

Burma Center

The Burma Center is a nonprofit organization that provides a wide variety of services to Burmese residents who live and work in Battle Creek and Springfield. Our services range from resource navigation, K-12 supplemental education support, health and wellness programs, interpretation services, and much more.

The organization was established in 2011 during the peak of Burmese refugee arrivals in the Battle Creek community. Refugees are people who have left their country of origin due to experiences of persecution or for having “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion,” as defined by US Legal Code 8 USC § 1101(a)(42).

Did You Know?

Due to the military regime and ethnic and religious persecution in Burma/Myanmar, Burmese nationals comprise half of all refugees entering the United States.

MISSION

The Burma Center empowers Burmese Americans and the Battle Creek community through advocacy, engagement, and education to support the whole person.

VISION

We envision a community where Burmese Americans are valued for who they are and their contribution, while being empowered to thrive alongside the people of Battle Creek and to create a more equitable and inclusive community.

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

The Burma Center is proud to announce a new strategic framework that will guide the organization through 2025 via five strategic areas:

1 / HEALTH & WELLNESS

Provide relevant and culturally appropriate resources, educational programs, and referrals to improve physical and emotional health.

2 / EDUCATION & CAREER

To support youth, young adults, and families in their formal educational experience and beyond to be prepared and better equipped for post-secondary and/or career entry.

3 / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To engage the Burmese Community, as well as greater Battle Creek, to increase access to needed services and programs that support relationship building, leadership and advocacy.

4 / FAMILY EMPOWERMENT

To provide support for Burmese parents and families in their desire to provide what is most needed for their children, from birth to adult.

5 / ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To align various segments of the organization (i.e., staffing, facility needs, funding, board development, etc.) with the stated goals and strategies of the Strategic Plan, to ensure the organization is supporting the Burmese community, in a way that is sustainable and equitable.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly interrupted our business income while increasing the demand of our services. For example, due to government shutdown and COVID-19 safety protocol our interpretation revenue decreased by 62%. We also lost income from event cancellation as well. Despite the decrease in business services, the Burma Center was and continues to be instrumental in responding to the impact of COVID-19.

The organization produced over 34 educational videos for the Burmese community about COVID and hosted 5 COVID-19 vaccine clinics, which led to the vaccination of over 450 individuals. The organization worked with public health and city government to provide translation and timely and accurate communication to the Burmese community about COVID-19 rules and regulations. We believe our work play a significant role in mitigating the spread of the virus.

In addition to the fear of catching the virus, the increase in anti-Asian hate crime nationally was a great concern for our community. Thus, we partnered with local law enforcement, the FBI, and the lieutenant governor’s office to teach our community about their rights and what they can do if they are targeted. To address the impact of COVID-19 in the education system, Burma Center launched virtual tutoring to support families with limited English and technology proficiency to successfully navigate and complete virtual tutoring. We served over 72 students last school year and 81 students during the summer.

The pandemic really highlighted the impact of and the need for strong nonprofit organizations like the Burma Center.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

The old Springfield High School building was initially purchased in 2014 to be a Burmese entrepreneurial hub. Due to zoning regulations, the original intention of the building did not come to fruition, and the business model pivoted. The Burma Center found it could sustain its programs by renting classrooms to community organizations. Eventually, leadership explored the idea of selling the building. However, Burmese leaders and community members were strongly resistant to the idea. Aside from their places of worship, individuals expressed that the Center was the only location they could be their authentic selves without fear or insecurities. In essence, the Burma Center is more than just a building: it's a symbol of inclusion and belonging for Burmese residents.

Over time, the building found its new purpose and, along with a dozen or so tenants, provides a variety of services to all the residents of the cities of Battle Creek and Springfield. Currently, the building houses two independent childcare centers, an alternative high school, a program for adults with disabilities, early childhood services, services for veterans, and other small businesses. Together with the Burma Center, these organizations serve over 300 people daily. On weekends our building is used for meetings, retreats, town halls, weddings, and parties.

The building is vibrant and thriving. However, there are critical infrastructure issues that require immediate attention. For that reason, the Burma Center is launching a multi-year capital campaign of **\$2.5 million** to address critical updates which includes the following: a new HVAC system, parking lot, courtyard update, ADA update, and new roof.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN COST ESTIMATES			
PHASE ONE	PHASE TWO	PHASE THREE	TOTAL
New HVAC System \$815,236.10	Parking Lot, Courtyard, & ADA Updates \$1,065,002.00	New Roof \$1,073,012.00	\$2,953,250.10

Phase One Funding Requests		
Source	Amount	Status/Note
Battle Creek Community Foundation	\$244,962.00 \$68,055.00	Approved Pending Review
Miller Foundation	\$81,500.00	Approved
City of Battle Creek	\$300,000.00	Pending Review
The Village	\$20,000.00	Pending Review
Blue Ox	\$1,000.00	Approved
Rotary Club Education	\$13,500.00	Approved
City of Springfield	\$100,000.00	Request Sent
TOTAL	\$829,017.00	

Of all the projects, the most urgent and time-sensitive need is the HVAC system. In 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention expanded their ventilation standards for K-12 schools to include temperature and relative humidity measurements to stem the spread of COVID-19. As with all school buildings, indoor air quality at the Burma Center is imperative to the health and safety of its daily users.

The Burma Center wants to continue playing a proactive role in mitigating the spread of the COVID-19 virus by improving the quality of air in the building. Equally important, the Burma Center does not have a reliable heat source. The unreliable 65-year-old boiler threatens all of the building's operations, programs and the 300 or so of its daily users.

The Burma Center's long-term sustainability depends on the success of this Capital Campaign. We kindly ask the city of Battle Creek to allocate \$300,000 of its APRA funds toward our HVAC replacement.

The Covid-19 pandemic taught us many lessons, one of them being the recognition of nonprofit organizations like the Burma Center as essential infrastructure for a strong and thriving community. We are the safety net of our Burmese community, and everyone in the community has a relationship with someone being served through our building and programs. An investment in the Burma Center is an investment in all the people of Battle Creek and Springfield.