

Impact Report

Elena's Light

2022



Women Learning Together

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Since our founding in 2018, Elena's Light has had one objective: Women Learning **Together**. To that end, we collaborate with refugee women and children to build a brighter future for their families.

Vision

We envision a community that respects and celebrates diversity, and provides equity of opportunity to all members.

Mission

Our mission is to help build brighter futures for refugee women and children.

Letter from the Founder and Executive Director

Dear Elena's Light Community,

I am excited to share our 2022 Impact Report with you, since every one of you has played a part in the lasting impact we have made on the wonderful community we serve. I want to sincerely thank you for prioritizing our work by generously giving yourselves, your skills, your time, and your resources to elevate our clients and the communities in which these women and children—and we all—live.

Whether you contribute by volunteering, working behind the scenes, mentoring and advising, sourcing donations, or generously giving financial resources needed to run our programs, we can only impact our clients' lives in the ways we do through the love and generosity of each of you. **For that, I am truly grateful.**

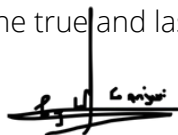
In reflecting on all we have done this year to forward our mission of creating brighter futures, one theme has really jumped out at me, and that is of connection. As you look through this report, you will learn how the legal advocacy program we started—initially as a result of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan—has blossomed through collaborations with law schools and other non-profits. Similarly, you will see how our health and wellness programming has grown through working in tandem with medical institutions and other non-profits.

At Elena's Light, we try to maintain a deep understanding of and connection to the women we serve. You will see this reflected not only in the programs we run but the way we run them, always seeking to foster deeper, more personal bonds among our clients and communities.

When I reflect on the meaning and value of connection, I think about Malika (not her real name), who escaped Taliban control and arrived in New Haven in September of 2021. She was from a small village and uses a wheelchair; for those reasons and more, she never thought she could travel outside the village or do much of anything with her life. When Malika came to the U.S., she spoke little English and didn't imagine that driving a car would ever be possible for her.

Through the support of Elena's Light, a volunteer tutor gave Malika one-on-one, personalized English tutoring from the comfort of her own home, and she can now read and speak English. Her purpose awakened, and she is now preparing to get her driver's license with the help of other volunteers. She hopes to someday return to Afghanistan to help other people with disabilities gain access to education and mobility. In the meantime, her life in Connecticut will be significantly easier for her to build. For the first time, she is dreaming of her future and the possibilities and promises it holds.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to have helped Malika. In reality, though, it was not me who helped her. It was the connection we made together, between a person with a thirst for learning and people with a love for teaching who are willing to volunteer her time and talents. This, and the hundreds of other stories we are humbled to play a part in, are the true and lasting impact of Elena's Light.



Fereshteh Ganjavi, Founder and Executive Director



July: Elena's Light Staff Party



August: Advocating for Afghan Adjustment Act



February: Elena's Light Birthday Fundraiser



January: Photovoice Project



EL ESL: Program Updates

In 2022, we continued our ESL program, now in its fourth year. The ESL program provides one-on-one customized ESL tutoring to our clients based on their personal goals (taking the US citizenship test, obtaining driver's permits and/or general English speaking).

In the Spring 2022 semester, we had 20 students enrolled. In the absence of a consistent ESL coordinator, we reduced our program to 8 attendees for the Summer 2022 session.

For the Spring 2023 semester, we have 15 students enrolled, with 15 tutors engaged from several local universities. The hope is to have our ESL program up and running again at a robust speed in 2023.

We currently have a 40-person student waitlist and a newly hired ESL coordinator who will be running the program.



Shukria Habibi's story

Shukria Habibi was born in Afghanistan and completed her bachelors degree in Business Administration at Kabul University. She went on to work as a Finance Officer at the Norwegian Refugee Council, an international organization that works to protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons during crises.

She is currently pursuing her MBA at Southern Connecticut State University while also acting as the ESL Coordinator at Elena's Light. Shukria has devoted her life to touching the lives of refugee women like herself through her work.

Shukria writes: "Starting my life in a place that I had never been to was not easy. The U.S. is a land of opportunities, most people believe. But I can say that it is not easy to get those opportunities, especially for newcomers. It is a land of challenges that every day we need to face and overcome. As the youngest child, life was pretty easy for me with my family and friends in Afghanistan. However, now I have to take all responsibilities of my life on my own, most of which I didn't have awareness of in the past. Although I feel so proud of myself for being independent and to help my family who still live in Afghanistan in this situation, I miss my family and my parents every single day. I hope to see them once again at some point."



