



e|lena's
light

women learning together

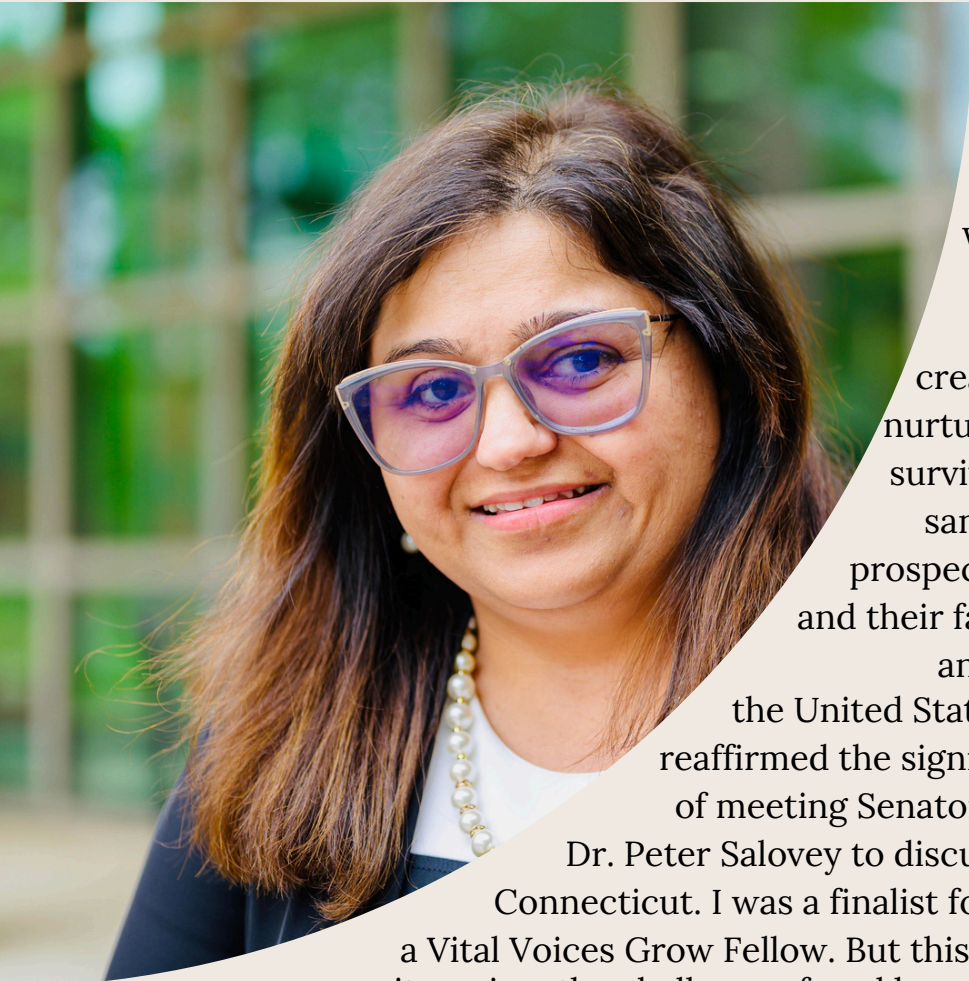


ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER



Dear Elena's Light Community,
Thank you to our wonderful donors, staff, volunteers, and the refugee & immigrant community who bring us to this level of radiance and make positive changes in lives. 10 years ago, when I envisioned the creation of Elena's Light, it was a dream nurtured by the fervent hope that women survivors of war and conflict would find a sanctuary where not just hope, but real prospects for a better future for themselves and their families would be kindled. It has been an incredible journey since I arrived in the United States in 2011, full of moments that have reaffirmed the significance of our work. I had the honor of meeting Senator Chris Murphy and Yale's President, Dr. Peter Salovey to discuss how to better support refugees in Connecticut. I was a finalist for the Echoing Green Fellowship and a Vital Voices Grow Fellow. But this year, my most impactful experience was witnessing the challenges faced by refugees and immigrants particularly, by the women in these communities. It's a perspective that broadened my understanding and deepened my commitment to our cause. Reflecting on our progress, I am reminded of the invaluable support and assistance received on my own journey to citizenship. Thank you for being an integral part of Elena's Light's journey. As we move forward, I invite you to support and sustain this transformative work with your generosity. Your contribution will enable us to provide essential resources and support, ensuring that hope and opportunity continue to flourish within our community.

*Fereshteh
Ganjavi*

*Founder and Director
of Elena's Light*

MISSION AND VISION

SINCE OUR FOUNDING IN 2018, ELENA'S LIGHT HAS HAD ONE OBJECTIVE: WOMEN LEARNING TOGETHER. TO THAT END, WE WORK WITH REFUGEE WOMEN AND CHILDREN TO BUILD A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THEIR FAMILIES.

