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DETERMINED TO GIVE HER CHILDREN A BETTER FUTURE — Khadijeh Sarvari —

When Khadijeh couldn't afford to pay for the hospital delivery room, a stranger offered to buy her newborn son. As a 33-year-old Afghan refugee living in Iran, she was incredibly vulnerable. Her husband had just passed away, and she alone was caring for their three children and her sick mother. Even her extended family let her down, encouraging her to accept the stranger's offer so she could support her other children. Khadijeh couldn't bring herself to part with her son and sever the tie with her late husband.

Someone at the hospital recommended she talk to the United Nations. Soon, the UN helped her family move to Slovakia, where they waited to relocate to a country that could take them permanently. After six months, Khadijeh was elated to learn she would be moving to the U.S. She was confident her children would have

a better life here, even though she'd never heard of Chicago.



Khadijeh (third from left), her four children, and RefugeeOne volunteer, Caitlin Martinez (second from right)

RefugeeOne staff met Khadijeh and her four children at the airport and took them to their new apartment this June. Living in Slovakia prepared them for Chicago winters, but the family had given away most of their possessions. Khadijeh is grateful to RefugeeOne for finding an apartment for her family, giving her and her children coats and boots, and for introducing her to Chicago's Afghan community. Local Afghans gave her family two beautiful rugs to make their apartment feel more like home. RefugeeOne's partner, Urban Muslim Minority Alliance (UMMA), also gave her a thoughtful Ramadan gift, which made her feel welcomed.

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DID YOU KNOW? WOMEN REFUGEES

The risks faced by refugee women and girls – particularly discrimination and sexual or gender-based violence – can be significant. Community support structures break down and justice systems may not uphold women’s rights.

Despite these challenges, displacement can enable women to take on new roles and instigate positive change. With support, refugee women can improve their lives and the lives of their children, families, and communities.



A Syrian refugee kisses her child. More than 145,000 Syrian refugee women now run their households alone.

- Of the 42 million people who have had to flee their homes because of war, 80 percent are women, children, and young people.
- More than half of all displaced women have experienced a sexual or gender-related crime.²
- Girls account for only 30 percent of refugees enrolled in secondary school.¹
- More than 60 million girls – some as young as 10

years old – get married before the age of 18, making them more likely to experience gender-based violence, to drop out of school, and to contract sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.¹

- In June 2014, UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie co-chaired a global summit in London on ending sexual violence in conflict, helping to put a spotlight on the issue and galvanize public support.

¹ Women’s Refugee Commission

² NPR article, Oct. 2014

From the moment she arrived, Khadijeh worked hard in RefugeeOne’s English classes and was consistently at the top of her class. After only four months in the U.S., she applied for a job at Five Star Laundry and was hired on the spot. It’s a physically demanding job with a 90-minute commute on public transit, so she isn’t home to make dinner for her children. She often worries about



Khadijeh’s daughter, Marzia, age 12, plays at Foster Beach during a field trip with RefugeeOne’s youth program.

them, but they look out for one another and her 17-year-old son especially helps around the house. RefugeeOne also arranged for childcare for her youngest child.

“Khadijeh is an amazing example of a woman determined to do whatever it takes to provide for her children. She was very nervous her first days at work but that didn’t stop her,” says Stacey



Khadijeh’s youngest children, Razia, age 6, and Mohammad, age 3, color together at their new home in Chicago.

Tsibulsky, RefugeeOne’s Employment Manager. “She’s really proving herself at this job. That enables us to help her get a promotion.”

Today, Khadijeh is very happy that all of her children can go to school, especially her 17-year-old son, who would have been required to work if they stayed in Slovakia. This summer, the children were counting the days until school started. The two middle daughters, ages 12 and 6, love attending RefugeeOne’s after-school program and making new friends there.

Khadijeh wishes she could help her children more with their schoolwork. She can’t always understand their homework or the permission slips sent home but is glad that RefugeeOne staff is able to help. She’s also grateful that Caitlin Martinez, a RefugeeOne volunteer, visits the children twice a week to help with homework and English skills. Caitlin, a senior at Northeastern University, uses homemade flash cards, dialogue games, and a sticker incentive system to help the children with their homework. Once their work is done, everyone loves dancing to Shakira.

Khadijeh’s youngest son, Mohammed, has become an adorable and talkative toddler. His favorite animals are butterflies and his favorite food is “tasty food.” He points to a photo of his father and says, “I have hair and eyes like him.”

Khadijeh hopes that her children will get a quality education and find good jobs, which is why she is willing to work so hard. “Everything I do is for my children.” And she gives thanks to have them all with her.

TEENAGERS ENLIST THEIR COMMUNITY TO WELCOME A REFUGEE FAMILY

For Ben Matejka's 16th birthday, he received a colander and mixing bowls. These are unusual gifts for most teenage boys, but he didn't want them for himself. Ben and his next-door neighbor, Maggie Taaffe, are collecting everything they need to co-sponsor a refugee family.

Two teenagers collecting enough furniture and donations to set-up a home for refugees is a very impressive feat. Usually co-sponsors are larger community groups – a congregation, school, alumni association, or three or four families – who furnish an apartment, raise funds for the family's rent and groceries, and mentor them during their first six months in Chicago.

