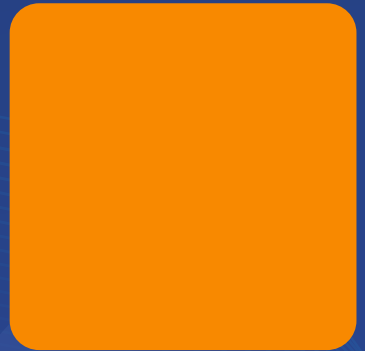


COVID-19 Impact Report



EMBARC

 **RISE**
AmeriCorps



By Refugees, For Refugees

Founded in 2012 as the state’s first refugee-led social service organization, EMBARC helps refugees in Iowa expand their world of possibilities through advocacy, education, and community development. Our focus on individual empowerment is based on the principle that lasting support systems and solutions come from within.

As a voice, friend, mentor, educator, and leader for refugees in the state, we offer support and resources in multiple areas, including:

- Education
- Health Care
- Housing
- Food
- Employment
- Mentoring
- Interpretation

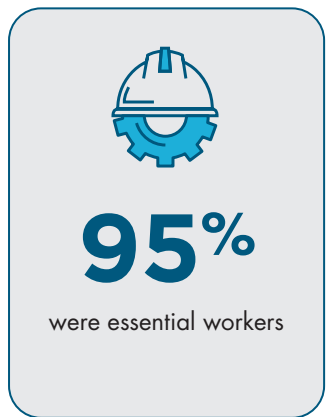
It’s all about building stronger refugee communities, which in turn builds a stronger Iowa.

2020: Year in Review

EMBARC began this year in our strongest position ever, with a focus on expanding our programs, reaching more refugees, and removing barriers that cause systemic inequity.

But when the pandemic hit, all that changed. We shifted into crisis mode—to get the word out about the virus in 10-13 different languages and to respond to families affected by the pandemic, including those who lost jobs, faced eviction, needed food, struggled with virtual schooling, and required medical assistance.

RISE AmeriCorps members also pivoted their efforts to crisis response on a statewide level. Working with 20 host sites, 99 RISE AmeriCorps members supported their communities by coordinating support services like, setting up food distribution, helping file unemployment applications, coordinating with local schools and health departments, or handing out masks.

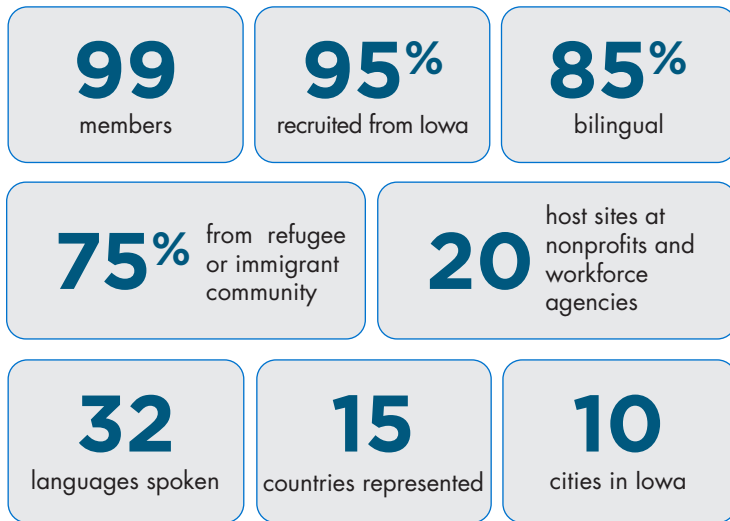


We RISE Together

Launched by EMBARC in 2015, RISE AmeriCorps (Rebuild, Integrate, Serve, Empower) trains emerging leaders in refugee and immigrant communities to connect with, support, and empower fellow refugees. The goal is to increase economic self-sufficiency, job readiness, and community engagement.

RISE AmeriCorps is the only statewide program positioned to support refugee essential workers with critical services and basic needs. When COVID-19 hit, members stepped up in their local communities. Pivoting from job training efforts to disaster response, RISE members provided information and navigation to thousands—helping them file for unemployment, get COVID-19 tests, obtain personal protective equipment, access food, and more.

