

Chicago Refugee Coalition

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What is the Chicago Refugee Coalition?

- “Established in 2018, the Chicago Refugee Coalition is 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to innovative, dignity-driven, and community-led relief services for Chicagoland refugees. Our organization is informed by the community whom we serve and we seek to actively dismantle the systemic barriers faced by refugees and serve to be a conduit for a paradigm shift away from the Global North.”
- This organization operates out of Rogers Park local high school, Sullivan High, where a resource center is present and available to provide resources and support to the majority-refugee population of students at Sullivan High and their families.
- As a small and growing organization, the Chicago Refugee Coalition fits itself in where it is needed. That is, the Chicago Refugee Coalition picks up where larger refugee-centric organizations such as Heartland Alliance and RefugeeOne leave off on the local level.

Internship at The Chicago Refugee Coalition

- As an intern for this organization, all tasks and projects were centered on supporting efforts of **growth** for this relatively new organization:
 - Collecting data on how other current refugee-centric organizations operate, how they are successful, how much revenue they work with, etc.
 - Conducting social media engagement to increase awareness of local presence
 - Sharing content on partnerships with local and national organizations, such as Imperfect Foods, Bombas Socks, and the Welcome.US Coalition
 - Practicing mindfulness in social media spaces so as to prevent toxicity and exploitation
 - Working within the resource center located in Sullivan High, being readily available to answer questions and provide resources to students, teachers, and families
 - Ex. distribution of Bombas socks during Parent-Teacher conferences
 - Updating donors and logging donor information
 - Preparing and organizing for special events
 - Ex. Book release party

Refugee Organization Data Collection

- The purpose of this project was to better understand how the CRC as a growing nonprofit organization should act in the increasingly developing nonprofit world, where there are new methods of fundraising, awareness, and support
 - Learning from organizations that tailor their support for particular demographics
 - Observing how solely online refugee resource centers operate and if they are successful in doing so
- As a new organization, the CRC has room to take this nonprofit in whichever direction it chooses
- Important focus on how much money other refugee-centric organizations are using/receiving in order to achieve/not achieve their goals

Social Media

- Presentation on social media is essential as it serves as source of “first impression” for potential volunteers, partners, and donors
- Central CRC objective of practicing mindful social media habits
 - Refraining from abusing refugee stories to obtain more views, followers, and engagement
 - Effectively communicating organizational desire to work WITH Chicago’s refugee community and not necessarily looking down on said community in a savioristic, paternalistic manner
 - Generally exercising proper ethics in the content being publicly shared

The Resource Center- Sullivan High School

- Direct interaction with the Chicago refugee community
- Provide physical resources (socks/clothing/coats, groceries, toiletries, etc.)
 - Emphasizing how important providing these basic resources are
 - From a comparative point of view, these sorts of measures can be considered low-impact in comparison to bigger, more successful refugee nonprofits, but working face to face with this community demonstrates how large, structural change and service is certainly necessary, but tending to the individual needs of refugee families is arguably just as essential
- Meeting students, faculty, and parents

Book Launch: “Refugee High: Coming of Age in America ” by Elly Fishman

- This text tells the stories of several students at Sullivan High and their refugee backgrounds
 - The CRC hosted and promoted the release of this book, as it also enabled more Chicago-wide exposure to the CRC as a growing nonprofit
- The event was incredibly successful in raising awareness of both Elly Fishman’s novel and the CRC as well (donations included)
- This sort of event highlights how essential it is for nonprofits—especially small, growing nonprofits—to obtain donor funding
 - Although this event took place in one night, the aftermath of coordinating funds and information from new donors was a lengthy process

Learning Outcomes/Takeaways on the Struggles of Nonprofit Organizations

- Local, small nonprofits can still have a sizable impact on the communities they aim to serve even though they operate with limited money and resources
- However, the inherent struggles that nonprofits face cannot be ignored
 - Nonprofits operate within a majority for-profit, business world and must thus appeal to figures and groups who are willing to fund nonprofits. This reliance makes it so that nonprofits often spend most of their time and resources catering to their donors by providing them with informational reports, tokens of appreciation, and regular updates on how donor money is being spent.
 - There is an argument to be made that given the nature of this environment that all nonprofits must operate in, they are spending almost too much time on donor efforts and not enough on pursuing their actual mission of serving the underserved. Social media and special events play into this problem as well.
 - Nonetheless, local nonprofits such as the CRC strive to and succeed at achieving a balance between spending the necessary time and resources on catering to their donors without taking those materials away from actually supporting the Chicago refugee community.

So, what comes next for non-profits?

- More lateral and downward accountability to balance out upward accountability (Christensen and Ebrahim 199)
 - Lateral accountability refers to staff, board, and volunteers of the organization, emphasizing the importance of being accountable to each other as members of the same team
 - Downward accountability refers to more informal methods of accountability that emphasize being accountable to the clients and beneficiaries of, or the people being served by, the nonprofit organization
- Implement corporate governance measures (Wellens and Jegers 224)
 - Intercommunication between all the stakeholders involved in a non-profit organization—from donors to employees to beneficiaries to board members to volunteers
 - Utilizing a stable platform for regular communication
 - Increases the above-mentioned types of accountability

Christensen, R. A., & Ebrahim, A. (2006, December 22). *How does accountability affect mission? the case of a nonprofit serving immigrants and refugees*. Wiley Online Library. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/nml.143>.

Wellens, L., & Jegers, M. (2013, February 26). *Effective governance in nonprofit organizations: A literature based multiple stakeholder approach*. European Management Journal. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0263237313000194?token=036FBF84A07F9E47E323478AD6EEF331E3C68CAAC47F0B0DB06FA687B0DAC3A1891C06A95AC00A71359586ED3D74E1D6&originRegion=us-east-1&originCreation=20211203214637>.