MISSION:

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

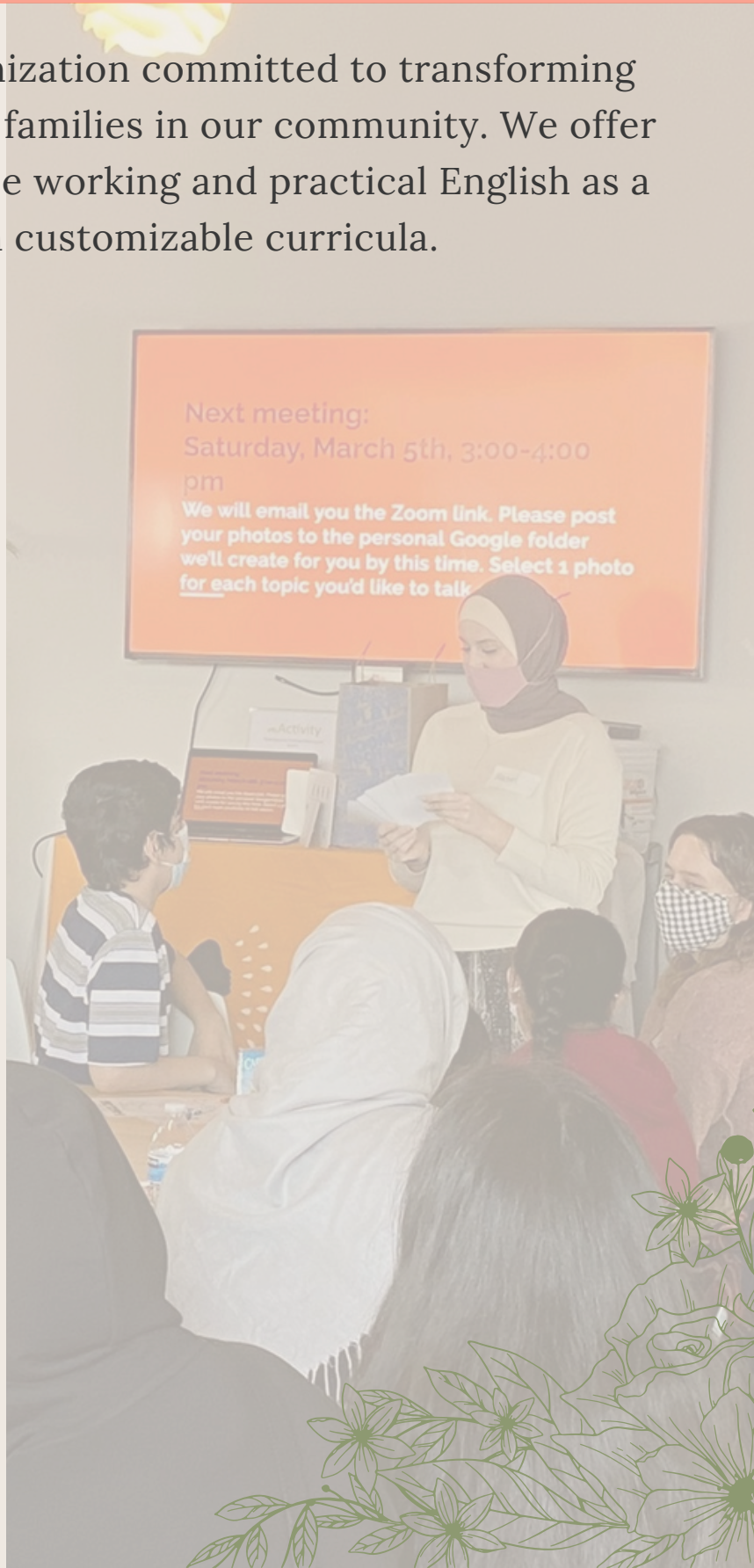
VISION:

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

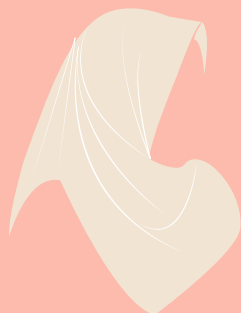
ABOUT ELENA'S LIGHT

Welcome to Elena's Light, an organization committed to transforming the lives of immigrant and refugee families in our community. We offer culturally competent and accessible working and practical English as a second language (ESL) classes with customizable curricula.

