

DECEMBER 2021

Partner Update

Foundations Newsletter



REFLECTING WITH GRATITUDE

In January 2021, World Relief Chicagoland expected a landmark year that would leave a lasting impact on the organization and the immigrants and refugees we serve. We looked forward to COVID-19 vaccination, more refugee arrivals, and a return to in-person activities with great hope, anticipating innovations in post-pandemic life and the rebuilding of the refugee resettlement program. We knew 2021 would set the stage for an exciting future ahead.

Now, at the close of the year, we can see just how much our community accomplished. Every success feels like a triumph against adversity because each came amid ongoing pandemic challenges, the slow rebuilding of the refugee resettlement program, and external factors like the scarcity of affordable housing. Your consistent partnership not only sustained vital programs, but you helped World Relief Chicagoland rapidly resettle 230 Afghan evacuees in just four months. That's more people than in the last two years combined. 2021's accomplishments were possible thanks to your support and a robust network of partnerships and we will carry that knowledge as we enter 2022 and encounter each opportunity and challenge the year brings. Thank you.

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CHICAGOLAND

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COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

When we think of community collaboration, we think about partners who provide job skills trainings, landlords offering affordable apartments, psychiatric referral partners who care for low-income immigrants and refugees with mental illness, and many others. This intricate web of relationships is essential for building welcoming communities where immigrants and refugees can thrive. We see this in each quarterly Community Consultation when agency leaders, community-based organizations, law enforcement, social workers, and others come together to exchange updates, work together, and brainstorm solutions to shared needs. This December's meeting discussed issues like how households need language and skills development support in addition to help applying for public benefits in order to achieve financial stability and food security.

In 2021, we saw how developing relationships to 108 new employer partners in 2021 made our job services program stronger and support from the Chicago Community COVID-19 Response Fund helped us provide much-needed pandemic support to families. In 2022, we look forward to continuing these relationships of mutual exchange and learning for the good of our shared community.

Recent Successes

COVID-19 Vaccination Outreach:

In collaboration with other community-based organizations, United Way, and the Chicago Community Trust, World Relief staff continue sharing culturally-relevant COVID-19 health and pro-vaccine messaging with families through workshops, flyers, and one-on-one discussions. From April to November, more than 120 individuals were reached with vaccine outreach materials or assisted with scheduling vaccine appointments.

Reaching Career Dreams:

A refugee named Aaron*, who came to the U.S. from East Africa in 2009, is reaping the fruit of years spent learning and working to advance his career. Aaron learned in a World Relief Chicagoland job class that watching a company's job board is a good way to find opportunities for advancement within one's own workplace. He started paying attention to ways he could move up from a minimum wage role at his food production company employer. Soon he found a posting for a quality control position, took the test for the role, and won the job. Since then, he's been on an upward trajectory, continually training and accepting more and more responsibility. Most recently, Aaron was hired as an inspector for USDA. He receives fair wages, is provided with transportation, has travel costs covered, and receives employee benefits. From lessons learned in a job class, Aaron's hard work has helped him advance and become responsible for a significant region in the Midwest for the USDA!

YOUR IMPACT

We often talk about the basic things that refugees and immigrants need to rebuild their lives in the United States. We discuss housing, employment, education support, mental health care, and other essentials that are fundamental for those seeking to regain financial and social stability. All of those are important. However, we can also acknowledge that a flourishing life doesn't stop at the basic essentials. Ultimately, we want immigrants, refugees, and entire communities to thrive – with each individual using their unique talents, skills, and interests. That means it is imperative that we create opportunities for them to do so.

I was reminded of this recently, when my World Relief Chicagoland colleague Shannon told me about Samira*, a recently-arrived Afghan evacuee who is living in the suburbs west of Chicago. She and her family, including her young daughters, were resettled by World Relief after their sudden evacuation from Afghanistan earlier this year.

In Afghanistan, Samira* was a gifted seamstress. With her skills in sewing and crocheting, she crafted gorgeous wedding gowns, dresses, and other apparel. Today, those days are only documented through photos that Samira kept throughout her entire journey, from when she and her family fled Afghanistan to their arrival on the U.S. military base until now, as a recently resettled family in the Chicago suburbs. Even when the family awaited resettlement at the military base, Samira stayed busy using her talent to take care of her family. She transformed a bedsheet into a dress for her daughter. She made yarn by hand.

When World Relief Chicagoland staff met Samira, we learned of her incredible skill. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we were able to provide Samira with a sewing machine, fabric, thread, and other basic sewing tools so that she could continue using her creative talent and begin using it to support her family. The next time that Shannon, a World Relief staff member, visited the family, she found Samira and her daughters wearing brand-new dresses that Samira had sewn with her new supplies! But not only that – but Samira also sewed two shirts for Shannon and a beautiful dress for Shannon's daughter too! Right now, Samira is busy crocheting scarves, gloves, and hats for the cold Chicago winter and sewing beautiful garments with the fabric provided by World Relief – using her talents and her skills to bless others and support her family.





This year, we're celebrating...

- Resettling 220+ Afghans between September and December 2021
- Hiring 5 Afghan caseworkers, some whom are themselves refugees
- Expanding our paid and volunteer interpreter network to a total of 10 interpreters who speak Dari and Pashto, the primary languages spoken by Afghans

LOOKING FORWARD

In 2022, there are exciting events ahead. The State of Illinois is expecting about 3,070 refugees and 1,604 Afghan evacuees to be resettled across the state in 2022, so communities across Chicagoland have ample opportunity to offer warm welcomes to those fleeing violence, persecution, poverty, or disaster. At World Relief Chicagoland, we are particularly looking forward to new trainings in trauma-informed service delivery for all staff, incorporating social and emotional learning (SEL) principles into work with Children & Youth, the growth of our Refugee Career Pathways program, continued relationships with 108 employer partners who hired their first World Relief client employee in 2021, more digital literacy trainings, and continuing on our organizational DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) journey. As we enter 2022, we are grateful to do it together with you - a strong community of like-minded partners who share a vision for welcoming and just communities where everyone can thrive. Thank you and happy new year!



Connect

Visit our [Foundation Partners page](https://chicagoland.worldrelief.org/partner-updates) to read past updates: chicagoland.worldrelief.org/partner-updates or email me any time! I would love to hear your updates, answer questions, and talk about our community.

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