

SEATTLE HIGHLIGHTS

August 16th – 19th, 2023

With the help of 87 providers in Seattle, our team reached 1,347 Afghans (42 percent of the local, newly arriving population) and provided the support they needed. We served an additional 200 participants from varying countries of origin. While we cannot share every amazing story from our work, we can shine the spotlight on a handful of compassionate professionals who made a significant difference for so many families. We look forward to continuing our work in Oklahoma City, September 6th - September 9th at Delta Hotels by Marriott. For more information, please visit centersforafghansupport.org.



preparing to help this population when an Afghan student in their advanced English language class predicted refugees would be coming to the region. That student is now a Hopelink employee, serving as a cultural liaison and helping speed delivery of care to his fellow Afghans.

English language instructors focus on meeting Afghans where they are and filling in the gaps along the way. Their trauma-informed mindset helps establish the basis of a trusting relationship – which is critical to long-term success. The team is ramping up for its ESL classes in the Fall and is actively reaching out to the local community. Their team also offers financial literacy guidance, helping newly arriving immigrants with the basics of credit, loans and our banking system. They also provide career development resources – from reviewing resumes to interview coaching and making connections to prospective employers when possible. During the event, a student named **Shabana** (pictured above) was able to meet her teacher in person for the first time after working together for months on Zoom. She’s making great progress as she learns to read and converse in English.

Hopelink also operates five food markets in the Seattle region, giving clients an authentic shopping experience as they can select grocery items needed the most. It also is a more dignified experience for those in need. Hopelink traces its roots to the early 1970s when a wave of layoffs hit the region and thousands of families were struggling to make ends meet. Today, the agency’s programs help more than 63,000 people every year.

Hopelink provides services to low-income families in King and Snohomish counties, focusing on providing basic services and skill-building to help families leave poverty behind for good. **Kelli Graham, Jim Boland** and **Donna O’Connor** were on hand at the Support Center to help to offer support in the areas of education, financial literacy, employment coaching, food and housing assistance. Their team began

Project Feast is a non-profit focused on transforming the lives of refugees and immigrants by providing pathways to employment in the food industry and enriching communities through cultural exchange.

Program specialist **Donna Rice** leads a three-to-six-month apprenticeship program combining classroom, kitchen and ESL lessons to prepare participants for a career in the food business. The program starts by covering food handling, safety regulations, sanitation and proper hygiene. It then moves into recipe development, learning about foods they prepared in their cultures and adapting to commercial or restaurant environments.

After the impact of COVID-19, Project Feast pivoted from an on-site cafe to delivering meals to hundreds of food-insecure families across greater Seattle. Meals are inspired and created by staff and apprentices from the training program.

Students in the program shared their experiences and hopes for their new lives in the U.S. They spoke about coming to our country unsure about career opportunities and what may lie ahead.

With the help of caring and encouraging instructors, they developed the confidence to pursue their dreams of opening bakeries, private kitchens and working as chefs in restaurants. The program has also taught skills beyond the kitchen, such as creating opportunities to socialize with new groups, learning more about American culture and becoming more connected to their communities.

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Valerie Hill is a senior portfolio manager with [Allied Residential](#), a property management company of apartment communities in the greater Seattle - Tacoma area. She and the Allied team manage more than 12,000 properties across the region – 50 percent of which are designated as affordable housing. This is critical given that Seattle Times recently reported a minimum wage employee in King County would need to work 103 hours a week to afford a one-bedroom apartment. As a result, Allied Residential is committed to expanding the number of affordable housing options throughout the area.

When beginning the search, many Afghans do not know where to start, cannot afford to lose money on applications or hold fees and need assistance navigating relationships with property operators who may be apprehensive about renting to low-income families. There are inconsistent identity verification options and a lack of information on rent vouchers and subsidies. Allied Residential serves as a full partner to applicants and supports them throughout the entire renting process.

Valerie stressed how important it is to look beyond what you may see on paper when assisting applicants. She recently worked with a woman who was facing eviction. After investigation, Valerie learned the woman was the victim of repeated domestic violence and was forced to leave her apartment. Her abuser stayed behind and failed to keep up with rent payments. Valerie helped explain this issue to landlords and supported her search for a more stable environment.

Allied Residential also offers mentoring and training programs for those that would like to join their team. With a large portfolio of apartment communities to manage, their team is always looking to bring new talent into the housing industry. Allied has many opportunities in all areas of property management for entry-level training and those with prior housing experience.



Abdullatif Ahmady serves as a prime program coordinator at the [Refugee Women's Alliance](#). ReWA provides immigration services, employment, housing, health and behavioral support to refugees and immigrants. When he first arrived in the United States in 2017, there were very few support services for Afghans. Today, he is happy to see so many organizations step up to help his Afghan colleagues.

During his time at the Support Center, he worked with families find rental assistance, connect to employment opportunities and enroll in school. He assisted a woman whose husband was still in Afghanistan and needed legal help. They were previously working with an expensive lawyer and the bills were becoming unaffordable. With Abdullatif's guidance, they found a pro-bono attorney who agreed to help them at no charge.

Abdullatif stresses the critical importance of learning English. He works with many clients who possess significant work experience and skills but have not addressed the language barrier. He encourages these men and women to embrace change and focus on the opportunities that can be unlocked once they learn the language. Service to his community means everything to Abdullatif. He is committed to finding solutions for every person he works with so they can reach self-sufficiency and take care of their families.

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For five years, **Mohammed** (alias used) served alongside the U.S. military in the Kandahar region of Afghanistan. When the Taliban seized control of the country, he and his family escaped on one of the last flights out of Kabul. When he landed in the U.S., his last name was misspelled on his and his family's official documents. This is not a unique situation for Afghan refugees as they frequently encounter English language translation issues.

For the last two years, he and his family have had difficulty receiving the benefits they are entitled to given the name discrepancy, including health insurance so he can care for his son who suffers from a significant skin disease.

While at the Support Center, he was able to work with [USCIS, Immigration Legal Services for Afghan Arrivals](#) and staff from his Congressional office to update his information and check on the status of his immigration case. He was very thankful for the support, including the round-trip transportation from his home 100 miles away.

With his temporary work permit, he is delivering groceries and saving money to purchase a car. He is committed to establishing a new life in America, given that he cannot return to Afghanistan because of his military service. He left the Support Center optimistic and hopeful for the future opportunities ahead.



[Riverton Park United Methodist Church](#) in Tukwila, Washington, heard about the Support Center from a member of their congregation. The church recently began supporting a group of Angolans, Pakistanis, Peruvians, Malawians, Columbians and Venezuelans who are asylum seekers. Since arriving a few months ago, they have lived temporarily on church grounds in makeshift housing and tents.

The group heard from experts about their asylum options, learned about public benefits available to them and were given guidance about critical next steps. **Jasmine Majid**, a volunteer with [Project Anar](#), provided the group with a Know Your Rights presentation and helped answer questions about their path ahead.

Afghan interpreters were eager to assist these families, saying they wanted to extend a warm welcome to this group – just as so many have shown them kindness and compassion.