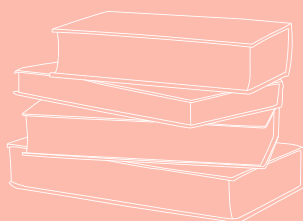
In addition, we provide high-quality health education services, bridging care gaps and educating on the American Healthcare System. We empower individuals to embrace independence by preparing them for the CT DMV driver's license examination. Our programs foster cross-cultural friendships and provide safe spaces for cultural exchange among refugee and immigrant youth. Most importantly, all our services are offered free of charge to refugee and immigrant families, ensuring equal access to knowledge and support. Join us on a journey to make a meaningful impact in the lives of those who need it most.



ESL WORK BY THE NUMBERS



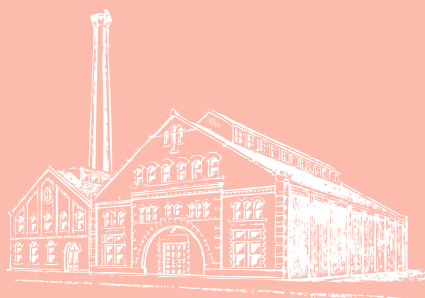
63 REFUGEE WOMEN
students enrolled in ESL classes



2400+ HOURS TUTORED
in 2023 alone



41+ ESL TUTORS
with the Elena's Light Team selected from...

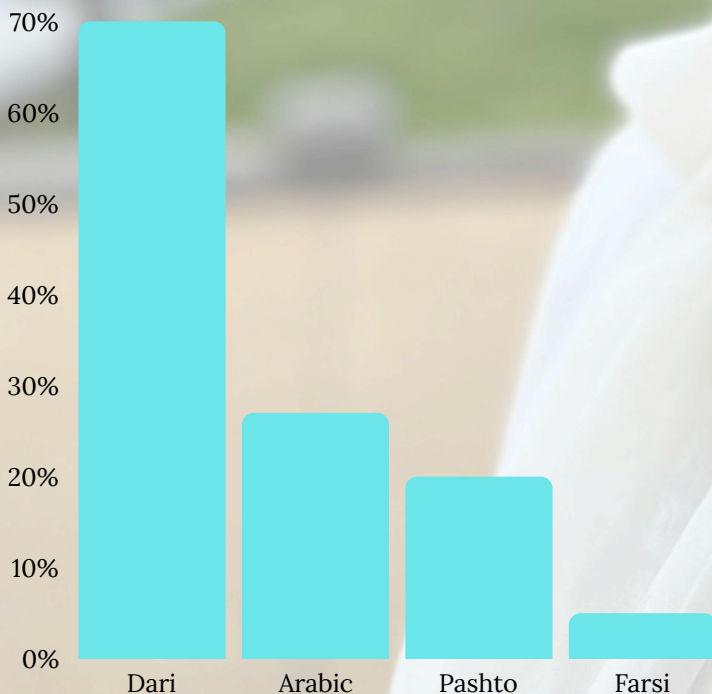


21 UNIVERSITIES
across the country

ESL: PROGRAM UPDATES

The ESL Summer Program has a diverse student body with 70% Dari speakers and the remaining 30% consists of Arabic, Pashto, and Farsi speakers. This diversity enhances the classroom, fostering a multicultural environment for language learning and cultural exchange.

Participant Language Demographic



ESL: PROGRAM UPDATES

ENCOURAGING CONTINUED SUPPORT

This year, we initiated an ESL driving education and permit testing in Stamford through a partnership with Jewish Family Services, spanning 14 sessions. Elena's Light handles curriculum, organization, and training. As we reflect on our achievements, we invite continued support and exploration of new opportunities, such as providing direct training for women in New Haven.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TUTORS:

Providing ongoing professional development opportunities for our tutors, including workshops and training sessions on the latest language teaching methodologies and techniques, will ensure they continue to deliver high-quality instruction.

LANGUAGE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS:

Creating language exchange opportunities with other language learners at our institution, where ESL students can teach their native language to others in exchange for practicing English, will promote language diversity and encourage peer-to-peer learning.

CULTURAL ENRICHMENT EVENTS:

Organizational cultural events and activities that showcase the traditions, customs, and art forms of English-speaking countries would provide a deeper understanding of the language's cultural context. This exposure will foster cultural appreciation and help students connect more meaningfully with the language they are learning.

ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES:

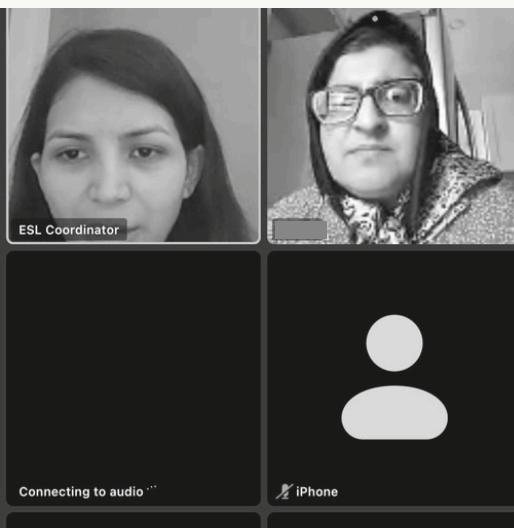
Expanding our online learning resources, such as interactive language exercises, self-paced modules, and multimedia content will cater to different learning styles and allow students to practice outside of the classroom hours, facilitating continuous improvement.



ESL TEAM UPDATES

To build on the successes of our English program in 2023, EL continued recruiting more ESL tutors to lead specialized online English classes. In response to demand and in anticipation of a large number of refugee clients in 2022, we added another ESL Coordinator to provide professional training for volunteer staff and oversight of the program. We are delighted to welcome Isbaah Khan to EL's team. Isbaah brings experience in Adult Education and is a Pashto speaker. With Mina, who speaks Dari, and Elham, who speaks Arabic, our ESL team is now complete. We'd like to Welcome Isbaah to the team!

"I became a part of EL because of my firm belief that knowledge empowers. Underserved communities face the highest risk of lacking proper educational opportunities, contributing to a cycle of low-income statistics. I sought to contribute to an organization dedicated to helping underserved communities not just survive but flourish in their new lives in America."
-Isbaah Khan



HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS



5 HEALTH CLASSES

taught by medical professionals



100+ HOURS

of teaching and planning



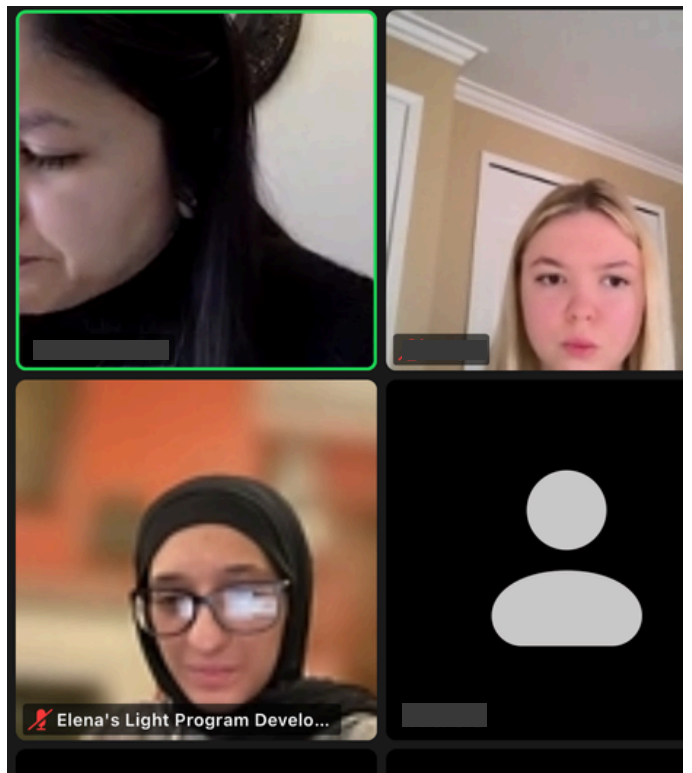
120+ WOMEN

in attendance!

ELENA'S LIGHT HEALTH CLASSES



We had the privilege of hosting more empowering sections of health classes for refugee women. At Elena's Light, we believe in spreading knowledge and wellness to those who need it most. Our dedicated team worked tirelessly to create a safe and inclusive space for these incredible women to learn about health and well-being.



LEGAL: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS III

Together with local immigration lawyers and partner legal aid organizations, Elena's Light hosted our third presentation in the "Know Your Rights" series, which has educated hundreds of Afghans and their families on legal rights.

The first two KYR presentations expanded on immigration options for Afghan refugees. These options include Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Asylum, Special Immigrant Visas (SIV), and more. Our third KYR presentation in 2023 educated refugee families on the application process for Humanitarian Re-Parole.

The session was conducted by local immigration lawyers and legal aid experts, who stayed for over an hour to answer individual questions and concerns from our attendees.

