

How a Simple Idea Grew Into a Mission.

Impact Report

Summer 2025 – June 2026 · therefugeearchive.org

Preserving and archiving the oral histories of female-headed households (FHH) and single mothers in real-time displacement from conflict- and climate-affected regions worldwide, connecting stories to research, policy, finance, programming, art, and experience for advocacy and impact.

15	67+	6+	528K+
NARRATORS	HOURS	COUNTRIES	REACHED

ORAL HISTORY · RESEARCH · EDUCATION · ADVOCACY

A Note from the Founder

I did not start with refugees. I started with youth mothers in Washington, D.C.

While earning a master's at Georgetown, I volunteered at a halfway house for homeless youth single mothers. I learned the youth services system from the inside: how it categorized, what it covered, and what it quietly excluded. One exclusion stood out. The law reclassified services for single mothers between 18 and 24, moving them from wrap-around youth services into adult services. The distinction was profound, and the consequences were real — system accountability dropped, and youth mothers and their children slept on buses and sometimes went missing, unable to navigate adult services on their own. I entered Georgetown's Public Policy Challenge to change it. I went on to win first place, and the law was challenged.

The way a policy is written tells you exactly who the people writing it were willing to hear.

Those years shaped my doctoral research into female-headed households (FHH) — a term from international development broader than “single mother.” It includes any woman who becomes the responsible member of a household, whether by widowhood, divorce, abandonment, or the absence, illness, or economic incapacity of the household's male head. I began studying Syrian refugee FHH in Jordan and how their voices do or do not influence the programs built to serve them.

To learn Arabic, I spent a season in Amman — mornings at a language institute, afternoons teaching English to Syrian and Sudanese refugees, weekends volunteering with a girls' sports program for Syrian refugees. It was there, alongside those women and girls, that the idea for The Refugee Archive took shape.

Back at Georgetown, I organized a small team, and Pia and I interviewed two women on Zoom. We had no website, nonprofit status, social media, or programming. Noor, a publicly identified widow, recorded her displacement as it unfolded in real time, fleeing Gaza and landing in Egypt. Ataa, shot in the head before she fled Syria for Jordan, a single mother of three, recorded her journey from university to single motherhood in a camp. Each told her story over several hours-long sessions. The work was slow, careful, and completely worth it.

By the time we registered as a 501(c)(3) on December 30, 2025, we had also collected an oral history from a Rohingya single mother in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar Refugee Camp, and a single mother from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, living amid the M23 rebel conflict in urban displacement.

Six months since going official, The Refugee Archive has a backlog of oral histories recorded around the world in very hard-to-reach places, requiring on-the-ground partnerships — which we have. Alongside this, we have a fellowship program, volunteers, a podcast, a webinar, a fine art program, a peer-reviewed journal in development, our university-level archiving program, youth policy tracker teams in three countries, and community engagement programs and events.

We run on passion, skills, and donated time. Women in Goma, Nakivale, Gaza, Cox's Bazar, Amman, Benue State, and other places said yes, even when saying yes meant giving hours they did not have and mobile data they could not spare, for something nobody had asked them to do before – the chance to have an unedited voice, connected to impact and preservation. Volunteers and fellows traverse our programs and build published, tangible work for their portfolios while learning about this demographic and global advocacy, law, policy, justice, health, and even art.

This is the very beginning. Six months from now, I will defend my dissertation and complete my doctorate, and our full library of original, unedited audio will begin its transfer into permanent university archiving – outliving us, for generations of researchers to come. Our journal will carry an ISSN and an editorial board preparing its first call for papers, our published archive will surpass 100 hours of testimony and a million social impressions, and a new micro-economic project in Africa will pair single mothers with a mentorship-driven education portal. One idea, many threads – all pulling toward the same place: the world's leading center for the preservation, study, advocacy, and protection of FHH in real-time displacement.

Kristi Dawn Riggs

Founder & Executive Director, The Refugee Archive

FOUNDING YEAR SNAPSHOT

REGISTERED

U.S. 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Dec 30, 2025

TEAM

Five people, three continents

ARCHIVE

67+ hours protected audio

REACH

528K+ impressions, 11 platforms

ACADEMIC AFFILIATION

Georgetown University Special Collections partnership in development

Who We Are

At our core, we are oral historians and archivists on a mission to preserve the testimony of female-headed households living through real-time displacement. From there, everything else follows: research, education, and advocacy that give youth, NGOs, and decision-makers real points of entry to listening, understanding, and getting involved.

