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# GABLES

## *living*



Special Edition!

Meet Refugee Assistance Alliance

Cover photo provided by Jamie Scotti Everett



Best Version Media



# Special Edition!

## Meet Refugee Assistance Alliance

By Christopher Miyares

Photos provided by  
Jamie Scotti Everett

We are blessed to live in a country like America, where immigration and refugee settlement is cherished and encouraged. There is perhaps no better example of displaying the diversity which comes as a result of this than the cultural landscape that exists throughout Coral Gables, and all of South Florida. Assisting refugees in assimilating into

the Miami way of life, is Refugee Assistance Alliance (RAA), a wonderful nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure that all refugees who are coming to our community feel safe, secure, and welcomed. Showing me the ins and outs of the work and the services provided by such a powerful organization is their current Executive Director, Jamie Scotti Everett.

One of the first things that Jamie had told me when we started

our interview was that communities can only strengthen when neighbors are united and outsiders can feel as if they are part of the community. RAA empowers refugees entering our beloved Coral Gables by providing a wide range of services like helping gain employment, ESL instruction, community navigation, and much, much more. Jamie firmly believes that creating a sense of independence and self sufficiency in a foreign culture can happen much quicker

when you have genuine, human relationships. "We provide what I'd call the 'long welcome' to the new members of our community." The American way of life can be a real shock to those not from here, and RAA makes sure to facilitate this process as smoothly as possible.

### NEW BEGINNINGS

Most of the people that RAA assisted this past year are from Afghanistan and Syr-



(Left) Refugee Assistance Alliance knows how to throw a party! Their 2022 Annual Holiday Party.

(Below) Some key members of RAA. Adriana Jaramillo, Volunteer Coordinator, Romona Allen, Client Coordinator, & Rajaa Zewannah, Client Liaison



ia. In fact, the first person whom RAA had helped was from Syria. The President and Founder of RAA is Kristen Bloom, and had met a woman from Syria while at a dinner one night. Kristen quickly realized that this woman spoke very little English and virtually had no means of communicating with other people, leading to not having an income to pay her bills, buy groceries, etc. Kristen wondered how in the world this woman was going to survive, and decided that she would take this Syrian woman under her wing.

Kristen had learned of many more Syrian refugees around the neighborhood who were

effectively living in isolation, locked up in their homes all day long because they had no idea on how to navigate through the community in this strange, new world. She practiced English with them, helped them learn where to shop for groceries, assisted in sorting and reading through mail and school work, essentially helping these people in need blossom into real South Floridians. After some time, Kristen's friends started encouraging her to make things official, and at the end of 2017, Refugee Assistance Alliance was recognized as a 501-3c nonprofit organization. RAA has grown tremendously since then, allowing for a greater capacity in help-

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Beautiful artwork by RAA, promoting love for all.

ing those in need! Unfortunately, Kristen had to relocate across the country just six months after founding RAA, but luckily Jamie is doing a phenomenal job as being the "boots on the ground" Director here while Kristen continues running the organization from another state.

#### INDIVISIBLE, WITH LIBERTY, AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

"True equity comes when the barriers to success, progress, and inclusion are broken." Was Jamie's response when I asked about the philosophy behind RAA. The foundational prem-

ise of RAA is to ensure that everyone can live and prosper in the same way, focusing on the struggles and individual hardships of each and every person. Jamie calls RAA's approach to problem solving as descriptive, rather than prescriptive, as there is no 'one size fits all solution' to such a complex situation. RAA sets out to ensure that everyone in the community feels as if they are a part of it, and that can't happen if just one person isn't treated with the same level of care as their neighbor.

these refugees, English literacy is extremely low, and RAA offers online and in-home English classes to all of their clients. It can be horrifying for someone who lives in foreign lands without any knowledge of the native tongue, since intimidation can ensue - leading to further isolation and despair. Once the language barrier is broken, social involvement becomes much more tenable, benefiting everyone and creating a much stronger community.

Because they are powered by donors and volunteers, RAA is able to care and provide in accordance with its mission to the highest level. It's an example of how when a tight-knit group of people come together, the lives of everyone involved can drastically change. Whether it's tutoring school studies, helping apply for jobs, or simply showing where the local library is located, the experi-

**Featured Article**



**Raghav Chugh remains motivated as golf career blooms at Rice**

By Isaiah Butler,  
BVM Sports Journalist

Raghav Chugh established himself as one of the best collegiate golfers in the country with Conference USA Freshman of the Year Honors in 2022. Now the Rice University standout aims to become the next Indian golfer to make it to the PGA Tour, and he's carrying plenty of motivation to make that dream a reality. Growing up, Chugh was interested in cricket, the most popular sport in India, but with most of the country playing it, he and his family soon realized that his talents might be on the links... *Continue reading on the BVM Sports website.*

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Children of RAA keep up with their studies regularly



RAA's world Refugee Day Event is one of their yearly highlights!

ence will always be a special one because of how RAA centers its relationships. Jamie really wants to make sure that no one ever feels like they are on their own, especially in times of crisis. "They need guides and mentors, but on top of that, they need friends. They need to know that there are people who will walk beside them in unison, and teach them all of the complexities of American life without judgment. People don't realize that America is full of cultural norms that aren't found elsewhere across the globe, like ordering medical prescriptions, or punctuality. I have had to explain many times that doctors won't take patients who stroll in an hour late to appointments." Just imagine how debilitating it can be to be turned around at the

doctor's office, maybe thinking it was simply because you are a foreigner and don't speak the language. It's important to be aware of these cultural practices, and RAA does just that. South Florida presents a different wrinkle in the fold of life, as most people not from this region have no idea what sorts of physical and emotional damage hurricanes can bring. RAA pledges to provide every client family with a hurricane supply kit, and real-time directions for safety and evacuation procedures.

In addition to the services previously mentioned, RAA helps parents with getting their children situated with their studies, as RAA requires for children to be enrolled in school. These parents who don't speak the language, or even understand Western culture need help in understanding what a school website is, and someone to advocate on their behalf for school administration. RAA will assist families in various ways to ensure

that their children can get the highest level of education and respect possible.

The work of Refugee Assistance Alliance is essential to the current global refugee crisis, and they are a shining example of what is possible when interpersonal relationships are formed through dignity, inclusion, welcoming and mutual respect. As Jamie puts it, "Many people think the refugee crisis is too big to fix, but look at us. One step at a time is the way we are doing it in Miami. It's not perfect, and it certainly is not easy, but in the end it forms a beautiful tapestry of cultural diversity. Just look at our amazing staff, which includes former refugees and immigrants!" It's time for all of us to follow in the footsteps of this amazing organization and extend our reach in order to help those in need, Refugee Assistance Alliance style.

Make sure to check them out here!  
[www.refugeeassistancealliance.org](http://www.refugeeassistancealliance.org)

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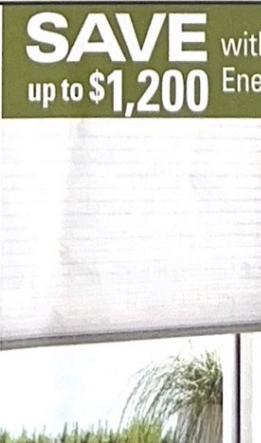
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