If history has taught us anything, it’s that you cannot deny people their freedom forever. And North Korea is no different.

The last few years have been some of the most difficult we’ve seen on this issue. In 2023, as the world returned to normal and North Korea’s borders partially reopened, interviews from inside the country revealed unimaginable circumstances people had faced during the pandemic lockdowns. North Korean refugees in China also faced grave danger. Last October, amidst reports that 600 North Korean refugees had been forcibly repatriated, the South Korean government confirmed that “a large number” of North Koreans had been sent back.

In moments of despair, I think about how hard so many North Koreans fought for their freedom – what they lost, and what they had to sacrifice. I am reminded what a privilege it is to do this work.

We’ve seen that when North Koreans have access to the tools they need, they have unlimited potential. Last year, we continued our work in building their capacity through our English language program, mentorship and skills workshops, and advocacy and storytelling training. We also launched a new program providing two types of scholarships to North Koreans pursuing higher education. Thanks to your support we are cultivating the next generation of North Korean leaders, strategists, advocates, and agents of change who are determined to work toward the freedom of their people.
We were honored to partner and executive produce one of the most powerful documentaries ever about North Korean refugees and their harrowing escape journey. The level of attention on such an authentic, humanizing story about the North Korean people is truly unprecedented. Beyond Utopia has received numerous accolades, nominations and awards, but most importantly, it reached a new audience of millions of people around the world who had not yet known about the plight of North Korean refugees, their amazing resilience, and the unfathomable sacrifices they make to reach freedom.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of our organization. We are filled with immense gratitude for your support and the work we have been able to do together over two decades. But as we look forward, we also recognize that there is still much work to be done. There are still opportunities for change and progress on this issue, and meaningful ways we can and must continue supporting North Korean people in their pursuit of freedom.

If the last few years have taught me anything, it’s that hope is not a feeling – it is a choice we make. We are so grateful to all of you, our supporters, who choose to remain hopeful with us and unwavering in your support for our shared vision.

With hope and gratitude,
Hannah Song
Liberty in North Korea. The day every North Korean man, woman, and child can live free and full lives.

Working with the North Korean people to accelerate change and opening in the world’s most closed country.
29 RESCUED

$4,533,639 RAISED

10,793,918 REACHED

210 EMPOWERED

51 SUPPORTED

2,104 REACHED

2 LABS PROJECTS
The Work We Are Accomplishing

**Refugee Rescues & Resettlement Support**
Helping North Korean refugees reach safety and freedom, and gain stability and independence during the first years of their new lives.

**Empowering Resettled North Koreans**
Working with resettled North Korean refugees to support their success and develop their capacity as agents of change.

**Increasing Information Access for North Koreans**
Developing new initiatives to empower North Koreans inside the country with greater access to information and technology.

**Changing the Narrative on North Korea**
Amplifying North Korean people’s stories and mobilizing a global movement of support for this issue.
Refugee Rescues & Resettlement Support
the U.S. Government to help exceptional cases of North Koreans in third countries through a process known as “Humanitarian Parole.” In 2023, as we continued to regain momentum with rescues, we welcomed 29 North Korean refugees to freedom.

Once North Koreans reach freedom, our team provides crucial resettlement support to help them succeed in their new lives. Whether this means financial assistance, home visits, or connecting people to resources and services, we work together with each individual to develop self efficacy and navigate location-specific challenges in both the U.S. and South Korea.

“Thank you so much for bringing me to South Korea during such a difficult time [in the underground]. Surveillance in China has gotten more intense and rescue fees increased so much that I had lost hope of ever leaving. What a blessing that I could be connected to LiNK and come to South Korea safely and without cost. It was possible because of the support of all the kind-hearted people out there [staff and supporters].”

– Yu Jung, rescued in April 2023
United States

Humanitarian Parole cases arrive in America without status and are ineligible for standard refugee resettlement benefits from the U.S. Government. As a result, LiNK provides full fiscal sponsorship, case management, housing and financial assistance, interpretation and translation services, medical support, and help with coordinating legal needs.

“LiNK staff helped me find the right school for my child and arranged for the bus to pick them up, even though we’re located outside of the school’s district. My child is so excited that the school bus stops right in front of our house now. I’m so thankful to the love and care shown by [LiNK staff], who look after us as if we were their own families.”

– Mirae, rescued in 2023

30+
received post-resettlement support
(5 humanitarian parole cases)
South Korea

As North Korean refugees arrive, adjust, and come to thrive in their resettlement, LiNK continues to be a hub for community and support. It’s a privilege to be a part of their lives, from working through challenges together to celebrating major milestones.

