

QANNUAL REPORT

QARAVAN

2024 EDITION

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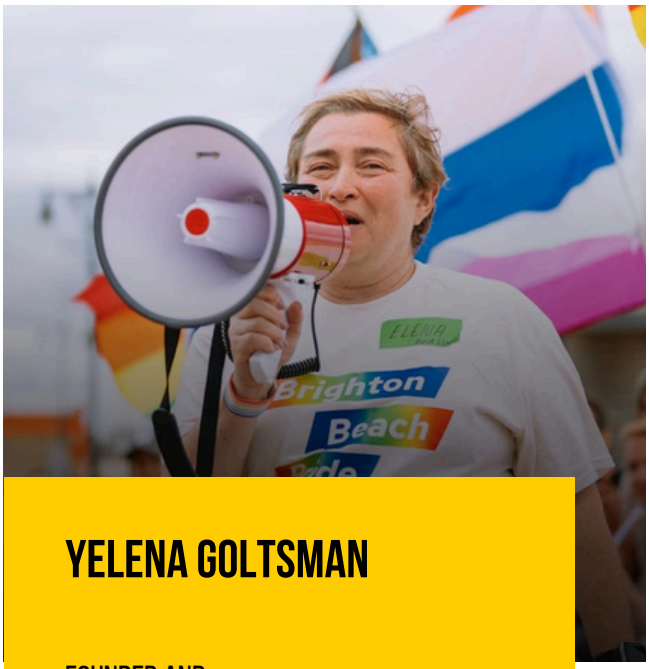
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FOREWORD



YELENA GOLTSMAN

FOUNDER AND
BOARD PRESIDENT

As we reflect on another year of growth, resilience, and impact, it is with great pride that we share this annual report under our new name: Qaravan.

This milestone is more than just a rebrand—it's a reaffirmation of who we are and what we stand for. Qaravan is a powerful symbol of movement, strength, and the shared experiences that hold our community together. It reflects our deep commitment to inclusivity and honors the incredible diversity of those we serve, spanning languages, cultures, ethnicities, and countries of origin.

For me, Qaravan means close community, chosen family, and mutual care—especially for LGBTQ+ immigrants from post-Soviet countries. So many of us have no one but each other to rely on as we navigate the complex journey of rebuilding our lives in the U.S. Our mission has always been clear: to welcome all LGBTQ+ immigrants who've faced persecution and discrimination—sometimes even from their own families—and to offer a space where they can feel safe, supported, and free to be fully themselves.

For 17 years, we've been building that refuge. We've created safe spaces, provided peer support and emergency aid, and embraced over 15,000 LGBTQ+ immigrants across New York City and far beyond with love, care, and solidarity.

Our community is vibrant, growing, and deeply rooted in resilience. I'm truly honored to continue this journey under our new name. Together, we offer hope, a path to freedom, and a steady, warm reminder: no one has to walk alone.



WHO WE ARE

Qaravan (formerly known as RUSA LGBTQ+), headquartered in New York City, is a community-based, nonprofit organization of LGBTQ+ immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers and their allies, who come mostly from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Qaravan was formed as a grassroots group in 2008 and registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2022.

Qaravan provides informational support and mutual aid to asylum seekers and other immigrants in the United States and regularly hosts various gatherings and events to build a stronger community of LGBTQ+ immigrants and allies and increase our visibility and voice to promote the wider acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. and worldwide.

At the heart of our work is the goal of building and strengthening a vibrant, resilient community. Through community events, mutual aid initiatives, navigation services, and orientations, we unite LGBTQ+ immigrants, amplifying their visibility, voices, and rights. We are also committed to deepening Qaravan's expertise and capacity, ensuring that we not only deliver on our mission but also foster a stable, impactful, and sustainable organization poised for long-term success.



OUR PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Through various activities, we work towards building a more robust support system, a stronger community, and more effective advocacy for the rights of LGBTQ+ immigrants.