Know Your Rights

• • •
APPLYING FOR RE-PAROLE

IN ENGLISH,
DARI, AND
PASHTO


 **elena's light**
women learning together


When?
August 3rd 2023 from 6:30-8:00 PM EST


Where?
Virtual
Link: <https://rb.gy/leag7>

Who?
Attorney Ben Haldeman from New Haven Legal Assistance, Attorney Lauren Petersen, Mohammad Safi Sina & Nallely Acosta from the law office of IRIS

Overview
The presentation will provide an overview of the Re-Parole application process, explain the I-131 Form, discuss the advantages and benefits of applying, and conclude with a Q&A session.

 **iris**
INTEGRATED REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT SERVICES

 **LAA** | NEW HAVEN LEGAL ASSISTANCE ASSOCIATION, INC.



A group of people are gathered on a modern, covered patio overlooking a harbor filled with numerous sailboats. The patio features a wooden ceiling, several large cylindrical columns, and various seating options including blue plastic chairs, wicker armchairs, and a sofa with colorful cushions. A large potted plant is positioned in the center of the group. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly faded style, with the text 'EL COMMUNITY UPDATES' overlaid in the middle.

EL COMMUNITY UPDATES

PATIENT-CENTERED OUTCOMES RESEARCH INSTITUTE (PCORI)

Elena's Light was approved for a funding award through the Eugene Washington PCORI Engagement Awards Program, an initiative of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). Marta Moret, President of Urban Policy Strategies and Advisor of Elena's Light, facilitated this discussion as the evaluator on the project, where stakeholders in refugee health collaborate with refugee and immigrant community members to train in Patient-Centered Outcomes Research and work towards the betterment of refugee health. Marta Moret has already been working with us for over two years pro bono. We are fortunate for a dedicated team of researchers, clinicians, community organizations, and community members who are committed to this initiative.



The Elena's Light team, the Yale medical team, individuals from the refugee community, and nonprofit organizations held the first meeting at the Yale President's House in September.



PCORI MEETING AT THE YALE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE



Thank you to 20 refugee community members, 10 nonprofit organizations, and 10 research specialists who all came together for our PCORI project gathering to collaborate, discuss, and train each other on research, aiming to create a better future for our refugee leaders. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who worked diligently to make this a reality, both in person and virtually. During this meeting, we didn't just learn; we shared and cared for each other.

REFUGEE WOMEN CIRCLE

Collaboration between Elena's Light and Jewish Family Services of Greenwich for cultural training.

Refugee Women's Circle, led by Elena's Light and JFS and supported by other community organizations, is a bi-weekly educational group for refugee women in America. In these sessions, we discuss language acquisition, employment, cultural competence, women's health, and more. Childcare and cultural interpreters are provided. This fosters resilience and integration, improves communication, boosts confidence, enhances productivity, and creates a supportive community, ultimately contributing to their successful adaptation and overall well-being.



LOCAL EVENTS



MEETING WITH SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY

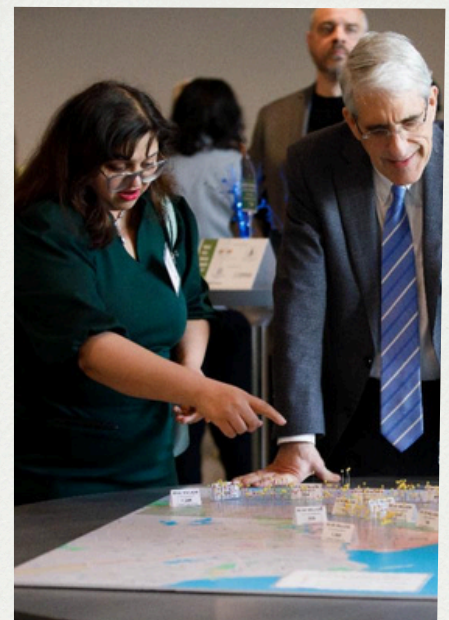
The senator spoke about his admirable bipartisan work on immigration at the Southern border. Fereshteh shared her experiences as a refugee leader; explained the necessity of support for on-the-ground organizers, and suggested policy changes—including support for the Afghan Adjustment Act—that can benefit refugees both in Connecticut and nationwide.



At the end of the event.



MEETING WITH SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY AND YALE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT, DR. PETER SALOVEY.



WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2023

LIGHTING THE FUTURE SPEAKER SERIES



On June 17, 2023, we celebrated World Refugee Day, a global initiative that aims to raise awareness about the difficulties faced by refugees while celebrating their resilience, courage, and contributions to society. We were honored to host a discussion with Marwa Lahlou, 2022's Miss Arab USA and refugee advocate Basma Alawee at Yale.

Thanks to Yale Dwight Hall for generously providing their beautiful venue. We hosted accomplished Afghan artists Laila Mohammadi and Mosa Sadat, commemorating World Refugee Day. Our event was enriched by the presence of refugees and supporters, both serving as featured speakers. Together, we celebrated this important day with unity and shared humanity.



