



# Partnerships for Trauma Recovery

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



“Change happens when we stop to consider our own pain, hold it with compassion, and realize that we can similarly hold a space for others who have survived some of the worst our world has to offer.



Leah Spelman  
Executive Director

## With Hope and Firm Resolve

Dear Community,

**It is with equal parts firm resolve and hope that I write this letter.** This past year has witnessed a continued increase in challenges for people seeking refuge in the wake of violence and persecution. The Trump Administration has reduced the refugee cap to the **lowest level** in history, eligibility factors and the process for applying for asylum have changed, and asylum grant rates are decreasing dramatically.

All of these factors not only place additional logistical strains on our clients – by increasing the number of hurdles that people must navigate – but they also **have an adverse effect on clients' mental health and wellbeing.** Refugees and asylum seekers already have deep histories of trauma. Because of these experiences, refugees are 10 times as likely as the general population to suffer from PTSD. When we enact policies that create additional barriers for refugees and asylum seekers, we are simply furthering pre-existing traumatization. **There is a high human, social, and economic cost to these actions.**

**But all of this can change;** nothing about our current situation is inevitable. Change happens when individuals, groups, and communities open their doors, and stand with people who are in search of safety. Change happens when we stop to consider our own pain, hold it with

compassion, and realize that we can similarly hold a space for others who have survived some of the worst our world has to offer. Change happens when we remember that all of us have the capacity to heal.

**There are so many things about our work that give me hope,** chief among them, our clients. To survive and escape violence takes incredible bravery, as does the journey to seek greater recovery and wellbeing in the wake of these experiences. Our staff also humble me, with the myriad ways they show up for and stand with clients to support wellbeing. Our job, as clinicians, as outreach workers, as advocates, is to bear witness to our clients' stories; to promise them that, no matter what they have experienced, we will not look away. **Our job is to tell the truth.**

That job is possible because you help make it so. Your support ensures that clients are connected to essential services, that critical conversations happen around trauma and mental health care, and that the Bay Area continues to be a place for welcome and refuge. **With you, we look forward to continuing to stand for healing** in many years to come.

In partnership,

Leah Spelman  
Executive Director



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Partnerships for Trauma Recovery

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# The Greater Environment in Which We Do Our Work

In recent years, advancing the rights of people who have been forcibly displaced has proved increasingly difficult. **Returning to wellbeing in the wake of trauma is already a great challenge; additional structural and policy barriers only complicate this process.** This is particularly the case for asylum seekers, as they are waiting for their cases to be adjudicated.

291,600



the number of asylum seekers living in California in 2020; between 2012-2017, CA was the #1 ranking state for asylum and UNCAT applications.

5,460



the number of children separated from their families under the Trump Administration.

18,000



the maximum number of refugees who will be admitted to the US in Fiscal Year 2020. This is the lowest cap for refugees since the founding of the US refugee program. For comparison, in 2017, the US only received 8% of the refugees admitted by Turkey, the number one refugee-hosting country in the world. The US GDP per capita is five times that of Turkey.

65%



the national asylum denial rate in 2018. Six years ago, the asylum denial rate was 42%. The number of overall decisions has also increased in recent years, but the denial rate has risen faster than overall decisions.

54%



the percent of asylum seekers in 2019 determined by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents to meet the credible-fear standard. The first step in applying for asylum is to pass a credible fear interview. The Trump Administration has deputized CBP officers to conduct credible fear interviews, despite the fact that CBP officers have the competing mandate of securing the border. Previously, credible fear interviews were only conducted by asylum officers, and 80% of interviewees passed.

55,000



the number of people who have been subject to the Trump Administration's Migration Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as "Remain in Mexico". Under the policy, people must remain in Mexico, where they face a myriad of additional risks and stressors while they await a decision on their asylum claims, instead of waiting in the US.



# The Journeys of People Seeking Safety

Since opening its doors in 2016, PTR has served **clients from 45 countries**. In 2019, PTR's clients came from Latin America (54%), Africa (35%), Asia (6%), and the Middle East (5%). Refugees and asylum seekers are "educators, lawyers, journalists, doctors, nurses, engineers, farmers, business owners and others, many of whom worked for democratic change." (NCTTP) The map below shows all the countries of origin for PTR's clients, along with some of the conditions that force people to flee.

