All Are Welcome Here

Project FINE

2017 Annual Report
**Our Mission:**
To strengthen and enrich our community by facilitating the integration of people who are ethnically diverse.

**About Project FINE:**
Project FINE is a nonprofit organization based in Winona, MN focused on integrating newcomers into our local community. We provide culturally and linguistically appropriate educational programming, and help newcomers access existing services in our region.

Since 1990, we have served as a connection point for refugees and immigrants, helping build contributing individuals, healthy families and a more respectful community.

Our work is accomplished by a small staff, committed volunteers, dedicated board members and extraordinary community partners. We look forward to continued collaboration with others across our region in pursuit of our organizational mission and vision.

**Our Vision:**
To create a respectful and sensitive community.

**Our Guiding Values:**
- Diversity
- Respect
- Culture
- Family
- Partnership

**Geographic Area Served:**
We are proud to serve Winona County and the surrounding region.
Welcome

Several years ago, Fatima Said approached me to gauge my interest in serving as a board member for Project FINE. I agreed and am proud to say that I just completed my fourth year with the organization and the first as its president.

Many board positions consist of “rubber-stamping” things that are actually planned and carried out by staff. That is not the case at Project FINE - each board member serves on at least one committee, and those committees help lay the foundation for our work. Another unique aspect of our board is the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of our members: we have a farmer, business owners and professionals, a city councilmember, and school administrators, but we all have one thing in common: we are involved because we believe in Project FINE’s mission and goals.

The success of Project FINE can be traced back to the amazing individual who guides this organization to achieve its goals, Fatima Said. Her drive and passion is ever-present and through her leadership, Project FINE has earned a reputation as one of the best nonprofits in our region. One of her greatest accomplishments is assembling a staff that shares her beliefs and passion to help those in need. Working together, they have accomplished many things in pursuit of Project FINE’s vision: to create a respectful and sensitive community.

I have been blessed to be able to serve such a fantastic organization, and to work with remarkable people like Fatima, her staff, and my fellow board members. I would also like to thank all of our partners and community members who work with and support Project FINE as we help newcomers achieve the American Dream.

Dan Matejka, 2017 Board President

On a cold December night 24 years ago, my family and I arrived at the airport in Rochester, Minnesota to begin our new life in the United States. We were unsure, afraid, and weary from our journey. One of my fondest memories of that night was the sight that greeted us when we entered the airport. I was shocked to see a group of about twenty people there to greet us. They had welcome signs in Bosnian, fruit and gifts for my children. I have never been more touched in my life – they were complete strangers who had come to welcome us. Many of them stayed involved in our lives, helping us adjust, and are now some of my dearest friends.

At Project FINE, we practice welcoming every day, serving as a resource for refugees and immigrants in our region. Our educational programs and services are often a first point of contact for newcomers, and over time we have become friends and trusted allies for our community. We also welcome the opportunity for new collaborations and to deepen our relationships with our many partners and supporters. All Are Welcome Here was selected as the theme for this report because welcoming has been a large part of our 2017 for Project FINE. Over the past year, many people have contacted us to share their support of our organization and of refugees and immigrants. Their outpouring of kind words and contributions of time, talent and funds has been amazing and illustrates how many welcomers there are in our community. We also celebrated our first annual series of Welcoming Week events in collaboration with the City of Winona, and I look forward to continue those events and expand to offer even more welcoming opportunities.

On behalf of all of us at Project FINE, thank you for your ongoing support of our mission. We appreciate your support of our organization and commitment to make our region a place of welcome and opportunity.

Fatima Said, Executive Director
Advocacy & Information Referrals

Advocacy & Information services assist newcomer families as they adjust to life in the United States, providing culturally and linguistically appropriate referrals and information about existing services. These connections help families ensure that their basic needs are met and increase awareness of resources available in the community. During 2017, Project FINE provided 6,522 hours of advocacy and information referrals to more than 1,850 newcomers in our region.

“\textbf{If we are looking for a successful model for community outreach, we should look to Project FINE. Their staff reach out to new community members rather than waiting until they are contacted. Whatever people need, they figure out a way to help. Finally, the staff check back in with families on a regular basis and continue to provide support and services as needed.}”

- Nicole Schossow, Community Relations Coordinator
  Winona Health
and immigrants ease their adjustment to the United States and begin the journey to self-sufficiency.

