

TULSA HIGHLIGHTS

September 20th – 23rd, 2023

With the help of 37 providers, our team reached 508 Afghans in Tulsa (53% 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 Denver, October 18th – 21st at the Renaissance Central Park Hotel. For more information, please visit [Centers for Afghan Support](#).

Omid Mobarezpoor and Ayesah Karimi are refugee navigators with [Tulsa Public Schools](#). They serve as essential connection points between students, families, and educators, offering translation, interpretation, tutoring, mentoring and referral services to 260 students across the district. These experts also assist with the enrollment process, updating addresses and providing backpacks, school uniforms and supplies.

Tulsa Public Schools launched the initiative at the beginning of the 2022 school year after a significant increase in Afghan student enrollment. Leaders knew these students and families needed a support system to help them acculturate into American society. After conducting a needs assessment, their team created a comprehensive support strategy for each student.

The team proactively contacts parents to ensure their essential needs are met. Over the summer of 2023, Omid and Ayesah noticed a student they had been working with was missing his classes. They reached out to the parents to schedule a home visit to ask how they could help. They learned the family was struggling and couldn't consistently find enough food to feed everyone. His parents were quickly connected to a local food bank and enrolled in public assistance programs, helping create a stable home environment conducive to school achievement.



Mohammad came to America as part of the evacuation process in 2021. He was forced to leave his wife, siblings and parents behind. While in Afghanistan, he worked for the Ministry of Higher Education and served alongside U.S. Special Forces. He missed the Support Center event in Seattle, given his work schedule. When he found out about the event in Tulsa from a friend in Virginia, he boarded the next flight so he could speak with [USCIS](#) staff about his case. Mohammad received an update on his green card application, confirmed his biometrics, and reviewed his application to bring his family to the U.S.

Today, he's working as a security guard in Seattle and operates a small business via Amazon. He sends as much money as he can back home. Mohammed was honest about the stress and anxiety of his situation, especially as he has struggled to continue his education. His wife's future is limited in Afghanistan. She has much less freedom after the Taliban took control of the country.

"I'm no different than anyone. Everybody wants a good life. Everyone wants opportunity and to make a better life for themselves and their families. I wish my wife was here with me. I want to solve this problem I'm facing, but it's so difficult to just sit and wait and wait."

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[The Surayya Anne Foundation](#) provides rent and utility assistance to Muslim women in Tulsa and owns eight apartments available for transitional needs. The foundation's goal is to help those who have been subjected to domestic abuse begin rebuilding their lives in a stable and secure environment. Additionally, many of the women have children who also need support. The group provides more than just temporary housing — they connect clients to vital resources, including financial counseling, job training and English language classes, supporting women as they get back on their feet in an independent and self-sufficient manner.

Executive Director **Jenel Fatihah** spoke about the power of their work and the difference their small team is making in the Tulsa community. A recent client came to them in desperate need. With their help, she soon signed up for driving school, attended job training and began learning English. In a matter of months, the woman found a job in retail and has been able to leave their housing and move into her own space. She comes back regularly to volunteer and uplift other women, encouraging them not to let their lives be derailed by violence and abuse. The foundation is primarily funded by private donors. Their annual fundraiser, [The Art of Healing](#), will take place on November 11, 2023.

Capturing the biometrics of asylum seekers is an important part of their immigration process, as each applicant must have their photo taken and submit their fingerprints and a signature. [USCIS Congressional Officer Angela Lackey](#) was onsite in Tulsa assisting more than 30 applicants, including approximately 20 children, who were missing biometric information.

In some cases, sections of the asylum application requiring confirmation of the status of their children's location inside the U.S. is overlooked. This puts applications on hold until the data is collected. Once it is gathered, cases are immediately updated and can be scheduled for an asylum interview.

Without the onsite biometric kit, asylum seekers must make an appointment at a USCIS Applicant Support Center, where lead times can be 30 to 45 days and require applicants to make another trip to visit the office.

The mobile biometric kit has been a vital tool the USCIS team has brought into the communities we serve and helped to resolve dozens and dozens of pending files.



Amanda English is a regional program manager for the [American Red Cross](#). In addition to health, safety and disaster relief programs, the organization also operates [Reconnecting Families](#), locating and reuniting loved ones separated by crisis and conflict.



American Red Cross contacts can enter detention camps, perform welfare checks, send messages to loved ones, transfer documents and help locate identifying paperwork. The service is not based on immigration status. They understand the helpless feelings one can experience when you are unable to find your spouse, parents or children.

Amanda mentioned working with an Afghan family that recently lost contact with a relative who was forced to leave their home. They were desperate to find out their location or if they were still alive. After an exhaustive search, the family member was located and found to be in good condition.

People looking for loved ones separated by disaster or migration can call 844.782.9441 or visit their local Red Cross chapter.