

BUILDING PEACEFUL BRIDGES

"Bridging the hearts and minds of all people"



Bridge Builders with BPB mentored and sponsored families

BPB Family Update

Our Bridge Builders brought goodwill and cheer to our families over the holidays. Their weekly visits included sharing holiday treats and conversations about holiday traditions. A highlight of the season was the trip to Six Flags Great America to experience the dazzling display of lights. The Bridge Builders and families enjoyed walking through the immersive maze of lights and sounds.

Ismail and Gulaly and their family have been busy. Ismail earned his Commercial Drivers License. Gulaly obtained her driver's permit and has begun practicing her driving skills. The Mentoring Team celebrated with the proud parents when Rabia, their oldest daughter, was named Student of the Month in her seventh grade class. Ismail also finds time to help BPB welcome new Afghan families by offering his translation services, driving to doctor appointments, gathering clothing and assisting in the set up of new homes.

Ghufran was busy with home sewing projects. In addition to mending clothing, she made Christmas ornaments which we distributed to our Bridge

Builders. She is eager to do additional sewing projects and build a business at home allowing her to care for her children and receive income. Much thanks to Bushra who is providing translation and sharing her refugee experiences - using FaceTime!

Ali began working full time at a local restaurant. He, his wife and children continue their English classes. Soheila's advancement in English has enabled her to enroll in classes at Truman College. BPB continues to meet virtually with the family and are grateful for our volunteer Oghay's translation services as well as sharing her own experiences of coming to the U.S. from Afghanistan.

CALENDAR

Learning Luncheon

Monday, February 28
12pm to 1pm

Housing Challenges for Afghan
Newcomers

Reading Refuge Book Club

Wednesday, March 30
7pm to 8pm

From Tyranny to Liberty: A
Personal Story, Bela Suhayda



Dear Bridge Builders,

Congratulations on welcoming many Afghan newcomers to America! Your generosity of time, financial support, and in-kind contributions has turned a living

space into a home, and enabled our families to feel a sense of belonging.

There are more refugees to be resettled in 2022. Affordable housing is a necessity from the beginning. BPB's Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) reached its goal of \$20,000. Thank you!

Currently, the local resettlement agencies are overwhelmed, given military bases moving Afghan evacuees to agencies and community based organizations by mid February. BPB is initiating a Call to Action to identify landlords and realtors in the Northern Suburbs who can offer new housing paradigms for our newcomers. Suburbs can become welcoming communities for resettlement, expanding the housing offering existing in the Chicago metropolis. BPB will partner with agencies and community based organizations to resettle families into suburban affordable housing.

Thank you all for sharing in our Gather for Good Annual Event. We raised over \$40,000 to support five Afghan families and initiated BPB's Affordable Housing Fund. It was a heartfelt evening of watching our families share their favorite recipes and life stories.



Bridge Builders

We shared a touching moment when Ahlam presented Ann Balusek with BPB's second Bridge Builder Award. Their friendship runs deep as they trailblaze for refugee support.

We look forward to seeing you at BPB's two upcoming events: Learning Luncheon, February 28, discussing Housing Challenges for Afghan Newcomers and Reading Refuge Book Club, *From Tyranny to Liberty: A Personal Story*, by Bela Suhayda, Wednesday, March 30, 7 p.m.

We are grateful to Fr. Wayne Watts and Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish for providing a space in their Collection Room for clothing and small household items in Wilmette; and Father Issac Lara, St. Catherine Laboure, Glenview for space to store furniture.

Welcome to new Board Member Moira K. Pollard, BPB's new Treasurer. Thank you to Carrie Classick Johnson for Board membership and Leslie Berkowitz for her role as BPB Treasurer these beginning years.

BPB is creating an All Faiths Refugee Collaborative. We are working to mobilize the power of collaboration among faith based and secular institutions to give our new and resilient immigrants the best opportunity to achieve independence. More information in future communications.

Thank you to our donors, volunteers, speakers and communities for all of their support of "bridging the hearts and minds of all people." Please participate in BPB's Afghan Family Sponsorship Fund with the goal of supporting one family from Fort McCoy for one year (refer to p.6 Call to Action).

"If not me, who? If not now, when?"

Lori Consadori Lucchetti

Lori Consadori Lucchetti, President & Co-Founder

Building Peaceful Bridges is a nonprofit organization supporting people of all faiths whose mission is to foster multicultural relationships by assisting in the integration of refugees into American society and educating communities on the challenges facing refugee populations through their stories.



Learning Luncheon



Bridge Builders at fourth Learning Luncheon

World Languages and Bilingual Department Chair at Evanston High School (ETHS), Rachel D'Onofrio, and ETHS English Language Learner (ELL) Teacher, Katie Kelly, BPB Moderator, Laura Kushner

BPB welcomed World Languages and Bilingual Department Chair at Evanston High School (ETHS), Rachel D'Onofrio, and ETHS English Language Learner (ELL) Teacher, Katie Kelly at our fourth Learning Luncheon of 2021. They led an informative presentation of the Bilingual Education Program at ETHS complete with testimonials from some of their students.

Rachel and Katie explained the structure of their program as well as highlighted the many challenges faced by their English Language Learners. Katie explained how their program strives to provide an environment where the students can flourish. The videos of the students were informative and brought smiles to all of our faces.

Laura Kushner, BPB volunteer, moderated the discussion. As a retired elementary school principal who had many ELL students at her school, she sparked an interesting discussion with our guest speakers.