We are a small organization built to become a big one: a collective of people and places, in-country partners, women-led organizations, and community groups, growing toward one shared center.

FOUNDED

December 30, 2025

STATUS

501(c)(3) · EIN 41-3858591

REGISTERED

Newark, DE, USA

OPERATING

DC, Virginia, Texas, Manila, Lagos

How We Listen: Pillars & Story to Action Labs

Each country we work in operates as its own Story to Action Lab, holding the laws, policy, religion, partnerships, language, and economic landscape specific to that place. Every lab shares one universal framework: the four-pillar method, a non-produced, open-ended way to guide a woman through her life story, one section at a time.

Pillar one is birth and childhood, the foundation. Pillar two is womanhood, coming of age into motherhood, sometimes before displacement, sometimes during or after it. Pillar three is the displacement story itself, where the loss of a husband or partner often falls, though for some women that loss lands earlier or later in the arc. Pillar four is life inside displacement: navigating systems, health, economics, the granular reality of getting by.

Taken together, the four pillars give us full context: the roots someone came from, the experiences that shaped her, how she mothers today, how displacement happened, and how she is living inside it, along with what she hopes for next.

The urgency is real. A generation is now being born inside displacement, in camps and settlements, never knowing life outside it. Politics, war, and the fight for land and resources will not end. Female-headed households are rising sharply worldwide within that reality. Understanding where people started, and how they got here, is how we help shape what comes next for the people living through it.

10 NARRATORS IN GOMA, DRC Marie · Lucille · Ruth · Wivine · Patricia · Guilaine · Juliette · Anne · Merveille · Rosaline	1 NARRATOR IN NAKIVALE, UGANDA Madeleine · Tumaini for Refugee Women	4 PRE-NON-PROFIT ORAL HISTORIES Ataa (Syria/Jordan) · Noor (Palestine) · Kolima (Rohingya) · Sakena (Rohingya)
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“Her nine-year-old daughter didn’t know the story of her childhood; her roots, dreams, or even about her parents. It was the first time she’d heard it, on the recording we made together. Speaking her existence into record for the first time brought her daughter a sense of belonging she’d never realized was missing.”

THE REFUGEE ARCHIVE TEAM · APRIL 2026

Collection Footprint

COUNTRIES WHERE ORAL HISTORIES HAVE BEEN COLLECTED

Jordan (Amman)

Palestine / West Bank

Bangladesh (Rohingya)

DR Congo (Goma)

Uganda (Nakivale)

Nigeria (Benue State)

Kenya · in progress

South Africa · in progress

Sudan · in progress

More countries planned

67+

HOURS OF RAW ORAL HISTORY AUDIO

Archived, protected, and being prepared for Georgetown University Special Collections.

Noor's Story — *direct impact*

Noor was our second oral history collected, while we were still in our pilot phase. She is a female head of household living in Egypt with her son as a refugee, and is now applying to graduate school. Her full story is published in four parts on Substack, on YouTube, and on Spotify.

Beyond sharing her testimony, Noor was sponsored to host one of our Refugee Archive Roundtable webinars, studying the academic materials herself in preparation. She gained an inclusive opportunity to participate from home, get paid, and receive training in public speaking, academic research, and analysis — along with the education and mentorship to prepare for the discussion.

She now holds a tangible asset for her portfolio: speaking and engaging on a topic she lives. We want to create more opportunities like this for direct impact — not only through our economic projects arm, but in paid fellowship opportunities woven through the other programming we run directly with FHH in active displacement.

LISTEN & WATCH NOOR'S STORY

Substack: [Part 1](#) · [Part 2](#) · [Part 3](#) · [Part 4](#)

[YouTube](#) · [The Archive Speaks](#)

[Spotify](#) · [full podcast](#)

THE ROUNDTABLE WEBINAR SHE HOSTED

Prolonging the Temporary with Syrian FHHs in Lebanon

Featuring Dr. Jasmin Lilian Diab and Assma Awkal — the complex lived experiences and migration decisions of Syrian women navigating protracted displacement in Lebanon.

[WATCH THE WEBINAR →](#)

The Impact We Made

In six months, testimony from fifteen women reached 528,000+ people across eleven platforms, in nine countries, translated into 66,000+ words of preserved record.

SIX-MONTH PLATFORM REACH

LINKEDIN

93,578+

FACEBOOK

106,421+

INSTAGRAM

42,111+

PINTEREST

62,300+

TIKTOK

28,900+

YOUTUBE

30,900+

Also active on Substack, Threads, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon Podcasts.

