LIBERTY IN NORTH KOREA

2017 ANNUAL REPORT
We believe the North Korean people will achieve their liberty in our lifetime.
North Korea is the most repressive and closed country in the world. For decades, 25 million North Korean people have been repressed, stifled, and isolated.

But there is hope.

While the rest of the world focuses on politics and Kim Jong-un, the North Korean people are changing their country from the bottom up and challenging the status quo. And these social and economic changes are irreversible and are eroding the regime’s power. It is impossible to know when, or how, the North Korean people will achieve their liberty, but we believe that the North Korean people are one of the best solutions to this problem.

Working with the North Korean people to accelerate change and opening in the world’s most closed country
01

Refugee Rescues

We rescue North Korean refugees because of the humanitarian imperative and also because of their incredible potential as agents of change.

Our rescue route gives North Koreans who escape the country safe passage to freedom.

02

Empowering Resettled North Koreans

Empowered North Koreans are some of the most effective advocates and changemakers accelerating progress on this issue.

We invest in the long-term ambitions, potential, and strength of the North Korean people.

03

Changing the Narrative on North Korea

When the focus is on the North Korean people and not just the politics, it humanizes the issue and mobilizes international support.

We work with North Korean defectors to develop new ways of understanding the issue, and through our own media and engaging with international journalists we bring attention to the North Korean people.
"I decided to come out knowing that I was risking my life. Whether I died in the country or on my way out...I would have died anyways. Now that I know it's not impossible to come out I want to bring the rest of my family out."

— Gim Sung
Resettled through LiNK in 2017
They face the constant threat of being arrested and repatriated. Using a 3,000-mile secret rescue route, we help North Korean refugees safely reach freedom.

“I noticed a plainclothes police officer was following me. I can’t imagine what would have happened if I had been arrested and repatriated... I dropped all my belongings right where I was standing and ran without looking back.”

— Soo Ah
Safely resettled through LiNK in 2017

“It was two hours past midnight, and I was on the run from my Chinese husband with my children. I don’t know what we would have done or where we would have gone if it wasn’t for you [LiNK].”

— Chung Ha
Resettled with her children through LiNK in 2017
2017 was one of the most difficult years in decades for North Korean refugees in China.

“Starting in July, China appears to have intensified its crackdown on groups of North Koreans trying to move through China in search of protection in a third country, and on the networks of people that facilitate their escape.”

— Human Rights Watch, Sept 18, 2017

Despite these extreme challenges, we rescued 154 people

106 females
48 males
30 children

2017 rescues
total rescues

2010 – 2017

746
Ages (years)

Data through the end of 2017

- 0: 1%
- <10: 6%
- 10-19: 12%
- 20-29: 26%
- 30-39: 22%
- 40-49: 16%
- 50-59: 12%
- >60: 5%

Gender

- 240 male
- 506 female
Where They Come From

*Hometown/birth city data was not provided by all rescued individuals

- **JAGANG**: 6
- **NORTH PYONGAN**: 11
- **SOUTH PYONGAN**: 12
- ** PYONGYANG**: 11
- **SOUTH HWANGHAE**: 9
- **RYANGGANG**: 284
- **NORTH HAMGYEONG**: 232
- **SOUTH HAMGYEONG**: 35
- **GANGWON**: 12
- **NORTH HWANGHAE**: 5
reunited with family
"I have become a pioneer of freedom to my family back in North Korea."

Social change in North Korea is driven by grassroots marketization and increased access to foreign information. Many North Koreans who safely resettle re-establish contact with their family and friends back home, which is vital to accelerating change. Here’s how:
From Refugee to Agent of Change

Information from the outside world challenges the regime’s propaganda and erodes ideologies — especially when this information is coming from a trusted family member or friend.

Resettled refugees relay insights and information to their home communities

Tens of thousands

Estimated number of illicit phone calls made between North Korean refugees and their friends and family inside the country each year

Resettled refugees send money back to their home communities

$15,000,000+

Estimated amount of money sent into the country each year by resettled North Korean refugees.

The average annual income in North Korea is roughly $1,400 so $1,000 - 2,000 received by a family in North Korea is a huge sum of money. This money not only covers basic needs, it’s also used to fund entrepreneurial endeavors, both of which accelerate marketization that cannot be stopped.
"I have many friends who are still struggling to pay back brokers. I didn’t realize how blessed I was until I met them...While they pay their debts, I can send all my income to support my family back home."

