ANNUAL REPORT

2024



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

At the core of the populist narrative is a perversion of the truth. Populists are now some of the richest and most powerful people in the world, yet they portray their kind as victims forced to defend themselves against some of the most vulnerable communities on the planet: trans folks, refugees, people experiencing poverty.

What makes these populists so effective - especially now - is that they have worn down their opposition. Where there once was resistance, there is now resignation.

To keep fighting - it all seems too hard. But then we must consider: what will the price of inaction be? Many of us think we could ride out the worst of this historical moment, but how will history judge those of us who could have supported the most marginalized people - but didn't?

At Witness Change, we refuse to do nothing. We believe that these marginalized people - who are targets, now more than ever - cannot be abandoned.

We do not have all the answers to end bigotry, but we know one thing for sure: that every fight for equality requires hearing and listening to people experiencing injustice. In silence, victimization grows. In raising one's voice, there is humanity, resistance, and hope.



Robin Hammond

ROBIN HAMMOND DIRECTOR

CONTENT

Executive Summary	04
What is Witness Change?	05
1000 Dreams	06
In My World	17
Where Love Is Illegal	19
Social Media	21
Witness Change	22
The Future	23



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2024 was a big year for Witness Change.

We continued to invest time and effort into our ongoing projects, and laid the groundwork for impactful new developments. Witness Change staff and volunteers are co-creating strong systems and processes that ensure our organization functions at its best - and that our projects are executed well, disseminated widely, and have measurable impact.

Some highlights from 2024, in numbers:



2.5 million social media reach



17 new 1000 Dreams refugee storytellers taught and mentored



964 total stories documented for 1000 Dreams to date

1000 Dreams continued to be a major focus this year - our first workshops in the United States. Where Love Is Illegal also expanded in scope, with new storytelling developments to look forward to. Internally, we improved our systems for supporting, monitoring, and evaluating our impact. Our team and advisory board have both grown, building more fundraising capacity.



All in all, this has been an impactful year for Witness Change projects and programs. We have lots to look forward to in 2025.

WHAT IS WITNESS CHANGE?

Our society is shaped by stories. However, the voices of marginalized people are often excluded, even when the stories are about them. **Witness Change** uses visual storytelling to support excluded people in reclaiming their narratives and improving their lives.

Witness Change's projects include:

- Where Love is Illegal: LGBTQI+ stories of discrimination and survival
- In My World: Stories of living with mental health issues, psychosocial and intellectual disabilities
- 1000 Dreams: Refugee stories authored by refugees



VALUES

Purpose: Creating a more just world.

Niche: We share stories that positively impact the lives of marginalized people.

What we do: Witness Change is a non-profit that uses interviews, testimonies, photography, and film to support marginalized groups – like LGBTQI+ identifying folks, people living with mental health issues, and refugees – to tell their own stories in their own words. We use storytelling to advocate for positive change for their communities.

The qualities that make us unique:

- 1. We produce quality collaborative storytelling
- 2. Our projects are impact-led
- 3. We work with marginalized groups

































































PROJECT PURPOSE

1000 Dreams changes harmful refugee narratives through a storytelling project sharing the stories of 1000 refugees across Europe and the United States. 1000 Dreams is entirely authored by storytellers with a refugee background.

THE IMPACT OF CURRENT NARRATIVES

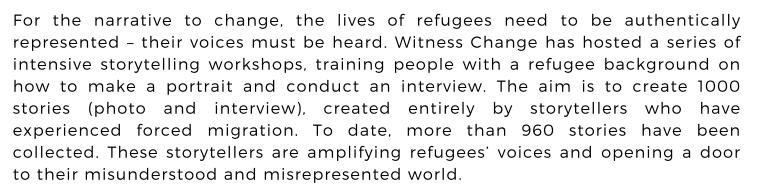
Refugees are often depicted as invading hordes threatening the identity of, and placing unsustainable burdens on, a host population. Those more sympathetic to refugees regularly represent them as helpless and hopeless victims. Both views reduce the refugee experience to a stereotype, forgetting that each refugee is an individual.

The refugee experience is hugely diverse. These prevailing stereotypes form attitudes that affect policies and practices that. at best, are not as effective as they could be, and at worst, can have severe negative impacts on the lives of refugees.

