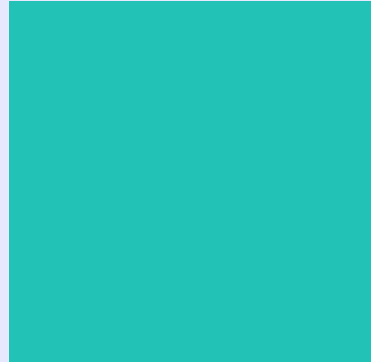
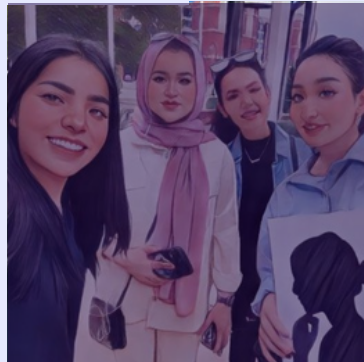
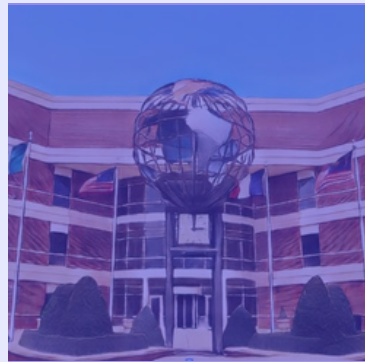
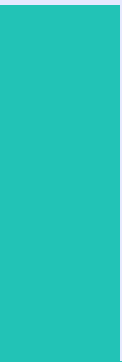




IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Sourced from *Şawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses*.
Funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship



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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

These are the heartfelt stories of refugees who were hosted and resettled by colleges and universities across the U.S.

These stories were collected through *Şawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses*, a project capturing the voices of 19 refugees hosted by ten diverse campuses nationwide. Through these interviews, participants shared candid reflections on their challenges, triumphs, and the unique support they received while being hosted by higher education institutions. Representing a wide spectrum of ages, genders, languages, and countries of origin, their stories underline the universality of hope and resilience in the face of uncertainty.

To learn more about *Şawt* visit: everycampusarefuge.org

The hosting institutions that were once home to *Şawt* participants include both public and private campuses of different sizes and settings. They are:

- Agens Scott College in Decatur, Georgia
- Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina
- James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia
- Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania
- Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma
- Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia
- Russell Sage College in Troy, New York
- University of Tulsa in Tulsa, Oklahoma
- Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina
- Washington State University in Pullman, Washington

If you would like to learn more about the protocol used for *Şawt*, please contact us as ecar@everycampusarefuge.org.

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.





ROCKY

“ People would not treat us like we were refugees. We didn't feel like ‘oh we’re someone else from a different country.’ We felt like we're all just one.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

I came from the other corner of the world to a different country.

I had no idea what's going to happen. I have a wife, I have a child, how [am I] going to be able to find a job?

When we arrived on campus, everything was so quiet. I think it was the weekend. . . they showed us our apartment. We don't see anybody around the campus. In the Afghan culture . . . if somebody comes to the neighborhood, we Afghans go to their house, right? . . . [M]y wife is saying, no one is coming here to my room to invite me to say, “Oh, welcome to the neighborhood” . . . We thought “no one is welcoming us.” What's going on?

I think it was very surprising for us the first few days. But eventually, when we learned how to approach a neighbor, how to approach someone else on campus it was a lot of fun. . . it turned out to be wonderful. We loved it. We made a lot of friends, eventually. . . And it was great. Even . . . if you're in your own country, if you move from one place to another to a new place, it's going to be [hard] for the first few days. But eventually, you get used to it. You make friends.

We were in the family graduate housing. So there [were] families with kids. They're asking about my son, about my wife, and the ladies are calling my wife. . . it's like a relationship we created with our neighbors.



Hosted by:

**OKLAHOMA STATE
UNIVERSITY**



Interviewed in English by:

ZAKIA ANWAR

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

In the beginning, it was a lot of people [who had come from Afghanistan]. It was hard. . . there was only one case manager, one case worker dealing with 70 or 80 people. But eventually . . . they put one volunteer with a certain family. If that family needs to go grocery shopping, for example, that volunteer will go and help them out . . . If somebody in the family needed to take [the] written driver's license test, that volunteer is going to help them. And if a person needed to learn English on their off time, the volunteer was there to help them.

In terms of jobs, in terms of medical services, transportation, language, computer literacy, writing skills, reading skills, all these things were provided . . . everything was organized. More case managers joined; volunteers joined to help.

Especially the ELIC* . . . help[ed]. . . all the Afghans [become] self -sufficient. They were able to learn English, which is so important.

I was lost, but the people around me, the case managers, like the director of ELIC, the staff at the university, they were the ones [to] direct me [in] the right direct[ion]. If I had a question . . . like, “how can I get a job?” they would help me go online and install an app, Indeed, on my phone and create a resume and tell me that's how you're going to apply for jobs here in the US. Or LinkedIn . . . that's how you create your resume. These are simple things . . . It is not like I didn't know these things, but the system here is different . . . compared to where I came from.

*The English Language and Intercultural Center (ELIC) is a program under the Oklahoma State University Global Department.

Everyone was there to help me and my family – not only me and my family, but the rest of the Afghans. They would go and reach out to the family, “what do you want? What are your needs?” And based on the family's needs and wants, the university will go and tackle your issue and address your needs.

There were some very good, talented ladies [who] wanted to sew things and design things – clothes, bags, and everything. . . [t]he university eventually provided that equipment. They provided fabrics for them, sewing machine[s], classes for the ladies. So the ladies were successful [in] hav[ing] a job to sell their products online.

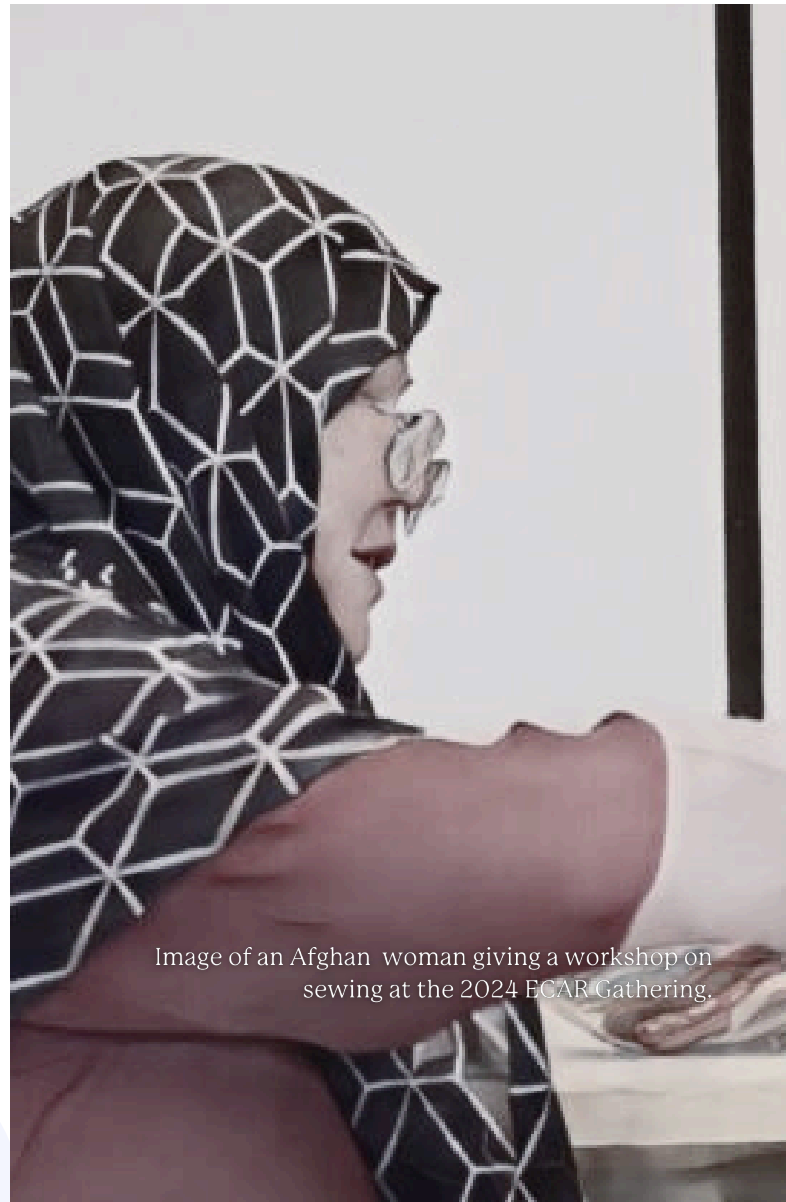


Image of an Afghan woman giving a workshop on sewing at the 2024 ECAR Gathering.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

This one night, it was like three in the morning. My wife had a certain medical condition. I didn't have a car. And I didn't [want] to bother people. . . And I didn't know how to go to a doctor. I didn't know how to find a hospital. And I think that was the first week when I arrived on campus.

When I had to go grocery shopping, I had to walk miles and miles and get a bag and put all my groceries in the bag and . . . put it on my back and walk home. And that wasted a lot of my time.

Oklahoma, Stillwater – it has a beautiful public transportation [system]. We had a bus system, but unluckily, we didn't know how to use the bus. But eventually . . . we had this added to the classes, how to use a bus . . . how to use transportation. Transportation is important for a newcomer.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

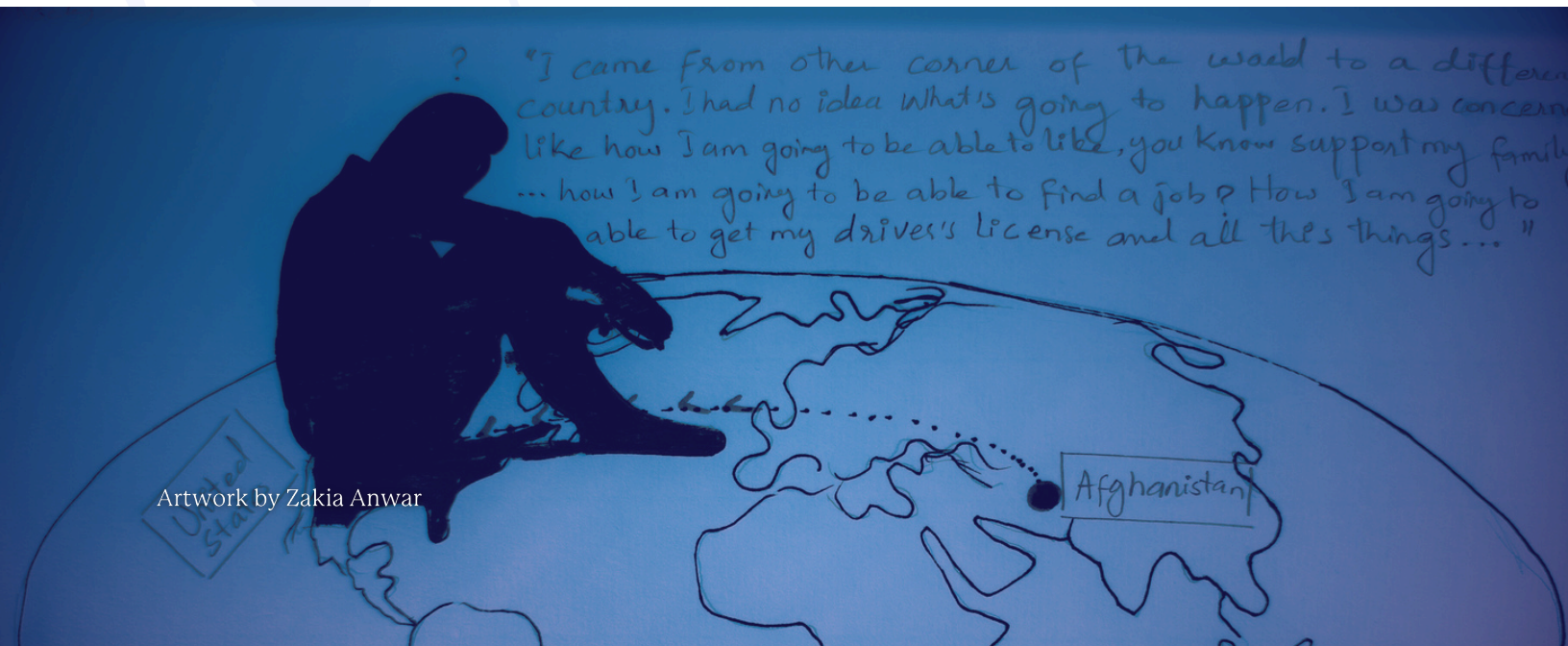
The one and a half years that I was there [at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma], the connection that we created, the bond that we created as a family . . . people would not treat us like we were refugees. We didn't feel like "oh we're someone else from a different country." We felt like we're all just one.

I'm in North Carolina right now, but I still consider everyone a family. I give them a call. I send an email. . . I still reach out to my friends there in Stillwater, and they don't say no to me.

I'm still working with Oklahoma State University as a part-time[r]. I'm still in contact with the case managers, and also I'm still working with the attorneys in Oklahoma, with the lawyers that are working on the immigrants' legal documents. I'm still working with these people, and I'm still in touch with most of the instructors there, the teachers there, the families there, you know, the Afghan families or the refugee families. So I'm keeping all pretty much what I was doing there; I'm still keeping it right now, but I'm not physically there, but I still represent myself from North Carolina on the phone if they need my help. . . We're still connected.

I miss those days . . . I'm appreciative of those events that they organized once in a while, that we go to . . . it was wonderful.

Artwork by Zakia Anwar





FATEMA

“ Everything was there and everything was there.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.

ARRIVAL

I personally could not bring anything when we came from Afghanistan.

[But] I have a ring . . . a ruby stone. It is a gift from my father and . . . a symbol of the homeland and the family. I remember the day that my father came from a long trip and gifted this ring to me, and I was so happy. This ring reminds me of those memories and makes them fresh, and I take that feeling everywhere with myself. I wear it because holding it in my hand makes me feel relaxed; that is, whenever I feel anxious or, for example, feel a little distant from the homeland or family, then I wear that ring.

Every time I talk to my family, especially my father, who I miss a lot, my father always asks “where is the ring I gave to you?” I know he is joking, and also he wants to know if I still have it or do not have it with me. Because I am someone who easily loses everything, everything. If I have something with me always, then it means I love that person so much, and they are so important to me.

[The ring] gets people’s attention, and when people see that they start asking me . . . where I am from. And I always talk about myself and where I come from and about my ring.



Hosted by:

**JAMES MADISON
UNIVERSITY**



Interviewed in Dari by:

ZAKIA ANWAR

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SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

I was on a campus before so it was the same thing. [They] had a very good gym facility. I am a person who gets relaxed by working out in the gym. I always wanted a place where I could have a gym close to my house – gym or swimming pool. And the good thing, or luckily, is that memberships in all of these places were free for us [during] the time that we were on the college campus. I really like the gym [on] that campus.

For me, I was preparing myself mentally and physically, so I was always in the gym or in my room. People could only find me in the gym or in my room because I was always in the gym. The good [thing] about it was that everything was open for 24 hours. You could use the gym for 24 hours if you wanted. Or [the] game fields if you wanted.

It is a kind of security that you feel emotionally and mentally, spiritually secure; and one type of security is that you feel physically secure. More than physically, I feel more emotionally and mentally, spiritually secure and safe in that place, that I could go anywhere, anytime that I wanted, and I had this feeling that I would not be attacked by anyone in here.

Every new person who just arrived . . . who brought nothing but a few clothes and needs everything, we can say that we had everything there [on campus], from, for example, even a dental bag, toothbrush, which is the simplest thing, to kitchen materials. Everything was there, for example a bed, for example a blanket.

Everything was there and everything was there.

"I wear it because holding it in my hand makes me feel relax"



"I have a ring that besides what I can say, can be a symbol of the homeland because it has a ruby stone. and the fact it is a gift from my father can be a symbol of the homeland and family!"

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

When you immigrate to a new country, they are not going to prepare a red carpet for you.

I am grateful to those who did give me hope and supported me and said that one day you will stand on your own feet and you will have the opportunity as a person who was born here. Those sayings had an effect on me . . . giving me hope for the future, because at that time nothing was clear: we did not have any ID, social security. I even did not know how to apply for a job, did not know what else we need[ed] except our resume. Those times were so hard.

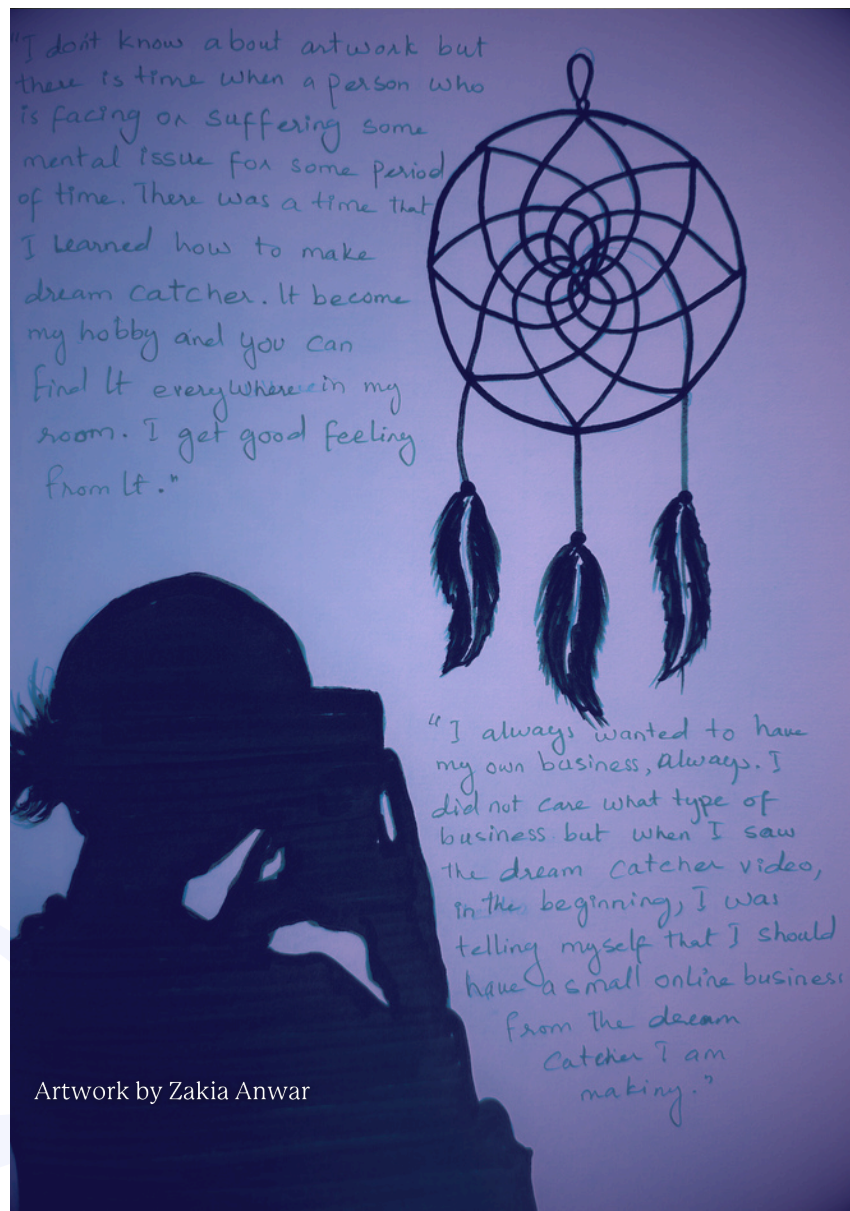
There is a time when a person is facing or suffering from some mental issue for some period of the time. There was a time that I learned how to make a dreamcatcher. It became a hobby for me, and you can find it everywhere in my room. I get a good feeling from it. It is so fancy, but I like it. It was just something to make myself busy with. I like my dream catcher though it's not artistic, but I am so happy I did something, and it is kind of a preoccupation.

I always wanted to have my own business. Always! I did not care what type of business, but when I saw the dreamcatcher video, in the beginning, I was telling myself that I should have a small online business from the dreamcatcher. But when we came here, we did not have time. I still make it but just as a hobby, just when I have time.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

[We arrived] during the summer vacation. Obviously we didn't have any students, that is, I personally did not see the students, but . . . all of us were immigrants, immigrants who were people like me . . .

There were refugee families in that campus; I do not know how but we had Arabic families, we had families from African countries, and we did live in one place and had greetings with each other and were saying salaam to each other.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar



FAHIM & ADIBA

“ It was as if we were the owners of the house, and they were the guests.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.

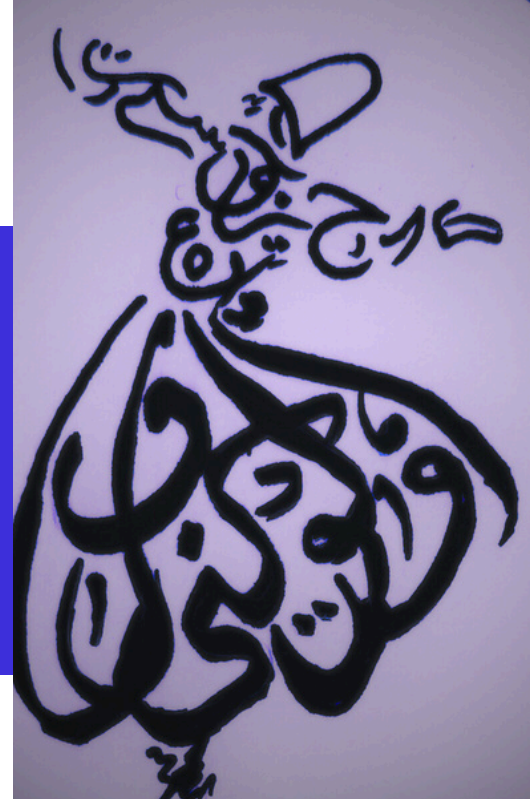
ARRIVAL

We could not bring anything that belonged to us when we got out from Afghanistan. I [Fahim] could [not] even bring my laptop.

