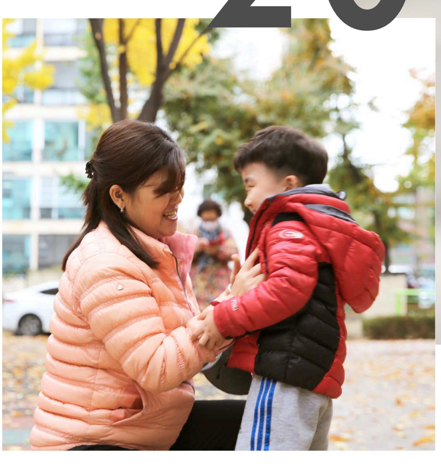
LIBERTY IN NORTH KOREA

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



Letter from CEO

To our dear supporters,

2020 was a year unlike any other. For some, it was the year of finally learning how to bake bread and trying out new food trends (hello dalgona coffee); for others it was the year of learning TikTok dances and binge watching every movie and Korean drama on Netflix. And for most people, it was a year spent in isolation – trying to recreate human connections and be there for each other through Zoom birthdays, graduations, weddings, and even funerals.

Whatever this past year was for you personally, it was a year where we were all reminded that despite any amount of distance, we are all still deeply connected.

As Coronavirus spread through Asia at the the beginning of the year, and borders began closing down, we were sad and frustrated as we heard of North Korean refugees in China unable to finish their journeys – their dreams of freedom put on hold as they were stuck in hiding, fearful of the possibility of being caught and sent back to unimaginable punishment.

Rescues came to a halt and our field team in Southeast Asia quickly pivoted to find new ways to support North Korean refugees where we could reach them. For refugees arriving in South Korea ready to begin new lives, they found themselves isolated in a country-wide lockdown with shuttered support systems. Our post-resettlement team jumped into action recalibrating our programs to accommodate these new and changing needs and came up with different solutions to continue supporting and encouraging this community.

In the midst of a year already filled with so much loss, our team struggled through an unexpected and heart wrenching loss. Our beloved friend and dedicated staffer from our South Korea team, Katty Chi, passed away. She had an incredible passion for the North Korean people that was known by everyone with whom she crossed paths. Through her time at LiNK, Katty helped over 800 North Korean refugees reach freedom. Her legacy lives on through all of the lives she touched and she serves as a powerful reminder of the profound impact that one person can have on so many others. We dedicate this annual report to her and the incredible life she lived.

With all of the struggles and challenges that 2020 brought, there was one constant source of hope. And that was ***you***. In March, when we were facing so much uncertainty about what the future would look like, many of you reached out to check in on us and our North Korean friends. You encouraged us and reassured us that we could count on you. You inspired us. We saw students working from home organizing virtual fundraisers, determined to find new and creative ways to raise money to ensure our work could continue. You inspired our North Korean friends, writing letters and reminding them that despite their isolation, you were standing with them, offering them hope to help make it through the year. And our North Korean friends inspired all of us. Sending us messages, cheering us on, and hand sewing hundreds of masks to make sure we were all safe. As we navigated every twist, pivot, and turn, we knew we had the absolute best people in our corner. And that we were going to be okay.

Thank you for being there through it all, by our side. We are so excited to share with you everything we were able to accomplish in 2020 because of your unwavering support.

With gratitude,
Hannah Song

2020 Highlights

1,300 rescued — We celebrated 10 years of rescues! Thanks to YOU, we have helped 1,300 North Korean refugees and their children reach freedom.

1 million raised — In a year with no in-person events, we brought our movement of supporters from around the world and our North Korean friends together for *A Night of Freedom*, a large virtual event where we shared inspiring stories of the North Korean people.

500 supported — The world changed and we responded. We supported over 500 resettled North Korean refugees in South Korea and the United States through our post-resettlement and Coronavirus Relief Programs.

10 million reached — We shared the stories of the North Korean people with over 10 million people online from all over the world!

