



Restoring Dignity
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*"To recognize the humanity of the other,
to see in them our own image,
is a small step that can change the course of history."*

-Amin Maalouf (author and former refugee)

Eh Paw is a single mother in Omaha, supporting five young children by working the night shift. She sleeps when her kids go to school and wakes up to care for them, before heading back to work. Taking care of the maintenance in her home has been a constant struggle, namely due to the cost and the unfamiliarity of the intricacies of the Western home. When she heard that a new class was being offered by Restoring Dignity, one that teaches people how to unclog their drains, change furnace filters and understand more about taking care of a house, she was ecstatic! Even though her time is very limited, she made sure to be available to take the new Home Owners Maintenance Education (HOME) classes right after she got back from work in the morning. Chit Thel Oo, one of Restoring Dignity's Karen and Burmese speaking family educators, came to Eh Paw's home on four different occasions to teach the 8 hour class series. One of the first things Eh Paw learned was how to use a Drain Weasel to unclog her bathroom sink and tub - an issue she said happens a lot with five little ones in the house. Normally, it would cost hundreds of dollars to hire someone to clean the drains. However, Eh Paw now has the tools and knowledge needed to get rid of basic drain clogs; a resource that has already saved her a lot of money. She was even able to help her friend get rid of a bathroom clog! *"I am very proud of myself for taking time to take the class and being able to help the people around me,"* she told Chit Thel Oo during their last class together.

Ahmad and Sahar came to Omaha from Afghanistan and have been busy settling into their new life. There are a lot of new things to learn about life in America, but they are eager to absorb everything they can. Their resettlement agency referred them to Restoring Dignity's Welcome Home Program, so they could get critical home/fire safety and healthy home acclimation training. Family Educator, Hamida Sahak taught the family several classes before receiving a surprise call a few

weeks later. "Hamida!" Sahar exclaimed breathlessly. "I was cooking today and the stove caught on fire. I panicked at first but then remembered what you taught me about how to use a fire extinguisher. I grabbed the one you gave us and was able to put out the fire quickly! I don't know that we could have put out the fire without the extinguisher. Thank you!"

Eh Paw and Ahmad & Sahar are two families out of 1,060 that we taught in 2024. Each family has their own story and their own successes that came out of learning critical home acclimation skills via our program. Each family came to Omaha after having to flee their homes after war, genocide or other violence forced them out. Ali Saeed, a refugee from Ethiopia explains: *"Being a refugee is not a choice. No one chooses to be a refugee. It is imposed by different tyranny governments and people are escaping their own governments."*

Restoring Dignity exists to provide **dignified and compassionate housing services** to people who have lost everything and are starting over in Omaha. We firmly believe that we must **treat our refugee neighbors the same way we would want to be treated**, if our situations were reversed. The Dalai Lama teaches us that *"compassion is the wish to see others free from suffering."* It is also the *"basis of morality"* (Arthur Schopenhauer). If we are to be truly moral people, we must practice compassion. We must work to ensure that we are **reducing the suffering** of our fellow humans. And what greater suffering is there, than losing a home, losing loved ones, losing everything, at no fault of your own?

Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, it is clear that there is **much work still to be done**. We recently did a complete inventory of the classes we teach and there are *861 families on our waitlist for Healthy Home classes, 1,423 families on our waitlist for Home/Fire Safety classes, and 859 families waiting to take our Home Owners Maintenance classes*. In total, we have **9,427 classes** left to be taught, just from our current waitlist (2 classes for Healthy Home per family, 3 classes for Home/Fire Safety per family and 4 classes for HOME per family who owns a home)! This amounts to about **three years** of teaching, and does not take into account future referrals we will receive! **The need has never been greater!**

Thank you for your support of Restoring Dignity. We are only able to do what we do because of **you**. Without a community behind our classes and programs, they would cease to exist. Thank you for **your compassion**. Thank you for **your generosity**. Thank you!

