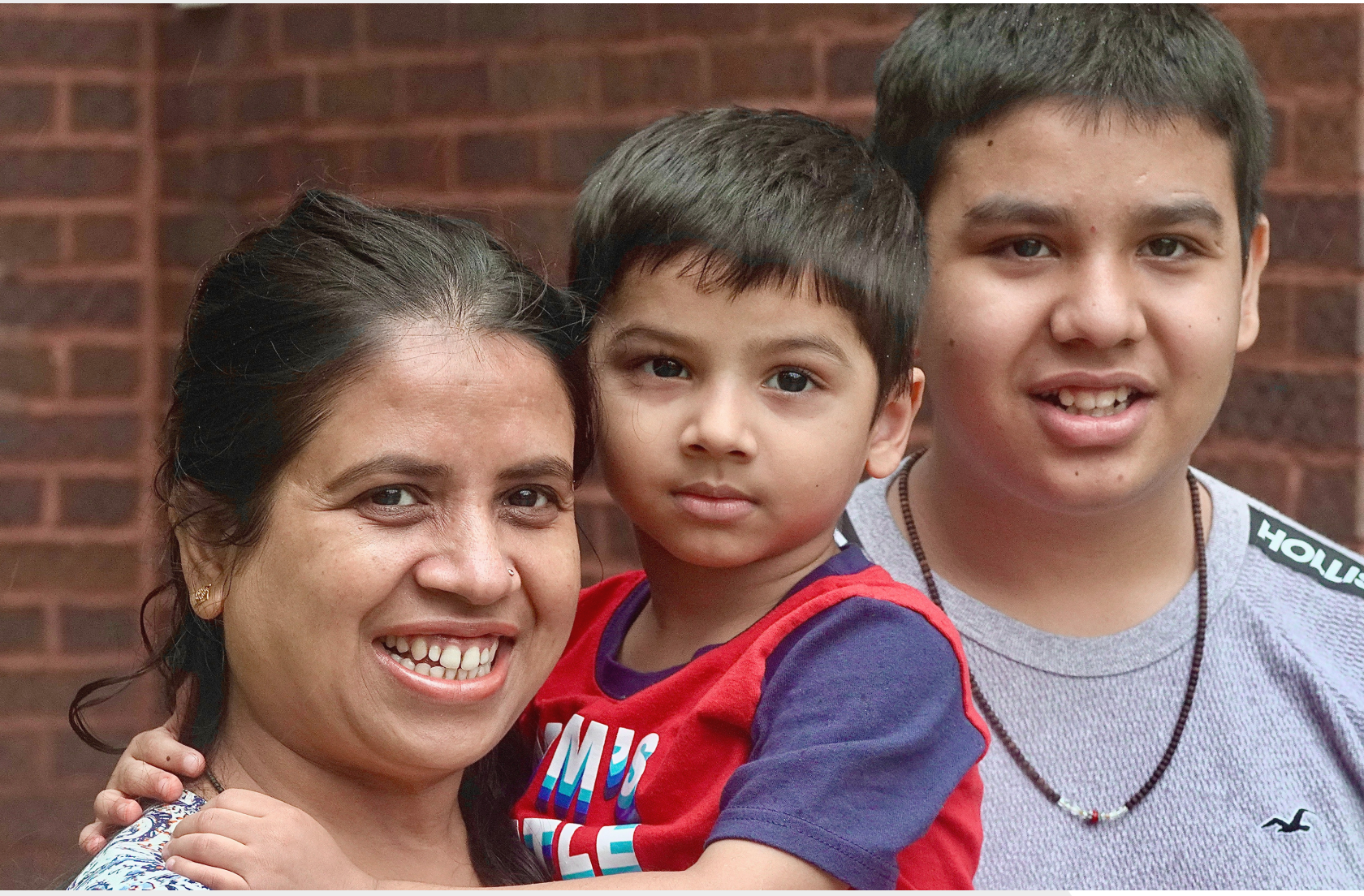
FORGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES IN AMERICA

FORA'S 2020 IMPACT REPORT

PANDEMIC RESPONSE & BEYOND



REFUGEE RESILIENT

FORA BY THE NUMBERS

23
MONTHS SINCE WE FIRST OPENED OUR DOORS

2,000
HOURS OF ONE-ON-ONE VIRTUAL TUTORING PER MONTH

99%
PERCENTILE OF FORA STUDENTS MEDIAN RATE OF GAIN IN MATH

200
VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS ONBOARDED SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC

66%
OF OUR STUDENTS DOUBLED THE EXPECTED RATE OF GAIN IN READING FLUENCY DURING THEIR FIRST YEAR AT FORA

4,616
NUMBER OF BOOKS READ BY FORA STUDENTS WITH THEIR TUTORS THIS SUMMER

2,500
VIRTUAL MATH LESSONS COMPLETED THIS SUMMER

60
STUDENTS RECEIVING TWO HOURS A DAY OF VIRTUAL ONE-ON-ONE TUTORING

1,000
NUMBER OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN FORA'S LIBRARY

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

CERTAIN OF FORA'S BOARD MEMBERS ARE WILLING TO MATCH ANY DONATION THAT YOU MAKE, UP TO $200,000 OF DONATIONS, ON OR BEFORE MAY 31, 2021. THAT MEANS THAT YOUR DONATION WILL HAVE TWICE AS MUCH IMPACT ON A REFUGEE CHILD'S ABILITY TO READ, WRITE AND DO MATH, AND PURSUE HER VERSION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM.



"[I donate to FORA because] the work that FORA does really resonated with me. It enables us to make a difference in our own community, raise awareness of global issues, and empower vulnerable children with education. FORA has been an incredibly positive experience for my daughter Zara who is a tutor at FORA. Zara got a chance to meet, connect, and relate with children from very different backgrounds and lived experiences, as well as watch them grow and evolve as they gain more confidence through peer level tutoring." — Zainab Baig, FORA Donor

HOW TO DONATE

MAIL A CHECK MADE OUT TO FORA TO OUR MAILING ADDRESS: 5822 S. BLACKSTONE AVE., #2, CHICAGO, IL, 60637

SCAN OUR QR CODE TO BE TAKEN TO OUR PAYPAL PAGE

WWW.REFUGEEFORA.ORG/DONATE

VISIT OUR DONATION PAGE (SEE ABOVE)

LETTER FROM

DEAR FRIENDS OF FORA,



Imagine fleeing from your home in fear for your life. You leave your country, have nowhere to go, and spend years, or even decades, in a refugee camp. Finally, with great anticipation, you arrive in a new homeland, but the beliefs, customs and laws in this new land are strange and confusing. This does not feel at all like "home." Yet you tell your children, and yourself, over and over again, that everything will be fine, that "we will make it here." And just then, all doors are closed to you because of the pandemic. The American "welcome mat" has, it seems by cruel fate, been brusquely withdrawn.

These times have been tough for us all, but for newly arrived refugees, the events of 2020 have been extraordinarily frightening and isolating. Who would notice, welcome and accompany these newcomers in our midst at this most difficult time? You did. You reached out to FORA, and we responded. It is as simple and wonderful as that.

Because of you, as others shut down, FORA stepped up. In 2020, we rapidly expanded to welcome and empower more and more of our recently-arrived refugee neighbors. In January 2020, FORA had fewer than ten volunteers and 30 students at our Chicago in-person site. Since then, approximately 200 volunteers have joined FORA, allowing us to provide more than 60 refugee students with up to two hours of one-on-one tutoring a day. **Because of you, we are providing approximately 2,000 hours a month of one-on-one virtual instruction in both reading and math to formerly illiterate refugee children.**

THE CHAIR

To be frank, the term “tutoring” does not do justice to what you are doing. You serve as more than simply a “private teacher.” You are empowering new Americans who, until just recently, were illiterate. By consistently showing up, day after day, you have had an enormous impact on the lives of our students in terms of how these children think of themselves, and how these families understand their new home country. With no exaggeration, because of you, these children feel accepted and wanted as part of our society. And that makes all the difference, not only to the children but to their parents as well. And it will make a difference for our country, because these are some of the most determined and resilient people you will ever meet.



