WATER FOR Ishmael

Hold on to HOPE

REFUGEES. IMMIGRANTS. NEIGHBORS. TOGETHER.

IMPACT REPORT 2026



ASW Students from Bolivia, Venezuela, Afghanistan

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Water for Ishmael | 20 Arco Drive, Toledo, OH 43607 | 419-720-8089 | waterforishmael.org

Be joyful in hope. Patient in suffering. Faithful in prayer. — Romans 12:12



This has not been an easy year. We have watched the needs around us grow as immigrant families navigate uncertainty, changing policies, rising costs, and the everyday challenges of building a new life in a new country. We have faced our own challenges — significant financial pressures and difficult decisions about how to steward the resources God has entrusted to us.
And yet, when we look back, what we see most clearly is not the hardship. We see hope.

We see women learning English so they can advocate for their families and participate more fully in their communities. We see children growing in a place where they are known and welcomed. We see volunteers faithfully showing up — not simply to teach a class, but to build relationships that last. We see immigrants from dozens of countries finding friendship, belonging, and a community that says: You matter. You are welcome here.

This year's theme — **Hold on to Hope** — is what we have watched our students do, day after day, in classrooms and hallways and living rooms across Toledo. Hope is not pretending that suffering doesn't exist. Hope is believing that suffering does not have the final word. So we keep going. We keep opening our doors, welcoming our neighbors, and building relationships across cultures — trusting that every seed planted in faithfulness will, in God's time, produce a harvest.

As you read this report, I hope you see **more than numbers and stories**. I hope you see **people** — people who have crossed oceans, started over, and found courage when life was difficult. And people like you, who have given your time, resources, and prayers to make this work possible. Thank you for holding on to hope alongside us.

We are choosing **joy** — not because everything is easy, but because our hope is bigger than our circumstances.

We are choosing **patience** — not because suffering is simple, but because we believe God is present in the waiting.

We are choosing **faithfulness in prayer** — not because we know what tomorrow will bring, but because we know the One who holds tomorrow.

Be joyful in hope. Be patient in suffering. Be faithful in prayer.
That is our calling. And it is our joy to live it — together.

With much gratitude,

Janelle

Our Mission: to partner with the local church to build a welcoming community for Toledo area internationals, to share the hope and love of Jesus Christ, and to empower internationals with skills to become successful.

THANK YOU PARTNERS FOR MAKING IT ALL POSSIBLE!

WFI's experienced staff, facilities, programs, and external relationships enable supporters to make a meaningful difference with Toledo's International Community. Thank you to our Donors, Partner Churches, Corporate Sponsors, Volunteers for your faithful support and participation!

Household Items Giveaway

American School for Women (ASW)

Shared Shelves

American School for Children (ASC)



Toledo International Hospitality Program



American School for Kids/Teens (ASK/T)

American School Evening (ASE)



Workforce Development (WFD)

Conversation Partners (CP)

WATER FOR Ishmael

Our Donors

Corporate Sponsors

Partner Churches

Board of Directors

Volunteers

OUR PROGRAMS

American School for Women (ASW)

ASW offers six levels of English for women, all taught by women. There is a strong emphasis on fostering relationships and connections within the community.





ASC Students from Japan, Sudan, Syria

American School for Children (ASC)

ASC is a safe and affirming environment for dual-language learners ages 6 weeks to 5 years, including ESL and kindergarten readiness.

American School Evening (ASE)

Multiple levels of employment-focused English for both men and women.





Conversation Partners (CP)

International students building cross-cultural understanding and friendships while practicing spoken English.

Household Items Giveaway

Thousands of international students arriving at the University of Toledo have walked into a furnished room thanks to a single WFI volunteer who has spent 18 years collecting donated furniture, delivering it at no cost, and retrieving it again when students move on. Over 4,000 living spaces. More than 10,500 UT students served. When students discover this is not a university program but an expression of God's love, the conversation rarely stays on furniture for long.

OUR PROGRAMS (CONT'D)

American School for Kids and Teens (ASK/T)

A warm and inviting space, ASK/T offers support for young people to learn, make friends, feel included, and gain new abilities.





WFD Students learn the skills and vocabulary for skilled trades and office work



Workforce Development (WFD)

WFD offers immigrants with limited English training for the workforce, including job-specific English and connections within the Toledo community.

Church Mobilization

Empowering and training church members to engage with internationals in fruitful relationships.





Toledo International Hospitality Program (TIHP)

Connecting Internationals with Americans for the purpose of friendship, hospitality, and learning about American culture.