## EL SALVADOR

El Salvador has the highest homicide rate in the world. El Salvador is also the only country in the world with a law against "femicide suicide" – the crime of driving a woman or girl to kill themselves by abusing them; this law is a recognition of the psychological damage inflicted particularly upon women and girls in El Salvador. Approximately 50% of PTR's clients come from Central America.

## UGANDA

Uganda is one of many countries in the world that criminalizes LGBTQ+ people. The maximum punishment for being LGBTQ+ is life imprisonment. Approximately 20% of PTR's clients are LGBTQ+.

## ERITREA

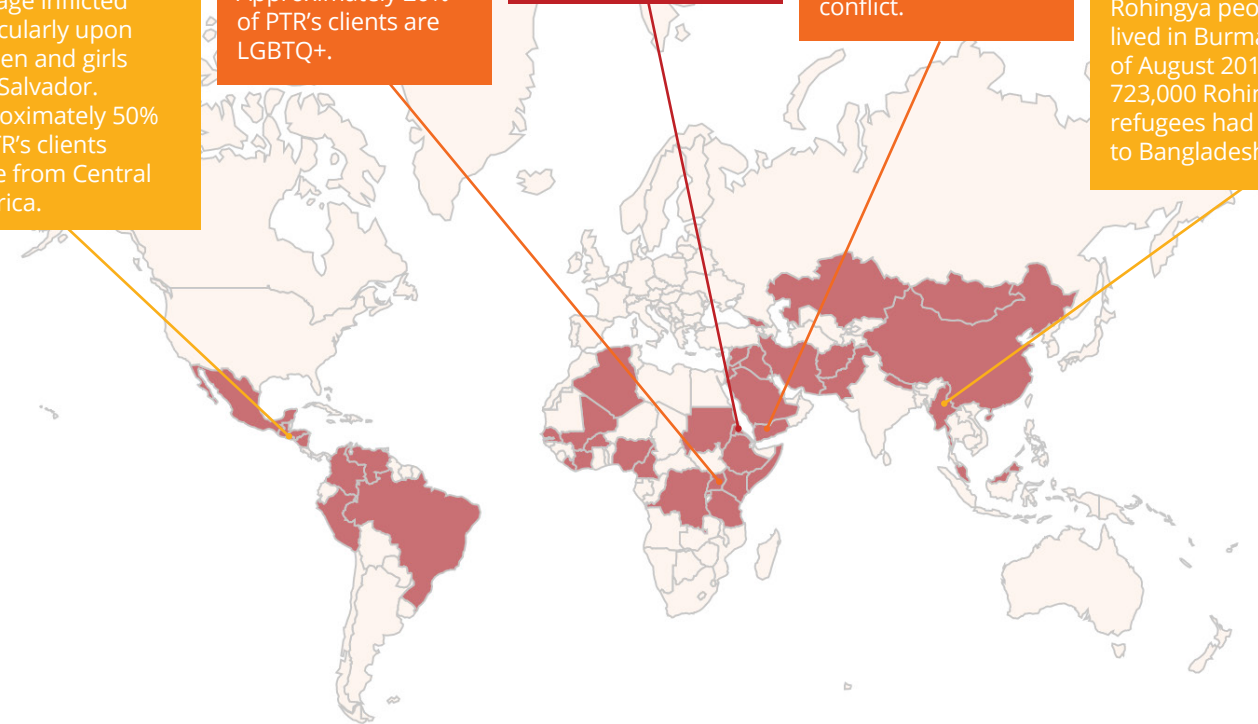
In recent decades, approximately 12% of Eritrea's population has fled the country, due to human rights abuses, lack of civic participation and independent judiciary, and mandatory military conscription.

## YEMEN

An estimated 80% of Yemen's population requires some form of humanitarian assistance. Over 4 million people were internally displaced at the end of 2019, due to the ongoing conflict.

## MYANMAR (BURMA)

Burma has been in the top 5 countries of origin for US-resettled refugees in the past 3 years. Myanmar is also home to the Rohingya, a Muslim-minority group in a majority-Buddhist state. Before the 2017 crisis, an estimated 1 million Rohingya people lived in Burma. As of August 2018, over 723,000 Rohingya refugees had fled to Bangladesh.



