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The Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio (BCCO), an ethnic minority-led, 501(c)(3) organization since 2012, provides post-resettlement direct services, case management, programming, education, leadership and mentoring to the 28,000+ Bhutanese refugee population in Central Ohio. While the BCCO predominantly serves Bhutanese refugees in Central Ohio, the largest Bhutanese population in the U.S., it also serves other South Asian refugees, including Pakistani and Burmese families, and recently, began providing support for newly resettled Afghan refugees.

A trusted provider of culturally and linguistically competent services for refugee families and individuals, the BCCO is often the first place that vulnerable Bhutanese and other South Asian refugees turn to for answers and accurate information, essential services and help navigating the intimidating social services systems in order to access support.

In 2021, the BCCO continued to play this critical role in Columbus, helping stabilize hundreds of vulnerable families on multiple fronts including housing, employment, mental and physical health, COVID-19 response, and helping students stay engaged in school. In addition, BCCO’s effectiveness in delivering culturally competent services not only serves refugee families in a much more efficient way, it also helped reduce burden on City and County personnel, time and resources.
The BCCO adjusted to the many growing needs of Central Ohio refugees in 2021. Coming off of 2020 and its full-on emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic called BRAVE, the BCCO shifted in 2021 more toward COVID-19 vaccine access and support, community outreach (including client home visits), mental health research with Ohio State University and NAMI Franklin County, and advocacy on prominent issues -- while continuing its core everyday work of providing culturally appropriate direct services, mental health support, and programming in order to help stabilize families and give them a shot at a better tomorrow.

The nationally recognized BCCO BRAVE COVID-19 program, developed in 2020, proved that the BCCO can respond to emergencies impacting the community in an effective way while maintaining its core mission. In 2021, the BCCO reacted swiftly to several other emerging issues and tragedies, and remained at the forefront with community partners.

For example, when five South Asian refugee families in North Columbus lost their homes and belongings to a fire in late 2021, BCCO responded immediately and rallied enough support and funds to help the families get back on their feet.

Over

3,692

INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES SERVED THROUGH DIRECT SERVICES AND PROGRAMS, & EDUCATION EFFORTS IN 2021 ALONE

Whether it is providing cultural case management, advocating for neighborhood safety, researching mental health outcomes in the community, or vaccine education; each year the BCCO is expanding capabilities and reach to better serve our communities in more ways.
Core Programs

Two vital three-year grants helped support the core of BCCO’s staff, programming and services in 2021.

BCCO helps families break language barriers

The Rai family reached out to BCCO with the hope to register their seven-year-old into elementary school. The Rais brought mail to be translated. There they learned they had been referred to Children Services and the family was required to report to a Children Services case manager. The family was frustrated that efforts were not made to reach out to the family directly and in their language. Soma, a case manager with BCCO, reached out to Children Services on the Rai family’s behalf and helped schedule a family assessment. After the assessment, the family completed parenting classes and were able to register their son in school. Soma helped the family every step of the way and their son is happily going to school all year!

HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) grant program is funded by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement and centers on supporting recently resettled refugees in Central Ohio. In 2021, year two of the grant cycle, the BCCO ORR program enrolled 154 new refugee clients and assisted a total of 258 clients and families in 2021 with case management and direct social services. Community members who use the ORR program receive culturally comprehensive wrap-around services that can be all accessed at BCCO, or through a referral to a BCCO partner organization.
In 2019, the BCCO was one of only 15 non-profit organizations in Franklin County awarded a three-year competitive grant called the Catalyst Program. In the Catalyst program, the BCCO helps vulnerable Bhutanese families and their children by building relationships between the community and the public school system while assisting students to develop positive coping skills required to boost confidence, build resiliency, and improve mental health.

Whether it's assisting with digital education access, meeting with school counselors or supporting families through case management and mental health first aid training, BCCO is helping ensure student success by increasing parent and student engagement and providing support.

"Man Sanyasi family came to BCCO to get help to register their daughter to the Westerville School District. I helped them with the school registration process and informed parents about the school system. I discussed the importance of following up with teachers, attending parent-teacher conferences, asking children how they are doing in school, and following up with their academic performance. They also needed other case management support regarding Food Stamps and Medicaid benefits. So, I referred to our BCCO Outreach Specialist Mani Biswa to help further. Mani helped them with their case management needs and provided support."