**Community & Healthcare Transformation**

Community & Healthcare Transformation is a three-year project that began in 2017. The project goal is to engage refugees and immigrants to identify barriers to health and to work with the community to develop positive solutions that promote equity and lead to improved health outcomes. During 2017, project activities included developing a strategy and work plan for the duration of the project; staff development and training on conducting effective listening sessions and analyzing data; and conducting focus groups and interviews.

In the summer and fall, five focus groups and 35 interviews were conducted, reaching 91 individuals. Responses were collected and 5 key challenges or barriers were identified that prevent refugees and immigrants and their families from living a full and healthy life. Several quotes that were collected through the focus groups and interviews are included on this page. In early 2018, Project FINE will share this data with the community to build understanding of the needs of those we serve and begin to explore solutions or possible changes that will improve health equity.

This project is funded by the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

“I don’t think we are connected to the larger community. We don’t really know what is going on around us.”

“Now that I’m an American citizen, I feel like I belong here.”

“I would like for all of us to be united and for everyone to see that we are not worth less than anyone else.”

“For me the hardest thing is not knowing the system.”

“Another barrier for me is that I don’t feel free in this country, and that is the opposite of happiness.”

“I have to take medications every day to stay healthy and because I’m a single mom it’s important for me to take care of my daughter. I have private insurance and it costs me money to go to the doctor.”
Building Communities

Programs in the Building Communities category bring together diverse groups of refugees, immigrants, and established residents to promote cultural sharing and build understanding.

Diversity training is offered on a variety of topics to local businesses, organizations, service providers, and educational institutions. Training is designed to meet the specific needs of each client and often focuses on information about a specific culture, barriers to service or strategies to engage diverse populations.

In 2017, an estimated 750 individuals in the Winona area participated in Project FINE’s Diversity Training.

African Percussion & Drum Circle

The African Percussion & Drum Circle project shares the importance of drumming traditions in African culture through educational workshops and drumming events. Activities began in 2016 and continued through summer of 2017. Sessions were taught by Lance Katwa Ngari and shared with the community through a collaboration with Winona Area Public Schools’ Community Education.

In 2017, 42 individuals participated in project activities, learning about drumming traditions, proper hand positioning, and rhythm patterns. Project activities also included a performance by participants during Project FINE’s Annual Report to the Community event in February. The project culminated with a Drumming Circle capstone event in May, with 51 people in attendance.

This activity was made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts & cultural heritage fund.

Diversity Training

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Hearing the Voices: Digital Edition

The Hearing the Voices: Digital Edition project began in August 2017 and provides an avenue for refugees and immigrants to share their life experiences with the community. The project began with educational sessions on the power of story and how to develop a compelling narrative. During the fall of 2017, 8 individuals shared their story on video. They spoke of their journeys, struggles, triumphs and history, often sharing photos and other mementos. The videos will be edited into digital stories in early 2018, and the project will culminate with a capstone event in May of 2018.

This activity was made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts & cultural heritage fund.

We would also like to thank Matt Fluharty and Outpost Winona for providing technical assistance and space for the story interviews.

Developing Diverse Workforce Solutions

The vision for this project grew from regional conversations hosted by Southeast Minnesota Together in 2016. One of the needs identified was to discover strategies to attract and retain diverse employees.

Project activities included an online survey, which was completed by 88 employers; as well as the creation of a guide of resources for southeastern Minnesota. In 2017, project activities included training sessions in Owatonna and Rochester with best practices and tips for recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. Over 60 employers registered for the training sessions.

This project was funded through a grant from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation.
Cultural Arts & Ancestry - Hmong Art

This project was developed to empower Hmong artists to share their knowledge and artistic traditions with the community. Activities included a series of educational workshops on the Qeej (Hmong Flute), Batik Fabric and Basket Making. 52 community members participated in the workshops, which were taught by 3 local Hmong artists.

Feedback from the workshops was overwhelmingly positive, with all participants noting that they had increased their knowledge of Hmong culture and the significance and history of the art forms. The project culminated with a public capstone event at Winona State University, which included cultural information, art created by participants and a qeej demonstration.

This activity was made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts & cultural heritage fund.
Empowering Youth

Programs in the Empowering Youth category support youth from refugee and immigrant families as they pursue education and seek a balance between their traditional and American cultures.

Girls Reaching Above & Beyond

The Girls Reaching Above and Beyond (GRAB) program is designed to help middle and high school girls discover their identity and strengths and create a roadmap to pursue their dreams. During this year, the program underwent a planning phase and was awarded a multi-year grant in summer 2017.