Because of your efforts, we at FORA have gained the trust not only of these children but of their parents as well. And these parents are now willing to come to us when they face difficult challenges. As a result, FORA has organically evolved into an empowerment center, helping to empower entire refugee families to find solutions in times of crisis. If we are here to help children, then we must be here to help the entire family. And so we are. We ensure that parents understand and can access the social services system, the health care system, the justice system and the educational system, and by doing so, we help their children thrive.

And so we come full circle, back to the reason why we started FORA three years ago — to help children thrive.

And because of you, there are sixty more refugee children — and scores of their families — who are thriving more than they would otherwise be thriving in the world.

Do not be discouraged in this time of great difficulty. You are making a real difference.



Believe me. For FORA, and for all of us together, this is just the beginning. Our next step is to mobilize a group of like-minded people around the idea that our neighborhoods, cities, states and country must rally to invest in these new neighbors in our midst. And, yes, we will be asking you to financially invest in them. But we also want you to spread the word, one person at a time, about the possibilities of reshaping how we welcome others. With that said, this is not a normal annual report. We have been advised to “keep it simple,” “be emotional, and only emotional,” and “ask for money on every page.” ***But we at FORA are passionate about educating and empowering others, giving them the knowledge to help change the world***. So, loyal to our beliefs and values, we go deep here and gratefully provide you with this, our 2020 impact report.

Sincerely, Kathleen O'Connor

CO-FOUNDER, BOARD MEMBER, & PRESIDENT OF FORA

KATHLEEN@REFUGEEFORA.ORG ~ (708) 256-6056

A STORY OF

Quickly establishing herself as one of the most enthusiastic nine year olds I have ever met, FORA student Nurshafidah needs minimal prompting as she excitedly jumps from story to story about her time at FORA, as her parents look on and her little brother, Hamza, plays in his mother's lap. Nurshafidah is clearly running this interview, with the following quotes fired in rapid succession.

"The first time I ever walked in I was like 'Wow!' We each have our own boxes and we can get help from all of the tutors, and my grades were, like, kind of bad but then they started to get better. I like FORA because it's fun and we learn a lot of new things. And sometimes we have celebrations like a pizza party or a movie!" "Well, Suwaiba is my favorite tutor because she's fun and lets us do everything! Every day [pre-COVID], Suwaiba picked up the students at our houses and we all walked together and talked on our way to FORA..." "When we're at FORA, we play games and read books together and do our homework, and I see my friends. On my first day at FORA I made a new friend and we were having fun and talking and we realized that many of the same things that had happened to me had also happened to her...we couldn't believe it!"



"THE DENIAL OF BASIC RIGHTS FOR THIS FAMILY STOPS HERE AND NOW, IN WEST RIDGE CHICAGO IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM."

A particularly special memory for Nurshafidah's family was FORA's final gathering before COVID-19 precipitated the transition to online tutoring. "We were celebrating because my family got our [U.S.] citizenship!" Nurshafidah explains proudly. This is an enormous milestone for anyone, but citizenship holds a particular importance to Rohingya families who, due to religious and political persecution, were and are denied citizenship in their own home country of Myanmar/Burma, rendering them stateless since birth.

"In Burma I only finished the seventh grade," explains Nushafidah's mother, whose name is being withheld for privacy. "So the most important things we wished for were good educational opportunities for Nurshafidah and Hamza. We wanted them to have the opportunities we never had, and now we get to in a way live through our children. We know the hardships that come from not having a good education." However, despite the fact that Nurshafidah was enrolled in Chicago Public Schools, she was far behind her grade level and needed additional help to bridge the gap. The reason for the gap was not a mystery. In the country where Nurshafidah was born after her parents fled from Myanmar/Burma, she could not attend school, as her family was undocumented. But her family is determined that this generation will be the first in which they will not be denied a robust education. The denial of basic rights for this family stops here and now, in West Ridge Chicago in the middle of the first century of the new millennium.

RESILIENCE

FORA FAMILY PROFILE

Last year, Nurshafidah's father, who runs a small grocery store, found out about FORA from members of the community. "We knew that FORA had a good reputation in our community, and we knew they did good things to help both parents and kids," Nurshafidah's mother explains. "We have a Burmese store, and when people would come to our store, we heard from everyone who goes to FORA that they help the adults learn English and they do a good job of helping the kids [with reading and math]. Also, the location was very convenient." In FORA's original location, the family didn't even have to cross the street to get to tutoring. Now, with the new location on California Avenue, it's just a bit further — a four minute walk — but it's still easy to get the kids there and home. The program is great, but the key that unlocks the opportunity is FORA's community-based location.

"[Since starting at FORA,] we have seen an obvious improvement in grades... Nurshafidah went from B's and C's to now A's and B's," says Nurshafidah's mother. However, her daughter is not the only one who has made significant progress. Through attending FORA's adult ESL classes, the mother has also made strides in her English literacy. "It makes a big difference for us to know our ABC's," she explains. "We had taken some fundamental English classes provided by the U.N., but it's a completely different situation when you arrive here in the US and have to do everything in English. To run our store, we have to read so many letters, documents, and bills. We used to rely on our phones for translating, but now we don't need to do that as much anymore."

Additionally, the US citizenship test was a particularly important goal of the family's ESL education — among other requirements, in order to pass the test applicants must demonstrate the ability to read, write, speak, and understand English. Explaining that many refugee adults do not speak English, often due to a lack of resources, the mother is very grateful that FORA provided free lessons to her and her family and emphasizes the life-changing nature of such programs being available to refugees.

When asked about their aspirations for the future, the little brother, Hamza, happily announces his dream of becoming a pilot; the mother smiles and says that she would like for Nurshafidah to continue her education and become a doctor. **But Nurshafidah interjects, saying that she has a different dream — she hopes to become a teacher so that she can someday teach kids in the same way that she has been taught at FORA.**



"SO THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS WE WISHED FOR WERE GOOD EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR NURSHAFIDAH AND HAMZA. WE WANTED THEM TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITIES WE NEVER HAD...WE KNOW THE HARDSHIPS THAT COME FROM NOT HAVING A GOOD EDUCATION."

RISING TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF 2020:

During our first 18 months of operation we expanded to a larger space that allowed us to host not only adult ESL classes but also two classes of 15 kids every afternoon, as well as a class that met Saturday and Sunday mornings for kindergarteners through third graders. Then, of course, COVID hit.

In late February of 2020 we were already alarmed by the devastating effect that school closure could have for households where no one spoke English and no one could read. We pro-actively ensured that all of our students could remain in contact with us and with their teachers if Chicago experienced a lock down. The last event in our center was a large party to recognize two families who were being sworn in as US citizens. Everyone brought food, the kids ran around having a ball, and we finished the evening with goodbye hugs for everyone as we distributed all our Chromebooks and iPads. And, yes, we shut our physical doors. But that did not stop us.

Over the course of the next few months we continued to work around the clock. Because of the financial support we received towards the end of 2019, we were able to take every student from our waitlist as the ramifications of closed schools, illness, and economic hardship spread through the refugee community. We developed the technical knowledge to supervise our iPads remotely and we purchased 30 additional devices. We onboarded approximately 200 volunteers from around the country, so that all our students could have one hour with a math tutor and one hour with a reading tutor each day. The staff also developed a tutor mentoring program, so that our volunteer tutors are joined by an experienced tutor to provide feedback and guidance approximately every two weeks. We even created an intern program that has brought more than 20 interns -- high school, college, graduate students, and young professionals -- to volunteer with us as a means of gaining non-profit career experience.

All of this growth allowed us to continue to change lives even during a global pandemic. The New York Times described the educational impact of COVID as a "lost year" for America's schoolchildren (1), a term that doesn't adequately capture the consequences for children in illiterate homes. But, thanks to our volunteers, our students read more than 4,616 e-books this summer. Our youngest kids complete over 2,500 math lessons, while kids fourth grade and up have worked diligently to get themselves up to common core grade-level standards. Fifteen of our most advanced students participated in two weeks of on-line Westfield debate camp, thanks to partial scholarships provided by Westfield Academy.







