GROWING SUCCESS AT GLOBAL GARDENS
– Hasta Bhattarai –

For many of us, growing tomatoes or squash is a simple, satisfying way to spend summer afternoons and feed our families. For Hasta Bhattarai, a refugee from Bhutan who was resettled by RefugeeOne in 2008, gardening is all that and more: it’s a way to live out a legacy that goes back generations. As a coordinator of the Global Gardens Refugee Training Farm, he uses his knowledge of farming to help build community among refugees in Chicago.

Bhutan, where Hasta was born, is a small country in the eastern Himalayas. Though it’s known for being the only country that measures Gross National Happiness alongside Gross Domestic Product, Bhutan isn’t always a sunny place—especially not for the Lhotshampa. Descended from Nepalese immigrants who arrived in Bhutan in the 19th century to work as farmers, the Lhotshampa (which means “southerners”) preserved Nepalese traditions even as they thought of themselves as citizens of Bhutan. But by the 1990s, the Bhutanese government had branded the Lhotshampa as illegal immigrants—despite the fact that their families had been working the same farms for generations—and targeted them for harassment, violence, and even deportation.

In 1992, after Hasta graduated high school, the government forced his family from their farm and out of the country. He and his parents, brother, and sister traveled to Nepal, where they settled in a camp alongside other refugees. There, separated from the country and work they had known all their lives, the family waited. Though the wait was punctuated by moments of happiness—Hasta met and
married his wife Chandra in Nepal, for instance—it was hard to be in limbo without citizenship anywhere.

After sixteen years, Hasta and Chandra found out that they were to be permanently settled in Chicago, and better yet, that his parents and siblings would follow. They were greeted by RefugeeOne staff at O’Hare in August 2008, and taken to their new apartment. Soon after, RefugeeOne helped Hasta connect with his first job: working in a restaurant at O’Hare.

As Hasta and his family found their bearings in their new city, he wanted to give back to other refugees. In 2012, he had a chance to do just that when he became one of three leading volunteers at the Global Gardens Refugee Training Farm. The farm is located in Albany Park and holds about 100 forty-foot-long plots tended by refugees, who grow crops familiar and novel to feed their families and sell at a semi-weekly market. The farm includes community garden plots for neighbors, too. Hasta and his fellow volunteers write grant proposals, tackle organizational issues, and get their hands dirty with the other farmers.

Hasta estimates he spends about 20 hours a week at the garden, where he grows bitter melon, broccoli, and snake gourd, among a host of other crops. (“I like all of them equally,” he says.) His plot is thriving—it’s difficult to believe that the long Chicago winter could have slowed the planting season when the garden looks this lush—and provides food for him, Chandra, and their two young sons. But the garden doesn’t just support his family in their present life in Chicago: it also connects them to their past in the Himalayas. “In Bhutan,” he emphasizes, “we were all farmers.”

Refugees from all over the world—and now, from all over the city—have plots at Global Gardens, too. Many of them were resettled by RefugeeOne. “We connect our clients to the garden, but not just as a food source. It helps them become part of the community,” says Helen Sweitzer, manager of adjustment at RefugeeOne. When Hasta talks about what the farm means for others, it’s clear that it provides as much emotional as physical comfort to those who work there. “It’s not only a place to share fresh food, but a place to come together and share stories,” he explains. “The garden helps people practice English: they sell to buyers at the farmer’s market, and they talk to refugees from other places.” And cultural differences are seen as enriching: “We grow some of the same greens,” he says, “but we don’t all cook them the same way—so we learn from each other.”

DID YOU KNOW? FOOD IN REFUGEE CAMPS

Though many refugees leave their home countries with farming experience, few find themselves in environments with all the resources they need to grow food as they wait for resettlement.

- In 2011, PBS described the rations the World Food Program provided to Somali refugees daily: 15 ounces of bulgur wheat, 2 ounces of beans, 1 ounce of oil, 1 ounce of corn-soya blend, and .2 ounces of iodized salt. Though this adds up to 2200 calories, it lacks fresh fruits and vegetables. People living on this diet can suffer from malnutrition, even as their caloric needs are met.
- According to Unite for Site, in some places in Bangladesh, refugees are permitted small gardens, where they grow garlic, spices and vegetables to enhance their existing rations.
- CNN reported that in Palestine, some refugees have built elevated gardens to grow food without expanding their camp.
- The World Fish Center has set up fish farms in multiple refugee camps in Zambia. Fresh fish is not only a great source of protein for residents, but a trading commodity as well.

Support the farmers! You can buy great vegetables and fruits at the Farmer’s Markets, every Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and Thursday from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. at 4810 North Sacramento Ave.
“It all started with soccer,” David Fahnbulleh says of his life-changing friendship with the Ray family. When David was eleven, RefugeeOne settled him and fourteen family members in a house in the quiet Chicago suburb of Wilmette. The journey there had been long—they had fled Liberia during its second civil war and spent four years in a refugee camp in Sierra Leone—and now the family had new challenges to face. Fortunately, connecting to new people was not among them. Despite fears that they’d have a hard time meeting their new neighbors, the family received a warm welcome. People stopped by every day with food, household items, and greetings. Patti and Dave Ray and their four children were among these friendly faces. The first time they visited the Fahnbulleh’s home, David told Patti about his love for sports. She found him a spot on a local soccer team and David began biking to practice with the Rays’ twin sons, Aaron and Michael.