During 2022-2024, the number of Eurasian asylum seekers in the USA has increased exponentially. LGBTQ+ people from Russia and other post-Soviet countries seek asylum because everyone expressing LGBTQ+ identity, transgender people especially, in these countries has been oppressed through ongoing waves of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. In 2024, the Russian government both banned transgender medical care and designated the entire “international LGBTQ movement [to be] ‘extremist.’”

After the start of the Russian government’s aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the persecution of LGBTQ+ people greatly intensified in Russia. We have also embraced asylum seekers from Ukraine who are coming to the U.S. to seek safety from the war the Russian government waged against sovereign Ukraine in 2022.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Regular in-person community gatherings and events provide a safe space to welcome newcomers, build a sense of belonging, make friends, receive support, and learn. During events, we serve refreshments and distribute necessities like clothing and personal hygiene items. Guest speakers from nonprofit and public agencies join to present their services.

25-30 new participants join us each month, and our events have an attendance ranging from 15 to upwards of 200 people. Our annual Brighton Beach Pride attracts hundreds of participants.

Our social outings and art programs foster community engagement and provide opportunities for LGBTQ+ immigrants to connect and express themselves creatively, promoting social integration and overall well-being. Our community members—musicians, singers, painters, and drag artists—perform and present at the Brighton Beach Pride, World Refugee Day, and other events around the city.

In 2024, we organized over 100 community events, mostly in person. These included orientation, advocacy and community building, health and well-being events, information sessions, social and cultural gatherings and programs, volunteer trainings, and a winter coat distribution event.

In 2024, the Brooklyn Community Pride Center, Pier57 Community Classrooms, Coney Island USA, the Brooklyn Public Library, and NYC Pride donated the meeting spaces.









RAINBOW CONNECTIONS

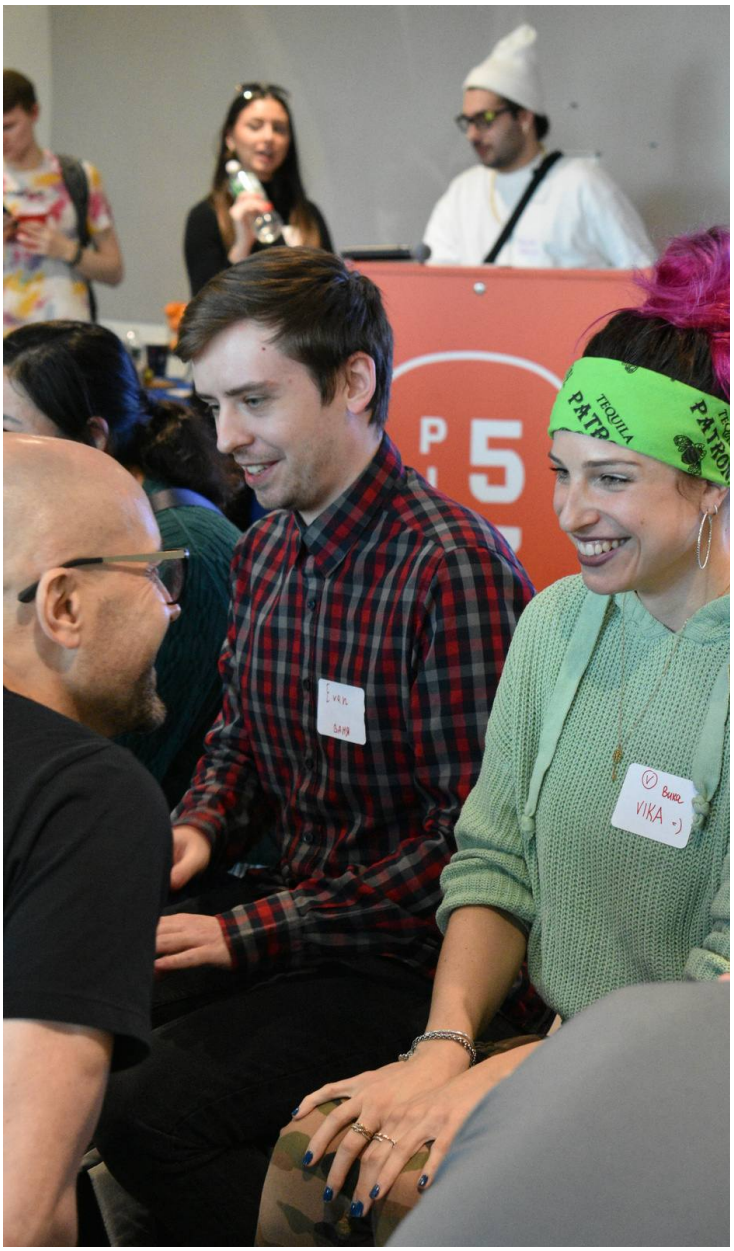
Rainbow Connections is our flagship initiative, relaunched and reimagined from its previous iterations in November 2023 in direct response to the increased needs of larger numbers of LGBTQ+ newcomers from post-Soviet countries and beyond. This program has quickly become a cornerstone of our community, offering vital support and fostering meaningful connections between local volunteers and LGBTQ+ immigrants.

