11	3	3	4	27
Job maintenance	2	5	16	1	4	3	31
Total:	5	20	53	12	18	9	117

The figure below illustrates the breakdown of asylum seekers served who have successfully received their Employment Authorization Documents (EAD) and are therefore eligible to work in Vermont.

Figure 5: Distribution by Employment Authorization Status (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)



Most asylum seekers served (**64%**) were legally permitted to work, reflecting positively on the efforts made by the organizations to assist in the employment authorization process. However, this finding also underscores the importance of continuing and enhancing services to support the remaining **36%** of asylum seekers in securing their EADs. Obtaining this authorization is crucial not only for their ability to work legally in the country but also for their long-term integration and stability.

This will ensure that more individuals can benefit from job placement, vocational training, and other employment support services provided by VASN, thereby improving their prospects for self-sufficiency and integration into Vermont communities.

2.2 Ensuring Housing Stability

During the reporting period, VASN collectively provided a range of services aimed at ensuring housing stability. A total of **99 families** were supported via assistance in securing housing and the provision of short-term housing assistance.

Table 4: Housing Services Rendered (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)

	B2R	CASAN	CASP	CVRAN	NEKASA N	SHARe	Total
Assistance in securing housing	9	34	18	5	3	6	75
Short term housing assistance	0	0	10	7	3	4	24
Total:	9	34	28	12	6	10	99

- **Bridge to Rutland (B2R)** provided assistance to 9 families, all of whom received help in securing housing.
- **Chittenden Asylum Seeker Assistance Network (CASAN)** was the most active, supporting 34 families in securing housing.
- **Community Asylum Support Program (CASP)** assisted 28 families in total, with 18 families receiving assistance in securing housing and 10 receiving short-term housing support.
- **Central Vermont Refugee Assistance Network (CVRAN)** supported 12 families, with 5 receiving assistance in securing housing and 7 benefiting from short-term housing assistance.
- **Northeast Kingdom Asylum Seeker Assistance Network (NEKASAN)** provided support to 6 families, focusing equally on securing housing and short-term housing assistance.

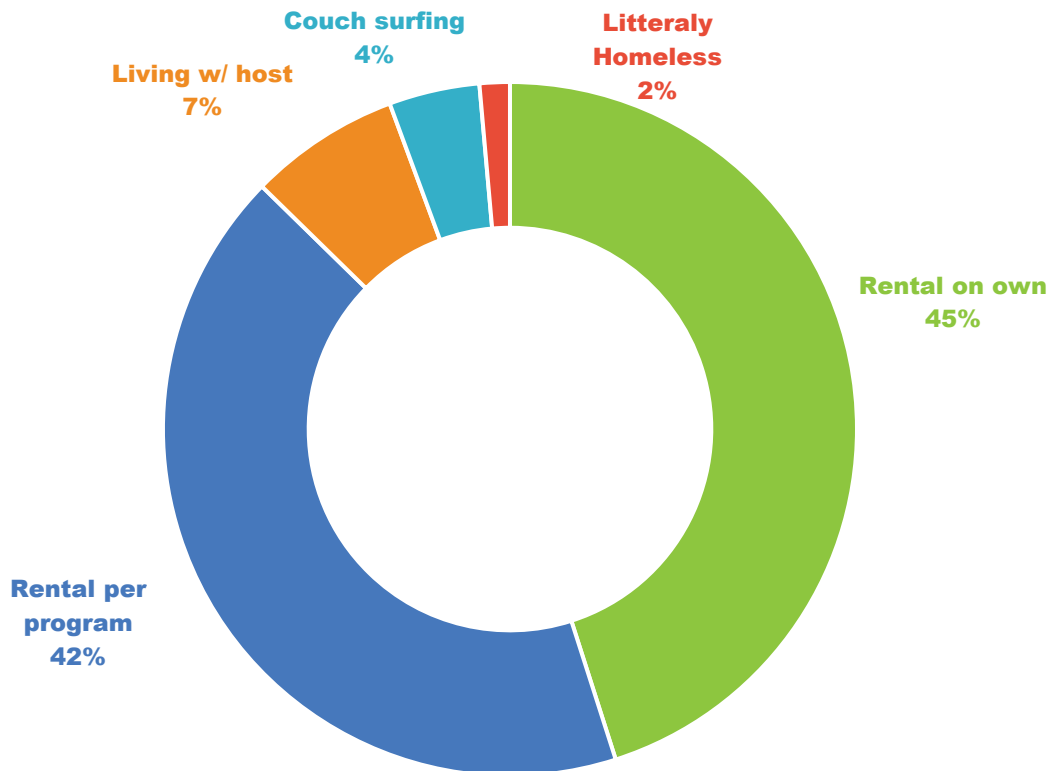
- **Support and Housing for Asylum Seekers (SHARe)** assisted 10 families, with 6 families receiving help in securing housing and 4 in short-term housing assistance.

During the reporting period, the housing status of asylum seekers who received assistance in securing housing was represented by a diverse range of living situations.