One memorable visit was with a North Korean friend who had just opened her own restaurant. She had worked at a pizzeria for years, and was promoted to store manager during that time for her diligence and positive attitude. In 2023, she was ready for the next chapter, and fulfilled her dream of starting her own business!
2023

Meaningful Milestones

3
starting university

9
marriages

1
new home

1
new business

2
university graduations

2
babies born

2
new jobs

2
U.S work permits received
Empowering Resettled North Koreans
We believe that the North Korean people themselves will be the ones to lead change on this issue and transform their country. Emerging from one of the most oppressive regimes in the world, they’ve already demonstrated incredible strength, resilience, and a determination to rise above their circumstances.

One of our biggest opportunities is to go beyond resettlement support and invest in developing the capacity of North Koreans as agents of change. LiNK identifies current needs in the defector community and partners with North Koreans to increase access to education, skill-building, and career opportunities. With the tools to succeed, they prove their potential as leaders and activists on campus, in the workplace, and on the global stage.

We’re already seeing the impact of these initiatives. North Koreans are leading this issue, sharing their stories and humanizing how the world sees 25 million people in North Korea. They’re advocating for changes to policy, and sending money and information to their families back home. Every call into the country, interview with the media, and opportunity for advocacy represents one small step towards the day when the North Korean people finally achieve their freedom.
Changemakers Scholarship  South Korea

As resettled North Koreans seek ways to contribute to this issue, many find themselves constrained by limited resources. They may be sending money back to family in North Korea or working additional hours to support themselves through university, impacting their capacity to excel academically and engage in activism.

“I look forward to participating in greater advocacy, learning from other activists, as well as growing as a leader to improve the North Korean people’s human rights during the Changemakers Scholarship program.”

– Jin Myung, 2023 scholarship recipient

The Changemakers Scholarship provides financial support to North Korean refugees who have demonstrated a commitment to activism, maximizing their potential for activities and projects that promote change on this issue. Recipients have gone on to produce media that tells North Korean stories, write books and articles, host an art exhibition, start activist clubs on their campuses, and partner with us on projects to increase information access in North Korea.
U.S. Scholarship Program

In 2023, we launched two scholarships for North Korean students in the United States who are pursuing higher education — the Bao Sei Scholarship*, designated for undergraduate students, and the Jayu Leaders Scholarship, supporting post-graduate studies, non-traditional post-secondary institutions, and international students. Our first class of scholarship recipients included fourteen individuals, with areas of study ranging from psychology to international security policy, sociology, media studies, and political science.

Our goal is to see more resettled North Koreans complete their education programs, achieve their academic and career goals, and be empowered to play a role in helping to change this issue.

*The Bao Sei Scholarship is made possible thanks to a generous grant from the Bao Sei Foundation

“I am absolutely thrilled and honored to have been selected as the recipient of Liberty in North Korea’s Jayu Leaders Scholarship. Thank you for this incredible opportunity. Thank you for believing in my potential and supporting my educational journey.”

– Hyunseong, 2023 scholarship recipient
Conversational English ability in South Korea has been identified as a top need for personal and professional growth. Confidence in speaking English helps North Koreans adjust to life in our globalized world, and also opens up new education and career opportunities.

The LiNK English Language program has become a mainstay in our efforts to help build the capacity of North Koreans as agents of change. Students are matched 1:1 with volunteer tutors from all around the world, leading to customized practice, conversations that break down barriers, and connections that will last a lifetime. Empowered to use their voice, many program alumni go on to advocate for this issue and share their stories with international audiences.

“Learning English is not easy for me, especially with young children, but when considering the future, I believe it’s not a choice but a necessity. While parenting limits the time for personal development, participating in the LiNK’s program has given me confidence. Seeing myself improve little by little compared to the start has been encouraging. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the LiNK staff and sponsors for their support.”

– Hazel, North Korean participant, Fall 2023

146
North Korean students

2
semesters

69%
of participants saw an increase in test scores
countries represented by volunteers

23

82% gained greater confidence

2,790 hours of study
In 2023, LiNK continued a partnership with The George W. Bush Institute to co-host a four-day workshop for North Korean activists and scholarship recipients. Thirteen North Korean refugees were welcomed by President and Mrs. George W. Bush themselves.

The agenda was filled with enriching sessions led by experts, prominent political figures, and internationally known dissidents on the topics of media training, current events, the fundamentals of democracy, and more. LiNK also led sessions to discuss what working toward liberty in North Korea looks like, and the importance of mental wellness as we engage with this issue.

“Thank you so much for organizing such a great event. I see a healthy and energetic young North Korean community being formed through the support of your work.”