I [Fahim] am a calligrapher myself. I have worked as a calligrapher in Afghanistan but don't have anything at hand at the moment.

Of course, when we first came, it was a very stressful time; we were under pressure in every way. It was really hard in the first days when they said that you don't have more than four hundred and fifty [dollars] since we were far away from our home, from our family. At that time, the college stepped in and promised “we will give you a house.”

The only people that we got help from were the college and the friends that we found in the college. If we knew them in our first days, we would never have experienced those bad days. We were in the hotel for two months. It was very hard for us.



Hosted by:

**RUSSELL SAGE
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in Dari by:

ZAKIA ANWAR

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SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

When we [first] came here [to the US], the things that happened to us in the camp were [with] [American] military soldiers -- because they were all soldiers.

When you get out, it's not like a camp. The things they said to us in the camp were based on fear, that if we go outside the camp and I [Fahim] don't know the language properly, we will get into trouble or someone will fight with us, but when we got to know this college, they introduced us to the teachers and students. Each of them called us separately and came to our house. Then we realized that the things that we heard in the military camp were not true.

We were given a kind of hope and encouragement; all the disappointment and stress, all of this disappeared.

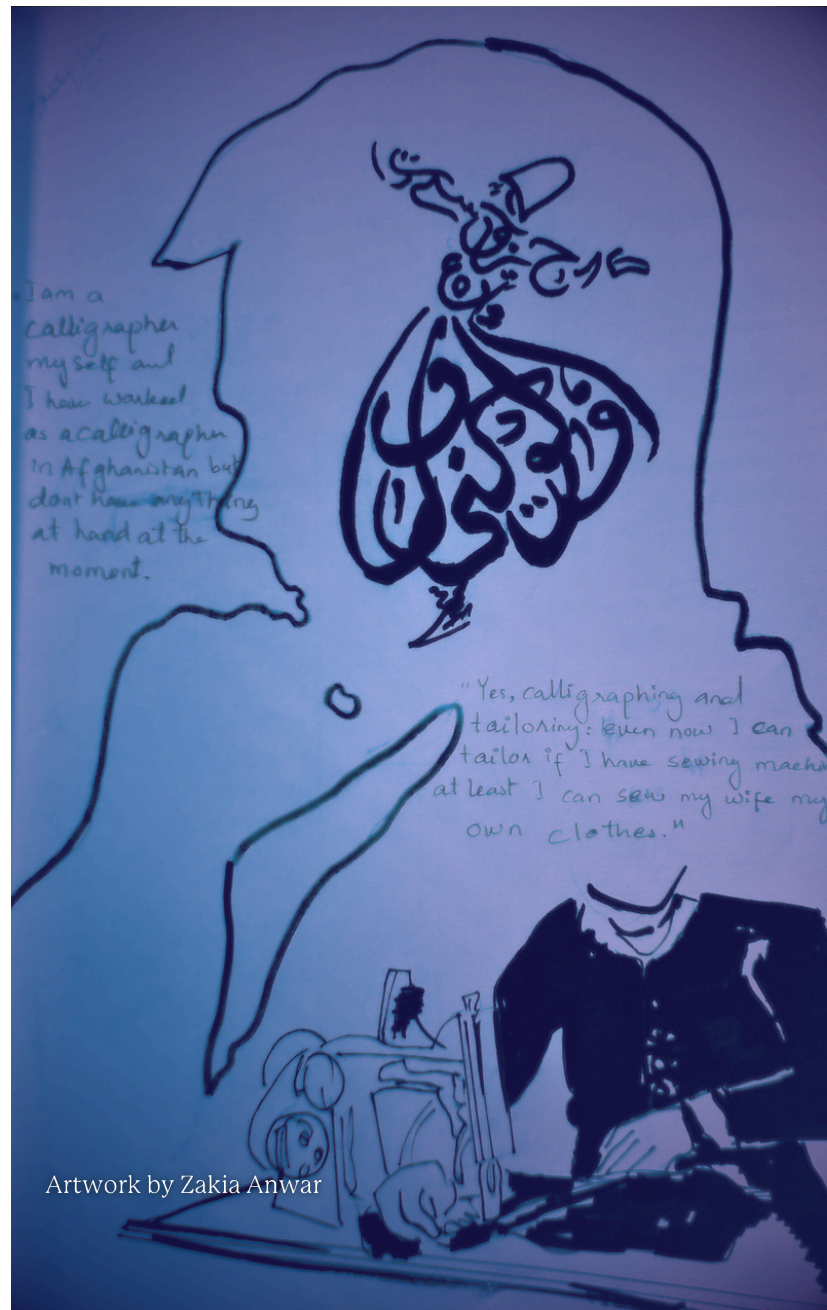
A few days after they took us to the college and to the classes, they registered us in English learning classes. They paid 11 months of our rent (almost one year). Fahim did not have any job and they helped us.

I [Fahim] was introduced to the professors and some of the students who were in the psychology department . . . and they helped me to find a job by preparing a CV for me. They applied online. They even took me to the job fairs in person. They would bring a car to our house, and they would pick me up and take me to the job fairs. They would say [at the job fairs]: "they are new people who have come here."

Professor Ali [would take us] to some communities that help the immigrants, for example, food packages, or for example household items, or things like that. The best experience was when [Professor] Ali introduced us to everyone. She would come to our house as a teacher in some way; for example, she wanted to help us, encourage us to live, or take us away from stress and depression! They said that you are not alone here, we are here with you, if it is paperwork, or if you need a car, or if you have a problem, they will invite you to their house, they even said that we will bring you halal food.

They insisted on taking us to their home. Even to distant cities like Saratoga, which is 45 minutes away from Albany; they came to our house, they took us for lunch there, and then they brought us back.

Then we got introduced to several teachers and students, and it gives us hope. They told us that you both can come on Thursday, we have English learning classes, and we took some English learning classes.



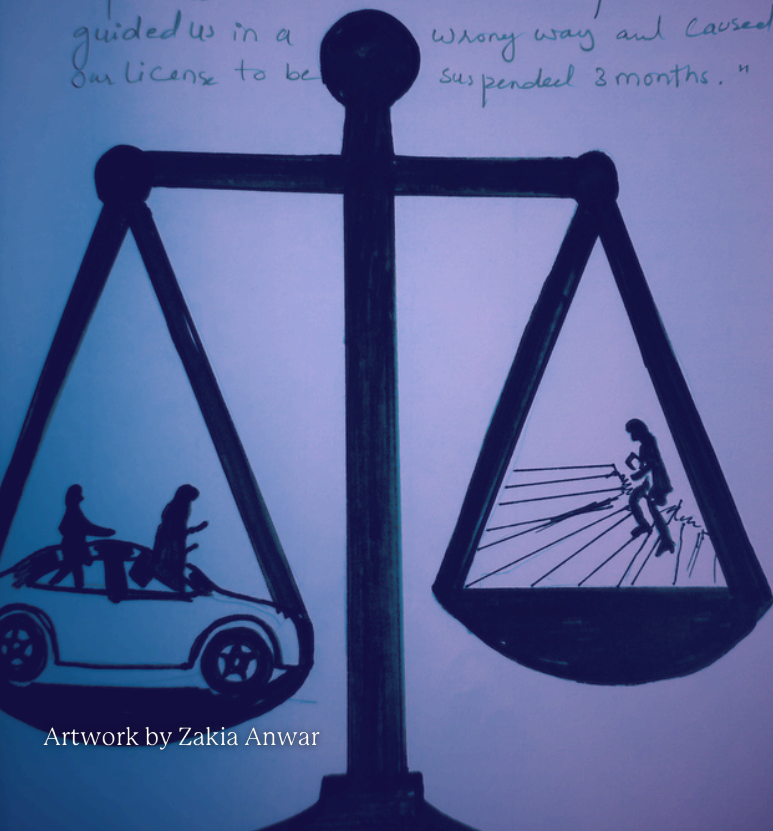
Artwork by Zakia Anwar

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

We wanted to continue our studies. Of course, the same university currently has options for continuing education, but it didn't really have the fields that me and my wife wanted. For example, I [Fahim] wanted the IT department, and my wife wanted the mathematics department, because she was a math teacher in Afghanistan.

My wife has a bachelor's degree and I [Fahim] have a master's degree. At first, wherever we applied, we were not even shortlisted. When we went to communities or other places, they told us that if you want to be hired for a good job you should have at least one document or certificate from the US or this state; this will help a lot for an immigrant who comes here and [wants] to get a good job he prefers. That will help a lot, both financially and socially.

"papers, emails, and the same mails we were receiving and we could n't answer. We did n't understand. Eg: a problem that the two of us encountered, my license was suspended for 3 month. for example from someone who had no experience like us. He did n't have experience, he guided us in a wrong way and caused our license to be suspended 3 months."



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

[Professor] Ali introduced us to our neighbors and our friends at the community garden, and we actively continued to communicate with a library that belongs to the same area. The Community Garden, which I [Fahim] am a big fan of, they have given us a piece of land from the government. When we come from work, we do farming there. For example, we plant vegetables and plants such as curry trees and fruits.

We all have the experience that it is very difficult to leave the country, family, and everything at once, so that all of these things, we sometimes thought that they are like or part of our family, and they treated us in the same way [as if] each of them had a [similar] experience before. They understood us in a special way. They welcomed us a lot.

We were at all the parties; we were at Easter yesterday and Thanksgiving. They were giving us gifts. Even today, our relationship is the same and we have our visits, especially during these special days in America.

Everything here was friendly, and it was as if we were the owners of the house, and they were the guests. That is how they treated us.



AURY & FABRICIANO

“ This isn't an experiment to see if it might work; it truly works.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.

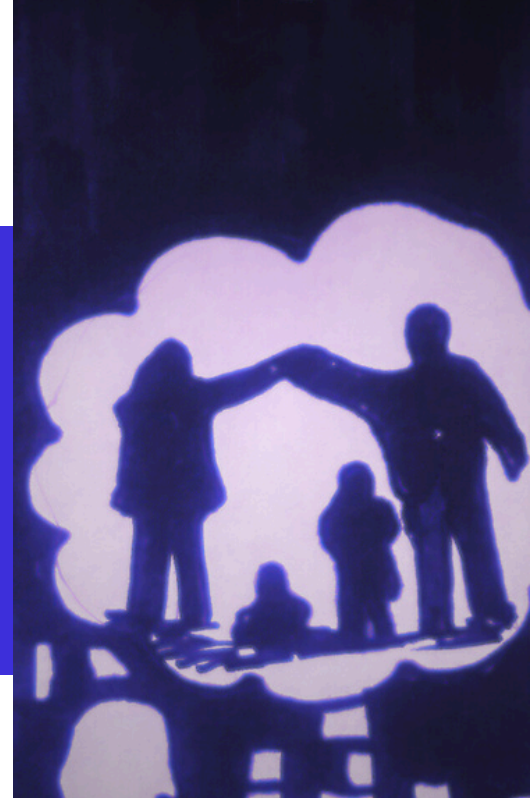
ARRIVAL

My husband [Fabriciano] was shot in Venezuela because of our religion, and we had to flee. In Ecuador, he had a terrible accident, falling from a four-meter ladder and breaking his arm in two places. We faced many challenges, including my inability to work because I had to take care of our young daughter and manage our household needs.

[Fabriciano] was always working, always worried about problems, about what we were going to eat, how we were going to provide for the children, their schooling. Everything was a constant worry; I [Aury] couldn't even sleep. I practically had insomnia because I couldn't sleep, always worried about life, about the children, making sure nothing happened, constantly anxious.

Despite these difficulties, we held on to the hope of coming here. Many people doubted us, asking how we could travel without passports, without money, with three children.

When you arrive here, you come with so many hard experiences that you've lived through before, and they weigh you down. You arrive wounded, filled with problems and anxieties.



LAFAYETTE

Hosted by:

**LAFAYETTE
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in Spanish by:

BLAISE PASCAL

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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I [Aury] will never forget the moment we arrived on November 22nd, 2020. Everything was very different for me, and it was all new and unfamiliar, like experiencing something for the first time. I constantly felt a sense of loss, thinking I had lost everything I had worked for over the years, practically since I was a child. I worked from a very young age, and I had this mentality that I had lost everything. But that day, when we arrived here, it felt like a miracle from God. It was as if everything I had lost was restored to me.

When we arrived here, those first days were like a dream for us, a dream come true. It was a time of peace, tranquility, without worries, sharing stories with family, being with our family. Those were the first days. We had never experienced such warmth and hospitality. We began to build trust, and we are able to start a life where we built a positive coexistence with the students.

The first days were very cold. Very cold. I [Fabriciano] wasn't used to that kind of extreme weather, with ice and all. But honestly, my experience was a peaceful one. I breathed peace. I felt peace.

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

The girls at the university welcomed us with open arms, showing a special warmth, especially since we had been practically alone, just the five of us, without any trustworthy person or family.

Meeting them, they immediately became part of our family. From that moment on, we never felt fear again. The fear disappeared, and we started to trust and love these people who became our family and helped us in every aspect. It was a very safe place, a place where you could breathe peace. There were no strange noises, just the sounds of birds and small animals. *For us, it was the perfect place, full of peace and security. It felt incredible to be there.*

When I [Fabriciano] saw an American football game for the first time. There were a lot of people, but everything was well organized. *People were coming and going happily, and it was so significant to me to see so many people gathered without any problems.*

We gradually started attending church, walking through the streets, and my children spent a lot of time on the football field. We walked three, four, five blocks, and we began to see that it was a very safe area. Very, very safe. Unlike our past experiences, which were marked by insecurity, being in such a secure place felt reassuring.

Our neighbor, named Nancy – an American woman – she was always attentive, greeting us warmly. Another lady across the street would also greet us with affection. When we walked down the sidewalk, people would greet us with kindness. *They knew that refugees were living in that house, people who came with problems and difficulties from their previous lives. And when they saw us, they greeted us with warmth and affection.*



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

The university organized an event to help refugees with clothes, kitchen utensils, and things for the kids. We didn't have anything at that moment; we didn't have much time and hardly any kitchen utensils. That was something very special for me because, as I [Fabriciano] said, we didn't have clothes or anything like that when we arrived. They gave us the opportunity to choose what we needed, and the items weren't damaged or old. That struck me because I thought, in other places, they would give you things that were already worn out. But here, the items still had tags from being bought recently. It was incredible.

For me [Aury], the most important resource was housing—ten months without paying rent, without paying utilities, without paying for water, and without paying for internet. That was the opportunity of a lifetime for us because we could start working and focus on other needs. The support we received with food and all the information about the benefits we could access in the United States as refugees was invaluable. The assistance from the county, the donations—all of it.

We arrived and found furniture that was even better than what I had lost. We found a table full of food. We were very hungry, and seeing that, it felt like our souls returned to our bodies.

One aspect that stood out to me [Fabriciano] was the cultural orientation we received. They explained what we can and cannot do in the United States, which had a significant positive impact on me. Now, having been here for some time, I have witnessed the positive results in my work, my family, and my personal life.

I [Aury] remember one of the girls, her name is Samantha, she took us to the first church we visited here in Easton. She guided us to the church, explaining even how to walk, how to wait for the light to change so we could cross. I remember the little white man, meaning we couldn't. She explained everything to us with such love, respect, trust, and affection, like family.

When we ran out of food, [a professor] was always attentive to us. Every time we needed to go to campus or when we were running low on something, he would call and check in on us, asking if we needed anything, if we needed supplies, if we needed anything at all.

We used the library, which, by the way, I [Fabriciano] frequented a lot. We always visited this place. They gave us books.

What I [Aury] appreciated the most, what was most valuable to me, was all the help that Lafayette [College] provided to my children. My children hadn't experienced that kind of peace, tranquility, harmony, and unconditional love in a long time. For me, that was the most precious thing because the students at the university were always attentive to my children's needs, ensuring they got into school and had everything they needed.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

We took the kids, and we went to the pool with a student who was in the recreation department; her name was Mackenzie. She always took us to eat, took the kids to eat. She also took us to a park. Yes, Mackenzie took us to the park with the kids so they wouldn't be stuck at home, and we went to the park.

There's a park right on campus, and near that park, there's also a soccer field. I [Aury] remember that day was very nice because the kids played a lot at the park. Mackenzie always took us out for recreation and brought lots of toys for the kids. My daughter would go crazy over the dolls she gave her, and the boys loved the toys too. She brought balls and other things to play with.



Image of one of Aury and Fabriciano's children grocery shopping.

They were always attentive to giving them English classes so they could understand. The girls had their educational plan in the afternoons, and the kids would often be nearly asleep in the afternoons because they woke up so early. But when the girls called them, they had to get up and attend the classes. This helped them a lot because, as an adult, it's harder for your brain to absorb information, but since they are young, their brains are more flexible and less occupied, like sponges that absorb everything quickly. The girls made it fun for them, speaking to them in English, and they absorbed all that teaching, education, and help.

Since my children were born, their education has been my primary concern and dream—to see them succeed in their studies. I [Aury] am the happiest now because, thanks to all the help, benefits, and care from the students, my oldest son Fabrizio, who turned fifteen last year, is graduating from high school at fifteen . . . Fabrizio broke all kinds of records. Imagine, in just one year, he surpassed all expectations. For me, it's excellent. He has been the student of the month several times in the whole area. It's been truly wonderful for me. I believe that if it weren't for this opportunity, he might not have been able to achieve it.

Chico, a young man from Africa. There was a moment when he became like a mentor. He would come to the house and take my children to play football on campus. It became a routine. Whenever Chico arrived, it meant it was time to play football. He became a part of my children's lives. They had their own language, so to speak.

[The students] helped us move everything from the old house [on campus] with great care. They arranged transportation to bring everything here. Many of the students used their own vehicles to transport things carefully, ensuring nothing was broken. They even organized cleaning the old house. They helped clean the entire house, organize the kitchen, and put everything in its place again. Their care and dedication were total, which was impactful for me.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

When we arrived on campus, it was during a snowy period, which we were not used to. It was challenging for us because we came from a tropical climate with constant heat, around 35 degrees Celsius. It was a bit difficult, but at the same time, we were eager to explore.

This city is a bit complicated because it's not easy to rent here. When we applied for this house [after transitioning from free campus housing], they required three years of bank statements in the United States. They asked for a lot of documents that we couldn't provide because we had only been in the United States for a few months and had only six months of bank statements. It seemed impossible for us to rent this house because other applicants had better credentials, with ten years in the United States.

That's why I [Aury] say everything here has been a miracle.

I [Aury] remember sending a message through the application process to the owners of this house, explaining that we came recommended by the university. We mentioned that we were an honorable family from Lafayette College. I believe that made an impact because we were accepted and qualified to rent this house.

Our goal was to stay here because moving would mean learning a new system, new streets, and a new place all over again. Staying here was a huge opportunity for us because we were already familiar with the area, we knew the streets, and we were settled. It was wonderful and very important for us.

When we left the refuge [the campus], it was time for us to spread our wings and fly on our own. *We learned a lot; the students taught us, helped us, informed us, and provided us with all the tools we needed. They equipped us with the knowledge to navigate this country.* It's been a challenge, truly, to separate ourselves from them. It's like when a child is weaning off their mother's breast; now we have to learn to walk on our own and navigate by ourselves.



Image of Aury and her children.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

Refugee Action [Lafayette College's ECAR Program] taught us how to integrate into the community. These lessons helped us outside of Refugee Action, and now we enjoy the respect of several families and friends in this community.

We've learned to see ourselves as servers of the community, which has earned us great respect where we live. We hold prayer meetings here, and people from different countries come — Ecuadorians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Colombians, Guatemalans, and Americans. This has integrated us into the community in a way that allows us to serve and connect with others.

We met many brothers and people who helped us in the beginning, offering their vehicles when we needed them. When we walked to church, whether it was sunny, raining, or snowing, many offered to drive us, picking us up from home and bringing us back. Now that we have a vehicle, we do the same for others. This mutual support has created harmony in the community.

Even though we are no longer in the shelter [on campus house], they still keep in touch with us. They call us, send us messages, and keep us informed about all the activities and opportunities available. They are always attentive to our needs, always asking if we need anything and offering their help. They are always there for us.

When I [Aury] was researching about resettlement, I found something that really struck me: it said that out of a million people, only one gets resettled. It's like a miracle, like a small remnant that God saves. But there are still so many thousands of people who need this.

That's why I [Aury] say it's so important to expand, to involve other universities, and create more opportunities. Ensuring that others also participate in this beautiful work would help us reach more people and save more lives.

This isn't an experiment to see if it might work; it truly works. *It gives us evidence that organizations like these can transform lives of families, change perspectives, and create transformation. We are living testimony of how this program worked, how we had to leave one country for another, fleeing persecution and leaving everything behind.*

Our story is real; it's not a fairy tale.

Image of one of Aury, Fabriciano, and family with Lafayette student volunteers.





OJULLO

“ The ECAR members became like my family.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

I didn't bring any other item with me other than my story.