In July, a group of 17 girls participated in a three-day camping trip to Great River Bluffs State Park. They learned how to pitch a tent, prepare meals and care for a campsite and participated in fun activities such as glow in the dark bowling, decorating t-shirts, hiking and swimming.

Monthly sessions resumed in the fall, with 22 girls participating. Sessions include educational presentations and community involvement activities. There are also 6 girls serving as GRAB leaders who plan program sessions and encourage others to participate in program activities.

The GRAB program is funded by the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota. Funding for camp scholarships and activities was provided by the Pohlad Family Foundation.
Learn to Code

Learn to Code program provides education and experience in computer coding and app creation for middle and high school students. In 2017, afterschool sessions were held in Winona and St. Charles with 50 students participating. In April, youth toured Benchmark Electronics and Minnesota State College Southeast to learn about technology careers and educational opportunities.

All participating youth reported that the program increased their knowledge of coding and their interest in technology-related careers.

Learn to Code is funded by a grant from the Blandin Foundation.

Colorful Growers

Colorful Growers focuses on teaching youth age 10-18 about agriculture and entrepreneurship. Participants have an opportunity to grow their own vegetables, beginning with planting the seeds and tending their plants throughout the growing season. They also have an opportunity to sell their produce at the Farmers Market. 15 individuals participated in program activities in 2017.

Supplies for the garden and hoop house were funded through a mini-grant from the Winona County PartnerSHIP.
College Education Connection

The College Education Connection program provides academic support and access to resources for youth from Immigrant and refugee families as they pursue post-secondary education. The program serves students from the Winona, St. Charles and Lewiston-Altura school districts. In 2017, Project FINE awarded scholarships to 7 graduating seniors to support their post-secondary education. The program also completed an evaluation phase in 2017, with input from the community, educational institutions, students and families about their needs and ways the College Education Connection program can play a role in their educational success.

College Education Connection is funded through a Community Innovation grant from the Headwaters Foundation for Justice.

Kid’s Cultural Club

The goal of the Kid’s Cultural Club program is to help youth age 5-12 increase their knowledge and acceptance of other cultures and form relationships with youth from different backgrounds. The program meets weekly at Kid’s First, an afterschool program for youth residing in the Maplewood Townhomes. The program began in August 2017, and since that time 45 youth have attended Kid’s Cultural Club activities.

Each session includes a learning portion and fun activities focused on building respect and gaining knowledge of other cultures. Learning activities have included art, cooking, music and language, as well as monthly volunteer activities.

The Kid’s Cultural Club is funded by a grant from the Sheltering Arms Foundation.
Toys for Kids
In January, the Hiawatha Valley Marines and Toys for Kids donated hundreds of toys to Project FINE for distribution to children from refugee and immigrant families in our region.

CYFAR Professional Development Workshop
In May, Fatima traveled to Washington D.C. for the CYFAR Professional Development Workshop. CYFAR stands for Children, Youth and Families at Risk and they provide grants for youth programming. Project FINE started as CYFAR grantee in 1990 and Fatima spoke during the keynote panel presentation about how Project FINE has grown over the past 27 years.

Rural Arts & Culture Summit
In June, Fatima spoke at the Rural Arts and Culture Summit in Morris, MN. She was part of a panel presentation titled “Sharing Artistic Traditions to Build Strong Communities” and shared experiences and best practices from Project FINE’s art programming.

IMAA Walk Around the World
In August, Project FINE hosted an informational table at IMAA’s Walk Around the World event in Rochester. This annual event celebrates the cultural diversity of our region and provide information about resources and organizations that serve refugees and immigrants.

Gladiolus Days Parade
On August 27, Project FINE staff and program participants walked in the Gladiolus Days Parade in St. Charles to raise awareness of Project FINE and our mission.
Involvement

Blandin Broadband Conference
In October, Project FINE staff participated in a panel presentation at the Blandin Border to Border Broadband Conference in Brainerd, MN. They shared best practices and lessons learned for teaching technology to refugee and immigrant populations. The Blandin Foundation grants have provided funding for Project FINE’s technology programming since 2011, reaching over 300 participants.

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Project FINE and the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM) continued to collaborate in 2017, coordinating educational presentations on immigration in our region. ILCM also received a grant to increase access to legal services across southern Minnesota, including Winona. As part of that grant, an immigration lawyer is available on a weekly basis at the Project FINE office.

Outstanding Refugee Award
In October, Fatima received an Outstanding Refugee Award from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Fatima was nominated by the staff of Project FINE for the Civic Leadership Award category, which recognizes individuals who have had refugee status, or their children, who are outstanding leaders, for her leadership and commitment to assisting newcomers in our region.

