

Ripples of Impact



GRATEFUL HEARTS

15 YEARS OF GVP
DECEMBER 2023



How Far We've Come

Tears flow freely in my office: when students are hurting, when staff are having their hardest days, and especially when donors and guests see our mission in action for the first time.

Sitting in my office I've listened to a new friend share about the big, open scars of hate and rejection she still carries from her childhood – the pain of being othered. She remembered so painfully the words “You don't belong here. Go back to your country.” Seeing and feeling the mission of GVP first hand brought back memories that reduced her to tears.



I've heard many stories of people who immigrated to the U.S. as children: the isolation of sitting in the back of the classroom for years, not understanding a word of English, not being cared for or about, the pain of feeling lost and unseen. The resonance of our mission is immediate and personal.

I've heard stories of Jewish parents and grandparents coming to the U.S. as refugees fleeing war and genocide, the scars of generational trauma still fresh. Sadly too many of us have experience with being excluded; too many people can relate to a school system that didn't serve them. For so many of our community, GVP is an opportunity to right the wrongs of the past.



One of my superpowers is creating safe spaces for people. I am honored to bear witness to these stories. A favorite part of my job and of GVP's mission is being a broker between the change-seekers and the change-makers, bridging the gap between those who want to make change in the world through their philanthropy and those who need the world to change in order for them to be free of war and persecution.

The impact of GVP's mission on the lives of our students has many ripples and we are excited to share those stories. We are also grateful to every member of our community who has been part of our story for these last 15 years.

Elizabeth Elango
CEO and Head of School

Music at GVP

A Conversation with Elise Witt, Music Director

Before I came to GVP, I had never been a classroom teacher. I was a visiting artist and I traveled all around the state of Georgia and beyond. I traveled around the country visiting schools and I would do a lot of residencies where I would be in a school for several weeks at a time. It was always wonderful and I would teach songs from around the world and write songs with the students, then at the end of the residency we would have a big, joyful concert, and then it was goodbye.

I had a residency at the International School where Ms. Anne, a GVP teacher, used to teach and I worked there for three years in a row. I worked with the ESOL teacher and really loved that community. I'm a language person. I thought I was going to be a translator or interpreter when I was growing up. That was my whole trajectory. I loved music, but I didn't want to do it as a profession because I thought it would ruin it to study it. So the combination of language and music was the perfect way for the work that I was doing.

When I heard about Global Village Project, it was just getting started and a friend of mine was connected with the group of people that was starting GVP. She was going to be leading song circles with the students and she asked if I wanted to join, so I did. It was the second semester of the very first year and we would meet over at Agnes Scott College in some fancy library. It was magical! That is where we wrote the song "Imagine a Circle" with our girls. It was the first song we ever wrote.



IMAGINE A CIRCLE

*Imagine a circle of women who are beautiful
Imagine a circle of women who are strong
Imagine a circle of women who are powerful
We are that circle of women
Ready to care
Ready to share
Ready to learn to be free
We are that circle of women
We are that circle of women*



I fell in love with the idea of the school and the program. I really believe in the power of music in education and how important it is to use music and the arts, and especially singing, to learn language. I am an improviser and every week I am improvising what to teach because I am listening, trying to meet the students where they are and wanting to help them move forward.

—Elise Witt, Music Director at GVP, where she has taught for over 14 years.



Journeys to Education

My family and I arrived in the U.S. from Tanzania in April 2016. I was eight years old when we moved, the fourth-eldest in a family of, at the time, six children (and now nine).

The trip to the U.S. was long and tiring; I remember that my ears ached the whole time during the multiple flights. But when we finally arrived in Atlanta, GVP's School Support Specialist, Crispin Wilondja, was there to greet us. Crispin was a case worker at the time.

I wasn't really sure what to expect of America. Back in Tanzania, people had told me that everyone in the U.S. lived very luxuriously—that they all had houses, pools, and more. My family and I would soon experience the U.S. for ourselves. After arriving, we were resettled in Clarkston, GA.

The first thing I remember doing in Clarkston was visiting my mother's friend's house to play. I ate apples there for the first time, which I remember being delicious.

I started school at Global Village Project when I turned 11. I quickly added English to my other languages, which include Swahili and Kimbembe. My favorite subject is science, and it comes easily to me. I enjoy doing projects where you design and build things and I am also interested in biology, anatomy, and chemistry.