At the heart of Rainbow Connections is a one-to-one pairing model, thoughtfully matching each newcomer with a dedicated volunteer. These pairs meet regularly, virtually and in person in public spaces, over six-month cycles, focusing on English language practice and orientation to life in the U.S. Through these relationships, participants gain not only language skills but also practical guidance on navigating daily life, accessing resources, and building social networks in their new home.



Rainbow Connections has grown to include over three dozen active pairs per cycle, with participants consistently reporting increased confidence, improved communication skills, and a greater sense of belonging. The program also serves as a platform for cultural exchange and peer support, allowing volunteers and newcomers alike to share experiences, celebrate diversity, and form lasting friendships. Rainbow Connections exemplifies Qaravan's mission to build a community of LGBTQ+ immigrants, empowering them with the tools and support they need to integrate into New York City and build their new lives.

Applications to volunteer and participate in Rainbow Connections are on our website.



HEALTH AND WELL-BEING PROGRAMS

HEALTH SERVICES NAVIGATION

In 2024, we referred over 500 health-related cases to the NYU Langone LGBTQ program and other specialized programs, providers, and clinics with the help of our volunteer LGBTQ+ healthcare navigator. We work with trusted partners to make personal referrals for health insurance navigation, medical appointments, obtaining emergency medications and treatments, and finding culturally appropriate health and mental healthcare.





PEER SUPPORT GROUPS



To address the critical shortage of bilingual mental health services, we have created safe, welcoming peer support groups where LGBTQ+ immigrants can connect and share in their native languages. These groups offer a compassionate space for participants to openly discuss their challenges, seek guidance, and receive emotional support, all led by volunteer facilitators who are themselves immigrants and bring expertise in case management, psychology, and art therapy.

In 2024, our efforts expanded to include two vital groups: a dedicated mental health support group and a peer support group specifically for transgender individuals, both meeting regularly to foster resilience, understanding, and community healing.



SOCIAL SERVICES NAVIGATION

We address health, safety, food, and clothing issues, ensuring individuals receive the necessary support and resources. Led by coordinators, graduate social work interns, and a team of trained volunteers, Qaravan has advocated for the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals residing in shelters and neighborhoods.

We refer our community members to trusted social and healthcare services and English classes, providing accompaniments and interpretation. In 2024, we assisted over 1,000 LGBTQ+ immigrants in accessing social and other services such as NYC HRA (Human Resources Administration) and HASA (HIV/AIDS Services Administration), and also IDNYC, banks, and legal services by providing personal accompaniment, interpretation, and personalized referrals.

We moderate an online chat channel where we share resources, exchange advice, and answer questions. In partnership with RIF Asylum Support and SAFE Asylum, we referred LGBTQ+ immigrants to free and trusted legal resources.