2024 Highlights

Total Served

- Altogether, **Restoring Dignity directly served 7,020¹ people in 2024 via: *in-home classes, window a/c installations, home-makeovers, housing advocacy and mobile clinics.*** Of these, **3,393 were children.** Aside from 2020 and Covid outreach, **2024 has been our biggest year** in terms of impact! Going into 2025, we have **six full-time and ten part-time employees.** Of our 16 staff, 13 (81%) are former refugees.

Welcome Home Program

- Our signature **Welcome Home Program** expanded significantly in 2024! We hired more family educators and are now teaching in **14 languages.** In total, we taught **2,725 in-home classes** from January to December 2024:
 - 833 Healthy Home classes
 - 1,144 Home and Fire Safety classes
 - 748 Home Owner Maintenance Education classes
- We impacted a total of 1,060 families (431 from Healthy Home, 426 from Fire Safety, and 203 from HOME) and provided 12,990 cleaning items and approximately 5,112² home/fire safety items: *fire extinguishers, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and fire escape planning tools.* A total of **5,483 lives were impacted through these classes**, including the lives of **2,599 children.**
- Our classes were taught in **17 languages³** (*Arabic, Burmese, Dari, French, Fulani, Karen, Karenni, Kinyarwanda, Nepali, Nuer, Pashto, Somali, Swahili, Ukrainian, Dinka, Kakwa and Kirundi*). Individuals in our program identified with **27 different ethnicities** (we have taught a total of 32 ethnic groups since this program began in 2019).
- 64.81% of the families reported a total combined household income of **\$40,000 a year or less.** 40.13% of program participants reported having an incomplete education experience

¹ NOT INCLUDED: the number of lives impacted by the Emergency Language Alert Network (which is not directly measurable). We estimate that number to be in the thousands.

² This is based on an approximate number of 12 items per fire safety kit. Some homes require more or less smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Different sized families need different numbers of safety cards.

³ Our educators speak 14 languages and we contracted out with interpreters for 3 additional languages

as a child in their home countries due to instability and a lack of educational resources. **23.70% reported no educational opportunities in their lifetime.** 64.15% of program participants have lived in the USA for over 5 years.

- Our **Healthy Home** classes continue to teach families how to keep their homes clean and healthy. The majority of families we teach came from refugee camps, where there was no plumbing, electricity, refrigeration, or appliances. If no one teaches families how to clean and maintain their homes, many end up randomly guessing cleaning products at the store, which has led to safety issues. In our classes, families receive a **cleaning starter kit** with waterproof, translated tags placed on each bottle of cleaning product. Our family educators go room by room with family members and demonstrate each product and different cleaning techniques. Families then practice, and educators observe and reteach as necessary. The process takes several hours and includes all family members. We then follow up with the family and reteach to ensure full understanding.
- For our **Home/Fire Safety** classes, families are taught hands-on, in-home education about fire safety. We install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, teach families *how to use fire extinguishers, explain how to recognize the smell of gas, discuss the safety procedure of what to do when gas is smelled, educate about the weather, electrical systems, candles, space heaters, grilling safety and a whole host of other critical topics!* We teach these classes in partnership with the American Red Cross, who provides all of the smoke detectors.
- Our newest **Home Owners Maintenance Education (HOME)** classes (officially launched in January 2024!) are teaching refugee families how to maintain the house they have purchased. Topics taught include how to: *use a power drill, reset circuit breakers, change furnace filters, unclog a drain, turn the water off in the house, change the water heater temperature, and much more!* We teach 41 core home maintenance topics over the course of four in-home classes. A total of eight hours per family is spent teaching hands-on home maintenance that will give families the knowledge and skills they need to prolong the life of their home.

Emergency Alert Network

- We continued working with the Douglas County Health Department to expand and strengthen the **Emergency Language Alert Network**. This network allows the Health Department, City of Omaha, OPPD, and MUD to **send urgent messages to refugee and**

immigrant community leaders, who then get the information out to their communities.

