

IT TAKES A TEAM: COMING TOGETHER TO HELP A CHILD

“WE SET OUR MINDS TO IT, AND WITH THE HELP OF A LOT OF PEOPLE, WE WERE ABLE TO DO IT.”

From their rural home outside of Damascus, Wafaa and her husband Mahmoud never imagined they would one day raise their family in the United States—much less in a bustling metropolis like Chicago.

But when their second daughter, Malak, was born with health complications during the height of Syria’s civil war in 2013, they knew they would have to flee to protect their family and obtain treatment for their newborn daughter.

They walked more than 100 miles to find safety in neighboring Jordan. There, Malak was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, a neurological disorder that permanently affects body movement and muscle coordination.

With no option to safely return home or obtain care for Malak in Jordan, the UN refugee agency recommended their family for resettlement, a process replete with paperwork, interviews, and background checks that took nearly 18 months to complete.

“I hoped things would get better so we could return to our home in Syria,” said Wafaa. “But when we found out we were approved for resettlement in the U.S., I thought of my daughter and from that moment on, I had faith that this was the right decision for my family.”

More than three years after fleeing Syria’s violent civil war,

Wafaa, Mahmoud, and their two daughters arrived in Chicago on June 13, 2016.

RefugeeOne greeted them at O’Hare Airport with their co-sponsors, a group of volunteers from four Lutheran congregations and the Turkish American Society of Chicago, who helped prepare the family’s first apartment and welcome them to their new home.

“Everything was new for us here—new and good,” said Wafaa. “Coming to Chicago has been like a dream come true for my family.”

Finding quality care for Malak was one of her parents’ top priorities upon arrival. With the help of RefugeeOne’s Medical Case Management Program, founded in August 2016 through a \$100,000 grant from Impact 100 Chicago, the family was connected with specialists with expertise in helping children with

cerebral palsy. Among those specialists was a talented team of therapists and social workers from the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, a partnership forged by RefugeeOne to meet the needs of refugees, from accepting public benefits to providing compassionate services with interpretation in the clients’ native languages.

When they first arrived, the family’s co-sponsor team



Thanks to your support, Wafaa’s daughter Malak, who has cerebral palsy, is learning to walk. Jennifer (volunteer) was with them every step of the way.

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REFUGEES REGAINING THEIR HEALTH



RefugeeOne's Medical Case Management Program was founded in August 2016 to help refugees with medical needs regain their health and lead productive, independent lives.

In partnership with Chicago's medical community, donors, and volunteers, RefugeeOne now goes beyond universal health screenings to provide:

- A dedicated staff person (herself a former refugee) with a Master's in Public Health
- Trained volunteers with health expertise
- Interpretation in 35 languages
- Educational workshops on healthy living, nutrition, health care access, and more

More than 70% of refugees participating in the program (ages 4-91) have already experienced an improvement in their health.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

RefugeeOne is looking for volunteers available during the day to assist in the Medical Case Management Program, as well as Arabic interpreters. Interested in helping out? Email volunteer@refugeeone.org.

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provided transportation to all of Malak's appointments, but the young couple was determined to become self-reliant and do things for themselves.

"We were thankful for their help, but we knew we needed to become independent," said Wafaa. "So we asked them to teach us how to navigate the city using public transportation."

Before long, Wafaa and her girls were taking buses and trains to their appointments while Mahmoud completed English classes at RefugeeOne and found a full-time job. A few months later, Mahmoud found an even better job at Erva Tool & Manufacturing Co. with a pay raise that enabled them to purchase their first car.



Wafaa said it wasn't easy to learn so many new things, but with the help of others, she was able to do it.

"I got my license July 22, only a month after I arrived," Wafaa said proudly. "I had to learn because my husband works every day and I need to take Malak to appointments. It wasn't easy to learn so many new things, but we had to learn to do things for ourselves."

Learning to drive and purchasing their first car are only two of the family's accomplishments. With RefugeeOne's help, Malak is now in school for the first time. She proudly attends Chappell Elementary.

Before coming to Chicago, Malak was unable to walk or communicate verbally. Today, she is learning to walk with an occupational therapist twice a week and has even begun to speak.

"We are a family that has experienced many hardships," said Wafaa. "Sometimes it seemed like we wouldn't be able to overcome them. But we set our minds to it, and with the help of a lot of people, we were able to do it."



"Coming to Chicago has been like a dream come true for my family," said Wafaa.

RefugeeOne gives thanks to Impact 100 Chicago for making this pilot program possible through their \$100,000 grant. Thanks also to the G.A. Ackermann Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee, The Chicago Community Trust and individuals like you for helping continue the program into its second year.

ESPERANCE: A NAME THAT MEANS HOPE

When Esperance arrived at O'Hare with her two daughters last summer, she was four months pregnant and had received no prenatal care. As a widowed mother from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she fled her country's civil war when she was only a child and spent the next 20 years living in a refugee camp in Rwanda.