1000 DREAMS CHANGES THE NARRATIVE

For attitudes, policies, and practices to change, the narrative must change.

HOW DOES 1000 DREAMS DO THAT?



Interviews provide insights into the individual lives of refugees and the emotional impact of current policies and attitudes.

Supporting refugees to document the stories of other refugees allows opportunities for dialogue that isn't influenced by prevailing narratives. They are documenting diverse refugee experiences.



ACTIVITY SUMMARY

OVERVIEW:

The challenges faced by people experiencing forced migration (refugees) are not limited to the European continent. In the United States, migration has become the major focal point of a toxic political discourse. In 2024, Witness Change held its first two 1000 Dreams workshops in the United States. **These workshops represent an expansion of 1000 Dreams: deepening the project's scope and potential impact.**

Workshop locations were selected to ensure the stories collected reflect a diversity of backgrounds/experiences. The first workshop was held in New York City, where Southern states have bussed thousands of migrants in recent years. The second workshop was held in San Antonio, Texas. Texas has resettled the most refugees of all states in the last 10 years and is currently at the center of political battles over migrants arriving from the Southern border. These two cities spearhead our ongoing mission to share the range of refugee experiences in the United States.



NEW YORK CITY:

In April 2024, Witness Change ran its New York City workshop with eight participants who have a refugee/asylum-seeking background. As a result of the participants diversity of current location and country of origin, 33 countries of origin are represented in stories.

The workshop was held at the **Bronx Documentary Center**, a space that celebrates visual storytelling. Witness Change are grateful to **The Joseph Handleman I Believe In You Foundation**, who funded the workshop, and to **Sony Electronics**, who provided cameras through their Create Action grant.



SAN ANTONIO:

The 1000 Dreams San Antonio workshop took place in August. Nine people with a refugee/asylum seeker background participated in two workshops. The United States' shifting politics caused additional challenges, with some students reporting that potential interviewees were unwilling to speak publicly for fear of retaliation.

Sony Electronics' Create Action grant supported both workshops by providing photography equipment and fully funding the San Antonio workshop. This support also allowed Witness Change to expand the project's storytelling scope by creating video profiles of the refugee storytellers in both cities. These testimonials highlight the importance of refugee-led storytelling when interviewing individuals who have experienced forced migration.



"My dreams have always been to fight for what I wanted, which is to have my own home. have **a business,"** says Gaviota (pseud, 35) a trans woman from Ecuador. her She left home where she faced transphobic violence, and death threats. Even as she traversed the many countries on her journey to the U.S., she was attacked. Living away from her family is hard, and the memory of her journey makes Gaviota cry when she is alone. "Sometimes I feel that I am overcome by nostalgia, sadness." She was suicidal at one point. "I am afraid of falling into depression because, sometimes, there are days that I cry day and night." Being in touch with her family however gives Gaviota joy, while she derives strength from her friends in the trans community. "Every day, I'm trying to get ahead because... being in this country alone is not easy for me." Now, she wants to gain asylum and visit her family in Ecuador. "All I ever wanted was to have something for my life, something of my own."





"Because our future is in our own hands, we can study and if my husband's work permit comes...we can go to the house and schools we dream of, we can take our children there and provide them a good life." Nilofar Said Por, 29, sought asylum in New York with her family after fleeing Afghanistan in 2023. "We did not imagine that our country would be taken over by the Taliban all of a sudden and we would have to leave... because our lives were in danger." Not knowing the language and going for days without eating when shelters couldn't provide halal food made the journey to the US difficult. "We went through a lot of hard days and were depressed and stressed," she says, "but I had hope that I came here and that the lives of our children and ourselves would be better." Nilofar misses her family back home but she's hopeful about the future: "My dream is... that I can continue my studies or work in the field of law that I graduated from. If it doesn't work, I want to work in midwifery or nursing."

EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

1000 Dreams was exhibited three times in 2024, primarily through partnerships with **Heinrich Boell** and the European Union political party **Greens/EFA**.