2023 HAND-IN-HAND DONATION DRIVE

HAND-IN-HAND DONATION DRIVE

A family-centered donation drive seeking to collect toiletry, clothing, and personal care items for refugees in New Haven. Special thanks to our volunteers who came to the donation center to distribute goods to families.

COMMON GOOD & CREATIVE WORKING DRIVE

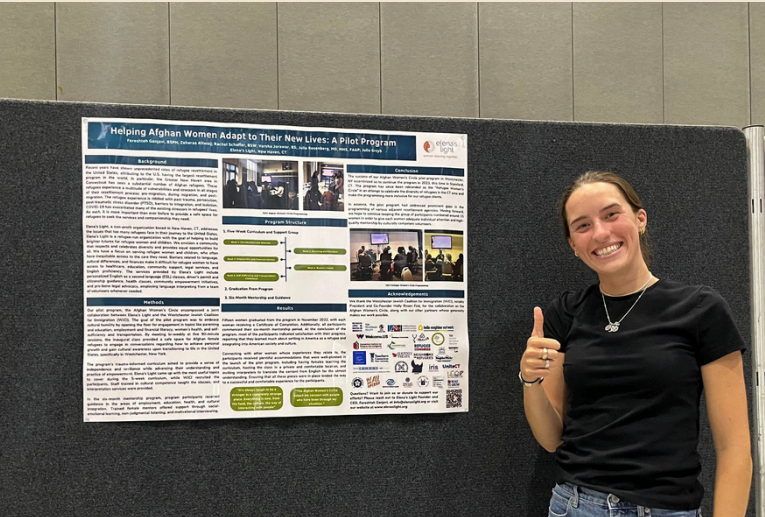
Elena's Light was invited to this event hosted by Yale where we were fortunate enough to meet with many students to explain our mission and the work we do. Thanks to FOCUS group at Yale



2023 AT A GLANCE: HEALTH CONFERENCES

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS (NARC) CONFERENCE

Thanks to Dr. Rosenberg and Dr. O'Brien for sharing our poster about the Refugee Women Circle with everyone in Canada.



MUSLIM MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

Zaharaa, our health coordinator, attended the event in Chicago, while Leslie Koons and Fereshteh Ganjavi participated virtually. Zaharaa shared insights about the health and cultural differences among refugee children and women.



YALE TALK

Refugee Health discussion for Dr. Kaveh Khoshnood's class involved a team of refugee leaders and organizations educating the new generation about their work experiences. EL team members shared their valuable information with all.



2023 AT A GLANCE: ADVOCACY DAYS

ADVOCACY MEETING WITH OFFICES FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE ROSA DELORA, SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY, AND SEN. RICHARD BLUMENTHAL.

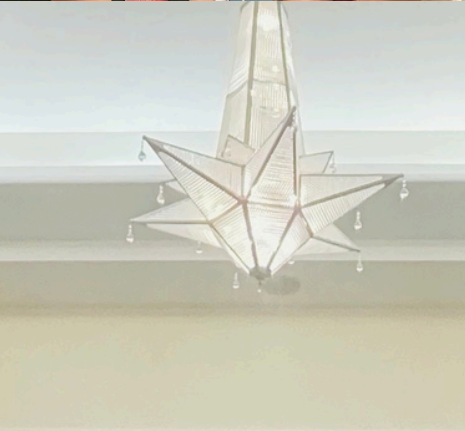


EL COLLABORATE WITH WE ARE ALL AMERICA ADVOCACY DAYS IN WASHINGTON D.C.

This year, we were honored to actively participate in the We Are All America (WAAA) Campaign, led by refugee and immigrant grassroots organizations based at the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA). Elena's Light (EL) collaborated directly with them, volunteering our efforts in planning and coordination.



ELENA'S LIGHT AT NIIC CONFERENCE



Elena's Light got to attend the National Immigrant Inclusion Conference, which celebrates inclusivity, seeking to integrate and uplift all. This conference seeks to impact all communities. The conference is inspiring and intersectional, and showcases the expertise and innovation of a wide range of leaders, organizations, and networks all working on behalf of America's immigrants and refugees.

EL COMMUNITY: FUNDRAISING EVENT



At this heartwarming event, we gathered at a board member's residence to support immigrant and refugee causes, combining the warmth of a family gathering with the power of collective goodwill.



With the help and support of our generous donors, we were able to raise \$3,400 to put towards assistance for refugees and immigrants.