Nearly half of households (**45%**) were able to secure rental housing independently, demonstrating a significant step towards self-sufficiency. This is a positive outcome and aligns with the program's long-term goal of increasing the number of asylum seekers who can rent on their own.

Meanwhile, **42%** of asylum seekers were renting with the assistance of VASN, highlighting the critical support provided by the SASAP to bridge the gap between immediate need and independent living. A smaller segment, **7%**, were accommodated by host families. Unfortunately, the remaining **5%** experienced housing instability, underscoring the ongoing challenges and the necessity for continued efforts in providing emergency housing solutions for asylum seekers.

Figure 6: Distribution by Housing Status (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)



2.3 Promoting Self-Sufficiency

A total of **279 support services** were provided to families in the following domains: Communication/Technology Support, English Language Instruction, Interpretation and Translation, and Legal Referrals/Support for Asylum Applications. The table below illustrates the number of families supported by VASN across four key areas related to promoting self-sufficiency.

Table 5: Services Promoting Self-Sufficiency Rendered (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)

	B2R	CASAN	CASP	CVRAN	NEKASAN	SHARe	Total
Communication/Technology Support	4	19	18	5	8	6	60
English language instruction	8	16	9	7	3	7	50
Interpretation and translation	8	14	27	4	3	6	62
Legal referrals/support for asylum applications	8	23	57	5	7	7	107
Total:	28	72	111	21	21	26	279

2.4 Enhancing Community Integration

During the reporting period, VASN rendered **130 support services** to assist families with community integration. The support provided to asylum seeker families encompassed three main areas: transportation, social adjustment (including community orientation and life skills), and daycare for children, as detailed in the table below.

Table 6: Community Integration Services Rendered (12/1/23 - 6/30/24)

	B2R	CASAN	CASP	CVRAN	NEKASAN	SHARe	Total
Transportation	0	16	6	7	8	10	47
Social adjustment (community orientation, life skills)	9	17	11	7	9	4	57
Day care for children	1	8	12	3	2	0	26
Total:	10	41	29	17	19	14	130

Section 3: Capacity Building

3.1 VASN Website

To further strengthen the network and ensure its future stability, CVOEO has been allocated an additional \$30,000. With these funds the Vermont Asylum Seekers Network (VASN) aims to develop a comprehensive website that serves as a central

hub for sharing information among network members and the public. This website will enhance the capacity of VASN by facilitating better communication, resource sharing, and public awareness about asylum-related issues.

The proposed website will significantly bolster the capacity of the VASN network by creating a centralized, accessible platform for information and resources. By addressing the specific needs of asylum seekers and those supporting them, the website will enhance communication, streamline service delivery, and promote a better understanding of asylum issues within the broader Vermont community.

Target Audience

1. The Vermont general public
2. Members of the Vermont Asylum Support Network
3. Asylum seekers
4. Individuals seeking information about the asylum process and current policy issues

Desired Actions

- Find relevant information quickly and efficiently
- Interact and collaborate as organization members
- Information Sharing and Resource Centralization

Proposed Content

- **Asylum Seeker vs. Refugee**: Clarify the differences between asylum seekers and refugees, helping the public and asylum seekers understand their rights and statuses.
- **Banking Information**: Explain FDIC rules and the differences between local and international banks. Provide guidance on accessing banking services safely, including confidentiality and privacy considerations.
- **Border Partners**: Highlight partnerships with organizations such as Casa Anunci3n, Casa Alitas, and Canada-US Border Rights Clinic. Share resources and best practices from these partners to enhance local support efforts.
- **Confidentiality and Safety**: Outline guidelines and practices for maintaining the confidentiality and safety of asylum seekers.
- **Driving**: Provide information on obtaining a driver's license or driver's privilege card. Offer resources for new drivers, including Spanish-language materials and access to driver's education courses through VSAC grants.
- **Healthcare Access**: Explain eligibility for programs like Dr. Dynasaur (IHIP) and VT Medicaid. List free clinics, emergency care options, and mental health resources, such as the 988 Crisis Help Line and UVM Connecting Cultures/NESTT.

- **Legal Resources:** Offer information on legal services and resources, including pro bono support and immigration forms. Highlight organizations like ILAP, ASAP, and Jewish Family Services.
- **English Language Learning:** Provide links to online classes and applications for English learning. Include tutoring and conversation options, as well as public education support.
- **Emergency Services:** Detail access to emergency Medicaid and local emergency care services.
- **Food Assistance:** Explain eligibility for food assistance programs like 3SquaresVT.
- **Resource Library:** Create a comprehensive glossary of acronyms and terms related to asylum and refugee support. Include guides on settlement steps and public education support.
- **Volunteer Recruitment and Training:** Promote volunteer opportunities and training programs for supporting asylum seekers. Provide information on how asylum seekers can volunteer.
- **Educational Advancement:** Detail how asylum seekers can apply for VSAC advancement grants and access higher education opportunities.
- **Financial Assistance:** Guide on sending money out of the U.S. and accessing financial aid for medical care at local hospitals.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Offer resources on trauma-informed care practices for service providers and volunteers.