- Laxmi D., Outreach Coordinator
Many refugee families look to the BCCO first for answers, services and hope. The BCCO responded in 2021, whether it was helping vulnerable families during an immediate emergency, advocating for safer neighborhoods and against Asian hate, working with our close partners on mental health stigma, the digital divide, health equity research, and parenting sessions, or helping facilitate the administration of nearly 900 COVID vaccines to Northland and Columbus area residents.

On November 5, 2021, residents at the 4600 block of Tamarack Boulevard awoke to their apartments on fire. The call to emergency services was made at 1:45 AM. Four individuals were taken to the hospital after trying to escape the flames through windows and balconies, including one woman who had suffered a broken back. As a result of the fire, five Bhutanese and Burmese refugee families were displaced with all their belongings and important documents destroyed. Many of these individuals were vulnerable members of the community – the elderly, disabled, or single parents.

Staff shopping for bedding and essentials for families. BCCO case managers and staff worked with the families to recover documents and provided appropriate referrals to help the families get back on their feet.
We lost everything in the fire. We had nothing left,” said Jit, who was forced to flee Bhutan with his family at the age of 5 and then spent nearly two decades in a refugee camp in Nepal. “We're so thankful to BCCO and Mani. They were there right away, helping us quickly find a place to live and helping us with rent support, groceries and furniture.

For anyone who has had to endure the effects of a natural disaster or an unexpected accident, picking up the pieces can be daunting. An incident like this can be even more distressing for a person who has a refugee experience. Many older community members can remember the Bhutanese government burning down their homes and forcing them to flee. Or the hardships encountered in the refugee camps and throughout their journeys to America.

Witnessing or experiencing such an event can inspire trauma to resurface and take effect at a time that has already been difficult for everyone during this COVID pandemic. The BCCO responded quickly to the fire tragedy and rallied behind survivors. BCCO’s director, Sudarshan Pyakurel, initiated a GoFundMe campaign to support the families. What was expected to be a few thousand dollars, quickly raised to $21,000 to help the families stabilize and begin the process of recovery.

These funds helped BCCO help the families find new apartments and covered the first two months of their rent. Staff at the BCCO supported survivors by buying groceries, basic supplies, and new furniture from IKEA. BCCO's case managers and outreach coordinators provided ongoing guidance for the families to establish some semblance of normalcy.

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Jit Chamlagei and his four-year-old son, Akrit, in their new apartment after a November 2021 fire destroyed their apartment building and all of their belongings.

“"We lost everything in the fire. We had nothing left," said Jit, who was forced to flee Bhutan with his family at the age of 5 and then spent nearly two decades in a refugee camp in Nepal. "We're so thankful to BCCO and Mani. They were there right away, helping us quickly find a place to live and helping us with rent support, groceries and furniture."

With flames and smoke raging through their apartment building, cutting off their exit through the front door, Jit Chamlagei, his wife, Ambika, and young son, Akrit, had only one choice: jump out of their second floor window and survive. Jit jumped first. Then Ambika dropped her son safely from the window down into Jit's waiting arms below. Ambika, seeing their apartment now engulfed in flames, quickly followed. They survived, but the trauma continues. Jit has also had health problems requiring surgery, and was unable to continue his job at a warehouse, putting more financial pressure on the family.
Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

The Columbus Northland area has one of the highest concentrations of Bhutanese populations in Central Ohio. Many Northland refugee and immigrant residents are individuals who have recently moved from a different city or have lived in America for less than 10 years. The Northland neighborhood has many ethnic businesses and restaurants that are within walking distance for community members, providing an atmosphere of familiarity for the community and has served as a major pull for new residents. The BCCO participated in the 2021 Northland Festival, featuring ethnic businesses, and celebrating Bhutanese culture.

Unfortunately, some community members who live in the Northland area have faced many difficulties in recent years. Northland has experienced a rise in violence and crime. Many residents have trouble accessing safe and affordable housing. Newly resettled refugees are typically placed in low-income areas with little assistance. Some of these apartment buildings and leasing agencies take advantage of their residents. Reports of broken locks, poor building conditions, and lack of security puts community members at risk.
To confront rising violence in Bhutanese neighborhoods, BCCO conducted a safety push through online forums and door-to-door campaigns to inform community members on tenant rights and safety. BCCO also partnered with the Columbus Public Health and Columbus Care Coalition to address the trauma the Bhutanese refugees have faced during their lifetime.

The BCCO, in partnership with Columbus Care Coalition, hosted six in-person debriefing sessions at the BCCO office where Columbus city code enforcement officials and public safety, social workers from Columbus Public Health, and the City of Columbus Department of Neighborhoods, came and listened to the community members' concerns regarding their safety.