NETWORKING



VITAL VOICES GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP



E WOMEN NETWORK



BIG CONNECT EXPO



YALE UNDERGRADUATE LEGAL AID ASSOCIATION

NOTABLE MENTIONS



2023 WINNERS OF THE WOMEN OF IMPACT AWARD



FEATURED ON THE WERUCHÉ PODCAST

This year, our founder got to speak on the Weruche Podcast about her experience coming to America as a refugee. Her journey to America led her to become an advocate for women and she shares her story with with the podcast. It was truly an honor to be featured here.



HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY CO-SPONSORS WORLD REFUGEE DAY 🖱️

On World Refugee Day, we joined a panel of community members for learning enrichment sharing our journey and how we faced adversity.



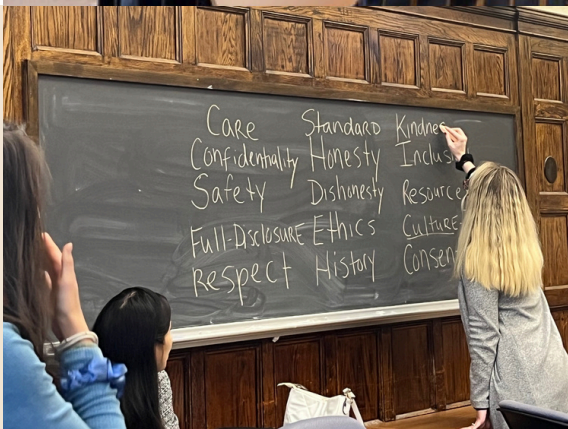
Credit: Maher Photography

EL IN PUBLICATION



FEATURED ON NEWSWEEK

Afghan women face new education barriers in the United States. Access to higher education is one of the most important priorities for refugees and other newcomers as they rebuild their lives.



FEATURED IN BORGEN MAGAZINE

In the United States, Afghans, especially women, are confronted with a lack of access to education. In 2022, only 30.3% of the Afghan community aged 25 or older has attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the national average of 37.9%.



VITAL VOICES GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

Fereshteh Ganjavi is 2023 Vital Voices Fellow. The Vital Voices Visionary Program created to support the next generation of emerging leaders who are redefining leadership in their everyday lives.



PUBLICATION IN OXFORD JOURNAL

This year, our research was published by Oxford University Press in Health Education Research. We explored the determinants of successful implementation of a preventive mental health and wellness intervention for Afghan refugee families.

THANK YOU TO OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND ADVISORS

Board of Directors:



Dr. Preethi
Varghese-Joseph



Jaden Harris



Dr. Trish Ryan



Dr. Camille Brown



Leslie Koons



Benjamin M.
Haldeman, Esq.



Dr. Chris
Rominger

Advisors



Marta Moret



Naveed Safi



Ahmed Badr



THANK YOU TO OUR CURRENT STAFF, INTERNS, AND VOLUNTEERS



Chelsea Cleary



Regine Villarmeamea



Isabella Mandell



Morgan Reilly



Rebekah Sookdeo



Lily Mac Hugh



Rishika Khanna



Mina Sediqi



Isbaah Khan



Cassandra Traver



Riana (Naima)