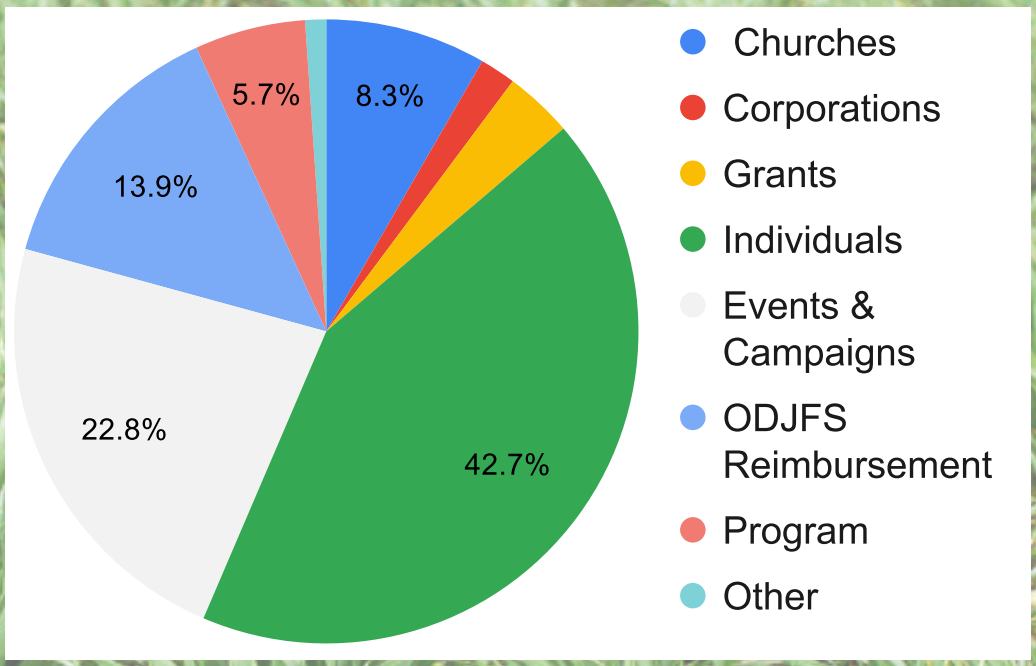
Shared Shelves

Informal food distribution for needy students

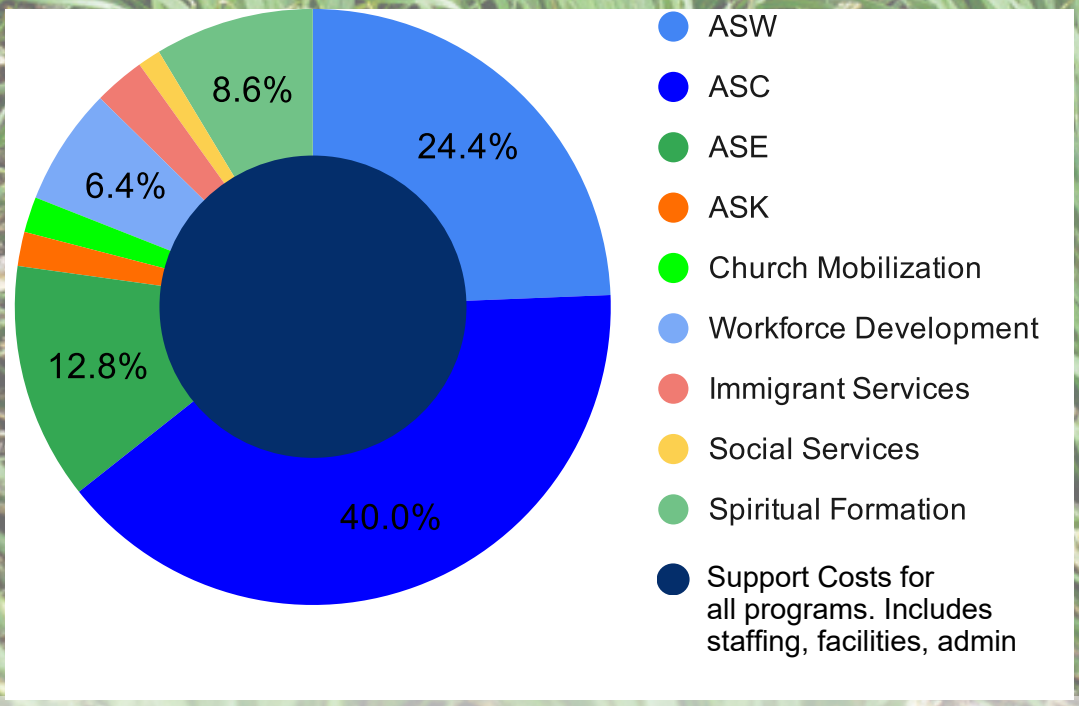
FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

2026 TOTAL BUDGET: $948,100

INCOME



EXPENSES



WORLDWIDE IMPACT

Our ESL students represented 18 languages.

We served 191 total clients at Arco Dr.!