I'm from Ethiopia. I fled my country in 2003, went to Sudan, stay[ed] in Sudan for 2 years, and then move[d] to Kenya. I spent 11 years in Kenya before resettling to the United States.

Life in the refugee camp . . . it was very challenging. We went through a lot of problems like shortage of food, insecurity. Life there was not good generally, but despite the difficult life we had in the camps, we also still have the positive [experiences]. In the camps, we have the school, primary to secondary school and the refugees who want to study would go, they would continue with their study up to secondary level. So I did my study there up to secondary level, but I didn't get [the] chance to go to higher education . . . to go to college. Living there is not really bad, because that is when I start[ed] to know, to live with many people from different countries who don't share the same language with me, who don't have the same cultures so I learned a lot of things from [the refugee camp].

So now in my story chain, I leave the camps when I got the resettlement.



Hosted by:

**WAKE FOREST
UNIVERSITY**



Interviewed in English by:

BLAISE PASCAL

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My first day here was a regret. I don't feel like I belong in the US. I asked myself [a] silent question: "why did I come to the US?" Maybe there is another US. I feel that the environment was very strange to me. I don't know the people, but the World Relief who receive[d] us really tried to support us. They dr[o]ve us around within the town, within Winston Salem. They also took us to many places like the store, and took us also to ESL classes. I would say they did everything for us to adapt to the environment.

In December, the strange weather came. By then I was taking [the] bus from home to Forsyth Tech, to take my ESL classes and back. So then I feel that the weather was very cold, so I immediately, then I decided to, to stop going to . . . classes.

Within that year, I still say "no." I wish I [did] not come here. I wish I [c]ould stay in the camp. I still feel like [a] homesickness. I feel that I miss some of my friends in the camps, and I also feel that I was not going to do anything here because when I came I had a plan that when I arrive in US, I would go to school, but within that year I feel that no, a school here is not going to be easy, so maybe I can work. But at the same time I also tell [myself] "no, no matter what, I have to go to school."

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

That is where I came to know ECAR. World Relief was aware that there is a program that was supporting the refugees. And in July 2019, I was called to Wake Forest University campus. I met with . . . Professor Michelle and [Professor] Barry. These are the members of the ECAR. They came and talked to us openly. We feel that we belong.

In August, they called me again, and they said: "we are going to tell you the date of when to move to the new house [on campus]."

The first day on the campus was very nice. I also feel relief because on the lease they told me that ECAR is going to cover everything.

When I went to the campus, I did not worry. I didn't worry about the bill anymore, because ECAR has paid everything for me.

They paid all the bills, the rents, the electrics, wi-fi, then, and you know, sometime they [w]ould also bring food to us. And they also help us with many thing[s] like the transportation. I remember when I appl[ied] for my citizenship, they also dr[o]ve. They also help me to fill out the forms. And yeah, they did a lot of things."



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

What the relationship [with ECAR members] is just goes beyond a friendship. The ECAR members became like my family.

Because . . . when I have a problem I could just call them without making an appointment. I was very close to Professor Michelle. Even if I don't call her, she would ask me, "Ojullu, how w[ere] the classes? . . . What subject, or what course are you facing? Are you having difficulty with it? If you need my help, please let us know or . . . if you need some more connections, you have to let us know, so that we can connect you with different people."

Usually what I do [is] mostly reading the books. That's what I did for the last 8 years . . . I have been reading books every day. In addition to the academic, the school books, I still have some time to read the books outside of the school. I read 3 autobiography [books] within 3 months. Those are the story books you read about someone, maybe, who succeeded, who is, who has been struggling throughout his life, who ha[s] experienced a lot of problems, but in the end he succeeded, or she succeeded.

So those are the stor[ies] that I usually read and the reason why I read them. It always motivates me to focus on my study. It give[s] me encouragement. They inspired me to do more.

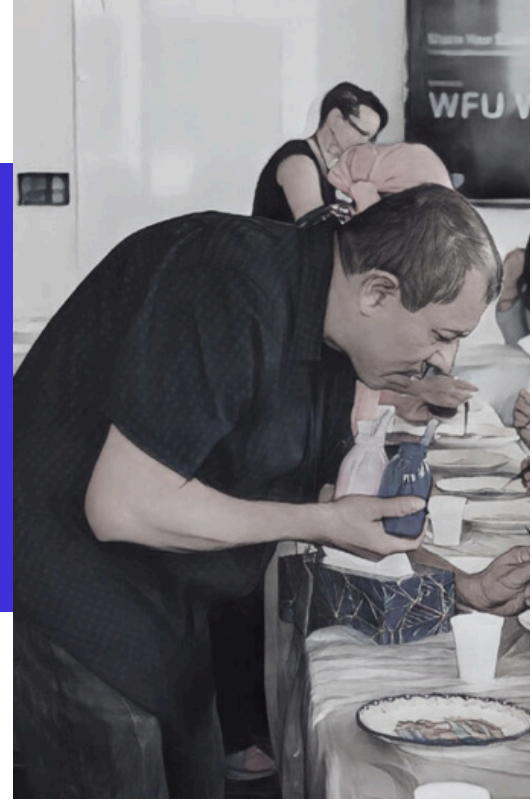
Life is good because it taught us a lot of things to be resilient, to persevere.



ALI

“ When we entered the university, [it is] like a person who felt safe entering his own home.

Şawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

[I brought with me] a book. It is near to my heart because it contains memories. . . of someone I lost in my life, who is my beloved father. Written by my father, he talks in this book about the city in which he lived and was born. The name of the book is Baqubah, City and History. [It] carr[ies] his memory of the sweet days and the memories of the people who lived in this simple, small city, which is the city of Baqubah. I was a contributor to the preparation of this book. He wrote a simple statement [a dedication], thanking [me for] my contribution to the completion of this book because it was an important part in his life as well. I loved that my father . . . remained attached to the land in which he grew up and lived.

When a person is born and grows and gets attached to the place in which he grew up and lived. . . even when life forced him to leave this place by virtue of work. . . they are ready to sacrifice anything for this land.

I hope to be like these people, or like my father, or like any person who loves his land and loves his country of origin.

The wedding picture [of] my wife and I was hanging in my room. I made sure to bring it, so I pulled it from the frame, wrapped it, brought it here, made a new frame for it, and put it in our room, just as it was before, in the same place.



Hosted by:

**GUILFORD
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in Arabic by:

NOOR GHAZI

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I brought with me Arabic calligraphy tools. Some of these tools were originally owned by my father in the days when he used them in Arabic calligraphy. I made sure to collect them all and bring them with me in order to continue practicing the profession of Arabic calligraphy and art.

Safety – this is what any refugee who comes to a strange country other than his own for the first time needs. It means that there was a certain feeling of fear. Fear is present in the heart and what is the unknown future that awaits us?

In the first couple of days, my wife and I in particular would not pass beyond the college's fence by foot because we were afraid. When we would leave the apartment we were in at the university and walk, we would only get to the traffic light, and then we would feel afraid to pass it because the outside world is unknown to us. We didn't know the roads around us or the city. Thus, we wouldn't risk it and would just return directly to the College campus where we felt safer; especially if we needed any help, no one at the college would hesitate to help us.

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

When we entered the university [Guilford College], it was like a person who felt safe entering his own home. When you feel that you have a father, mother, and brothers, you wouldn't have any kind of fear or kind of confusion or kind of hesitation in doing a certain thing inside his house because his family is there, and if he needs something, there is a father, mother, or brother who helps you.

Aside from the basic services that they offered us . . . housing and food, and other external services, they also tried to provide us with other services to include my family in terms of entertainment; for example, if there was any occasion or events on campus, or something like that, they would invite us to see the place and enjoy it with the students there -- for example, if there was a dinner or games. My kids would enjoy the time with students there. Sometimes they needed vaccinations, they needed to follow through with schools and registration. These are all done by ECAR.

We came to a very wonderful, beautiful and clean place. They provided us with something that meant a lot, especially for a refugee who in the beginning needs a moral boost. Our morale was frankly exhausted and tired, but what made it easier for us in this exile and after we left our families is what we have found here as soon as we arrived. We found people who welcomed us. We found people who smiled at us. *Instantly, we had an internal feeling that the future would be beautiful for us.*

We remember some of the places where my children used to go -- around the lake, for example, by bicycle, or sometimes they played in these places near the golf course located at the university.



Image of Ali's children and their friends on biking on Guilford College's campus.

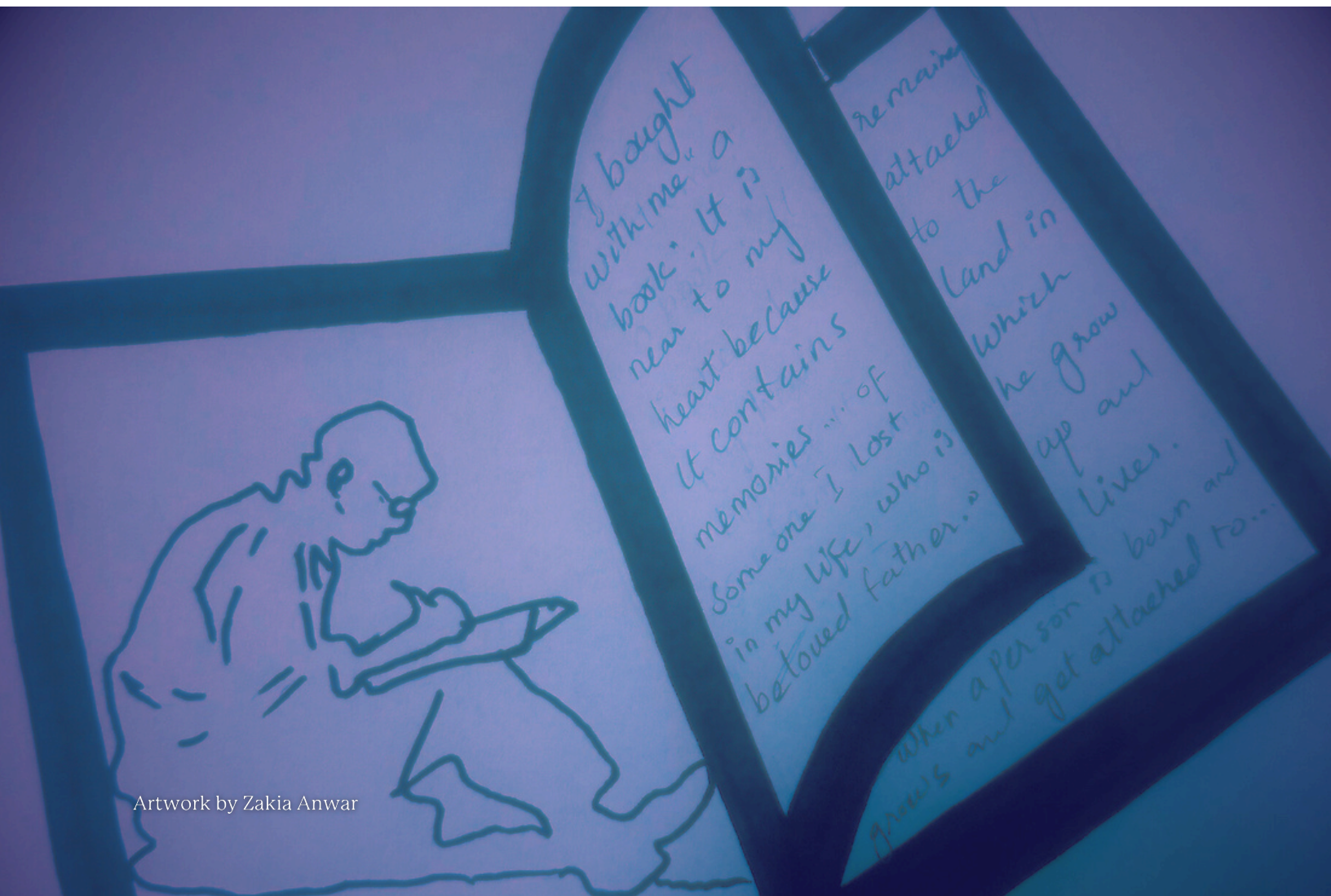
The thing I appreciate is the effort they provide, for a family, especially if it is a large family. I appreciate. . . that this program can provide services to families who come, especially families consisting of a father, a mother and children in particular, because children have a special upbringing, and special care is needed for them.

At some point, the college began bringing us some of these products [from the college farm], including eggs from their chicken and vegetables.

After the college learned that I was an artist, and I have this profession of Arabic calligraphy, they tried to help me in using this idea on campus by allowing me to provide Arabic calligraphy workshops for the students and professors on campus. They provided me with a special hall for attendees. They also contributed by introducing me to people. . . including introducing me to teachers and students.

I think the best experience is the [ECAR Gathering] event that happened at the College in September, two years ago. This was a very interesting event and for the first time ECAR gave me a big role, which is the teacher's role in this - event]. The event was for two days. I had approximately 50 students for two days. Each day I had 25 students. I was given the opportunity to practice the profession of the teacher who teaches students how to draw with glass colors on the plates made of porcelain [and] ceramic. It was a very enjoyable and beautiful event through which I got to know people. *Many people got to know me, welcomed me and loved the idea that I have and the art that I have. It was a very beautiful and enjoyable event that I will never forget.*

Prior to this event, Guilford College gave me a chance before this to display my artwork through the College. My calligraphy artwork stayed up on campus [in a gallery] . . . These paintings remained available for almost several days, and the university students viewed them.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

The first difficulty for me personally is the difficulty of the language. This was frankly the most difficult problem for us, which is the language of dealing with the new society in which we are. My family also had difficulty with the language because my children were still beginning to speak English as their language was limited to what they had learned in elementary school -- meaning that at a simple level they could understand some vocabulary (yes and no), but they had difficulty understanding teachers and understanding outside people.

We were very careful . . . when possible, to converse with the students, faculty members and people on campus. We conversed with them even with simple terms that helped us to strengthen our language, for example, "Good Morning" "How are you?" "How are you today," "How do you feel today?" etc. Simple words and phrases that helped us to practice our language and at the same time to be involved and integrated in this society.

The challenge [of moving off campus] is like a person who is eighteen years old and lives in his father's house. And his father is telling him that you are now old enough and should live your life. Guilford didn't give up on us. *They even helped us when we left campus; they helped us find the appropriate housing, apartment for me and my family to make sure that we are in the right place.*

There were people who came and helped [with the move], with their kids, picking things up by hand. . . someone brought his son with him, and this son was autistic. Despite that, his son was keen to provide assistance on a voluntary basis. This left a positive impact on us that we will not forget.



Image of Ali's wife, Marwa, and his sons in front of their new house.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

Some people that we met at the college and still up to this minute are as friends. They have become a family to us. These people are the ones who welcomed us, me and my family at the airport from the first day. They are still friends up to this moment. For example, I recall the name of brother Walid; he was amongst the people who welcomed us at the airport. Madame Diya in particular. She became a family friend, and we got to know her family, and it became like a family relationship. And we came to know that her weak point is the food. She loves Iraqi food, especially the *dolma*. We would go out and go places with some of her family members and my family; and beyond that, she shares our special occasions with us, and we share her special occasions, which are, for example, birthdays.

Halloween and Easter... we did not know [about] those occasions . . . now, honestly it has become a part of our lives. *I do not deny that we must coexist with this country, meaning for us to be able to live with them and take part of their behaviors and part of their livelihood, but in return, our original country remains a great role in our lives.*

America is considered one of the largest continents with the largest community in the world . . . and you see people here during occasions and on their official holidays, including religious holidays, until now, with their own traditional clothes that they wore in their country [of origin], and with the traditions that they practiced on these religious occasions; they did not abandon them but rather preserved them. For example, the Indian community and the Pakistani community, I noticed these communities, and I see them until now, being proud of their traditional clothing in particular.

I hope that this will be a bigger program to accommodate a larger number of future refugees.



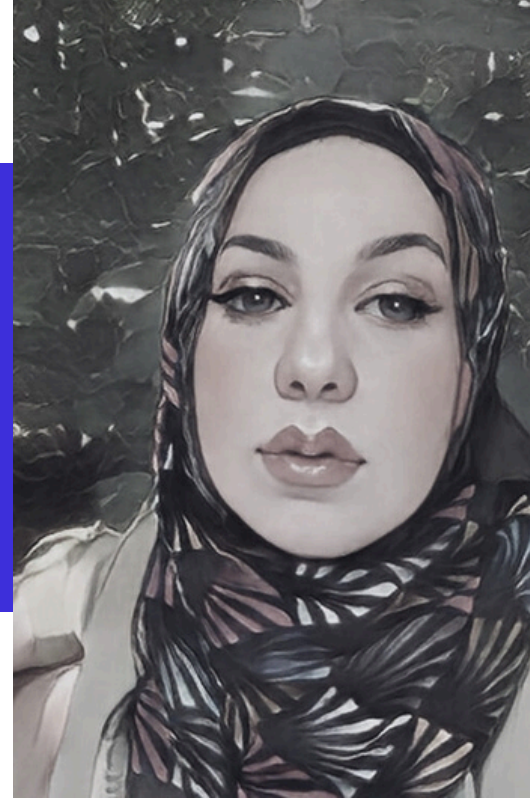
Image of Ali giving a workshop at the 2023 ECAR Gathering.



MARWA

“ I believe this stage [ECAR] is very important because it combines the family’s kindness, the sense of home, and warmth.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

When I said goodbye to my family, my brother made a bracelet. We are only two sisters and one brother. And we have never been apart. So, [the bracelet] has my name, my sister’s name and his name, and he made three of them. One for me, one for my sister, one for him. We were careful not to take it off. I don’t honestly remember how I lost it. My brother and sister still have theirs. My mother gifted me a gold necklace with my name on it [the letter M]. I am always afraid that I will lose it when I take it off. Even when I go to sleep, I hold the letter. I became obsessed or linked to my relationship with these people with this object or this thing.

[When we arrived] our friend said “Wow, they brought you to this place!!” We didn’t understand what he was talking about. “Wow, this is the nicest area. The most expensive area, and this is Walmart.” Of course we thought “What is walmart!?” The children were young, so they entered the rooms with games -- *mashaAllah*, so much!! They forgot their fatigue and fear. This friend was the one who stood up and asked Walid and Diya [ECAR team members]: “Who are you?” Because this is not the norm.

Sometimes, I would go out and I would be emotionally tired. I would take the children around and go to cry somewhere. But then I would accidentally see a volunteer; we would chat a bit about topics, then my crying intentions would go away, and I would return home. In this way, the hardest time passed. Because the first period of time is the hardest.



Hosted by:

**GUILFORD
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in Arabic by:

NOOR GHAZI

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SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

You live in your homeland among your family. My entire life, I was part of a big family. Then I got married, so my family is there and my husband's family is there, which made our circle even bigger. You feel the safety. [You know] the language and the law of the country that you are a citizen of; you know your rights. So just like a baby who is at home with his family, his mom, nothing is required, no rules – you want to eat, you can eat, you want to sleep, you can sleep. You can't take that baby to school right away where there are rules upon rules upon rules. *I believe this stage [ECAR] is very important because it combines the family's kindness, the sense of home, and warmth. Then little by little, learning the rules and slowly integrating in life.* Same thing with ECAR. I always say, if it wasn't for them, maybe we would have also returned.

They were very kind, whether volunteers or campus employees. Sometimes a volunteer girl comes with another volunteer male. She alerts me to wear the scarf saying there is a male with her.

The farm – I used to take Yousif [her youngest son at the time] and bring fresh stuff, maybe eggs. It depends on the produce of the day. And sometimes they would bring it to our doorsteps . . . every Tuesday.

My kids, when we were in Iraq, I wouldn't allow them to go out on the street. . . or a place where they would go without me and [me still] feeling safe. But on campus, it was fine for me. Sometimes their father [goes out with them], sometimes Diya and I, and sometimes by themselves. Yousif learned to ride a bike there.

So, the first Ramadan was a disaster because we have a big family and we do gather [back home], and all of a sudden, nothing. Then Walid came over, brought some sweets and toys for the kids. He took the kids out and told me to go with them, but I was tired and couldn't even eat. So, he took them out. I won't forget this experience. We had *Eid* at that time; he made the *Eid* despite the simplicity of the situation.

Last Ramadan, Kate [one of the volunteers], there was a group who were holding an Iftar at the Church and she suggested that we go. We went with the kids and had Iftar there and sat on one table, and they started talking about Ramadan and why we fast and the spiritual connection. Then it was prayer time, and we broke our fast at the same time. . . complete respect and acceptance. *I think we add to one another instead of taking away from others.*

Kate played a big role with all the family in teaching English. She started with me and all of us. The simple methods that we started with, because this person doesn't speak the language that you speak, is "this is a chair, let's put a sticker there and label it as a chair." This is how it started. Or a picture in the magazine, and we point out something that attracts us and we put the name on it. We had an album. It was first me, then Ahmed, and now Yousif. She would also communicate with their teachers to see where the weaknesses that they have are.

Hali was the program director during that period of time. She was able to get a scholarship for Yousif at the school [preschool/daycare], and she was the one who would drop him off.

Image of refugee children at Guilford College campus farm.



Ree Ree and Salah [ECAR volunteers] helped Ali mostly to look for a job. They applied for many jobs. If the job required certain clothes, they would go to get them. [Salah] would point him out to the place where he can get the clothes at a good price. They helped me with my Green Card.

Iraqi students on campus would stop by to say hi and ask us what we need and give us their phone numbers telling us if we need anything [we can call them]. Not in an official way, but sometimes they just get new ideas all of a sudden [to help]. I always say that they are creative. They suggest things to us that we don't even think about, and we welcome the idea.