"THE PEOPLE WHO WERE IN CHARGE OF THE PROJECT WERE ABSOLUTE AMAZING PEOPLE. IT IS LONG TIME NOW BUT WHEN I THINK BACK I STILL FEEL THE FRIENDLINESS AND WARM HEARTED PEOPLE BEHIND THIS PROJECT. ESPECIALLY WILLIAM AND ROBIN! I APPRECIATE THAT THE PROJECT IS STILL GOING FURTHER WITH NEW PEOPLE AND PARTICIPANTS!" QUINN GAPP - 1000 DREAMS STORYTELLER MAY - FRANCE, PARIS - HEINRICH BOELL, PARIS: An exhibition hosted at the Maison Heinrich Heine, a Franco/German cultural space and student housing. The project was presented by 1000 Dreams storyteller Mirza Durakovic. MARCH - AUSTRIA, VIENNA - GREENS/EFA: An exhibition hosted by the Greens/EFA with 1000 Dreams presented by storytellers Esra Gültekin & Quinn Gapp.

"IT ACTUALLY HELPED ME WITH REAL LIFE, COMMUNICATION BECOME MORE EASIER AND ON A DEEPER LEVEL." RIMAN AMIN - 1000 DREAMS STORYTELLER



JUNE - GREECE, THESSALONIKI - HEINRICH BOELL, THESSALONIKI:

Featured during a conference on migration, Heinrich Boell Thessaloniki exhibited 1000 Dreams stories with a presentation by two storytellers, Zahra Mojahed & Quinn Gapp, and 1000 Dreams facilitator William Lounsbury.



In 2025, Bronx Documentary Center (BDC) will host the first 1000 Dreams exhibition to feature work collected in the United States. Running from **April 3 - May 11, 2025**, The exhibition will be hosting "educational walkthroughs" accessible to the local community and schoolchildren. **Witness Change is currently creating an educational resource to accompany the exhibition so that 1000 Dreams stories can be used as a learning tool.**

NYC STORYTELLER VIDEOS:



ABDOULAYE



EDUARDO



EVANNA

TEXAS STORYTELLER VIDEOS:



HUSNA



HEBERTO



<u>MAHA</u>

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG The Green Political Foundation







BRONX Documentary Center







trint

The Joseph Handleman I Believe in You Foundation



PARTNERSHIPS:

THE JOSEPH HANDLEMAN I BELIEVE IN YOU FOUNDATION

The Joseph Handleman I Believe In You Foundation invests in the livelihoods, creativity, and health of all beings to promote resilience, opportunity, and a more compassionate world. Their generous funding made the 1000 Dreams New York City workshop a reality.

SONY

Witness Change was awarded a Sony Create Action grant to run a 1000 Dreams workshop in the United States. This grant funded the San Antonio classes and provided the photography equipment students used. In addition to the grant, Sony agreed to generously provide equipment for the New York City workshop.

BRONX DOCUMENTARY CENTER

Bronx Documentary Center is a New York City institution supporting and amplifying visual storytelling in the city at large, and specifically in underserved neighborhoods of the Bronx. They provided workshop space at a reduced rate for the NYC workshop, and agreed to host an exhibition 1000 Dreams in 2025.

KUDO

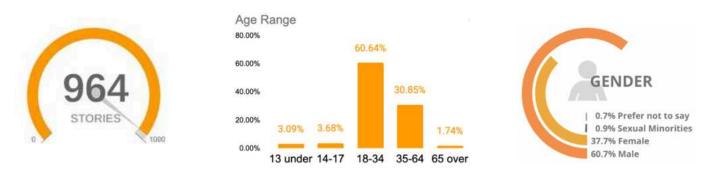
Kudo is an AI-powered live translation tool that was provided as a donation to Witness Change. Kudo's tools allowed storytellers with limited English greater access to the program.

PROJECT EVALUATION

We hope to replicate the success 1000 Dreams has already achieved in Europe, where exhibitions, created in partnership with influential and political parties, being used to change the organizations are narrative. In the United States, building counter-narratives to growing anti-immigrant sentiment is more important now than ever. These two workshops are a crucial first step in this work.

