

world relief   
CHICAGOLAND

# CHANGEMAKERS

VOL. 01





# DEAR CHICAGOLAND **CHANGEMAKERS**,

Thank you for your commitment to World Relief Chicagoland. I am excited we are launching Changemakers Chicagoland and getting this first edition into your hands!

It goes without saying this past year has been an extraordinarily challenging year for all of us, and especially for those who are most vulnerable in our communities. Amid the ongoing challenge and pain, there have been numerous stories that have filled with us with hope. Lives have been changed and hope renewed. **This change has been possible because of your partnership and generosity.** Thank you for the many ways you are seeking out opportunities to show welcome and love to refugees and immigrants.

Through the Changemakers Chicagoland newsletter, emails, events, and coffee meet ups, we seek to deepen your engagement as a vital part of the community of World Relief Chicagoland. Our commitment to you is that we make fewer financial asks and offer more opportunities to see, firsthand, your impact!

**No matter what life continues to bring, we are working so that all refugees, asylees, and immigrants in vulnerable situations are cared for and empowered.**

When refugee families arrive at our doorstep, when immigrants come to us for help in navigating the immigration system, and when families ask for help to rebuild their lives, we believe that together we will be ready and able to respond out of love for Christ and to our neighbor. We are thankful to have you on this journey with us.

**SERVING WITH YOU,**



*Susan*

**SUSAN SPERRY**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
WORLD RELIEF CHICAGOLAND



288

## CHANGEMAKERS

demonstrated a high level of financial commitment to our work and vision last year.

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## TOTAL GIVEN FROM CHANGEMAKERS LAST YEAR:

**\$363,793**

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30

## CHANGEMAKERS

joined us in financial partnership for the first time last year.

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## TOP 5 CITIES WHERE CHANGEMAKERS LIVE:

Chicago  
Wheaton  
Glen Ellyn  
Park Ridge  
Naperville

## WHAT IS CHANGEMAKERS CHICAGOLAND?

Changemakers Chicagoland is a small community of people who **give generously** to and **engage deeply** with the World Relief community in Aurora, Chicago, and DuPage County. You are among our most committed supporters and your generosity sustains the work and inspires the vision that every refugee and immigrant become stable, well-integrated members of our community.

Changemakers are people like you, putting love into action in every season!

Your gifts are making a difference and we want to keep you up to date on what your generosity is accomplishing. Changemakers will not only receive this occasional newsletter, but will also enjoy exclusive access to program updates, World Relief Chicagoland leadership, and field staff.

**WELCOME TO CHANGEMAKERS!**

## CHANGEMAKERS RESOURCE

### QUESTIONS?

Want more information about what your gifts are doing?

Have questions about Changemakers?

**Gaby Keim** is your Changemakers Team Lead and would love to talk to you!

**PHONE: 630-580-5148**

**EMAIL: GKEIM@WR.ORG**

# THERE IS SOMEONE YOU SHOULD MEET

## YOUR GIFT GIVES BACK

“At the beginning of this pandemic everything we were doing as an EMT became 10 times harder.” Twenty-six-year-old Reyna has been working as an EMT and front-line worker throughout the Covid-19 crisis. It is hard to imagine her small frame lifting grown men from a third-floor apartment down the stairs to the ambulance below, but as she tells stories of her job she beams with pride because she knows she is making a difference.

*She is passionate about serving her city.  
And you gave her the support to help our city.*

Originally from Mexico, she came to the United States when she was four years old. Her father brought her family across the border because he was having difficulties finding work to care for his family as a mechanic. They settled in Chicago and she has grown up here with her close-knit family.

She recalls not sharing her family’s situation with many because of fear. **But when she connected with World Relief’s Immigration Legal Services team, opportunities were opened.** She started the DACA application process right after high school and was approved in a matter of months. Reyna shares, “I could do so many new things. I was able to have job opportunities. I never really thought I would go to college and I do not think my family ever expected I would be able to go to college because I was undocumented. We never knew what we could and could not do.”