Our ESL Work by the Numbers:



50 REFUGEE WOMEN

students enrolled in ESL classes



3,000+ HOURS TUTORED

in 2022 alone



45 ESL TUTORS

within the Elena's Light Team, selected from...



15 UNIVERSITIES

across the country

EL Legal: Know Your Rights

Together with our partners at law schools and legal organizations, Elena's Light hosted a "Know Your Rights" series this year that reached hundreds of Afghans. The series expanded on immigration options for Afghan immigrants. These options include Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Asylum, Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans (SIV), and more. The sessions were conducted by local immigration lawyers and legal aid experts, aiming to provide the most informative and individualized experience for our attendees.

Humanitarian Parole (HP) & Other Options for Afghans Abroad

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS PRESENTATION

February 10, 2022



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: IMMIGRATION OPTIONS FOR AFGHANS

Thursday, August 4, 2022
6:00 - 8:30 pm EST

Scan code to register!

Presentation** will provide an overview of the immigration options for Afghans (including humanitarian parole, asylum, SIV, TPS, etc.); & their basic requirements; deadlines; preparing your case; and what to expect. (** in English, Dari, & Pashto)

- **Welcome:** **Fereshteh Ganjavi**, *Elena's Light*
- **Sheila Hayre**, *Quinnipiac University School of Law*
- **Caroline Sennett**, *CT Institute for Refugees & Immigrants (CIRI)*
- **Jessica Daly**, *HIAS Pennsylvania*
- **Lauren Petersen**, *Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS)*
- **Benjamin Haldeman**, *New Haven Legal Assistance Association*
- **Jennifer Williams**, *Building One Community*

The image shows a row of logos. From left to right: Elena's Light logo, LAA (New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc.) logo, Building One Community logo (The Center for Immigrant Opportunity), Iris logo (Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services), Quinnipiac University Law logo, and HIAS Pennsylvania logo.

EL Legal: Pro Bono Clinic

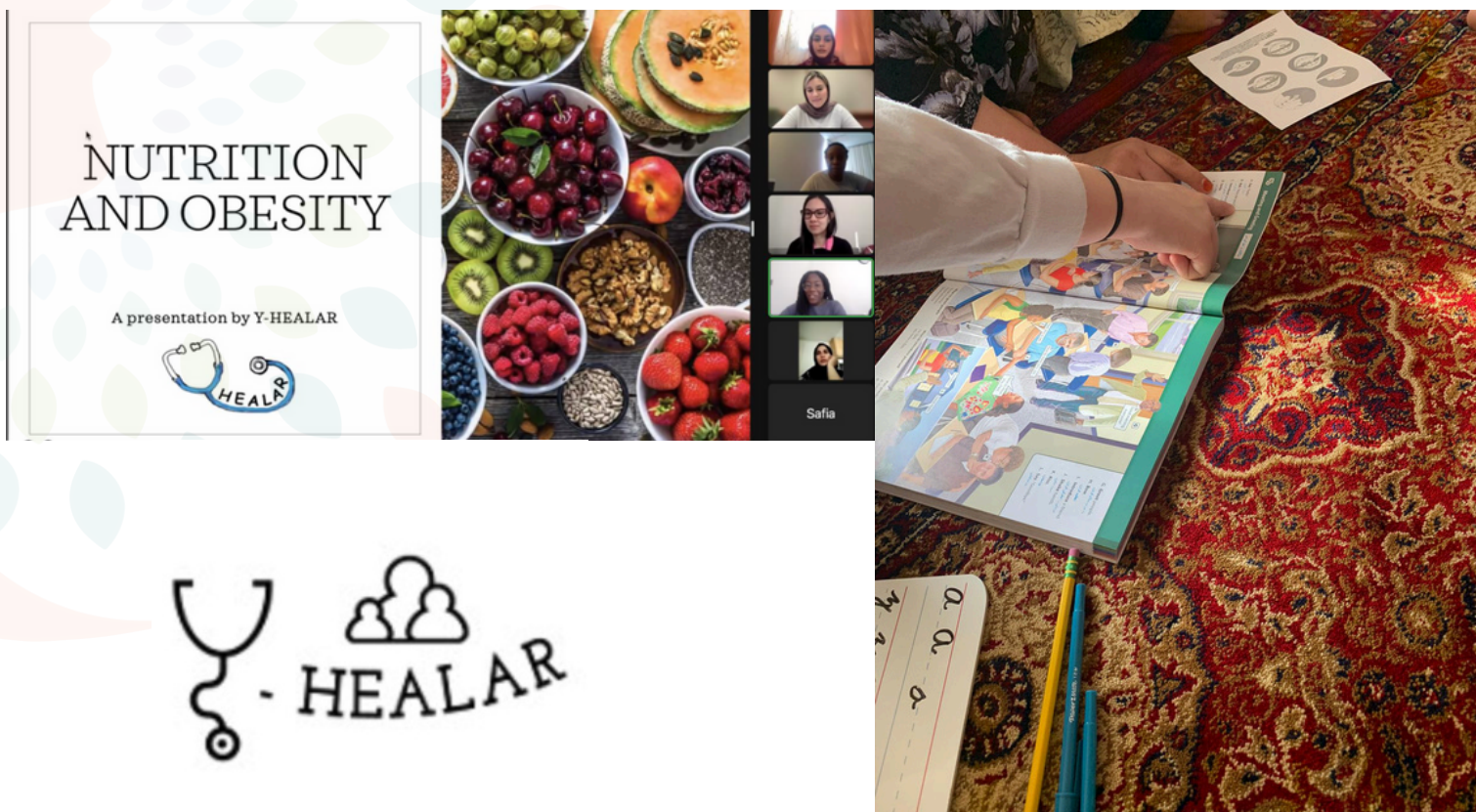
One of the biggest objectives for Elena's Light in the coming year is to establish a pro bono legal clinic. In coordination with Quinnipiac Law School, IRIS, CIRI, Building One Community, DARA, and New Haven Legal Assistance Association, we plan to develop a service to fill the gap of the overwhelming need for advocacy for Afghan immigrants. Legal representation is especially vital for immigrants and refugees escaping humanitarian crises.