3.2 Sustainability Planning

With the remaining capacity development funds VASN members will develop detailed strategies and action plans to fortify the network. The network has scheduled a **retreat for August 12, 2024**, to draft a Request for Proposals (RFP) for hiring an organizational development consultant. This consultant will guide the network members through a structured strategic planning process, providing and/or proposing training and support to foster growth and long-term sustainability of the network. VASN members will play an active role in identifying and prioritizing the consultant's tasks, ensuring that the network's most pressing needs are addressed effectively.

Section 4: Successes

4.1 Bridge to Rutland (B2R)

- **Client S:** celebrated a milestone with a full year of employment in the United States. His work environment is supportive, with colleagues and administration treating him like family. Demonstrating growing independence, he learned to manage his banking and received his first tax return, choosing to donate nearly half of it to Grace Church, which welcomed him into the community. He is also pursuing a driver's permit for greater autonomy and has taken the initiative to contribute more than half of his rent. His positive experiences and fondness for Vermont and Rutland highlight his integration and community spirit.
- **Family L:** faces challenges with their 3-year-old child, who has yet to speak. Despite the school district's limitations in providing bilingual speech therapy services, Rutland Regional Medical Center has stepped in to offer free support, extending their services beyond their usual age range. The preschool staff and a pro-bono family practitioner actively work with the family to secure additional resources. The grant provided by Bridge to Rutland has covered the family's apartment rent and essential supplies for the child's preschool attendance, ensuring a stable and supportive environment.
- **Client M:** has gained independence and dignity through employment, moving out of her host family's home into a small apartment furnished with donations. Her job as an intake front-line worker in an emergency department has brought challenges, including facing racial slurs from patients. However, her supportive co-workers have stood by her, fostering a welcoming and inclusive workplace. The grant has helped cover her apartment costs, enabling her to embrace her new life with confidence.

4.2 Chittenden Asylum Seekers Assistance Network (CASAN)

- In July 2024, **CASAN celebrated its 5th anniversary**, marking a significant milestone in its positive impact on many individuals.
- **Family E:** A family from South America, expressed deep gratitude for CASAN's support, which included housing, transportation, medical assistance, and educational support for their son. They felt embraced by the community and were grateful for CASAN's role in their lives.
- **Family S:** An asylum-seeking mother and daughter from Africa received housing, food, clothing, and educational support from CASAN. CASAN also helped the mother secure a job and access English courses and transportation, enabling them to build a new life in Vermont.

- **Family M:** With CASAN and SHARe's support, an asylum seeker graduated and entered a much-needed medical field. She expressed heartfelt thanks for the support that helped her achieve her professional goals.
- **Family C:** CASAN helped a young mother and her child, who had been living in shelters, secure their own apartment just before the child's birthday. This experience was transformative, giving them stability and the mother a sense of financial independence with her first stipend and job.
- **Networking:** CASAN played a key role in forming a local network informally known as the Asylum Seeker Service Providers (ASSP). This network, organized and hosted by CASAN at the Vermont Law School's Center for Justice Reform (CJR) clinic, holds monthly hybrid meetings with 74 members on the email list. The ASSP emerged from the need for better communication, resource-sharing, and problem-solving as the number of asylum seekers increased dramatically over the past few years. Like a local version of RISPNet, but focused on asylum seekers, this initiative has been greatly needed, appreciated, and valued since it began in February 2023. CASAN's statewide networking with colleagues in the six other groups through the Vermont Asylum Support Network (VASN) and one group in New Hampshire has been a rewarding experience. The collaboration over the past years, particularly with valued legal partners at the Vermont Law Clinic and VAAP, culminated in a very successful symposium in June.
- **Advocacy:** CASAN collaborated with partners, including Migrant Justice and some legislators (one of whom is a CASAN volunteer), to address key barriers identified by the Vermont Asylum Support Network (VASN). This advocacy work led to tangible and positive policy changes. The CASAN chair represented both the group and VASN in an ad hoc group that advocated for housing and higher education bills. The group was pleased to see the Higher Education bill pass, which will go into effect in July 2025. This legislation will allow asylum seekers and others to apply for education at institutions within the Vermont system and seek financial assistance through VSAC. The Housing bill was tabled for further study and will be revisited in the next legislative session.

4.3 Community Asylum Seekers Project (CASP)

- **Client S:** to undergo job training and secure employment at a hospital. She loves her job, her employers appreciate her work, and she is now paying her own rent.
- **Client E:** to enroll in school and take classes that advance their career goals.
- **Family Y:** to maintain their jobs by sending their children to summer camp, providing a stable environment for the family.