Witness Change is committed to regularly re-evaluating the effectiveness of its programs. In Q1 2025, Witness Change will conduct a review ahead of future US workshops to ensure they are most effective in the US context. **2025 represents a unique opportunity to expand 1000 Dreams. Thanks to incredible partner organizations, the reach and impact of these stories continues.**

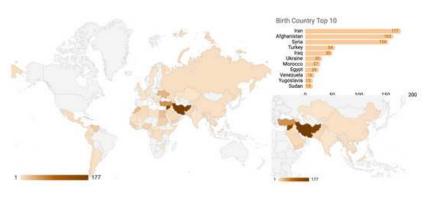
By 2024, storytellers had collected 964 stories across 89 countries. Most participants are aged 18-34, with a near 60/40 gender split (men/women) and representation from LGBTQI+ refugees.



Stories shared represent people born in 89 countries, with 51% of refugees born in Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria - reflecting both the backgrounds of storytellers and broader migration trends in Europe and the US. The project distinguishes between birth country and nationality,

as many refugees do not identify with their country of birth, and some come from nations not recognized by the UN, such as Kurdistan and Palestine.

In total, the stories reflect 90 nationalities and were collected by storytellers based in 16 host countries.



Since the project began, 1000 Dreams has trained 92 refugee storytellers, based across 13 host countries and representing 33 different countries of origin, further highlighting the global diversity and lived experience at the heart of the project.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

EUROPE WORKSHOPS:

At the beginning of 2024, Witness Change's Research team conducted postworkshop surveys with storytellers who had participated in past workshops. Research found that participants experienced a notable improvement in their storytelling proficiency, photography expertise, interviewing techniques and confidence levels throughout the workshop. Participants displayed a heightened belief in the influential power of stories and expressed improvements in their capacity to lead conversations, refine questioning approaches, and make subjects comfortable. Their feedback praised the workshop's professionalism and enriching experience.

Those who stated their skills in storytelling as "beginners", particularly women, reported greater overall skills growth. They submitted a higher number of stories, expressed stronger motivation, and reported a greater sense of accomplishment.

These findings speak to the value of investing in emerging storytellers and affirm our belief that narrative change begins by amplifying voices too often excluded.

UNITED STATES WORKSHOPS:

Significant and consistent data have proven the effectiveness and impact of our workshops. This year, with workshops in the U.S. for the first time, evaluations focused on the approachability, knowledge and cultural sensitivity of the mentors as well as participants' comfort in group dynamics and in workshop location. The data shows that participants felt safe, supported, and respected—despite mentors not having lived refugee experience. This points to the strength of our training model and the care taken to create inclusive, welcoming environments. We will continue to monitor this closely in 2025 as our U.S. work expands.

EDITING & DISSEMINATION

Every 1000 Dreams story begins as an interview, recorded by a refugee storyteller and then carefully transcribed and translated into English by our team of paid and volunteer linguists. In 2024, we translated 166 stories across seven languages, with new teams in development for Turkish and Kurdish. Only once translation and safeguarding are complete does editing begin, each story is distilled into a powerful 1000-character testimony by a team of skilled volunteer editors and writers. In 2024, 75 such stories were prepared for publication.

Behind every story shared publicly is a careful, collaborative process—one that honors the storyteller's voice at every step. Since the project's launch, over 51,800 people have accessed the 1000 Dreams site, helping these stories reach new audiences and challenge harmful narratives. LOS DOCENTES TRANSMITIERON MUCHA EMOCIÓN AL PROYECTO, FUE MOTIVANTE CADA PASO DEL APRENDIZAJE AL PENSAR EN LAS HISTORIAS QUE PODRÍAN SURGIR Y QUE NOSOTROS SERÍAMOS LOS PORTAVOCES."

"THE TEACHERS BROUGHT A LOT OF EXCITEMENT TO THE PROJECT. EACH STEP OF THE LEARNING PROCESS WAS MOTIVATING, THINKING ABOUT THE STORIES THAT COULD EMERGE AND THAT WE WOULD BE THE SPOKESPERSONS.

ERIK - 1000 DREAMS STORYTELLER

"J'AI EU QUAND MÊME BEAUCOUP D'EXPÉRIENCE POSITIVE CAR GRÂCE À CE PROJET J'AI RENCONTRÉ DES PERSONNES ET CELA M'A AIDÉ POUR MON INTÉGRATION DANS CE PAYS."

