qaravan

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



JAN
Watercolor workshop



FEB
Résumé workshop



MAR
Female Queer Perspectives

APR

Immigration Q&A



MAY
Brighton Beach Pride



JUN
NYC Pride march

JUL

Beach volleyball



AUG
Central Park picnic



SEP
Education in the USA

OCT

Job Ready workshop



NOV
Group hike

DEC

Holiday drag party

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

2025 tested us. In late January, new federal orders took aim at immigrants, asylum seekers, and transgender people — the heart of our community. We responded the only way we could: by organizing legal training with our partners at SAFE and ensuring our community members had the knowledge and resources to defend themselves in the face of an unprecedented assault on their rights.

QARAVAN is a group of LGBTQ+ immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, on the journey together toward safety and dignity. Over the course of the year, we held 93 events, roughly one every four days. Our core programs served 485 people, and 25 to 30 newcomers joined us each month. Dozens found a volunteer partner for English practice and a first friend in a new country. Hundreds of us marched at our ninth Brighton Beach Pride.

When four of our members were in crisis, the community stepped up and, chipping in what they could, raised the funds to help them through difficult times. We also stood beside people in detention with legal funding, translations, and letters of support, helping bring members home.

Our work, while not flashy, is absolutely critical. It makes a tangible, meaningful difference in people's lives.

You made it happen this year! Every donor, every volunteer, everyone who came to our events.

We are on this journey together. Join us.



Yelena Goltsman (she/her)

Founder & President, QARAVAN

Photo: Dinara Khairova

2025 IMPACT

2025 in numbers

485
participants served in core programs, FY2025 program year

~500
participants at the ninth Brighton Beach Pride

25–30
new participants each month, on average, FY2025

109
program sessions and gatherings

100
participants in Rainbow Connections, FY2025

93
distinct events in 2025

68
letters of support for asylum cases

155
inquiries received through qaravan.org

46
new winter coats distributed

7,800+ messages exchanged by more than 420 community chat members

Participation: FY2025 (July 2024–June 2025). Attendance and activity counts are estimates.
Chat: late 2024–late 2025. Detention stories include releases in early 2026.

ABOUT QARAVAN

QARAVAN (formerly RUSA LGBTQ+) is a New York-based nonprofit serving LGBTQ+ immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. We organize events, provide peer support, help members access services, and advocate for LGBTQ+ immigrants' rights.

THE NAME

QARAVAN, the name our community adopted as it grew beyond its origins, means what it says: a caravan traveling together toward safety and dignity.

2008 Founded in New York City as RUSA LGBTQ+, growing from a Brighton Beach circle into a citywide community.

February 2025 QARAVAN earned the Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency.

June 2025 NYC Pride selected us as one of 11 nonprofits citywide for its Pride Gives Back grant.



Participants at Brighton Beach Pride, May 10

WINTER

The year opened with ice skating at Wollman Rink and closed January with an emergency know-your-rights briefing, organized with SAFE Asylum within days of the new federal orders.

February brought a résumé workshop, stress-resilience training with psychiatrist Konstantin Boykov, and weekly Drag Race watch parties at Coney Island USA and the Workshop of Inspiration.



Ice skating at Wollman Rink, January 10, 2025.

SPRING

March was our busiest month, with 19 gatherings, including the Female Queer Perspectives exhibition for Women's Month. April activities included an immigration Q&A and a picnic at Sheep's Meadow.

In May, sign-making sessions preceded the ninth Brighton Beach Pride on the Riegelmann Boardwalk. Roughly 500 people marched under the slogan "No Hate, No Fear" in support of trans and non-binary immigrants.

Brighton Beach Pride #9 on the Riegelmann Boardwalk, May 10



BRIGHTON BEACH PRIDE #9

Brighton Beach Pride

Brighton Beach Pride brought LGBTQ+ immigrants and allies to the Riegelmann Boardwalk for our ninth annual march.