We have seen many families who were scammed in many things, but thank god, we didn't face any of those things. Because ECAR will guide you to get your ID card, your paperwork, to find a job, the license for my husband, the school for my kids, medical appointments, all of those things they were helping us with at the beginning.

I used to go out with the volunteers. They would tell me something with confidence, like "you can do it."

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

We were on campus. It was Ramadan. We sat at the dining table with the kids breaking our fast. Ali was working at a restaurant. His work shift had started already that night. We heard a noise. I was praying that it would not be the thing in my mind. I thought it was a squirrel because I haven't seen a mouse here. The noise was very clear, maybe because the floor was wood, I am not sure. We looked and saw a mouse. The kids and I all sat on the dining table. The dining table, I swear – and I am not exaggerating – it was shaking because we all were shaking from fear. I called Ali and he said that his shift just started, and we are busy, and it is impossible. I called Walid and he said I am at work. I will send you the security at the campus.

Image of Marwa and her children .



Thank god the phone was close to me. Every time we moved a bit, the mouse would move as well. We enter, and she hides. What came to my mind is the room . . . by the stairs. So, I told them let's go in there and use the coffee table as a shield. I sat and told Abboudi [her oldest son] how to say things in English to our neighbor – she is still one of the collaborative people in the program and got to know the refugee families – Kristy. “Abboudi, do you know how to tell Kristy that we have a mouse?” I was reviewing the topic with him, and I was relieved to know that he can communicate the idea. So she came, and I can't imagine [what she thought] when she saw the scene where we are all sitting behind the table. She brought a mouse trap and tried to lessen our stress and started to ask us how to say “mouse” in Arabic, and we would answer because in fact we were shivering. Then we heard the big boom [of the trap]. She said “Okay, my role has ended here” because she also was scared. She went and called her husband, and he came and picked [the mouse] up. Then the security guard came, but I wanted to act before he came. The next day Walid told me “I wasn't at work, but I also am scared of the mouse.” And after that, of course, the whole team came and discovered that more than one mouse had entered, so they discovered the place, and they solved the problem.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

For 8 years, except Covid time, every Monday, Kate is here at our place. She will come up with ideas, depending on the person that she is helping. For example, “why don't I take Ahmed or Yousif to the library if there is an event?” Even to the parents' conference at school, I take her with me. This year, in the first quarter, we both were crying when the teacher was praising Yousif.

We went to [Kate's] son's funeral, unfortunately, and her mom's. So even the family – Jim, her brother, was Guilford's president for some time; he was one of the volunteers who would bring the bikes [and other] stuff since he had a truck. It might start like that when they help me with something, and we stay in touch after that.

I think in our country we don't have the idea of humanitarian work and volunteering. Not to this level. When we first came, I didn't know about this idea or hear about it, honestly. So that you go out and help people for free; this is a great idea. I get this feeling and try to implement it with my kids. I don't want to force them to do anything, but I feel this [idea] was strengthened in me. There is a picture from when they went to welcome the family [to be hosted by ECAR]; I asked them, “what did you guys feel?” Maybe many of the volunteers were refugees at some point, not all of them, but some. That is why they felt the importance of this work. *I really appreciate this, and it also helped me in the way I raise my kids. . . those people are also busy and don't have a lot of free time and they have priorities, so, it is beautiful to think that with all of that you still put in the time to help a family.*

When we met with Syrian and Iraqi refugees who were resettled sometime before us, [one of them] told me that the first place they came to here and lived in, after 3 years, that she doesn't even like to pass by it in the car because she will have [bad] memories. A week ago, I visited the new family [hosted by ECAR on campus]. I didn't enter, but I had a great feeling. I felt that she [the mother in the newly hosted family] is close in age to when I first arrived. But I remember her [the friend's] sentence when she said, “she doesn't even like to pass by in her car” to the place they first resettled.

ECAR and Guilford College, all of them are there when I need them.



Image Marwa's children at the airport welcoming another refugee family to be hosted on Guilford's campus.



ABBOUDI

“ We kind of see it from our point of view as home.

Şawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

My dad gave [the keychain] to me. He knew I'd like this team for my entire life. It has the Real Madrid logo. When we moved here, that's how I started conversations with other people, by asking them. . . soccer questions and “do you like this team or no?” That's what really got me into making friends at first. It's very special. I don't want to lose it.

My grandmother got me a wallet. And that wallet, I've never changed it. Every time I see a new wallet, and it looks nice, I'm like, no, I can't buy a new one. It's different. It has my name on it too. I remember that exact same day that she bought it for me. And it just holds a special place in my heart. It's kind of getting worn out. So I was thinking I could just hang it on a wall because I just. . . I can't give it up. Maybe buy a new one and use it, but this one I will never throw away.

I was still in elementary. . . [at school] we didn't really learn the world maps, so I basically didn't know where I was going. And it was my first time going on a plane, so I didn't know which way was the US. . . I didn't know how the US looked like. I didn't know how American people looked like because when we hear about American people from our past experiences, we. . . think of them as the soldiers. . . that was pretty much the whole stereotype.



Hosted by:

**GUILFORD
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in English by:

NOOR GHAZI

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I had this idea of us on the plane. I thought we would get off and . . . the government would just give us a house and [say] “go work.” That's what it was in my head. It was very different. I didn't know it was a campus when I first got there [to Guilford's campus]. I didn't even know what it was, because I've never seen a college before. It was very big. And I really liked it. I thought it was a resettlement agency. . . and all the people that were there weren't college students and they were just refugees.

It was very fun seeing different people because we grew up seeing just Iraqi people. We never knew so many people come from different backgrounds and ethnicities. It was a new thing to see. . . [a] very clean college campus. . . filled with people that always smile at you because we don't really see that back home. So you walk around and you see people smiling. [The] college students were 10-20 years older than us.

We thought everybody was supposed to come to a college refugee campus, but it was not the case. We were one of the few lucky people. It was like a lucky chance; it's one in a million.

When I first came, I thought people would actually have more different opinions on stuff. You don't know their culture. And and so we thought, in my head, it was like, they weren't like us. . . it was like they were the aliens. But when I learned that people actually over here watch soccer, play soccer, and then do biking. . . it kind of got more memories back from when I first had my bike in Iraq, and when I played soccer with my friends. . . to actually see people who love the same thing.

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

We got what you [would] call a starter pack. . . like a jumpstart or a head start in life because you're creating a new life here. You left everything behind and you come here. . . you got someone to lead you, teaches you everything. It was a new beginning. You know how some people say you're reborn when you die? So this was exactly like it. You kind of left your old life behind, but then you came back and you started life. It was like being reborn, but at a different age. And I think that if it wasn't for ECAR, we would have definitely gone back. It was just like a visit to America, but ECAR got us a home, and we call it home because. . . we felt hopeful, we felt relieved.

I remember two volunteers came in to play soccer with me from ECAR. They were volunteers and they came, knocked on our door and they [said] “Hey, we're college students,” and they had a soccer ball. . . that was a thing that got me back [to soccer] because I left my friends that actually play soccer.

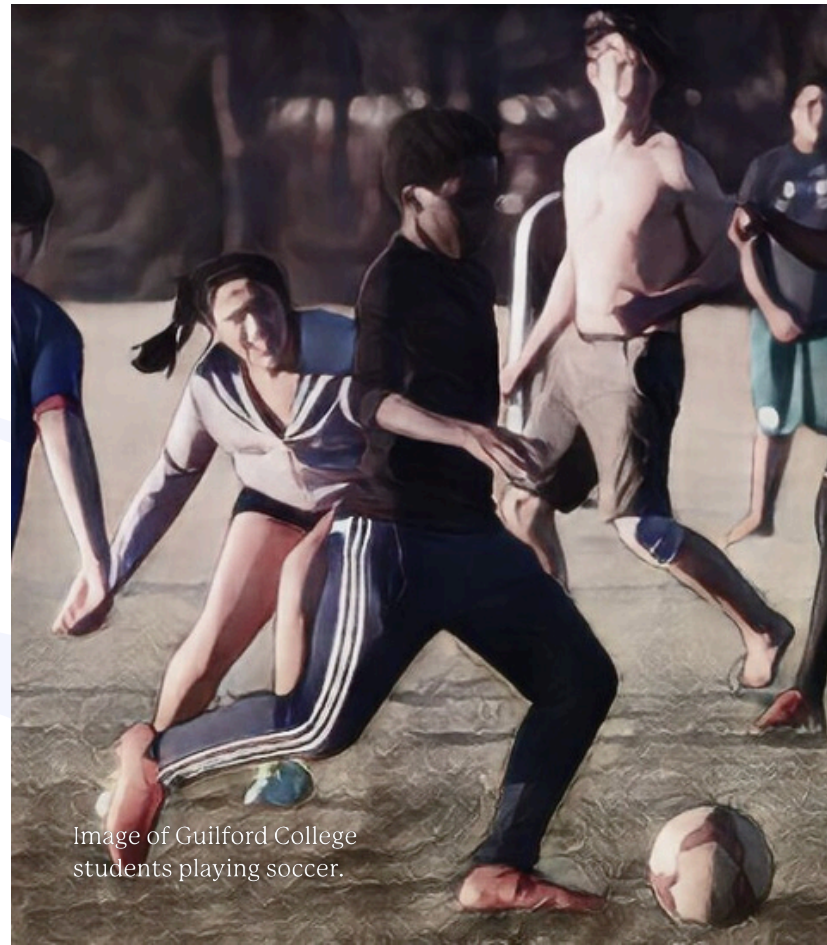


Image of Guilford College students playing soccer.

Walid was more like an uncle to us. We thought he was a teacher. . . always teaches me stuff. . . And just like uncles do. . . he would just spend money out of his pocket and never worry about it. It reminded me of my uncle back home [be]cause he would do the same thing. He would take us out to places, buy us some food, and then it's very fun with him.

The best experience was when me and my brothers got our bikes, and we finally got out of the house because it was kind of depressing inside the house. . . the bikes really got us started because other volunteers or other students had bikes, and so we did biking around campus, and that got us more familiar with how the campus looked like. It was very, very big. I've never seen a campus before so it was kind of like a nervous feeling.

[Another best experience was] when we first saw snow on campus, and we saw other people playing, and we saw college students playing.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

As the oldest child, I had to take responsibility for my brothers. It was kind of a mixed feeling because my brothers were happy. We got lots – they got lots of toys. They got a home to live in; they got to sleep, eat. But when I look[ed] at my mother and my dad, they were kind of stressed out; they didn't know what to do. So I was kind of in between feeling happy and feeling stressed at the same time.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

The relationships we, I, formed with the . . . volunteers . . . they're like long friends. We've been friends for a while now. And even though we've gotten to the point where we live our lives, and we don't live over there anymore, it's just that they're friends. . . They're just friends in our everyday lives.

[Creating an ECAR Chapter at the university where he is currently a student] would . . . be a win-win situation for both the students at the college and also the refugee. The refugee would benefit from getting started in life, getting advice and getting the resources they need to survive. And also the students would get . . . service hours. . . they [would] create a big impact on the refugee because they'll create memories with them. It's a win-win situation for both students and refugee. . .

I would love to be. . . involved in these things because I would definitely know how it felt for my first day coming to [the] US. I would love to help people get started and reassure them because I feel like a lot of refugees come with a feeling of anxiety and stress. . . kids shouldn't feel depressed or feeling stressed out because it's . . . bad for them. It's just really, really bad because as a kid, I didn't really feel stressed. I did feel a little stressed, but not as much as other people who resettled with the agencies of the US. So it was definitely a good start to our lives because it really set us on the right path.

We do go back [to campus]. We kind of see it from our point of view as home. You don't really move on, you don't leave a community, you just make new ones because you get to know more people.

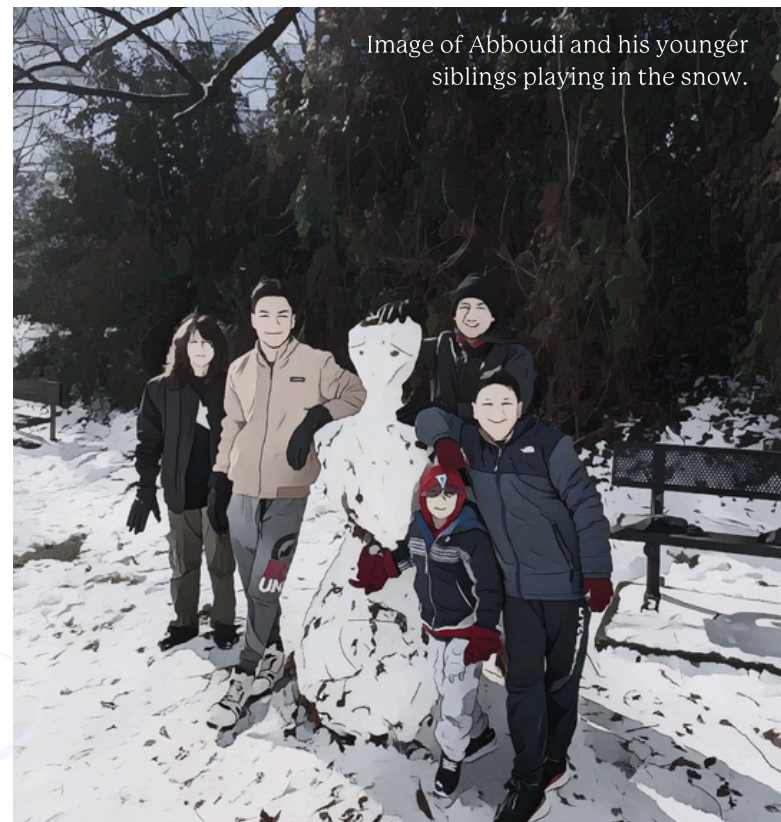


Image of Abboudi and his younger siblings playing in the snow.



BLAISE

“ I started to feel like also I can be one of them.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

The first few days in the US in general, I call it lost. I was lost. I was lost. I didn't know where was the North, South, West, East. I see everything black. They look alike. It was easier for me to get lost.

There was a time I wanted to go to the Walmart. I was new in this country, and I went down the road, and I was waiting for that guy on the light. He was red. I was waiting for him to be white for me to cross the road. And I stood there for 45 minutes, waiting for that guy to be white. . . . I know how to cross roads back home. We don't wait for this guy. We just run and cross the road. And I waited a minute and look[ed] from my left and my right . . . All the cars are a little bit distant, so I ran across the road. But there was an old lady. This old lady. . . she saw all this and she [said] “Oh, are you new in this country?” And I [said] “Yeah, I'm new. I'm from Africa”. . . excited about talking about where you're coming from. She [said] “OK, I'm going to show you something. So. . . there's a button here. You need to push the button in the middle.” Oh, my god, I stood there for 45 minutes. And the button was like just some inches away. . . So accepting learning is one of the first steps to do when you come [to] this country.



Hosted by:

**GUILFORD
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in English by:

NOOR GHAZI

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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Back home, you speak the same language with everybody. You know everything. You do everything like everybody. So you're not scared of facing a new thing. But I remember here every time I hear. . . "Oh, tomorrow we're going to get . . . social security." I [thought] "What is that? Am I going to succeed in this one?" Because I don't know. I don't know how to express myself. So you get lost with everything.

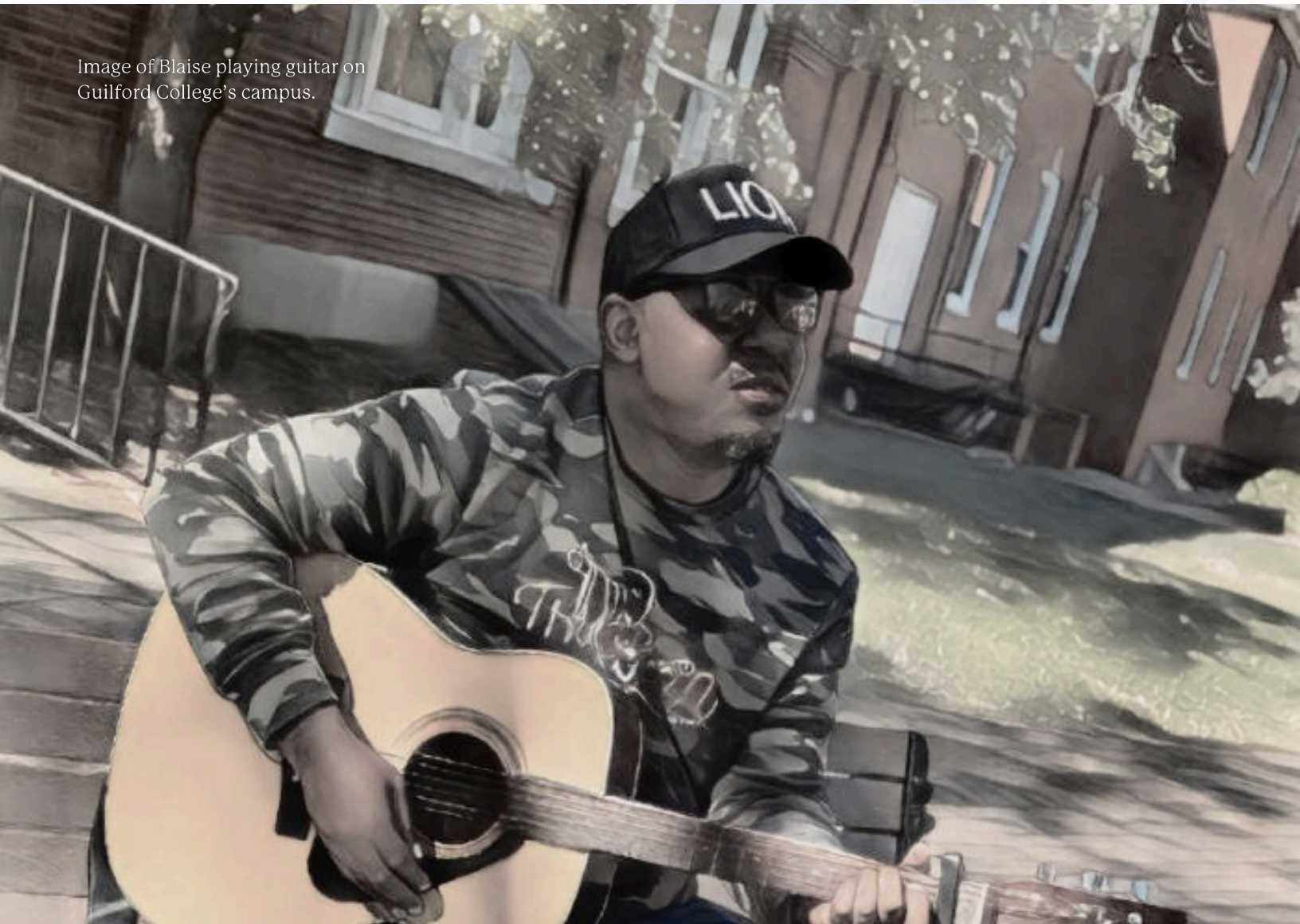
My guitar, which I call my girlfriend. . . because my guitar is always on my bed. That's my wake up to touch, you know, the cuddle, the hugs. We have this type of bond. . . I can call special. . . and the reason why I bring my guitar is because music will have been a big part of my life since I was a kid. My mother was a singer. Yeah, in a choir, she was a singer. Actually [at] home, everybody's a singer.

This is one of the first things I owned when I came [to] the US, one of the first thing[s] I owned. This is something that helped me to go through difficult moments, especially when I was alone in the US. In a time, I wanted to sing my sadness. This is what I was using, playing, calling songs. . . making some cries in singing. . . and the guitar was there.

Every time I sing or I use my guitar, the mood is not the same. . . when you play, you start to enjoy and start to discover something else. You start to . . . put your mind in playing rather than focusing on what made you sad. So it's like a cure – my heart's cure.

I like how, how it [guitar] treats me.

Image of Blaise playing guitar on Guilford College's campus.



SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

You find yourself lost. But the campus, it's another story. I think it was learning. It was learning because I'm happy I started here. Because I got some knowledge of life in the US by meeting people on the campus. And they were open. I could ask questions with my limited English. They tried to understand what I was asking. So it was like a process of learning. They tell you, "Oh, this is how they do things." Lost in the US in general, but learning at the campus.

Being in this campus or being in their house was like winning the lottery. It was like hitting the jackpot. That was a life's dream, [a] beautiful house, everything you need. . . their house was really, really clean. . . you see these facilities. . . being [in] a place where most of my people dream to be. [T]he place was good, beautiful people, people who understood the reason why we are here. And whoever knew that we are here as refugees or he was interested in helping, asking questions, "Oh, do you need anything or do you want to learn anything?"

And the campus . . . I think we don't have this type of school back home . . . When I grew up back home, everybody who went to school in the US, they say is smart. . . so it was like you put yourself down and you see these kids come into this school and say, "oh, this kid must be smart" . . . [but] people will open, open to receive you. They didn't show that feelings of superiority. *I started to feel like also I can be one of them. I didn't see myself different from the students or the teachers.*

[I lived on campus] rent free and you could eat for free [at] the cafeteria too. . . I remember there's someone who brought me a jacket from the campus, [a] student. Really good jacket. I think I still have it. . . because when I came, I only came with the sweater. Back home, we don't have this type of winter clothes. We don't know what is the winter. Home, we always in the 70s, 80s degree. But when I came, it was in February and it was really cold. For me, it was really cold. It's real cold.

