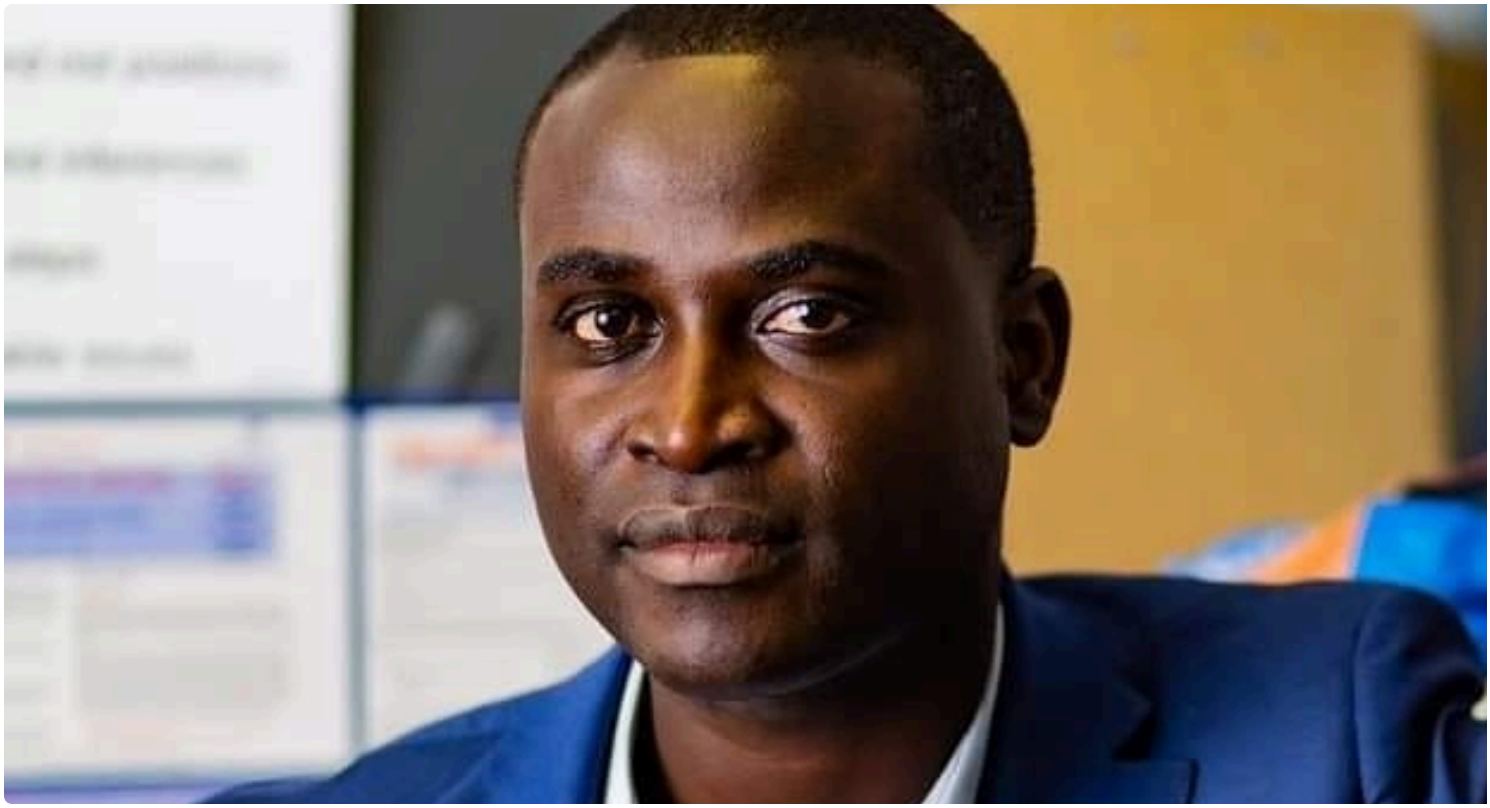

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# R.I. Centers serving refugees and immigrants continue their wo under new Trump policies

By G. Wayne Miller October 22, 2025

## "They come from all over the world. It's not just one country or one part of Africa."

PROVIDENCE – When he founded the Refugee Dream Center in 2015, Dr. Omar Bah had no way of foretelling the policies that Donald Trump in his second presidency wo wanted to help refugees and immigrants like himself who needed help in their new home, Rhode Island.