Advocacy Against Asian Hate

The COVID-19 pandemic had spurred some to act out with violence towards Asian Americans, specifically our East Asian neighbors. This was a nationwide problem with accounts of extreme violence in nearly every corner of the nation. In 2021, the BCCO partnered with other advocacy groups to support Asian Americans, stand up to hate, and promote the safety of our community.
Community Projects

With National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Franklin County
BCCO was tasked with three mini-grant projects throughout the year. With NAMI Franklin County, BCCO was able to partner on the Mental Health and Stigma Reduction Project. Community members were invited to participate in open discussions concerning mental health and how it impacts their families and community. There were two sessions, one at BCCO and the other at Laxmi Narayan Temple. Both sessions were filmed and uploaded to the community Facebook page.

It is estimated that this project reached 2,778 individuals. However, with content being online and shared, it is expected that even more community members were engaged and equipped with essential mental health information.

With Ohio State University
BCCO joined forces with Ohio State University faculty and conducted surveys within the community to better understand the digital divide in the community and its impact on healthcare, education, and access to human services. This work is essential in determining the impact that COVID has had on the community and health equity.

With Columbus Foundation
The Columbus Foundation and BCCO teamed up to facilitate parenting sessions for community members with adolescent children, called Better Together. These sessions lasted for 12 weeks starting in June and ending in August 2021. The sessions informed parents of resources available to ensure student success and functioning homes. The sessions were held in a group setting where parents can share their experiences. Each parent was rewarded for their participation and effort.

Parents celebrating their last Better Together session. Community members received a certificate and a Unity Against Hate T-shirt.
COVID and Vaccine Access

In 2020, the BCCO partnered with the OSU College of Social Work and quickly developed the nationally recognized COVID response, BRAVE. BRAVE, a volunteer-led initiative, was instrumental in supporting community members during the COVID crisis, and saving lives. BRAVE provided language appropriate accurate resources, access to screenings, guidance, and essential supplies.

As the vaccines became more available in 2021, the BCCO adapted its services to include vaccination advocacy, support and access. The BCCO facilitated partnerships with Columbus Department of Public Health, Ohio Health, Lower Lights, and Mount Carmel. BCCO hosted multiple vaccination clinics and was directly responsible for 581 community members getting the vaccine. Through all of BCCO's advocacy and education, nearly 900 individuals were inspired to receive a vaccine.
The BCCO’s important work would not be possible without our supporters and funders. In 2021, the BCCO increased individual giving, corporate contributions, and event-based fundraising efforts. BCCO was able to raise $45,000 in 2021, a record high. The BCCO is grateful to all who support our efforts. Every new dollar or partnership helps make our refugee community stronger.

### Revenues and Expenditures

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BCCO accepting generous donations from CareSource and Amazon. These gifts and new partnerships will help BCCO to continue delivering essential services every day to the most vulnerable.
Thank You

FOR OUR MAJOR FUNDING PARTNERS

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services of Refugee Resettlement

FOR OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Community Refugee and Immigration Services
The Kaplan Foundation
Gandhi Memorial Society
US Together
Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS)
Jewish Family Services
ASHA Ray of Hope
Legal Aid Society of Columbus
Ohio Asian American Health Coalition
The National Alliance for Mental Illness
ADAMH Board of Franklin County
Lower Lights Health Center
Primary One Health
Arogya Wellness
City of Columbus Dept. of Neighborhood

League of Women Voters of Ohio
OSU College of Social Work
OSU James Cancer Center
Mt. Carmel
Ohio Health
OSU Harding Hospital
Nationwide Children’s Hospital
SAMHSA
Bhutanese American Student Organization
Center for New Americans
Anomatic
SK Food Group
Columbus City Council
Freedom Daycare LLC
Ohio Family Counseling
Mission

Every day, the Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio supports refugees and immigrants with essential, culturally appropriate social and health services and empowers them through education and advocacy. The BCCO serves as a resource to local and state agencies and organizations, and as a national model for other non-profits which serve New Americans.

Staff

Sudarshan Pyakurel, Executive Director
Soma Thapa, Program Manager ORR
Mani Biswa, Case Manager ORR
Laxmi Dahal, Outreach Coordinator Catalyst
Yamuna Adhikari, In-take/Case Manager
Haley Crook, Communication Coordinator
Sarmila Khatiwoda, OSU Social Work Student

Your support can mean a better life for those who struggle. Strengthen BCCO's life-changing work by donating at: bccoh.org/donate

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