After receiving a scholarship for being in the top 10% of her high school class, Reyna began college studying Computer Science. After a year of studying, she realized what she really wanted to do was be a part of the medical community, so she became an EMT. Her goal now is to continue her studies to become a nurse and hopes to work in an emergency room.



“

*I never really thought I would go to college and I do not think my family ever expected I would be able to go to college because I was undocumented. We never knew what we could and could not do.*

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*You provided new possibilities.*

*Reyna is providing her patients the very best.*

She has gone above and beyond in her job even carrying a fanny pack with extra supplies like masks for people that do not have them because for her “being there for my patients is my job.”

Reyna is a vibrant and brave young woman who like many essential workers is risking her safety to serve others during this crisis in our nation.

**“When people ask me if I am Hispanic or Mexican or American, I say that I feel Mexican-American. I am both and Chicago is home, and it is where I belong. I fell in love with this city. And I want to help Chicagoans.”**

She beams with gratefulness because your support has opened more opportunities in her life, “I so appreciate World Relief’s advice – it is one of those places you can definitely trust.”



# WHAT IS THE ASYLUM PROJECT?

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## A Q&A WITH PROGRAM MANAGER, ANGELICA BARAHONA

### WHO IS AN ASYLUM SEEKER?

An asylum seeker is someone who enters the United States seeking protection from persecution or other factors harming them or their family. Asylum seekers get to the United States in different ways and upon arrival they request asylum. When applying for asylum one must have credible fear of persecution and need to also submit evidence of persecution in another country.

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### WHAT IS THE ASYLUM PROJECT AT WORLD RELIEF?

We have realized that asylum seekers must go through a very lengthy application process and throughout this journey have little to no support. So, the purpose of the program is to provide the case management services and employment services to asylum seekers while they are going through the process. Usually, an asylum seeker can wait up to five years for their case to be approved.

The process really is an uphill battle. **World Relief helps asylum seekers navigate the systems by building partnerships with legal providers, medical providers, and childcare services.** Ultimately, the Asylum Project helps asylum seekers receive the proper support and helps them figure out what it is they need and where they can go for help.

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### CAN YOU GIVE SOME EXAMPLES OF WORLD RELIEF'S ASYLUM WORK?

Most families reach out to us because they were referred either by a friend, family member, or another provider. When they get in contact with us, I always do an assessment talking with them about their life. I talk to them about what is going on, the different challenges they are facing, and the dreams they have. We then put together a set of goals we can achieve in the short term. It looks different for every family.

For some they may be just newly arrived, so they will need to get their children in school and their house set up. For others, they may have been here for a long time and need employment authorization or a new job. **Over the past 18 months since starting this project, we have been able to serve 120 families.**

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### HOW DOES THIS REFLECT GOD'S CALLING?

I really think this work is right on in showing God's heart and God's mission from the moment Christ started his public ministry. He wanted the world to be saved. He wanted people from across the nations to hear his Word. He came for that purpose.

**There are commands in God's word we cannot ignore.** Commands that are related to serving the poor in our community, serving the vulnerable, making room at the table, and being attentive to the foreigner. All of this is embedded in God's Word and this is what World Relief is doing.

It requires for us to have a solid view of the Kingdom and the hope ahead. When we are faced with pain and injustice like many of the families are (and we are, too, by listening to their stories), faith is what really empowers us. A lot of the people I work with share a deep faith. It is exciting to look ahead and think about all the contributions each family will continue to make in our community. It is so humbling how God can use so little in us to multiply his immense grace.

# REBUILDING DREAMS

*Before she and her husband opened their salon business, Imrana—originally from Pakistan—spent four years as a single mother and refugee in Malaysia. She survived and provided for herself and her son through the same creativity, skill, and entrepreneurship that define her business today.*

**“My story is a novel,” Imrana said with a laugh. “A huge novel. And every person I’ve met on my journey has played a part.”**

Imrana’s challenges started in her early 20’s when she decided not to marry the man her father picked for her. They were living in Europe at the time, and her father was so upset he sent her back to Pakistan. Distraught, isolated, and angry, she met and married a man of her choice.