I am grateful for my teachers and GVP's volunteers. While my school in Tanzania had a strict discipline culture, here at GVP we're not scared of the teacher. It's more fun, and the teachers teach in a better way.

My family and I have built a new life in America amid the vibrant Clarkston community. Outside of school, I enjoy playing soccer, hanging out with my friends, and vlogging. I also attend church with my family and love to sing. One of my favorite memories of living in Clarkston was the time my older sister's GVP mentor took us out to go play.



Georgette

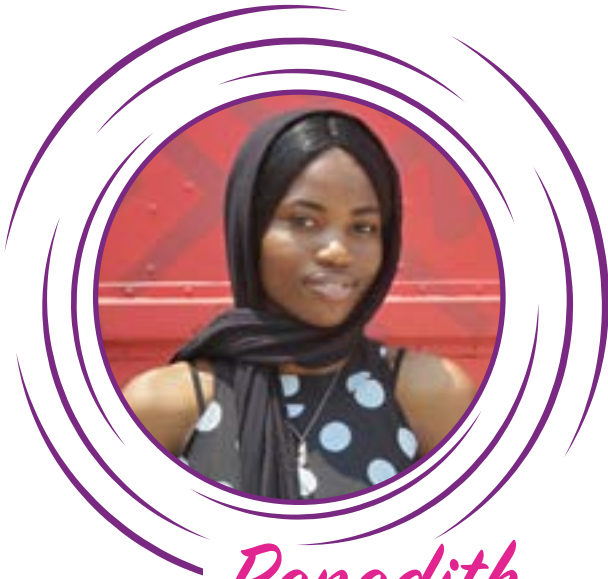
Georgette graduated from GVP in 2022 and went on to attend Harlem High School, Illinois.



Ehsoe

"When I first started my job here, I thought 'wow, I'm back in that room where I started my life.' It brings back so many memories, so much emotion too. I never, ever thought that I'll be back here one day. Sitting here with the students again, helping them. Still now, it feels like a dream. It's so surreal to me."

Ms. Ehsoe Moo (left), is a GVP alum who graduated in 2014. She now works at GVP as a teaching assistant, helping students with classwork and guiding them through the school day. She is pictured here with her former teacher and now colleague, Ms. Linda Smiley.



Benedith

Benedith graduated from GVP in 2021 and is currently at Clarkston High School. After graduation she plans to attend college and hopes to become a business owner and CEO.

I was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2006. My first language is Swahili. I have five brothers and two sisters. In Congo, we had a good life. We had food and we had a good education. However, things changed very suddenly in 2012, when we were forced to move across the border to Uganda.

My father was a successful businessman. Some people became jealous of him and threatened to kill him and hurt our family. We had no choice but to flee. One evening, we stole away in a large van that was being used to transport livestock, bringing nothing with us but bottles of water. The van smelled awful, and it was a long ride to Kampala, Uganda. I spent most of the ride crying and sleeping, frightened and anxious. I was six years old.

In Uganda, many of our new neighbors were hostile toward us. My parents struggled to find food and work, constantly worrying about what we would eat and whether they would be able to pay our school fees. We wished we could go back to our old life in Congo, but it was too dangerous to return. A family friend told us we could apply for resettlement in the U. S. However, due to a lengthy and complicated application process, it would be another seven years before we were able to move to the U.S.

In Uganda, I had to wake up early and walk about a mile to get to school, or there would be strict punishments for being late. My classrooms were hot and crowded. Some students at my school bullied me. However, I also met some other students from Congo who spoke Swahili like me. One of them told me, "Don't worry about them. Just continue learning." Still, I dreamed of continuing my academic journey to high school and then college.

One day in 2019, our lives changed again. My dad came home crying for joy. Our application for resettlement in the U.S. had finally been approved. I was 14 years old. My parents' greatest hope was moving to the U.S. so that me and my siblings would be able to successfully complete our studies and get a good education.

The first time I came to GVP, I was so happy. I was shy, but the teachers were welcoming: smiling, hugging me. During my time at GVP, I became very good at reading English, and cherished singing in music class. I really loved this school.

It's not easy to be a refugee, you go through a lot. I wish people knew that they should not judge somebody because they don't know what they're going through.



Why GVP?

A Conversation with Teachers

Elizabeth: I'm happy to have a conversation with our teachers and get your perspective on GVP. I want to ask about you and your motivations for being at GVP and your GVP experience. What made you choose GVP as a place to teach?