— Gyeo Neul
Rescued through LiNK’s network in 2017

Up to $500,000

The estimated amount of money North Koreans who reached safety through LiNK’s network send back to their home communities each year.

Free Passage Model

Because of our “free passage model,” we rescue without any cost or condition. This means North Korean refugees that come through our network can begin sending money back into the country to their families soon after resettling.
Most North Korean refugees come from cities and towns in the northeast of the country. Some of these areas are known as hotspots of change because key economic, social and information changes are happening here at a faster rate. People living here have more access to outside information and as a result, ideological erosion in these areas is more evident than in other parts of the country.

After North Korean refugees have resettled safely, many will re-establish contact with their home communities, thus acting as a bridge for information and money going back into these hotspots. This role that resettled refugees are playing is a role that only they can play and it contributes to accelerating important changes in these areas.
“Everyone in Hyesan would escape if they had money and connections to brokers. Right after I crossed the river, I was hiding at a house near the border and met more than twenty people who escaped from Hyesan that very day.”

— Yoon Ji
Hyesan resident, safely resettled through LiNK’s network in 2017

“I knew I’d be sentenced to hard labor if I was caught watching foreign media, but I did anyway. When I first saw the buildings, cars, and clothes on the screen I thought they were all set up just for the sake of the movie. That’s what they do on North Korean TV all the time — lying. But as I watched movie after movie, I thought to myself, ‘that can’t all be fake. That’s got to be real.’”

— Chae Hwan
Musan resident, safely resettled through LiNK’s network in 2017

“I played a computer game called 시스 (Counter-Strike). It was a shooting game where you can see the tip of your rifle on the bottom of the screen. We all knew what kind of punishment we could face if we got caught playing games, but we played and shared games on flash drives anyways.”

— Yeon Woo
Musan resident, safely resettled through LiNK’s network in 2018
“I like LINK’s approach because they focus on much more than just giving basic solutions for resettlement. LINK empowers North Korean refugees by strengthening our own abilities to overcome our struggles.”

— Min Sung
Resetted in South Korea
We invest in the long-term ambitions, potential, and strength of the North Korean people.

We work to encourage and empower resettled refugees in their new lives in freedom. Our work focuses on building a community that will equip them to pursue their dreams and empower them to become agents of change on this issue.

This includes:

- Resettlement Counseling
- Interpretation and Translation Services
- Education Grants
- Providing information and referrals for additional support services
- Workshops + Community Events

In 2017, we supported & empowered 30 North Korean refugees in the United States and 114 in South Korea

“LiNK provided us with things we needed but lacked, and we relied on them both mentally and emotionally. I’m really glad that I was introduced to LiNK.”

— Han Sueng
Resettled in the United States
In June 2017, we hosted our very first Summer Camp in South Korea. This 3 day gathering brought together South Korean, North Korean, and other international students from around the world.

**Learn**

about the incredible role the North Korean people are playing in accelerating change

**Connect**

with students of different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives

**Activate**

and empower students to be changemakers in their communities and advocates for the North Korean people
Charles Ryu escaped North Korea for the first time when he was only 14. He was soon arrested and returned to North Korea where he was sentenced to hard labor for 9 months and nearly starved to death. He escaped a second time at 16, traveled to Southeast Asia, and safely resettled in California!

Charles completed courses at Coding Dojo in Silicon Valley with the help of LiNK and became LiNK’s IT intern in 2017. With a desire to share his story and be an agent of change, Charles eventually became LiNK’s advocacy intern, traveling the world and advocating for the North Korean people.

Thousands have heard him speak in person and millions have watched his story online.

Charles’s story has been featured by major media outlets and his ATTN: video interview has been viewed over 17 million times online!

“I advocate because I want to see North Korea change. I can’t wait for the day North Korea opens up and I can return to see old friends and celebrate freedom with them. I hope my work helps make that day come sooner.”

Charles Ryu
Chloe escaped from North Korea at the age of 15. After resettling in South Korea, she traveled to New York to study abroad with LiNK’s help. Now Chloe is studying to become a Nurse Assistant in South Korea.

Even though Chloe is still in college, she committed to becoming a Liberty Donor in 2017 and gives monthly in support of the North Korean people.

“I see this as a responsibility for me. Because I was born in North Korea and was able to escape, I should contribute to the cause too.”
“I agree that we have to focus on the North Korean people. We have to look at the people. Politics is far but people are close.”