The Work We're Accomplishing

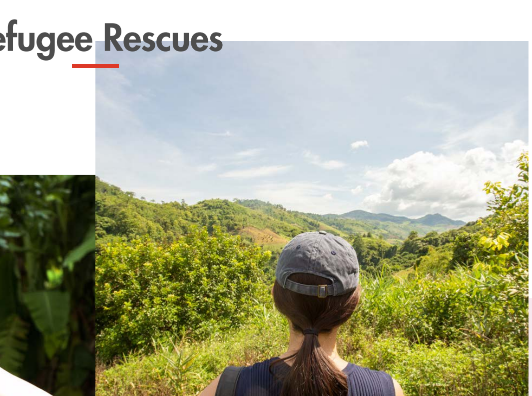
Refugee Rescues
Helping North Korean refugees reach safety and freedom

Empowering Resettled North Koreans
Working with resettled North Korean refugees to support their success and develop their capacity

Accelerating Change in North Korea
Researching, innovating and incubating new ideas to empower the North Korean people with access to information and technology

Changing the Narrative on North Korea
Focusing on the stories of the North Korean people and mobilizing a global movement of support

Refugee Rescues

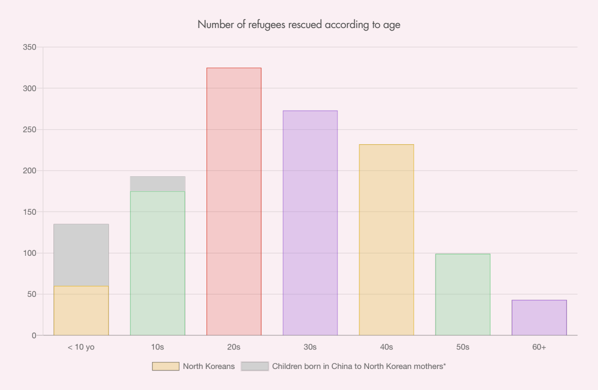


10 Years of Rescues

In the early years of the organization, Liberty in North Korea supported shelters in China hiding North Korean refugees. North Korean women were particularly vulnerable facing unimaginable circumstances being sold as brides or forced to work in brothels and online sex chatrooms. These women sometimes found themselves being further exploited by brokers and individuals who were supposed to help them in their escape. Over the years, with the increasing risks of repatriation, punishment, exploitation and trafficking, it became clear that there was a need for an alternative way to escape through the "modern day underground railroad." So we created our own network and way of doing things – a route that focused on the safety and dignity of North Korean refugees and would help them reach freedom without any cost or condition.

With your support, we launched our first rescue mission in 2010 and 10 years later, we have been able to help **1,300 North Korean refugees and their children** escape and begin new lives in freedom!

Number of refugees rescued according to age

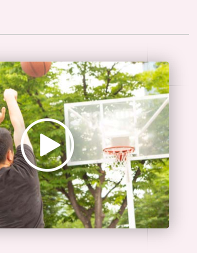


882 females**	325 males**
237 minors	472 traveled with family
409 reunited with family	52% of women trafficked/sold as brides in China***

*North Korean mothers who give birth in China (usually after being trafficked or forcibly sold into marriages) should not have to choose between their freedom and their children. We are committed to helping them escape with their children.
**These numbers do not include children born in China
***Based on 406 women who responded to this question.

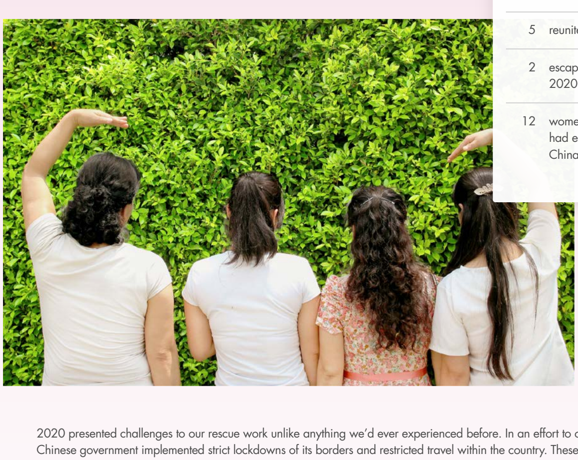
MEET MINSUNG

In 2010, Min Sung escaped North Korea on his own. When we met him in China and asked why he made the dangerous decision to escape, he told us, "You only live this life once. I want to live like a human being."



