

ELENA'S LIGHT

2021 ANNUAL
REPORT



e|ena's
light

women learning together

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Letter from our Founder & Executive Director



Dear Elena's Light Community,

Years ago when I dreamt of creating EL, I envisioned a community where women survivors of war and conflict would be uplifted with a sense of hope - hope for themselves and for their families' futures. I knew that in order for this to happen it would take the dedication and hard work of not just me, but of many, volunteering what spare time they may have to bring this vision to life.



What I could not have imagined was that in just a few short years EL would grow into what we are today: a supportive and safe community empowering hundreds of women, mostly of Afghan origin who came to the US as refugees escaping violent conflict back home.

We could not have done this without the incredible help from dozens of volunteers and community partnerships. Even while continuing to operate under the demands of a pandemic, we have been able to grow our specialized programming, focusing on the unmet needs of our clients. Events this past year in Afghanistan have been devastating, but we are encouraged by the formation of a new legal advocacy program initiated as a response to this crisis. Since August we have been helping Afghans navigate the legal systems to emigrate safely to the US. We look forward to growing this program to meet the ever increasing need of those affected.

I remain indebted to those of you who have joined me on this journey. For the first time I have been able to draw a modest salary, enabling me to more fully commit my time and effort, and we have been able to offer a few part time paid positions as well, an important step toward sustainability.

Elena's Light continues to be a force to be reckoned with and I look forward to seeing what we accomplish in 2022.

Fereshteh Gangavi

EL Founder and Executive Director



ABOUT ELENA'S LIGHT

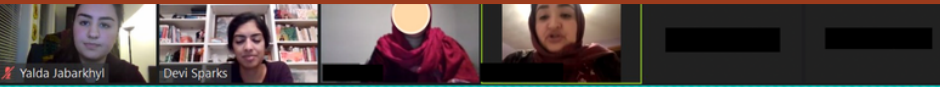


Vision

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

Mission

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



Goals of this talk د دې خبرو هدفونه

- 1) What is an infection
- 2) Different types of infections
- 3) How do infections spread
- 4) What is COVID?
- 5) How to stop spread of COVID and other infections



HEALTH CLASSES WITH Y-HEALAR

RESPONSE TO COVID-19: VACCINATION CLINIC



ORAL HEALTH FUNDRAISER AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM



EMPOWER 2021 SUMMER PROGRAM

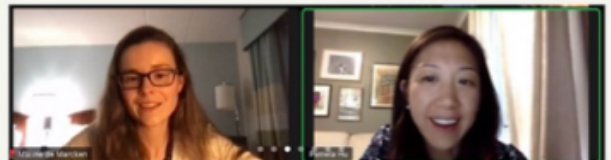
SUMMER HEALTH AND WELLNESS CLASSES



1/3

Nutrition, Obesity, and Parenting

Summer Health & Wellness Class #2



HEALTHY
EATING

Teaching Children through
Positive Parenting

Y-HEALAR



PHOTOVOICE PROGRAM IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY



FLAGSHIP LEGAL REPRESENTATION PROGRAM

Afghan Humanitarian Parole

THURSDAY, FEB 10, 2022
7-8:30 PM EST
REGISTRATION LINK (CAPTION AND BIO)

KNOW-YOUR-RIGHTS: PRESENTATION

Get an in-depth account of the humanitarian parole process and expectations from experts:
- Jessica Daly, Pro Bono Coordinator at HIAS PA
- Caroline Sennett, Director of Immigration Legal Services at CIRI.
We will have live interpretation in Dari and Pashto.



