



e|lena's
light

women learning together

2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT





TABLE OF CONTENTS

About Elena's Light	3
Letter from the Executive Director	4
2019-2020 at a Glance	5
EL ESL: Program Update	9
EL Health with Y-HEALAR	10
EL Community: Refugee's First Thanksgiving	11
Elena's Light in the Media	12
EL School Collaborations	13
Conclusion - 2021 Goals	14



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.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Fereshteh Ganjavi

Dear Elena's Light Community,

In the last two years Elena's Light has made incredible progress! As you will see in this report, we were able to grow our flagship program: ESL Classes for refugee women. With a team of dedicated volunteers, we were able to help 90 women over six semesters achieve their goals! This past semester we expanded our reach and recruited volunteers from all across the world.

In addition to expanding our ESL program, we also introduced the EL Health initiative in August 2019. Thanks to the generous support of the Blossom Hill Foundation and Y-HEALAR, Elena's Light was able to offer health education for the first time. During the pandemic we were able to adapt our existing classes to an online platform. In the summer of 2020, we introduced the Empower program where we offered two months of outdoor health classes to 40 children which focused on emotional and mental health education.

Our COVID-19 response did not stop there! We started several COVID relief projects. With the help of Neighbors for Refugees and Muslims Giving Back we provided cash relief for utilities. We also donated 2000 masks to refugee and immigrant families.

In addition to these new initiatives, I am also proud to report on the expansion of our EL Community Initiative. Dedicated to creating a safe space for cultural exchange, exploration, and immersion for refugee and immigrant children and families, the EL Community initiative has been an exciting undertaking for Elena's Light. In 2019, we hosted our first annual "Refugee's First Thanksgiving" event as part of this initiative.

In October 2020, Elena's Light introduced a new Speaker Series called "Lighting the Future: Refugee Conversations" which features different speakers who talk about their refugee experience. I would love if you joined us at our next event on January 7, 2021 featuring Asma Rahimyar, the first Rhodes Scholar from Southern CT State University and the daughter of Afghan refugees.

These past two years have been a period of growth and expansion for Elena's Light. This would not have been possible without the support of all our generous donors, volunteers, and staff members. We are so grateful for all you have done for Elena's Light and we look forward to another great year ahead!



2019-2020 AT A GLANCE



EL's Flagship Program: ESL Tutoring 2019



Elena's Light Celebrates its 'Second Birthday' February 2019



AC Donations with Muslims Giving Back July 2019



2019-2020 AT A GLANCE



Farmer's Market Fundraising July 2019



EL Health with Y-HEALAR: Our New Program August and October 2019



EL Community: Refugee's First Thanksgiving November 2019



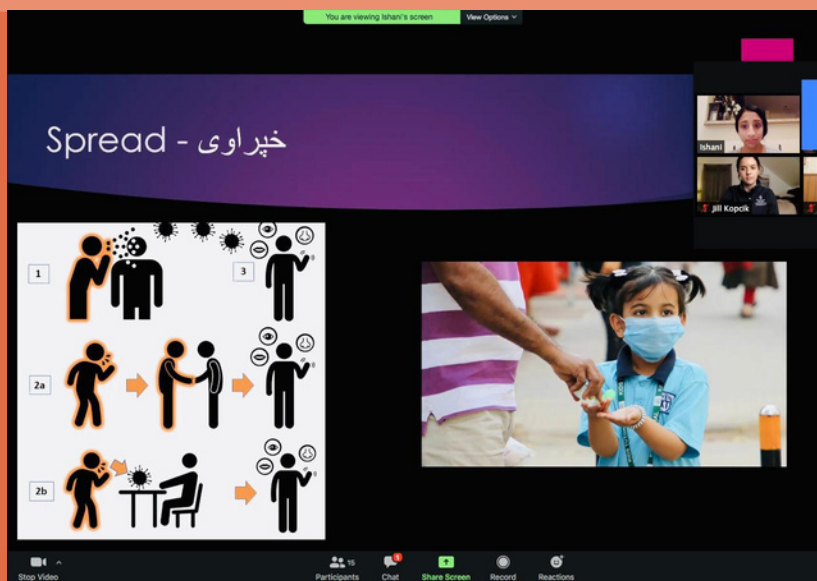
2019-2020 AT A GLANCE



Empower Program June-July 2020



COVID-19 Virtual Health Classes October 2020



Speaker Series "Lighting the Future: Refugee Conversations" October 2020



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*Lighting The Future:
Refugee Conversations*

FEATURING RHODES SCHOLAR
ASMA RAHIMYAR

January 7th @ 7pm

LINK IN BIO

2019-2020 AT A GLANCE



COVID-19 Mask Project 2020



Farmer's Market Fundraising 2020



Toy and Heater Distribution to Refugee and Immigrant Families December 2020





EL ESL: PROGRAM UPDATE

Over the course of 2019-2020, our ESL Program at Elena's Light continued to grow. We were fortunate to have an amazing team of volunteers that conducted classes with our clients. We were able to move all our in-home classes to a virtual platform after the pandemic.