– 2023 Workshop attendee
In the U.S., many North Korean refugees have a difficult time finding professional development opportunities and navigating their career options. LiNK’s Mentorship Program connects North Koreans 1:1 with industry professionals and experts, opening the door to their fields of interest and building self efficacy through in-depth, personalized guidance.

As North Koreans develop and steward their expertise and skills, they become effective agents of change in their communities. They will be the ones to lead the next generation and impact this issue long-term.

“I really appreciate your support and help planning this trip [to visit my mentor]. It was a great opportunity to be amongst impressive people. I spent time with my mentor, met my mentor’s colleagues, and many people from Harvard. I feel inspired and motivated to pursue my career goals in the future.”

– Sangwoo, 2023 Mentorship Program participant

Areas of mentorship:
- Graduate-level writing coaching
- College entrance prep
- Career mapping in nonprofit field
- Job search/Resume building
Where They Are Now

- **Michael, U.S. Education Grant Program alumni**
  With the help of his mentor, Michael applied to Columbia University and received his acceptance letter in 2023!

- **Chanyang, LiNK program alumni, former intern**
  Chanyang has been involved with LiNK in many ways over the years, from speaking at LiNK Summit to having a central role in our documentary, The Jangmadang Generation. Today, only a decade after her resettlement, she’s running her own business, the Tong-il Orah Cooperative. “Tong-il Orah” means “let unification come” and it’s a wellness and community hub. Her goal is to cultivate more North Korean entrepreneurs and foster greater collaboration between North and South Koreans!

- **Geumhyok, former LiNK Advocacy Fellow | Class of 2018**
  Geumhyok studied politics and diplomacy at one of South Korea’s top universities, and has long been a vocal advocate for this issue through LiNK’s programs and his own YouTube channel. In 2023, he achieved his goal of getting a job in the South Korean government, and is now a policy advisor in the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs (국가보훈부). Last year, he and his wife also welcomed a beautiful baby son into the world!
Increasing Information Access for North Koreans
In open societies, access to information and free communication is taken for granted. In closed societies, information scarcity contributes to a pervasive set of issues. It hinders people’s scrutiny of government rhetoric and policy, impedes people from making informed decisions and contributing to their society’s development, and leaves citizens with little choice other than to believe government-curated propaganda and ideology.

Although the North Korean government has gradually allowed cross-border travel to resume in 2023, and some North Korean overseas workers were able to return home after many years abroad, overall border security has remained high. Increased restrictions that were enacted during the pandemic continue to keep the country siloed from outside information and media.

Despite these difficulties, North Korean defectors still consistently report that empowering North Korean people with information access is one of the most important and effective ways to increase forces of change and opening in the country. In 2023, we stepped up our efforts to partner with resettled North Koreans and engineers in pursuit of this opportunity.

Please note that to maintain operational security we are limited in what we can share publicly about Labs projects.
Labs

Labs is our space to collaborate, innovate, and develop new initiatives that empower North Korean people with information and technology from the outside world.

In 2023, we co-hosted a summit of approximately 40 key players from around the world—technologists, content creators, activists, researchers, and funders—to discuss the latest trends in this space, demonstrate prototypes, ideate solutions, and work together on tailored technologies and curated information.

We also briefed and shared recommendations with key stakeholders in various governments and think tank communities, emphasizing how increased support for information access will empower positive transformation in North Korea.
Changing the Narrative on North Korea
For decades, North Korea has been defined by its politics, its dictator, and its weapons. Portrayed as a country without hope, it’s trapped by this narrative as well as by the regime. We’re here to share a different story — one of human tenacity and triumph, still being written by the North Korean people and their allies around the world.

LiNK amplifies North Korean voices through online media, documentaries, and events, and empowers North Koreans to take authorship of their own stories. Their personal accounts challenge the regime’s narrative of a rigid and monolithic country, instead highlighting the dynamism, humanity, and forces of change within it.

By changing the narrative on North Korea, we’re engaging global support for the North Korean people and shaping how individuals, institutions, and governments respond to this issue. We’re sharing opportunities for advocacy and allyship, and turning interest into tangible action. Together, we’re making strides towards the day when every North Korean man, woman, and child can live free and full lives.

10,793,918 reached online
2,104 reached in-person
LiNK in the Media

LiNK is recognized by international media outlets as a leading source of current information on North Korea. We continued to work with journalists and advocate for a people-centered approach to reporting, bringing attention to the authentic stories of North Koreans and how they’re changing their country.