Not long after her arrival, Esperance developed an infection and had to have an emergency C-section. Her baby boy, Manzi, was born 8 weeks early, weighing just 4 pounds.

"I was terrified," said Esperance. "When I found out I would give birth early, I feared for my life and for the life of my baby."

Thankfully, RefugeeOne's new Medical Case Management program was able to help her through this crisis.

While she was still at the hospital, RefugeeOne helped Esperance schedule follow-up appointments and matched her with 4 volunteers. These dedicated volunteers rallied to get Esperance from her home in Rogers Park to Lurie Children's Hospital—a 20-mile daily round trip—so she could bring breast milk to her premature son.

Among these volunteers was Laura Hilb, a nurse practitioner from Evanston who visited her weekly and showed her how to care for her C-section wound. She says the opportunity to help Esperance came at the perfect time.

"I had been really discouraged that I wasn't finding a job," she said.

The morning RefugeeOne contacted her, Laura woke up feeling very hopeful, like things would start looking up soon. Moments later, she received an email asking her to help Esperance care for newborn Manzi.

"Esperance's name means 'hope' in French and I felt like I needed some purpose in my life at that time, so it was really beautiful timing."

As Esperance felt stronger, Laura and the other volunteers taught her to take two buses to get to the hospital on her own. Teaching Esperance to ride public transportation was an adventure in itself because she had never seen such a big city and was not yet literate, even in her native language.

To help, the volunteers took pictures so Esperance would recognize the bus transfers and they accompanied her until she was confident going to the hospital on her own. With creativity, patience, and plenty of encouragement, Esperance eventually took the lead and began making the trip alone five days a week.

"I wouldn't have been able to get through this situation on my own," said Esperance. "I am so thankful for the generosity I received."

The volunteers' support and encouragement empowered Esperance to make other advancements towards self-reliance, as well. She enrolled in English classes and, as her language skills developed, worked with our workforce development team to search for a job.

As for Manzi, he progressed rapidly under the care of his loving mother and the skilled medical team at Lurie. Today, nearing his first birthday, he is thriving.

"I learned that it can be challenging to overcome obstacles like those I've encountered if you don't humble yourself and accept the advice and support of others," said Esperance. "But through hard work and a little bit of help, I've been able to take care of my family."



Laura (volunteer and nurse practitioner) visits Esperance and Manzi in the hospital. Volunteers play a critical role in helping refugees like Esperance flourish.

RUNNING FOR REFUGEES



When New Trier High School's boys cross country team learned RefugeeOne's childcare center was closed due to recent funding cuts, they decided to help by turning one of their practices into a fundraiser. Team members collected donations for every mile ran during a practice they called "Run for the Refugees." Together, they raised more than \$10,000 to help reopen our childcare center. Thanks!

SAVE THE DATE: REFUGEEONE ANNUAL GALA



SATURDAY, MAY 5, 2018

RADISSON BLU AQUA HOTEL CHICAGO
221 NORTH COLUMBUS DRIVE
CHICAGO, IL 60601

Mark your calendars for a beautiful evening in support of refugees, with a silent auction, fantastic food, performers, live music, and more.

For sponsorship information, contact Jenn at: jgoodwin@refugeeone.org.

Letter from the Executive Director, Melineh Kano

Dear friends,

One thing about refugees is that they're resilient. The same is true of RefugeeOne. Thanks to your support, and despite a virtual moratorium on refugee arrivals from July to October, we are not shrinking back. At a time of historic need, we continue to work on behalf of refugees seeking lives of safety, dignity, and self-reliance.

The stories in this newsletter celebrate the resilient refugees who've used our new medical services to build healthy, independent lives: a Syrian mom, proud that her new driver's license allows her to take her daughter to The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago while her husband works... and a Congolese mom who, after giving birth prematurely to a 4-pound boy, was humble enough to accept support from four amazing volunteers and strong enough to learn from them how to manage on her own.

It is horrible to imagine what these families would have suffered without the U.S. refugee resettlement program and without the support of people like you. Thank you for giving these families the opportunity to recover their health and rebuild their lives.

At a time when division and fear threaten to dominate the political landscape, we're grateful to people like you for speaking up to welcome refugees and to give them opportunities to thrive.



— Melineh



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refugeeONE

SETTING THE STORY STRAIGHT: THE ECONOMIC & SOCIAL VALUE OF REFUGEES

A new study shows that **refugees end up paying more in taxes than they receive in welfare benefits after just 8 years in the U.S.** The study of 19,298 refugees from two dozen countries is the largest sample of refugees analyzed to date.

Hear from the report's co-author **Professor William N. Evans**, University of Notre Dame chairman of the Department of Economics, along with panelists **Ms. Fatima Duran**, WeWork's Director of Operations, and others. RefugeeOne Executive Director **Melineh Kano** will moderate a panel discussion.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

wework

20 W. Kinzie, 17th floor
Chicago, IL 60654

RSVP required.

More info at refugeeone.org/events