Mr. Crispin: Prior to GVP I was working as a case manager for refugees, welcoming girls and registering them in schools. I was shocked to see how kids were registered in grades not depending on what they knew, but depending on their age. A student is put in an advanced grade even when she might not even know how to write her name. As a result it was frustrating for the kids, who were just praying to turn 16 and quit school. On the other hand, the first girl I brought to GVP had never been in school. How she was welcomed stood out to me. After three months she was able to write her name and say "how are you doing?" So I said something special is going on here. I became fond of GVP and encouraged other refugee caseworkers to come to GVP. I wanted to be a part of this team.

Ms. Anne: I was here from the third year of GVP and I was a newcomer teacher. Just being able to meet these girls and learn from them, and from my coworkers, has really been what has kept me here. I like the flexibility to make our own curriculum. I enjoy the opportunity to stay with the same girls. Starting in my first year, I was with the same girls for three years. In education we call that looping. I looped with them. It's amazing to see what they learn and what they teach each other and teach us. It's truly inspiring! We have put together some great integrated units, so I get to work closely with my colleagues and I learn so much from them.

Ms. Marjorie: I have learned to try to meet our students where they are, which is what we all try to do. I have learned how resilient and how gritty and how brilliant these girls are. They just blow me away! Watching one of these students who hadn't been one of the higher readers suddenly say "I'll try", I almost started crying because I was so proud of her. I am so thrilled that we have made the classroom feel safe enough that she was willing to try and she was so successful. So I think what I have learned is to get to know the girls, get to know where they are and then figure out what to do.



“ Just being able to meet these girls and learn from them and from my coworkers has really been what has kept me here. I like the flexibility to make our own curriculum. I enjoy the opportunity to stay with the same girls. It's amazing to see what they learn and what they teach each other and teach us. It's truly inspiring! – Ms. Anne



Student Life



Being a Third Culture Kid

“Where are you from?” It is a simple question to most people, but I struggle to answer it. College orientation week was stressful and overwhelming. I found myself struggling to answer the question of where are you from because I am not from one place. Where I am from is made up of different parts of the world. That is because I am a Third Culture Kid.

A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside of his or her parents’ culture. Our experiences and circumstances are unique, but most of us started traveling before we could even walk.

I was born to Burundian parents. Burundi is my native country. My parents fled to Congo where they met and got married.

When I was two years old, a civil war broke out in the Congo. My family fled again to neighboring Tanzania where we stayed for eleven years.

We moved to Atlanta in 2008. Later that year, I was enrolled in public school. It was even hard for me as a newcomer without any English language skills; I had no clue what was going on at school socially and academically. I cried when I got home almost every day because I was overwhelmed. Most of my public school experience was a nightmare.

In 2009, I withdrew from Clarkston High School and started attending GVP. At GVP, I felt like I belonged. Despite the diversity that is at GVP, we went to school together in harmony. We sympathized with each other, cared about each other, we learned, played, and studied together. At GVP I learned that I was not just a Burundian girl who spent most of her life in a refugee camp, but someone who could make a difference in the world.

By the time I left GVP, almost three years later, I was reading on a ninth grade level. I received a scholarship to Saint Nicholas Orthodox Academy, where I graduated at the top of my class. I went on to attend Berry College on a Bonner scholarship, a community service based scholarship granted to college students who have in some ways impacted their communities through volunteering and service. In 2018 I graduated from Berry College



Bertha

Bertha is currently working at a real estate investment company based in Washington, DC. In 2022, she graduated with a Master's Degree in International Development from American University.

with a Sociology and Anthropology degree, with a Public Relations minor.

Within seven years of being in the US, we had lived in two states and four different cities. I have absorbed little bits and pieces of all the different cultures, values, and languages from all the places I have lived. Moving frequently is alienating and distressing. It creates inconsistency in friendships, education, and culture, but moving enabled me to see different parts of the world at a young age. It has made me multilingual and helped me acquire multicultural skills. It made me the unique and independent individual that I am today.

Each time my family moved meant switching languages, cultures, and schools. I speak Swahili, Kirundi, English, and I am working on retrieving French, which I spoke fluently when I was younger. Despite the hardships I have encountered, I have survived. I am a natural adapter; I connect easily with people from different countries. For me, home is not a physical place; it is in people. I am from anywhere and everywhere where there are caring, kind hearted, compassionate, and benevolent people. I am a global citizen. I am the future of the world.