At Elena's Light, we are focusing on volunteer recruitment to build the program with our colleagues. We hope to continue to grow our legal partnerships next year.



EL Health Updates: Y-HEALAR Classes

In collaboration with Yale Health Education and Literacy for Asylees and Refugees (Y-HEALAR), Elena's Light completed our 6-class ambassador program with two health ambassadors this year. Each spoke their own language, one Dari and one Pashto. Throughout the program, they were both taught to lead a health class on their own and develop the skills and knowledge they needed to be not only facilitators, but health educators.



EL Health: EMPOWER

In the summer of 2022, Elena's Light Health hosted its **third annual summer program** in New Haven with 5 families and 22 children. During the summer camp, children followed the EMPOWER curriculum, which stands for Emotions Program Outside the Clinic with Wellness Education for Refugees. For four weeks, the families played their way through social-emotional learning, coping mechanisms, physical activity, family emotional literacy learning, and more.

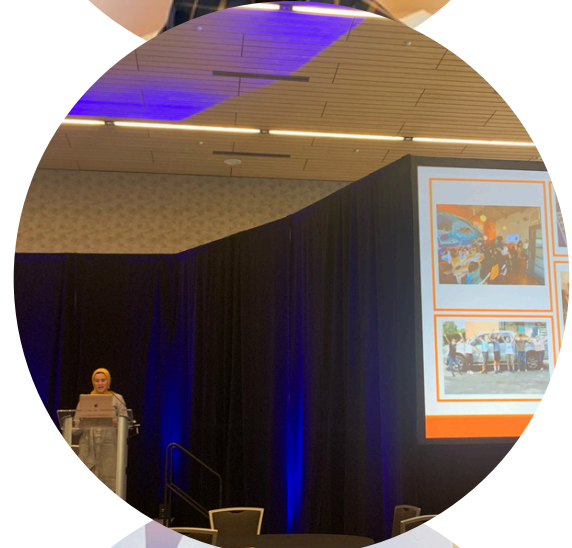


EL Health: Conferences

Elena's Light had the honor of attending four health-based conferences in 2022. The first was the **Muslim Mental Health Conference** in March, hosted at Yale University. Fereshteh Ganjavi, Rachel Schaffer, and board member Preethi Varghese-Joseph spoke about the impact of COVID-19 on refugee mental health, and the ways Elena's Light adapted its approach to healthcare in response.



At the **North American Refugee Health Conference** in Cleveland in June, Rachel and researcher Joseph Williams from Yale's School of Public Health spoke about COVID's impact on refugee families, and how Elena's Light is striving to help families as we emerge out of the pandemic.



At the **Mental Health America Conference** in June of 2022, Fereshteh, and Rachel shared their research and expertise and offered practical approaches for addressing our nation's refugee mental health crisis.



Lastly, at **Photovoice Worldwide** in October, Rachel spoke of her experience running a Photovoice activity with refugee youth earlier in the year with Wesleyan University.