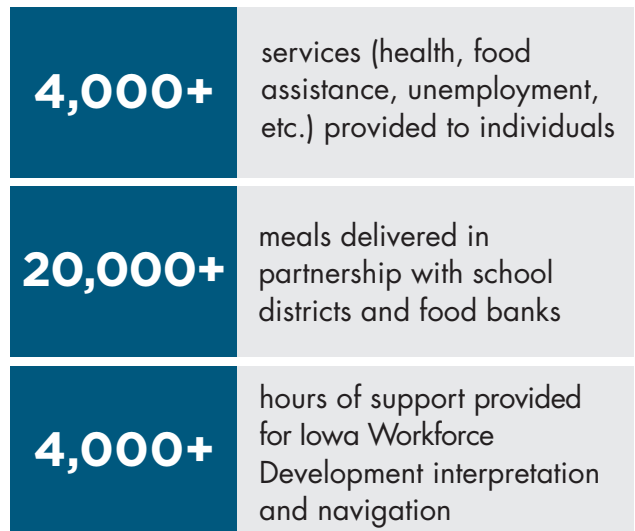
Our RISE AmeriCorps Members



Learn more at refugeeriseiowa.org



Our Impact



Goals for 2021

- **300** people get jobs
- **500** people improve their workforce readiness skills
- **2,000** clients access support services
- **500** volunteers start serving their communities



Elize Dushimimana

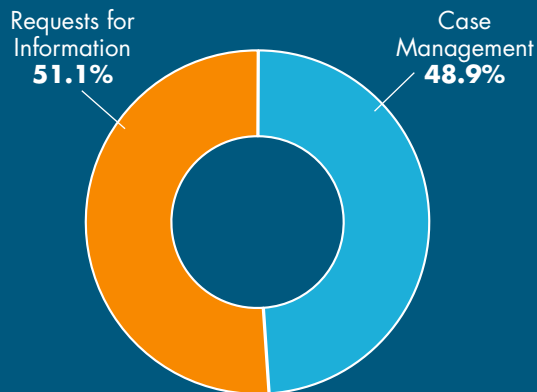
As a RISE AmeriCorps member during the 2019-2020 term, Elize helped lead a food pantry and distribute food to families in need. When the derecho storm hit Cedar Rapids, she was the first to step up to support the refugee and immigrant communities who bore the brunt of the disaster. Elize was recently hired by EMBARC as the Cedar Rapids Member Support Coordinator.

Crisis Helpline and Virtual Access Center

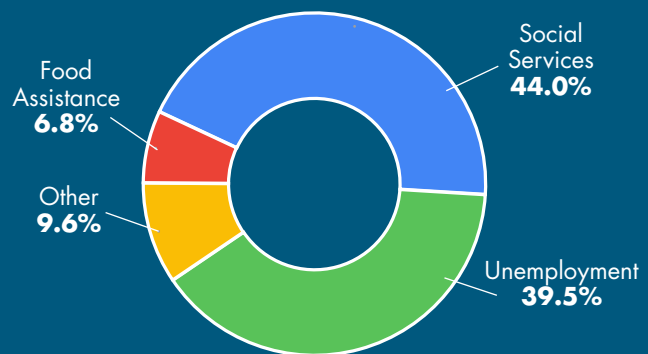
When the pandemic hit, EMBARC and RISE AmeriCorps members worked frantically to establish a helpline to address the barriers faced by immigrants and refugees in accessing critical and lifesaving resources.

Run by a multi-ethnic team of immigrant and refugee community members who collectively speak more than 25 languages and dialects, the Helpline provides holistic, virtual case management and follow-up services to callers.