FORA'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE



FORA Director, Kathleen O'Connor, has a socially distant visit with FORA students



In addition to this academic progress, these refugee families know that Americans are here for them during this time of worldwide crisis. Showing up, consistently, has impacted not only educational outcomes, but how these children think of themselves, and how these families understand the new society they have just joined. Thanks to our volunteers, our daily virtual presence in each student's home allows us to continue functioning as a clearinghouse for issues that the students' parents might be facing regarding health, work, housing, and food.

It is no exaggeration to say that many of our volunteers are just as transformed as our students. Retired teachers describe their enjoyment of connecting with students again, while high school and college volunteers report becoming inspired to pursue careers in education and social service. Most importantly, by committing an hour of tutoring every day, our volunteers form relationships with students whose lives and backgrounds are completely different from their own -- a broadening experience and a healing one, given the fraught isolation and division that we are all experiencing right now. All of this is made possible by the generosity of our donors. The energy and joy that is consistently apparent through our Zoom windows into tutoring hours, team meetings, mentoring sessions, webinars, and BLM assemblies is life-affirming.

Now that we have seen the effectiveness of our program, we are ready to expand. We are poised to scale up and serve many more families. We have big hopes and dreams. We want to provide at-home Zoom English language and literacy instruction to parents. We want to grow to serve more families in more cities, possibly Milwaukee or Houston. Once we accept that reading is a human right, the drive to expand feels urgent. The more we come to know these families the more we feel that the drive to expand is an investment in the future of the United States. Truly, these people are extraordinary. They are determined and resilient, and they carry with them experiences and perspectives that will make our nation both stronger and kinder.

In the years to come, as more "pre-literate" refugees arrive on our shores, we will know how to provide them with the tools to learn to read and to achieve academically. Ultimately, the gifts of these future-readers will enrich and renew our democracy so that all our children will see a brighter future.

(1) Emily Bazelon, "Will This Be a Lost Year for America's Children?," September 11, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/11/magazine/covid-school-reopenings.html.

CURRENT BOARD



Kathleen O'Connor, President and Programs Officer, has spent her entire adult life teaching in diverse educational settings. She graduated magna cum laude from Amherst College with a degree in History. Afterwards she taught math in the Washington D.C. public schools, before earning a Masters in Education from Harvard University. She went on to earn a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Vanderbilt University where she worked developing math curricula and teaching both under-privileged middle school students and Vanderbilt undergraduates. She was awarded the Provost Fellowship in Educational Technology and the prestigious Master Teacher fellowship, which she used to study equity in undergraduate teaching. Upon graduation, she was awarded the Jules Seaman Award for scholastic, personal and professional achievement, and the Tennessee State Volunteer Award, recognizing her work with students from low-income families. She then moved to Madagascar where she worked as a volunteer English teacher with Malagasy orphans and as a full-time math and science teacher at the American School of Anatananarivo. She later worked as an educational consultant in Belgrade and spent several years as an assistant professor of psychology at Dominican University, where the majority of her students were first generation college students.



Maricruz Ponce de Leon, Vice President, is a Chicago native who has worked in community development and housing policy for various non-profits in the greater Chicago area. She studied urban planning and public policy at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, where she also worked in housing and neighborhood revitalization efforts. She has experience leading collaborative planning sessions and has provided consulting services in the areas of process planning, facilitation, and relationship building, primarily to nonprofit community organizations. Maricruz has served on various action and parent advocacy committees and has held several leadership positions for social justice organizations. She has helped develop leadership at the volunteer, administrative and board level at various not-for-profit groups.



Hieu Ton That, Treasurer, came to the United States as a refugee from Vietnam in 1975. His family settled in Ohio, and he attended both undergraduate and medical school at Brown University. Dr. Ton-That has worked with many community service organizations. He was a team leader for City Year Providence. He has served on several boards mainly focused on nonviolence and serving the Southeast Asian community. Dr. Ton-That works as a trauma surgeon and intensive-care specialist at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Illinois.



Michael O'Connor, Secretary and Operations Officer, attended Amherst College and Harvard Law School, where he was President of the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. While in school, he worked for Cesar Chavez and the U.F.W, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the Southern Center for Human Rights, D.C. Public Defender Service, and the United States Department of Justice, Office of Policy Development. In the mid-to-late '90s, he was a Senior Trial Attorney for the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice and an Associate Counsel to the President of the United States at the White House. He then was an international field worker for Catholic Relief Services in war-torn Madagascar and Kosovo and then served as Regional Director for South Asia for International Justice Mission, in which capacity he testified to a U.S. House of Representatives' committee on issues of international human trafficking. Since 2007, he has been a portfolio manager in the financial industry.

ADDITIONAL BOARD MEMBERS TO BE ADDED IN DECEMBER 2020



Wendy Kaplan Miller attended Amherst College where she co-led the Cambodian Refugee Tutoring Project. She taught fourth grade at the Bullis School in Potomac, MD. After graduating Harvard Law School, she served as an AmeriCorps attorney doing domestic violence work at Western Mass Legal Services and a housing attorney at Greater Boston Legal Services. She has been on the boards of Raising A Reader Massachusetts and the Cornelia de Lange Syndrome Foundation. She has been on the selection advisory committee for the GreenLight Fund and co-chaired a philanthropic giving circle at the Palo Alto Jewish Community Center. She volunteers in the Ravenswood School District. She currently lives in Palo Alto with her husband, two sons and two dogs.



For the first fifteen years of his adult life, **Seth Rigoletti** was an English and theater teacher at a private high school. He started and ran his own outdoor theater company for a few years in his early thirties and served on the board of two different non-profit organizations that worked with teenagers using theater-based learning. In 2010 he left the career of teaching behind to start his own company. He became a leadership coach who focuses on helping leaders and teams communicate with clarity and a greater impact. His passion is in helping leaders and organizations create cultures that engender trust and collaboration that improve the lives of all stakeholders. He's grateful for the opportunity to work with FORA and to be back in the world of education. What he most admires about FORA is that it is an organization that fosters genuine relationships with students and their families to change the trajectory of their lives. He spends his free time exercising virtually with Michael O'Connor, hiking with his wife and being teased by his children.



Melike Oncu was named General Counsel of the International Code Council in January 2013. Ms. Oncu joined the International Code Council in October 2008 as Assistant General Counsel. As General Counsel, Ms. Oncu serves as a member of the ICC Senior Management Team and oversees all legal affairs for ICC and the ICC Family of Companies. Ms. Oncu holds a juris doctorate from George Washington University, and a bachelor's degree from Lafayette College. She began her legal career as a corporate attorney with the law firm White & Case, LLP. She also served as Of Counsel for the law firm of Bingham McCutchen, LLP. She currently lives in Chevy Chase, MD with her husband, two teenage daughters and her dog.



Farah Noor Cheema was born and raised in Pakistan, where she earned her medical degree with honors at King Edward Medical University. After immigrating to England, then the US, Farah was moved by a common theme: the unifying, cyclic benefits of community service. She became impassioned to promote self-sufficiency and empowerment through educational advancement. Thus, over the last decade, she has held volunteer leadership positions at various institutions, including the Avery Coonley School, the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, the Muslim Leadership Academy at the Islamic Foundation of Villa Park, the Islamic Council of North America, and many interfaith community unification endeavors between Muslim, Christian and Jewish places of worship. She has also served on the board of the US branch of the Hunar Foundation, and collaborated with both Viator House of Hospitality and the Human Development Foundation.



Julia Manglano Toro is a native Chicagoan of a Spanish and Colombian background. She has studied literature at the University of Illinois (UIUC), the DePaul University College of Law, J.D., and American University Washington College of Law, LL.M. in International Human Rights. She had worked for 2 years with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. She has practiced immigration law for 16 years and runs her own immigration law firm, JULIA M TORO LAW FIRM, for the past 8 years in Washington DC and Baltimore, MD. She currently lives in Virginia with her spouse and three children.