- **Client B:** to utilize their ESL skills in the community. Previously barred from teaching in their home country due to disability, they are now fulfilling their dream of being an ESL tutor and helping others achieve their goals.
- **Client J:** to focus on her ESL classes and improve her interview skills. CASAN facilitated mock interviews with a UVM student, allowing her to gain confidence in her abilities.
- **Family D:** to keep their housing while on medical leave from work. They will return to work after their final hearing, with the grant covering their rent during this period.
- **Family O:** to submit their I-589 applications, starting the process for their work permits.
- **3 clients:** had academic milestones: one graduated college and had a job lined up upon graduation; another graduated high school with honors and is looking for her first job; and another graduated kindergarten.
- **1 client:** with learning disabilities has worked hard to succeed and has successfully obtained and maintained a job in the healthcare field.
- **4 clients:** who have won asylum are now filing for their green cards.
- **4 children:** have been reunited with their parents in the U.S.; **2** are already working and one is volunteering.
- **1 client:** has been reunited with her sister in Vermont.
- **8 clients:** are volunteering at the local library, food bank, and ESL program while awaiting their work permits.
- **1 client:** was released from ICE detention and now tutors ESL.
- **4 new clients:** came as a family and for the first time in their lives can be openly gay and attend their daughter's doctor's appointments together and get her baptized. They are also working towards their CDLs.
- **3 clients:** are enrolled in therapy for the first time as part of our pilot mental health program, and say it is helping them work through what they suffered because of their persecution and childhood abuse.
- **CASP held our first pro se adjustment of status clinic** in conjunction with the Ethiopian Community Development Council and helped **20+** refugees and asylees file for their green cards.
- **CASP helped 5 clients file their asylum applications** pro se and filed several successful motions to change venue.

- **1 client:** who came up over New Year's is now enrolled in college and has their work permit, and can be prescribed hormones, which is illegal in their country.
- **2 clients:** who have worked under the table for seven years between them will be able to file for their work permits later this year.

4.4 Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN)

- **Skills Development, Housing and Employment:** 2 clients completed a construction training program, equipping them with valuable skills for the job market. Additionally, CVRAN assisted two individuals in relocating within Vermont to access better job opportunities and improved housing conditions.
- **Language Proficiency:** The organization facilitated substantial improvements in English language proficiency for nearly all participants, enhancing their ability to integrate into the community and access employment opportunities.
- **Volunteerism and Employment Support:** 1 client, who had been actively volunteering in the community, experienced a medical emergency. She is now recovering and has received her work authorization, with CVRAN assisting her in finding employment.
- **Legal Referrals and Community Support:** A notable success story comes from an individual from Africa who was granted asylum this year. She said:

"When I was no longer safe in my country it was like I lost my roots. I had to leave but because of CVRAN, I found people who helped me grow new roots, grow new leaves. Because of CVRAN, I survived. CVRAN does not offer only material and financial support, they offer emotional and mental support. Today I feel safe. I have a home. I have work, I am part of a community. Without their support, I could not have done it. Nobody can remake a life without support."

4.5 Northeast Kingdom Asylum Seekers Assistance Network

- **Work Permits and Employment:** NEKASAN assisted **3** individuals in obtaining work permits, allowing them to legally work and gain financial independence. **1 client** successfully obtained a dental assistant certificate and is now employed at a local dental office.
- **Housing Support:** The organization provided housing for **5** households, fully covering or supplementing the rent for four of these households. **1 client** has become fully self-sufficient, paying their own rent after securing full employment.

- **Community Engagement and Support:** NEKASAN actively engaged with the local community to foster a welcoming environment for asylum seekers. They hosted events such as a "Volunteer Tea" to appreciate current volunteers and recruit new ones, a Tamale-Making Party in collaboration with a local church and students from St. Johnsbury Academy and participated in the "Final Friday" event organized by Discover St. Johnsbury and other local partners.
- **Fundraising:** The organization raised approximately **\$43,000** within the reporting period, exclusive of the SASAP grant, to support their initiatives.

4.6 Supporting and Helping Asylees and Refugees, Inc. (SHARe)

- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** SHARe established key partnerships, including with a pro bono lawyer providing legal guidance, a network of English language educators, a local hospital employing newcomers and expanding support services, and a regional service organization. These collaborations have been instrumental in providing legal, educational, and basic needs support to asylum seekers.
- **Community Engagement and Support:** The organization has been actively engaging the Upper Valley community to improve the reception and integration of newcomers. This includes efforts to educate and mobilize the community on welcoming and supporting asylum seekers, despite ongoing political controversies surrounding asylum.
- **Public Outreach and Advocacy:** SHARe participated in events such as the "Free-Time Fair" organized by the Upper Valley Young Professionals, where their presence highlighted the community's interest in asylum and related issues. The event provided an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of asylum and encourage community involvement in both policy advocacy and direct support services.

Section 5: Challenges

5.1 Bridge to Rutland (B2R)

- **Housing Shortage and Need for Affordable Housing:** The organization faces challenges in renting affordable apartments due to a housing shortage and the end of the Vermont Rental Assistance Program (VERAP). This need is exacerbated by Rutland's role as a hub for the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), which brings a significant number of refugee families to the area. There is a critical need

for additional housing, particularly for asylum seekers who lack access to federal housing assistance.