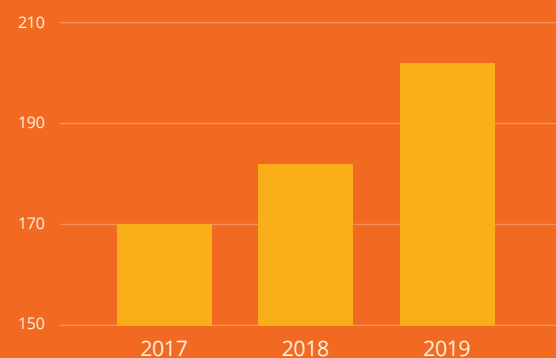


## Mental Health Care

Since opening our Mosaic Healing Center in 2016, PTR has provided mental health care for **over 400 clients, from 45 countries, and been able to offer care in over 25 languages**. PTR maintains an open-ended treatment model, which enables people with profound histories of trauma to access care over a longer period of time, when needed, in order to heal from the impacts of protracted interpersonal violence. In the past year, PTR also held 5 support groups, which

included groups for youth from African countries, as well as an LGBTQ+ group. Nearly 70% of individual and family therapy sessions were conducted in a language other than English. In the second half of 2019 alone, PTR contracted with 29 interpreters through our Refugee Voices Program, in order to increase language accessibility through ongoing in-person interpretation services.

Number of Clients Served Annually



TOTAL  
NUMBER  
OF SESSIONS  
PROVIDED IN 2019



OF THESE  
SESSIONS  
WERE GROUP  
SESSIONS



OF THESE  
SESSIONS WERE  
PSYCHIATRY  
SESSIONS



*The following testimonial is from Inés, a client from Central America who survived childhood abduction and over a decade of brutal abuse and servitude in captivity.*

*"These disorders led me to various attempted suicides. In my darkest hour, I somehow fell into the hands of [a PTR clinician]. This is where my slow recovery began to take place. I am sure I would not be on this Earth today if I hadn't been treated by [them]."*

*A special thanks to [PTR clinician] for being there for me and bringing me out of the darkness and into the light. As I once depended on you, I see now that others can depend on me."*

- INÉS

*Today, after receiving support for healing from her severe trauma, Inés is finding meaning and purpose by giving back to her community of origin. Through creating a flourishing independent business, Inés has been empowered to help support other women. She is deeply proud of these accomplishments.*

*PTR measures impact in several ways: through clients' narratives and self-reports, as well as through in-depth assessments, to track changes in psychological, physical, and social circumstances, as well as symptoms of PTSD, depression, and anxiety over time. PTR's goal is that 70% of clients who complete follow-up assessments will show improvement in one or more of these areas.*

*"I feel free and I feel safe. I mean there are things, I still have my trauma, but I still feel happy. I know I'm going to overcome everything one day. I have faith. It's going to be over one day. My health is gradual and it's improving day by day."*

- PTR CLIENT



PERCENTAGE OF PTR CLIENTS WHO SHOWED AN IMPROVEMENT IN PTSD, ANXIETY, AND/OR DEPRESSION IN 2019

*"Most wounds that I've kept to myself, hidden inside of myself, I speak more freely when I'm here and I feel alive. The environment is friendly. It presents some kind of peace. People understand your situation and know how to deal with it."*

- PTR CLIENT





## Clinical Training

Core to PTR's work is our Global Healing & Human Rights Clinical Training Program for advanced psychology doctoral students. The training program takes place over 11 months for 24 hours/week, and includes 6 hours of in-depth weekly group and individual training and supervision. PTR conducts pre- and post-surveys to evaluate trainees' learning, and solicits trainee feedback twice during the training year. **On a 1-5 scale, the 2018/19 cohort reported an increased understanding of the varied experiences of refugees, asylees and asylum seekers who have fled their countries due to danger**, (an increase from 3.33 to 4.5), greater knowledge of the mental health and psychosocial needs of refugees, asylees and asylum seekers in the US (an increase from 3.17 to 4.5), and heightened confidence in their clinical skills providing trauma-informed mental health care to forcibly displaced communities (an increase from 3.33 to 4.0).