66,000+

WORDS PROCESSED

528K+

TOTAL IMPRESSIONS ACROSS ELEVEN
PLATFORMS

1,000

LINKEDIN FOLLOWERS, +154 NEW

20m 29s

AVG. WEBSITE SESSION, UP 18%

Our Programs

The Refugee Archive does not just collect stories. It turns them into art, research, media, events, and the infrastructure for advocacy and understanding of single motherhood living in modern real-time displacement settings due to conflict, war, and climate.

Oral History Collection

Multi-hour, trauma-informed oral histories, audio-recorded and transcribed from displaced single mothers and female-headed households. Collected using the Four-Pillar Method, translated by digital language tools and real native-speaking humans. Original, unedited recordings are archived; edited versions are produced for visual, auditory, and written consumption.

Art of Oral History

Launched in 2026. Artists from developing countries volunteer to create original artwork inspired by listening to or reading a single unpublished part of a multi-part oral history. The artwork appears on YouTube and Substack above the captions and voice of the woman telling her story. Each artist titles their piece and shares a narrative of their feelings, process, and vision. We feature them across our social channels and award a program certificate.

FHH Policy Tracker

A policy analysis program where youth studying or starting careers in government, law, journalism, and related fields learn to examine laws and policies in country-specific settings, focused on one demographic: female heads of household. Each policy team is composed of nationals of the country it studies – the Nigeria team, made up of Nigerian nationals, examines policy affecting FHH refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria; the Kenya and Lebanon teams follow the same model in their own countries. Reports are published, presented to stakeholders, and used as portfolio pieces alongside each fellow's certificate of participation.

Across Archives Podcast

A long-form podcast bringing together oral historians, researchers, advocates, and storytellers on fieldwork, displacement policy, and the work of preserving stories and correcting the record. Guests speak from years of field experience. Hosted by Desmond Asakitikpi. On YouTube, Spotify, Apple & Amazon Podcasts, and Substack.

Refugee Archive Roundtable

A webinar series bringing together professionals and academics who have published research and commentary on women in displacement globally, discussing their findings and reflections on current events, policy, and trends. Each episode is produced end-to-end: guest research, coordination, recording, editing, and multi-platform publishing.

Refugee Voices Blog

Participatory journalism by and for displaced single mothers. We hold a space on our Substack platform for FHH to post written and audio messages that pair with their oral histories, adding granular, first-person context to life in displacement.

Education Programming & Seminars

In development: hybrid educational programs covering local partner training, policy research team development, and finance and business management skills, built to complement our economic projects arm.

Economic Projects

In development: The Refugee Archive will self-fund micro-finance projects within FHH populations, and will manage third-party micro-finance projects within FHH populations on behalf of partners and funders.

University Archive

A robust, resource-intensive partnership with Georgetown Special Collections: transferring and cataloging raw audio files, transcribing across multiple nuanced languages that cannot be handled by AI tools, and meeting the data security standards, planning, training, and cost that long-term preservation requires. It takes real manpower to build an archive meant to outlast us.

TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING

Adasu University, Nigeria
30+ students trained, Jan 2026

De La Salle University, Manila
Grad students recruited as fellows

ARWNET
25 reps trained, 20 African countries.

Fellowship Program
Active on four continents



“While reading Merveille's story, the word ‘perseverance’ kept coming through and sort of became the theme of the piece. Watercolor is fluid and forgiving. Water is powerful – it can forge and create.”

SHOSHANAH ROSE · ARTIST, “MERVEILLE'S WAY,” GOMA DRC

NIGERIA ART EXHIBIT · NOV 2026

Conceptualized for a Lagos university, the exhibit will feature the work of Nigerian artists from this program alongside the oral histories that inspired them. Sponsorship opportunities are available.

Our Partners

The Refugee Archive works because of the people on the ground who bring their access, credibility, culture, and skills to a unified effort: to build the world's largest center for FHH oral history collection, advocacy, education, and research.

PCR Foundation · DR CONGO, GOMA

Our primary partner for the Goma Oral History Project, trusted deeply by the women we serve. PCR Foundation works alongside our narrators from the very start – through an education program, into collection with mentorship and guidance – facilitating transportation, food, and mobile data on the ground so oral history collection can continue safely under active M23 conflict conditions.

Tumaini for Refugee Women · UGANDA, NAKIVALE

Partner for our Uganda pilot oral history project. Tumaini holds the trust of women inside Nakivale, guiding narrators through the process and standing alongside them in the telling. The partnership and collection protocol are established and ready to scale with funding.