Student Life



Our Journey Through Time



2004

Saturday school
doors open



August 10, 2009

GVP officially
welcomes
30 students



2009-2010

GVP Volunteers
get the school going
as teachers and
administrators
(Reading, Social
Studies, PE, Art and
Design, Dance, Music)



2011

GVP receives state
accreditation, a
“Special Purpose
Middle School”



2008

Grant From Atlanta
Women’s Foundation
lays groundwork for
GVP’s growth

2010

First two teachers
hired, including
Yang Li

2010

Agnes Scott
partnership begins,
providing lunch to
GVP students





2012

Amy Pelissero becomes Head of School



2015

GVP signs lease with Decatur Presbyterian Church, finalizing it's home



2016-2019

The Program and Curriculum are developed and refined



2020

Elizabeth Elango is hired as CEO and Head of School

2014-2015

GVP undertakes a space renovation for the school



2015

Bus program begins with grant from Ribbons of Hope



2018

A new strategic plan is created with focus on program expansion

2022

GVP re-accredited by Southern Association of Independent Schools



From the Classroom

Math with Ms. Linda & Ms. Caroline



Ms. Linda Smiley is a math teacher at GVP, where she has taught since 2010.

Ms. Linda

We have the girls for three years at the most usually and I see a real evolution of their own social relationships. When they get here they are more comfortable with their own language groups if they have that and they're a little shy. By the time they are in their second year, they are comfortable with each other enough to argue, which is normal, and they get to know each other. By the third year these girls are generally best friends, it doesn't matter where they came from and it's such a beautiful thing to see, especially at graduation. That it's just an amazing evolution with these same children.

Ms. Caroline

I have the pleasure of teaching math to our Forms 1 and 2 students here at GVP. In math class, my students learn quickly that when I invite them to the board to share their work, I don't just want a numerical answer. Students in my classroom must share their thinking, explain their strategy, and analyze as a group which strategies work best. Although they know they may always "pass" – to my delight – most girls jump at the chance to share their mathematical thinking with their school sisters. In Form 1 last year, there was one student, typically very reserved, who would break into enthusiastic clapping each time a classmate shared her work with the class. It quickly became a tradition: if you feel safe enough and brave enough to stand in front of the class, show us your math and explain it in English, you deserve a round of applause! This same student has carried the tradition to a new group of girls this year, and the classroom is full of shouts of encouragement, congratulations, clapping, and so much joy.

For me, it is this joy that is the great privilege in my work here. These seemingly small things that we celebrate each day at GVP really are not small things at all: a girl has survived, a girl has adapted, a girl is getting an education. Here these girls feel safe taking risks, trying new things, and celebrating one another out loud each time that happens.



Ms. Caroline Henry is the Form 1 and Form 2 math teacher at GVP

Checking In With Ms. Olivia

Anyone who has ever sat in on one of my classes is familiar with the check in that we do every day. After our daily journal time, I pull up a feelings chart on the Smartboard. It has 16 different emotions, including proud, bored, relaxed, and content: each feeling has an accompanying emoji. With this chart to guide us, I ask each student and volunteer in the room how they are feeling, and they either respond with their feeling or choose to pass. I think it's important to have this daily practice of noticing and naming our feelings, and my hope is that it will help students identify their feelings beyond my classroom.

Last year, when our current Form 3 students were in Form 2, they became very invested in this check in process. So invested that one day, to my delight, one of the students asked if she could come up to the front of the room, sit on my stool, and lead the check in. The student and I swapped seats, and I beamed with pride as I watched her ask every student and volunteer in the room, "How are you feeling?" and students responded, "Thank you for asking. I'm feeling _____." My days of leading the check in for that group were over.

In the following days other students asked if they could come up to lead the check in, and the enthusiasm was so high that I agreed to make a chart to keep track of who leads each check-in, so that everyone got an equal chance.



Ms. Olivia McKellar (center) is an ELA teacher. She has been at GVP for two years. This year, she is also the Form 3 homeroom teacher.



