

SAN ANTONIO HIGHLIGHTS

October 25th – 28th 2023

With the help of 59 service providers, our team provided much-needed support to 1400 Afghans in San Antonio – 47 percent of the local, newly arriving population. 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 Atlanta from November 15 - 18 at the Atlanta Convention Center at AmericasMart. For more information, please visit please visit [Centers for Afghan Support](#).

For more than 50 years, [World Education Services](#) (WES) has worked with immigrants, refugees and international students. The team's mission is to help people learn, work, and thrive in new places and ensure society recognizes the value of people's education and experience. The organization has an array of resources it uses to achieve this mission, including academic credential evaluation. Displaced populations come to the U.S with specific skills and talents but often have a hard time retaining original documents that validate their backgrounds. WES experts review transcripts, ask about associations and memberships, as well as examine any available documentation – even if it is a picture of a diploma or professional license. There are 31 institutions in Afghanistan their team can evaluate. Once the review is complete, they generate reports recognized by thousands of academic institutions, licensing bodies and employers across the U.S. and Canada.

Director of Program Development **Raquel Sevilla** and Program Manager **Isabel Schroeder** shared how their team is working with the Afghan community in San Antonio to continue their educational journey and earn certifications and licenses in their fields of study. The Afghan clients they work with come with impressive credentials – including architects, engineers and healthcare professionals. Currently, more than 50 clients have undergraduate or graduate degrees. According to the Migration Policy Institute, underutilizing the skills and training of immigrants and refugees results in almost \$40 billion in forgone annual earnings and \$10 billion in unrealized federal, state and local taxes yearly.

WES knows the value of ensuring clients avoid starting a completely new career from scratch or take on roles that are not commensurate with their skills. Raquel shared the meaningful impact of their services. "For so many, this support is an incredible boost. Their histories have been validated. They have proof of what they have achieved and can continue rebuilding their lives here in the U.S."



[Franklin Apartment Management](#) owns and operates apartments across San Antonio specifically designated for low-income individuals and families, including the Park at 38Thirty, a 100% affordable housing community with 196 units. The complex includes children's play areas, a community room, a gym, a library and a business center. Residents have access to STEAM programming, health and wellness courses, a food pantry and financial literacy instruction.

Leasing agent and translator **Mohammed** was among the hundreds of Afghans who began arriving in the region in late 2021. In Afghanistan, he served alongside the U.S. military as a security guard. Mohammed joined the Franklin team in 2022. He, his wife and three children live in the complex, where he assists Afghans with applications, paperwork and provides cultural support.

Mohammed spoke about the experience of starting a new life in the U.S. The challenges have been steep. Many arrived with limited English skills and needed to find work immediately to support their families. A few of his friends work multiple jobs and have little time to spend with their loved ones.

Despite the challenges, Mohammed said the Afghan community is making progress locally and has felt welcome and accepted by so many in San Antonio as they work to make the city their new home.

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San Antonio Police Officers Joel Pope and Douglas Green attended the Support Center event to continue strengthening the department’s relationship with the public. Officers Pope and Green serve in the community engagement unit, helping newcomers navigate the system and removing barriers to accessing key services.

Their role is not to enforce – it is to build relationships and establish trust. The officers discussed the value of proactive engagement and education versus reactive policing. They spend their time talking with the community, participating in events, going to schools, and collaborating with non-profits to learn what leaders from throughout the community need.

Their work starts with ensuring people know a few key basics, knowing the location of stations or substations and what numbers to call when they need urgent help or to report a crime. It extends into cultural events where meals are shared, traditions are experienced and stories about families are recounted.

Despite some misconceptions, San Antonio has a wide variety of immigrants, including families from across Europe, Asia, South America and many other parts of the world.

The commitment is to take the same approach with all cultures. Officer Pope said, “the people we work with are just like us. They want to feel heard and be safe. This is not an overnight process. At a minimum, it can require 6 to 18 months to build bonds. We start by giving a high level of respect. Our job is to gauge how much they would like us to be involved and never push anything. We have such a passion for what we do.”



Project Quest started more than 30 years ago after the closure of a Levi Strauss factory and the shuttering of Kelly Air Force Base left thousands of community residents looking for new job opportunities. Today, their team connects San Antonians to in-demand careers through their workforce and skills training programs. The organization is transforming lives with its wrap-around services such as rental assistance, scholarships, job interview prep and funds for tuition and books.

Project Quest has an impressive track record of working with clients and successfully positioning them for jobs where they can earn significantly more. Their retraining program has a 90 percent completion rate, and employees earn an average of 200+ percent more in wages.

It is also a tremendous benefit to employers as it provides them with a new pool of talent who previously would not be in their consideration set. Project Quest is a key partner with the city of San Antonio in their Ready to Work program – a workforce development effort to match candidates across the region with high-paying jobs in growing industries.

At the Support Center, **Nadia Tillman** and **Vanessa Sandoval** worked with the Afghan community to ensure they were aware of the many career pathways available. A candidate may have a passion for healthcare but could be unsure about taking the first steps. Staff coordinators provide specific guidance and partner with a vast network of partners and supporters to deliver results to all they deserve.