UNITECT RENTAL ASSISTANCE SIGN UPS

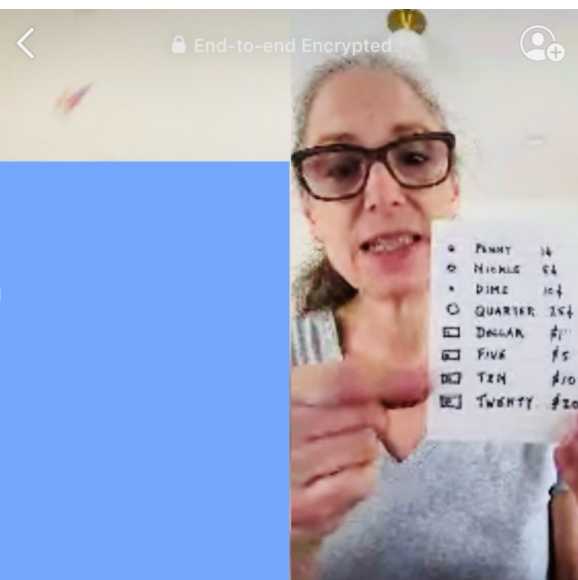
SPEAKER SERIES: "LIGHTING THE FUTURE: REFUGEE CONVERSATIONS"



EL ESL: PROGRAM UPDATE



60 volunteer tutors from around the country provided virtual 1-on-1 ESL education to over 60 women refugees. We were able to help clients obtain their Connecticut learner's permit, pass the citizenship test, and even have conversations with their families in English. As we continue to deal with the ongoing pandemic, the adaptation of the virtual teaching model is in place. We look forward to implement a hybrid model as the state of the pandemic evolves.



Elena's Light tutored 60 ESL women refugees this year.



12 women refugees were successful in obtaining their driver's permit.



20 women were successful in achieving U.S. citizenship.





Over the past 5 years that EL has been in operation, many lives have been changed through our programs. Here is a testimonial from the two sides of our ESL tutoring; a tutor and a student impacted by a tutor

Alicia Mazzurra

Alicia is a Yale English and Education Studies scholar who tutors with EL ESL part time.

"I'M EXCITED TO WORK WITH ELENA'S LIGHT [MY REFUGEE CLIENT THAT THEY CONNECTED ME WITH] BECAUSE I THINK THEIR MISSION OF EMPOWERMENT AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION IS REALLY IMPORTANT. I HOPE TO BECOME A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TUTOR."

"SOMETIMES MY CLIENT'S DAUGHTER WILL JOIN IN ON THE LESSON, AND SHE EVEN SANG THE ABCS TO ME ONCE"
-ALICIA



Aliyah*(Refugee Client)

Aliyah is a graduate of the ESL program and recently got her driver's license.

Aliyah was an ESL client at EL who was a single mother with major health complications. She also has disabled children that needed constant medical care. Aliyah would walk to the bus stop with her children to take them to their appointments. It would be a constant struggle and a stressful process until she was tutored in our ESL program that led to her obtaining her license.

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR HELPING ME. AFTER RECEIVING 6 MONTHS OF TUTORING FROM EL, I GOT MY LICENSE, NOW I AM INDEPENDENT AND I CAN DRIVE MY KIDS TO THEIR APPOINTMENTS AND BE A HEALTHIER VERSION OF MYSELF" -ALIYAH



*Name changed for privacy reasons

EL HEALTH CLASSES WITH Y-HEALAR



We enrolled 25 women refugees in our 11 health classes on topics from COVID, mental health, maternal care, and more. We introduced the EL Health initiative in partnership with Blossom Hill Foundation and Yale Health Education and Literacy for Asylees and Refugees (Y-HEALAR). EL Health is an interactive virtual health education program taught by licensed health professionals from the Yale New Haven Health System. This program focuses on addressing the many barriers to healthcare for refugee and immigrant populations. Our goals are to increase health literacy, health system navigation skills, patient autonomy, and healthy behaviors. Interpreters are provided to ensure client understanding of the teachings, and as always, classes are free.



CHILD WELLNESS PROGRAM



Despite the pandemic, following strict health guidelines, Elena's Light was able to continue its Children's Wellness Program [EMPOWER-Emotions Program Outside With Wellness Education for Refugees]. The EMPOWER summer camp was developed by Dr. Tricia Ryan, a Pediatric Neuropsychologist at Gaylord Specialty Healthcare and Elena's Light Board Member. Yale New Haven Hospital, and NeighborWorks New Haven also provided support. In 2021, an article about the program, "Pilot Wellness Program With Adapted Social-Emotional Learning and COVID-19 Curriculum for Refugee Youth" was published in SAGE Journals.

