

# Using the Tarjimly Interpretation App to Enhance Refugee Integration and Communication at Iskashitaa Refugee Network and Worldwide.



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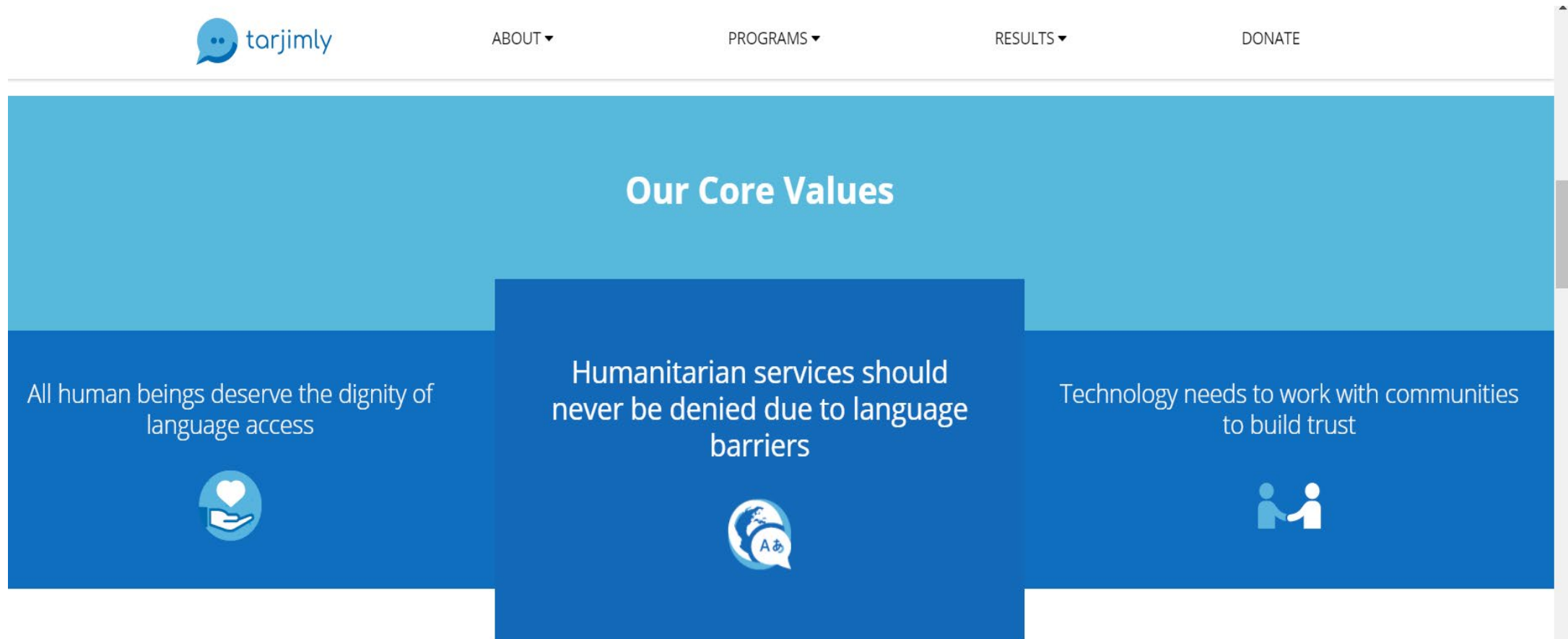
## Background



**Iskashitaa Refugee Network** is a Tucson-based NGO that provides services to asylum seekers and UN resettled refugees, using food as a means of community integration. Language barriers have been an ongoing challenge in the 18 years of the organization's existence.

Refugee needs often extend past resettlement agency support, and many small organizations and grassroots efforts in Tucson support the efforts of the resettlement offices through creative programming.

- **Tarjimly** is a mobile app that translates for refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants
- Founded during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2016, the **human right to be heard and understood** is a core value of the company



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Tarjimly website with the logo and menu items: ABOUT, PROGRAMS, RESULTS, and DONATE. Below the navigation is a large blue banner with the title "Our Core Values". Underneath the banner are three dark blue boxes, each containing a core value statement and an icon.