EMPLOYEES



David McKenzie, Chief Administrative Officer, grew up in California and moved to Chicago more than 20 years ago. Possibly the only person who really loves the weather here, he enjoys taking long walks around the city, even when most people would much rather be indoors. David would like to spend more time at the Art Institute of Chicago and in Millennium Park, but he's pretty happy living in Logan Square because there are trees everywhere. He has a law degree and a degree in Chinese Studies. He has done a lot of different things over the years, from computer programming to sculpting, and spent many years running his own small manufacturing business, but he always says that FORA is by far the best and most rewarding work he's ever done.



Suwaiba Osman, Chief Operations Officer, was born and raised in the US as a first-generation daughter of Bengali immigrants. Her formal education ended at the age of ten and only continued when she entered college as an adult with a GED. After completing a degree in Applied Science, she entered the FORA workforce with the passion to assist other disadvantaged individuals attain literacy, grade-level proficiency, and pursue a path to higher education. She believes in contributing to a world that is kinder, brighter, and equal in its compassion for people regardless of their race or background. She also dreams of the day cat owners will finally be appreciated by their pets. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, and gaming.



Kevin Klein Cardeña, Pandemic Response Director of Mentoring, coordinates FORA's tutor-mentoring team and has lived in Chicago since his family immigrated from Mexico City when he was a child. He has a B.S. in Mathematics from DePaul University (minors in Psychology, Philosophy & Spanish) and is drawn to critical and affective/relational approaches in education and beyond. He likes local organizing and is interested in movements and social thought.

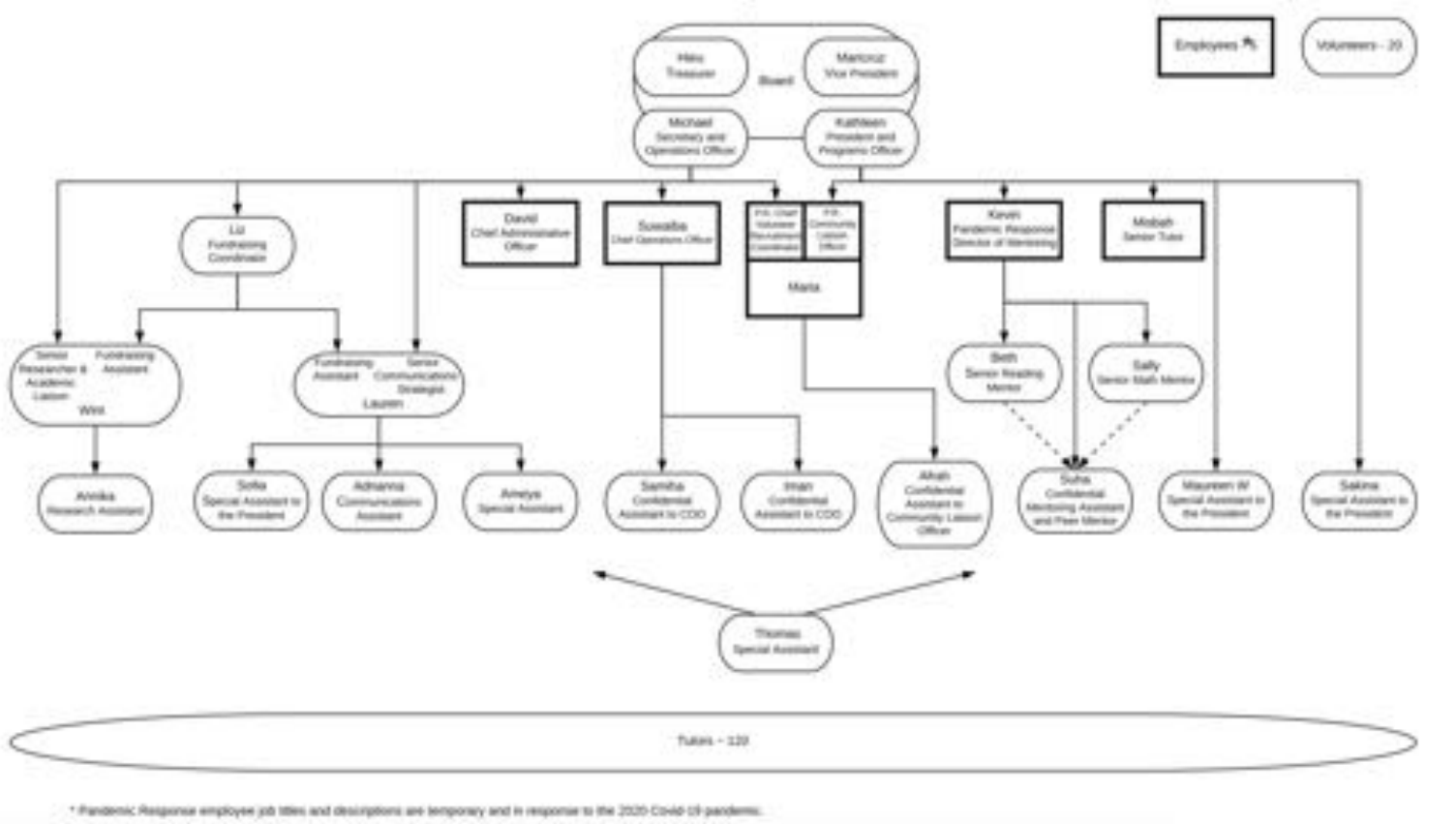


Misbah Noorwala, Pandemic Response Chief Volunteer Coordinator, is currently completing her Bachelor's of Social Work at the University of Northeastern Illinois, and her passion lies in advocating for people who do not have a voice. Prior to working for FORA, she gained experience volunteering at the Indo-American Center, working in case management at the Center of Concern, where she assisted individuals who were homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless, and serving as an activity aide at nursing homes.



Lauren Kearns, Chief Outreach Officer, was born and raised in Virginia, and as of December 2020 she will hold a bachelor's degree in International Relations and English from the University of British Columbia. She has previously done communications work for a congressional campaign, worked with a refugee aid nonprofit in her hometown, represented the US State Department as a Youth Ambassador for a year in Berlin, and taught ESL in a variety of settings. She is passionate about using education and literacy as means of empowerment in under-resourced communities, and in her free time she most enjoys reading, learning languages, and meticulously planning her future travels, as she is an avid backpacker.

SUMMER 2020 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



In addition to the more than 200 tutors who stepped up to volunteer virtually during COVID, we also welcomed many new volunteer staff members from around the country. As an example of how robust our volunteer staff is, please see above our 2020 Summer Organizational Chart.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR, SAMIHA SYED



In recognition of her significant contributions to our organization, Samiha Syed has been named FORA's 2020 Volunteer of the Year. In total, Samiha has dedicated more than 400 hours to FORA since she joined us in June 2020, and she also recently received the Lincoln Laureate Award, the state of Illinois' highest honor, in recognition of her service. We are incredibly grateful for all that Samiha has done and continues to do to further FORA's mission.

Samiha says, "This past year and continuing...I served as a Tutor, Tutor Mentor, Youth Advisory Board Advisor, Speech/Debate and Model UN Program Coordinator, Confidential Assistant to FORA's Chief Operations Officer, Research Assistant and Urdu Liaison. Through these experiences, I learned that freedom in its most whole form can be experienced in helping facilitate freedom for others. I found myself on a path to helping refugees explore and gain freedom by finding their voice. I am very passionate about what I do. FORA means so much to me and is an irreplaceable joy in my life. What I value most about this experience, however, is definitely the FORA community, in which, I was met with a mentor in all of the individuals I worked with, especially Suwaiba Osman and Michael O'Connor. I am both humbled and very grateful to be selected for this honor. Thank you very much."

A STORY OF

When Jyoti Kadel and her son Babesh began a new chapter of their lives in Chicago in January 2015, they considered themselves lucky to have been resettled in America, where the standard of living is higher than in the refugee camp where they had lived for the previous three years. However, just because electricity and water and medical care were now readily accessible, starting a new life in America was far from easy.

"I missed my home country, and everything was a new experience," Jyoti explained. "Every system was different, and I needed help with understanding everything. The paperwork especially was very difficult." What Jyoti worried about most, though, was her son's education. Despite knowing very little English, Babesh was entering into Chicago Public Schools as a third grade student. And although Jyoti had worked as a teacher in Nepal, she felt completely unable to help her son navigate his new school's homework, causing her lots of stress. "It was really awkward," said Babesh. "There were a lot of things I didn't know, and I didn't have any friends yet." For homework help, Babesh would go to his cousin, because she had already been living in the United States for awhile. However, knowing the importance of a good education, Jyoti still worried about her son and his future.