2020 Rescues

15 North Korean refugees rescued



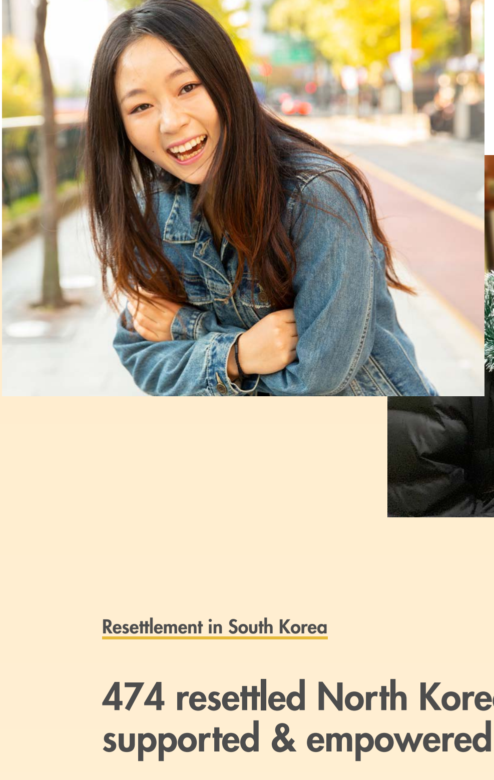
14	women
1	man
5	reunited with family
2	escaped North Korea in January 2020 right before the pandemic
12	women had been trafficked or had escaped forced marriages in China

2020 presented challenges to our rescue work unlike anything we'd ever experienced before. In an effort to contain Coronavirus, the Chinese government implemented strict lockdowns of its borders and restricted travel within the country. These restrictions, along with increased check points, made it incredibly difficult to move refugees safely through the country.

The North Korean government also followed with the same restrictions and even more extreme measures. There were reports of execution for violating quarantine measures, and the government raised the level of punishment for people trying to cross the borders making it nearly impossible to escape the country.

Fortunately, we were able to help 15 North Korean refugees escape safely.

Empowering Resettled North Koreans



Resettlement in South Korea

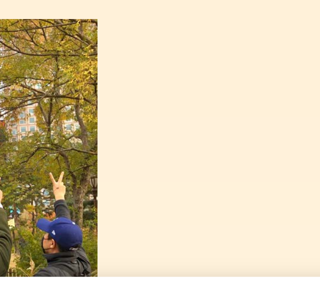
474 resettled North Korean refugees supported & empowered

After their dangerous journey to freedom, many North Korean refugees continue to face challenges in their resettlement. Having to leave everything they've ever known behind and starting all over again comes with its own set of obstacles and can be overwhelming, especially in a fast-paced, hyper competitive society like South Korea. But Coronavirus changed many of these challenges and made the transition even more difficult.

Mental health challenges are often exacerbated by the lack of community and loneliness that many North Koreans face in South Korea. For those who arrived in 2020, they experienced greater isolation due to quarantining measures and social distancing. Various government programs and local resettlement centers were shut down or scaled back during the pandemic which impacted the level of support newly arriving refugees could receive. This was particularly problematic for those resettling alone because they did not know anyone and did not have a strong social support system.

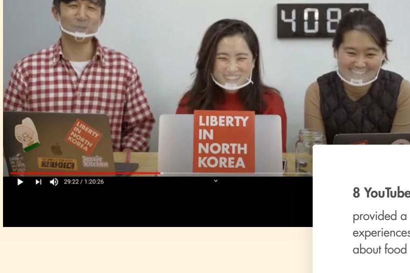
But our team jumped into action and found creative ways to connect, provide support and create community.