When emergencies happen, alerts have historically only been communicated in English. This leaves tens of thousands of people in Omaha in the dark about what is happening and what precautions to take.

- By the end of 2024, **75 community leaders** (*representing 34 ethnic communities and speaking 41 languages*) had signed up to receive alerts. Throughout 2024, the network was used **11 times** to communicate emergency information.
- **We need YOUR help** recruiting more community leaders! We are missing community leaders from 16 ethnic groups. If you or someone you know is a leader in one of the following communities, please sign up for alerts on our website: rdomaha.org/alerts
ZERO community representation for the following ethnic groups: Belizean, Cameroonian, Chadian, Chin, Chinese, Eritrean, Indian, Iranian, Kachin, Kenyan, Pakistani, Rohingya, Russian, Turkish, Venezuelan

Window A/C Program

- **51 window air conditioning units** were given to 24 families who did not have access to cool air during the summer. This impacted the lives of 120 people, including 72 children! All air conditioners were purchased by the wonderful Omaha community. THANK YOU!

Housing Advocacy

- We hired the amazing Elizabeth Ajongo as our part-time housing advocate! In 2024, we received **42 housing advocacy** referrals which led to an impact of **190 people** getting assistance with housing issues such as evictions, home repair issues and move-out bills. Restoring Dignity also continues our proud history of **supporting housing justice bills** and wrote a letter of support in 2024 for Nebraska's LB846 (Bedbug Detection and Treatment Act).

Community Vaccination Clinics and Health Fairs

- Restoring Dignity continued to bring **important health resources and vaccines** to refugee communities, in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and Douglas County Health Department. Together, we hosted two large health fairs which brought community health resources directly to refugee families. Between both health fairs, **53 community organizations** provided information, health screenings and vaccines. These events served over **1,200 people!**

- The events were a success because of the partnership of several refugee-led organizations, who provided interpreters to serve as navigators for each participant attending the health fair. We are grateful to these wonderful refugee-led organizations for continuing to partner with us: *African Immigrant Family Services, Omaha Center for Refugee and Immigrant Services Inc., Karenni Catholic Community of Nebraska, Nebraska Afghan Community Center, Karen Community, East African Development Agency of Nebraska, Nuer Community Development Services, and Clothing World Needy People.*

Refugee Housing Planning Study

- With grant funding from Front Porch Investments, we hired Wilder Research from Minnesota to conduct Omaha's first ever **Refugee Housing Planning Study**. This study concluded in the early summer of 2024, and the final report was published in July. The entire **50+ page report** takes a deep dive into the situation surrounding housing and refugees in Omaha, as well as provides a road map forward. It is available for reading on our website: rdomaha.org/refugee-housing-planning-study.

Home Makeovers

- In April 2024, we completed a **home makeover for Nyaliep**. This South Sudanese mother of five children (2 sets of twins and one singleton, all under the age of 8!) was involved in a rollover car accident that left her without the use of her legs and arm. She spent two months in the hospital fighting for her life and has undergone seven surgeries to regain use of her body. For the past year and a half, she had been physically unable to play with or lift her children, clean, and cook, among many other things. Her apartment was in desperate need of household items and furniture! The **apartment turned out beautiful**, and the family was incredibly thankful for the support they received!

Emergency Situations

- Every year, **emergency situations** come to our attention, and we rise to meet the need as much as possible. In April, one of our educators went into a home and learned that the family was **not able to cook anything** because the stove no longer works. The family was not in a financial position to buy a new stove. We asked the community to help, and a generous donor purchased a new stove that was delivered to the family!
- In May, a newly arrived refugee family from Sudan was in desperate need of a **lawnmower!** The mother was raising her six children alone (dad is sadly still in a refugee camp and is

trying to get to his family here). They were renting a house and the grass had gotten to the point where snakes were present in large numbers, and it caused issues. Mom was working, but could not afford to buy a lawnmower. A generous supporter, reached out and delivered a **new lawnmower** to the family!