When Jyoti would go for walks in her neighborhood, she took notice of an education center that impressed her. Inside, she could see students reading and getting individualized attention. She wanted her son to be a student there too. "Every day I requested for Babesh to receive tutoring from FORA," said Jyoti. "I was so happy when he was accepted. Before FORA, he wasn't able to read well and had difficulty with pronunciation. But after two or three months, he improved greatly. Even his school teachers commented on his progress."

Jyoti believes that part of the reason that FORA students, including her son, make such significant progress is that FORA allows students to learn through playing and fun activities instead of pressuring them to always study. Students are rewarded with gifts and prizes for their academic achievements each semester, and it makes them excited to learn. But most importantly, to Babesh and Jyoti, FORA is more than just a tutoring center. From playing games with the staff ("David and I like to play chess. He always wins," Babesh described with a big smile), to throwing birthday parties for the students, to being introduced to new books ("I just finished reading Holes," said Babesh proudly), to celebrating holidays like Martin Luther King Day, FORA is a community where Babesh feels happy, welcomed, and surrounded by friends — peers and staff alike.

"Babesh has changed a lot because of FORA," explained Jyoti. "He is happier, and FORA is also able to teach him skills like politeness, respect for everyone, and how to interact with adults. I have never seen anything like it. My son has never missed one class, because he loves going to FORA. He even goes early and stays late." "FORA helps in other ways too," Jyoti continued. "They help me to understand my papers and emails, and they have helped a lot with Babesh's school." Kathleen O'Connor, President of FORA, would go to school meetings and speak with Babesh's teachers, finding out what he needed to do to improve his grades. Additionally, Kathleen and Michael helped guide Jyoti through the process of finding and applying for the best high school for Babesh. "They take care of everyone," said Jyoti. "It's like family."



"[FORA] TAKES CARE OF EVERYONE...IT'S LIKE FAMILY."

SUCCESS

FORA FAMILY PROFILE

Despite the pandemic, Babesh has still been involved with FORA this summer, now attending his tutoring sessions over Zoom each day. A highlight of his summer has been getting to attend Westfield Academy, a world-renowned debate camp that FORA sponsored students to attend in June. “It was really fun,” said Babesh. “I met new people, learned new words, and on the last day [the FORA staff] dropped off ice cream for us.”

Students from all around the country came together virtually to learn how to debate and share their experiences. “The camp taught him to think more maturely,” said Jyoti, pointing out that Babesh’s improvements lead to improvements for the whole family.

When asked about their experience as refugees in Nepal, Jyoti explained that “in Nepal, people look down on refugees. They think refugees are not human beings. It is very difficult.” She and her family moved to various Nepali states before living in a refugee camp from 2012 to 2015.

Life in the refugee camp was extremely challenging, because of the lack of essentials like accessible electricity, water, and sanitation. Since coming to America, Jyoti feels that her family’s safety has improved, as well as their health and living standards. Babesh has only a few memories of life in the refugee camp, but described how it was very big (“the size of a whole town”) and they lived there with many of their relatives. In 2012, the Kadel family applied with the United Nations Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, to be resettled in another country. Jyoti wanted to come to the United States because it represented freedom and opportunities for her family, plus her sister-in-law already lived here. There were many logistical hurdles that lengthened the resettlement process, such as determining that the Kadel family met the legal requirements of being refugees, and then verifying all of their information with paperwork. In January 2015 the Kadel family finally arrived in Chicago, and since then have welcomed into the family another son, who is now three years old.



“BABESH HAS CHANGED A LOT BECAUSE OF FORA...HE IS HAPPIER, AND FORA IS ALSO ABLE TO TEACH HIM SKILLS LIKE POLITENESS, RESPECT FOR EVERYONE, AND HOW TO INTERACT WITH ADULTS...I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT."

Speaking to Babesh, it is clear that with his hard work and resilience, he has a bright future ahead of him. He will start at an excellent new high school this fall, and has a dream of someday becoming an engineer. Since starting at FORA, he has jumped from the 37th to the 61st percentile on the nationally-normed University of Oregon Math test, and in school he has gone from mostly C’s to the Honor Roll. “He's an extraordinary young man, and it's such a joy to know him,” says David McKenzie, FORA's Chief Administrative Officer and Babesh's tutor. “I think of us as friends, inasmuch as an old man and a teenager can be friends, but I do hope that over the next few years, as he becomes an adult, that we will remain friends.”

A RESEARCH BASED, SCIENTIFIC APPROACH FOR

THE CHALLENGE WE FACE: REFUGEE ILLITERACY

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that in 2019 there were 26 million refugees in the world in need of a welcoming country where they could permanently settle and call home (1). The overwhelming majority of those refugees have fled from ten countries, and five of these countries are notable for their low literacy rates (2). Indeed, four of these countries, Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Somalia, all have literacy rates of less than 40%, which is less than half the world-wide average of 86.1% (3).

Bleak as these numbers in these four countries seem, the situation for the Rohingya people is much worse. Members of this ethnic minority group from the nation of Myanmar are not recognized as citizens of the country where they were born and where their families have lived for hundreds of years. Government oppression has forced more than one million Rohingya people to flee their homes since 2012, often at gunpoint or from burning villages. Currently, over 850,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh where they endure squalid conditions in the largest cluster of refugee camps in the world (4). Only 17% of the men and 6% of the women are able to read basic texts in their primary language (5). Though shocking, this situation is not surprising given that systematic governmental and military efforts have deprived the Rohingya of basic human rights for decades -- including actively preventing Rohingya people from educating their children (6).

All of these illiterate refugees face enormous challenges when it comes to thriving in their new homelands. As a result, they are often rejected by countries that receive refugees (7). Compared to some other countries, the U.S. has, in the past, been exceptionally willing to accept the challenge of welcoming refugees who have been systematically abused.

If we plan to re-engage with this effort, we should be clear-eyed about the difficulties and the level of support Refugees who arrive in the U.S. with extreme deficits in schooling are particularly vulnerable to school failure (8). A review of the relevant literature emphasizes the difficulty that these students have when it comes to learning English and the extent to which most school systems are unprepared to meet the needs of these students. These realities are reflected in the 2017 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) report, which concludes with a basic challenge – to "expand education and language-learning opportunities. Expanding these opportunities would require improving refugees' access to mainstream education…." (9)

The research regarding the current challenges facing mainstreaming refugee children provides an overwhelming picture, as follows: "Adjusting to school [is] one of the most difficult experiences for young refugees" and "[s]tudents with interrupted schooling have missed the staged development which occurs in formal schooling, have little age-appropriate experience in literacy, numeracy, use of print and multi-modal texts, limited content knowledge of the world and little experience with problem-based learning." (10)

This research confirms the pattern we have seen anecdotally in our experience working with refugees in Chicago. Most of the refugee families we know have been able to surmount enormous financial and logistical hurdles to become independent and contributing members of their new communities. Nevertheless, a large percentage of their children are not succeeding in school due to their difficulties in learning basic math, reading, and even spoken English. This trend is especially heartbreaking given the extraordinary high value placed on education by parents who have never attended a day of school because of systemic governmental oppression in their homeland. The situation results in a profound feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness in these parents.

Unfortunately, few organizations or institutions are prepared to address this problem. The standard plan is to assume that public schools will accommodate these children's needs, but the schools' solution is to integrate these "SIFE" students (Students with Interrupted Formal Education) with "ELL" students (English language learners). As the research cited above makes clear, students who have not had access to schooling face much greater challenges than ELL students, and these existing programs fail to provide the necessary support (11).

Even worse, many refugee advocacy groups do not articulate the seriousness of this crisis in an effort to avoid exacerbating anti-refugee sentiment. But this refusal to face facts does not address the underlying issue that refugee families need and deserve significant educational support. The politics will only become more hostile until and unless we offer a practical path to literacy and numeracy for all newcomers -- even those who will be the first in their family to learn to read.



EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF PRE-LITERATE REFUGEES

THE FORA SOLUTION: INTENSIVE PERSONAL INSTRUCTION IN READING & MATH

Your generous support of time and money has shown that children of unschooled refugees can succeed when given intensive support. When we first opened our doors, in January of 2019, all but two of our students were scoring below the 50th percentile in math -- nearly a third scored below the 20th percentile. This past spring, 60% of our students who were retested scored above the 50th percentile math. These scores will translate into amazingly better life trajectories. We already see this in the self-confidence that our students now have.

As but one example, one of our young scholars, whose father grew up in a refugee camp, joined FORA in the spring of 2019, when he was a "C" student, struggling in all his classes. After teaching him the basics, we discovered that he was a math whiz! He doubled and tripled down on learning math, often spending four or five hours a day at FORA. This fall he began his freshman year at a rigorous charter high school, where he tested into Algebra I as a 9th grader - an advanced track that will see him completing calculus in the 12th grade. The academic skills he has gained are allowing him to pursue a path that will lead to a 4-year college degree and possibly even further. We are honored to be part of his journey and we will be there to support him along the way.

We've also seen fantastic gains in reading. Two-thirds of our students doubled the expected rate of gain in reading fluency during the first year they participated in our program. Three of those students saw triple the expected rate of gain. Once again, this is phenomenal progress that changes the experience of school for these students, and means the world

We don't have new data from the school-administered standardized NWEA MAP tests because CPS has not met in person since last March. We do have results from the previous two years, however, and the results are fantastic. In order to really know how effective we are, we need to consider the rate of students' growth in the year BEFORE they joined FORA with the rate of gain in the past year. That comparison allows us to account for the fact that refugee children don't necessarily fit with national norms. **The median rate of gain before FORA was in the 40th percentile nationally. In the past year, the median gain for reading is in the 76th percentile and in math the rate of gain is in the 99th percentile.** Our kids are killing it in math!

How do we support this level of improvement? There is very little research on effective programs for SIFE students like ours. One consistent recommendation is the intensity of academic intervention (12). To that end, we strive to create an environment where the love of learning is a given for students and tutors alike. We interview each tutor and staff member so that we can determine their dedication to education and impress upon them the importance of modeling a positive attitude towards reading and math. Our students spend an hour-and-a-half to two hours each day with us -- five days a week, through school vacations and all summer long. They get to know their tutors and our program very well, and they know how important their own learning is to all of us. Our center is a happy place where students work hard. Rather than merely helping with homework, we provide our students with a rigorous math and reading curriculum that is individualized for each child's level of learning. Each student enters FORA with either a first- or third-grade common core math assessment, so that they can shore up their foundation and move forward at their own pace. Similarly, reading is targeted to each student's level. Reading instruction is a mix of exercises covering phonics, word structure, grammar, and vocabulary, along with significant time spent reading books out loud with a English-speaking

Both math and reading curriculum are presented from online learning platforms that are based on the science of learning and tested for effectiveness, including Lexia for reading, Dreambox for beginning math, and ALEKS for more advanced math. When we are physically meeting together we read books from our own library, which contains over 1,000 new, beautiful high-interest books across a spectrum of reading levels. Especially valuable are our culturally relevant books that present characters that relate to our students. Our students often articulate how much they value and enjoy reading books about characters that look like them with relatable experiences.

Our aim for face-to-face learning is at least one tutor for every two students, and we often surpassed that goal. Online tutoring is almost always one-on-one. The sheer amount of time and the close interactions between tutors and students promotes authentic relationships between volunteers and refugee children. These relationships are the heart of learning at FORA.

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A STORY OF

(This FORA family does not want the names or images of the family's adults publicly disclosed. The reason is simple. They are afraid about possible retribution against relatives who are still vulnerable back in their former homeland. We are not making pseudonyms for the adults because we know them for who they are, and any other names sound to us fake at best. So they are simply "mother" and "father" -- roles that they embrace and embrace so well. And to maintain consistency, we will call the 7 year old son and 6 year old daughter, "the children.")

For reasons both known worldwide and that at the same time are highly personal, the years before coming to the United States were very difficult for this refugee Rohingya family. They suffered greatly prior to arriving here, and the family clearly does not want to dredge up these old memories, and neither do we. The mother softly but firmly sums up their lives prior to coming to the United States by suggesting "[t]here was a lot of unhappiness, and it was very disheartening to know that there was not much I could do about it."

The parents had two children after leaving their homeland but prior to coming to the United States. They were living (under United Nations auspices) in a transition country, unable to become citizens there or move around freely or pursue fulsome employment. Because of their restricted status, this family of four was making and living on only $15 a day. The parents prayed that by the time their children were old enough to start school, they would be living in another country, a new homeland. Fortunately, this dream was realized and in early 2016 the family arrived in the United States and were granted a pathway to American citizenship. Thanks to a very helpful caseworker and the fact that they already had relatives living here, their transition was relatively smooth; above all, the mother felt grateful to be in a safe country where education for her children would be prioritized, and her family could practice their religion without fear of persecution.



STRENGTH

FORA FAMILY PROFILE

The hardest part, however, was the language barrier. Navigating life in a new country without being able to speak the language was incredibly difficult, and the two children would come home from kindergarten and elementary school with homework and notices that the parents could not understand. As parents, they wanted their children to be happy at school and receive a good education, but the language barrier was preventing this from becoming a reality. The mother says, “we felt helpless in that position.” Anybody who is a parent and has hopes and dreams for their children would understand the painful depth of such concisely phrased sentiment.

"THE KIDS CAN SEE HOW MUCH CARE TUTORS PUT INTO FORA – THEY KNOW THAT EVERYONE IS THERE TO HELP THEM, SO THEY ARE HAPPY THERE."

Then, in the summer of 2019, the family found out about FORA from a friend whose son was already enrolled. They went through the application process and were accepted, and since then the change in the two children has been remarkable. “The kids get really excited about school and tutoring,” says their mother. When asked why she thinks this is, she answered that “a lot of it is about reciprocity. The kids can see how much care tutors put into FORA — they know that everyone is there to help them, so they are happy there. Also, the children really benefit from learning to read, which they enjoy, and everything is pinpointed to their individual needs. Plus, Michael is so enthusiastic about learning that they feel excited, too… they always want to hurry and get to tutoring on time!”

There is a picture of the children along with this article. That is because the parents have no fear that the children will somehow be recognized back in their former homeland as the children were not even born there. As it always does, the past moves further into the past. Not always though does the temporal distance allow for us to rebound. Being discriminated against can have such long-term repercussions. But as for these children, they are now flourishing! We at FORA know that the credit is all because of their parents. They have suffered much to get here and now they are leveraging opportunities so that their children can thrive. The past will not haunt these children, but will empower them. They will see how strong and adaptable their parents were while also holding onto the ideals that matter to their family. Their religion and their culture are very important to them, and in these regards we stand as allies.

Another ideal that they embrace is that of a robust education, and it is here that we can play a very active role. We at FORA are beyond grateful that these parents allow us into their lives and entrust their children to us for two hours a day, every day. It is among the highlights of our lives to know this family and to consider them to be our friends. And it is a high honor for us that they have allowed us to share their unfolding story.

"BUT ULTIMATELY WE DECIDED TO STAY HERE IN CHICAGO… BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE FORA IS."

Since starting at FORA, the progress made has been stunning. “In terms of English and verbal skills, there has been a huge improvement,” says the mother. “[My son] was slower to talk in kindergarten [prior to joining FORA]; he was very quiet and didn’t speak very much. His grades were B’s, C’s and D’s. Now he is making A’s and B’s! He now understands and speaks English well.”

President of FORA, Kathleen O'Connor, recounts one of her favorite memories of working with these two children. “When the daughter began coming to FORA, she did not like being there; she did not want to talk with any of the tutors; and she did not want to read any book. I remember distinctly the first time she showed interest in any book…it was a small board book called ‘This Little Trailblazer’ with a cartoon picture of Malala wearing a hijab on the cover. The girl lit up all over when she saw a face that looked like her on the cover of a book. She wanted to read the book every time she came in. To me, this story was a great demonstration of how important culturally appropriate materials are for new readers.”