High Crest Middle School, where David was enrolled, had a strong support system in place for an international student like David, but he was at a disadvantage compared to his classmates: he had only completed the second grade in Sierra Leone. This did not hold him back, for as Aaron says, “David has a great work ethic.” Despite many disruptions, including shifting family circumstances and the fact that the cold climate frequently made him sick, he no longer needed ESL support by eighth grade. As he carved out a place for himself at school, David became an important presence in the Rays’ household too. They appreciated his inspiring focus, patience, and spirituality, and began to think of him as a member of the family. “Patti and I like to say we have triplets,” Dave Ray says. It isn’t a joke: for years now, David has shared family vacations and been pictured on their Christmas cards.

As David entered high school, it became clear that he would excel in higher education, so Patti and her friend Joanne Aggens devised a plan: If David worked as a golf caddy throughout high school and kept up his grades, he would be eligible for a Chick Evans college scholarship. Patti arranged for David to learn to caddy; he woke up at 5:30 a.m. every summer day to bike to the golf course for work. Meanwhile, he worked hard to excel academically, even in AP English, a class he never thought he would be able to take.

This spring, David’s summers of caddying, years of studying, and participation in a grueling series of interviews all paid off—he was accepted for a Chick Evans scholarship at Purdue University, where he plans to study urban planning and architecture. It seems clear that his relationship with the Ray family will remain strong. “I admire LeBron James, but not just because he’s the best at what he does,” says David. “I like that no matter how famous he has gotten, his mother always comes to his games, and he always gives her a kiss.” He considers family ties of all kinds sacred, and about the Rays, he says simply: “They are parents to me.”

As for the Ray family, David has helped expand their world, just as they have helped expand his. “Over the years, as David has become a part of our family, it has become easier to understand the plight of refugees,” Patti explains. “Perhaps ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ is an overused phrase, but it’s certainly true. In supporting RefugeeOne, I feel a bit more like a citizen of the world, rather than of just one country.”

**HELP WITH OUR WINTER COAT DRIVE**

The breeze off the lake may be warm right now, but in a few months the chill will set in. Many refugees arrive during the colder months with no winter clothing.

From September 15th to November 14th, we will be collecting clean and gently-used coats, outerwear, gloves, boots, scarves, and hats for all ages and genders. Organize a collection on your block, or with your book club or congregation!

For more information about when to drop off items, visit refugeone.org.

**DONATE TODAY & DOUBLE YOUR GIFT**

Make a tax-deductible donation to help ensure newcomers to Chicago get what they need to succeed. Thanks to a generous donor, your gift will be doubled!

Donate online at refugeone.org/donate or send your check to RefugeeOne, 4753 North Broadway, Suite 401, Chicago, IL 60640.
Dear friends,

As a refugee myself, I am especially proud when another refugee helps others. Hasta, who grew up in Bhutan, is one of those people. Through his and other leaders’ tireless work, refugees now have a vibrant farm community in Chicago’s Albany Park neighborhood. Read about this bustling farm in our newsletter – then be sure to visit the farmers market before summer ends.

These pages also feature a young man about to start college. Some of you had the pleasure of meeting David, a Liberian refugee, at our annual gala in April. David is quick to say his success wouldn’t have been possible without the support of the Ray family in Wilmette – and the Rays don’t hesitate to describe the extraordinary difference his presence means in their family’s life too.

These are the stories that bring us joy and make us proud. We are honored to have played a role in Hasta and David’s new beginnings in the United States, to see the ways they give back, and to witness the extraordinary relationships that form when people welcome refugees into their lives.

Join us in this work. Sign on to be a mentor, organize your club or faith community to co-sponsor a family, help with our winter clothing drive... and don’t miss your opportunity to have your gift doubled. Thanks to a generous, anonymous donor, your gift will have twice the impact.

Thank you!

Team RefugeeOne: Soccer Champs

On June 20th refugees came from all over Chicago to celebrate World Refugee Day at Foster Beach. There was a musical showcase of performers, a water-balloon toss for the kids, and ice cream for everyone, but the centerpiece of the day was undoubtedly the soccer tournament. After several games in the hot sun, RefugeeOne’s team emerged victorious. The team was made up of RefugeeOne clients from many countries – from Burma to Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ireland – and Todd Mayer, who won the privilege to play on the team at this year’s Many Voices. One Vision. gala and silent auction. “I was excited to be on the team,” he says, “but I thought ‘there must be something else I can do.’” Todd decided to donate uniforms (in RefugeeOne orange, of course), so he and his teammates would look cohesive on the field. “It seemed appropriate,” he says. “We come from different places, but we’re all on the same team now.”

Letter from the Executive Director, Melineh Kano

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