Project FINE staff serve on several boards and committees, including:

- Cotter School Board of Directors
- FEAST Local Foods Group
- Goodview Farmer’s Market Board of Directors
- MN State College Southeast Foundation Board
- Ready Set School Board of Directors
- SE MN Together
- St. Charles Farmer’s Market Board of Directors
- U of MN Extension Community Advisory Committee
- Winona County Citizen’s Review Panel
- Winona County Community Services Advisory Committee
- Winona County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
- Winona Human Rights Commission
- Winona Wellbeing Collaborative
In September, the City of Winona and Project FINE collaborated on a series of events to celebrate Welcoming Week (September 15-24, 2017). This annual celebration recognizes the contributions of immigrants and refugees and the role communities play to foster greater welcome for everyone.

To kick off Welcoming Week (September 15-24, 2017), large banners proclaiming “All Are Welcome Here” were displayed at Central and Lake Park in Winona. The mayors of Winona and St. Charles both issued proclamations, declaring the week as Welcoming Week in their city and expressing their support of welcoming efforts.

On September 15, Project FINE hosted its’ annual Citizenship Day Celebration, recognizing naturalized citizens from across our region. Over 70 people attended, including 25 naturalized citizens. Winona Mayor Mark Peterson spoke about the value of newcomers and the League of Women Voters were available to help naturalized citizens register to vote.

Throughout the week, Project FINE and City of Winona staff presented for many community groups, including the Learning Club, Rotary Club and on the Minnesota State College Southeast, Saint Mary’s, and Winona State University campuses. They shared information about diversity in our community and current programs and services for newcomers. There were also opportunities for individuals to have their photo taken with welcoming signs and share messages of welcome. To reach an even larger number of community members, Welcoming Week was also promoted in the newspaper and on the radio. Project FINE also had yard signs with the message “All Are Welcome Here” in English, Arabic, Spanish and Hmong available for people to post in their homes or businesses.
Welcoming Week concluded with a celebration at Winona’s Lake Park on September 21. Over 100 people attended the event, which included a program and several interactive activities. During the program, Winona Mayor Mark Peterson shared his reflections on welcoming and experience with diversity on a personal and professional level. The program also included speeches by Board President Dan Matejka, reading of the City of St. Charles proclamation by council member and Project FINE board member David Kramer, and comments from State Senator Jeremy Miller.

Those who attended the event added their messages of welcome and inclusion to our welcoming display and had their photo taken with signs stating “I'm a Welcomer.” Live music and refreshments contributed to the welcoming atmosphere and attendees were encouraged to stay to enjoy the beautiful fall evening and get to know others in the community.

Feedback on Welcoming Week activities was overwhelmingly positive, and over 300 people participated, bringing a positive message of welcoming and inclusion to our region.
2017 Financial Summary

Income Statement

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<td>Total Revenue 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Expenses 2017</td>
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Board Designated funds for continuation of:
- Navigating Community Systems Programs: $15,000.00
- Building Communities Programs: $20,000.00
- Empowering Youth Programs: $20,000.00

Balance Sheet

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</td>
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Financial information provided was prepared using the Accrual accounting method.

The Meets Standards Seal is given by the Charities Review Council to nonprofits who meet their Accountability Standards. The Accountability Standards create a common ground across the nonprofit sector, building a foundation of strength in our community. For more information, visit www.smartgivers.org
Community Partnerships

Thank you to the many businesses and organizations who partner with Project FINE in support of our mission.

