

# Spotlight Report

## ON SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND MENTORING YOUTH

Issue 13 | December 2025



# A Message From the CEO



So many of us are here because a family member—or we ourselves—made the brave decision to rebuild our lives in the United States. These stories take many shapes, but the most common thread is someone making an uncertain journey in the hopes of a better future for their children. Many of us, myself included, are living examples of these hopes coming to fruition. We have not only courageous family members to thank but also welcoming American community members who opened their hearts and arms to newcomers.

Even amid the turmoil, prejudice, and uncertainty facing immigrant and refugee communities today, those of us who were once given this same chance have a profound opportunity—and responsibility—to help create pathways to success for the next generation of children, who are here seeking the chance to grow up in a safer, freer place than the one they were forced to leave behind. Supporting their potential is one of the strongest investments we can make. In New England, where our population is rapidly aging, immigrant and refugee youth are not only part of our shared future. They are essential to it.

Of more than 19 million children displaced globally, less than 1% are likely to find a safe, permanent home.

For kids who do make it to the U.S., their arrival can feel miraculous. However, it also comes with tremendous challenges. Refugee youth carry within them both the scars of displacement and the seeds of resilience. They must navigate a new language, culture, and education system while dealing with the effects of trauma. They often serve as translators for their parents, and those of working age frequently have to help support their families financially.

As we continue to advocate for the federal administration to reopen safe, legal immigration pathways, we are deepening our services to provide generational support for those already here and most in need. For our youngest clients, this means supporting their education, socialization, physical and mental health, and helping them set and pursue their goals. When we provide access to education, mentorship, and safe spaces, we empower young people to transform trauma into strength, and uncertainty into opportunity.

Thank you for investing in their future—which is ours.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey Thielman". The signature is stylized and cursive.

**Jeffrey Thielman, President and CEO**

# Services for Children and Families



## School Support

Learning a new education system can be very daunting. IINE staff help families enroll their children in public school and understand school expectations and resources. They make sure students have transportation to and from school and serve as points of contact to help families and schools resolve any challenges that may arise during a child's transition.



## Social Engagement

Growing up in a new place with limited language skills can be isolating. Through partnerships with youth development programs, libraries, museums, parks and recreation departments, arts organizations, and entertainment venues, IINE helps ensure that young clients are invited to explore their communities and socialize with their peers, after school, during the summer, and on special outings.



## Health & Wellness

Services for families begin with ensuring access to a safe living environment, nutritious food, and medical care. IINE also provides resources like peer support groups for mothers, workshops on maternal and adolescent health, and domestic violence prevention and support.



## Childcare

In order to participate in IINE services, including ESOL classes, skills training programs, and job readiness workshops, parents need to know that their children are being cared for while they're engaged. IINE relies on dedicated volunteers to provide play activities for children during adult education programming and is actively working to expand this support.

2025

499

CHILDREN & YOUTH SERVED

119

KIDS ENROLLED IN SCHOOL

138

YOUTH MENTORED

609

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN REUNITED WITH CAREGIVERS AND RECEIVED SUPPORT

# Refugee Youth Mentoring

Serving refugee youth ages 16-21, IINE's Refugee Youth Mentoring program provides case management and comprehensive educational and career support during this critical developmental stage. Weekly workshops include tutoring sessions with volunteers and peer social activities like arts and crafts, gardening, yoga, and sports. Participants are matched with volunteer mentors who meet with them weekly to help set both short and long-term goals. They are also regularly visited by guest speakers from the community, such as local employers, city officials, and service providers.

Refugee Youth Mentoring programs are currently offered at two of our sites, and we plan to continue to expand programming.



## From Refugee to College Student: *Sijad's Story*



Sijad was fourteen years old when the Taliban returned to power, and he was forced to flee Afghanistan with his mother, sister, and three brothers. IINE helped his family resettle in Lowell and enroll in the Refugee Youth Mentoring program. Dedicated to improving his English skills and excelling in school, Sijad showed up for every tutoring session. He also got a job at a local grocery store to help support his family.

Sijad was eager to share his culture with his classmates and excited to contribute to a school project, *Tasting History*, a multicultural cookbook highlighting recipes and the cultural history behind traditional meals, in which he wrote about Afghan bolani. As he settled into his new community, he became eager to give back and began volunteering at a local elementary school.