> *I'm a middle-aged man who resettled in South Korea a year ago. After coming here, I envied people who resettled here in their youth. I didn't have the confidence to live my life anymore. I was able to change my mind to be more positive thanks to the encouragement of people around me. My Hana Center social worker (the local government-run resettlement support center) supported me to get medical care and LiNK staffers took care of me, always encouraging me not to give up. There were a lot of difficult situations in my first year but thanks to the people who stood with me, now I have become confident. I am proud of who I am today and how I live my life, full of confidence as a member of this new society."*
>
> — Myeong Kwon

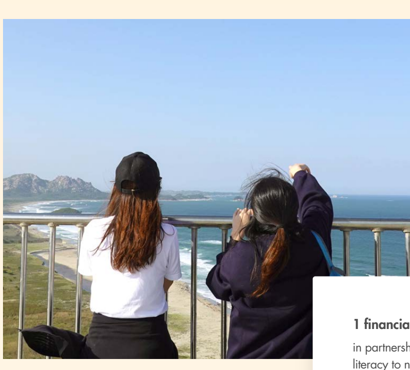


89 newly resettled North Korean refugees
that we met with to welcome and to share resources and information.

3 community gatherings
to build relationships and be together (when possible) during the pandemic and over the holidays.



8 YouTube live events with over 2,000 views
provided a virtual way to share stories about resettlement experiences, offer tips for life in South Korea, sing together, talk about food and to bring the community together.

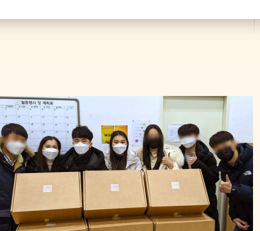


1 financial management workshop
in partnership with the Financial Consumer Agency to teach financial literacy to newly arriving refugees.

1 volunteer partnership

with Re:Code, an upcycling fashion company, where North Korean friends came together to make face masks to donate to people during the pandemic.

> *"I got to know about Liberty in North Korea when I was in China. I wanted to go to South Korea as quickly as possible but I didn't know anyone there. When I was secretly using my friend's laptop, I found an organization called LiNK. From what I remember, I couldn't find a phone number. It really feels like a dream to receive a care package from LiNK after coming to South Korea. I never imagined this day would come. I got butterflies in my stomach opening up the box because it felt like opening up my old memories. It was a shame that I didn't come to South Korea through LiNK's network, but the fact that there are people working for the North Korean people has helped me overcome my fear."*
>
> – Anonymous North Korean College Student



292 care packages delivered

to North Korean college students in Seoul (which included letters from LiNK's UCLA Chapter!) and also to individuals who had been rescued and resettled through LiNK's network.

Resettlement in the United States

1	newly resettled North Korean refugee from LiNK's network*
6	North Korean entrepreneurs
13	Coronavirus relief grants
36	care packages delivered

*This low resettlement number is due to a few key factors:
– Most North Korean refugees choose to go to South Korea
– Coronavirus impacting and prolonging wait times for North Koreans in processing centers in Southeast Asia
– A general decrease in the number of refugees escaping (due to COVID and non-COVID related reasons)

Entrepreneurship Program

We partnered with professors from the Fred Kiesner Center for Entrepreneurship at Loyola Marymount University to develop and pilot an Entrepreneurship Program for North Korean refugees resettled in the United States. The program taught business and entrepreneurship basics, and focused on developing an entrepreneurial mindset. After completion of the program, LiNK and LMU provided participants with a small investment to begin new business ventures or to reinvest in their existing businesses.

The pilot program was completely virtual (due to the pandemic):
– 3 core areas focused on becoming self-starting, showing future-thinking, and overcoming barriers
– 2 training programs in 2020
– 6 participants who already had their own businesses or were interested in starting one

Coronavirus Relief Program

As the reality of Coronavirus set in, many resettled North Koreans experienced various economic challenges. In response to this, we created a Coronavirus Relief Program to provide grants to individuals in need of financial support.