Playing soccer as a former soccer player, that was the best experience, especially playing with the young people. And the young people got me and said, "Oh, you're so good, man. You're so good." You know, that was like, okay, I'm proving to you that I'm so good. I used to be a professional, you know?

Dave. . . a music professor. . . [h]e used to come and we play guitars. He has his guitar and I have mine. And we used to play the guitar together. It was a good, good experience. . . two or three times, he took me to his house and he brought his friends and we started playing music and everybody was like, "Oh man, you got a beautiful voice!" . . . so I started to feel myself, "Oh yeah, I'm accepted."

Robin was from the US, teaching me things from the US. You know, there was another girl, she's from Asia, really, teaching me things about Asia, because I like to ask questions. [Another volunteer] she was Hispanic. So, I started to ask questions about Hispanics, you know, at that point, I didn't meet a lot of them. And then my favorite person was Naomi. Naomi, she's American, but she's Jewish. So, she told me so many things about the Jewish [people], about their belief, and how they don't celebrate this type of celebration, like Christmases.



Image of Archdale Hall on Guilford College's campus.

You get to get these different cultures, different mindset, and you make one thing which is going to be special, because you don't call it knowledge. It's like having an idea on different types of cultures. It makes you to know how to locate yourself.

One of the biggest challenges with the people who came and doesn't live on the campus, they only get their case manager when they come to visit them. When the case manager came to visit them, that's when they listened to English. And the case manager is there just for 30 minutes. So you get like 30 minutes to listen to this fast English. . . [but on campus] volunteers take you to the cafeteria. So you have to talk with them, you have to listen to them. So the six months was really, really beneficial for me. It was good for me because everybody was going fast, but I get to listen to them on a daily basis, like every day. So it was good like training my ears to get the fast speaking of English daily. That helped me a lot.

Hali [is]. . . how I see ECAR in general. She's like this type of lady who helps them, a woman, to give birth. You know, the lady who received the baby. These people are very important in our life because if they do wrong about their jobs, we are dying. But these are the type of people we don't mention in our entire life. They have been there the first day. Very, very important about the first day to make you live. But we don't mention them. So Hali was like them to me. The first day, she was there and she guided me. The first guidance I get was from her. So that's why she's very important.

It was good people ready to teach you or to show you, to guide you.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

One of my dreams was a big bed. The reason why when I grow up, I lost my parents very young and the family I went to live in, they didn't allow me to sleep with their kids. So they started to put me under the bed. That's where I was passing my night. So putting something under the bed and go under the bed, sleeping under the bed. If I go like this, if I go like facing up, that's how I'm gonna sleep the entire night because I cannot move under that bed. If I put my belly down, that's how I'm gonna be if I lay down like that. So under that bed, I was a little, I was like 10 years . . . something like that. Under that bed, I was like, oh, what if I get the money? I'm gonna get myself a big bed. I don't have a big bed, big, big bed [yet].

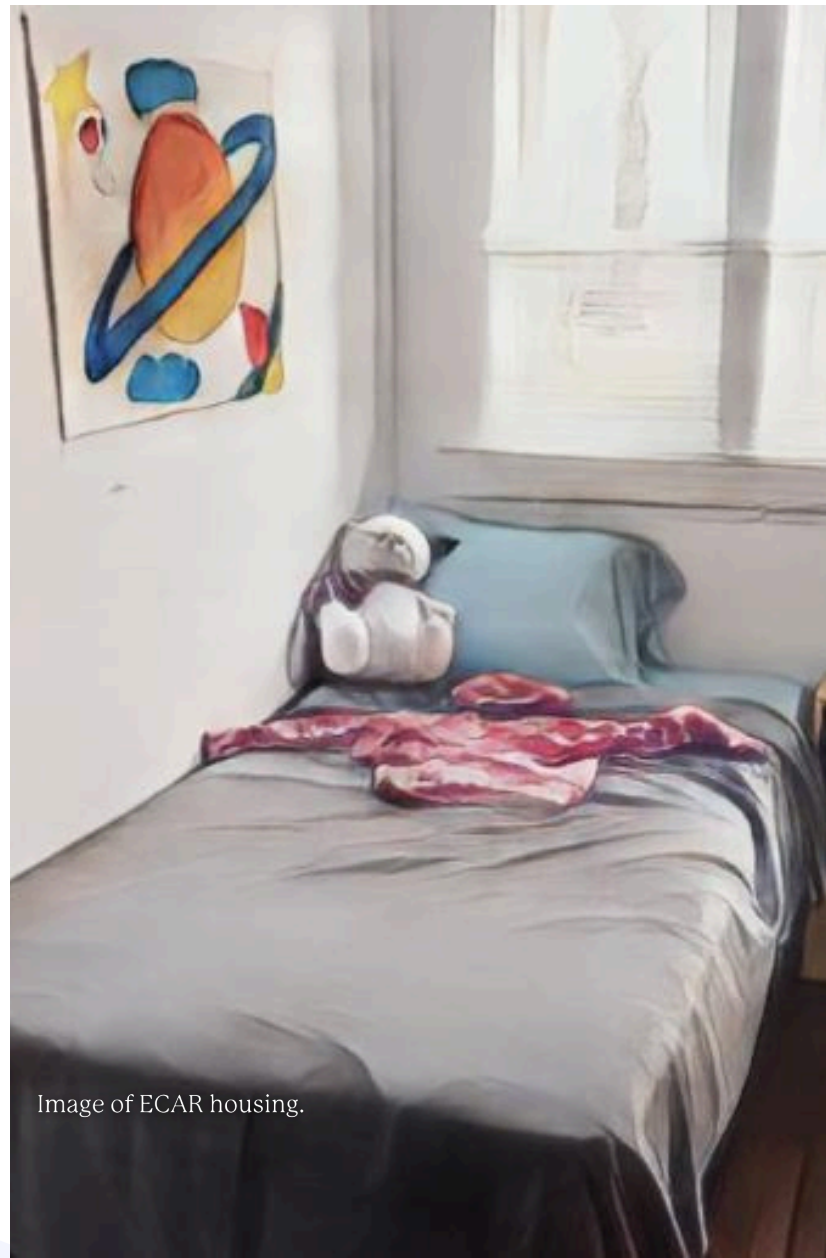


Image of ECAR housing.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

It was good to meet different people from different countries, cultures, continents. You become a little bit richer when you meet different people because you will learn from different people and you get one thing special from different things. Every time you cross a border, you're into something else. You're into another culture. You're into another mindset. You need to accept others' truth, others' reality too, for you to succeed, especially if you want to stay a long time where you're going.

This community means a lot. It means a lot. This is my new family. These are my new neighbors... I was talking to my sister who's still back home, and she was like, oh, remember, remember I'm your sister. . . and I was like. . . you will not be the first one to be here for me, which was a joke, but that's the true reality. Your neighbor can be quick to help you when your family [is] far.

I'm still ECAR-man. ECAR-man, yeah. That's my new name, ECAR-man.

I think ECAR spoiled us, because we didn't face the same thing that other refugees face. *The ECAR was like a shelter for us, like, you know, this type of shadow that it helps you to not face the really, really heat of the sun.*

Image of Blaise with a community member at the 2022 ECAR Gathering.





FARZANA

“ It's not just a university. It's like a family. It's like a big family.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.

ARRIVAL

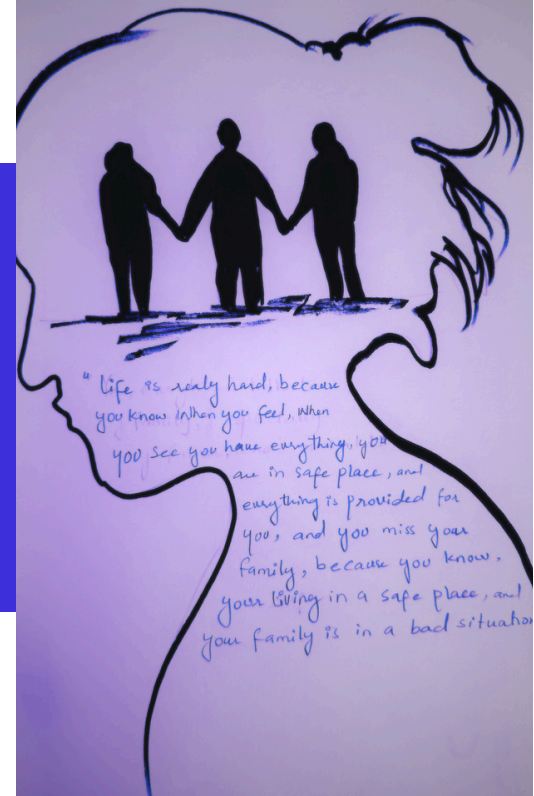
When I left my country, I was really shocked for more than one year. . . I was in shock. . . dream[ing] [that] I'm in Afghanistan [and] the Taliban came . . . it was really stressful for me.

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

I like the campus view. It's very beautiful. . . When I walk around the campus, I really enjoy walking because it's green and. . . busy. . . [with] many people around the campus [in the fall and spring]. In [the] summer also I like it because we sometimes need to live in a quiet place, to stay in a quiet place, and I like both, but now it's summer, and everyone has gone.

I spend my time with my friends. . . I have [2] Afghan friends and. . . Mexican friends, American friends. Usually on weekends, we get together and play games, and spend our time together, or going for dinner or lunch.

There's a beautiful space in front of my apartment, close to my apartment, and. . . there is for children. . . a small park. . . sometimes I go there when it's a nice day. Here is a lake, a small lake. But it's beautiful! You feel so comfortable when you sit in front of the lake and just mak[e] yourself relax. Relax.



Hosted by:

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY



Interviewed in English by:

ZAKIA ANWAR

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International students – each semester, we spend our time [together]. We coordinated Friday's excursion for students. . . and we take them to beautiful places like museum[s] or some events [o]n the campus. I just remember [o]n campus they had many events like multicultural night, cultural night. . . our department provided - [the] ECAR Chapter – this semester.

My friends. . . they always encouraged me, supported me [i]n my studying. . . there's many other friends, they always help me with everything when I need something or I have problems. But especially, I appreciate . . . these people [who] supported me during my studying.

When I arrived in Stillwater, after a few days. . . in the Global Studies, there was a hooding ceremony, and [Miss Sue Bennett] invited me [to] this ceremony, and it was my first time I joined this kind of event, and she said that, “I know you can do it. . . I know you will achieve [this]. . . I believe [that] one day you will be here on this stage and receiving your degree.” I still remember those words. . . that really encouraged me to do this [pursue my education].

*OSU has a big library here. They have many resources online and physical [resources].
When I needed resources, I will go.*

We learned many things from the ECAR chapter . . . [they] advise you how we [can] achieve our goals [based on] the past experiences, challenges.

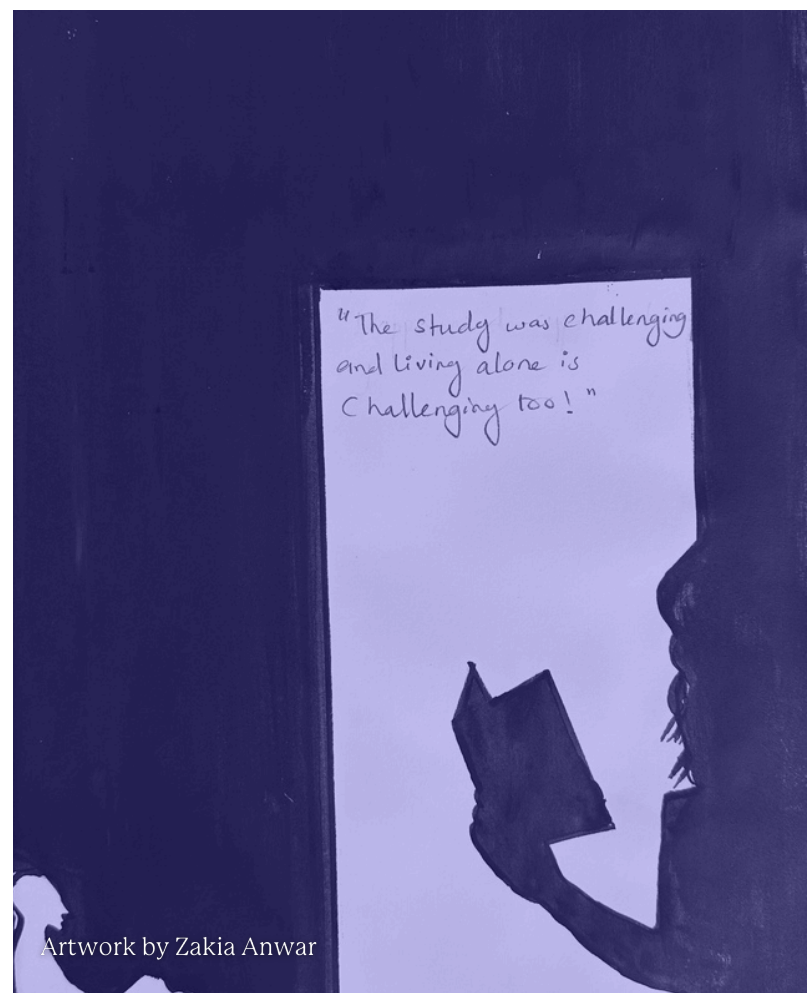
NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

Life is really hard, because, you know when you feel, when you see you have everything, you are in a safe place, and everything is provided for you, and you miss your family, because, you know you're living in a safe place, [at the same time] as your family is in a bad situation.

*The English Language and Intercultural Center (ELIC) is a program under the Oklahoma State University Global Department.

The study was challenging and living alone is challenging sometimes when you miss your family, when you miss your country, your people.

Because the building[s]. . . are the same color. . . the first day when I came to the ELIC,* I came with one of my friend[s]. She was my neighbor. Her name is Gabby. She was my neighbor, and now she is like my sister; her parents [are] like my family. She and her husband [are] like my brother and sister, and they are still with me. They moved now from this [place] – 5 or 10 min walking. But [back then] I'm living upstairs and she was living downstairs, and I came with her [to] the ILC. And when I wanted to go back home, I got the direction[s], but the direction was not showing the location. . . the location didn't show me the exact address. Then I went left. . . I was confused. No, I didn't come this way. And then I went to [the] right, and I was confused. No, it's not the same way I came. And finally I found it because. . . in front of my apartment [is] my friend's car [which] is orange. And the one thing [made me] realize that this is my apartment [was] because her car was in front of our apartment. It was so difficult to find the locations.



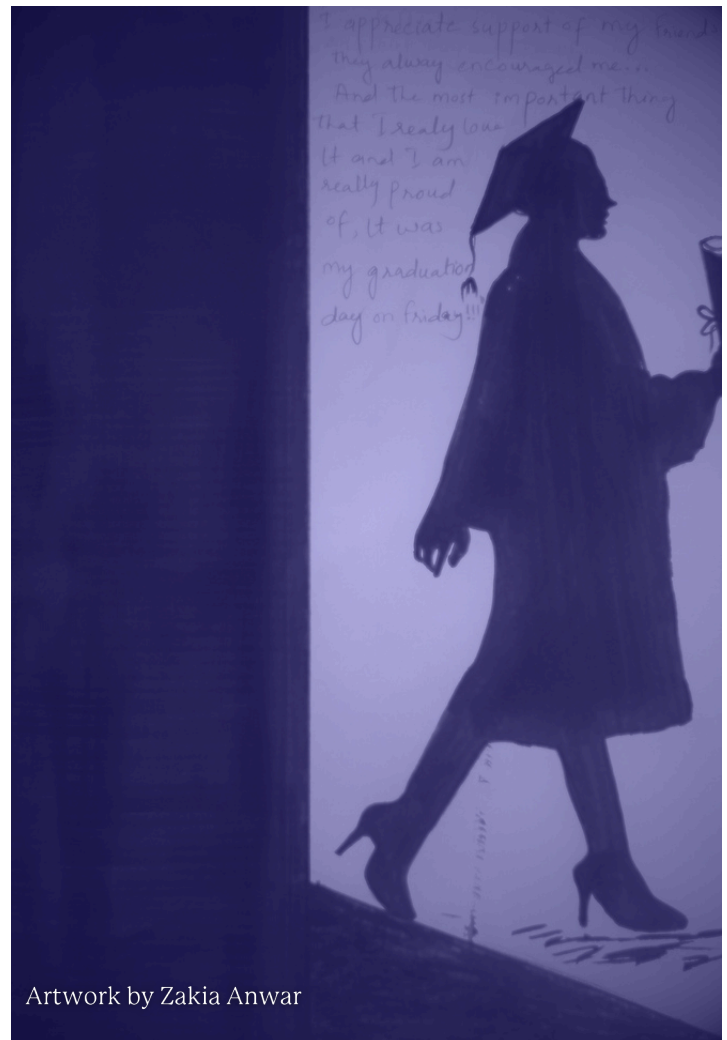
Artwork by Zakia Anwar

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

Oklahoma State University is like my home now. The people here are very nice, so friendly. The professors, the coworkers. It's a very safe place, I think. Yes, a safe place.

I made friends here whenever I need anything. . . Friday, it was my graduation day. All my friends, I never imagined. . . they come here, and like my family, they didn't allow me [to be] alone on my graduation day, and not only [on] my graduation day. Always. [T]he most important thing that I really loved. . . I'm really proud of was on my graduation day on Friday. [My favorite experience is] celebrating my graduation party because it was big, huge, and unforgettable. . . On that day, I [was] really proud [of] myself. I was really happy . . . it was my biggest, the biggest dream that happened.

It's not just a university. It's like a family. It's like a big family.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar



Image of Zakia Anwar with Farzana and her friends at Oklahoma State University.



BAREEN

“The environment is very peaceful, very calm, and the security was good. . . you are always feeling: “Okay, I’m safe in here.”

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

When I left my country. . . we were in [a] hurry. So we couldn't bring a lot, and our departure was kind of sudden, so we didn't know when we will have the flight. What I could take [is] just a book, a grammar book of English. . . I thought it may be useful for me to use it and to read it, because my grammar has [a] problem. It is from when I was teenager, and I just started English classes. So at that time I was studying in it, so whenever I open it . . . I go to my teenager age. At that age I was with my grandmother. She passed away. My grandmother was very encouraging [of] me to learn. Oh, every time she was just . . . encouraging me. She was telling everyone “shh, be quiet, she is studying.” It's very precious for me. So whenever I open it. . . it brings a lot of memories [to] my mind. It give[s] me a kind of relief or something . . . All my memories are inside this book. [Now] my kids ha[ve] it.

When we came to Stillwater. . . my mind was blank. [It was like] I was. . . in a hot boat . . . when the winds are pushing [it]. I was totally blank. I didn't know what will happen, what will be the next step? So when I came here, and then a lot [of] other Afghan families had already arrived before us one or 2 months earlier . . . it was good. . . then I thought, “Okay, I'm not alone, and a lot of other families were there already.” At the time, my kids were . . . 4, 3, and 2 [years old]. At this time we were living in . . . the campus apartments, and so it was good. Yes, looking, [and seeing] you are not alone.



Hosted by:

**OKLAHOMA STATE
UNIVERSITY**



Interviewed in English by:

ZAKIA ANWAR

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We cried a lot together. I was feeling depressed. . . I was thinking “I left my house, my everything, [a] full house, everything I left just behind, and I came here.” In the beginning, yes, I was suffering, I cried a lot, and then gradually I thought – at the time my oldest son was about 5, so he was going to school – Okay, it will be a kind of sacrifice for their future. They will have a better life. And it was very encouraging when you see that they are going to study, for at that time I was suffering how. . . should I start? I was just sitting behind the window. And I was watching. Okay, it's the time for them to go to their classes. . .and when they were coming [home]. “Hello!” I saw them coming. So it was also very encouraging for me to see them and get the spirit: “Okay, you should never give up and try from different sides.” I was trying to apply for my master degree.

The environment is very peaceful, very calm, and the security was good. . . you are always feeling: “Okay, I'm safe in here.”

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

There was [a] building which was called FRC. It was very nice. Whenever we had some questions or problem[s], we were just asking FRC.* And they were always ready to help us. In the beginning. . . we need[ed] a lot because we didn't know, we were not familiar with anything. So a lot of [it] helped a lot, and also [there was] a lot of volunteers.

Every family had a family assistant and volunteers [who] were helping us. Ms. Terri. She was a wonderful, great lady. She helped us a lot, not only our family, but a lot of Afghans. So she was ready to [help us] whenever we had any problem. We were just texting her, and she was available for us. . . she was feeling what [it is] we would need as a mother or as a person who is totally alone in the country. So she was great.

They introduced us [to] everything about the US. We didn't know how to get the sim [card] for our mobile. Once we had questions, these volunteers were available with us after the English classes.

*The Family Resource Center (FRC) is a department at Oklahoma State University.

OSU, the department of Global Studies has provided English language [classes], still for almost 2, 3 years. So they are still providing English classes for Afghans who are still suffering. . . from from the beginners to the advanced level they are providing classes. . . They provided the courses for ladies to learn driving, and it was very helpful. Till now they are providing the facility to get together on our two important celebrations, *Eid*. [They also take us] to visit another city. It's very interesting. We have visited Oklahoma City two, three times to get familiar with the places and also other places. . . These are very interesting and useful to get familiar with other places.

*Inside the campus, it was very calming. Very relaxing . . . We had English classes in the Global Studies [building]. So Afghans were gathering there. . . about 3 days in a week. So we were gathering. I was not alone. We were crying. We were sharing together. One day there was a celebration for *Nawruz*, and they played the song, *Alan Auru Zama*. So all the men and women were crying, and they had to stop the song in the middle, and because no one was able to watch it, some men left the class, and the ladies and the men who were in the class all were just crying. Yes, we cried a lot.*

Image of the School of Global Studies at Oklahoma State University.