This year, Form 3, my homeroom class, continues to lead the daily check-in. Their facilitation has gotten more sophisticated with many students starting with a greeting like, "Hi everyone. Thanks for coming to school today. How are you today?" They've also tuned in to how to respond when someone says they aren't feeling well. For example, they might say: "Sorry, you can talk to Ms. Hope (the school counselor) if you need to." This is a sweet part of my morning, unique to that specific group of students, and it gives us a moment to connect with each other amidst the hustle and bustle of the school day.

The Power of Mentors

Guiding Paths, Shaping Futures

My name is Sufia. I was born in Burma and moved to Malaysia for a year and a half. In Malaysia, we heard about the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees). That's how I came from Malaysia to America in 2014.

The government didn't want to allow us to become citizens in our own country, just because we're from a different nation. So, because my father was not a citizen, I couldn't become one either; both parents need to be citizens in order for the children to become citizens. My father went to Malaysia, but the Malaysian government didn't allow outsiders to become citizens either. My family didn't have a choice but to stay there temporarily as residents. Every four to five years we had to go renew our residency. So when we heard about the UNHCR they decided to move here for us to have a better education and have a better life. My mom and dad left their parents back home, just for us.



Sufia

Sufia graduated from GVP in 2017. She is currently majoring in Business Administration and Management and is an intern for GVP.



I heard about GVP from one of my relatives. I spent about two years at GVP. In the beginning, everything was strange; getting here and adapting to the environment. It was very different, everything was unfamiliar. It took a while for me to adjust to the environment, the schools and the teachers, and the way they interact with the students. It was different from the way teachers interacted with students back home.

Having a mentor is really a great thing for us. The mentor's goal is to help us get where we need to be to get into school, to finish high school and go beyond. They were helping us anywhere, everywhere, whenever. They also helped us with our family's things like doing taxes, applying for jobs, getting a driver's license or buying a house. My mentor sometimes came to our house to see how things were going, to see how our family was doing. And then they kept in touch with us. It was really good to have a mentor.



Rita

Rita graduated from Georgia Tech with a Bachelor's Degree in biochemistry. She currently works in an R&D department of a local company as an analytical chemist.

My name is Rita and I heard about GVP through our caseworker from the refugee settlement agency. She told us about the school for girls and for refugees. At that time my English was not good. My math was not good because I was already older than other students. My sister at the time was placed in ninth grade. We didn't feel like we fit in because we were so much older. We transferred to GVP and we really liked it from the start because we felt like we were all in the same kind of situation. We fit in right from the moment we got here.

I was 16 and I had the option of going to get a GED or going through high school. I opted to do a GED so I got one-on-one tutoring in every subject. For me, it was really special. I wouldn't get that anywhere else.

GVP was one of the most important steps in establishing life in the United States. You know, it led me to the life I'm living right now, with all the guidance and help I get from here in terms of education and outside of education. And you know, even after I left GVP I was still in contact with other mentors and mine, the people who were giving me a one-on-one tutor, so I think it really helped me to be where I am today.

Luckily for me, we have other members of the Chin community, which I'm from, and they also helped me out a lot, but in terms of education, giving guidance, because when we first got here, I didn't know the education system. I didn't know what universities there were. So in terms of education, I really got the guidance from GVP. My mentor helped me to get into Georgia Tech. He actually took me personally to visit the school. Outside of education, we had mentors who took me to different events like museums and even shopping. They helped me to socialize outside of education, to get used to the culture and learn how things are done.



Dreaming Big

The Remarkable Journeys of Our Alumni

"I think I'm a customer service kind of girl. I love doing things, decorating, and making plans. Hospitality really speaks to me," says GVP alum, Asma Ibrahim. Asma is currently interning at GVP while job hunting. She graduated from Atlanta Technical College in May 2023 with a degree in Hospitality and Hotels Management. She says her ideal job would be as a flight attendant. Even though years have passed, Asma still recalls how she first came to Global Village Project.

"My parents are from Somalia, but the way we came here is through Djibouti," Asma recalls of her path to GVP. She remembers that her younger sister, Nasteho, set everything in motion. They were 13 and 14 years old at the time. She recalls that it all started with a conversation at the cafeteria of the school they were attending.

"My sister loves people, so she was more outgoing. She said we've got to go there. We can't stay here (at our school) because we don't understand anything and they expect us to know so much. She convinced my parents to let us go."

The first few weeks were very nerve-racking because they did not speak English. It was very hard to communicate. But Asma recalls that everyone was supportive. "They would speak slowly. They would make sentences shorter and they would help us with books and everything that we needed for the school. They made our parents feel comfortable and like their girls are being taken care of. Asma attended GVP for two years before going on to high school.