13 grants provided:
– 7 grants for individuals facing wage-reduction or unemployment
– 4 grants to support tuition and other education related costs
– 2 grants for struggling businesses

Meaningful Milestones

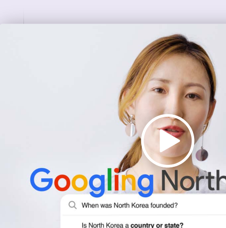
2 university graduations
7 marriages
1 baby born
3 people starting university
1 new US citizen

Changing the Narrative

10 million people reached 4,325,428 Youtube views

Sharing stories about who we are, where we're from, and where we're trying to go is a uniquely human activity. We are designed to understand the world through stories. But the North Korean government knows the importance of controlling narratives both domestically and internationally. So when North Korean defectors share their authentic stories and perspectives, it is a radical and powerful act in itself and it weakens the narrative control of the North Korean government.

Top videos



GOOGLING NORTH KOREA

1.9 million views

Our North Korean friends and Advocacy Fellows answer some of the most Googled questions about #NorthKorea!

NORTH KOREAN'S REACT TO CLOY

820,000 views

Our North Korean friends react to one of Netflix's hottest k-dramas "Crash Landing on You."

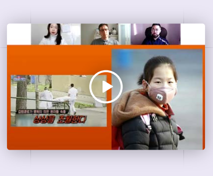
THE RED BOX SERIES

200,000 views

Supporters from all over the world submitted questions for LiNK Advocacy Fellows to answer – explaining everything from schooling to weddings in North Korea!

We Went Virtual

5	virtual events
800	people participated live
20,000	total views



CORONAVIRUS & NORTH KOREA

We spoke with journalists from NK News and The Daily NK to try to understand the impact of Coronavirus in North Korea.

COOK WITH JESSIE KITCHEN

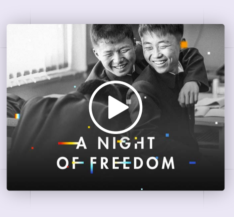
Jessie Kim, 2018 Advocacy Fellow, did a live cooking class with our supporters on how to make a North Korean snack called dububap.

MEDIA Q&A

We hosted a Media Q&A to share why changing the narrative is important and how we work with North Koreans to share stories.

VIRTUAL TOWN HALL

LiNK's CEO, Hannah Song, and our Assistant Director of Programs, Elena Lee, shared how COVID-19 was impacting our organization and our work in the field.



NIGHT OF FREEDOM

$1,062,498 raised

We ended the year with our first ever virtual gala, bringing together our entire community of supporters from around the world. *A Night of Freedom* was an incredible evening where we learned what "freedom" means to our supporters and our North Korean friends; it was a time to celebrate the stories of the North Korean people and to raise the crucial funds needed to continue doing this important work. It was so inspiring to watch the movement of support for the North Korean people come together in real time!

– 2 galas (East Coast & West Coast)
– 14+ countries tuned in
– 1,000 new supporters

Rescue Teams

211	teams
18	countries
$85,000	raised

Rescue Teams are LiNK chapters at schools and in communities around the world that are committed to helping us change the narrative on a local level and raise funds to support North Korean refugees.

LiNK's Rescue Team at the University of Michigan raised over $6,000 for *A Night of Freedom*. Despite the restrictions around in-person meetings and the challenges of virtual fundraising during a global pandemic, the team at U Mich got creative and they never gave up. They hosted North Korean cooking nights on Zoom, planned educational events for their members, and hit their fundraising goals by supporting and encouraging each other throughout the process. They are A.M.A.Z.I.N.G!