**27** Graduated 27 advanced psychology and social work students from our clinical training program



PTR estimates that these graduates collectively have the capacity to serve up to 10,000 survivors of human rights abuses over the course of their careers **10,000+**

One graduate from the 2018-19 cohort shared the following:

*"In reflecting on this past year, I believe that I have grown as a clinician and human being more in this year than the previous 3 years of my graduate studies combined. I felt very challenged both interpersonally and intellectually. The discussions throughout the training day were always thought-provoking. I felt very supported, especially when I asked questions. I truly felt as though the staff was eager to not only watch me grow, but to support my growth. I am so grateful for this experience."*



## Outreach: Connecting with Communities



*Left: a young participant creates a stress ball at PTR's booth at the Umoja Festival in Oakland. Middle: a map from an activity where participants were invited to mark their countries of origin. Right: African Communities Liaison Tizita Tekletsadik speaks at an event celebrating the Ethiopian New Year in September.*

The African Communities Program enables PTR to connect with and work alongside Bay Area African communities. The outreach program aims to **combat stigma around trauma and mental health needs; increase awareness of available mental health and trauma healing resources; and learn from our partners, in order to most effectively collaborate with the communities we serve.**

Activities implemented by the African Communities Program in 2019 include: two support groups for students at Oakland International High School (one

in the fall, and one in the spring); three Education Workshops on understanding trauma; ongoing counseling with individual clients and family members; and monthly psychoeducation groups open to all community members. Monthly workshops have covered topics such as: managing the stress of seeking employment; affordable housing and tenant rights; creativity and wellbeing; parenting in a new country; addressing the stigma of mental health; creating a community of wellness; the new Public Charge rule; and the health benefits of gratitude.



## Policy Advocacy



**From the outset, PTR intentionally located itself at the intersection of global mental health and human rights.**

While providing quality clinical care will always remain a core component of our mission, we also recognize that, when survivors arrive at our healing center, they have already experienced extreme levels of trauma.

**In a perfect world, we would be able to go further upstream to prevent that trauma from occurring.**

This year, PTR engaged in several advocacy efforts targeted at addressing the root causes of trauma and preventing further traumatization. We partnered with Oxfam to meet with both Speaker Pelosi's Office and Congresswoman Lee's Office regarding the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), and H.R. 3524, the Northern Triangle Stabilization Act. These policies have the potential to impact levels of instability and violence, and thus the root causes of trauma, faced by people in Yemen, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

These efforts led to Congresswoman Lee agreeing to co-sponsor H.R. 3524. PTR is also a member of the National Consortium for Torture Treatment Programs, and is one of 14 Trauma Recovery Centers in California. We engage in advocacy efforts as a member of both of these groups.



*Above: PTR Board Chair Monika Parikh and Executive Director Leah Spelman join Oxfam for a meeting at Congresswoman Barbara Lee's Office in Oakland. Left: PTR staff participate in a march for Survivors Speak in Sacramento; the march brought together crime survivors and advocates to call for measures to both prevent and address violent crime.*

## Growing Team, Wider Impact



Last year, PTR's team grew from 13 to 18 members. This growth has allowed us to expand our outreach efforts; provide mental health care and case management for a greater number of refugees and asylum seekers; and offer additional support and training for our interpreters, who have enabled PTR to provide care in over 25 languages since 2016. **Through both mental health care and outreach efforts, PTR**

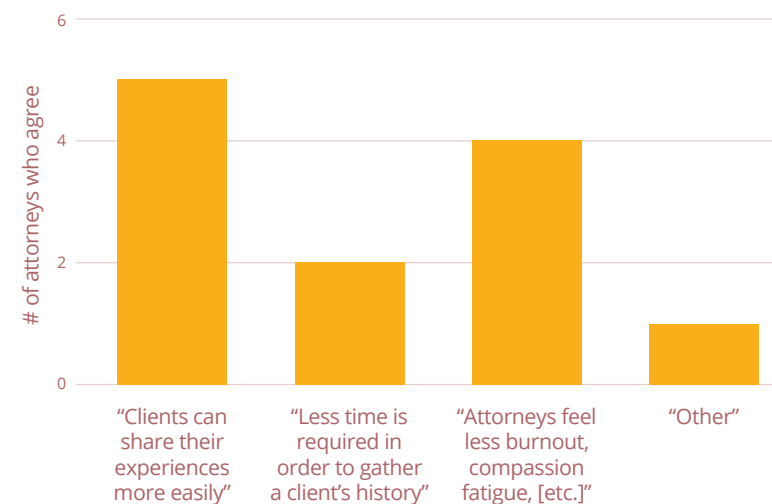
**was able to support the healing of 440 survivors of human rights abuses and interpersonal violence in 2019.** This growth is made possible due to generous support from, among other partners, the California Victims Compensation Board, the California Office of Emergency Services, Alameda County Behavioral Health, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