INFORMATION GUIDES

We have created and are constantly updating an extensive information guide for our community members and volunteers on the immigration process, housing, public benefits, English classes, higher education, and career resources, among other information requested by the community. The community-created and translated guides are currently in three languages, and the latest versions are posted on our website.



EMERGENCY CASH ASSISTANCE AND OTHER MUTUAL AID

We coordinated emergency cash assistance and other mutual aid to LGBTQ+ immigrants who faced hardship. We raised these funds from other immigrants in the community, allies, and supporters. We collected and distributed over $10,000 in 2024, providing $50-$200 per person to asylum seekers in crisis.







We also conducted clothing and household item drives. We partnered with the First Presbyterian Church for a coat distribution event. Additionally, we partnered with Ruth's Refuge, which delivers new furniture, household items, and air conditioners to refugees who move from shelters into apartments

OUR ADVOCACY AND PRESS COVERAGE

We advocate for our community through mass media appearances, commentary, and partnership building, and we join organizations and coalitions to better advocate for all immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, LGBTQ+ populations, low-income families, and other New Yorkers.

We participate in NYC Pride, NYC borough Prides, and immigrant and LGBTQ providers' coalitions and networks. In 2024, Qaravan was featured in at least 20 TV programs, newspapers, and online mass media.

We meet with local elected officials to work together on better supporting LGBTQ+ immigrants.



BRIGHTON BEACH PRIDE PARADE

Qaravan organizes the annual Brighton Beach Pride. Brighton Beach Pride is our flagship community and advocacy event. This celebration of LGBTQ+ identity and diversity brings the community together, raises awareness, and promotes inclusivity, especially in southern Brooklyn.

On May 19, 2024, it was our eighth parade. Hundreds of people, immigrants and allies, paraded our banners and flags from Coney Island to Brighton Beach on the Riegelmann Boardwalk under this year's theme, "Our Love is not Extremism." Ann Northrop, an activist and journalist who co-hosts "Gay USA," and Adam Eli, a founder of Voices4, along with several other community leaders, spoke at the rally.

Gay City News and several local bloggers and outlets covered the event.