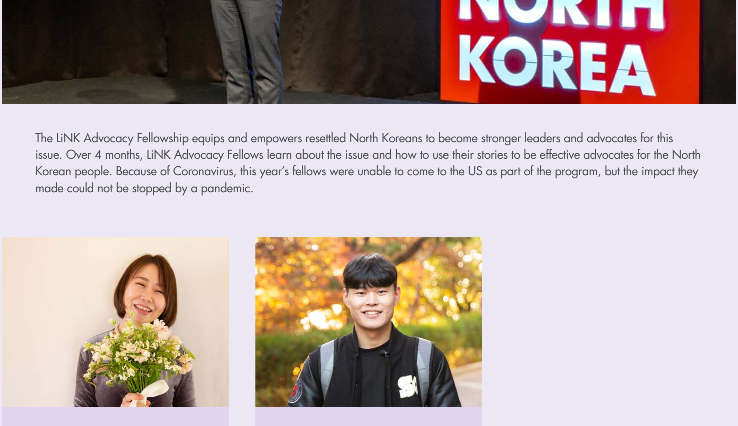
Changing the Narrative in South Korea

We launched a new program aimed at cultivating North and South Korean college students for this issue in order to address the huge deficit of interest and empathy for the North Korean people. Each team came up with creative and new ways to change the perceptions and conversations around North Korea. Some of these initiatives included podcasts, designing and selling products, and other ways to build community and support for the North Korean people.

20	student ambassadors
13	colleges
3	month program
30,000	college students reached with a new narrative on North Korea

> *I may not be working full time for the human rights of the North Korean people but this issue will always have a special place in my heart. No matter what I end up doing in my life, I am sure I will always think of the North Korean people."*
>
> – Saeyoung, South Korean college student

Advocacy Fellows



The LiNK Advocacy Fellowship equips and empowers resettled North Koreans to become stronger leaders and advocates for this issue. Over 4 months, LiNK Advocacy Fellows learn about the issue and how to use their stories to be effective advocates for the North Korean people. Because of Coronavirus, this year's fellows were unable to come to the US as part of the program, but the impact they made could not be stopped by a pandemic.

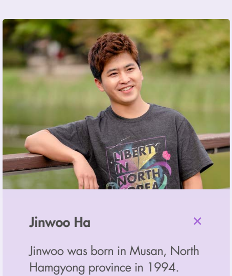
Miso Yoon ×

Born in Hyesan, Yanggang province in 1990, Miso's happy childhood was shattered at the age of 14 when her mother passed away. Miso moved into her aunt and uncle's house and started learning about the outside world through South Korean dramas. Desiring a life of freedom, she escaped from North Korea in 2010 and resettled in South Korea in 2013. Using her natural eye for color and fashion sense, she has become an image consultant; the first ever from North Korea. While working passionately on both her career and self development, Miso sleeps little but dreams big. Her goal is to become an established image consultant and create a society where North Korean defectors can be proud of their identity.

Dongjin Kim ×

Born in Gilju, North Hamgyong province in 2000, Dongjin is currently majoring in political science at Sogang University. He escaped from North Korea at the age of 13 with his mother in 2013. His wish was humble in that he only wanted a normal school life, but unfortunately Dongjin was met with discrimination from his South Korean peers in middle school. Lacking friends and finding it hard to integrate with South Korean students, Dongjin would only eat in the school cafeteria 3 times in his first year. The memories of this period still remain as a scar, but now Dongjin's dream is not just to integrate well within South Korean society, but to create a world where anyone can proudly reveal their background and not be discriminated against. He will continue to raise his voice until that dream is achieved.

4,000+	people heard our Advocacy Fellows' stories
14	meetings at foundations, foreign embassies, and the UN Human Rights Office
4	interviews with media outlets like BBC News and Radio Free Asia
4	in-person events



Jinwoo Ha ×

Jinwoo was born in Musan, North Hamgyong province in 1994. When he was young his family was falsely accused and subjected to harsh investigation for spying. Their lives were eventually spared, but they lost their house and assets, forcing them to do anything they could to make money. Jinwoo started working as a broker to help North Koreans escape, and after successfully helping his first family he continued to help those in need, eventually helping over 100 people escape. However his operations were discovered by the authorities, forcing him to hurriedly defect from North Korea with his father in 2014. After resettling in South Korea, he did everything he could to make money to bring his mother and sister from North Korea. In 2018 he founded a health food business and is now dreaming of becoming an entrepreneur that can bring hope