"I STILL HAD A LOT OF POSITIVE EXPERIENCES BECAUSE THANKS TO THIS PROJECT I MET PEOPLE AND IT HELPED ME WITH MY INTEGRATION IN THIS COUNTRY."

ABDOULAYE - 1000 DREAMS STORYTELLER



GROWING UP IS HARDER THAN EVER.

YOUNG AMERICANS ON HOW THEY SEE THEMSELVES

GLORIA, 13

IN MY WORLD

PROJECT PURPOSE

Mental health issues will affect one in four people in their lifetime, and cause more disease and death than any other illness. Adequate mental health care should be both a moral imperative and a fundamental human right, yet it is not a global priority in action, funding, or policy. In My World is a bold campaign that uses a visual storytelling approach to give people living with mental health issues, psychosocial and intellectual disabilities the chance to be seen, heard, and valued. Witness Change travels to countries around the world, telling stories about the different circumstances and environments that impact people's mental health. By giving everyone a platform to tell their story, the silence and challenge the stigma that shrouds mental health is broken.

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

In 2024, the In My World project took a backseat to 1000 Dreams and Where Love Is Illegal, both of which covered new ground and expanded in scope.

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY FOUNDATION - GHANA:

Witness Change continues to support Mental Health Advocacy Foundation (MHAF) Ghana, a grassroots service provider in northern Ghana. Funding has helped more than 160 people in total, specifically paying for travel, food, clothes, medical treatment and psychiatric support, and supporting beneficiaries in economic activities.





PROJECT PURPOSE

At least 67 countries have laws criminalizing same-sex activity between consenting adults. In addition, at least nine countries have laws criminalizing transgender and gender-nonconforming people. Worldwide, violence and prejudice against the LGBTQI+ community are rampant, targeting those who simply wish to live openly as themselves. Since 2015, WLII has shared LGBTQI+ stories of discrimination and survival. To date, Robin Hammond has traveled to 14 countries, documenting more than 250 stories of queer people globally.

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

In 2024, we deepened our commitment to WLII by expanding into more film work, which allows for queer stories of survival to be told in nuanced, immersive, and longer-form ways. For this, Witness Change team members traveled to Kenya, working with refugees to document their stories. This work will continue in 2025.

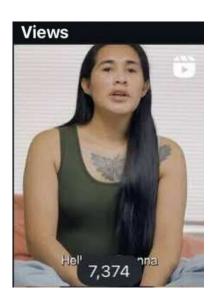


SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2024, Witness Change reached 2.5 million users across our own social channels. Collaborations with notable partners such as National Geographic, Samaritans, The OCD Stories, The TMI Project, and Trans Lifeline amplified our advocacy and storytelling.

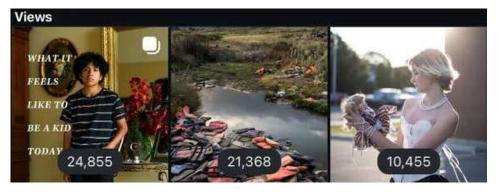
1000 DREAMS

Stories from workshops in Barcelona, Turkey, and the U.S. - along with those collected earlier in the project were shared throughout the year, resonating strongly with audiences. The first stories from the United States workshops were shared in late December, coinciding with the announcement of the Bronx Documentary Center exhibition. In total, 1000 Dreams content reached over 100,000 users via Instagram alone. As platforms shift toward video, six testimonial videos like NYC storyteller Evanna's, with 7,000+ views—helped bring these narratives to wider audiences.



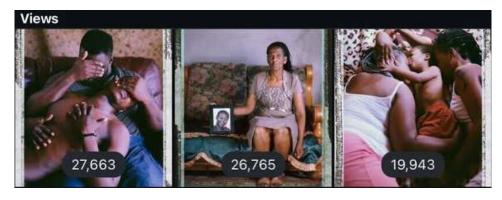
IN MY WORLD

Stories from our collaboration with the Youth Empowerment Group and past campaigns focused on themes like shackling, dementia, and care access. The top-performing post reached 25.8K users, with user-generated content further building awareness and community engagement.