93 Volunteers served our students.

Workforce Development graduated 4 students!

Our ESL students represented 13 countries.

Volunteers gave 3,093 hours!

Household Items Giveaway has furnished over 4000 dorms, serving over 10,000 UT international students in the past 18 years.

Scan the QR code to get involved!

SOPHIE'S STORY: HOLDING ON TO HOPE

The first time Jill saw Sophie*, she was standing at the back of the lobby at Water for Ishmael, watching a young woman in a wheelchair and the sister standing beside her. Two Syrian refugees who had survived a civil war, crossed an ocean, and arrived in Toledo. Her sister Ana* had learned some English in high school in Syria. Sophie, never able to attend high school, couldn't speak a word of it.



"I felt like God put a big, bright light around her head," Jill says. "And He said to me: 'Jill — Sophie. I put that love in your heart before you even met her.' "

Born with spina bifida, she was able to walk a little when young. But a botched surgery in 2013 took away much of her mobility. While still recovering and hopeful, and Syria's civil war raging in her hometown of Homs, a bomb fell near her car, shattering her leg. She spent a year in bed convalescing. The one bright spot was getting refugee status and coming to America. Still, Sophie's sister Ana puts it plainly: "We had lost our house. Our family. Our home."

In Syria, Jill says, independence would never have been possible for Sophie — "not even without the war." Here, Sophie dared to believe things could be different.

At WFI, Jill began sitting at Sophie's table after the Bible story each week. One morning she asked: "What can I pray for you for?"

"I want independence," Sophie said.

It was a simple answer — and a complicated one. She needed a car with hand controls. Cost: $40,000–$50,000. She couldn't get a loan without a job. She couldn't get a job without a GED. And the GED exams are offered only in English and Spanish. Every door led to another door. Jill, a retired nurse who spent her career finding people who could help, started making calls.



Sophie and Ana's hometown, before and since the war

"She is free in America. But she is not yet independent."
— Jill, WFI volunteer

Jill took Sophie to Mobility Works in Perrysburg. Too expensive. She connected her with Ohio Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, who linked Sophie to a GED tutor. She found an OEI program to cover the cost of adaptive driving instruction. The University of Toledo provided an occupational therapist — one of the only people in Toledo trained to teach someone to drive with hand controls. TARTA Flex provided free rides to the library where Sophie meets her tutor each week.



"We had a lot of doors to walk through," Jill says. "A lot of walls. But we kept going."

"The GED helped me. I knew almost nothing about English. But now I'm passing exams in English."
— Sophie

Fourteen months ago, Sophie arrived at WFI at the literacy level — the very beginning. As of September 2026, she has passed three of the four GED exams: math, science, and social studies. She is preparing for the final exam — language arts. She has completed 48 hours of adaptive driving instruction and takes her driver's license test next month.

Her dream, in her own words: "I want to work. I want to buy a house — a special house. With big rooms, big doors. Handicap accessible." She pauses. "And I want a dog... A Husky." Jill laughs. Ana laughs. In the Middle East, dogs don't live in the house. But this is America. And Sophie is becoming someone new here.

Ana says her sister misses WFI — transportation has been harder since Ana's marriage. But Sophie has a plan. "The first step," she says, "when I get my car — I will return to Water for Ishmael."

"She wanted to work — not just receive. She wants to give something back to America. She wants to say thank you to this country."
— Ana, Sophie's sister

Sophie has hope now. Hope for independence. Hope that she will be able to support herself and her mom.

ABDALLAH: BLIND AMBITION

Perhaps you've seen those famous contests where chess players square off blindfolded.



It's an impressive feat of memory to navigate 32 pieces across the 64 squares, with literally billions of possible combinations -- without looking. Now, imagine you had to do something like that just to operate your computer -- word processing, spreadsheets, web navigation. The area -- not 64 well-defined squares -- an entire video screen. The pieces -- not 32 familiar shapes -- an unlimited number of sizes, colors, and locations. And instead of a mouse, only your voice. Who would do such a thing?

"Who would do such a thing?"

His name is Abdallah. He's a refugee from Syria... and he is blind.



In recent years, Syria's civil war has brought a number of families to WFI's doors -- each carrying their own story of loss and resilience. Like Sophie, Abdallah's challenges have been extraordinary. He crossed the border on foot with his mother and sister, leaving everything behind in search of a safer life. Abdallah enrolled in our English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, where he worked diligently to develop the technology skills needed for school and employment.

While many students learn by watching a screen, Abdallah navigates computers entirely differently -- using voice commands and screen-reading technology to listen, learn, and work with remarkable speed and accuracy.

His goal was to continue building those skills through an office assistant training program. The program, unfortunately, was unable to fully accommodate his disability. For many people, that might have been the end of the story. For Abdallah, it was only another step in the journey.