UKRAINE
ПУТИНА
ВОЙНЫ
Brighton


Brighton Pride
ЛЮБОВЬ -
НЕ ЭКСТРЕМИЗМ
This is Love
© dinara khairova

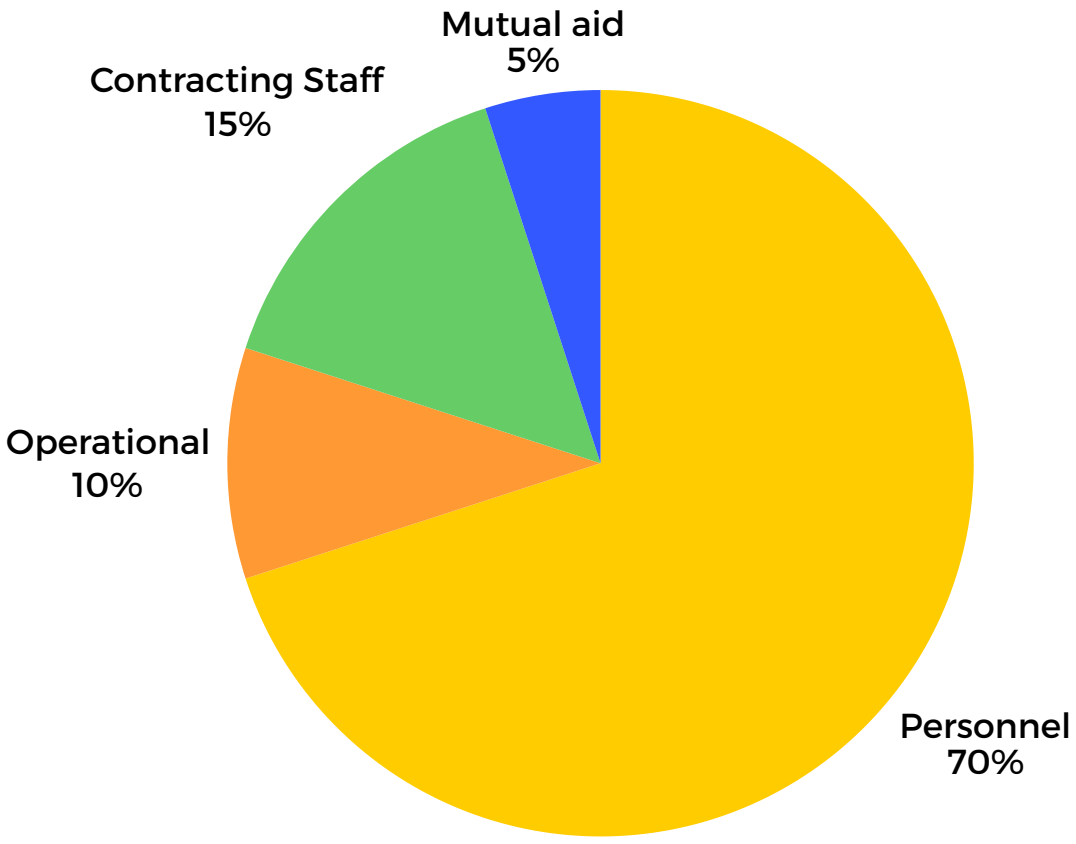

Brighton
Beach
Pride


Brighton
Beach
Pride
ЛЮБОВЬ -
НЕ ЭКСТРЕМИЗМ

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

In 2024, the total cash expenses were $83,000. We spent 70% of this on personnel: two part-time coordinators. Other board members and core volunteers contributed substantial time and expertise in kind. Our operational expenses were 10% of our budget, which included food for community events, printing, website and communication tools subscriptions, and membership fees.

We also engaged professionals for short-term projects and support, spending 15% on independent contracts. We distributed mutual aid in cash and computers, household items, clothes, and hygiene items (5% of our cash budget plus in-kind donations) to our community members who experienced financial and health hardship.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

In 2024, our funding did not cover our basic expenses. Qaravan received its funding from private foundations ($40,000) and individual donations ($6,000). We extensively rely on in-kind contributions from our volunteers and partners, with an estimated value of $250,000 received in donated time, space, and goods.



Received from private foundations	Received in donated time, space, and goods	Received from individual donations
$40,000	$250,000	$6,000

OUR TEAM



Yelena Goltsman, she/her

FOUNDER, BOARD PRESIDENT



Ezra Abdullabekov, he/him

BOARD VICE PRESIDENT



Alexandr Trifonov, he/him

BOARD MEMBER



Tanzilya Saleemjan, she/her

BOARD MEMBER, ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (JANUARY-MAY 2024)

BOARD



Enver Latifzade, he/him

TREASURER



Dante Matero, he/him

BOARD SECRETARY



Lyosha Gorshkov, no pronouns

BOARD MEMBER, BRIGHTON BEACH PRIDE FOUNDER

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Amin Yakubov, he/him, Board Observer

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COORDINATOR



Maxim Ibadov, they/them/fab

COORDINATOR





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Aleksandr Grigorev, he/him

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Gina Rafikova, she/her

PEER SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR

Samantha Shokin, she/her, fundraising and copyediting consultant



BIG THANK YOU TO ALL 2024 VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS!

Sabina D., Olga M., Lilu G., Olga V., Arsen, Mika, Liza, Stas, Timur, Maksim G., Yerk, Dmitrii K., Ekaterina D., Victoria, Aleksei I., Daria, Mila, Elena F. (MSW intern), Nadia, Vadim, Matvey, Assel, Zulfia, all 50 volunteers in Rainbow Connections, and many, many other community members—volunteers who help organize events and social outings, give advice, and navigate new members in NYC and in other cities!