- **Transportation Challenges and Funding Needs:** A lack of personal transportation among working asylum seekers leads to reliance on bicycles and a limited public transportation system. This gap necessitates volunteer drivers, creating an unsustainable situation. There is a need for funding to assist asylum seekers in obtaining driving permits, licenses, and vehicles, as well as covering associated costs like insurance and fuel.
- **Volunteer Training and Recruitment:** The organization requires more team leaders and volunteers to support current and incoming families. This need includes providing additional training to ensure volunteers are equipped to handle specific roles and responsibilities.
- **Policy Challenges and Independence:** The lengthy wait time for receiving Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) and the inability to open bank accounts without social security numbers hinder asylum seekers' independence. Shortening the EAD processing time and providing safe banking options are crucial for enhancing their dignity and self-esteem.
- **Bilingual Pediatric Mental Health Services:** There is an overlapping need for more bilingual pediatric mental health services, including trauma-informed care. This support is essential for the well-being of asylum-seeking families, highlighting the need for comprehensive healthcare services that cater to their specific circumstances.

5.2 Chittenden Asylum Seekers Assistance Network (CASAN)

- **Increased Caseload and Capacity Strain:** In fall 2023, CASAN assisted three new households, pushing beyond their usual capacity. This high demand for housing and support has stretched their resources significantly. The workload on volunteers has become overwhelming, as they face limits in their capacity to support additional families. This situation has taken an emotional toll on volunteers, especially when they are unable to help all those in need. To address these challenges, CASAN is considering the option of hiring a case manager, recognizing that volunteer capacity alone may not suffice to meet the growing demands.
- **Financial and Administrative Strain:** The financial and administrative demands on CASAN have increased, particularly in tracking and reporting on the varied family budgets they manage. Cash flow issues have arisen due to the structure of state grants, which require expenditures to be made upfront and reimbursed later. To manage initial expenses, CASAN had to use emergency funds from the Canaday grant for rent payments. This financial strain highlights the need for more stable funding mechanisms and better financial planning.
- **Housing Challenges:** CASAN has faced difficulties in securing appropriate housing arrangements, including challenges with shared housing. Issues

have arisen from tenant compatibility and payment responsibilities, making shared housing an unreliable solution. The broader housing crisis in Vermont exacerbates these difficulties, particularly for asylum seekers who already face significant barriers in finding adequate housing.

- **Coordination and Communication Gaps:** A major challenge for CASAN is the lack of a central "point person" to coordinate aid for new arrivals. This gap leads to inefficiencies and overlaps in service provision, as there is no designated intake system to streamline assistance. Without a structured approach to managing new arrivals, CASAN and its partners struggle to provide coordinated and effective support.
- **Leadership and Volunteer Needs:** CASAN is in need of more leadership roles, including Board members and committee chairs, to strengthen their organizational structure. There is a particular need for volunteers with lived experience in the asylum process to diversify and enrich the leadership team. Additionally, training for volunteers, especially in trauma-informed care, is essential to better equip them to handle the complex needs of asylum seekers.
- **Strategic and Operational Challenges:** As CASAN faces increasing demand, there is a pressing need to reassess the organization's capacity and sustainability. Exploring alternative service models may help better meet the needs of asylum seekers. The sustainability of the current volunteer model is a concern, given the rising demand and limited volunteer leadership. Strategic planning and capacity-building efforts are crucial to ensure the organization can continue to serve effectively.
- **Organizational Mission and Focus:** CASAN's mission to welcome and accompany families is long-term, labor-intensive, and costly. The organization recognizes that their current efforts may not fully meet the increasing and diverse needs of new arrivals. There are ongoing discussions and planning efforts to address these challenges and to explore potential changes in their operational model. These efforts aim to better align the organization's capabilities with the growing demand for services, ensuring that CASAN can continue to fulfill its mission in a sustainable and effective manner.

5.3 Community Asylum Seekers Project (CASP)

- **Funding and Staffing Shortages:** Critical need for more funding and staff. The organization currently operates with only 40% of last year's staff while serving 50% more clients. Increased funding is essential to hire additional staff, including those with lived experience in the immigrant community, and to provide a living wage.
- **Inadequate Service Provision and Overburdened Executive Director:** The limited staff capacity results in minimal service provision, affecting client success. The Executive Director is overburdened with multiple roles,

including case management, outreach, and legal services, leading to a triage model of support rather than consistent, holistic care. Hiring more staff would allow the ED to focus on securing funding and managing the organization effectively.

- **Legal Assistance Crisis:** The organization faces a shortage of attorneys to handle the increasing number of asylum seekers needing legal assistance. This includes those in defensive proceedings, affirmative proceedings, and those needing family reunification or work permits. There is a need for a full-time legal assistant and legal training for staff in various sectors to prevent missed deadlines and ensure proper support.
- **Housing and Support Models:** There is a need for innovative housing solutions, such as a boarding house model for interim housing for asylum seekers awaiting work permits. Additionally, the organization is evaluating whether to continue bringing new people to Vermont or to focus resources on those already in the state.
- **Mental Health Support and Language Access:** The mental health program, which provides culturally competent therapy using therapists from other countries, has been successful and should be expanded. There is also a need for language access and language justice training for employers and healthcare providers to ensure proper interpretation and avoid using unqualified individuals.
- **Service Relationship Clarity and Empowerment:** There is a need to establish clear expectations and limits on the duration of support provided to clients. The organization emphasizes empowering asylum seekers rather than providing endless support, focusing on self-sufficiency and opportunities.