Junghyuk Jang ×

Born in Onseong, North Hamgyong province in 1997, Junghyuk was raised with lots of love from his mother and grandmother. However love itself was not enough to stop poverty and hunger. His mother, wanting her son to have a better life, took Junghyuk to China when he was 13 years old. But it would turn out that life in China would be worse than in North Korea, as both he and his mother had to live in hiding. His mother was sold to a Chinese man and Junghyuk was constantly harassed for being North Korean. While he was getting beaten, he vowed to become stronger and started to work out. This influenced his eventual career in mixed martial arts after he resettled to South Korea in 2013. In his professional debut in 2019, he achieved an amazing KO victory against a Japanese champion. Since then,

to the North Korean people.

he has been undefeated in his professional career and is dreaming of becoming the best MMA fighter in the world.

Sharing my story wasn't easy I wanted to give up several times. But, I know this matters. I can't wait for my friends and relatives to see what I've done here for them. For me, human rights/freedom is... When I am able to decide what I look like!! I will make you (people in North Korea) all pretty and confident."

– Miss Yoon

LiNK in the Media

We continue to work with the international media to influence the way North Korea is reported on, bringing attention to the stories of the North Korean people and the important ways they are changing this issue.

We were cited, featured, and quoted 52 times in the media in 2020.

SOMEBODY FEED PHIL SEASON 3

Featuring Advocacy Fellow Jessie Kim and LiNK South Korea Country Director Sokeel Park

CBS NEWS

LiNK's CEO, Hannah Song, was on CBS News talking about the resettlement challenges North Korean refugees face

CNN · FT Financial Times · BBC · Reuters · The Washington Post

Accelerating Change in North Korea

LABS

Labs* is our space to experiment, learn, collaborate, and incubate new initiatives focused on accelerating change in North Korea. We conduct research to help inform our strategies and approaches on the issue. We also collaborate with partners to produce and curate information and media to empower the North Korean people with access to foreign information.

*This will include projects that need to be kept highly confidential.

Events

We co-hosted and convened a 2-day closed-door summit of 32 participants including North Korean defectors, researchers and practitioners from the US, Europe, and Asia. Together we shared, learned, and collaborated on information and technology solutions for the North Korean people.

Research

We partnered with the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) on an upcoming research project about North Korean refugees in South Korea and the money and information they are sending to their families and home communities inside North Korea.

A Special Honor

George W. Bush Institute Citation

On September 24, 2020 Liberty in North Korea was awarded the George W. Bush Institute Citation. It was an honor to receive this recognition from President and Mrs. Bush, who championed the cause of North Korean human rights and have brought much deserved attention to the struggle and potential of the North Korean people. It was thanks to President Bush that the North Korean Human Rights Act was signed into law in 2004, opening the door for North Korean refugees to resettle in the United States and begin new lives in freedom.

Helping North Korean refugees reach freedom is truly a privilege and we are grateful to our North Korean friends for entrusting their lives to us in this work. What we do as an organization would not be possible without their incredible bravery or without the thousands of supporters around the world standing alongside our North Korean friends, investing in their protection and in their future.

To our North Korean friends, our partners on the ground, fellow activists, and organizations working alongside us on this issue, to our staff and our incredible supporters who have worked tirelessly with us over the years – thank you. We are so incredibly grateful to do this work together with you.

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Dedication to Katty

On May 5th, 2020, we lost our beloved friend and dear colleague, Katty Chi. Katty was one of the most passionate advocates for the North Korean people and had dedicated her life to this issue. Growing up, her childhood nickname was "Save the World Katty," which tells you everything you need to know about her. During her time at LiNK, Katty played a vital role in our refugee work and was part of helping over 800 North Korean refugees reach freedom. It is without a doubt that Katty's work has not only changed the world, but has changed the lives of so many of our North Korean friends for generations to come.

Thank you, Katty. We miss you so much.