Our Health Work by the Numbers:



6 HEALTH CLASSES

taught by medical professionals



24 REFUGEE WOMEN

attended the classes



100+ HOURS

of teaching and planning



150+ PEOPLE

benefited indirectly from the classes

EL Community: Lighting the Future

Sponsored by the International Association of New Haven and hosted at Yale's Dwight Hall, Elena's Light had another installment of its "Lighting the Future" Speaker Series featuring **Alia Seraj**. Alia is the daughter of Prince Abdul Ali Seraj of Afghanistan, who along with her American mother and two sisters who fled Afghanistan in 1978 to resettle in Connecticut. Seraj spoke movingly about her lived experiences as an Afghan American, her advocacy work, and how being from a family of refugees has influenced her parenting.



EL Community: Lighting the Future

Sponsored by the International Association of New Haven and hosted by Yale's Dwight Hall once again, the final 2022 session for our speaker series was held on December 3rd. This "Lighting the Future" event featured **Marwa Lahlou**, Miss Arab USA 2022, and **Basma Alawee**, executive director and cofounder of the refugee storytelling organization WeaveTales. Lahlou and Alawee talked with volunteer and journalist Emily Gordon about what it means to be immigrants/refugees in the U.S., and the different struggles that they had to face. Throughout the conversation, both women demonstrated their strength, intelligence, perseverance, and the will to make a change.





“We learn from each other and see the world differently. I want everyone to appreciate who they are and where they come from, see the beauty in that, and be able to show it to others.”

—MARWA LAHLOU,
MISS ARAB USA 2022



EL Community: Donation Drive

Thank you to Amazon, Purple, and various community services for all the goods—including pillows, coversheets, personal hygiene items, and toys—that were packaged and donated to our refugee families. Student volunteers, along with FOCUS on New Haven from Yale's Dwight Hall, helped to make the care packages. We are grateful to the Hello Neighbor Network for providing us with the storage space for this event.



EL Community: Afghan Women's Circle

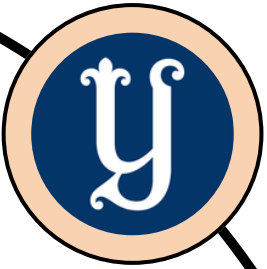
In collaboration with the Westchester Jewish Coalition of Immigration, the United Jewish Association, and the Jewish Community Center of Mid-Westchester, Elena's Light created and implemented a 5-week program for 15 Afghan women.

The women shared that they felt empowered and passionate about learning everything from health insurance, to driving, to skills for landing a job, and good childcare practices. The Afghan Women's Circle was taught by staff from Elena's Light.

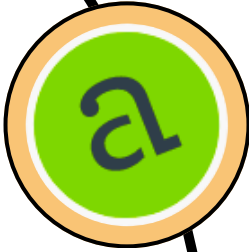
Inspired by the success of Westchester County's women's circles, the goal is for Elena's Light to bring it back to New Haven with a strong focus on job training.



Elena's Light in the Media



Yale Daily News: "Thirst for Education: Fereshteh Ganjavi, founder of Elena's Light and refugee advocate"; "Elena's Light non-profit continues to improve the lives of refugees"; "Miss Arab USA 2022 joins refugee advocates at Elena's Light fundraiser"; "Afghan Women's Circle connects refugee women with community and mentorship"; "A new COVID-19 clinic aims to provide free testing to Afghan evacuees in New Haven"



New Haven Arts Council: "One Year After Taliban Takeover, Afghan Women Issue A Call To Remember"



The Patch: "Elena's Light & WJCI Present Afghan Women's Circle"

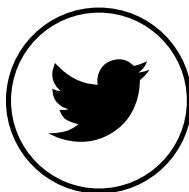
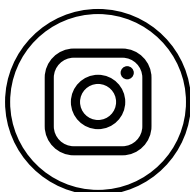


News 12: "New program helps Afghan women adjust to life in America"



"After Escaping the Taliban, Afghan Women Face New Education Barrier in the United States": op-ed by Fereshteh Ganjavi in *Newsweek*

Follow Elena's Light on social media to keep up with our work:



[elenaslight1](#) [elenaslight1](#) [elenaslight11](#) [Elena's Light](#)

Community Partners



Thank You

for a successful 2022

In 2023, Elena's Light will be working toward:

- Maintaining current collaborations while also fostering new partnerships
- Promoting cultural competency by developing cross-cultural friendships and building safe spaces
- Expanding our ESL and health programs to accommodate more clients
- Strengthening our legal advocacy program through our probono partnership with local legal professionals
- Continuing to support our current clients along with reaching out to more newly resettled Afghan refugees in Connecticut

To all our volunteers
and supporters who allow Elena's
Light to be what it is today,

To get involved, donate, or learn more
visit our website:

www.elenaslight.org



Scan the QR code to
support our efforts



We
thank
you!