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Press Release: The Vermont Language Justice Project Marks 4 Years of Bringing Essential Information to Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants in Vermont and Beyond

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The Vermont Language Justice Project, which started as a volunteer effort to disseminate crucial information to folks throughout the pandemic speaking languages other than English, will celebrate four years of operation on March 18th which was when their first video was posted on the Vermont Multi Lingual Corona Virus Task Force YouTube Channel in [Somali](#). This video shared lifesaving details about what the virus was and how to take care of oneself.

Four years later with three full-time members of staff and 17 contractors working in 18 languages, VLJP has produced over 2,045 videos with over 183,000 views on YouTube, and now boasts 800 subscribers. We are now foreseeing a funding crunch as our major funding will end at the end of this year and are exploring creative means of keeping this important work alive.

VLJP's History and Where We Are Now

In March 2020, in the early, uncertain days of the pandemic, service providers working with refugees and migrants in Vermont quickly became aware that very little of the critical guidance from the State of Vermont about how to stay safe was making its way to communities who speak languages other than English.

Alison Segar, a veteran social worker who had been working with refugees in Chittenden County for decades, took action. In collaboration with leaders from the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) Vermont and the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), a volunteer effort to translate the governor's orders, record the orders as videos posted on YouTube, and disseminate the videos via text and WhatsApp messaging.

Segar and other volunteers worked nights and weekends to translate, produce, and disseminate messages, helping keep particularly vulnerable communities—those who have limited English proficiency, limited digital literacy to navigate government and news websites, and limited literacy in their own languages to read translated texts—the information they needed to stay safe.

By mid-April 2020, the project had formed a task force with over 40 community partners working with refugees, migrants, asylees, and immigrants in Vermont. Funding from the Vermont Department of Health and the Cities of Burlington and Winooski, allowed 10 translators, all trusted members of their community, to be paid.

In November 2021, thanks to a CDC Health Disparities Grant, administered by the Vermont Department of Health, the project received two years of funding and was able to hire Alison Segar as Project Director. CCTV, Center for Media and Democracy, based in Burlington VT, became the home of VLJP.

Now, four years in, the project has three full-time staff (in addition to Segar, Dani Agin works as a production coordinator and Olivia Moseley as a project manager) and a team of dedicated freelance translators, and releases videos in 18 languages: **ASL, Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, Dari, French, English, Haitian Kreyol, Kirundi, Maay Maay, Mandarin, Nepali Pashto, Somali, Swahili, Spanish, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese**. The project has produced more than **2.045 videos** and VLJP's scope has expanded far beyond COVID-19, to create videos on a range of topics, such as [mental health](#), [natural disaster response](#), [housing](#), [tax credits](#), [voting](#), [bus fare resumption](#), [financial literacy](#), [winter driving](#), and more. The project seeks to make important information available to everyone—from [cyanobacteria](#) to [administering Narcan](#)—and to bridge the gap that so frequently exists between Vermonters from other countries and the available services.

VLJP has responded to changes in Vermont's linguistic landscape, adding Pashto, Dari, and Ukrainian translation when war in Afghanistan and Ukraine brought new communities to Vermont. Most recently, VLJP has begun translating into Haitian Creole, to meet the needs of a growing Haitian community in the center of the state, and Tigrinya, to serve Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees newly arriving in the south of the state. VLJP has also been able to respond quickly and nimbly to current events, such as the 2023 [flooding](#), getting videos out in record time with over 7000 views in a two week period.

VLJP's videos are available to all at no cost on its YouTube channel, and links are shared through community leaders (including the team of translators), partner organizations, and direct service providers. Though the majority of viewers are here in Vermont, increasingly we are seeing viewers in other states, where programs like VLJP do not exist, and even internationally. VLJP has made Vermont a leader in language access and equity for refugees and migrants, providing an essential service that is absent in the rest of the country. As a result, service providers, government agencies, and nonprofits around the country are sharing and using the project's videos to increase access to critical health, social service, and lifeskills information.

VLJP's funding from the CDC will end in December 2024, presenting a new challenge and crossroads for the project. The feedback from refugee and immigrant communities, as well as the agencies that serve them, is clear – VLJP's work is critical. However, without new funding the long-term sustainability of the project is uncertain. The project is exploring new funding options, developing a mobile app, preparing to launch a major donor fundraising effort, and advocating for state agencies to match their stated commitment to equity and language access with consistent, reliable funding.