Zaharaa Altwaij



Dr. Adina Safi-Aghdam

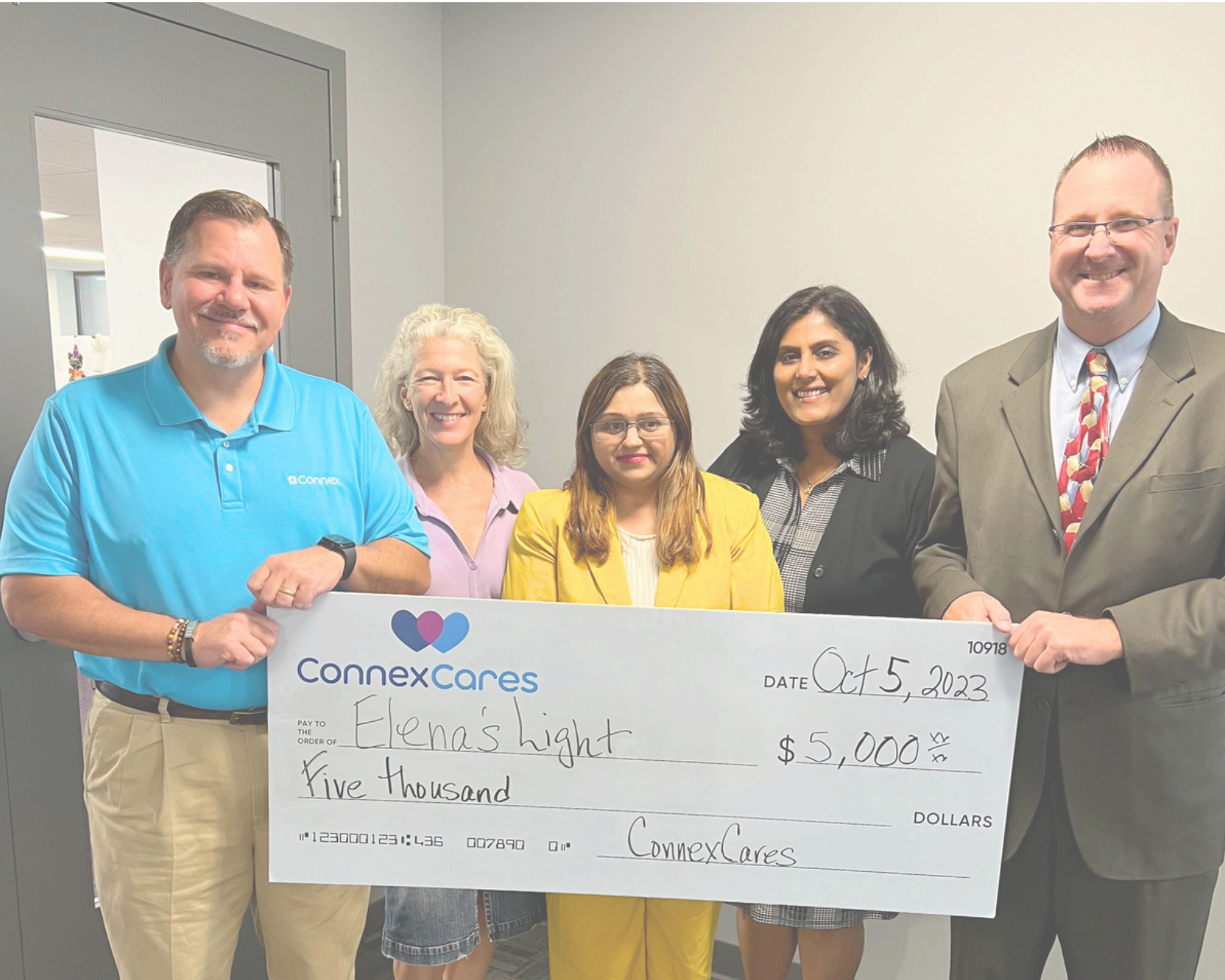


Sarvenaz Keshavarz



Leila Ansari

THANK YOU TO CONNEX CARE



"As a founder and director of Elena's Light, and as a refugee leader in my community, I am incredibly proud to announce that we received a grant from the Connex Care Foundation. This is a historic milestone for our organization, and I firmly believe that together, we will bring about positive change and work towards building a brighter future for refugee women and children in Connecticut." -Fereshteh Ganjavi

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS



HOW TO GET MORE INVOLVED

YOUR VALUED CONTRIBUTION

Your involvement directly influences positive change. Contributors enjoy exclusive newsletters, event invites, and personalized updates. Your generosity is acknowledged through our sponsorship tiers, ensuring your commitment to positive change is celebrated.



GIVING LEVELS

CHAMPION:

\$25 -Can support school supplies and essentials for children.

CONNECTION:

\$50 -Can support one month of Internet access for a family with children.

COMMUNITY:

\$100 -Can support one ESL book for a refugee woman in our ESL Tutoring Program.

BRONZE

\$250 -Can support three ESL books for refugee women in our ESL Tutoring Program.

SILVER

\$500 -Can support one health class for 5 refugee women or a laptop for our ESL tutoring program.

GOLD

\$1,000 -Can support

- 1) One health class for 20 refugee children during the summer, or
- 2) Two health classes for refugee women, or
- 3) 10 ESL books for refugee women, or
- 4) Unrestricted for other needs.

PLATINUM

\$5,000 -Can support

- 1) Two health classes for refugee children during the summer, or
- 2) Two health classes for refugee women, or
- 3) 20 ESL books for refugee women, or
- 4) 10 Know Your Rights classes, or
- 5) Unrestricted for other needs.



OUR 2024 GOALS

01

The 2024 Driving Initiative

Empower women through driver's education classes, providing a pathway to independence and mobility in their new communities.

02

Job Training at Yale

Allow women to apply their ESL knowledge in a professional setting

03

Annual Light the Future Awards Ceremony

Award and recognize the individuals who have contributed to the community.

04

Capital Campaigns

Hope to raise funds for a workspace and community center.

To all our volunteers and supporters who allow Elena's Light to be what it is today - we appreciate you more than we can convey!



To get involved, to donate, or to learn more about us, visit our website: www.elenaslight.org