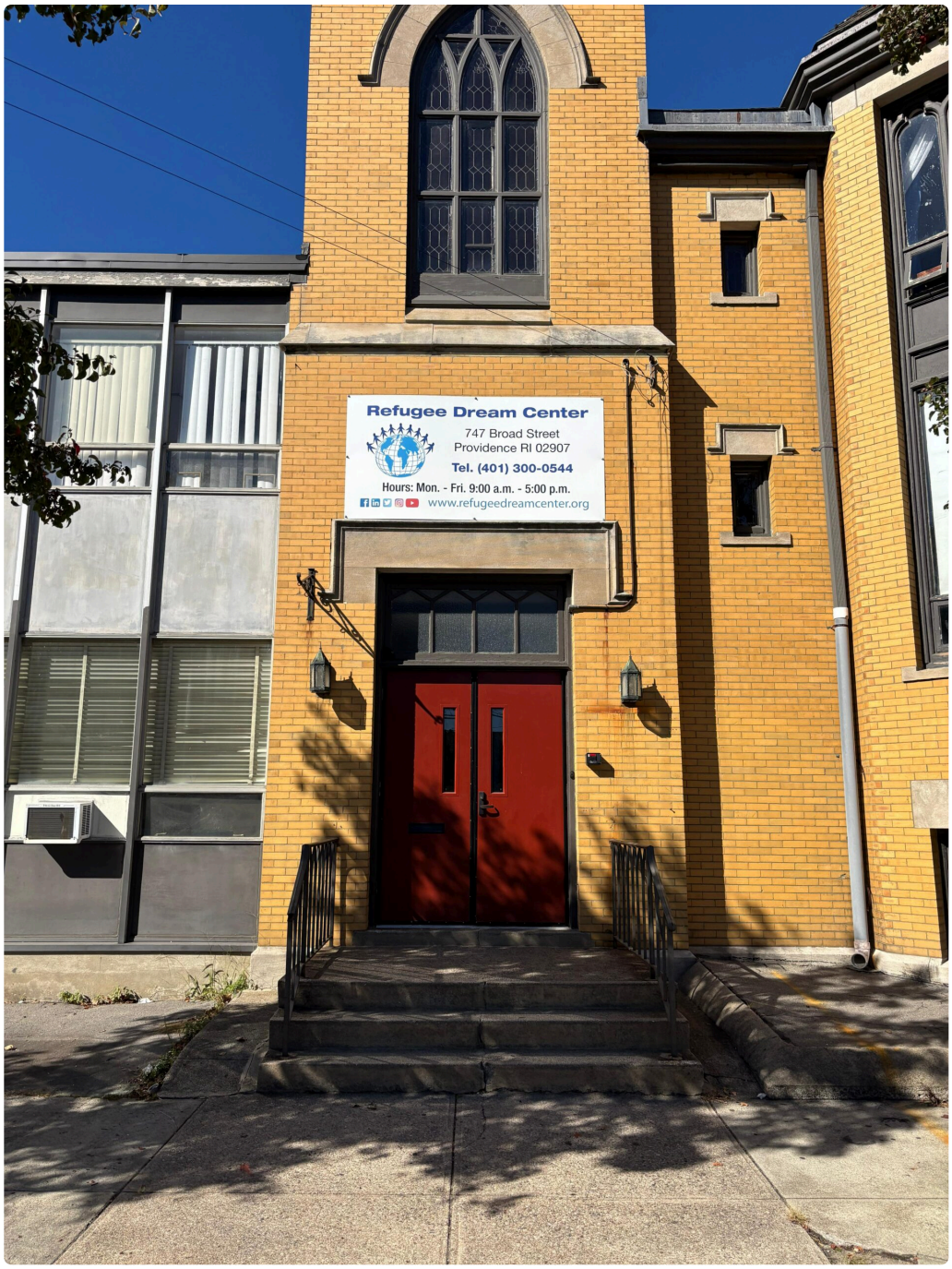
A torture survivor, former journalist, and refugee from The Gambia, Bah possessed a keen understanding of the needs of people who like him had moved to America. Th still leads, put out the welcome mat – and thousands of women, men and children from around the globe have since crossed it.