Ziabul Hossain Foundation · BANGLADESH, COX'S BAZAR

Our primary partner for oral history collection among Rohingya women in Cox's Bazar. Deeply trusted within the camp, the Foundation walks with narrators from education through collection, providing mentorship, transportation, food, and connectivity so their stories can be told safely and completely.

ARWNET · 20 AFRICAN COUNTRIES

The African Refugee Women-Led Network connects women-led organizations across the continent, each trusted locally and positioned to guide narrators from training through collection. TRA has trained ARWNET country representatives and is developing a mass oral history collection program through this network.

Borderless Single Mums · KENYA, ECONOMIC PROJECT

A skill-building community center for single mothers – a place to learn, build, and manage small businesses and sustain their households. Program details to follow.

Georgetown University Special Collections · ARCHIVE PARTNERSHIP

In development. Georgetown's Booth Family Center for Special Collections has expressed intent to house TRA's oral history collection – creating what would be the world's first special collection dedicated to the oral histories of displaced female-headed households.

Sponsorship

TRA is ready to scale oral history collection, fellowships, policy research, and public programs through mission-aligned partnerships.

contact@therefugeearchive.org

Where We Need Your Support

2026 · ACTIVE

ARWNET Mass Collection

Training and deploying 52 women-led organizations across 20 African countries to collect oral histories from female-headed households. The infrastructure is built – sponsorship unlocks the program.

Uganda Continuation

Tumaini for Refugee Women is ready to continue. One oral history collected, protocol established. Funding is needed to return to Nakivale Refugee Camp.

Goma Oral History Project

Collection is paused pending funding, and women are waiting. A GiveButter campaign is launching to fund the continuation of this project.

Nigeria Art Exhibit · Nov 2026

A public art event at a Lagos university featuring Nigerian youth artists from the Art of Oral History program, with the oral histories that inspired them. Sponsorship opportunities are available.

State of the World for FHH · Annual Journal

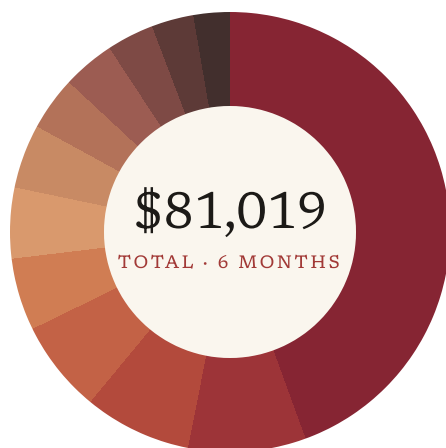
Volume 1 planned for June 2027. A peer-reviewed, ISSN-registered journal on the lives and policies affecting displaced female-headed households. Call for papers launching late 2026.

Vega School · Gaming for Good

A new partnership with Vega School, launched last week in a remote call with the student body. Gaming for Good is a student-led game design program that turns TRA's oral histories into playable, interactive experiences – using game design as a tool for advocacy, empathy, and public understanding of displacement. Over the next six months, we'll work with up to 20 student teams as they design games grounded in our archive.

Where the Money Went

A six-month operating snapshot of the founding year — every dollar accounted for across wages, programming, infrastructure, and operations.



LINE ITEM	AMOUNT	SHARE
■ Core Team Wages & Fellowship Stipends	\$36,000	44.4%
■ Event Programming	\$7,019	8.7%
■ Website & Domain Development	\$6,400	7.9%
■ Oral History Production	\$5,500	6.8%
■ Administrative & Operations	\$4,300	5.3%
■ Art of Oral History Programming	\$4,200	5.2%
■ Social Media Management	\$3,800	4.7%
■ Subscriptions & Software	\$3,200	3.9%
■ Across Archives Podcast Programming	\$3,100	3.8%
■ FHH Policy Tracker Programming	\$2,800	3.5%
■ Annual Journal Programming	\$2,500	3.1%
■ Roundtable Webinar Programming	\$2,200	2.7%
TOTAL · 6 MONTHS	\$81,019	100%

JOIN US

There are many ways to support this work.

\$1,200

funds one complete oral history, from collection to archival

\$13,000

a month keeps us operating at our current pace

Donate time, money, skills, networks, or ideas – we welcome every form of support in building this work alongside us.

[DONATE AT THEREFUGEEARCHIVE.ORG](https://www.therefugeearchive.org) →

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