They had some kind of gatherings, maybe twice a month, once a month. They had daycare after school. So the kids were getting familiar with each other, even if they were not in the same classes or same schools, and then [the] parents got introduced [to] each other. So these were very helpful for making a community.

When I didn't have a car. . . I was waiting [at] the bus stop. There was an Irani[an] lady who was also a student. So whenever she was meeting with me [at the bus stop], she was always showing me something: "Okay, on these days you can go to [the] mart" or "they have sales. You can go ahead and buy something." Or she was advising me; FRC* was also sending us the emails about . . . fresh vegetables and food which they were providing for students. So, that lady was always [telling] me "Okay, today is the day you can go to the FRC and get some bread, and these things." I miss her. I [have] not seen her [for] more than [a] year. And I miss her.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

I don't know when I will be able to get the job. . . but I'm satisfied for my kids' future, and my kids are going to school. They are studying. They are happy; they are learning. So it is. . . kind of okay from one side. I'm okay with it. Okay – my future, or my work, if I couldn't get [that], then it's okay; my kids will have a better life than me.

So whenever I was free from the kids or anything, I would stay at the house. I'm not the person to go outside. [As] for the kids, I was taking them to the playground.

[Before arriving in the US] I was scar[ed] a lot from driving. I never thought in my country [that] one day I will learn driving. But here, four kids I had to learn, because I had to drop them to school. In the beginning we suffered a lot because I was not familiar with driving. So I start[ed] learning driving and then got my license. So these all were not possible to do by myself.

*The Family Resource Center (FRC) is a department at Oklahoma State University.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

Afghans still are living there who are working at the OSU, and they are [also] their students. On *Eid* and other celebrations we go to each others', and we meet each other.

Most of [my] relationship was with Afghans, our own Afghans, and we get together with other Afghan families on *Eid* or any other gatherings, festivities, celebrations. . . it was good, because our on Afghan community was there. We were really close. The buildings were close. And whenever we wanted, we were going and visit[ing] each other.

Thankfully, everything, everything get[s] better and better day by day, and we settled slowly.



Image of community member donating a car to a former ECAR guest.



PARWIZ & WIFE

“ Even if I live in this university campus or live outside the university campus, or if I live in this state or in another state, I will always keep my relationship with these people while I am alive.

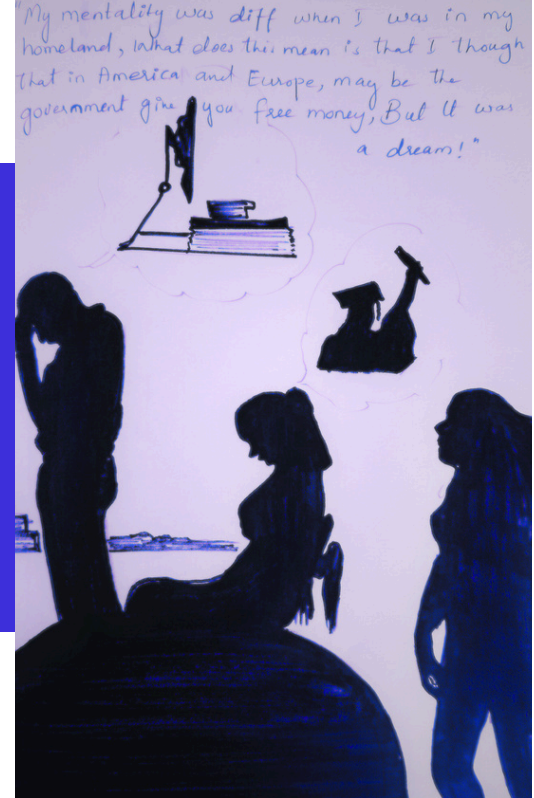
Şawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.

ARRIVAL

When we landed at the Washington airport. . . I [Parwiz] was accompanied by three other families. Those three families had some families who lived in the US before them, and their families came to welcome them in the airport. They took them with them, and we had no one here except Allah. It was very disappointing for us and was very sad for me and my wife. . . It was a very heartbreaking scene for me. . . I became separated from families, from homeland and from countrymen. . . no matter what a human heart is, you and I are Afghans [speaking to the interviewer], there is a disappointment in the human heart. Their families took those families, and you are a new guy who has just come from your homeland, you are far away from your homeland and in a new country, a new culture, a new language with new people, everything made my mind so sad. . . When we came here, we didn't have good memories. . . because it was the first time we traveled far from our homeland.

When we arrived in Washington. . . my child was very sick. I [Parwiz] didn't think that this is America. My wife and I were only thinking about our child. We arrived at the hotel, and I was called by my case worker at that moment; we [asked to] take my child to the doctor. He told me one thing – that you must have health insurance here. Without health insurance, it is very difficult. That moment was very worrying for me.

We were in the hotel and my husband had depression; it was hard for me [wife].



Hosted by:

**WASHINGTON
STATE UNIVERSITY**



Interviewed in Dari by:

ZAKIA ANWAR

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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Believe me, I [Parwiz] personally could not sleep all day and night, I could not fall asleep. . . and lots of bad thoughts were coming to my mind; that moment made me sick, and I became depressed a little bit. But my wife always supported me. . . telling me not to think about [these things]. It is clear to all of us that it takes a while for the brain and nerves of a person to calm down because our thoughts were on our country, our families and everyone. I was thinking it will take a long time to get used to this new environment, these people, and my goal was how to find a job, and my mind was so busy with all the things at those moments. . . what will happen to our future. . . our minds were restless, but after some time had passed, we found ourselves [thinking]: “we must stop thinking of the homeland. Let's put those things away and think about it here.”

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

There is one thing – everyone in this society is busy; someone is busy studying, someone is busy with work. . . everyone is busy with their own things. Sometimes it is very rare that you go to a neighbor or visit a neighbor, whether it is domestic or foreign, because everyone is busy, but our relationship with the people who are here, with our neighbors are good for now; at least if we don't see each other or there is no communication, sometimes when we do see each other, there is a respect between us, there is a greeting and a nice behavior.

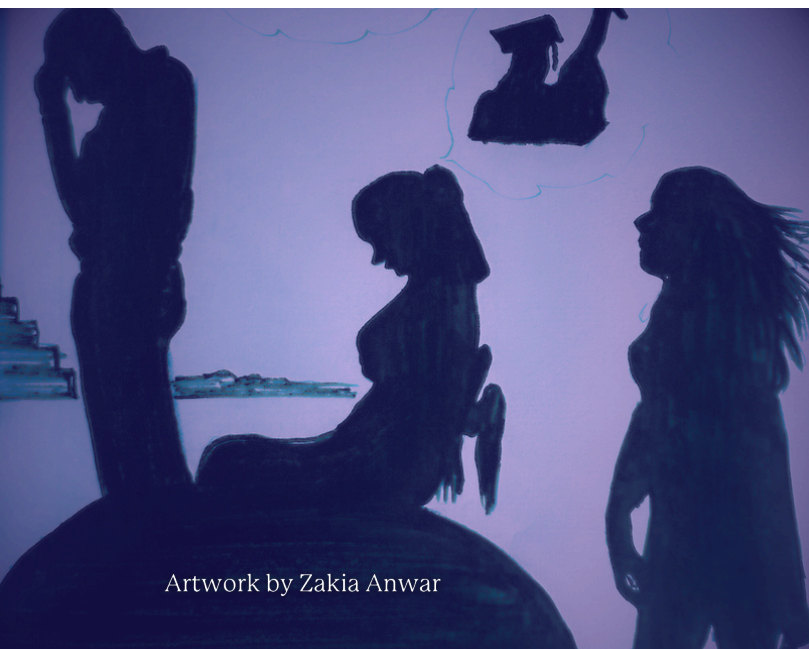
SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

After three days living in a hotel, we got sponsored and that person called and said to come here [Washington State University in Pullman, WA]. . . I [Parwiz] shared with my caseworker that wherever you guys are taking us and wherever you are getting a house for me, just please remember to take me close to my own countrymen. That was my request from the beginning. . . the love and long conversations in the heart . . . the way you talk to your fellow countrymen, you can't talk to another person. Some people who do not have [the same] experience, they will say “oh this is nonsense – the hardships.”

When we came here, I [Parwiz] first wanted to come from Spokane to Pullman, and I was just trying to be in a place where there are my own countrymen because we had a language problem. . . If there is a countryman, at least he could accompany or help us. When we came [to Pullman], we did feel that we were in America; we saw Afghan families that came to welcome us. . . *We found a lot of love – from our people, from these people. We received a good welcome and love. Our sponsors . . . they welcomed us very graciously and kindly.* Especially from our Afghans and from the people who were in this campus and the person who sponsored us through their office, he and his wife were always calling us and were asking if we needed anything. It was not necessary for us to get everything. . . this person [the campus staff member] was the one who ensured that we did not need anything. And they were asking us if we wanted to go to any place.

In this college campus where we live, we found it very good, a very peaceful area and very nice people. It has many other advantages. For example, its security is very good. . . in terms of education, they are very good in education, and the good thing this place has for us is that everything is ten or fifteen minutes away from us.

This place is a good place for learning and to get more life experiences.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

Everything was provided for us when we came here. It means that we did not lack anything, and they have accompanied us very well for a year. And when my [wife speaking] daughter was born, they cooperated a lot – like a family that can do a lot of good to one person. The person who sponsored us did lots of good things. Even they had a baby shower for my child and it was very nice, and they did help a lot.

Me [Parwiz] and my wife, we take our children and we walk around. . . there is an American football field close to us . . . five minutes from us. When the football season begins, we see it, and it is very enjoyable for us. We enjoy it a lot, and the excitement of the sound that is here. . . the fireworks. This is very pleasant for us.

They prepared English classes for us. They appointed English teachers for us from the university who said that it is important we should be taught the language and we should learn the English language. They prepared all of these and enrolled us in those.

I [Parwiz] work for this university [now]. The person who sponsored me, he prepared all the conditions for me and told me that if you want to study, it is possible to study. If you want to work, it is possible for you and your wife to work. We will prepare the conditions for you to take care of the child. We will prepare everything for you. Where I work and my relations with our colleagues, those who know me and those I know are very respectful and very kind people.

We in our Afghani culture have a famous saying that says “the flower gets its color from other flowers,” meaning if this is an educational environment and everyone is busy with studying, I [Parwiz] fall in love when I see everyone is busy with their education and telling myself that if it is possible I should also restart my education. *What I want to say is that this is an educational area or campus environment that makes anyone fall in love with studying. Education is something that does not have any end.* No one has finished education, and you can study as long as you can.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

When my [Parwiz] child was born, the person who sponsored us told me that we will make “a baby shower,” and I was thinking “how will they shower this child.” I discussed it with our Afghan [community] and asked what this baby shower is? It is a totally new thing. Our child is not born yet, and they are talking about showering the baby. . . Then the office asked me if I was ready to do the baby shower, and I talked with my colleague: “What is this baby shower? My child is not born yet, and you guys are talking about a baby shower?” Then my colleague gave me some information about it, and then I said OK. They told me “tell all your Afghan fellows that they will have a small party and every family should make their own food and bring it to the place that we choose. Foreigners and Afghans will be there.”

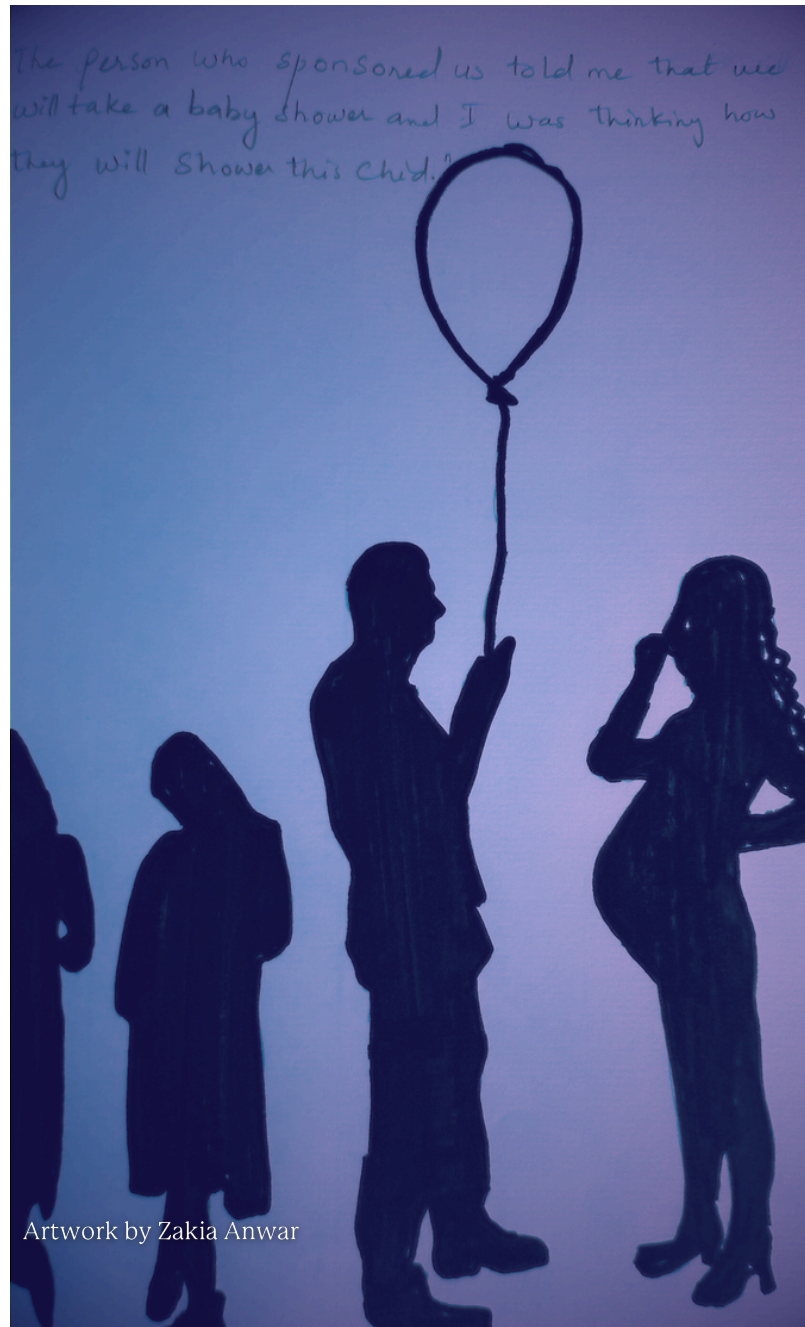
So I [Parwiz] said ok. They sent that place’s address to me, and we went to that place, and it was a really good place. Afghans that were with us brought their food, and the foreigners also prepped some foods and brought them to that party. I was waiting to see what would happen in this baby shower. So everybody ate their food and said congratulations to us and the party ended, and I was still thinking about what will happen in this baby shower. The person who prepared the party told me that the baby shower was over and that was it. That was so interesting for me.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

Among ourselves . . . our own countrymen, we have built a very good community here. For example, our country customs are popular here in the community that the campus helped to build. . . we are seeing each other on a regular basis.

One good thing here is there is a large Muslim community. There are Muslims who sometimes hold Afghani ceremonies. There is a park. . . where all Afghans cook their own special food, for example, [and the] Indian or Pakistani or from any race [or] ethnicity. . . they all have their own different dishes there. People sit and they are all busy with their own countrymen with their sweet stories; everyone is enjoying life there, and that is very relaxing and pleasant for us .

There is something that calms our brains. In the summer times, once a week, we gather for the ceremonies/entertainment with other Afghans and walk until evening and our children play there and we chat with other Afghans and get comfort.



Their support ended with us and they told us that after this you have to do everything by yourself and have to find your way. . . [but] he [campus member] is still the same kind of a person for us, the same kind of friend he was at that time. He is here right now, and we are in contact with those people. Sometimes we see each other. For example, at a birthday party or we invite them to our house, and our love and friendship is still with us. They are very kind to us, and we love them. . . Personally, even if I [Parwiz] live in this university campus or live outside the university campus, or if I live in this state or in another state, I will always keep my relationship with these people while I am alive.

I [Parwiz] want to thank them from my heart, and I am sure that they will hear my voice and with my name. I want to mention their names too which are Paul and his wife's name is Diana. I wish they hear my voice, and I am thankful for them and their team and I hope they are happy wherever they are .

Artwork by Zakia Anwar

People sit and they are all busy with their own
 Countrymen with their sweet stories.





ANONYMOUS

“ My campus group was supportive and inclusive, helping me navigate the new environment and build a sense of community.

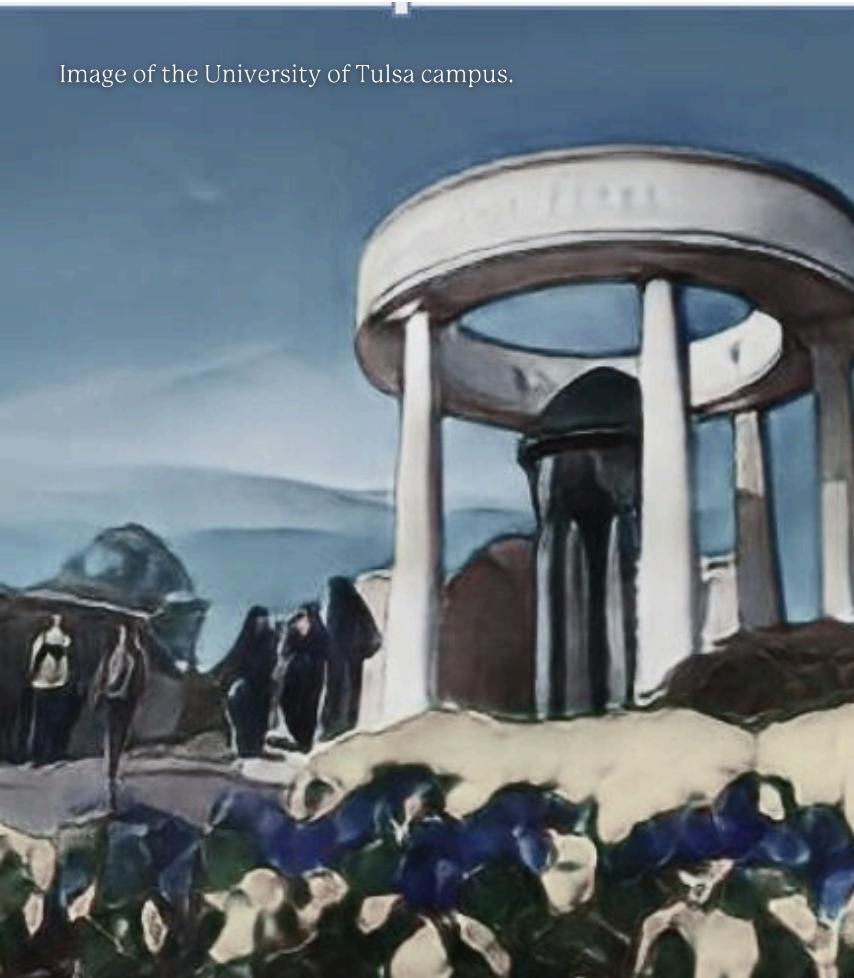
Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

On my first day on campus I focused on orientation, meeting people, and learning to navigate the new environment. It was challenging but marked the beginning of building a new community and support system.

Image of the University of Tulsa campus.



