

DENVER HIGHLIGHTS

October 18th – 21st, 2023

With the help of 64 service providers, our team provided much-needed support to 1,350 Afghans in Denver – 64 percent of the local, newly arriving population. While we cannot share every amazing story from our work, we can shine the spotlight on a handful of compassionate professionals who made a significant difference for so many families. We look forward to continuing our work in San Antonio from October 25 to 28 at the González Convention Center. For more information, please visit [Centers for Afghan Support](#).

[A Precious Child](#) provides children with opportunities and resources to empower them to achieve their full potential. What began in CEO Carina Martin’s garage 15 years ago has grown into an organization that has served 57,000 kids in the Denver region over the past year. The group operates a 26,000-square-foot cost-free resource center stocked with clothing, food, home goods, toys and books.



Chief Communications Officer **Courtney Wickberg** stressed the importance of offering a dignified shopping experience to their clients. She recalled how the team came together when Afghans began arriving in the area with so few possessions. They quickly assembled a group of volunteers to select culturally appropriate clothing and set up dedicated areas at the resource center where families did not have to sort through an overwhelming number of options to find the essentials they needed. More than 600 volunteers each month help sort, clean and organize the 4,000 pounds of donations A Precious Child receives each day.

A Precious Child donated 12 pallets of supplies to the Denver Support Center, capable of meeting the needs of more than 400 attendees. Afghan families were able to find clothing, books, cleaning supplies and baby essentials – and left expressing their deep gratitude for the group’s generosity.

The organization believes in supporting children from cradle to the start of their career and puts an emphasis on removing barriers to participating in sports and the arts, assisting with registration fees, equipment, musical instruments and supplies. This gives each child the opportunity to gain the skills for self-expression and confidence while feeling a sense of normalcy among their peers.

The [Denver Office of Economic Development](#) coordinated a job fair at the Support Center for Afghans, attracting more than 120 job seekers. Fifteen employers in the Denver region, including Amazon, FedEx, Denver Public Schools and Flagship, met with men and women on Friday afternoon to discuss open positions and career opportunities.

Event Marketing and Youth Program Liaison **Fatima Boufadize** operates job fairs across the city, helping employers match with qualified candidates. Fatima said there are ample opportunities in Denver: warehouse positions, retail, hospitality, data analysis and roles with city and county government. However, it is a more competitive market than six months ago. She and her staff work closely with job seekers to provide coaching and interview practice, review and polish resumes and connect applicants with resources, especially ESL classes, which are critical to finding the right role.

The job fair successfully matched a number of attendees with immediate opportunities. After initial screenings, many follow-up interviews were scheduled.

Amazon representatives reported hiring six Afghans for positions in local fulfillment centers. The positions offer \$1,000 sign on bonuses after 30 days and \$2,000 after six months of employment.

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Maria Elena Rivera serves as the Program Administrator for [New Americans Integration Network \(NAIN\)](#) for **Denver Public Works**. She and her team focus on helping newly arriving immigrants connect to resources across the region. The program operates three workforce centers in Denver, where clients are provided initial assessments and guidance.

More than 10 percent of workers in Colorado are immigrants. When talking with employers, Maria Elena stresses the diversity, linguistic skills and cultural richness these employees can bring to their careers. They have shown incredible resilience and determination to build new lives in the U.S., so she encourages employers to be open-minded and sensitive to minor accommodations such as prayer time and meal breaks. Maria was onsite with her teammates, **Lory Zaldana** and **Yaisha Lopis**, supporting clients at the Support Center. Maria shared a story about two sisters, one a dentist and one a pharmacist in their home country. They could not immediately continue those positions given licensing and certification issues, but with NAIN's guidance, they found roles as a dental assistant and pharmacy assistant.

Maria Elena talked about how the Support Center has been vital in her efforts to expand the visibility of their work. "It really helped raise awareness and ensure service providers know who we are and what we can offer. We have transitioned to such a virtual world it has become harder to network and connect with other organizations. Seeing so many people in person and putting names to faces was extremely helpful."



Thai Nguyen is the founder of [Kaizen Food Rescue](#), the only refugee-led nonprofit food access organization in Colorado. What started as a free food table at her children's school in 2019 has grown into more than 250 mobile food pop-up events each year, serving 1,200 customers each week. In communities across the region, Kaizen is committed to promoting



cultural diversity and inclusivity and ensuring everyone has access to healthy, culturally relevant food. Thai works closely with [Food Bank of the Rockies](#), which is the nonprofit's largest food supplier. Together, they brought hundreds of pounds of food and fresh produce to Afghan families at the Denver Support Center.

Kaizen also operates a community-led garden helping young people learn about the local food system, including where their food comes from and how it is produced. During the summer months, Kaizen provides food to students who rely on free or reduced-price school meals during the academic year. They also offer workshops and training programs to help the community and members to network, share ideas and resources, and build relationships and partnerships to create positive change.

Thai came to the United States with her family after the Vietnam War. Prior to her arrival, her family experienced the realities of food insecurity at four refugee camps in Southeast Asia. "Food insecurity has affected my family growing up, and it caused a pivotal moment in my life where I want to help people with food insecurity as well."

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Founded in 1916, [Emily Griffith Technical College](#) offers educational opportunities for all who wish to learn. They provide students equal access to education and real-world opportunities, striving to remove barriers in the education system. Offering day and evening programs, they have three campus locations easily accessible in downtown Denver, close to public transportation.

The college offers a specialized program to those who have arrived as refugees, asylees, humanitarian parolees and SIV holders. Emily Griffith helps these students translate their skills into a fulfilling career path, whether through English instruction or through Career and Technical Education. Among the Afghans they are working with are two women who were midwives in their home country. They have enrolled in the school's Medical Assisting Program. If combined with a doula certificate, they could return to supporting women during childbirth. College staff are also assisting seven former Air Force pilots and three aircraft technicians who are exploring career opportunities in the United States.

Samira Ghani (pictured in blue, on the right) recently graduated from the dental assistant program and is taking the first steps to build a career in dentistry in the U.S.

Manager **Tiffany Jaramillo**, who supports English, High School Equivalency and Career Services programs, shared that courses are designed for those in phase two of their resettlement process. It's critical that students are in stable environments with initial employment so they can invest the time needed to be successful. Tuition rates at Emily Griffith are affordable and Career Navigators help students connect to federal and state funding sources to help offset education and certification costs.