Activist Randy Wicker spoke, the Rude Mechanical Orchestra performed, and marchers carried a banner naming their countries of origin.



The Rude Mechanical Orchestra and Shana Knizhnik of ACLU.



SUMMER AND FALL

SUMMER

At NYC Pride on June 29, we marched for trans immigrants' rights. We shared resources at GayRidge Pride, played beach volleyball and gathered about 60 people for a Central Park picnic on August 23. Ainur Tleubay led a sunrise hike.

FALL

Education in the USA brought 40 participants to Pier 57 on September 22. The October 10 Job Ready session for trans people had 11 participants.

October Help Desk sessions offered private consultations on available services. We met attorney Galina Devita on October 11.

On October 10, 18 people joined tea and board games. Other activities included hikes in August and October, Lilu Goncharova's Awita exhibition, and letter-writing with RusReFund to Ukrainians held in Russian captivity.

DECEMBER

The Annual Holiday Party at HUSH featured Keeana Kee and Maxxxim, hosted by Svetlana Stoli and Olga Between Worlds. Early-bird tickets cost $5.





Central Park picnics and Medical in the U.S. Q&A at CBST

COAT DRIVE, NOVEMBER 1, 2025

Winter coat drive

Together with our friends and volunteers at The First Presbyterian Church, we distributed 46 new winter coats on November 1. People tried them on, traded sizes, and stayed for coffee and pie.