# Increased Impact through Partnership

PTR collaborates with **over 20 community-based partner organizations** that provide legal/immigration, employment/educational, language learning, medical care and social service support for our clients. PTR works closely with legal partners, as the majority of our clients are asylum seekers waiting for their cases to be adjudicated. PTR offers essential psychological support during times of extreme anxiety for asylum seekers, and provides psychological evaluations and expert witness testimony in Immigration Court. **The national asylum grant rate is 37%. With a medical or psychological evaluation, the grant rate can increase to 89%.**

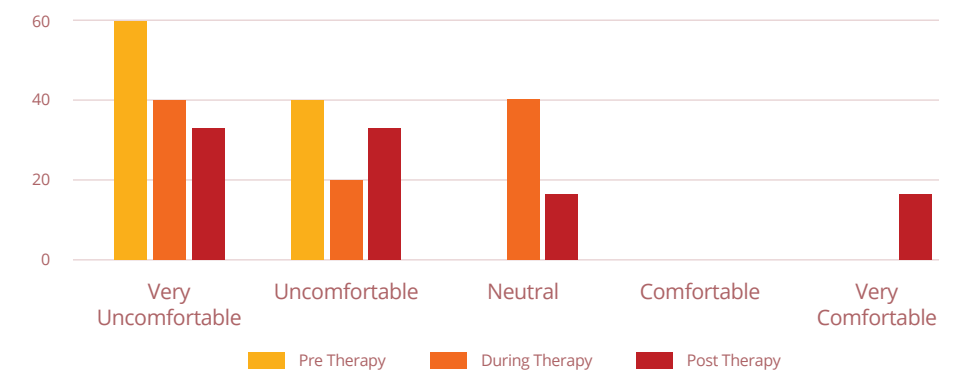
This year, in partnership with Pangea Legal Services, PTR gathered feedback from both attorneys and clients to document the impact of our ongoing collaboration. The graph to the right shows Pangea attorneys' responses about how consultations with PTR mental health staff have impacted clients we have jointly supported.

**What is the Impact of Mental Health Consultations on Attorney Time Spent with Clients and Communication with Clients?**



Understandably, one of the greatest sources of fear and anxiety for asylum seekers is preparing to tell their story at the Asylum Office or in Immigration Court. The graph to the right shows that before receiving care at PTR, the majority of clients were fearful when imagining speaking about their trauma. However, after receiving supportive services, clients' comfort with the prospect of telling their story greatly increased.

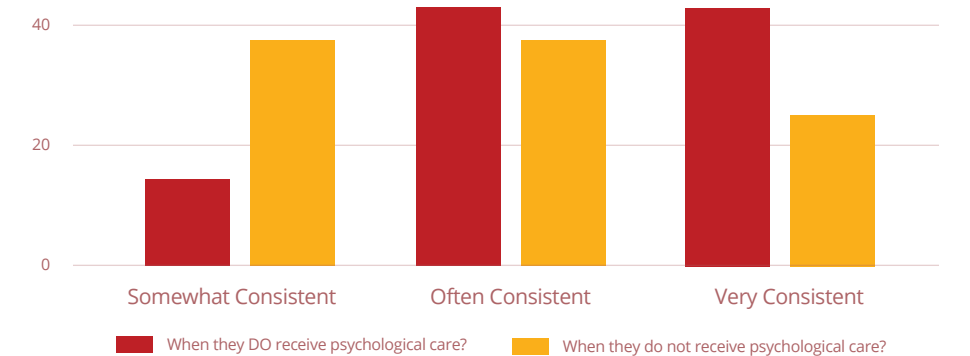
**How Comfortable Do You Feel Preparing For and Imagining Testifying in Immigration Court?**



*"In the cases I referred, I had an idea of the circumstances and the trauma; the therapy allowed clients to access those thoughts and talk about them with less shame."*

- PANGEA ATTORNEY

**How Consistent is Client Court Testimony?**



*Q: Overall, what was your experience going to therapy while preparing your case?*

*A: "My therapist told me to not feel guilty of what had happened to me. I used to feel guilty of what happened to me, but [they] told me it's not your fault and I shouldn't blame myself. Now I feel good, calm, happy. Whatever happened to me, already happened, now I feel happy. I don't feel trapped in negative thoughts anymore and I feel safe that no one is hurting me here anymore."*

