



PRESENTATION TO COMMISSION FOR
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH (CBH)

11/20/2025

CENTER FOR EMPOWERING REFUGEES & IMMIGRANTS

Website:
WWW.CERIEASTBAY.ORG



CERI is an **Oakland-based nonprofit** with the mission to cultivate **healing, advocacy, and empowerment of refugee and immigrant communities** affected by war, torture, genocide, and other life-altering traumas.

Founded in 2006 by Dr. Mona Afary, an Iranian immigrant and women's rights advocate, alongside Cambodian genocide survivors and community leaders.



MISSION





CERI is a community sanctuary for refugees and immigrants, serving over 1,200 people each year from diverse communities, including: Cambodian, Afghan, Burmese, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Nepali, Eritrean, and Iranian.

Staff speak 25+ languages in addition to English. 90% identify as refugees or immigrants, or children of refugees or immigrants.

Staff are not outsiders delivering services—they are trusted community members.

About one-third of our 37-member team have been participants in our programs.

They carry their own histories of displacement and resilience, and they know the languages, the values, and the cultural traditions of our clients.



OUR TEAM



WHAT WE DO

Community mental health that is holistic, culturally rooted, intergenerational, and justice-oriented



SCOPE OF WORK WITH CBH



OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

12 activities/year



TRAINING & EDUCATION

6 activities/year



LOCAL LEVEL ADVOCACY

6 activities/year

HIGHLIGHTS



Outreach & Engagement at:

COMMUNITY & CULTURAL EVENTS



Youth Event at Oakland Asian Cultural Center reaching approximately 200 people with a youth-led art exhibit, moving personal stories, and school supply and hygiene kit distribution.



Stories of Home project where refugee and immigrant leaders create short video vignettes about their lives, serving as counter-narratives to challenge deficit discourses and images that circulate about refugees and immigrants.



Annual **Pchum Ben Festival** in partnership with the Presidio Trust and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Cambodian ancestral holiday that brings hundreds of community members together across Bay Area counties.

Outreach & Engagement at:

COMMUNITY & CULTURAL EVENTS



Our Language, Our Stories photo exhibition in SF featuring CERI clients and staff that uplifts Bay Area immigrants and their experiences with language and life.



Dashain/Deepawali cultural event bringing together South Asian communities to celebrate the hope, lights, and colors of love and community, and witness beautiful cultural dance.



Through practice sessions and community performances, **CERI's Khmer Amathak Youth Dance Troupe** is reviving ancestral practices and sharing with the broader Bay Area, with over 10 performances this year alone.

RAPID RESPONSE NETWORKS
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNTIES

Alameda: **(510) 241-4011**
acilep.org

Contra Costa: **(925) 900-5151**
standtogethercontracosta.org

Santa Clara: **(408) 290-1144**
amigoscenter.com/rapid-respon

San Mateo: **(203) 666-4472**

San Francisco: **(415) 200-1548**
sfilen.org



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Training refugee and immigrant communities about their rights if they encounter ICE. Participant reflection at a recent training: "Solidarity with the participants and shared experiences made folks feel that their journey is not lonely, we are all in this together."



PROVIDER TRAINING

Education for frontline workers and therapists in fundamentals of trauma informed care, therapeutic strategies, such as Internal Family Systems, and decolonial analysis of current mental health systems

Local Level Advocacy at Alameda County Board of Supervisor meetings to uplift preventative mental health care as an essential service in a homelessness prevention strategy