— Seong Yong
North Korean Friend

“Changing the narrative”
In the global mainstream media, North Korea has been narrowly defined by Kim Jong-un and nuclear weapons and this has caused a lack of support for the North Korean people.

We work to change and broaden people’s perception on this issue in order to mobilize the level of support and attention that the North Korean people deserve.

#PeopleOverPolitics
We work with international journalists to influence the way the media reports on North Korea. Through interviews, shared insights and the stories of the North Korean people, this work is changing the narrative on North Korea and is changing people’s perceptions.

At the end of 2017, we were excited to partner with The Washington Post for the official online release of our documentary, The Jangmadang Generation, a film that documents North Korea’s millennial generation and how they are driving irreversible changes inside the country.

“The Jangmadang Generation is the most compelling documentary about North Korea out there… It also achieves the rarest of feats when it comes to coverage of North Korea: It leaves you feeling hopeful.”

— Anna Fifield
Tokyo Bureau Chief, Washington Post

65 citations, features, and quotes in 2017
In 2017, we produced our very first narrative film in partnership with the Tao Brothers. *Sleep Well, My Baby* tells the story of Eunmi, a North Korean woman who is sold as a bride in China. This story was based on true accounts from the field.

*WEBBY AWARD HONOREE*

Public Service and Activism

Vimeo Staff Pick
Video of the Day Winner
Cannes YDA Awards
Changing the World Frame by Frame
2018 Silver Award Winner
Cannes YDA Awards
Best Short Film, 2018 Shortlist
Webby Awards
2018 Honorable Mention

Executive Producers: Fortiss LLC, Emily and John Park and Nickolas E. A. Downey

Sleep Well, My Baby

700k+
views across all channels

$1M+
raised at fundraisers that featured this film

WEBBY AWARD HONOREE

Public Service and Activism
All around the world, our Rescue Teams and online fundraisers work to change the narrative on North Korea in their local schools and communities and among their friends and family. They host events and fundraisers in support of the North Korean people and inspire everyone around them!

Since 2012, Bethany has been one of our most committed and tenacious online fundraisers. She has inspired her friends, family and followers on social media to support her fundraising efforts. In 2017, Bethany raised over $48,000 which will help rescue 16 North Korean refugees!
On June 20th, World Refugee Day, we partnered with 15 businesses in the Los Angeles area to raise money for North Korean refugees. This was an incredible day that brought our international movement and our local community together in support of the North Korean people!

"I want you to know that the love and support from all of you around the world gives great strength and courage to North Korean people, including myself."

Gala

Over 300 people gathered in Los Angeles to hear the stories of the North Korean people and to invest in LiNK’s vision. It was a privilege to have Joy share her story.

JOY’S STORY

Joy escaped North Korea at the age of 18 only to be sold as bride to a man in China. After two years of living with him, she was able to escape through LiNK’s rescue network and safely resettled in South Korea.

Now she is studying social work and wants to dedicate her life to helping other North Korean women who have been sold.

World Refugee Day

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"We need a strategy that includes 25 million North Koreans, not just Kim Jong-un. That is the only way to put us on a track of long-term sustainable progress."

— Sokeel Park
LiNK Director of Research & Strategy
Research is an essential aspect of our work that helps to inform our strategy and approach on the issue. Through our work with North Korean refugees, and other partners, we are able to develop original analysis and insights on the North Korea issue. This informs our own strategy development and is sought out by policymakers, diplomats, various government agencies, researchers, NGOs and international organizations.

Together, with our North Korean partners, we have been able to influence and change the perceptions of important players on the North Korean issue. We’re bringing more attention to the North Korean people and their potential as agents of change, while encouraging a more holistic and effective approach on North Korea from the international community.

In 2017, we shared our analysis at multiple international conferences related to North Korea. Additionally, after several years of lobbying and consultations, BBC World Service Korea began broadcasting to the North Korean people on September 25th 2017.
2017 financials

Total raised in 2017: $3,467,273

68% for Program Expenses: $2,355,842

32% for Non-program Expenses: $1,111,431
We believe that 100% of your donation should go to programs that support the North Korean people. Our long-term partners, and other like-minded philanthropists/foundations, cover our non-program expenses so that 100% of all other donations can be allocated to our programs. We call this community of people our Vision Donors.

*These expenses are covered by our Vision Donors.*
Thank you for partnering with us in 2017
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Liberty in North Korea