5.4 Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN)

- **Resource and Capacity Limitations:** The organization faces challenges in providing adequate support to all who seek help, especially during weekends or for cases beyond their mission. This issue is compounded by the need for more emergency housing, faster work authorization, and more legal support. A potential solution is revisiting the current wrap-around services model to offer varying degrees of assistance.
- **Volunteer and Leadership Training and Support:** Recruiting and training volunteers and leaders is a challenge, especially since they often deal with high-needs populations involving domestic violence, medical emergencies, and other crises. There is a need for comprehensive training in trauma care and self-care, as well as support systems to prevent burnout.
- **Access to Medical, Counseling, and Translation Services:** Finding appropriate medical and counseling services is challenging. There's also a

need for universal intake forms with translations and access to translation services at all institutions, supported by adequate funding.

- **Handling Cases Beyond the Mission:** The organization often deals with undocumented workers and family members, which is outside its core mission. This situation calls for a dedicated state agency or centralized support facility to manage such cases, preventing the local asylum support organizations from being overstretched.
- **Impact of ICE Detainments and Political Uncertainty:** ICE activities create widespread fear among immigrants, leading to disruptions in stable situations, such as job and housing placements. The organization also struggles with political instability and conflicting information, necessitating a reliable state government liaison for eligibility queries and a statewide ombudsman to manage and direct incoming calls.
- **Administrative and Communication Challenges:** There is a need for accounting or bookkeeping assistance, possibly through shared resources or a universal chart of accounts. Additionally, allowing the use of WhatsApp in public services can improve communication with clients who do not have traditional phone plans.

5.5 Northeast Kingdom Asylum Seekers Assistance Network

- **Burnout and Workload:** NEKASAN is experiencing burnout among its board members and volunteers, who are currently handling both governance and daily support for asylum seekers. The board, mainly composed of older members, is facing a reduction in active members due to personal commitments and relocations. This issue is compounded by the lack of financial resources, which prevents the organization from hiring professional staff. Hiring staff would alleviate the workload and allow the board to focus on governance, fundraising, and strategic initiatives.
- **Volunteer Recruitment and Support:** To address burnout and sustain its operations, NEKASAN needs to expand its board and volunteer base. This includes recruiting more volunteers and providing better support and training, especially in legal and mental health areas. Adequate training would enable volunteers to effectively assist asylum seekers and reduce the risk of making errors that could jeopardize their well-being.
- **Financial Resources and Fundraising:** The organization requires increased financial resources to hire staff and cover the growing expenses associated with supporting asylum seekers. A more ambitious fundraising campaign is necessary to expand NEKASAN's donor base and secure the funds needed for operational sustainability.
- **Support System Reevaluation:** Given the increasing number of asylum seekers and the limited capacity of volunteer-run organizations like NEKASAN, there is a need to re-evaluate the reliance on such models. Ensuring adequate support for asylum seekers and volunteers requires a

more robust and well-funded approach, potentially involving partnerships with other community-based and professional organizations.

5.6 Supporting and Helping Asylees and Refugees, Inc. (SHARe)

- **Leadership Capacity:** While there are many willing volunteers and interested audiences, there is a shortage of coordinating leaders to manage these resources effectively.
- **Outreach:** The organization needs to prioritize outreach to maintain sustainability. However, the demands of direct service work often consume all available resources, making it difficult to focus on outreach efforts.
- **Funding:** Although the organization has seen steady growth in resources, it is at a critical point where improvements in fundraising strategies and systems are necessary. This includes enhancing donor databases, organizing events, and cultivating new donors.
- **Immigration Legal Support:** There is a need to improve the availability of legal assistance for immigration, especially for affirmative applications. The organization is optimistic about addressing this challenge through collaboration with VAAP and other initiatives.
- **Infrastructure:** Despite growth in experience and scope of work, the organization's underlying systems, leadership structure, and coordination efforts require strengthening. Efforts are being made to address these needs through board development and consulting, with plans to include paid staff for better coordination and retention of volunteers and partners.
- **Political Climate:** The upcoming election poses a significant challenge, particularly with the possibility of policies that could end asylum and increase deportations. This creates a climate of fear among non-citizens and may impact the legality of the organization's work. The organization must navigate these uncertainties and continue its mission amidst potential legal and political obstacles.

Conclusion

The Statewide Asylum Seekers Assistance Program (SASAP), funded by the State of Vermont, has significantly supported asylum seekers across the state. This report outlines the vital role of the Vermont Asylum Seekers Network (VASN) in providing employment assistance, housing support, and community integration services. Over the reporting period, **155 asylum seekers, representing 72 families**, received comprehensive support, helping them move towards self-sufficiency and stability.