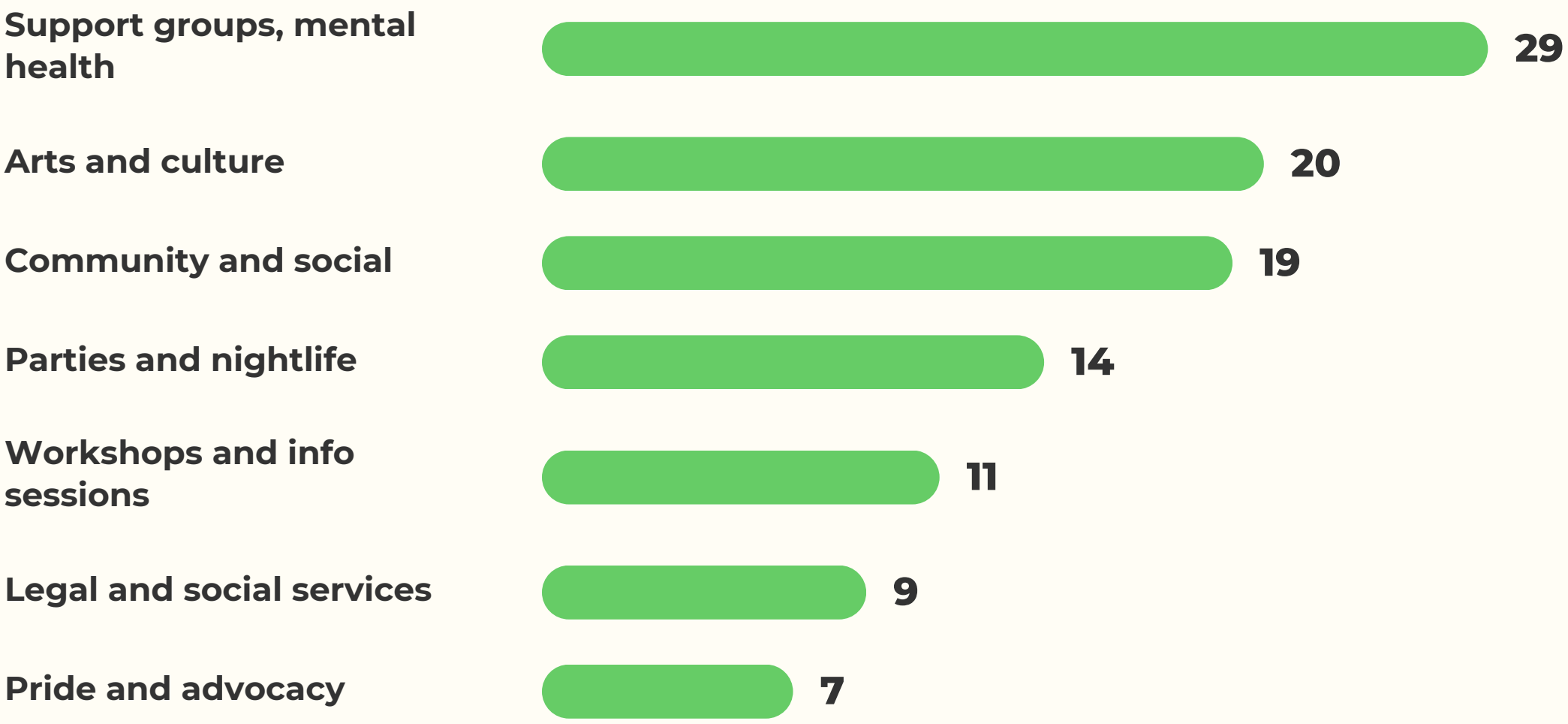
THANKSGIVING AT CBST

Thanksgiving at CBST

Around 60 people joined our Thanksgiving dinner at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) in November, with live music by one of our members. For many, it was their first Thanksgiving in the United States. We thank CBST for hosting the dinner.

PROGRAM ACTIVITY

Program sessions in 2025



Approximate recorded sessions by program area: 109 total.
March (19 gatherings) and October (14) were our busiest months.
Counts reflect event records and public announcements.

Following the federal policy changes in late January, we made immigration support a priority, with know-your-rights sessions, attorney consultations, and deportation preparedness.



SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Peer mental health and TGNC support

Bilingual peer groups with Regina (Gina) Rafikova and Simon Shterenberg, clinician-led therapy, and health navigation with Alex Trifonov. Ten therapy sessions ran in February-April. The February-June anti-violence program for trans and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) members held 26 group sessions for 23 people and made 13 referrals to legal, housing, and health services. Therapy paused in August-October and resumed November 16.

Rainbow Connections

About 100 people took part in FY2025. Newcomers met with volunteers for six months of English practice, companionship and orientation. By September 2025, 25–30 pairs and group activities had reached over 60 people. Venues included CBST, Kane Street Synagogue, Pier 57 and Central Park. Volunteers also trained in emotional support, cultural sensitivity and burnout prevention.

Gatherings and online support

QARAVAN held gatherings at CBST with tea, board games, and guest speakers. We also distributed clothing and personal care supplies. Members used QARAVAN Connects, our Telegram community, to seek help and stay in touch. From August to October, we published 18 Instagram posts and received 108 direct inquiries through Instagram and other online channels.

WOMEN'S INITIATIVES AND COMMUNITY CIRCLES

We held the Female Queer Perspectives exhibition in March. A women's group also met separately. About 20 members from Central Asia, most from Uzbekistan, with others from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, formed their own circle in 2025. They kept in touch daily and celebrated a birthday together. Many were not ready to be visible or join larger gatherings.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

“Thank you so much for the support and the advice, it means a lot to me. I feel that I am not alone, and that gives me strength.”

A COMMUNITY MEMBER PREPARING FOR AN ASYLUM INTERVIEW, JUNE 10, 2025

“Sometimes it is so important to hear kind words in a moment of despair. If anyone wants to know what questions they asked at the interview, I would be glad to share and help others.”

A COMMUNITY MEMBER, AFTER PRE-INTERVIEW SUPPORT, MAY 19, 2025

“I want to thank the people who have helped me and my husband, the world needs more people like you.”