Notable partnerships this year include a Financial Times Weekend feature about a North Korean love story, a BBC mini documentary that has garnered over 10 million views in Korean and English, and an article from our South Korea Country Director, Sokeel Park, on information access in North Korea.
Beyond Utopia

Gripping, visceral, and urgent, Beyond Utopia is a documentary that follows the lives of several people in the underground railroad and offers an unprecedented glimpse into the escape from North Korea. It debuted at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival, long regarded as a hotspot for the upcoming year’s most impactful stories, and took home the coveted Audience Award for U.S. Documentary.

We executive produced and provided fiscal sponsorship on the film, in alignment with our efforts to change the narrative on North Korea.

As Beyond Utopia toured film festivals worldwide, played in theaters across the U.S. for a two-day event in the fall, and secured distribution on multiple streaming platforms including Hulu and PBS, LiNK also served as an impact partner for the documentary. Every step of the way, we engaged new audiences and worked to turn this visibility for North Korean stories into sustained, long-term support for the issue.
For the first time in five years, LiNK Summit made its return on June 3rd, 2023! Over 200 supporters, North Korean advocates, fellow activists, and global LiNK staff gathered to spend One Day with the North Korean People in Long Beach, CA.

Attendees had the opportunity to hear directly from and collaborate with North Koreans through different breakout sessions, from “Imagining the Future of North Korea” to a live version of “The Red Box,” our popular YouTube series. In the midst of all this activity was “The Jangmadang Experience,” a collection of interactive booths and installations inspired by North Korea’s grassroots markets. The event culminated with a keynote speech from Joseph Kim, an advocate, author, and one of the first North Korean refugees LiNK helped bring to the US. He now works as a Program Manager & Expert-in-Residence at the George W. Bush Institute.

Summit was an important opportunity to share critical updates on the issue, brainstorm ideas to grow our movement, and hear powerful stories and perspectives from our North Korean speakers. It was also a powerful reminder that so many incredible people are committed to this important cause, and every person has an active role to play. We left feeling so inspired by our movement’s excitement and commitment to the work that remains ahead of us.
“The most meaningful part of the event for me was discovering how change is possible and how I can be a part of it.”

– Summit attendee

200+ attendees

45% of attendees met a North Korean person for the first time

94% of attendees left feeling motivated to share more about this issue

*who completed the post-Summit survey
Virtual Events.

As this global movement continues to grow, virtual events are a way to learn about the issue together and to share impact and updates on our work. In 2023, we hosted two major livestreams — a deep-dive into North Korea’s information and technology landscape with leading expert Nat Kretchun, and an exclusive Q&A with the BBC’s Seoul correspondent, Jean Mackenzie, who discussed unique insights she gained from covertly interviewing three people inside North Korea for their mini documentary.
When it comes to changing the narrative on North Korea, South Korea presents a unique challenge. Although South Koreans have enormous potential to contribute to progress on the issue, there is an overwhelming deficit of interest and empathy for the North Korean people, particularly among young people.

Despite the circumstances, we believe the next generation of young North and South Korean activists will play a crucial role in revitalizing interest in North Korean human rights issues and shaping the future of both countries. With that in mind, our team seeks to activate this demographic as a powerful force for change.

In 2023, LiNK facilitated a networking event with the University Students’ Association for Unification, bringing together affiliated clubs for open collaboration.

**USAU Networking Event, South Korea**

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In 2023, LiNK facilitated a networking event with the University Students’ Association for Unification, bringing together affiliated clubs for open collaboration.
To re-engage South Koreans on this issue, our team is finding creative ways to share a new, humanizing perspective of the North Korean people. LiNK hosted an experience booth themed as a “North Korean Travel Information Center” at the Yeouido Park Youth Festival, standing out amongst other companies, start-ups, and NGOs. Hundreds of people stopped by to learn more about our work, ask our North Korean friends questions about food and transportation in North Korea, and sign up for more ways to get involved.

“This ticket is not valid because North Korea is the most closed country in the world. But when the North Korean people achieve their liberty, this kind of travel will become our everyday reality.”

Youth Day Festival, South Korea

592 visitors
229 new Allies sign-ups
Staff Lectures & Presentations

29 events

1749 attendees

Topics covered included life in North Korea, women’s rights, North Korean stories, information access and strategies for change, social change in North Korea, LiNK’s work, and more.
Allies

All around the world, we’re activating a movement of support for the North Korean people. Allies are donors, fellow activists, North Korean friends, student organizers, and more — people who are working together with us towards the day when every man, woman, and child in North Korea is free. Our goal is to mobilize 25 million Allies — one Ally for every person in North Korea.