“

“I FEEL MY KIDS WERE ANXIOUS AND UNHAPPY AND REALLY BORED AT HOME. THERE WAS NO SCHOOL AS YOU KNOW AND WE DIDN'T HAVE ANYWHERE TO TAKE THEM OUT. THAT (EMPOWER PROGRAM) WAS HELPFUL FOR THEM TO GO OUT TO HAVE SOME ACTIVITY. IT EMOTIONALLY AND MENTALITY HELPS THEM A LOT AND IT OPEN THEIR MINDS, THEY KNOW THERE IS ANOTHER LIFE OUT THERE.”

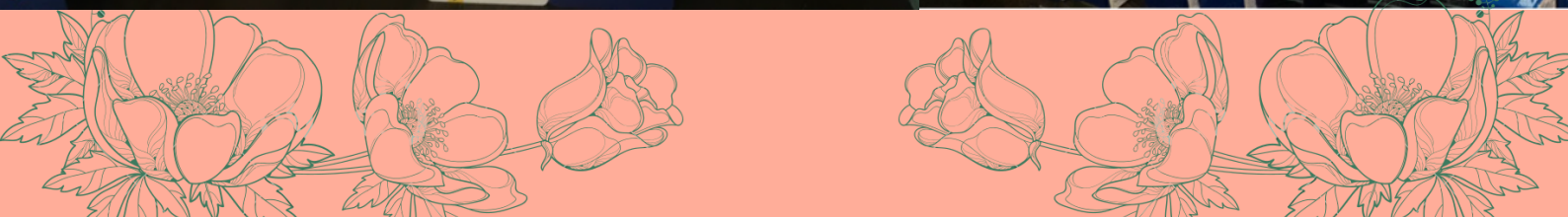
-MOM WITH 5 CHILDREN ENROLLED IN EMPOWER ”



EL HEALTH ORAL HEALTH EVENT



“Brush and Floss for a Bright Smile!”, was organized by our health team. This class showed how to schedule dental checkups, taught strategies to adjust diet and improving eating habits for oral health. It also brought attention to the importance of brushing and flossing regularly. Pre and post testing revealed an increase 50% of the parents who agreed with the importance of flossing, and an increase from 0% to 66.7% in the number of families who believed they should see the dentist. Over \$200 was raised through a fundraising event hosted by Huskies for Refugees UCONN (HRUC) to fund the dental hygiene event for refugee children.



VACCINATION CLINICS



In response to the pandemic, Elena's Light partnered with HAVEN Free Clinic and Yale's Community Healthcare Van to provide Covid-19 vaccines to over 130 immigrants and refugees.

The vaccination clinics ran in May and June. These clinics aligned with Elena's Light's vision to meet the needs of vulnerable populations with the objective to provide reliable healthcare to vulnerable, uninsured communities.



The clinics were accessible as it was close by to where most of the families lived. The vaccine was available for everyone without the requirements of ID or documents. There were also pizza and free PPE.

EL COMMUNITY: "LIGHTING THE FUTURE" SPEAKER SERIES



Elena's Light continued our "Lighting the Future" speaker series with a few new installations. "Lighting the Future" features different speakers from different backgrounds who all speak on a common theme: the refugee experience. Inspired by our executive director's stories about her own journey as a refugee, the series aims to shed light on refugee experiences and narratives across an array of mediums, from art to academia and more.