- In April, Restoring Dignity and volunteers provided a home makeover for Nyaliep and her five children. Afterward, Nyaliep **faced complications** from her sixth arm surgery, contracting two life-threatening infections that delayed her recovery. Once healed, she struggled to find a job due to daycare challenges for her 3-year-old twins, one of whom has moderate to severe autism. Despite applying for daycare and rent assistance, she had yet to receive help, and local assistance funds were depleted. Nyaliep faced eviction, owing \$2,851 in rent, while recently securing a job starting the following week. Her father agreed to care for the twins, enabling her to work. **Our incredible Omaha community raised \$4,721.94** to prevent eviction and rent for an additional three months! Another generous donor provided **funding to go towards childcare** for Nyaliep's youngest set of twins!

Volunteers

- We are continually amazed by the incredible support from our community volunteers! In 2024, **366 volunteers** dedicated a total of **806 hours** to Restoring Dignity, contributing an impressive **\$26,992.94** worth of their time. Many of the volunteers served regularly in our office by packing cleaning kits, laminating manuals and flyers and doing all the little tasks that keep our organization running! When we launched the HOME classes in January, volunteers showed up to help us build storage shelves and bins and to unpack and organize all the supplies that families receive to maintain their homes.
- Our 43rd home makeover was a success because of the **92 volunteers** who worked tirelessly to scrub every inch of the apartment, to load and unload supplies and furniture and to decorate the entire space! Volunteers assembled 23 pieces of furniture that day, ensuring that Nyaliep and her children had new clean, safe furniture that fit in their space.
- In addition to individual volunteers, **12 groups of volunteers** served at Restoring Dignity in 2024. These groups of students, co-workers, and community members each made a big impact by working together to pack a large quantity of cleaning kits, to clean our basement storage area or to restock our supply of translated laminated tags and manuals!

Additional Events

- In April 2024, we celebrated the **grand opening** of the Yates Illuminates building via a building wide open house! Hundreds of people attended and Restoring Dignity provided educational activities about fire safety and healthy home topics. We showcased our Welcome Home classes in our office, with educators talking to attendees about the important work we do.
- In June 2024, we hosted an in-house all-day "**optimization session**" in which our educators gathered together and discussed how we can improve and enhance the classes we teach. We went through every topic we teach in our Healthy Home and Home/Fire Safety classes and took detailed notes about how we are going to optimize the classes. Our 2025 goal is to **finish class optimization** and release the newly updated curriculum. Our hope is that this curriculum will be **used nationally** to provide critical acclimation education to refugees in every state. Our Welcome Home Program is a **unique, one-of-a-kind program** that has been built and directed by the refugee community and is culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- In December 2024, we needed help from our Omaha community to gather all the **soap** needed in 2025 for our Healthy Home classes. Omaha stepped up and donated over **1,600 bottles of soap** via our *Soap for Hope campaign*! Thank you!

Getting Involved in 2025!

There are several great ways to get involved in 2025 with Restoring Dignity:

- **Volunteer** at our office (help unpack items, laminate and do other office related tasks)
- Help at or attend our **gala**! We will host our 2nd **Welcome Home Gala** on *Thursday, April 24th, 2025*. This is a critical way for Restoring Dignity to raise funds to keep our programs going. We need lots of volunteers to make this happen!
- Become a **monthly donor** of Restoring Dignity and help us reach our goal of \$3,500/month! We are currently at 32% of needed monthly donors - help us get to 100% by visiting: <https://rdomaha.org/become-a-monthly-supporter>.

Email Bridget to get involved: bridget@rdomaha.org

At the heart of *Restoring Dignity* is our **belief** that something can and should be done to meet the needs of Omaha's refugee community through empowerment, education, and advocacy partnerships. **Thank you for continuing to support Restoring Dignity and the families we serve!**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hannah A. Vlach". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Hannah Vlach

Founder and Executive Director

Restoring Dignity

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