Today, ten months into the second Trump presidency, Bah told Ocean State Stories, center staff and clients experience "a combination of factors of fear. Staff sometime the community members, the clients that we serve. They were especially afraid when the new policies started but now people are freeing up a little bit and have started

Still, what Bah described as "the deluge of information," some true and some not, from social media and other sources, has placed staff in a predicament, he asserted.

"Sometimes we are not sure what to tell people," he said. "Then there are ICE raids happening across the country, in our city, in Providence, so people are afraid. Sometim officer and they think it's ICE; they don't know the difference. So that has created so much anxiety and fear within the refugee, immigrant and asylum-seeker population."

Bah said that one of the center's community members recently was arrested by ICE.




**Leaders of other centers serving these populations told Ocean State Stories** that they, too, are continuing their work, despite the political climate.

"The Center for Southeast Asians (CSEA) continues to provide vital services to Rhode Island's immigrant and refugee communities, as we have for nearly four decades," Executive Director of CSEA said in a statement. "Our focus remains on helping individuals and families live safely and productively through programs in employment, edu civic engagement.

"In recent months, some community members have expressed increased anxiety about their immigration status and have become more cautious about their visibility in interactions with government agencies. We have also observed that a few members of our community have delayed travel abroad out of concern about being able to ret they have legal status in the U.S."

Chhay continued: "Despite these understandable worries, our programs remain fully active. While attendance in some classes, such as English language instruction, has overall participation across our services remains steady. Our staff continue to remind all clients of the importance of following the law and pursuing their goals with con

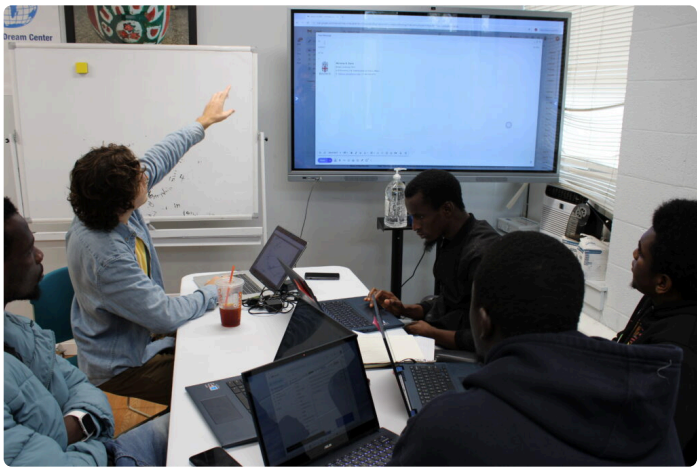
"CSEA is committed to maintaining a safe, welcoming environment for everyone we serve. We are not aware of any enforcement actions directly targeting our clients, an operate all programs – including job training, case management, assistance to victims of crime, and tax preparation for qualifying individuals – without disruption. Our n help every member of our community build stability, opportunity, and belonging."

**Bah brings a wealth of knowledge and education to his job.** In addition to his horrendous treatment in The Gambia, he holds a bachelor's degree in communications stuc political science, a master's degree in public administration, a master's in counseling psychology in global mental health, and a doctorate in organizational and leadershi William James College, according to the center's website. He also completed trauma treatment certification at Harvard Medical School through the Harvard Program in (HPRT). Bah is an adjunct professor of clinical psychology at William James College, and the author of a book, *Africa's Hell on Earth: The Ordeal of an African Journalist*. H and four African languages: Pulaar, Mandinka, Wollof, and Sererr.

Asked about the people the center serves, Bah said "we have hundreds of individuals coming every year. Of course, this year things have slowed down a little bit, but we have probably equal distribution of individuals from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Eastern Europe." A dropdown menu on the center site allows visitors to read in dozens of languages, including Chinese (simplified), Hebrew, Khmer, Serbian, Vietnamese and Hindi.


"The biggest populations right now that we work with are Venezuelans, Congolese, Syrians, and Afghans," Bah said, "but we have people even from Myanmar, Cambodia, Ecuador, Haiti, Ukraine, Somalia and Sudan. We call ourselves the mini–United Nations."

As Bah described it, the benefits of their work extend across the community. "A good number of the youth we work with are actually American-born to refugee or immigrant families. We have… kids from Moses Brown School and The Wheeler School whose parents are making an effort for their children to get to the inner city to learn from other cultures. We have dozens of kids coming from those schools to work with our youth to teach them, but also to learn from them — their cultures — and to promote diversity, which has been amazingly rewarding to both youth from America and refugee youth."