SUPPORTER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank our funders:

WSCF

NYC PRIDE

AYCO CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Statue Foundation Inc

Qaravan is extremely grateful for in-kind donations of meeting space, supplies, clothes, furniture, and services by these organizations:

SAFE

NYU Langone Health

RIF ASYLUM SUPPORT

Materials for the Arts | New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

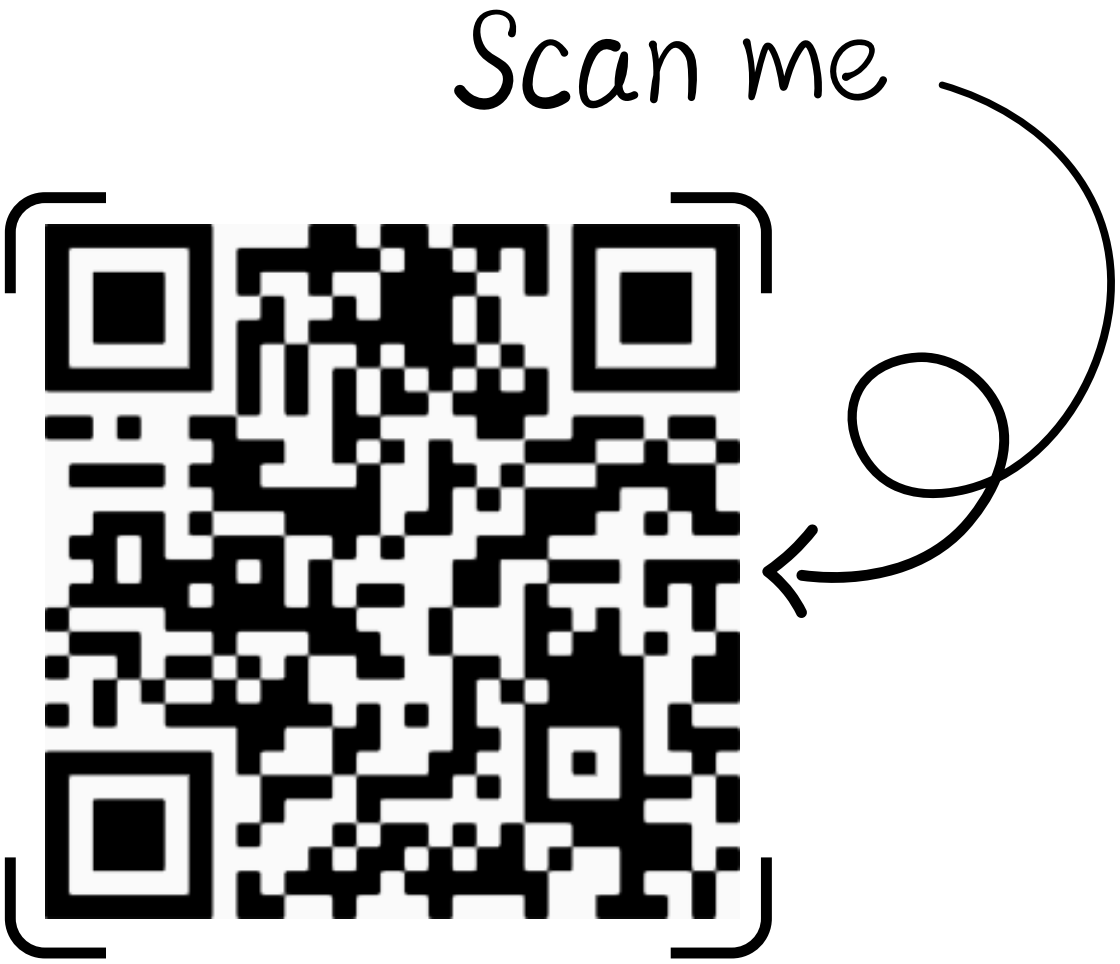
Beit Simchat Torah CONGREGATION
קהלה קדושה בית שמחת תורה