Hosted by:

THE UNIVERSITY OF TULSA



Self-interview in English

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

The physical space on campus was initially overwhelming but gradually became familiar and welcoming. *My campus group was supportive and inclusive, helping me navigate the new environment and build a sense of community.*

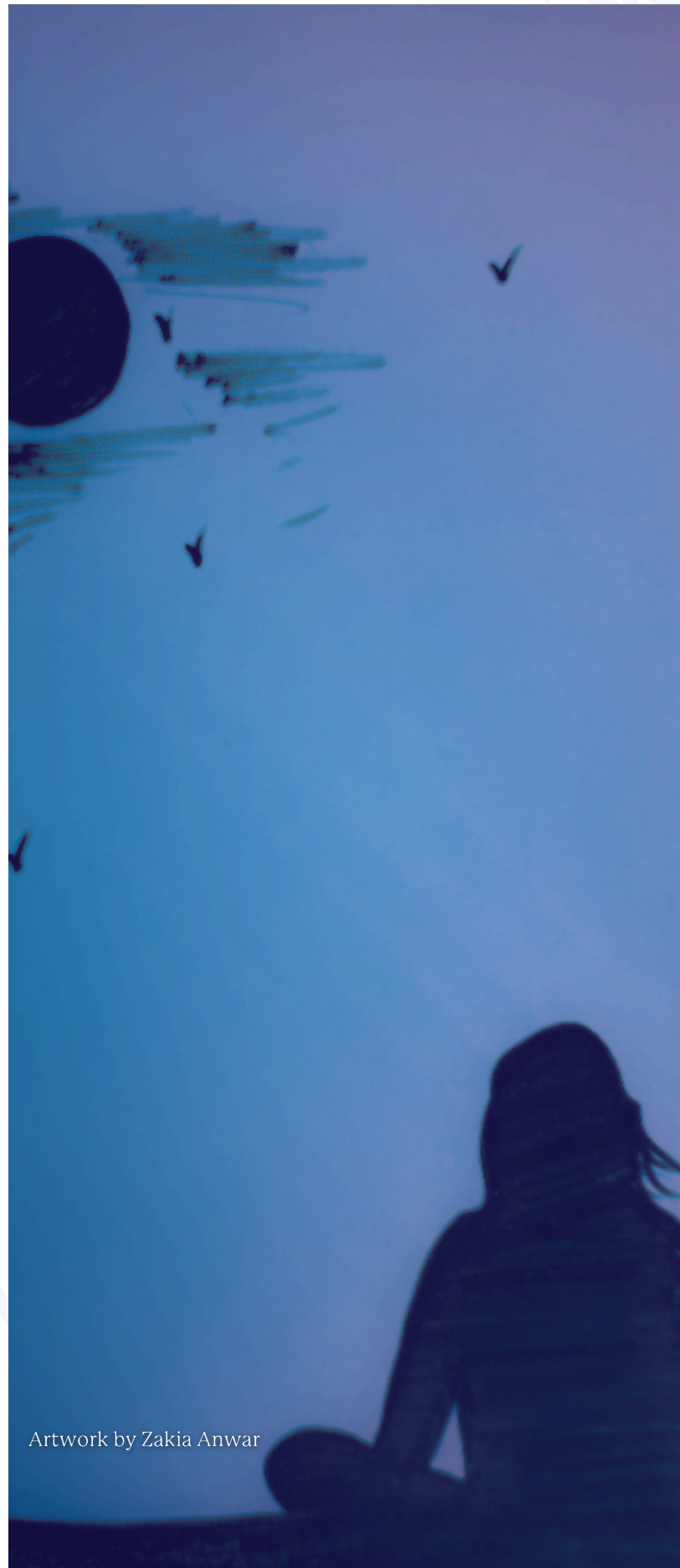
The best experience I have on campus was likely when I participated in a cultural exchange event. It was an opportunity to share my own culture with others while learning about theirs. The atmosphere was vibrant, and I made meaningful connections with people from diverse backgrounds [;] it was a reminder of the richness of diversity and the power of community in fostering understanding and mutual respect.

I appreciated the support and resources provided the most, including the legal support from TU legal Clinic, culture exchange classes and a welcoming community.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

I formed meaningful relationships with other refugees and students, providing crucial support and a sense of community.

Culture exchange class at TU helped me to find my community and build my relationship with people.



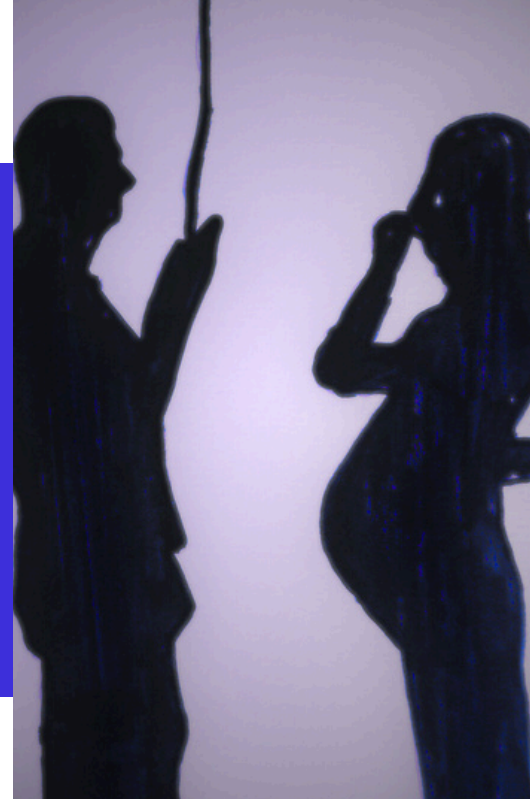
Artwork by Zakia Anwar



MAHER & YASMIN

“ We didn’t feel that they were from a different culture, or speak a different language or a different world; we felt that they were part of us.

Şawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

[We brought] pictures. Pictures of my kids so they remember how we lived in Syria, the house. When we left the country, that is when the war started. So, we can’t go back again, and the most important thing was the pictures because it has the memories. So, when the kids grow up, for example, they can see our house. . . back home.

This is the thing that we can pass down to our kids. The only thing we can tell them, considering that I [Maher] had a boy outside Syria, and he doesn’t know about Syria. So, the pictures are the only thing that we were able to bring from our original country, to bring him part of our past so in the future if we return to Syria, they will know things without feeling strange.

We talk [with the children] about how the circumstances have changed a lot. . . about our memories and how we used to live, how we got here. They didn’t see their grandparent’s house, my family back home, their uncles. Through those pictures they can recall those memories and how things used to be. . . because this is the only memory left for us.



Hosted by:

**OLD DOMINION
UNIVERSITY**



Interviewed in Arabic by:

NOOR GHAZI

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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When we arrived . . . [we] got out of the airport and for a minute we were in disbelief. We didn't believe that we really arrived, as if it was a dream. We stayed for a while in disbelief – are we here or not? When we looked at the American flag, it was a strange feeling – that we are actually here, and we arrived. This is for the first couple of days. Up to this day, when we see the American flag, we feel a strange feeling. You know it has its weight as a flag.

ECAR placed a family photo in the house. . . an old picture of us. I [Maher] didn't know how they were able to obtain it from our relatives, and they put it in a frame, and they put it in the middle of the house. So, when we entered the house, we were surprised; it was beautiful. They even placed a prayer rug for us and many other things that were so beautiful.

You come to a country where you don't know anyone, and you don't know the language. . . it was a fear for us . . . a little fear before we came because we don't know what the situation is. . . but at that moment we forgot something called fear and the differences between us or the fear of the other country where you don't know anyone. . . all of those things disappeared in that moment [when they entered the ECAR house].

When we came and saw this [the family picture, the prayer rug, etc]. . . [we realized] it was our perception that was wrong. We found the opposite of what we thought. *We found that they have acceptance here; they accept you are from a different religion, different language, different culture.* The minute you arrive you find this; it created a big difference for us. We didn't feel that they were from a different culture, or speak a different language or a different world; we felt that they were part of us. We felt as if we had known them a long time ago, and that was because of the way they treated us. . . they welcomed us from the first time we arrived; they greeted us like they knew us for a long time. It felt like they knew a lot about us; they asked about us before our arrival. *It felt as if they knew us for a long time, not that we were meeting for the first time.*

We left as refugees and left our countries to an unknown place; we didn't even know how the weather would be – cold or hot. But when you get here and see all this, this is a great surprise. . . you feel for real that they took in consideration everything and put actual thoughts into all the details.

We felt them as a family, yes as a family.

Image of Old Dominion University campus.



SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

When we first came to the US, they [ECAR Team] gave us our time to relax but then they brought two volunteers who speak Arabic . . . college students [who were] Sudanese. Each of them spoke some Arabic so we communicated faster. Even though we could use the [Google] translator, [using the volunteers] made us feel that they wanted to communicate with us in Arabic directly.

We had three people who are Jenny and Kathy and another one named Jennifer. They were responsible for us, to schedule our appointments with the dentist and even with our paperwork, when we needed our passports and papers that were still in Egypt. They worked to bring it all the way from Egypt. They divided the work, and especially when one of them is not available the other one would take over.

They paid a lot of attention to us. . . they [would] call us to ask if we needed anything. I [Yasmin] didn't expect this. I wouldn't expect someone to ask about us when we came here. . . *the campus group did everything in their power to provide us with our needs.*

They took us around the university, to the soccer field, to the library, to the learning language center, to the restaurants and they introduced us to the different sections around the campus – to the gym, the swimming pool, almost everything around campus they took us there. They toured us around all of campus and introduced us to the different sections and explained to us that “you will be a part of this campus, you will stay here as it will be a new beginning to you.”

They made us university ID cards; they enrolled us as university students and showed us to the classes where we were practicing the language. They were also trying to ask us to learn some Arabic words so that they could communicate more than just teaching us the language. They [showed] us the library, the gym, the cafeteria. *They told us that we can access any one of them since we have the university ID, and we can go around campus just like any other student. It was a beautiful experience since we didn't study back home at university and now, we felt that we are students on campus.*

[We used] some of those resources [on campus]. . . the library, books that we needed, we were able to check them out from the library and bring them back [home]. There was also a place on campus that provided us food in case we needed it. You can just go and get food, once or twice a week just like any other student. You go in and use the card just like any other student on campus and you can eat anything you want. Sometimes this resource was excellent honestly because it made things easier on us.



Image of Old Dominion University library.

I [Yasmin] attended the university classes and I loved this feeling. The teachers were very good, and I used to enjoy those classes when I attended. I learned English, not much, but I started to learn. First, I learned how to write my name, the letters, little by little. It was very beautiful for me because I didn't expect that since I don't know anything in English; I didn't even know the letters. I started to know things and understand them, and I think this was a very beautiful experience. I never thought I would know how to write my name in English, because I didn't study in school back in Syria until 6th grade and left, so I didn't have a good foundation, and then we left the country.

They were truly beautiful days that we didn't get to experience in Syria or any other country. When we got there, we became students, and we had books, notebooks and pencils. And a teacher explaining things to us. We wished that we furthered our education in Syria to this level. But thank God, here we lived it.

When I [Yasmin] go to the university everyday and attend classes and return home, I felt very happy. I used to walk back and forth. On my way, I would see students and they would not react to seeing me or feel strange. No one said anything to me or commented. So I felt comfortable because the campus was my first experience since [I arrived]. I felt safe. Initially, they would come with me until I memorized the way, so then I would go by myself, to drop off my son and come back and go to class. Then we got more involved with society and our home got farther from the campus at this time. But the basis was there.

They [also] took us to the university and tried to bring other students and put them with us to [allow] us communicate with other societies. The students at the university, for example, [were] from many nationalities. . . foreigners. They [ECAR team] tried to make some connection between us [and] to participate with them through questions and answers that they used to teach us during sessions. They encouraged each of us to speak about the culture of our countries, about the food, such as the food in Syria and the different types. There were also people from different nationalities, such as the Philippines and Afghanistan. These are beautiful things to consider while getting to know other cultures, other countries. While we took language classes, they used to teach us about those things as well, which was very beautiful.

[They also took] us outside the university to show us the reality of the world, and to do things to learn. For example, they were teaching us about money and how to use the US [currency]. And then we tested that. They took us to the mall and took us to different places to practice.

The two English teachers were excellent. They would always try their best with us, even when it comes to things outside the school. Once they took us to the zoo and once they took us to clothing shops and housewares [shop]. They would take us to such places, so we learn how purchasing and selling works, and not just teaching us the language, but to take us and show us things in reality and practically.

When my [Yasmin] kids used to go to the field and play, they enjoyed it. They would enjoy playing soccer. There was also a gym. I was even able to go to the gym and exercise. We were very happy that at least I was able to go to the gym.

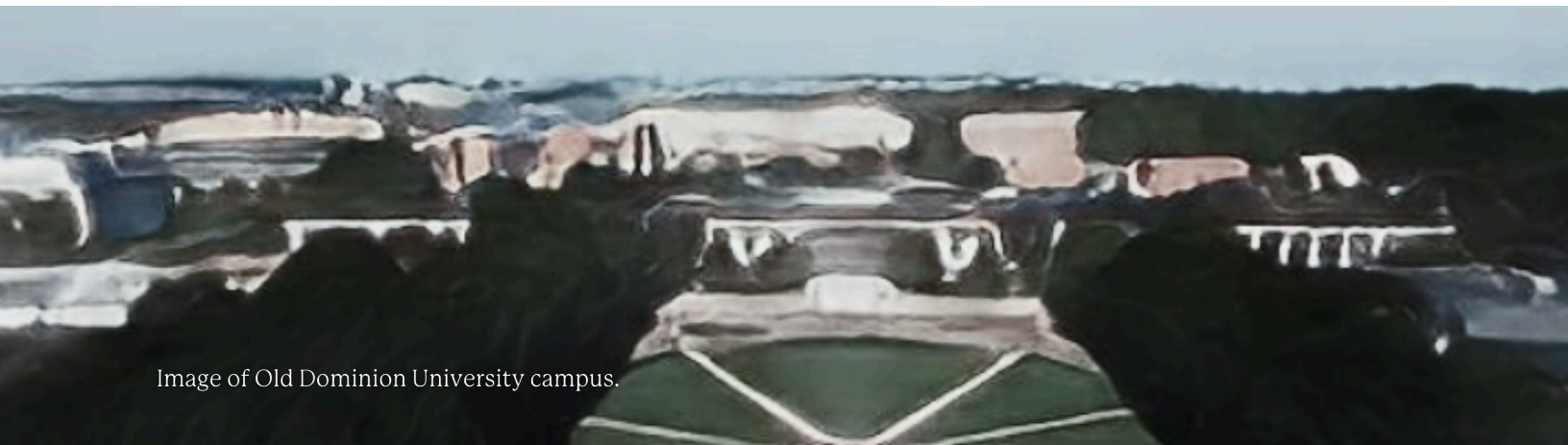


Image of Old Dominion University campus.

They showed us that the way to [the kids'] school is safe. . . My [Maher] wife covers up [wears the hijab], but no one would ask her why she is covered in this way. For a long time they walked with us back and forth. [Our] small boy needed to go to school [so] they took us to show us. They helped us get to know the teachers at the school. They introduced us as his parents so we can pick him up at the school. . . we didn't know all this information at the beginning.

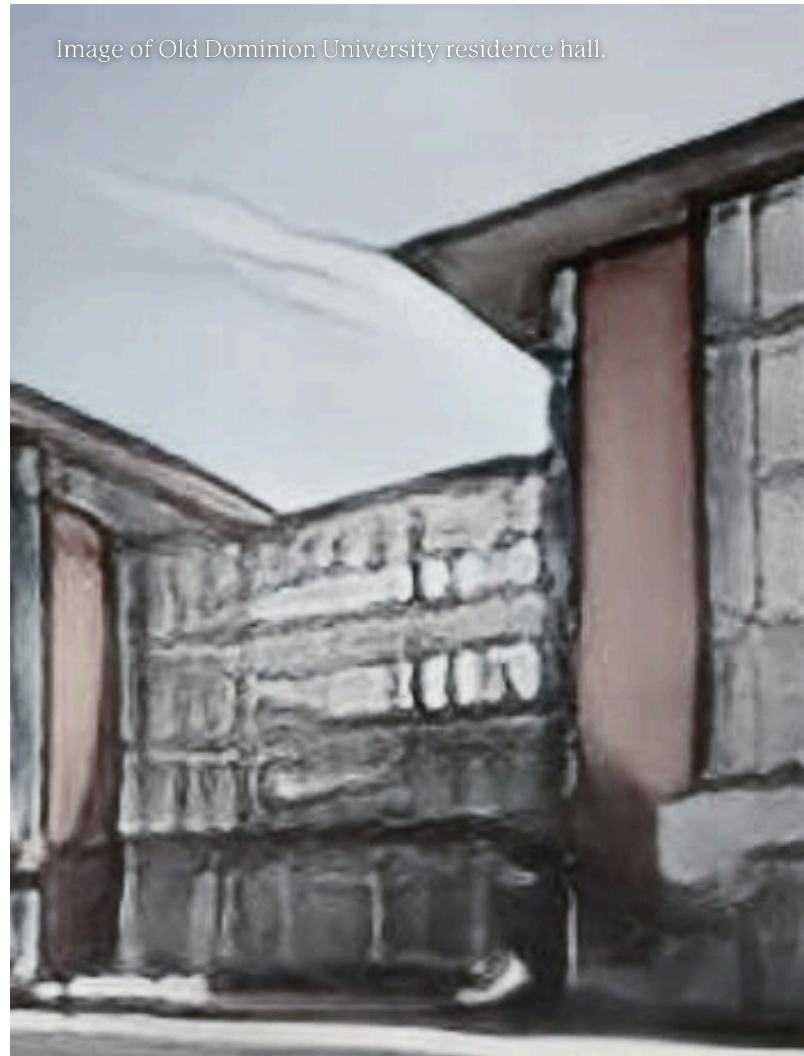
And they took the other kids, and they enrolled them in schools. They followed up with them with the teachers there, considering that they were having difficulties with the language at the beginning. For my [Maher] son, the teachers who taught us language applied for him for the university, and they showed him what the needed paperwork was. They also took his degree, the one he brought with us and translated it. They submitted the paperwork for him – all of this help so that he can attend school faster. Because if he goes to another university, he would have stayed for two years studying the language or three years. But here, they helped him with a shortcut to study for six months only. They helped him take those basic classes to study English. . . then, they helped him little by little until he was able to apply for the university. They explained to him how the system works, what the qualifications are, the scholarships. Also, they helped him because of his age, and he didn't want to waste years before continuing his study. So, they played a big role in helping him and providing him with intensive language training for only six months so he can directly start his first year at the university. He is now studying computer science at ODU.

Sometimes we didn't know what our needs are and what we can ask them for. So, they would usually initiate and ask. Sometimes unless it is very urgent, we wouldn't ask or pressure them. We never asked them where they failed to deliver. They never said no, or this is not within our expertise or limits. So, anything we asked, they would write it down and try their best to bring it.

Sometimes they would celebrate us, such as a celebration because we have been with them for a month. *They will make a celebration, even a symbolic one, because they are happy that we are with them for a month. Every milestone, they made into a celebration. They were celebrating us each stage by stage.*

[After moving off campus] They rented the house for us. At the beginning, I [Maher] learned that no one would rent a place for us until we found someone to cosign it for us, which they did. At the same time, they brought people and a car and volunteers. They even brought some furniture and basic home stuff because the first house was on campus with furniture already there that had to stay there. So, when we moved to the new house, they all came with their partners even though they are old, not young, but they were picking up stuff and were very happy. I felt that they were working and they were happy. This was something to remember when a person and his wife come to help us out and pick up our stuff; it was very beautiful.

Image of Old Dominion University residence hall.



NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

This was the [biggest] challenge, that I [Yasmin] wanted to learn the language, but it was difficult. I wanted to understand them and wanted them to understand me. So, this was the difficulty for me.

I [Maher] honestly suffered at the beginning until I found a job. They tried to make my resume and list the jobs that I have done in the past in Syria and Egypt. It was like a file for me so when I apply at any place, I have a resume that lists all my previous jobs and experiences.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

We were out of the [ECAR] program, and my son was in university, and they requested books from my son at the university, and we didn't know how to get them. So we called them to ask about how we can get the books. We just asked them to show us how to get the book, but they sent us the book to our house. We thought that since the program was over, they wouldn't help, and it is not their business anymore, that they would just guide us on what to do.

These are friends. I [Maher] mean even your relatives might not be connected to you in this way, and this is what actually happened with us, and this is how they helped us. Like this story we just shared. This is something that happened recently and not long ago. We are almost into the two years now in the US and as a program they should be done now with us which is only 3 or 6 months, I am not sure how long exactly the program was. Despite that, up to this hour, when we ask for something, they would try to help us. It is not like they were just helping within the university context, but they consider us as their friends as well. When we moved to the new house after that, when we rented by ourselves, they would help us. They were very happy to be part of this level that we got to. We now had a house that we rented by ourselves. And we live in a house now alone without anyone's help. They were so happy at the level we go to, they felt they were part of this level that we got to.

To this day, there is communication. Even if we don't need something, they are still people that we can talk to, and they respond to us if we need something in this country. Since we are still new here and have not reached our full capacity, I [Maher] still can call them if something happens and I need help; they will help me and tell me you should do this and that, and they stand with us.

Image of Old Dominion University English Language Center.



This is a big society, and it differs from our society in all honesty, so we felt the difference but not to the level that we thought we would before we arrived here. Not similar to what we used to hear about in the movies or from people who didn't live here. As you know, our Middle Eastern community is very different from the community here, but we didn't feel these great differences they talked about, such as racism or if they see you as different from them. Frankly, no one here crosses the line with anyone; people mind their own business. They all work and won't ask you about your own personal life and why you dress that way. They all accept you even when you don't speak the language; they won't just stop talking to you because you don't speak the language. No, they work with you, and you can use the translator and they would accept this method as well. In all, they try their best to accept you as part of the community. Honestly, up to this day, I [Maher] didn't find these difficulties in the community.

When I [Yasmin] walk in the street, I am not afraid of anything. Not my hijab or going out. I go out by myself; I feel safe. I also go to the mall by myself. All of those things I used to be very afraid of. I questioned how I would go out by myself. Our area doesn't have any Arab as well, so I was very concerned. But after all, I didn't feel any of those things here, on the contrary it was safe.

Anything you dream about, you can achieve it here [USA]. . . you can make progress even if you don't know the language.



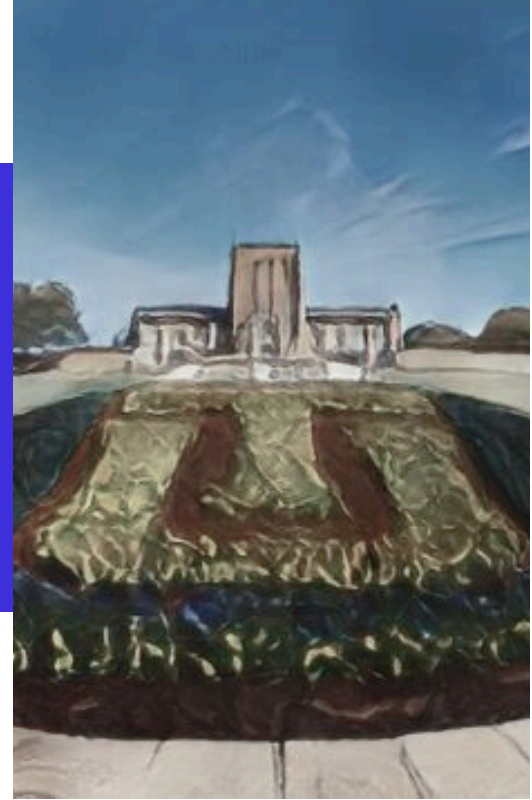
Image of Norfolk, Virginia.