Successes

The program's impact has been profound, with asylum seekers securing jobs, housing, and access to legal and language support. Notable achievements include:

1. **Employment Gains:** A total of **117 support services** were provided to facilitate employment for asylum seekers. Most of these services focused on job maintenance for those who had already obtained employment, enabling them to support themselves, their families and achieve financial independence.
2. **Housing Stability:** The program provided short-term housing assistance and helped secure housing for **99 families**, providing a crucial foundation for rebuilding their lives.
3. **Self-sufficiency:** The program rendered **279 support services** aimed at promoting self-sufficiency among asylum seekers. These services included communication and technology support, English language instruction, interpretation and translation, and legal referrals for asylum applications.
4. **Community Integration:** The program rendered **130 support services** to promote community integration for asylum seekers. These services included transportation, social adjustment (encompassing community orientation and life skills), and daycare for children.

Challenges Ahead

Despite these successes, challenges remain:

5. **Reevaluating the Model:** The increasing number of asylum seekers and the limited capacity of volunteer-run organizations highlight the need to reassess the reliance on such models. There is growing recognition that efforts to welcome and support families are long-term, labor-intensive, and costly, and that volunteer capacity alone may not be sufficient to meet the growing demands.

VASN member organizations are currently struggling to meet the expanding needs for services for asylum seekers. They face challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers and leaders, particularly those with specialized skills in case management and trauma-informed care. As these organizations are largely staffed by paraprofessionals and retirees, they face a crucial question: Should they hire professional case managers with social work backgrounds?

Transitioning to organizations with paid staff could enhance their ability to handle complex situations and meet the diverse needs of new arrivals. However, funding this transition poses significant challenges, especially as many organizations are experiencing financial difficulties. A more robust and well-funded approach, potentially involving partnerships with community-based and professional organizations, may be necessary to sustain these efforts and adequately support asylum seekers.

6. **Limited Housing:** As with the rest of Vermont, the housing crisis severely impacts asylum seekers, who are particularly vulnerable. The availability of

affordable housing is a critical issue, with asylum seekers facing significant barriers to securing stable housing due to high demand and limited supply. Securing emergency housing for new arrivals is especially difficult, particularly for large families, who may struggle to find suitable accommodation. This situation is exacerbated by the end of assistance programs like the Vermont Rental Assistance Program and the increasing demand for housing services. Additionally, asylum seekers lack access to federal housing assistance and may face discrimination from prospective landlords, which they might not report due to fear of retaliation or lack of awareness of their rights.

7. **Policy and Legal Barriers:** The absence of a unified intake system complicates service coordination, leading to inefficiencies and potential service gaps. Many VASN members report that there is a shortage of attorneys to handle the increasing number of asylum seekers needing legal assistance. Furthermore, delays in processing Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) and challenges in obtaining social security numbers hinder asylum seekers' progress. These issues limit their ability to secure employment and manage personal finances effectively.

Future Outlook

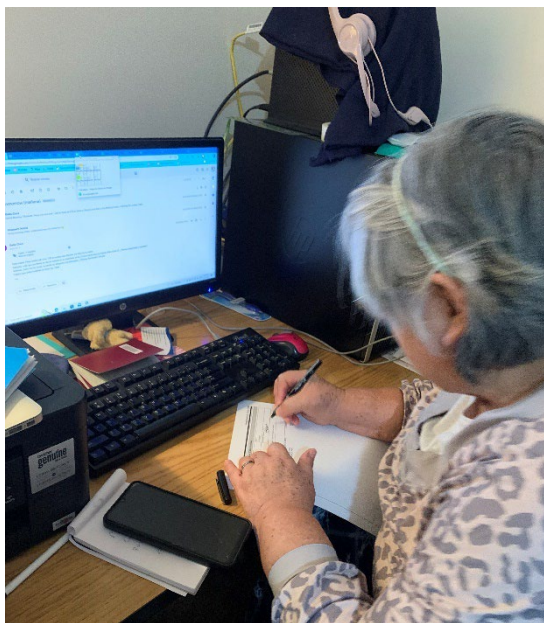
A coordinated approach involving increased funding, capacity-building, and potentially the establishment of a centralized intake system for asylum seekers may be required to address these challenges, continued support and innovation will be key to enhancing the program's effectiveness and ensuring that Vermont remains a beacon of support and inclusivity.

The ongoing commitment of the state, VASN, CVOEO, and the Vermont community will be crucial in overcoming these obstacles, sustaining the positive impact of the SASAP, and providing asylum seekers with the opportunity to rebuild their lives and thrive in their new Vermont communities.

Appendices

Appendix A: Testimonials and Photos

These heartfelt testimonials and photos highlight the transformative power of the Statewide Asylum Seekers Assistance Program. Through comprehensive support that addresses both material needs and emotional well-being, the program enables asylum seekers to build new lives, achieve independence, and become integral members of their Vermont communities.



- English class online - learning to use a donated computer

E., an asylum applicant, shares her gratitude:

"CASAN has been a blessing for my family – we have felt how God has embraced us, providing us with a house to live in, glasses to be able to drive the car CASAN gave me and thus be able to transport my mother to her cancer appointments, money for food and additional for gasoline; paying for cell phone bills, internet for my online English classes, additional medicine that insurance did not cover and glasses for my mom so she can see better, school camp so that my son can better explore all the wonders around him. We know that the human group behind it is very large, and we are eternally grateful for everything!! Thank you for being part of our life, CASAN."