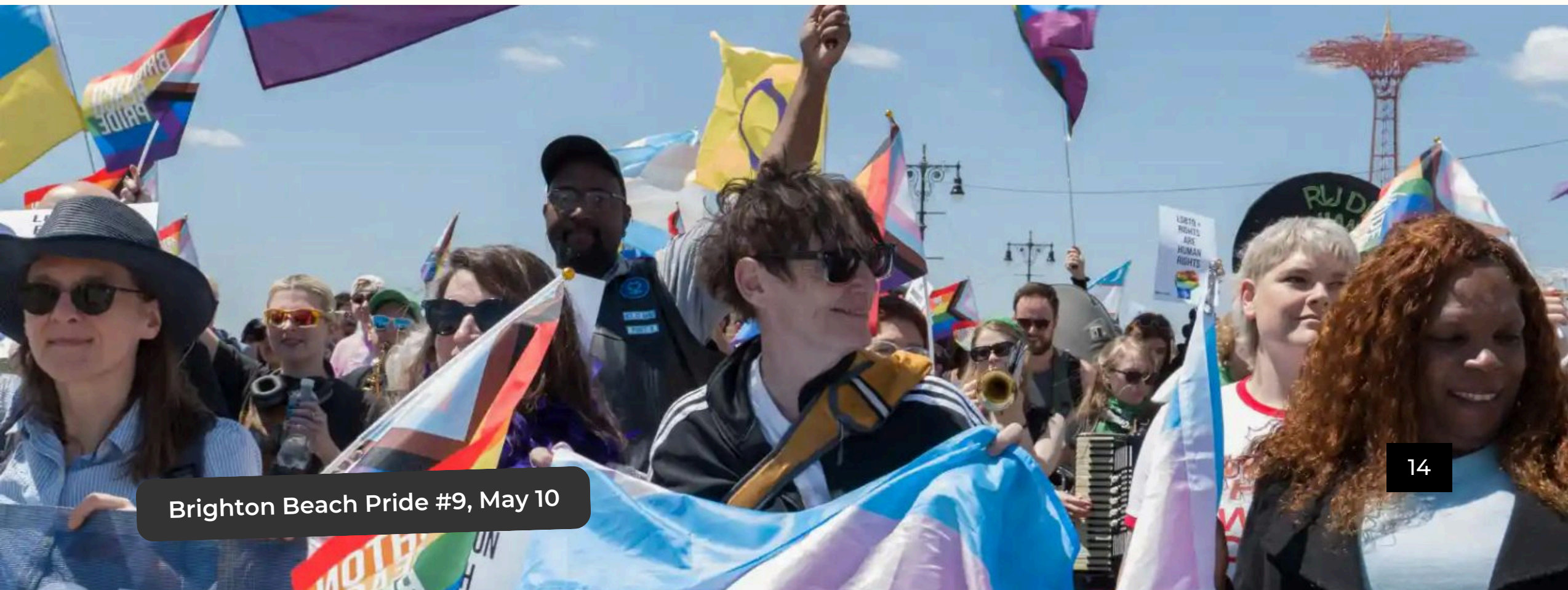
SANDRA, JANUARY 19, 2025

“Walking through Central Park with the little frog I knitted, saying a huge thank-you for a wonderful workshop. Already waiting for the next one.”

SASHA, AFTER A KNITTING WORKSHOP WITH LIZA MASODOVA, MARCH 22, 2025

“Thank you for organizing the picnic, I was so glad to see old friends and meet new ones!”

HAMZA, AUGUST 23, 2025



Brighton Beach Pride #9, May 10

MUTUAL AID

Emergency assistance

The community raised funds through four emergency campaigns to support members facing deportation, detention, and a cancer diagnosis. We limit the personal details shared about these campaigns to protect members' privacy.

THE EVERYDAY WORK

13 families moved from one home to another, with the essential furniture and food delivered to those who needed it

Provided seven new mattresses and several air conditioners.

Provided Christmas trees for two families with children.