Fereshteh Ganjavi

Founder and Executive Director of Elena's Light



Dr. Kaveh Koshnood

Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the Yale School of Public Health



Refugee Policy Talk

featuring:
Fereshteh Ganjavi, Ahmed M. Badr, Eli Sabin,
Chris George



ELENA'S LIGHT'S RESPONSE TO THE ONGOING AFGHAN CRISIS



“I am speechless when trying to explain my feelings, my sadness, and my future life. I feel very sorry for the world. They blame Afghans for not protecting their own country, but if their country was at war for this many years, would they be able to fight? Would they have the energy to fight? It’s been 40 years of war. 40 years of losing loved ones everyday.”

-Fereshteh Ganjavi



Creation of the Legal Advocacy Program

In August 2021, the Taliban captured the Afghan capital Kabul, resulting in a takeover of the country. The collapse of the Afghan government resulted in a humanitarian crisis, leaving millions of Afghans in danger under a terrorist regime. As an organization that works with many Afghan refugees, Elena’s Light felt an urgent need to address this crisis through our programs. Thus, the Legal Advocacy program was created in hopes of helping refugees safely escape to the US.



YALE DAILY NEWS:

"Two local organizations partner to distribute PPE to 56 refugee families"

NEW HAVEN REGISTER:

"Ensuring education access for all, including Afghan Refugees"



NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT:

"36 Refugees Vaccinated at Hill Clinic"

COLLABORATIONS



Thank you for your support!

2021 LOCAL UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS



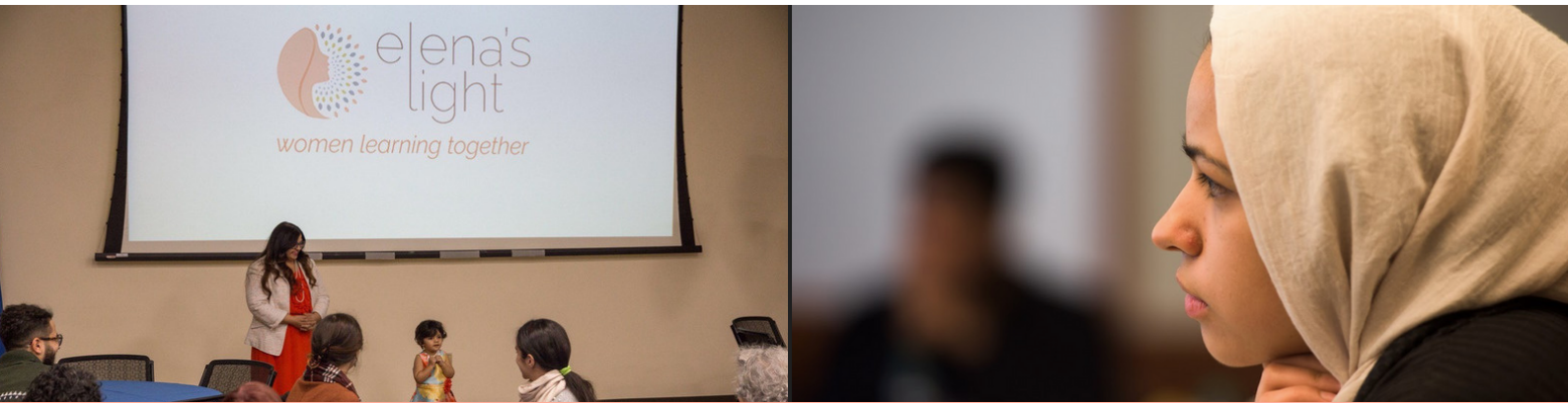
In 2021, Elena's Light worked with the following schools and universities:

- Southern Connecticut State University
- University of Connecticut (UCONN)
- Yale University
- Wesleyan University



Yale University





2022 GOALS

What to look forward to in the next year.

For this upcoming 2022 year, Elena's Light will be working towards:

- Maintaining current collaborations while also fostering new partnerships.
- Developing the organization's flagship Legal Representation program.
- Expanding our Health and ESL Programming through adding more clients
- Increasing community awareness of our organization and our services.
- Continuing to support our current clients as well as enrolling new ones.

Thank You

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

www.elenaslight.org

to all of our volunteers and supporters - we appreciate you more than words can convey.