**Milagro Sique, Interim CEO, Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island,** told Ocean State Stories that Dorcas "has long been the state's largest refugee resettlement a we have faced some of the toughest challenges in our more than 100-year history.

"Our refugee work has been paused due to the federal funding cuts and travel bans, yet we remain resilient and productive. Working with limited resources and a smaller we are continuing to deliver our adult education, employment services, workforce training, interpretation services, immigration legal services, and case management ser thousands of members of immigrant and low-income communities. While those we serve – of all ages – are rightfully fearful, they continue to persevere in order to gain to build their self-sufficiency.

"There has been a bright spot in the last nine months: unprecedented support from the community after the federal cuts were instituted, both from a funding standpoint volunteers. Knowing that our community understands and appreciates how critical our work is has been instrumental in our continued success."

**Aline Binyungu, Executive Director, Women's Refugee Care,** emailed Ocean State Stories, stating that "approximately 60% of Women's Refugee Care's total annual budget federal funding provided through our partnership with Church World Service (CWS), a national resettlement agency. This funding supported refugee resettlement activiti programs administered by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

"Funding was received as state pass-through grants and contracts. The federal pause on refugee resettlement directly eliminated this core funding stream, significantly staffing and programming capacity. The loss of federal resettlement funding—previously provided through Church World Service—has significantly impacted Women's R to sustain full programming and staffing levels. As a result, some full-time staff member was laid off, and all remaining staff have been reduced to half-time."

She continued: "This has placed considerable strain on our team, who are now managing a full scope of services with limited hours, leading to burnout and capacity cha also scaled back certain case management and outreach efforts due to reduced capacity. While we remain committed to our core mission, we anticipate an ongoing rec volume—particularly in our ability to provide individualized support and expand to underserved cities across Rhode Island.

"Despite these challenges, we are taking proactive steps to continue operating. Our Development Team is actively pursuing diversified funding through private grants an campaigns to help stabilize operations and restore staffing. However, without replacement funding, the long-term sustainability of our full programming remains at risk,

disproportionately affect refugee women and families who rely on our culturally responsive and trauma-informed services."

**Newly arrived individuals and families qualify for the Dream Center's Reception and Placement** program, which offers caseworker support for 90 days. Services include, center website, "pick-up at the airport; housing (securing housing, furniture, establishing utilities); transportation training (e.g. how to use the bus); cultural orientation (c financial literacy, U.S. laws); enrollment in English language courses; benefits registration; medical care; enrollment in employment services; and, school enrollment.

"After three months, refugees are expected to be self-sufficient, meaning that they are employed and making enough money to pay their rent and other household expen to understand how to navigate relevant systems in the U.S., such as accessing medical care."

**In its work, the Refugee Dream Center receives support from dozens of community partners,** including the Sisters of Mercy, Care New England, the United Way, Stop & Sh Providence, the Rhode Island Foundation, Tufts Health Plan, Rhode Island School of Design and the Rhode Island Department of Health.

These partners are integral to the center's work with "at least 3,000 individuals" annually, Bah said. "The majority are from the Providence County area, but we serve peop On a weekly basis, at least 100 people show up at the center; it's an open center, no appointment needed. And then we do outreach: home visits and food distribution."

The center is located at 747 Broad Street, Providence, R.I., 02907. The phone number is 401-300-0544. Email: info@refugeedreamcenter.org

*Editorial notes:*

*— Miller met Bah while reporting for the award-winning 2015 Providence Journal series "Race in Rhode Island" and wrote about him and the center many times after until he l 2022. https://www.facebook.com/raceinri/*

*— Chhay is a member of the Ocean State Stories Advisory Board.*

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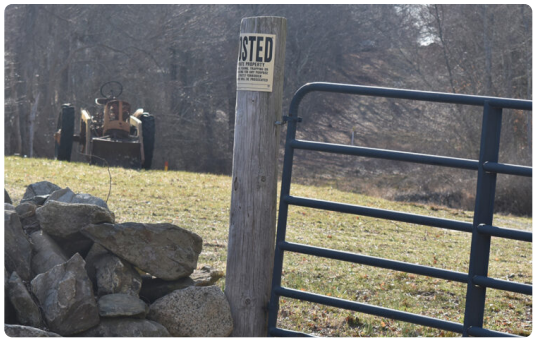

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