Suitcases and boxes stored for members living in shelters, until they had a place of their own

Documents translated and notarized by volunteers: birth certificates, records, case files

Helped members find paid project work.

By September, more than $2,000 in emergency cash assistance had helped members meet urgent needs, alongside food, medicine, and emergency legal support.







DETENTION SUPPORT

Support for members in detention

QARAVAN supported members in detention by funding legal defense, translating documents, gathering evidence, and preparing letters of support. Draft board minutes reviewing our 2025 work report that Chingiz was released after QARAVAN funded legal support for his master hearing. Our support for Nikita and Katya continued into 2026, when their releases were reported. We also wrote 68 letters for asylum cases, documenting country conditions and the risks members faced if they're deported against their will. Assistance with beds and documents continued after release.

Katya

Katya, a 26-year-old biotechnologist and LGBTQ+ activist, spent 21 months detained in Louisiana. She won protection from deportation in February 2025 but remained detained. QARAVAN found a pro bono lawyer for part of her case; volunteers translated evidence. Russian Seattle for Freedom raised funds for the habeas lawyer. By March 29, 2026, QARAVAN reported that she was free.

"I'm finally out - all thanks to your support and help. You can't even imagine how deeply grateful I am to each and every one of you."

Nikita

Nikita fled Russia with his partner in 2022 after years of persecution. ICE detained him in Brooklyn in April 2025; in September an immigration judge ordered him removed. His partner and QARAVAN supported his case for almost a year. A community fundraising campaign covered attorney's fees, and a habeas corpus petition challenged his continued detention. Nikita was released on February 25, 2026. His immigration case remained ongoing.

Volunteers also provided Russian–English interpretation at RIF Asylum Support's Thursday legal consultations.

LGBTQ+ RIGHTS, 2025

COUNTRY CONDITIONS FOR LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

In 2025, LGBTQ+ people across Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus faced criminalization, censorship, and threats to their safety. These are the conditions many of our members fled.

RUSSIA

By the end of 2025, at least 23 criminal “extremism” cases had been opened over LGBTQ+ activity. In November, a Moscow court convicted travel organizer Andrei Kotov posthumously: he had died in custody in December 2024. In December 2025, three people were placed under house arrest for private queer parties, and activist Sasha Kazantseva was sentenced in absentia to nine years.

KAZAKHSTAN

The president signed a ban on so-called “LGBT propaganda” on December 30, 2025, after parliamentary approval in November and December. The law restricted LGBTQ+ expression despite objections from Kazakh and international human rights groups. Its implementation followed in 2026.

UZBEKISTAN

Article 120 continued to criminalize consensual sexual conduct between men. Human Rights Watch reported that a local rights group documented at least 16 people prosecuted under that article in 2025. Many QARAVAN members are from Uzbekistan.

KYRGYZSTAN, GEORGIA AND TURKMENISTAN

Kyrgyzstan adopted restrictions on LGBTQ+ information in 2023; Georgia adopted broad anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in 2024. These remained part of the regional context in 2025. Turkmenistan continued to criminalize consensual sexual conduct between men.

Our asylum support letters document relevant country conditions and the risks members face if they’re deported against their will.

Sources: Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; Kazakhstan’s Adilet legal database.
Linked references and evidence limits are in the accompanying source-check document.

ADVOCACY AND MEDIA COVERAGE

INPUT ON CITY POLICY

With support from the NYC Commission on Racial Equity, we held discussions on October 4, 13, 20, and 22, with approximately 100 participants. We discussed rights, equality, and participation in city policymaking. We submitted survey responses to the city to inform programs and resource decisions.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

On April 19, volunteers attended a four-hour training on stress and burnout.

ADVOCACY

In January, we issued a statement opposing the new executive orders. In March and April, we shared posts on trans rights and visibility. Our Pride theme was “Stand Up for Trans Immigrants’ Rights,” and members joined citywide demonstrations, including on June 14.