SATEZA

“ The welcoming environment of TU played a crucial role in easing my transition and helping me feel more comfortable in my new surroundings.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

The first few days in the US were a whirlwind of emotions, excitement, nervousness, and hope. I was traumatized and culture shocked when I arrived in the US, but the TU campus stood out as one of the most welcoming institutions.

Arriving on the TU campus, I was met with warmth and support from both the administration and fellow students. Orientation programs helped me acclimate quickly, introducing me to the campus culture and the resources available. The welcoming environment of TU played a crucial role in easing my transition and helping me feel more comfortable in my new surroundings.

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

My interactions with the TU community were overwhelmingly positive, fostering meaningful relationships that I still cherish.

The collaborative and diverse community at TU made it easy to feel at home and supported in my endeavors.

TU offered numerous resources such as academic advising, mental health services, and cultural orientation programs.



Hosted by:

THE UNIVERSITY OF TULSA



Self-interview in English

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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My campus group, which was led by Dr. Danielle Macdonald played a crucial role in my adjustment, offering a sense of community and belonging through various cultural exchange programs and support initiatives.

I appreciated the sense of community and the comprehensive support system at TU the most. The willingness of the university to help Afghan students integrate and succeed was heartwarming.

To me, community means a supportive network of individuals who share goals, values, and interests, offering mutual support and fostering a sense of belonging. It's about connection, understanding, and collaboration, where each member contributes to the well-being and growth of the group.

This program has been a cornerstone of my cultural integration, allowing me to share my heritage while learning about others. It has created a bridge between Afghan and American cultures, fostering mutual respect and understanding. I have also celebrated the Afghan New Year (Nawroz) through ECAR back in 2022. ECAR has been very helpful to me, allowing me to share my norms with American Culture.

The sense of belonging and mutual support within these communities has been invaluable in navigating the challenges of adapting to a new culture and academic environment. The University of Tulsa (TU) campus is a vibrant and inclusive space. The people, including students, faculty, and staff, are exceptionally welcoming and supportive.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

The most challenging aspect was adjusting to a new environment and cultural differences, but the support from my peers and faculty helped ease this transition.



Image of Danielle Macdonald at the 2023 ECAR Gathering.

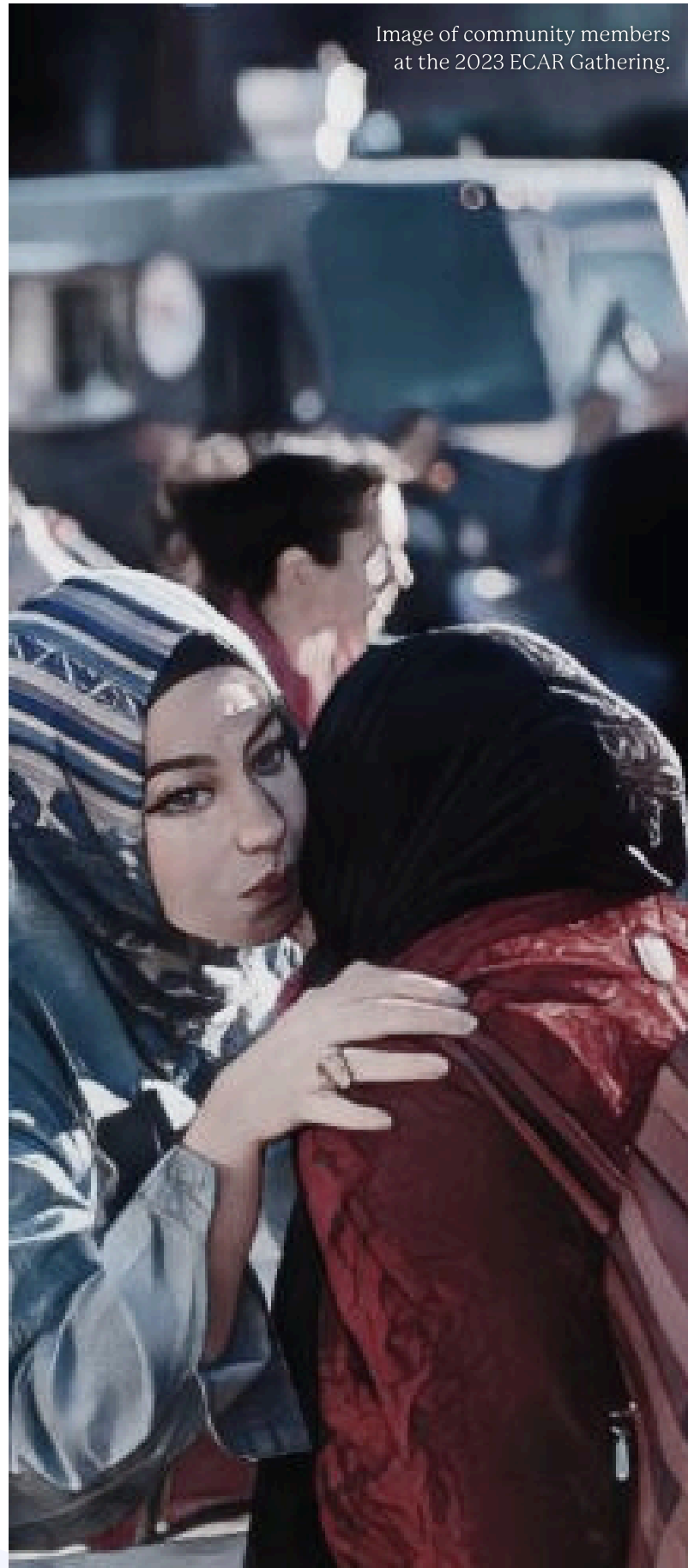
CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

My Project Afghan Student Empowerment is funded by a grant from UNHCR. This project, which commenced on January 1st, 2024, has been instrumental in providing vital support to Afghan students at the University of Tulsa. With a focus on peer mentoring, academic assistance, and cultural integration, the project has garnered significant success and demonstrated its potential to positively impact the lives of Afghan students.

Many grapple with language barriers, academic adjustment, and cultural adaptation, making the initial years of college particularly daunting. The Afghan Student Empowerment project stands as a beacon of support, offering tailored assistance to help these students navigate these challenges successfully. By providing peer mentoring, academic support, and cultural integration initiatives, the project equips Afghan students with the tools and resources they need to thrive during the crucial early years of their college experience.

As the project leader of the Afghan Student Empowerment initiative, I am committed to advancing the project's mission of supporting Afghan students' educational journey and fostering their success. With continued support and investment, I am confident that the project will continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of Afghan students, both at the University of Tulsa and beyond.

Image of community members at the 2023 ECAR Gathering.



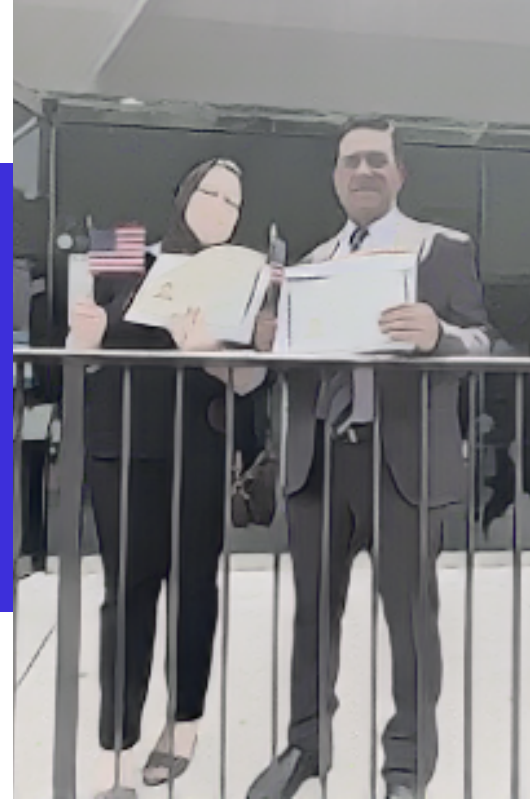


Every
Campus
A Refuge

SAADIYA

“ All the girls came, so we didn't feel like we don't know or we don't have anyone here. It was like a small family.

Sawt: An Oral History of Resettlement Campuses was funded by an Emerson Collective Fellowship.



ARRIVAL

My husband, he's a mechanical engineer. He used to be [the] owner [of a] gas factory in Mosul [Iraq] with a partner. He used to work with [the] US army [at] that time. It was dangerous for him. For that reason, we left Iraq, because people want[ed] to kill him.

I was [the] first one in my family to travel. I never imagine[d] one day [that I would] travel or leave my family. I graduate[d], [got] married, [we were] building our life. . . . then something happened to my husband [which] force[d] us to leave. We left; we [went] to the Lebanon.

Six years [in] this “station.” I always call Lebanon [a] station. . . . In this station, I los[t] five and a half years of my life. I don't know what will happen after. It was very hard. You are [at a] good level in your life, and then suddenly something happened and [you have to] start over from zero, and you don't know how you can build it [again].

March 2017. When we came . . . don't know even [that] we are coming to Atlanta. . . we apply for the travel [to] Michigan. We have a lot of friends there. We don't have anybody here in Georgia. So in Lebanon they give us a ticket; they say “Atlanta.” And we just look[ed] to each other: “Atlanta? Where is Atlanta? We don't know about it.” We came back home. We searched in Google to see where is Atlanta, where is Georgia?



Hosted by:

**AGNES SCOTT
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in English by:

NOOR GHAZI

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

everycampusarefuge.org

First two days [in the US], it's like . . . you're losing your mind or you don't know what are you going to do. I'm just waiting [for] what they tell me [to do]. And then I go, follow people to do what they ask me to do. . . I don't have any decision.

Two days without internet. I didn't call my family. My family, they don't know anything about us. Just in the airport, I connect, I say: "I am arrived. I am in [the] United States." That's it. They don't know where I am.

When I came to the United States, I'm not speaking English, just my husband was speaking because he used to work with [the] US Army before. . . So he was talking and I'm just looking: what they are saying? I don't know what's happening around me. My son was crying all the time. He said, I don't want to stay here. I want to go back to my friend because he do[es]n't know any English. He was studying French and Arabic in Lebanon. So it was [a] hard time in the beginning.

[I brought] pictures for my wedding and some picture[s] with my family and pictures when I was a child . . . I took them to Lebanon because . . . ISIS c[a]me and then stole everything. And then I take them again to the United States.

I have the first picture of. . . when we came here. I am very tired. We came to the New York . . . We slept there in the hotel, and then in the morning we came here.

We had a big community in Iraq and in Lebanon. . . I had a lot of friends . . . but when I came here, I feel like I'm strange –*ghariba*.*

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

When I came here, I didn't imagine where I'm going . . . where I will live?

So when they come to the airport, they take us, [and] we go directly to the home [on campus]. I cannot explain . . . this feeling [I had at] that time, because when you travel and you start over your life you don't know where are you going . . . I don't know what is waiting [for] me. So when I come to the house I see everything ready. . . The house was very beautiful.

I came. I sleep in my house. Next thing in the morning, the President of the Agnes College com[es] to my house, bring[s] us flowers, bears, and cards . . . to say welcome. And in the card she wrote that the house . . . is free, everything, even bills for power or gas or anything. I didn't pay [at] that time. Everything it was [paid by] Agnes Scott College.

[On campus], everything was green, and it was in spring; I came in spring. Flowers [were] starting to grow and people walking all the time. So the feeling, it was like everything was beautiful, because [it was] different weather, different environment. . . I cannot explain all the feeling[s] at that time, but everything, it was beautiful.

[When] I called my mom, she said: "Are you in the jail?" I say: "Why?" She's saying, "I don't know. People here, they say when they take you to the United States, they put you in the jail in the beginning and then they . . . put you in the house or something like that." And my mom was crying. She just want[ed] to hear from me any word [about] where I am. I say, "Mom, they give me a house." She said, "What? What do you say?" I say "Yes, they gave me a house. I will take a picture . . . and I will send you." I take a picture [of] the house. She said, "please post it [on] Facebook. People here, they are talking a lot." I posted it on Facebook. I say: "We are here in the United States."

**Ghariba* means "stranger" in Arabic.

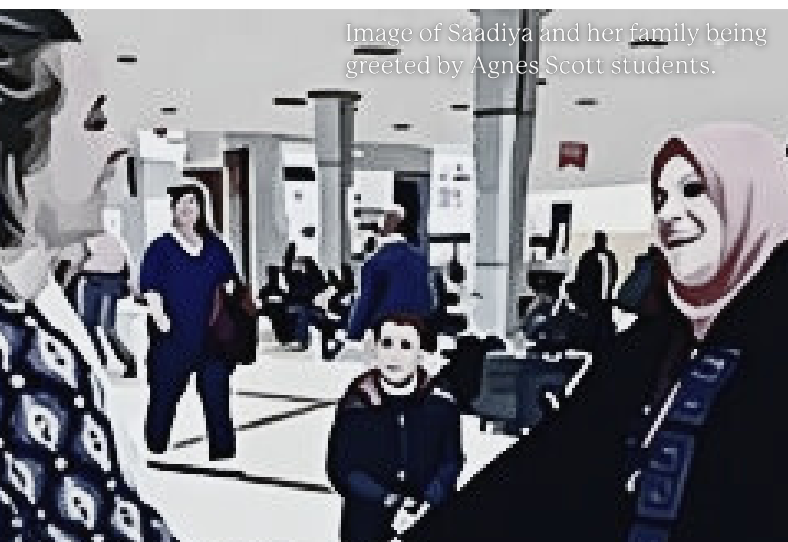


Image of Saadiya and her family being greeted by Agnes Scott students.

The six girls. It was Leila and Laurie and Jesse, and I cannot remember all the names. They were students in Agnes Scott College. So they are going to the college, and [during] the break, they come to my house. They drink coffee with me, tea, and then every day they have [a] schedule . . . every day two of them . . . come to ask me what I need. One girl or two girls come to help me . . . to grocery store, to do our paper[work], to register my kids in the school. Everything. They didn't leave me. They always come into my house; they take me, they teach me [to] drive. They take [me to get] my license. I cannot even leave the house. Maybe I [would not be able to] come back because I am new.

They were very good with me, the six girls . . . Maybe if bad people [had come] to help me, maybe they [would have] take[n] me to the bad way; but no, they are taking me to the good way. They teach me . . . how I can speak.

These six girls, and the lady, my neighbor the professor . . . each birthday, they came to make a party. [The] first one, it was my birthday. They do [a] surprise for me. They came all of them together. They talk with my husband. They go inside my kitchen. They put everything on the wall, and then they call me . . . I cried [at] that time.

And then, next one, it was my daughter's birthday. And then also they take us to the park, and I did the cake. They bring everything; all the girls came, so we didn't feel like we don't know or we don't have anyone here. It was like a small family. Until I start working and then, [I started] knowing other people.

People [were] always . . . helpful. If someone talk[s] Arabic wrong, maybe I will laugh. But here, they [are] never laughing. They're always holding my shoulder. I say, "Okay, okay, I understand you." And then they tell me what I need. And they tell me with moving or doing something in their hand to understand.

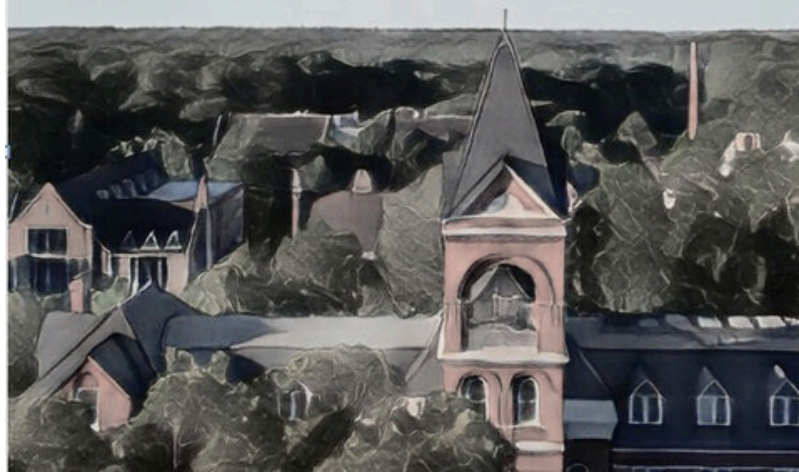
They registered me in the ESL class. It was very close to us in the library. And then [one of the students] took me also to the gym [at] Agnes Scott College. She said, "Okay, I have member[ship] here because I am [a] student." She took me with her . . . [The] gym, it's good for the refugee[s] when they come because I feel that in the beginning it was stress[ful]. So when you go to [the] gym, [it] reduce[s] your stress.

And also [the] library is very important for kids. My son used to go a lot [to the] library to read, to get books to read because he liked to develop that language. . . [His] school, it was very close to us [on] campus. It was a great school, elementary school . . . They don't have ESL students in this school. . . because the city is not for refugees . . . He was the only one taking ESL class. So I give him advice to read a book. So every time we go to [the] library, he takes a lot of books. If we give him money to save it or for pocket money or the allowance, he buys book[s]. We go to Walmart, he buys book[s]. When I moved, I ha[d] a big box of books for my son.

Then they have. . . events. Molly, the girl, she said "come with us, we have an event and maybe some people [will] support you." And she take[s] me there. And it was like a new environment, different college, different people, building is different than our country. It was amazing.

Anything I need, I say "we need to do this," and immediately or [the] next day, I see something like this thing I thought about – they bring it to us. I appreciate them when they find a daycare for my daughter. She was under three years [old], and I cannot work because she is young.

Image of Agnes Scott College.



Every day I'm cooking. Iraqi[s], we like the food. So when they come in the morning, we have to do a breakfast, and you know our breakfast is a big breakfast. They eat. They love my food . . . They say, you have to work in [a] restaurant or bakery or something like that. I say, I don't know how to work or how to apply. I cannot talk either. I don't have any language. Every day they are in my house, I start practicing with them. So even if I say something wrong. . . they say, "[it's] okay, say [it] wrong, it's fine. You will learn." With them, I learned my language in the beginning like the basic language. She applied for me. She comes, she said, "hey, you have [an] interview." I changed my clothes. She teach me how to talk. She teach me how to say, to act . . . everything. I go there. I speak exactly what she tells me to say. And then, [the] first job, they say, "okay, you can come after tomorrow to start your work." I say, "oh, I start work before my husband!" But he also was making interviews, so I start[ed] [on the] 20, [and] he started [on the] 22.

The work [was] three minute driving, 10 minute walking, so sometimes I go walking to work in the morning. They apply for me for work in [a] bakery, and then it was [a] success for me. I was the pastry chef in my department until COVID [when] they closed the bakery.

[One of the students] teach me how to drive. I [had an] accident in her car in the training. She didn't let me even call [the] police. She said, "no, because you are in the training. . . it's fine. I will talk to the man." Then I [was] scared. . . to drive again because [of the] accident in the training. She forced me to drive. She takes me again to the street. She said, "drive." She comes with me to get my license. [My score] was 100. I'm not forgetting her face because before the driving test in one week, I [had] the accident in her car. And then in the test . . . she see[s] "a hundred." A hundred times she says "How? How you got a hundred with a driving test?" So it was amazing!



Image of Agnes Scott College.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

My husband is in mechanical engineering, but when we came here [I hoped he would] have a good opportunity to work here in the United States, not like a worker like now in the company or hourly or something like that. I wish he had... more support for his job.

Me and my husband [were] working, but I got pregnant, and then I left my job [for] six months. . . . In the beginning, I used to work part-time because I cannot stand, and I have a lot of problem[s] with the pregnancy. My husband too left his job because I need someone always [to] take me to hospital, and he started working Uber. . . [in his] free time. . . We're struggling a lot. . . paying rent during my pregnancy, and after I left Agnes Scott College. And then after that, we moved again to [an]other apartment . . . we [are] both working, struggling to put my baby in daycare or someone to take care of her . . . 40% from my salary [went] to the babysitter or to the daycare. . . [and a] little money stay[s] with me to pay one or two bills to help my husband.

I ha[d] my own business. I create[d] my small business to sell Arabic food and pastry and our Iraqi food. Other organizations offer for me to study . . . a lot of customer[s] called me: "Hey, we want food," [but] I cannot . . . I don't have time. After I finish[ed] my study, I need to work, [but] all the customer[s] [are] gone. [At] that time, our goal [was] to open a small restaurant, but because I stopped my business . . . it's hard [for] us to do it again, but we keep this goal in the future.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

My neighbor . . . every day I give her food. Whatever we cook, especially in Ramadan. [In] the other house, [there] was [a] Pakistani lady . . . working in Agnes Scott. She's professor and her husband, he was very, very helpful. Every day I give food for both of them. My neighbor . . . his job was buying [a] house, old house and do[ing] a renovation, and then rent it or sell it. He gave us a house for rent . . . he helped us with that, and we are friends till now.

And then Jesse and Laila. Jesse we keep talking with her after I mov[ed]. . . And Laila . . . she moved to Alabama, but we keep talking on Instagram, Facebook, everything.

I am not forgetting the people who support[ed] me when I came to the United States.

Image of Saadiya's children.





Every
Campus
A Refuge