WHERE LOVE IS ILLEGAL

WLII content reached 1.5 million users in 2024, with an exceptional 9.09% average engagement rate on Instagram. The story of Avelino and Neston from Mozambique became the year's most-viewed post, with 27.6K views.



WITNESS CHANGE

MONITORING & EVALUATION:

Witness Change is committed to creating storytelling with impact. To evaluate campaigns' effectiveness, the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team conducts pre- and post-partnership surveys, and collects feedback from individuals who take part in Witness Change programs. Data is also collected through pre, mid and post-surveys with implementation partners and beneficiaries of the workshops and campaigns run by Witness Change. These are commonly conducted by Witness Change staff using digital surveys, as well as distributed by partners at exhibitions and voluntary social media sentiment analysis surveys.



These findings help Witness Change prove its effectiveness, and are referenced in this report.

COMPREHENSIVE M&E REPORTS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

THE TEAM:

The work of *Witness Change* is delivered by a small team of part-time employees, a large number of volunteers, and a fluctuating number of contractors. The strategic direction is formed in conversation with the Board and with consultation provided by the Advisory Board.

DELIVERY TEAM:		OUR PARTNERS INCLUDE:
ROBIN HAMMOND AUDE BARBERA WILLIAM LOUNSBURY STEPHANIE BURNETT SARAH SYED MADELEINE BAZIL	BOARD OF DIRECTORS: SAMANTHA CHIU ROBIN HAMMOND BRAM HANEKOM LEIGH ANN WEBSTER	ALLEN & OVERY BABEL - MIGRANTS MENTAL HEALTH DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS (MSF) ELTON JOHN AIDS FOUNDATION (EJAF) FIRE CAPITAL HOOTSUITE HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH HUMANITY & INCLUSION (FORMERLY HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL) ICRC INGKA INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES THE NOMMONTU FOUNDATION OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS (OSF) OUTRIGHT INTERNATIONAL REFOCUS MEDIA LAB
KEY VOLUNTEERS:	ADVISORY BOARD:	SONY THE GATES FOUNDATION THE JOSEPH HANDLEMAN I BELIEVE IN YOU FOUNDATION THE HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION THE REFUGEE
ANGELA PRITCHETT, VERONICA SCHORR, BARNABY FALCK, ELEANOR UPDEGRAFF, FANNY VILLIERS, ELIJAH JACOBS, CAMILA SARASOLA, OBADA SHANAB, TASNEEM ABU AL-KHAIR, LEILA	MICHAEL BARRON, EMINA ĆERIMOVIĆ, KASHA NABACESERA, PRAGYA LODHA, DR. LANGTON MIRIYOGA, MARIAH MOORE, HAUWA OJEIFO, HOWARD	JOURNALISM PROJECT THE UNITED NATIONS TRANSLATION COMMONS TRENCADIS FOUNDATION TRINT UNICEF VANS WORLD BANK 99 DESIGNS AND 25+ GRASSROOTS LGBTQIA+ ORGANIZATIONS AROUND THE WORLD
AYELÉN VALLE, VANIA ZUBAIR. JILL FARWELL, NOELIA SERRANO, FLORENCIA LESCANO	PULCHIN. SANTIAGO RAMIREZ SAID	CONTINUING TO EXHIBIT OUR EXHIBITION IN A BOX PROJECT.

THE FUTURE

We've packed a lot of valuable work into 2024, and we're poised to build on that momentum in 2025. In the face of a global slide toward populism, the world's most vulnerable communities are increasingly at risk. There are big challenges ahead: both in our work, and in the lives and wellbeing of the folks we work with.

Witness Change's mission of amplifying and supporting marginalized voices is more important than ever, and we're all growing to accomplish this in new ways: solidifying systems, running programs, and monitoring impact. Impact, after all, is why Witness Change exists.

In 2025, we're taking the groundwork we laid this past year - training 1000 Dreams storytellers in the United States and exhibiting the stories they produce; deepening the use of video with Where Love Is Illegal stories worldwide; and more - and carrying it further. If we do all this with care and dedication, we can galvanize 2025 into our most productive and impactful year yet.