IN THE PRESS

PinkNews coverage, March; Gay City News features, May; CBS News feature, June; and Resisting Project 2025 spotlight, May.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

QARAVAN was invited to the Mayor’s LGBTQ+ Pride Reception at Gracie Mansion. Our coordinator, Maxim Ibadov, was appointed to Brooklyn Community Board 13.



Thanksgiving at CBST

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

~$57K

2025 income, up 24% from ~$46K in 2024

~$69K

2025 expenses, down from ~$80K in 2024.
Largest category: salaries and stipends



Based on preliminary figures, income increased from approximately $46,000 in 2024 to $57,000 in 2025, while expenses decreased from approximately $80,000 to $69,000. Expenses exceeded income by approximately $12,000 in 2025. These figures are pending final review.

PLATINUM

QARAVAN holds the Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency, earned in February 2025.

Approximate figures per the Treasurer’s report to the board, June 2026, pending final review.

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

BACKED BY BROOKLYN ORG

NYC PRIDE

NEW YORK STATE | Office of Mental Health

NYC Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes

NYC Commission on Racial Equity

New York City Council

WSCF WEST SIDE COMMUNITY FUND

AYCO CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Thank you to the organizations that shared their expertise, hosted our programs and supported our work in 2025.

IMMIGRATION AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT

SAFE Asylum
Immigration Pro Se Legal Clinic partnership

RIF Asylum Support
Asylum information and support

Brooklyn Defender Services
Immigration support documentation

PROGRAM SPACES

Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST)

Kane Street Synagogue

Pier 57 / Hudson River Park

Brooklyn Community Pride Center

Coney Island USA

NYC Pride / Heritage of Pride

ARTS AND LEARNING

Hunter College's Russian and East European Cultures program and the Tamizdat Project
Film screening collaboration

Awita New York Gallery
Exhibition space

PRIDE AND OUTREACH

PFLAG NYC

National Queer Theater

GayRidge

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts
Outreach and collaboration around Pride

Rude Mechanical Orchestra
Music at Brighton Beach Pride

WE ALSO THANK

Legal Services NYC, NYU Langone, Riverside Language Program, Emma's Torch, CAMBA, International Rescue Committee, Ruth's Refuge, NYC Commission on Racial Equity, MyBiblioteka, Russian Refugee Foundation, Feminist Anti-War Resistance, Memorial, Russian Seattle for Freedom and First Presbyterian Church.

THANK YOU, DONORS

Thank you to our individual donors and recurring supporters. Your gifts helped pay for gatherings, practical assistance and legal representation for members in detention.

Ezra Abdullabekov
Karl A Afrikian
Brian Paul Allen
Dari Badmaeva
Vladislav Balin
Sonya Bandouil
Nathaniel Brenner
Bethany Cale
Ekaterina Chilina
Elizabeth Dzul
Barbara Eisold
Aleksei Ekimovskii
Olga Ermolova
Oleh Fazelianov
Deborah Friedman
Juan Garcia
Maksim Gavriliuk
Yelena Goltsman
Bruce Goumain
Matvei Groznykh
Georgii Gulunov
Diane Hayes
Aleksei Igumnov
Mark Kaiserman
Alina Koroleva
Natalia Kovaleva
Elena Kozhukhova
Violetta Kozhukhova
Katsiaryna Landziuk
Mikhail Ludkov
Olga Mamaeva
Nancy Meyer
Alexander Nabatov
Tcira Nikolishvili
Tanzilya Oren
Darya Oreshkina
Hadley Perry
Rustem Rakhimzhanov
Haley Rist
Jonathan Rodkin
Mikhail Sinev
Donna Spiegelman
Michael Thompson
Peter Trevino
Ekaterina Vasileva
William Vaughn
Mikhail Volf
Roberta Wemple
Nina Zaretsky
Galina Zbarskaya
Deborah Zum

And to everyone who gave anonymously: thank you.