"For many people, that might have been the end of the story. For Abdallah, it was only another step in the journey."



Today, Abdallah is enrolled at the University of Toledo and is successfully completing college coursework online. Watching him navigate complex computer systems using only his hearing, memory, and determination is nothing short of inspiring.

At Water for Ishmael, we believe that opportunity changes lives.

Abdallah reminds us what that looks like when it meets unrelenting determination.

WATER FOR Ishmael

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REFUGEES. IMMIGRANTS. NEIGHBORS. TOGETHER.

Lana Passes Her Test

Lana* took our Medical Terminology class, then enrolled in the State-Tested Nursing Assistant program at Ebeid Center. She studied every single day. She persisted through the difficulty. And then she passed.

Lana is now working for a home health care agency — and she loves it. What began as a goal became a career. What felt impossible became real.

We Can DO this!

Imagine being told a new word in a language you don't know — and having no way to write it down, because you've never learned to write in any language.

That is the daily reality for students like Roya* and Yasmin*, two women from Afghanistan who arrived at WFI earlier this year without literacy in their first language. Every English lesson requires holding unfamiliar sounds in memory with nothing to anchor them.

But right beside them in class sit Hana* and Nadia* — women who were in that exact same place just over a year ago. This semester, Hana and Nadia passed their first unit test with flying colors.

Their classmates watched. And something shifted. **We Can Do this!** Look at them, THEY did it. We can too!



Refugee to Teacher



Helen* came with her husband and 4 young children from the war-torn country of Syria approximately 7 years ago. They had spent several years already as refugees in Jordan, and landed in Toledo to start a new life here. Helen had been a teacher in Syria.

Soon she will be finishing an education degree at The University of Toledo (where her son also attends) so that she can return to being a teacher once again. The family have embraced their new life here in the USA.

She Found Family Here

One of our ASW students shared something beautiful this spring. With Eid al-Fitr approaching, she told us about the tradition she grew up with — spending the week moving from house to house, visiting family, celebrating together.

Her family is back home this year. But she wasn't celebrating alone.

She spent Eid al-Fitr with women she met right here at WFI — women from her home country who became her people in a new place. Sometimes belonging looks like a classroom that became a community.

"That kind of hope takes time to grow. We are grateful to be here for it."



Educated, encouraged, now ready to take on the world!

"I Don't Want to Leave My Friends"

Dee* came to us from Haiti, navigating enormous hardship as a single mom with two young children. Transportation was a constant struggle, and for a time it seemed like her children might need to transfer to a program closer to home.

When Dee's preschooler found out she might have to leave, she cried. She told her mom she didn't want to leave her teachers and her friends.

Dee didn't transfer her children. She re-enrolled herself in ASW.

We have walked with this family through hard choices, watching and waiting and continuing to love. Now, Dee is open to building not just for today — but for her family's future. That kind of hope takes time to grow. We are grateful to be here for it.

"...unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (John 12:24)

110, to be exact.

A single kernel produces 5 heads of wheat. Each head carries 22 kernels. Do the math and you arrive at a return that would make any investor take notice.

If you haven't picked it up already, the background graphic woven through this year's Impact Report tells that story — from a single seedling all the way to a field ready for harvest. Go ahead and flip through from the beginning, focusing on the background pictures. I'll wait .

WFI's theme this year is *Hold on to Hope*. Like the farmer who plants in spring, then cultivates, fertilizes, and waits — hoping the seed grows into a harvest that makes all the effort worthwhile.

But there's no guarantee. Rains may not come. A new pest may ravage the crop. The market may tank. All investments carry that shadow. The honest ones admit it. ***With one exception.***

Enter the paradox of giving: a gift looks like a write-off. Money is deducted from your portfolio. Dropped into the soil of God's work, it looks — for all the world — like it's just lying there. Dead. That is, until God gives it life. That dead seed becomes Sophie, learning to drive for the first time. It becomes Lana, passing her nursing exam and finding work she loves. It becomes a child who says to his mother after an evening at WFI: *"Mom, I felt love there."* **One hundred and ten times** over. Maybe more!

"'Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.'" — Malachi 3:10

God does not merely promise a return. He basically *dares* you to try and out-give Him!

The fact that you have read this far tells me you are a true friend of Water for Ishmael — and that you understand what is at stake in this work. May I ask you to take God up on His dare this year? To stretch beyond what feels comfortable, and place that seed — however large — into soil you trust?

He promises the harvest. He leaves us the privilege of demonstrating our faith by participating in the first step: planting! To set up a tour or discuss volunteer opportunities, please email volunteer@waterforishmael.org

To view giving options on our secure database please scan this QR code:

P.S. Please consider WFI in your legacy/estate planning. We are able to accept complex gifts such as appreciated stocks or real estate. Please contact us!

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