

OKLAHOMA CITY HIGHLIGHTS

September 6th – 9th, 2023

With the help of 39 providers, our team reached 355 Afghans in Oklahoma City (36% of the local, newly arriving population) and provided the support they needed. 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 Tulsa, September 20th - September 23rd at the Doubletree Downtown. For more information, please visit centersforafghansupport.org.



The Spero Project was launched in 2009 to welcome newly resettled neighbors to Oklahoma City and ensure each felt connected to the community. From January to June of 2022, more than 200 Afghan students from Pre-K to 12th grade enrolled in a Spero transitional education program after recently arriving in the city and were at risk of falling behind in their studies.

The Spero team located appropriate space and modified it into several classrooms. Donors helped fund teacher salaries and a bus so students could be transported to class each day. The full-day programming focused on core subjects and cultural orientation.

During that six-month period, children made incredible strides in reading and writing. They also often expressed their gratitude for the warm welcome they received.

Executive Director Kim Bandy discussed the tools and resources her team is also providing to Afghan women. Spero has created a specialized curriculum focused on the key skills needed, including learning English, getting a driver's license, navigating our health system, learning cultural norms and exploring employment opportunities.

This model brings resources directly into neighborhoods where Afghans live, which is especially helpful for women staying at home with children.

When Afghans began arriving in the U.S. in large numbers in late 2021, **Tyson** joined other U.S. employers pledging to create job opportunities, provide training and offer support to Afghans as they begin their integration into our society. Tyson dispatched hiring recruiters to locations across the U.S. where Afghans were temporarily housed and began discussing career paths with those who expressed interest in joining the company.

For most positions, no previous experience is required, and employment comes with competitive health benefits on day one. Tyson also offers fully-funded educational opportunities, with access to more than 200 programs.

More than 300 Afghans work in Tyson's Dakota City, Nebraska, location. Many other Afghans have joined Tyson's workforce in cities across the country, including Amarillo, Texas and Garden City, Kansas.

In 2022, Tyson committed to hiring 2,500 refugees over three years, providing new employees with on-site classes through its Upward Academy and Upward Pathways Programs, including professional skills training, English as a Second Language courses, citizenship and legal assistance and financial literacy training.

While at the Oklahoma City Support Center, **Associate Specialist Recruiter Jessica Stanley** met with Afghans to talk about open positions, the training process and the ample opportunities for career growth within the company.

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Girl Scouts of Western Oklahoma

focuses on building courage, confidence and character in girls so they can make the world a better place. Programming is designed to give girls a voice in determining the course of their scouting experience, encouraging participants to share their interests and passions.

Girl Scouts offers a barrier-free experience – providing the majority of programming during school or on campus after hours. This helps reduce travel time for parents and caregivers and eliminates obstacles preventing regular participation.

In recent months, their team has been developing new outreach strategies to reach immigrant communities. At the Support Center, **Community Programs Manager Chelsea Sather** discussed the importance of building diverse troops, giving girls the opportunity to meet people outside their community and learn about different cultures.

Selling Girl Scout cookies each year is a valuable contributor to their development. Girls learn the basics of running a small business by operating their own website, managing online and retail sales and working diligently to meet targets. They develop individual bios and share stories about their background, experiences and aspirations for the future. The experience is not too different than what any small business owner encounters.

Pierre Williams is a training officer for the USCIS Contact Center. He ensures officers are aware of immigration policy changes and answers questions to ensure the effective delivery of USCIS services. Pierre was on-site in Oklahoma City, helping Afghans update their addresses, birthdays and names and assisting with employment authorization documents.

Pierre shared he felt a special obligation to the Afghan community given his previous military service. Pierre enlisted in May of 2001 after graduating from high school. He did not have firm plans for his future and thought joining the service would be a sensible next step. He was deployed to Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom that same year. During his service, he worked with many Afghan interpreters and support staff who consistently put their lives on the line for our country. Pierre remembered thinking, “How many people in similar circumstances would put everything at risk – your life and the lives of your family – to support this mission?”

What he saw from the Afghan people inspired him to make a difference when he returned home. After leaving military service and earning his college degree, he joined USCIS.

Pierre said he’s determined to follow through with the commitment to Afghans and make their transition into American life as smooth as possible.



Work Ready Oklahoma is a job readiness program with a goal of helping people find, get and keep the job that is right for them. Their program includes a three-step process to help clients enter the workforce. They start by assisting with the application process, removing barriers along the way. Next, they review resumes to ensure applicants highlight the right skills needed for the job. Finally, when a candidate makes it to interviews, counselors prep for the discussion to increase the chances of making the best impression possible.

Finding employment is key, but keeping the job is also important. To support the newly employed, staff offer counseling on conflict resolution and effective communication. Employment specialists work with businesses across the region to raise awareness of available candidates and learn about open positions. **Missions Manager Tillo Johnson** discussed the importance of long-term thinking about employment goals, starting by a skills assessment and learning what careers are a good match. Finding a career path with passion typically leads to longer employment. At the end of the day, their team wants individuals to become self-sufficient so they do not need public assistance and can build a new future for themselves and their families.