Names are listed alphabetically by last name.

BOARD AND PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Yelena Goltsman
President

Ezra Abdullabekov
Vice-President

Enver Latifzade
Treasurer

Dante Matero
Secretary

Tanzilya Oren
Board Member

Lieb Fischbach
Board Member

Lyosha Gorshkov
Board Member

Alex Trifonov
Board Member

Maxim Ibadov
Board Member

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Olga Mamaeva
Program Director

Aleksandr Grigorev (Alex)
Assistant Coordinator

Maxim Ibadov
National Coordinator through May 2026; also Pride Organizer

Alex Trifonov
Health Coordinator

Regina (Gina) Rafikova
Support-group facilitator

Simon Shterenberg
Support-group facilitator

VOLUNTEERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Thank you to everyone who gave their time to welcome newcomers, coordinate programs, translate documents and organize events in 2025.

Aleksei Igumnov
Volunteer recruitment and coordination

Elena Fennell
Rainbow Connections matching and follow-up

Daria Ashikhmina
Female Queer Perspectives curation

Jason Sidorov
Communications and Pride preparation

Ainur Tleubay
Group hikes

Aleksandr Sabirov
Community Assistance & Support

Ekaterina Dostovalova
Rainbow Connections coordination

Sabina Dzhabbarova
Events and Pride preparation

Lilu Goncharova
Arts workshops and events

Liza Masodova
Knitting workshops

Arsen Sattar Abeu
Community Member Support

Maksim Gavriliuk
Pride preparation



Rainbow Connections gathering. From QARAVAN's September 2025 photo collection.

BRIGHTON BEACH PRIDE TEAM

Thank you to everyone who planned our ninth Brighton Beach Pride, welcomed participants, prepared banners and publicity, performed, helped with setup and cleanup, and documented the day.