Shortly after they married, the man disappeared to Europe for higher education, leaving Imrana behind with their one-year-old son, Abdullah, and no money. The man’s family came from a conservative tribal region of the country, and they soon showed up threatening her and trying to take Abdullah away. She researched where she could flee on a visa as a single Pakistani woman and ended up in Malaysia.

During the next two years, Imrana was exploited for her labor as a housemaid, falsely accused of theft, and separated from her son while briefly imprisoned. She also suffered various health issues and could not access medical care.

She ended up stumbling across a UNHCR office and applying to be registered as a refugee, which protected her from deportation and gave her access to possible third-country resettlement. But that process took two more years. During that time, she employed her skills, resourcefulness, and ingenuity to survive.

**“The last two years were better,” she said. “But still, things happened in Malaysia—like when I was put in jail and my son was taken away—things I feel like I cannot forgive myself for.”**

In September 2015, Imrana and Abdullah came to the United States through the refugee admissions program.

*When Imrana and Abdullah arrived at World Relief’s doors, you were standing with them.*

You were with our resettlement staff as we connected them with basic social services, public benefits, and potential employers.

A few months later, you were there again as our legal team put one more tool into Imrana’s skilled and thrifty hands—a green card that secures her as a legal permanent resident in the U.S. and strengthens her foundation to pursue her passion: opening her own salon.

Imrana worked and did full-time school for a year to gain her skin care certificate. Then they pooled their resources, combined their expertise (Ali has a degree in Information Systems), and opened Eyelashes R Us together in November 2017.

“For refugees, the middle country is tough,” Imrana said. “But it is like this: before becoming a diamond, you are just a rock. For my son and me, Malaysia was so hard, but it made us into diamonds. Made us real gold. So, when we entered the U.S., we were not rock. We were not stones. We were diamonds. We could really make a place for ourselves here.”

***Together with you, we plan to mobilize more staff, volunteers, churches, and community partners to provide the support refugees need as they resettle. We are optimistic about restoring the program and deepening our partnership with you to help refugees rebuild their lives in Chicagoland.***



# HEY CHICAGOLAND CHANGEMAKERS,

Welcome to the Changemakers newsletter!

I am filled with joy to connect with the team of people who care so much about coming alongside refugees and immigrants as they rebuild their lives in Chicagoland.

Let me share a quick story with you. There is one immigrant family who comes to mind whose path crossed with mine while living in Memphis a few years back. I believe these friends have led me in part to World Relief.

With two little kids in tow and not knowing any English, they immigrated to the United States. When I met them eight years ago, the family had grown since arriving to the U.S., but their kids were still translating their conversations.

Fast forward to the present, the parents learned English, the father opened his own construction company, the mother makes jewelry out of their home, and two of the girls have graduated from high school. **This is just the beginning for them.**

This family is one of many reasons why I am excited to be a part of the Changemakers community alongside you. There are hundreds and hundreds of more stories of resiliency like theirs which are made possible because of you. **This is just the beginning for celebrating these stories with you.**

With joy,



**GABY KEIM**  
**CHANGEMAKERS CHICAGOLAND LEAD**

*PS — Now that you know what I look like, please say “hi” next time you see me in person! I cannot wait to meet you all.*

## PRAYER REQUESTS

- **Pray for the overall well-being of many refugee and immigrant families** who have experienced significant setbacks this past year from job loss, food insecurity, and financial stress.
- **Pray for the refugee and immigrant children in our community** not receiving the proper level of engagement that virtual learning brings with it.
- **Pray for the new administration** and for President Biden to hold true to his commitment of a restored refugee program.
- **Pray for our staff, volunteers, churches, and community partners** who are preparing to provide the support refugees need as they resettle.