MEASURE W

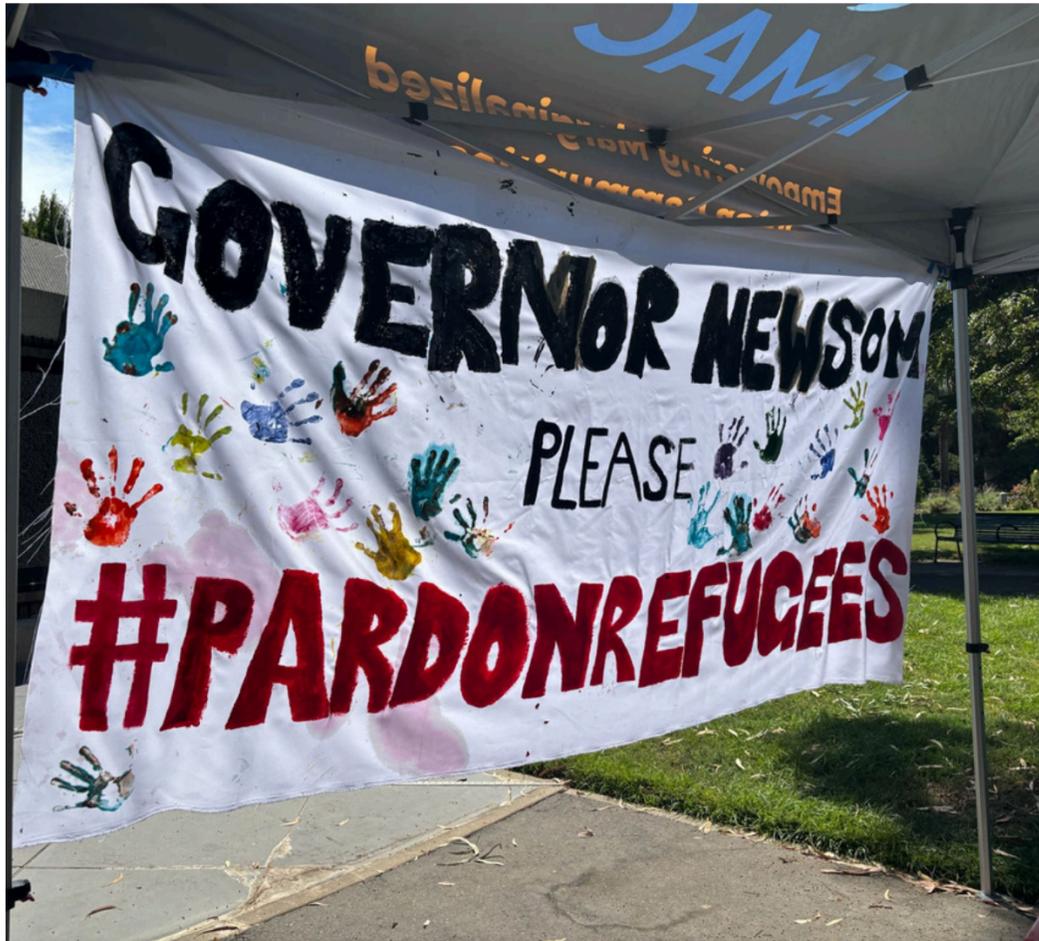


Participant reaction: "I learned that everyone has a voice, learned how public funds are used, and that going and showing up in meetings actually matters."

Local Level Advocacy to #PardonRefugees and show up for refugee and immigrant communities targetted by ICE



DEPORTATION DEFENSE



Participant reaction: "This event helped me see how forgiveness can play a major role in emotional and mental healing. Hearing stories about refugees being pardoned made me understand that carrying guilt, trauma, or fear can deeply affect mental health and that being forgiven can bring relief, peace, and a sense of belonging."



UN GLOBAL CITIZEN AWARD

CERI received the United Nations Global Citizen Award at the Bay Area's U.N. Day Celebration this October, themed "Beyond Borders: Uplifting and Protecting Immigrants and Refugees." To be recognized alongside Senator Alex Padilla, ACLU Northern California, Alameda Health System Refugee Clinic, and Soccer Without Borders was profoundly meaningful.



CITY & COUNTY RECOGNITION

CERI was honored by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and also the City of Richmond for Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May 2025 for a Legacy of Leadership & Resilience.



Support
Preventative
Mental Health Care

Resources and
assistance to CBOs
to transition from
MHSA to BHSA and
to onboard with
Cal-AIM

RECOMMENDATIONS



COMMUNITY VOICE

In 1975, a communist regime known as the Khmer Rouge conquered the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh.

The occupation set in motion a four-year campaign of genocide that would wipe out 2 million people – a quarter of the country's population.

[Video link](#)

THANK YOU



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