**tarjimly** ABOUT PROGRAMS RESULTS DONATE

## Our Core Values

All human beings deserve the dignity of language access

Humanitarian services should never be denied due to language barriers

Technology needs to work with communities to build trust

The icons represent: a hand holding a heart (dignity), a globe with a speech bubble (language barriers), and two people shaking hands (building trust).

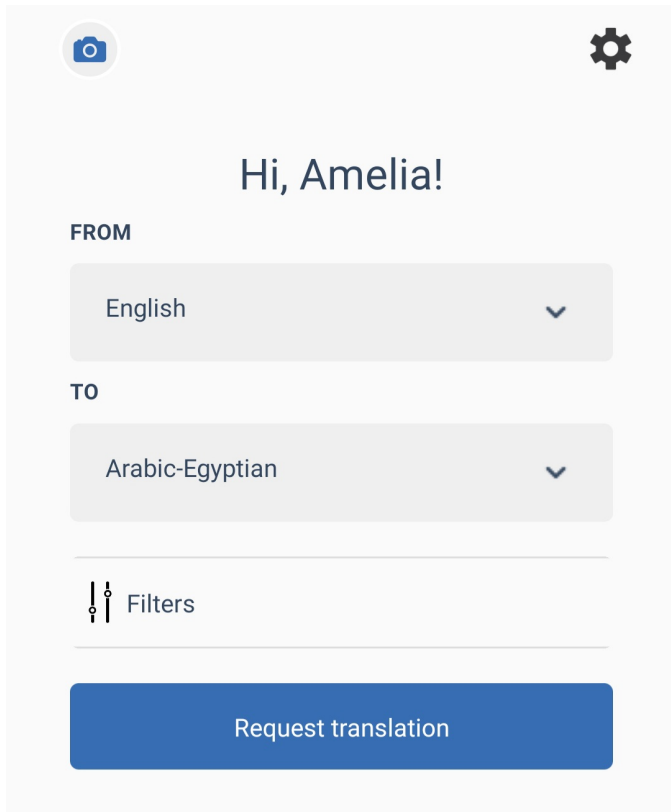
## Problem:

Situations with refugees and asylum seekers needed more nuanced communication than provided by AI translation.

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- Clients are refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and humanitarian organizations including resettlement agencies, NGOs, lawyers and medical clinics





The Tarjimly interface on a mobile phone





## Methods

Volunteer interpreters sign up to be contacted by the app

When a request for translation is made, machine learning is used to identify a pool of the most appropriate interpreters from over (currently) 14,000 volunteers, and they are connected with users within about 2 minutes.

60 languages are presently available, less common languages may require more time to find an interpreter, most features are free

- The Tarjimly app is available worldwide and is not connected to another communication platform like Whatsapp or Facebook

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- The user can have a conference call between themselves, another user, and the interpreter

- The app allows texts and images to be exchanged between the interpreter and user, and Zoom calls are also available



# Translation/interpretation and asylum cases:

- If an uncommon language is requested for an asylum case, this needs to be arranged before their asylum merits hearing (Benton 2019)
- **Asylum cases filed in minority languages that UNHCR does not have an interpreter for are automatically rejected**





## Interpretation issues in real life: personal medical information

- In small communities of language-speakers, an interpreter may know a client in an interpretation situation where private medical information is being discussed
- Agencies and NGOs may not have the capacity or knowledge to keep information private



KINYARWANDA

# NIKUBUNTU

## Urukingo rwa COVID-19

Pima County Health Department Kinyarwanda  
Covid Vaccine information, 2021

## Interpretation issues in real life: asylum case information

- Personal information may put someone at risk, particularly if asylum is denied and they are deported to a country where they are endangered.





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## Translation cases from other users:

Eritrean family needed guidance about safety information during California wildfires

- A Haitian asylum seeker wanted advice from an attorney
- US caseworkers interview newly resettled refugees about their work history
- A Syrian family needed a child's school evaluation translated

Our experiences with  
Tarjimly app:

Talking to an older refugee who  
had been in the US for years, but  
experienced social isolation  
because of language barriers

Letting refugee volunteers know  
time and place of programs and  
appointments



## Future Directions

- More interpreters for less represented languages
- Indigenous languages
- Request for female translators in specific situations
- HIPAA compliance (paid version)





## References and Acknowledgements

R-GAP and Iskashitaa Program Volunteers

Sara at Tarjimly

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