At the end of the interview, the mother told one final story that truly highlighted how valuable FORA has become to her family. “The ability to be settled somewhere and own a home feels to us like achieving the American Dream, and recently many of our friends began moving away to Milwaukee, because housing prices are better there. We were very torn over the thought of leaving and starting a new life in another state where we might be able to own our own home. But ultimately we decided to stay here in Chicago… because this is where FORA is.”

A STORY OF

"I was walking down Devon Avenue when I first found FORA, and when I came in Michael [FORA's co-founder] talked to me and welcomed me with a big smile. I saw students being taught one-on-one, and I saw people who were like myself, new to this country. I was so happy ... my son, Mahdi, needed this organization."

In her own words and with translation help from her young-adult daughter, Mahdi's mother describes FORA as an organization that provides academic support to students who can't get such help from their parents (because the parents are new to this country, language, and education system). When Mahdi first came to FORA, he was in fourth grade. He could not speak English well and avoided going to school — the language and communication barrier was so discouraging to him, preventing him from succeeding socially or academically. But after just two or three months of being at FORA, Mahdi's mom clearly noticed a large improvement; despite having been far behind his peers, Mahdi's grades improved and he started to catch up to his grade level. Additionally, his new English proficiency allowed him to make friends in a way he hadn't been able to before. Other than food, clothing and shelter, what more basic need is there for a child than friends?

In his mother's opinion, part of Mahdi's success came from the consistency of the tutoring. However, she believes that a larger part was from the mutual respect and honesty between students/parents and the staff, and the unwavering focus on what is best for each individual student. Mahdi's mom explains how she got to observe this firsthand, as she would come to the FORA learning center with her son each day and stay during his sessions to work, with FORA's help, on her own education.

The prioritization of her children's education was particularly strong for Mahdi's mom because their family was denied a robust education prior to being resettled in the United States. Although the family is ethnically Afghani, they were born in Iran, where they were considered to be "illegal" and were denied basic rights. Meanwhile, they could not live in Afghanistan due to the war there. "Afghanistan was not a safe place to be, so we preferred to live illegally in Iran rather than go back and be killed in the war," explains Mahdi's older sister. "But in Iran, we weren't even considered human. [As refugees] you can't get access to education, you can't do basic things like get a SIM card for your phone, you can't get a normal job...when you are born as an Afghan in Iran, you are born as a refugee."

In 2012 the family moved to Turkey, where their quality of life did improve slightly, but formal education still was not an option due to their status. They applied for resettlement with the United Nations and then waited for a decision to be made. "We waited for the phone call for four years... and then it came — we found out that we would be going to America. We were so excited! It was the best day of my life," says Mahdi's older sister. "And now, since arriving, these have been the best three years of my life. When we were in Iran and Turkey, I was so limited, but now I have human rights and I can reach my goals. When we arrived in Chicago, I signed up for ELL courses at a local college, and I met many people in the same situation as me, as well as people who came to the United States as refugees and through their hard work are now so successful. And I realized that if they can do it, then so can I."



"WHEN WE WERE IN IRAN AND TURKEY, I WAS SO LIMITED, BUT NOW I HAVE HUMAN RIGHTS AND I CAN REACH MY GOALS."

HOPE

FORA FAMILY PROFILE

After the family moved to a new home last year, FORA was too far away for Mahdi to attend daily tutoring sessions. “We tried to find something like FORA where we are now, but there was nothing like it,” Mahdi’s mother explains. However, when COVID struck in March and FORA went virtual, they received a call from FORA asking if Mahdi wanted to re-enroll, and he has been receiving tutoring over Zoom — a silver lining to the pandemic. “He was bored and had nothing to do since he couldn’t meet up with his friends,” explains Mahdi’s mom. “But now he again receives two hours of tutoring each day, and Mahdi is so happy to have this connection again.” Mahdi describes what he currently enjoys reading with his tutor -- a book about the ancient Mayan city of Chichen Itza, as well as the popular Big Nate series.

When asked about what else FORA does in the community, Mahdi’s sister is quick to respond with a recent story. “FORA did a very important thing for me by introducing me to a very good doctor,” she says. After suddenly developing a severe stutter while taking college classes (in English, a newly-adopted language), Mahdi’s sister felt overwhelmed and didn’t know what to do. Her mother says, “I am the mother, but I couldn’t help my daughter... my daughter was crying and so ashamed, and I didn’t know how to help, so I messaged Michael saying that my daughter had ‘lost her tongue!’” Little did the family know that Michael had a deep understanding of how a stutterer feels, because he has been one all of his life.

Sometimes things just work out. Call it chance, or call it kismet. In any case, Mike has a close relationship with one of the world’s top speech pathologists who specializes in stuttering. She had helped Mike and other O’Connor family members in the past. One call to her, and she was willing to provide Mahdi’s sister with extensive speech therapy free of charge. What a gift to both FORA and to Mahdi’s family! Mahdi’s sister says, with no sense of exaggeration in her voice, “it has changed my life.” She concludes that what makes FORA special is that it not only provides academic support, but it also lifts its students up, encouraging them to set big goals for the future and helping them to achieve their dreams. As for us, we at FORA are so excited to see what awaits for this very special family.



"WHAT MAKES FORA SPECIAL IS THAT IT NOT ONLY PROVIDES ACADEMIC SUPPORT, BUT IT ALSO LIFTS ITS STUDENTS UP, ENCOURAGING THEM TO SET BIG GOALS FOR THE FUTURE AND HELPING THEM TO ACHIEVE THEIR DREAMS."

CORNERSTONE AWARD

IN RECOGNITION OF GENEROUS SUPPORT OF FORA

This year, we at FORA are honored to present our Cornerstone Award to Matt and Julie Halbower and Pentwater Management. Their friendship and financial generosity has been invaluable to FORA, and it is with the utmost gratitude that we grant this award.

From Matt Halbower:

"There are few organizations in the world that I am aware of that can have such a direct and positive impact on improving the lives of such a large population. FORA takes families who have spent years if not over a decade in refugee camps with no written language skills. FORA then helps these families to become literate and succeed in school as well as integrate into US society.

As a result, not only are families lifted out of poverty as adults find work and children get educated, but also the lives of women and girls particularly improve. Through education, literacy, and the introduction of freedoms in the United States, cultural norms and attitudes towards girls and women change giving them much greater freedoms and opportunities than would have been possible in their lives if it was not for FORA."



PENTWATER
CAPITAL MANAGEMENT LP

WOULD YOU PLEASE MAKE A DONATION TODAY TO FORA?



You could be the reason that another pre-literate 6th grader gets accepted into our program, learns to read and write, catches up to grade level, and gets on track to college and beyond.



And all importantly, because certain of FORA's board members are willing to MATCH any donation that you make – up to $200,000 of donations on or before May 31, 2021 – your donation will have twice as much impact on a refugee child's ability to read, write and do math, and pursue her version of the American Dream.

Give now if you can, and double the life-changing impact of your gift. If you can give, give what makes you joyous! Every donation is appreciated and is an affirmation that the work we do together is life-changing. Would you please give now?