Elena's Light supported 90 clients over 6 semesters.



10 women were successful in obtaining their driver's permit.



4 women were successful in achieving citizenship.



EL HEALTH WITH Y-HEALAR

In 2019, we introduced the EL Health initiative in partnership with Blossom Hill Foundation and Yale Health Education and Literacy for Asylees and Refugees (Y-HEALAR). Y-HEALAR is made up of resident physicians and dentists, nurses, and students of medicine, nursing, and public health. The first class on child safety was held in August 2019 and the second class on parenting was held in October 2019. At these events, families received safety and hygiene gift boxes and their children had the opportunity to interact directly with the medical practitioners.

In November 2020, Elena's Light and Y-HEALAR hosted our first virtual Women's Health Class. Some of the topics covered in this class included COVID-19, child safety, and how to navigate pediatric healthcare.



"I felt like the doctors are part of our family and was surprised and happy to learn from them. I really liked the idea and told myself that one day I will be a doctor who help families on their homes. My brother is 8 years old and disabled. [On the day of the class] doctors were holding him and playing with him. My mother was happy, and my brother was smiling."

-EL Health Child Participant

EL COMMUNITY: REFUGEE'S FIRST THANKSGIVING



On November 25, 2019, we hosted our first annual "Refugee's First Thanksgiving." Members of the refugee community gathered at Southern Connecticut State University with volunteers, mentors, and members of the greater New Haven area for a Thanksgiving feast with a multicultural twist. The event featured delicious cross-cultural cuisine, children's arts & crafts, family games, pumpkin painting, and education stations designed to explore the intersection of Native American and modern immigrant advocacy within the local community.

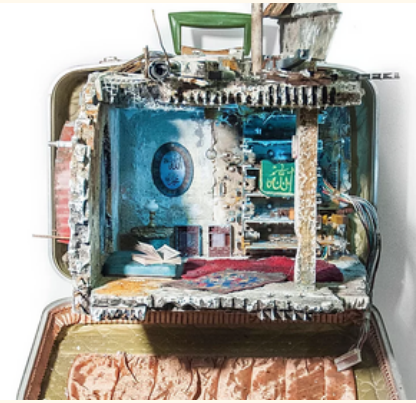
This program was a part of EL Community, an Elena's Light initiative that strives to create a safe space for cultural exchange, exploration, and immersion for refugee and immigrant children and families.



ELENA'S LIGHT IN THE MEDIA



Unpacked: Refugee Baggage is a multimedia art installation project that sculpturally re-creates rooms, homes, buildings and landscapes that have suffered the ravages of war. Each installation is embedded with the voices and stories of real people – from Afghanistan, Congo, Syria, Iraq and Sudan – who have escaped those same rooms and buildings to build a new life in America. Our founder, Fereshteh, was one of the refugees featured in Unpacked.



"Hundreds of millions of people are celebrating Thanksgiving, but for 22,000 refugees relocated to the United States through the UN Refugee Agency, this will be their first time. Ann O'Brien and Fereshteh Ganjavi from the Integrated Refugee and Immigration Service join Ali Velshi to discuss."

On Feb. 1 in the Alumni Lounge, Ganjavi celebrated the second "birthday" of the program, which coincides with her daughter Elena's birthday. She named the program after her daughter whose name, according to their website, means "light" in Farsi.

-The Charger Bulletin



Our founder and Executive Director featured on Crossing Borders, a feature on 103.5WNHH, where she discusses her experience as a refugee and her work with Elena's Light.



2019-2020 LOCAL SCHOOL COLLABORATIONS

In 2019-2020,
Elena's Light
worked with the
following schools
and universities:

- University of New Haven
- Southern Connecticut Community College
- University of Connecticut (UCONN)
- Yale University
- Wesleyan University



Founder and Director Fereshteh Ganjavi spoke at the 2019 Wesleyan Power of Language Conference.





Conclusion



2021 GOALS

What to look forward to in the next year.

For this upcoming 2021 year, Elena's Light will be working towards:

- Maintaining current collaborations while also fostering new partnerships.
- Developing the organization's flagship ESL program.
- Increasing community awareness of our organization and our services.
- Continuing to support our current clients as well as enrolling new ones.
- Providing new programs and services for the community.

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.