Sijad's goal is to study information technology and pursue a career in cybersecurity. Now eighteen, he will be graduating from high school in the summer. IINE has helped him enroll in Middlesex Community College, where he plans to earn an associate degree in IT and, hopefully, transfer to UMASS Lowell to get his BA. In addition to pursuing a career in IT, Sijad hopes to take in some World Cup matches when they come to Foxboro—he dreams of seeing Messi in action.

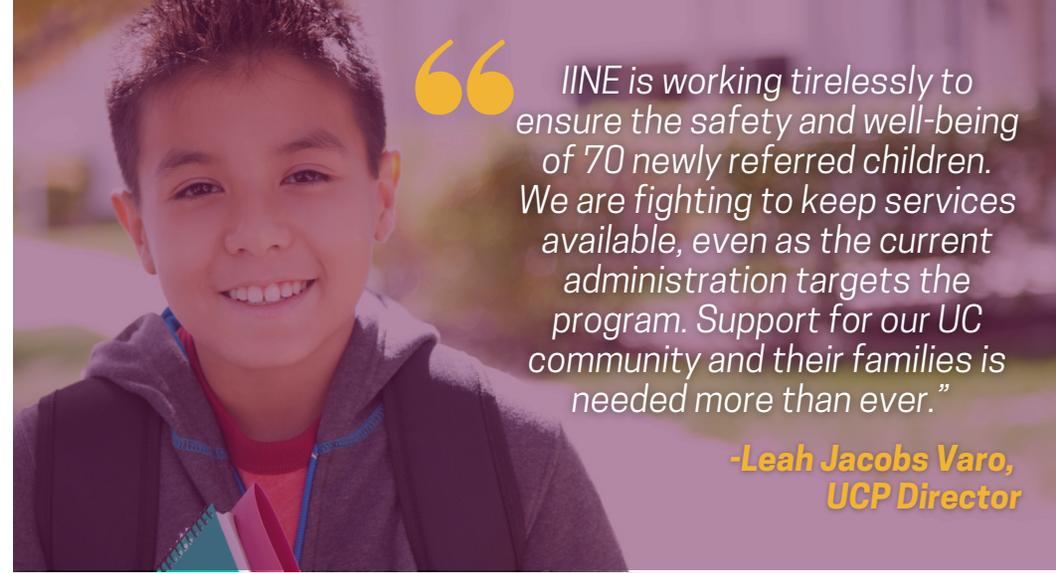
# Unaccompanied Children's Program (UCP)

While some immigrant families travel to the U.S. border together, very often children travel alone and cross the border in search of safety and reunification with a family member here in the United States. Since 2011, IINE has helped unaccompanied minors by providing the support and resources they need to reunify with loved ones in the U.S., stabilize, and integrate into their new homes.

## Lucas's Journey

IINE's UCP team helped Lucas reunite with his mother two years ago, when he was 15 years old. It was the beginning of an incredible chapter of healing, growth, and achievement. At first, Lucas was troubled by nightmares and depression. Through consistent therapy, medical support, and the caring guidance of his case workers, Lucas has now made remarkable progress. At 17, he has graduated from high school, speaks fluent English, and has exceeded all academic expectations. He has earned his driver's license and regularly drives to the gym, where he has learned to use exercise as a healthy coping strategy. Now Lucas is getting ready to attend college, where he plans to double major in psychology and business administration.

"Lucas's journey is a powerful reminder of resilience, determination, and the transformative impact of support and self-belief," says his IINE case manager. "We are incredibly proud of the accomplishments and look forward to seeing what the future holds."



*IINE is working tirelessly to ensure the safety and well-being of 70 newly referred children. We are fighting to keep services available, even as the current administration targets the program. Support for our UC community and their families is needed more than ever."*

**-Leah Jacobs Varo,  
UCP Director**

## How You Can Help



### Volunteer

Help mentor a refugee youth or provide tutoring or play group support.



### Donate

Many of IINE's youth programs are funded by federal programs that are now at risk. Your donation helps ensure that this work continues, and that we are able to sustain and expand youth programming going forward.