Prior to the luncheon, BPB encouraged attendees to read *Refugee High* by Ellie Fishman. The book follows the stories of a small group of refugee teens at a Chicago area high school and is described as “a vital window into the present-day American immigration and education systems.” BPB was pleased to offer a closer look at this issue thanks to our Learning Luncheon guests, Rachel and Katie.

Watch the video of this event [here](#) and share it with your friends and colleagues.

Board Transitions

BPB continues to be amazed at the talented individuals who are committed to our mission. Most recently we welcomed a new Board Member and three new Advisory Board members. Moira Pollard is joining our Board following her retirement from a Big 4 accounting firm where she worked as a tax attorney. She will take over the role of Treasurer from Leslie Berkowitz who, we are thankful, will remain on the Board and continue her outstanding leadership for our Special Events.

Our three new Advisory Board members are already familiar with BPB. Roqayah, a former refugee from Iraq, has shared her many talents as an intern with BPB over the last few years. We are grateful that she will now serve on the Advisory Board. We also welcome Ahadi and Ismail who have agreed to share their wisdom and refugee experiences. Ahadi is from the Democratic Republic of Congo and is currently attending Aurora University majoring in Social Work. Ismail is from Afghanistan where he served as a translator for the U.S. and British military. He is actively working in the Chicago Afghan community to assist newcomers.

Volunteer Spotlight

Bushra is our wonderful new intern that is managing our social media platforms. Bushra recently graduated from U of I with a B.S in Developmental Psychology. She is applying to medical school this upcoming 2023 cycle and is committed to reducing disparities in healthcare as a future physician.



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead



Moira K. Pollard
Treasurer

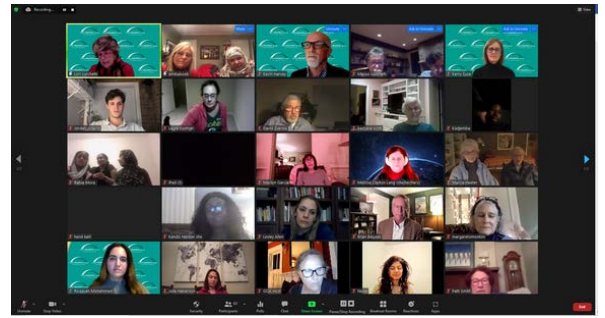


Roqayah Mohammed
Advisory Board



Ahadi Chibabira
Advisory Board

BPB 2021 Annual Event



The theme of the 2021 Annual Benefit was “Gather for Good.” Three of our families shared special recipes and stories of their lives and culture. The making of the video was a way for our families to reflect and connect who they are and where they come from to their new home and new friends, building a bridge between two cultures. There was great resonance among our community members and their generous donations will help support five newly arriving Afghan families.



Hawa and Ahadi
Democratic Republic of Congo



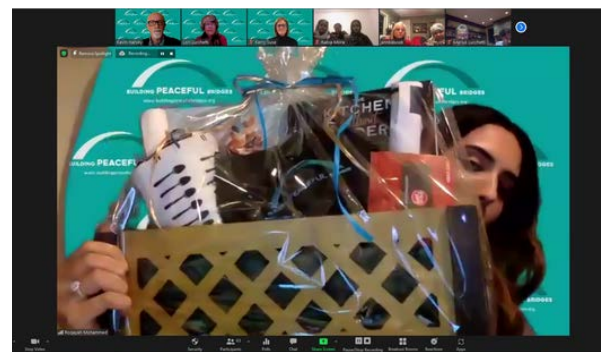
Haroun and Kaltouma
Central African Republic



Rabia, Hadya and Nadia
Afghanistan



The raffle using a prize wheel was a big hit at the event! Thank you, Roqayah!



Last year's Bridge Builder awardee, Monique Woel and Ann Balusek at a non-virtual dinner to honor Ann.



Ann Balusek received the 2021 Bridge Builder Award. BPB Co-Founder, Ahlam Mahmood presented it to her at her home!

Call to Action: Donate Now!

We are being asked to provide **one year of full support** for the resettlement of an Afghan family transitioning from Fort McCoy in LaCrosse, Wisconsin to the Chicagoland area. We have started an **Afghan Family Sponsorship Fund** with the goal of supporting this family, **who will be arriving by mid-February**.

One year total support averages around **\$23,000**.

- \$15,000 for one year's rent,
- \$5000 in supplemental food support
- \$3000 for household items, computer and gift cards for transportation and spending money.

DONATE NOW

Bridge to Belongings



We now have a space to collect clothes and small household items. The need for these items is mounting as more refugee families arrive in our community. Our Board Member, Nneka Obasi, is managing our Bridge to Belongings Program. If you would like to volunteer or donate any items, please fill out the form here:

www.buildingpeacefulbridges.org/donate/

Affordable Housing Fund Goal Reached!



Thanks to the generosity of many of our Bridge Builders, we reached our goal of \$20,000 for the AHF. Creative fundraising ideas included bake sales. Ellie and K.K., raised \$1,200 for the fund!

Thank you for supporting the BPB mission!

Be a Donor, Educator, Influencer, Mentor, Speaker, Sponsor

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OUR BELIEFS

Compassion bridges to Trust.
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 Hope bridges to Courage.
 Respect bridges to Inspiration.
 Knowledge bridges to Achievement.