RIVERSIDE Immigrant Services & Empowerment

CONEY ISLAND U.S.A. PRESENTS

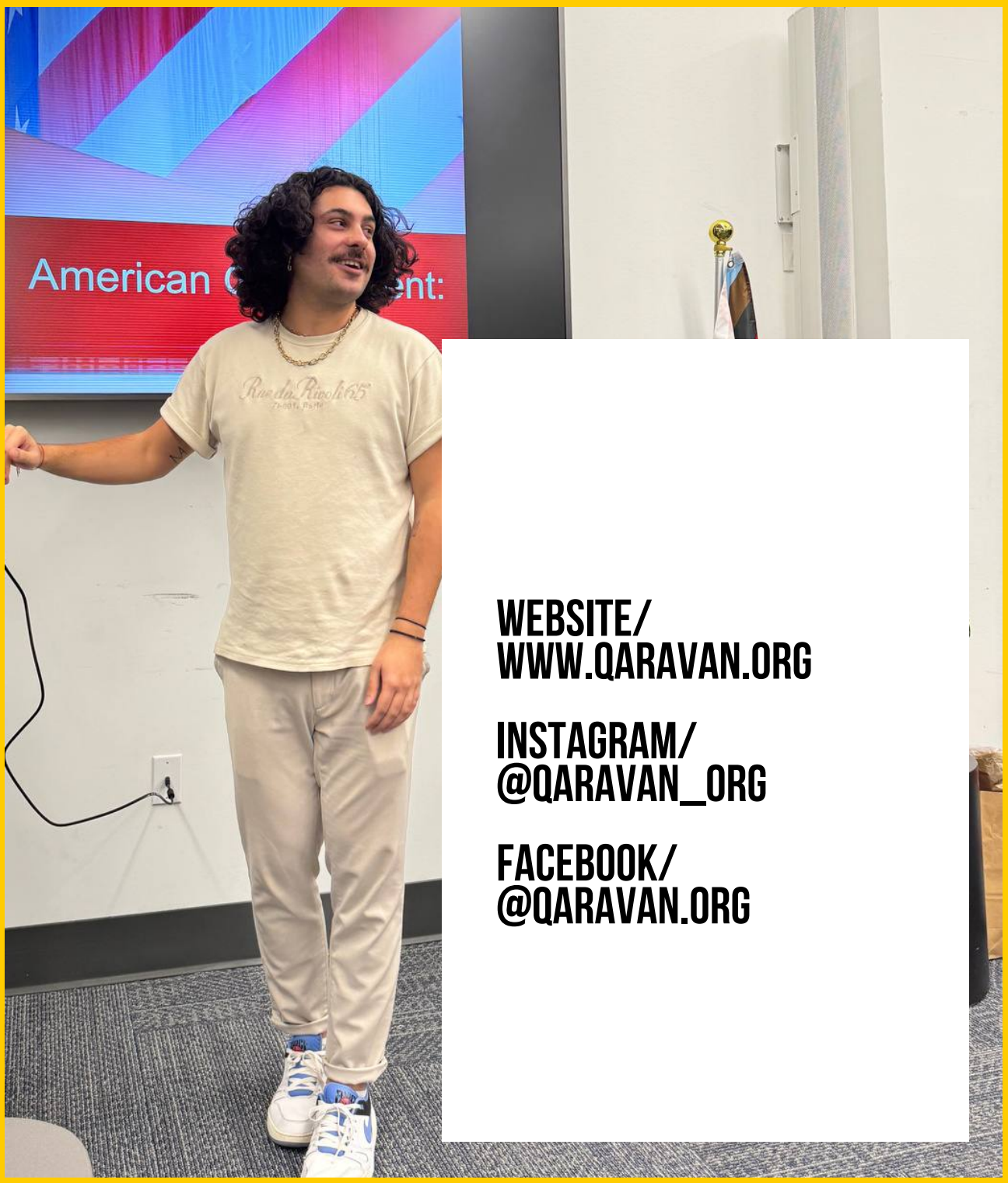
And all individual donors and contributors! Thank you!

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ВМЕСТЕ ПРОТИВ ВОЙНЫ
DESIGN BY VASILII SIDOROV (JASON)