Helpline Calls



Case Management Calls by Topic



10 languages
25 dialects*



Approx.
3,000
unique calls received



248
calls from recently arrived
refugees (less than 5 years)



32
intensive cases involving
100+ hours of
communication and support



Approx.
70%
of clients reported being
exposed to COVID-19

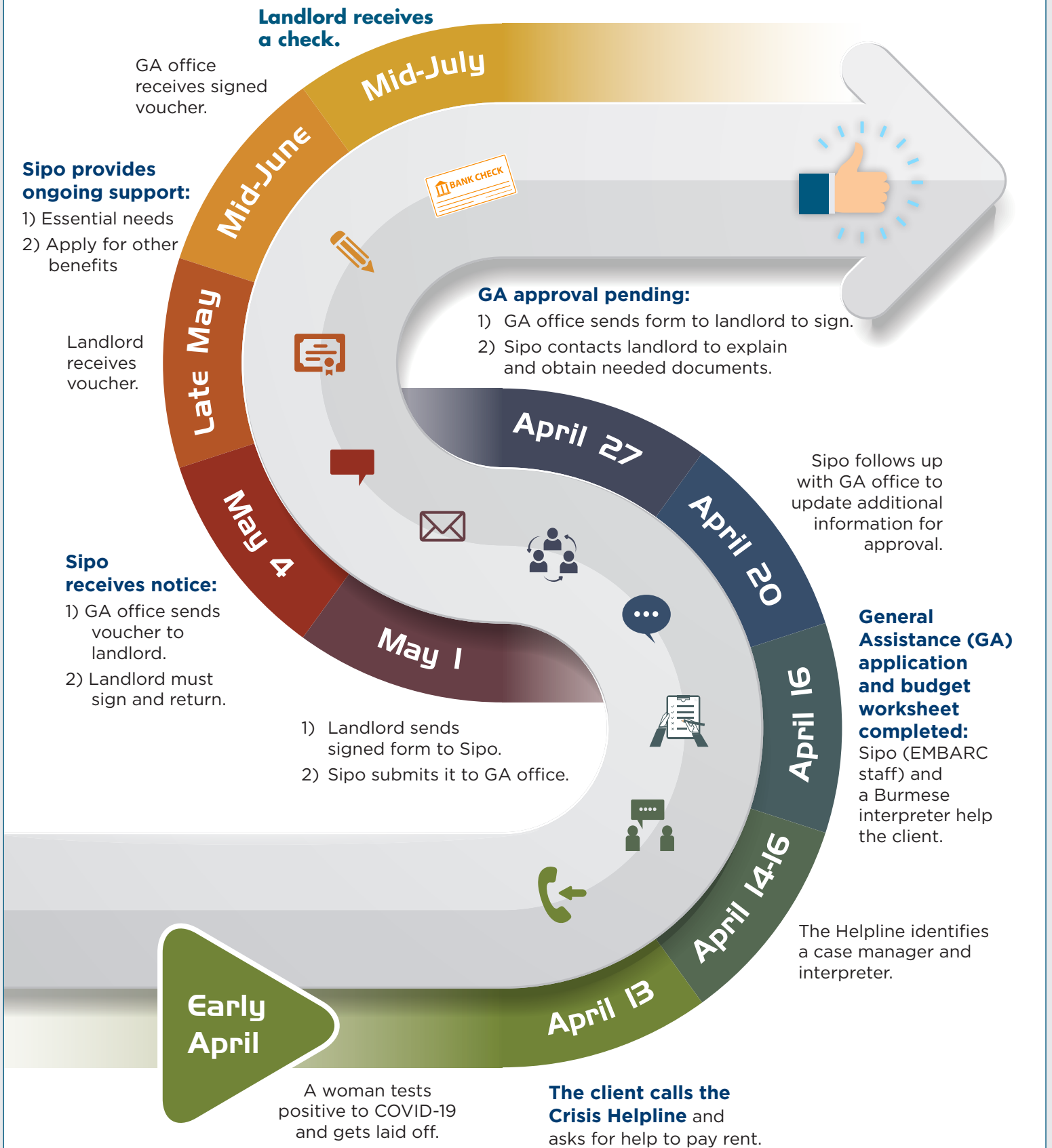


93.5%
case resolution rate

* Languages and dialects include: American Sign Language, Arabic, Burmese, Chin (Falam, Hakha, Mara, Mizo, Zomi and Zotung), Dinka, French, Kachin, Karen (Pwo, S'gaw), Karenni, Kibembe, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Kunama, Lingala, Rakhine, Saho, Swahili, and Tigrinya

How EMBARC Helps Clients

A typical case involves weeks or months of work for EMBARC staff. The graphic below shows what it took to help one client receive rent assistance. Her case was assigned to Sipo Ra, Family Navigator at EMBARC.