- PTR CLIENT

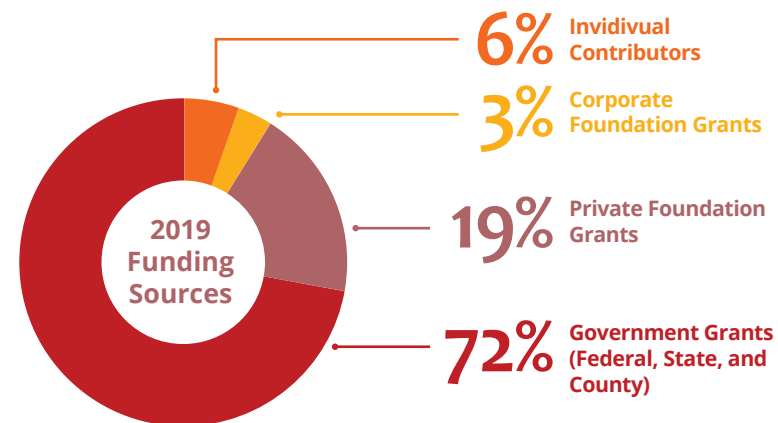


Our attorney partners also reported that when their clients received psychological care at PTR, the consistency and clarity of their testimonies increased. Trauma impacts our brains. When we experience extreme fear, our system goes on high alert in order to protect ourselves from danger. Our amygdala is activated to help us respond to threats, and our prefrontal cortex is inhibited. Trauma affects how memories are encoded and stored, and traumatic

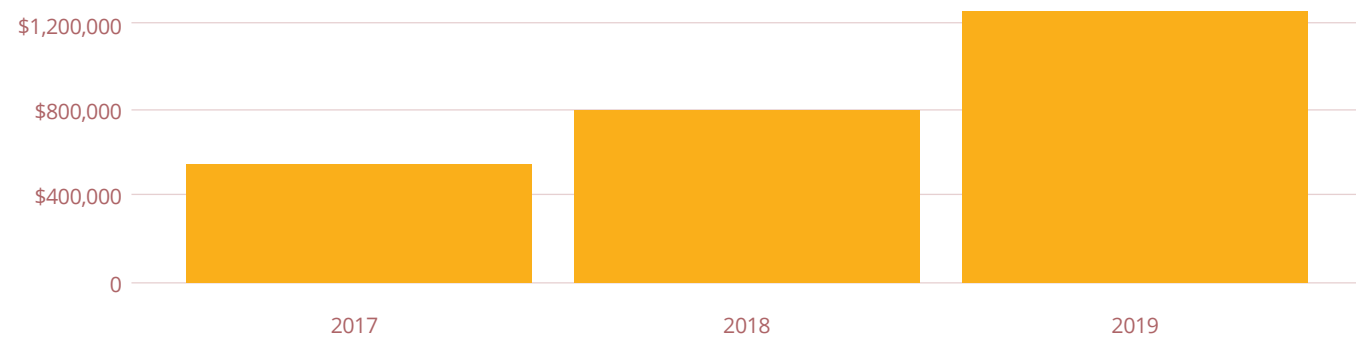
memories can be fragmented and non-linear. This can make clients' task of retelling their stories to adjudicators extremely challenging both emotionally and cognitively. The process of therapy allows survivors of violence to reconstitute their traumatic experiences in the context of a safe and supportive relationship. This coherent narrative strengthens survivors' asylum cases, and allows them to voice what had remained unspeakable and to begin the process of healing.

# Financials

PTR's **revenue increased by 45% in 2018, and by 56% in 2019**. This growth is in large part due to additional support from government grants, such as Alameda County Behavioral Health, the California Victims Compensation Board, and the US Office for Refugee Resettlement. PTR seeks to balance its funding sources through increased individual and private foundation funding in the coming years.



Annual Revenue



## Thank You to Our Generous Supporters

**GRANTS:** Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services • Bigglesworth Family Foundation • California Office of Emergency Services • California Victims Compensation Board • Firedoll Foundation • Genentech • George Sarlo Foundation • Gilead Health Sciences • Global Whole Being Fund • Kaiser Permanente • Office of Refugee Resettlement • San Francisco Foundation • Seattle Foundation • Sills Family Foundation • Zellerbach Family Foundation

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Some identifying details for clients have been changed in this report, for privacy and security reasons.

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