

# ANAHEIM HIGHLIGHTS

April 16 - 20, 2024

With the help of 90 service providers, our team arranged much-needed support for 2,415 guests – including 67 percent of the newly arrived Afghan population in the Anaheim area. 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 participating. For more information, please visit [CentersforAfghanSupport.org](https://CentersforAfghanSupport.org)

**CHIRLA** was founded in 1986 to protect and advance the civil rights of immigrants and refugees fleeing human rights abuses in Central America. In the decades since, CHIRLA has become a powerful advocate for immigrant rights, organizing, educating and defending immigrants and refugees in the streets, courts and halls of power.

The team prides itself on applying culturally sensitive approaches and significant flexibility when working with clients. CHIRLA is known for consistently making sure everyone is served to the best of the organization’s ability, whether they are funded by one of its programs or not. CHIRLA connects families to housing, legal and educational resources through Know Your Rights presentations and introduces newcomers to former refugees in their communities to help them navigate the integration process. Women’s issues are also an organizational priority.

**Afghan Programs Manager David Malikyar** shared what drives him. “I am a refugee from Afghanistan from the time of the Soviet invasion,” he said. “Being a refugee gives you insight and a special kind of compassion. I have an opportunity to give back after building my life in America and help these newly arriving families integrate and thrive. This work is paying back a debt of gratitude.”



**Lifting Humanity** is committed to education, social and economic development, relief, human rights and the alleviation of human suffering. In 2022, the organization expanded by opening a California chapter to support refugee families and their children. Lifting Humanity collaborates with various community partners to provide direct services within refugees’ first 90 days of arrival and beyond, including housing and employment assistance, benefits enrollment, health care assessments and community integration. The team also provides translation services, trauma-informed care and cultural sensitivity training.

**Regional Executive Director Tori Mohmand** brought food, new clothing and a determination to continue connecting Afghans to the vital resettlement services they need. “This is an opportunity for the community to have all the services in one place,” she said. “We will be resettling 125 clients in two weeks, and they will be looking for these services.” While on-site, Tori spoke with clients traveling from Washington, Texas and Northern California. She stressed the importance of continuing to provide integration help for this population, adding, “Hopefully we will have these more often in different areas.”

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[The Human Migration Institute](#) connects refugees to the resources they need to improve their lives. For recently arriving Afghans, HMI's initial areas of focus have included employment and education services, specifically for women, to promote gender equity and help close achievement gaps.

**President and Founder Dr. Selin Nielsen's** commitment to refugee causes began in Iowa in 2009, where she led a project for the Human Rights Commission about the education of displaced people. She has since provided trauma management to teachers at Syrian refugee camps in Southeast Turkey and organized the establishment of numerous international aid programs, passionately advocating for the needs of vulnerable populations worldwide.

Dr. Selin and her team expressed a deep connection to the Afghan community, supporting resettlement efforts in the early stages of Operation Allies Welcome. This background reinforced how critical communication is for newcomers, inspiring her to start community learning and ESL programs. HMI has recently started tutoring struggling Afghan high school students.

With HMI's help, the students' test scores have improved, and they now have more confidence in their academic performance. Dr. Nielson met two students at the Support Center who have participated in the tutoring program and are excelling. One is working toward receiving their PhD, and the other is in nursing school.

When asked about the Support Center, Dr. Selin said, "We are proud to be able to connect with other organizations and government agencies to develop partnerships. When meeting face-to-face, we were able to talk with people and humanize the experience of the systems that help newcomers. USCIS staff were kind and able to answer questions and have helpful conversations."



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Created by refugees, children of refugees and the local Southern California community, [Afghan Refugee Relief](#) believes in empowering those they work with to help rebuild their lives in safety and with dignity. Through a partnership with T-Mobile, Google and Welcome.US, the team has been able to distribute nearly 2,000 laptops and more than 1,300 mobile phones to refugees over the past two years. The phones come with one-year prepaid plans so they can stay connected to loved ones, help them in their search for employment, and feel a sense of security and safety in this new country. At the Support Center, Afghan Refugee Relief distributed dozens of mobile phones to guests.

“I am the daughter of Afghan refugees who left Afghanistan when the Soviets invaded in 1978,” said Executive Director Dr. Metra Azar-Salem. “I was three when I came to the U.S. in 1981. I remember their struggles and trauma and what we left behind. Very few resources were there for our parents, so we wanted to ease the transition and hopefully lessen the trauma for this generation. Within weeks, so many families were coming to us, and we wanted to empower them with opportunities. We have made a life for ourselves here and wanted to open doors to others.”



## [North Orange Continuing Education \(NOCE\)](#)

offers free noncredit programs to those seeking to improve basic skills, gain employment, promote self-sufficiency and enhance civic participation. Programs offered include literacy programs, U.S. citizenship, parenting, short-term vocational, social and emotional learning and programs for adults with disabilities. NOCE serves nearly 30,000 students annually, ranging from preschoolers to seniors, at three campuses and dozens of community-based locations. The staff takes immense pride in being the glue for families.

A native of Ukraine, **President and CEO Valentina Purtell** has a passion for working with refugees who have been displaced by war. She talked about how inspired she has been by the resiliency of the Afghan community after the challenges they have endured.

Purtell is particularly proud of having helped connect many Afghan families to [Access California](#), an organization providing immigrant families with citizenship, education and health services. NOCE consistently sees so many amazing success stories, helping clients start careers, become citizens and develop a sense of belonging in the U.S.