Ben and Maggie's desire to help started with RefugeeOne's youth program. Ben, a New Trier High School student, began volunteering at the after-school program in 2013, and Maggie, who attends Loyola Academy, started tutoring at the summer camp the following year. Ben and Maggie have spent many afternoons and summer days tutoring refugees of all ages. Despite language barriers and different life experiences, they found they could connect with students over games, field trips, homework, and laughter.

Ben has a natural gift for keeping easily distracted students focused, and Maggie, who takes extra classes during the summer, has a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with students. Melissa Janisch, RefugeeOne's Youth Activity Coordinator says, "We are lucky to have Ben and Maggie volunteering in the youth program. They are great role models for our students. By putting this whole project together, they show that no matter how young you are, you can make a difference!"

It's amazing that Ben and Maggie find time to organize donations and coordinate times for furniture drop-offs. Both sophomores have heavy course loads and row on their schools' crew teams. "You can always find some free time, even if it's just 20 minutes a day," says Maggie.

Last summer, they started teaching themselves Swahili, and have been getting plenty of practice with students in RefugeeOne's youth program. "We tried to learn Somali first," laughs Ben, "but none of the refugees could understand our accents!"

Ben and Maggie say the hardest part of co-sponsoring a family is collecting money for the first few weeks of rent and groceries. They had no trouble getting kitchen supplies and furniture, but not everyone will take two teenagers seriously if they are asking for cash.

RefugeeOne helped Ben and Maggie set up a webpage so that donors can see exactly how their donations will be used. "We hope the webpage will make us look more official," says Ben. It certainly had an effect. They reached more than 50% of their donation goal within two weeks of the webpage's launch. Now halfway towards meeting their goal, they can't wait to find out the refugee family with whom they'll be matched.



High school sophomores Ben Matejka and Maggie Taaffe are working together to collect enough furniture, kitchen supplies, and donations to set up a new home for a refugee family.

Find out how the project is going and consider a tax-deductible gift to encourage these young leaders at:

refugeeone.org/ben-and-maggie-project



SAVE THE DATE MANY VOICES. ONE VISION.



Join us for our annual gala at Venue One in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood. The gala features a silent auction, dinner, and dancing with live music by Gentlemen of Leisure.

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2015

Your sponsorship or ticket purchase helps support more than 500 refugees each year. For more information, contact Kim at 773-423-9834 or ksnoddy@refugeeone.org.

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

One of the best ways new refugees learn to navigate their new home is by meeting and befriending Americans. You can help by serving as a mentor to a refugee youth or adult, assisting with job readiness, tutoring English, or volunteering in our office.

Complete an application at refugeeone.org/get-involved and then attend a 1-hour orientation to learn the many ways you can help. Orientations are at our offices (4753 North Broadway, Suite 401, Chicago, IL 60640).

- Wednesday, January 21 at 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
- Monday, February 23 at 12:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, March 25 at 12:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Questions? Contact Juliana at volunteer@refugeeone.org or 773-423-9836.

Letter from the Executive Director, Melineh Kano

Dear friends,

There's no question that women form the backbone of many refugee families. When they are strong and healthy – both physically and emotionally – the whole family is likely to thrive.

It's also true that women refugees face unique challenges when arriving in the U.S. They typically speak limited English, have little (if any) job history, and experience difficulty adapting to American expectations and opportunities for women.

To help women build flourishing new lives here, we are pleased to open a new Refugee Women's Center at Berry Memorial United Methodist Church this winter. We hope you will join us for the center's opening on February 9th! Details are below.

The center will provide a space for women to share ideas, talents, and laughter while taking part in group mental health therapy, sewing and knitting classes, a pregnancy support group, and more.

Speaking of women, this newsletter features the story of a refugee from Afghanistan. Khadijeh is an inspiration to other women determined to improve their children's lives. These pages also highlight some of the individuals who make such a difference in refugees' lives – people like Caitlin Martinez, who mentors Khadijeh's children twice a week, and teenagers Ben Matejka and Maggie Taaffe, who have prepared an entire home for a soon-to-arrive refugee family.

It truly takes a village to welcome refugees. Thank you for being part of our village.



RefugeeOne

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refugeeONE

NEW REFUGEE WOMEN'S CENTER OPENS

Join us for the opening of our new Refugee Women's Center in Ravenswood!
Refugee women will sell scarves, dresses, and other handmade items.

Monday, February 9, 2015 – 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Berry Memorial United Methodist Church
4754 North Leavitt Street (third floor via stairs)
Chicago, IL 60625

RefugeeOne is grateful to the Polk Bros. Foundation, Chicago Foundation for Women's North Shore Giving Circle, and United Methodist Committee on Relief for generously supporting our women's program. The center is a partnership with Berry Methodist, the United Methodist Church's Northern Illinois District, and Catholic Charities.

The new center means we can increase the size of our sewing classes. If you have a working sewing machine to bring to the center, please contact Helen at 773-423-9804 or hsweitzer@refugeeone.org.