Turn the page to learn how to donate →

HOW TO MAKE A DONATION:

MAIL A CHECK MADE OUT TO FORA TO OUR MAILING ADDRESS: 5822 S. BLACKSTONE AVE., #2, CHICAGO, IL, 60637

SCAN OUR QR CODE TO BE TAKEN TO OUR PAYPAL PAGE

WWW.REFUGEEFORA.ORG/DONATE

VISIT OUR DONATION PAGE (SEE ABOVE)



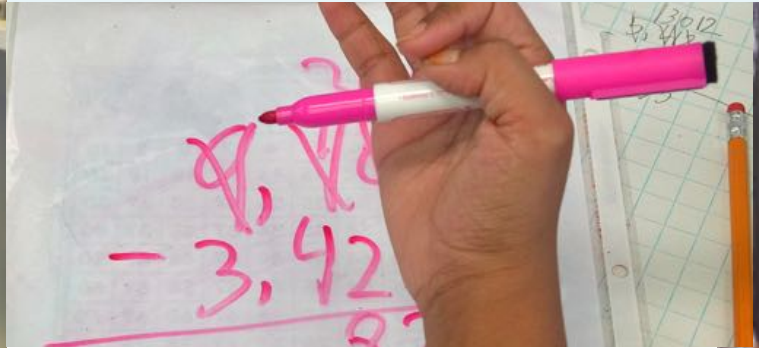
"Donating to this organization was one of the easiest philanthropic choices in my life, and the opportunity for my son to be a tutor during COVID has been one of the most profound of his short lifetime. I'm grateful that places like FORA exist, and that we have a chance to support organizations that are well-run, mission driven and impactful. It is not always the case where you get to make a donation to an organization that has such a profound impact on so many lives and that gives you a sense of hope for the future of our country. FORA is that kind of opportunity."
— Seth Rigoletti, FORA Donor





Thank you to *Westfield Academy* for generously providing the opportunity for our students to participate in world-class debate and Model UN programs at a discounted rate.

And thank you to Chuck Berman for being FORA's volunteer photographer. To note, most of FORA's students are not pictured because most do not want to be. We fully respect and support each family's choice.





OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our **vision** is a world where refugees in need are welcomed and empowered.

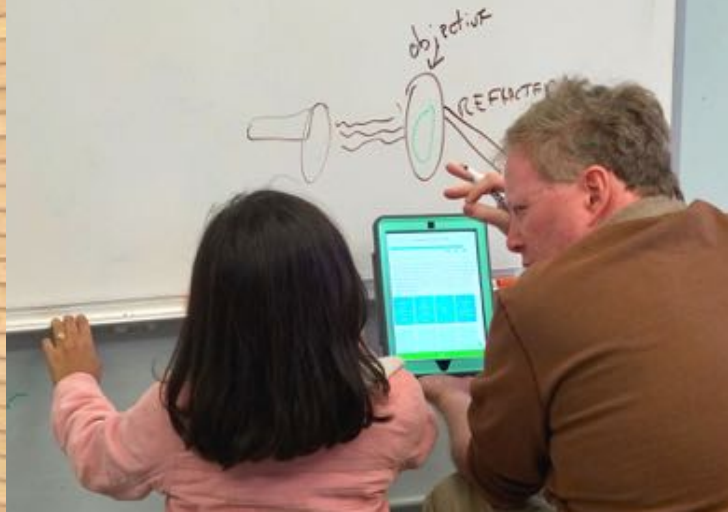
Our **mission** is to ensure that refugee families are provided access to an education sufficient to prepare them to become self-sufficient and robustly engaged in American civic life.

Our **strategy** is to be located in the neighborhoods that we serve to make daily educational services easily available to newly arrived refugees.

We **value** patience, kindness, wellness, intercultural connection, a passion for learning and a determined resilience... and modeling these values for others.







FACES OF A

VOLUNTEERS AND

FORA is ready to set the standard for welcoming refugees who are illiterate and we want to rally a generation of like-minded allies to our cause. We are still a small NGO but we have big ideas about how to tackle this problem head-on, both in Chicago and throughout the United States. As we grow, we will continually remember that "the larger the tree, the deeper the roots." First and foremost, we are about connecting individuals -- students and tutors -- who build relationships around learning. These relationships become the building blocks of community -- the community of FORA and our larger civic community.

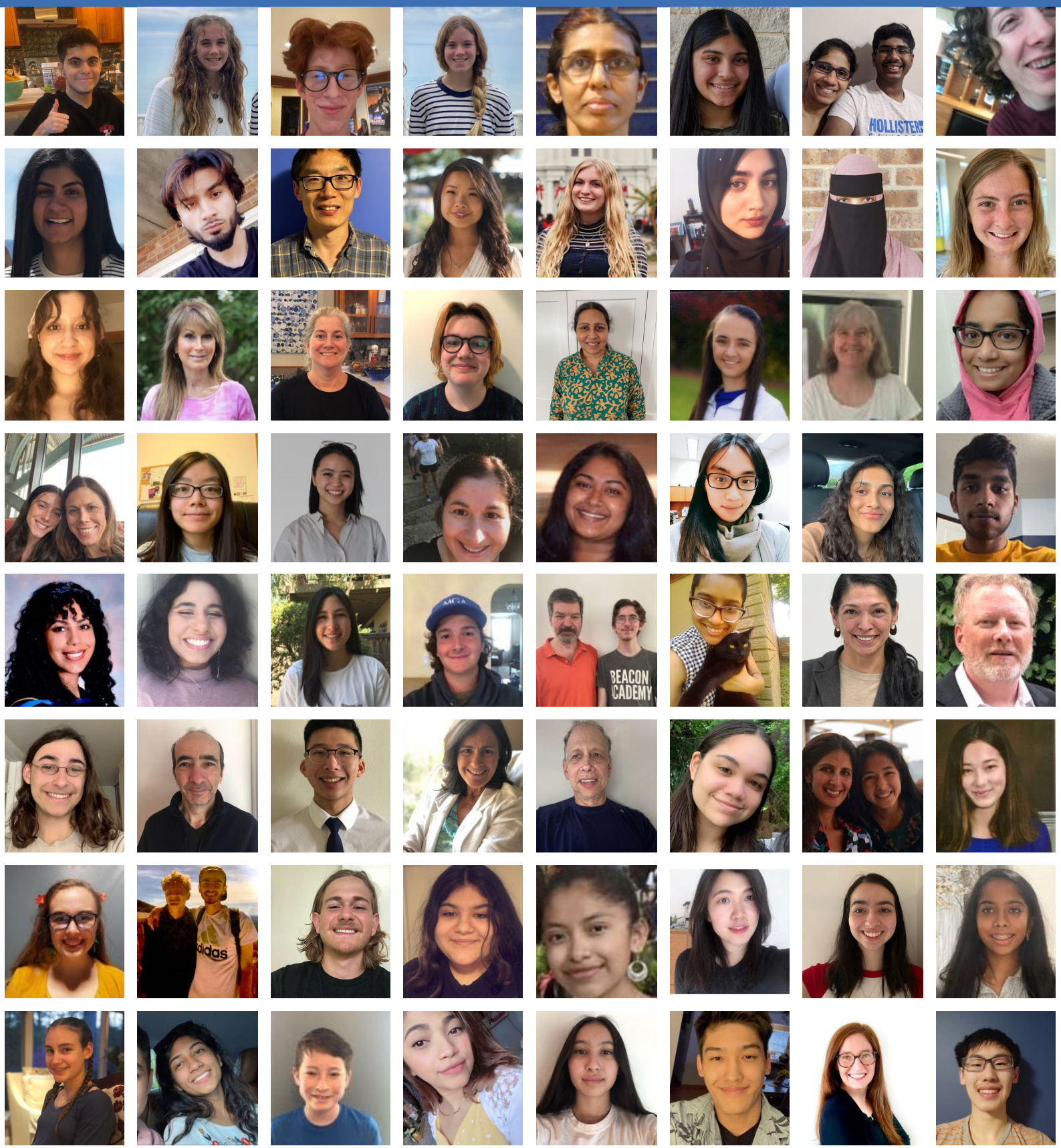
For our growing community, 2020 has been a year of great pain but also of splendid beauty. So many people -- from all around the country -- have come forth to meet the need, and to build a virtual community in these desperate times. But the gifts that you have given to our students are not virtual. Sharing of your time and your knowledge has made all of the difference for these families. We know it has been hard on you, all separate from each other, not able to know all of the other great volunteers and donors who have stepped up as well. You might have felt lonely. You might have felt like your individual actions were too small and isolated. You might have felt like you were the sole bulwark against a tsunami of despair. **But you persisted. As did the scores of other FORA volunteers. All of you, alone but together, created a movement.**

AND SO, WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, WE PRESENT TO YOU THE FACES OF A MOVEMENT...THE FACES OF FORA.



MOVEMENT

THEIR SUPERVISORS



FACES OF A MOVEMENT

VOLUNTEERS & SUPERVISORS



FORA

Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America