Spotlight: Sangchul Lee

North Koreans don’t feel like strangers to Sangchul because his grandparents were from North Korea. During the Korean War, they were forced to leave everything behind and take refuge in the South. Sangchul recalls visiting the border between China and North Korea and gazing at his grandfather’s hometown from atop a hill. He’s motivated to help the North Korean people because under a different set of circumstances, he could have grown up alongside them. He’s thankful that through LiNK, he can help North Koreans find new life in freedom.

Spotlight: Rob Anderson

Rob is a magician-turned-entrepreneur in Las Vegas who learned about LiNK after reading a news article on North Korea’s brutal prison camps. In his teen years, he practiced Tae Kwon Do, and has always had an appreciation of Korean culture. Rob has had the opportunity to meet North Korean refugees and hear their stories firsthand. As a committed donor to LiNK, he hopes to continue impacting the lives of North Korean people as much as they have had an impact on him.
LiNK Teams

LiNK Teams are a continuation of this movement’s grassroots origins, the next generation of student leaders and changemakers who are committed to seeing the North Korean people achieve their liberty in our lifetime. On campuses and in communities across the globe, they’re helping to change the narrative and raise funds through creativity, grit, and collaboration.

115 school & community chapters
10 countries
Advocacy

With the South Korean and U.S. governments taking renewed interest in North Korean human rights and potential initiatives, LiNK’s insights and ideas were regularly sought out. Our team speaks directly with key policymakers and stakeholders, advocating for a people-centered approach to this issue and identifying opportunities for our supporters to take action.

In 2023, we saw the impact of years of advocacy when Ambassador Julie Turner was finally sworn in as the U.S. Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues. Since 2021, LiNK supporters have sent over 2,000 letters to members of Congress, urging for this key role to be filled and to make the North Korean people a bigger concern in its policy on North Korea. Having Ambassador Turner championing this issue from within the administration is a significant step forward.

When Chinese authorities forcibly repatriated an estimated 600 North Korean refugees last year, we once again mobilized our Allies. Over 1,000 supporters joined us in contacting Chinese embassies and consulates around the world, advocating for the immediate stop to forced repatriations and demanding that North Koreans be treated with humanity and dignity.

This work is far from over, but we’re grateful to be doing it together with LiNK supporters around the world.
Joy, former LiNK Advocacy Fellow  Class of 2019

Joy fled from North Korea at 18 years old, but was trafficked in China shortly after crossing the border. In 2013, she was introduced to LiNK’s networks and finally reached freedom. Since then, Joy has been a dedicated advocate for the human rights of North Korean women and children. In 2023, she shared her story at the Liberty International World Conference in Madrid!

Ilhyeok, former LiNK Advocacy Fellow  Class of 2019

In August 2023, Ilhyeok shared his story at the UN Security Council meeting in New York, the premier forum for international issues and diplomacy between nations. It was the first time in six years that the Council took up North Korea’s human rights record. His decisive, humanizing speech advocated for a people-centered approach to the North Korean issue at a policy level.

“I hope with all of my heart that the day when all North Koreans can enjoy the same freedoms that we take for granted will come one day sooner.”
Financials

Note: Audited financials were not available at the time of publishing this report.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions &amp; Special Events</td>
<td>$4,396,194</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net Other Miscellaneous Revenue</td>
<td>$107,445</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$4,533,639</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Services</td>
<td>$4,368,215</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Services</td>
<td>$1,098,694</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$5,466,909</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources Spent for Programs</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rescue &amp; Resettlement Support</td>
<td>$1,174,704</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Agents of Change</td>
<td>$860,554</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labs</td>
<td>$381,779</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changing the Narrative (Includes Beyond Utopia*)</td>
<td>$1,951,178</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$4,368,215</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*LiNK provides fiscal sponsorship to filmmakers in support of projects that help change the narrative on North Korea and amplify the voices and stories of the North Korean people. The organization served as the fiscal sponsor for the documentary film, Beyond Utopia, which independently raised $1,205,231 in 2023 and was granted through LiNK.*
Board Members

Jensen Ko
Philanthropist, Chairman of the Board

Gloria Lee
Lawyer & Philanthropist

Henry Bedford
CEO and Chairman, Southwestern Company

Justin Wheeler
Co-founder & CEO, Funraise

Aaron Werner
CEO, Miller Marriott

Grace Chung*
Senior Director of Social Impact Programs, Automation Anywhere

John Park
Entrepreneur & Philanthropist

Scott Sugino
Corporate Partner, O’Melveny & Myers LLP

Blaine Vess
Founder, Immeasurable

Hannah Song
CEO, Liberty in North Korea

Joseph Kim*
Program Manager and Expert-in-Residence, George W. Bush Institute

Wonnie Park
CEO, Eric Buterbaugh

*Only active members for part of the year
Partners