S., an asylum applicant, expresses how the program has been life-changing for her and her daughter:

"My daughter and I left Africa to seek asylum here in the United States. And when we arrived here, we had nothing, neither where to live nor food to eat, but when I met with a CASAN person she helped us get an apartment, helped us with clothes, food, and everything we needed we got through CASAN. It helped me get a job in the field I wanted, it helped me get into the English course, it helps me with transport, it helps me with the driving course, CASAN simply helps me with everything I need and thanks to CASAN I'm able to build my life here in Vermont. I don't know what my daughter and I would do without CASAN's help. I am and will always be very grateful for this organization."



- B2R Annual Buffet

M., an asylum applicant, reflects on the crucial support received:

"Thank you for all your support. I thought to myself of all the efforts you have made to help me. I will always be grateful."

S., an asylum applicant, expresses how the program has been life-changing for her and her daughter: ***"My daughter and I left Africa to seek asylum here in the United States. And when we arrived here, we had nothing, neither where to live nor food to eat, but when I met with a CASAN person she helped us get an apartment, helped us with clothes, food, and everything we needed we got through CASAN. It helped me get a job in the field I wanted, it helped me get into the English course, it helps me with transport, it helps me with the driving course, CASAN simply helps me with everything I need and thanks to CASAN I'm able to build my life here in Vermont. I don't know what my daughter and I would do without CASAN's help. I am and will always be very grateful for this organization."***



- Dental visits for everyone



- CASAN local clothing drive

A volunteer noted about a client,

"He says he loves Vermont and the people in Rutland, whom he considers to be like family. He also says he really wants to see a bear - he is fascinated with Vermont's flora and fauna."



Social adjustment - learning where parks and playgrounds are

The story of an asylum seeker, as shared by a volunteer:

"It was an amazing experience to see the mom's eyes light up when she received her first CASAN stipend for food, household needs, laundry, and spending money. She said she had never had cash of her own before and held the bills in her hand like a deck of cards, with her eyes glowing with joy. We had never seen such an exuberant, blissful reaction like that before. She finally received her work permit in early spring and is REALLY proud to now be earning her own dollars and becoming financially independent."



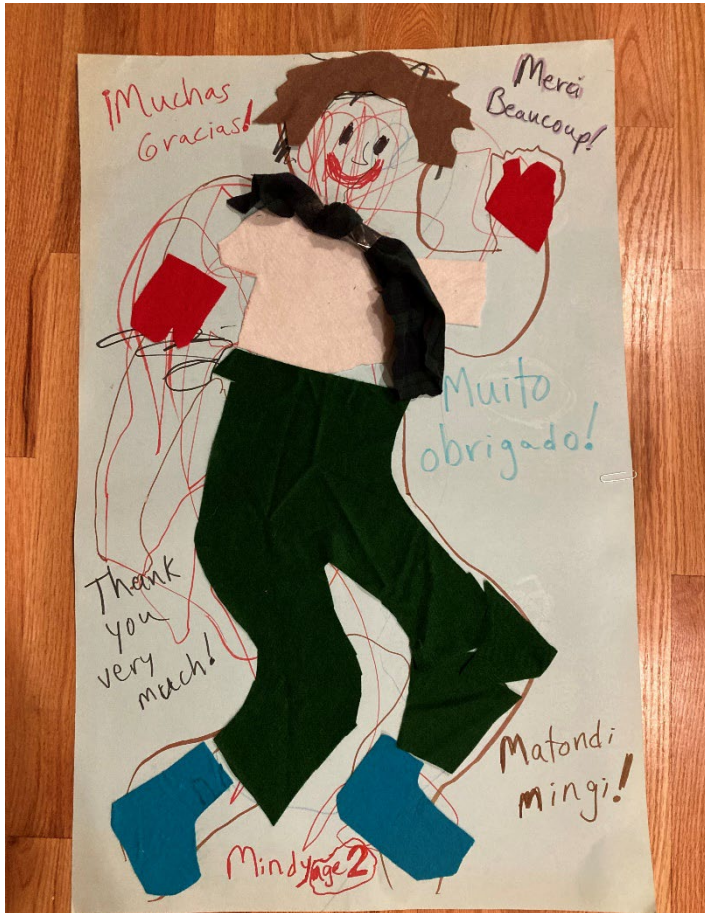
Social adjustment - First winter in VT!



Social adjustment - volunteers provide new experiences



- Empanadas to help their faith community raise roof funds



Clothing drive - thank you!

T., an asylum grantee, speaks to the emotional and mental support provided by the program:

"When I was no longer safe in my country it was like I lost my roots. I had to leave but because of CVRAN, I found people who helped me grow new roots, grow new leaves. Because of CVRAN, I survived. CVRAN does not offer only material and financial support, they offer emotional and mental support. Today I feel safe. I have a home. I have work, I am part of a community. Without their support, I could not have done it. Nobody can remake a life without support."