- ASAP
- Behrens Manufacturing
- Blandin Foundation
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of MN
- Catholic Charities
- Charities Review Council
- City of St. Charles
- City of Winona
- Cotter Schools
- CYFAR
- Diocese of Winona
- Engage Winona
- Family and Children’s Center
- Frozen River Film Festival
- Goodview Farmer’s Market
- Gundersen Health System
- Headwaters Foundation for Justice
- Hiawatha Valley Marines
- Hiawatha Valley Mental Health
- Hometown Resource Center
- Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
- IMAA
- Knitcraft-St. Croix Foundation
- Lewiston-Altura School District
- Live Well Winona
- Merchants Bank
- Midwest Dental Clinic
- Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
- Minnesota Department of Corrections
- Minnesota State Horticultural Society
- Minnesota Marine Art Museum
- Minnesota State Arts Board
- Minnesota State College Southeast
- Otto Bremer Trust
- Outpost Winona
- Pleasant Valley Church
- Pohlad Family Foundation
- Ready Set School
- River Arts Alliance
- Rollingstone Cenex
- St. Charles Public Schools
- Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota
- Semcac
- Severson Oil Company
- Sheltering Arms Foundation
- Southern MN Initiative Foundation
- Southern MN Regional Legal Services
- Southeastern MN Arts Council
- St. Charles Farmer’s Market
- UCare of Minnesota
- University of Minnesota Extension
- Welcoming America
- Wilder Center for Communities
- WinCraft
- Winona Area Public Schools
- Winona Area Chamber of Commerce
- Winona Community Foundation
- Winona County
- Winona County Historical Society
- Winona County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC)
- Winona County Statewide Health Improvement Project (SHIP)
- Winona Health
- Winona Hims
- Winona Housing & Redevelopment Authority
- Winona Human Rights Commission
- Winona Pediatric Dentistry
- Winona National Bank
- Winona State University
- Winona Volunteer Services
- Winona Rotary Club
- Women’s Foundation of Minnesota
- Women’s Resource Center
- Women’s Foundation of Minnesota
- Women’s Resource Center

2017 Partner of the Year

Each year, Project FINE designates one or more partners for special recognition through the Partners Award. This year, we are proud to recognize the following exceptional partner:

City of Winona
The City of Winona has been an exceptional partner to Project FINE and we greatly appreciate their collaboration. They have expressed their continued commitment to creating an inclusive community, becoming the first Welcoming City in Minnesota in 2016.

In 2017, the City of Winona and Project FINE partnered to host a series of Welcoming Week events, celebrating our diversity and sharing the message that “All Are Welcome Here.”

Project FINE would like to thank the City of Winona for their continued commitment to creating a welcoming community that is inclusive and safe for all residents.
Volunteers are an important part of Project FINE’s programs, events and activities. On behalf of our board of directors, staff and individuals served, we would like to thank the dedicated individuals who contributed thousands of hours during 2017. Their support helps us to fulfill our vision of creating a respectful and sensitive community.

A special thank you to these 2017 volunteers:

**Committee Members:**
Deb Ward, Development Committee

**Interns:**
Paola Arevalo, Christina Melecio, Caren Cazares, Sarita Gurung, Katelin Kent

**Experience Works Volunteers:**
Betty Rusert

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**Project FINE Volunteer Hours 2017**

5,406 Total Hours

- **Board of Directors**
  - 2,496
  - 46%

- **Interns**
  - 1,070
  - 20%

- **Students & Community Volunteers**
  - 1,840
  - 34%
Board Members & Staff

Project FINE’s board members are essential to the success of the organization, sharing their expertise and talents to advance our mission and vision. Their hard work and dedication is greatly appreciated and is highly beneficial to Project FINE, newcomers, and our community.

2017 Project FINE Board of Directors

Dan Matejka, President
City of Goodview

Paul Mundt, Vice President
Southern MN Regional Legal Services

Heather Bach, Treasurer
Community Member

Nicole Messenger, Secretary
Merchants Bank

Hamid Akbari
Winona State University

Dr. Dorothy Duran
Minnesota State College Southeast

Dale Hinckley
Hinckley Holsteins

Robin Hoeg
Winona Health

Mark Roubinek
St. Charles Public Schools

David Kramer
City of St. Charles

Pedro Lopez
Courtesy Corporation

Brian Voerding
Winona Daily News

Joel Von Haden
Winona Heating and Ventilating

Project FINE Staff

Fatima Said, Executive Director

Chong Sher Vang, Program Development Director

Katie van Eijl, Program Manager

German Victoria, Program Coordinator

Maria Rodriguez-Ramirez, Hispanic/Latino Community Liaison

Pang Vang, Hmong Community Liaison

Paola Arevalo, Program Coordinator

Amy Hang, Hmong Community Liaison

Pictured left to right: Fatima Said, David Kramer, Hamid Akbari, Dorothy Duran, Dale Hinckley, Heather Bach, Robin Hoeg, Brian Voerding, Pedro Lopez, Paul Mundt, Nicole Messenger, Dan Matejka, Joel Von Haden, Mark Roubinek

Back Row: German Victoria, Katie van Eijl, Fatima Said
Front Row: Maria Rodriguez-Ramirez, Chong Sher Vang, Paola Arevalo, Pang Vang

Not Pictured: Amy Hang
Project FINE
Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education

www.projectfine.org

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507-452-4100    Fax: 507-452-4644    info@projectfine.org

St. Charles office
830 Whitewater Avenue, St. Charles, MN 55972