ORGANIZING TEAM

Yelena Goltsman

Olga Mamaeva

Aleksandr Grigorev

Maxim Ibadov

Tanzilya Oren

Lieb Fischbach

Aleksei Igumnov

PRIDE PREPARATION

Ekaterina Dostovalova

Sabina Dzhabbarova

Jason Sidorov

Kirill Sannikov

Maksim Gavriliuk

PHOTOGRAPHY

Dinara Khairova

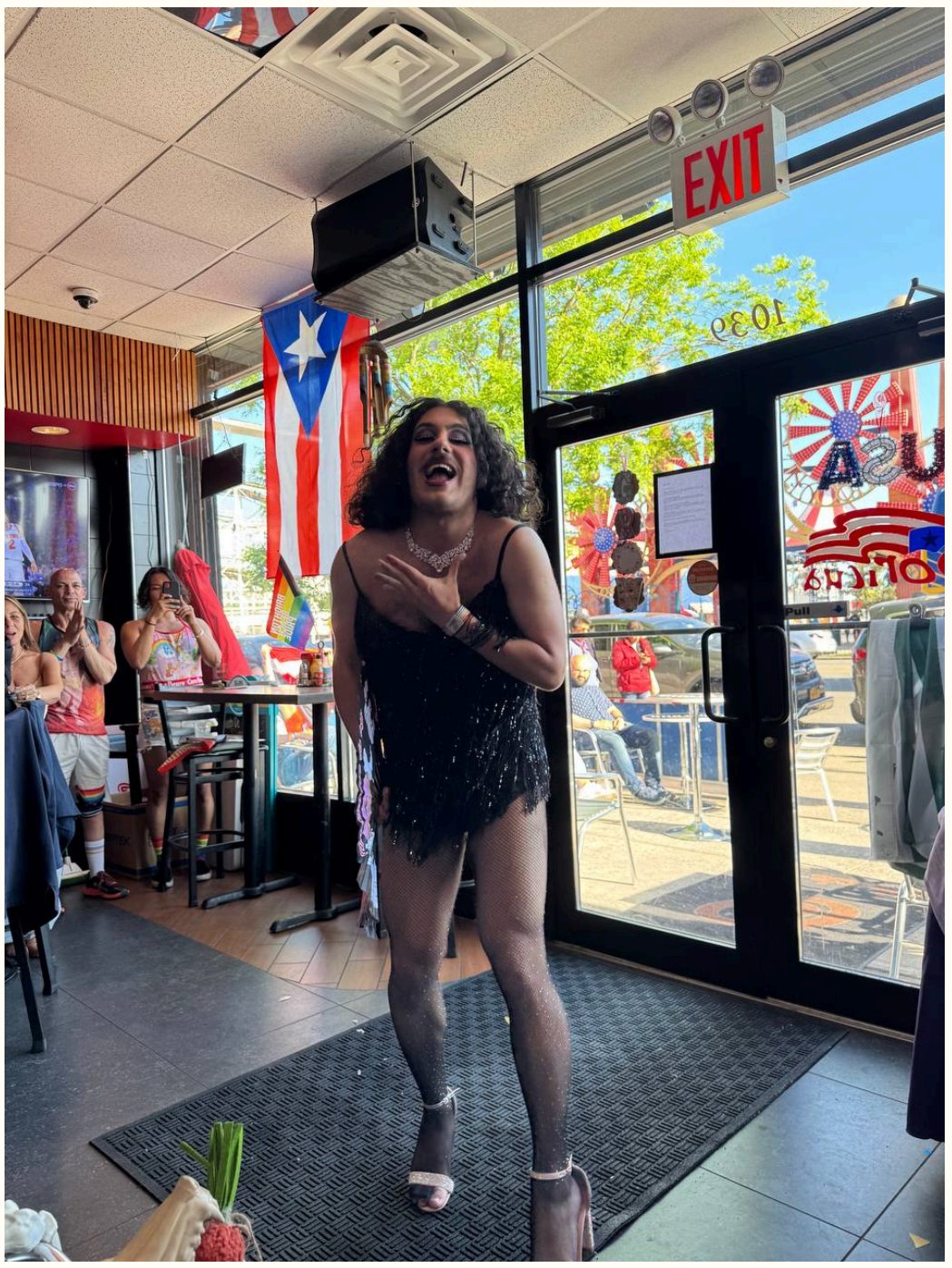
Stas Ginzburg / Liberation Archives



Brighton Beach Pride, May 10, 2025. From QARAVAN's report photo archive.

PARTIES AND DRAG

In 2025, we held a Brighton Beach Pride afterparty and a December holiday party with drag performers, DJs and hosts.



Pride weekend drag celebration, May 2025. From QARAVAN's photo archive.

BRIGHTON BEACH PRIDE AFTERPARTY

May 10, 2025
Buck-It Bar, Coney Island

After the ninth Brighton Beach Pride on May 10, participants gathered at Buck-It Bar on Surf Avenue for an afterparty with DJs and drag performances.

HOLIDAY AND NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

December 12, 2025 | HUSH, Manhattan

Svetlana Stoli and Olga Between Worlds hosted our holiday party, with Keeana Kee and Maxxxim. Early-bird tickets were $5. The invitation featured drag, contests, and music, with free entry for newcomers, asylum seekers, and people facing financial hardship.

SUPPORT QARAVAN

Help LGBTQ+ immigrants get the support they need.

Your gift helps QARAVAN provide food, mattresses, and emergency financial assistance. It also helps pay for legal defense for members in detention and gatherings where newcomers can meet people and find support.

Small, regular donations go a long way.

Choose a monthly amount that works for you. Regular gifts help us plan ahead and respond to requests for help throughout the year. One-time gifts are welcome, too.

Donate to QARAVAN

givebutter.com/qaravan

Scan to donate.

QARAVAN Connects, our Telegram community

@qaravanconnects



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

qaravan.org