News Updates and In-Depth Resource Videos

As misinformation about the pandemic began to spread, refugees couldn't find accurate and timely information in their native languages. To address this issue, EMBARC launched a series of news updates and in-depth resource videos in more than 10 languages with essential health information, as well as updates from the Iowa Department of Public Health, school districts, emergency response centers, and more. For many, **EMBARC's updates were their sole source of news in their language.**

* 60+ unique news update videos and 30+ unique in-depth resource videos.

Our Stories



Htoo Htoo and Yaya

Siblings Htoo Htoo* and Yaya*, both Karen refugees in their 60s, contracted COVID-19 in March and spent weeks in the hospital on ventilation. Grace Htee (pictured), of EMBARC, spent hundreds of hours from March to July providing over-the-phone interpretation for the family and health care providers. After time in rehab, the siblings recovered and were able to return home. "That was the biggest, happiest moment of my life." says Grace.

*Names changed for privacy reasons



Annie Mayombo

Annie Mayombo came to Iowa from the Democratic Republic of the Congo four years ago. She fell sick with COVID-19 in April and spent three weeks in a coma. When she woke up, she couldn't speak and had no idea what was going on. RISE AmeriCorps members worked tirelessly to bridge the gap between Annie and the medical staff as she recovered. EMBARC also contacted her employer to ensure that her job was safe. Happy to be back home with her son, Annie has also returned to work. "Without EMBARC, I don't know what I would have done," she says.

Essential Services

Food Security

- **4,464** people received food
- **20,000+** meals delivered in partnership with school districts and food banks
- **150** hours donated by volunteers

Health Care

- **28** families supported with medical emergencies in just three months
- **10** domestic abuse or mental health emergencies handled
- **248** refugees received health education or services in their native language

Workforce

- **936** Helpline calls received about unemployment
- **377** individuals and families required multi-step case management and support

Parent Support

- **70+** families received help communicating with schools and setting up virtual learning

Infrastructure and Training

- **13** Helpline training videos and posts created
- **20+** navigators completed the training
- **90%** average score on training assessment

Derecho Response

The August 10 derecho was a disaster for immigrants and refugees in Cedar Rapids. The storm led to serious housing issues and food insecurity.

RISE AmeriCorps members provided 24/7 support:

- Staying overnight at shelters
- Delivering food, water, emergency supplies, and other essential items
- Serving on 24-hour language-specific helplines
- Responding to families evicted with less than 48 hours of notice
- Performing wellness checks and daily COVID-19 screenings

During the 2020-2021 program year, **18** RISE AmeriCorps members will be supporting ongoing disaster response and relief efforts through partner organizations in Cedar Rapids. These members will continue to support families with **long-term housing and storage** and **case management**. A special focus will be placed on helping children, youth, and parents.



What We Heard: Voices from Our Community

The stories we heard from refugees were heartbreaking. Children called about parents struggling to breathe. Parents called because they couldn't feed their kids. Here's a selection:

I am scared I will die. Who will take care of my family?

I need food for my children, but I can't get it.

I can't breathe well, but I don't want to go to the doctor because of bills.

When I got sick, I needed help. Helpline workers helped my family call 911 when I couldn't breathe and helped save my life.

I lost my job because of COVID-19. I didn't know how to apply for unemployment, because I don't speak English. We didn't have enough food until the Helpline helped us.

After two weeks, I was not getting better. I still had a sore throat, coughing, and headache. I am not sure how I can pay my rent and my bills. I am worried about getting my children food, too. I am a widow and I have three children under 18. I have been sick almost one month now.

The coronavirus has put me and my family under panic. We are confused by the symptoms because it is very similar to the flu. My husband is sick: he has high blood pressure and also the flu. I have to stay home and take care of him, but I won't get paid at work.

I have lupus and asthma, and so I was afraid I would die if I kept going to work. We work so closely together, and many people are getting sick. So, yesterday, I quit my job.



Learn About Our Community

We're excited to announce that we launched a brand-new website in October! Explore remarkable stories about EMBARC clients and staff and take a deep dive into the issues affecting the refugee community in our new blog. To stay up to date on the impact you make through EMBARC, subscribe to our blog and newsletter.

embarciowa.org


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