Asma

Asma Ibrahim graduated from GVP in 2016 and went on to North Druid High School. After graduating she attended Atlanta Tech, graduating in May 2023 with a degree in Hospitality and Hotels Management



Mu Ku

I was born in Burma, which is now known as Myanmar. I have no memories of what living in Burma was like as my childhood memories were mostly made in Thailand. I can still hear the little giggles from my friends and I when we got in trouble for spending too much time outdoors. In 2014 my family relocated to America, making it our forever home.

Learning a new language and adapting to a completely different environment wasn't easy, but I had a whole village that raised me. GVP was that village. From the teachers showering me with love, to volunteers helping me academically, and my mentor guiding me through life along the way, what seemed impossible became possible. I wouldn't be where I am today without this village. Now, I am in college majoring in Education hoping to give back to my community someday, just as GVP was there for me.

Where is She Now?

A Journey of Achievement and Impact

"During my freshman year of college at Kennesaw State University, I discovered my passion for biological research. I applied and got into First Year Scholars, a research program for freshmen. I also often attended research events and club meetings. At one of these events, I learned about Research for Undergraduates (REU), a summer internships program. Most of these internships are fully funded by The National Science Foundation (NSF). I applied and got into some, so I decided to do my internship at Cornell REU. For this year's program, each student receives free housing, food/travel allowance AND an additional stipend for the entire



Par (Jennifer)

Par (Jennifer) graduated from GVP in 2016.



summer. Each student is placed in a different lab where we conduct independent research under a mentor's guidance. We're expected to be in the lab 40 hours a week, but my mentor has been very flexible with the schedule, so my hours are lighter than my friends'. I am working in the Ecology and Evolution department."

Par, who graduated from GVP in 2016, is now studying biology at Kennesaw State University. She was selected for a research internship at Cornell University and Boyce Thompson Institute this summer. During her 10-week program, she conducted research on the effects of fungicides consumed by the caterpillars on three different types of milkweed plants. She presented her findings at the George Helen Kohut Symposium.

Why I Serve

This year, I have the wonderful privilege and honor of serving as GVP's Board Chair. As I see the girls perform at their quarterly Authors' Tea or pass them in the hallway between classes, they always greet with smiles and questions like "Where are you from, Miss?" I proudly share that my parents came from South Korea and were so brave and courageous like they are to learn a new language and thrive in a new country.

The GVP girls are around the same age as my five aunties—my father's younger sisters—who all stopped their education when the Korean War started. I am a direct beneficiary of my father being able to continue his education and pursue his dream of being a doctor, an aspiration which is shared by so many GVP girls. Luckily, GVP exists to nurture their dreams into reality with a supportive learning environment that incorporates trauma-informed practices, social and emotional support, and more to meet their unique needs.

Our work is only possible through the generous support of donors like you. Thank you for being a part of our mission to reactivate the schooling of refugee girls so they can access all the benefits of a holistic education.

I invite you to become more deeply engaged with the mission of GVP and with other members of our community. Come and visit the school any time so that you can meet these amazing young women; they'll keep you on your toes with interesting questions, observations about the world, and sharp humor and wit.



Sonya Ko
Chair of the Board



Save the Date!

15th Anniversary Celebration

On Saturday, Feb. 24 the Global Village Project invites the greater Atlanta community to celebrate the release of **Imagine A Circle: the GVP Songbook**.

What: Global Village Project's 15th Anniversary Celebration Concert presenting Imagine A Circle: the GVP Songbook

When: Sat. Feb. 24, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

Where: Oakhurst Center for Community
222 East Lake Dr., Decatur GA 30030

**Join Us: A Gala Benefiting
Global Village Project**

Tribute to Education

**Sunday, April 21st, 2024
Savannah Hall, Atlanta Zoo
Doors open at 4:45 p.m.**

How to Give

The mission of Global Village Project is to reactivate the schooling of refugee girls so they can access all the benefits of a holistic education. The impact we make is visible through our alumni. Each one of these young scholars' and leaders' stories serves as a powerful reminder that an investment in refugee girls' education pays a lifetime's worth of dividends.

There are many ways for you to donate to our program.

Please scan the QR code below to donate.



Donate online at:

<https://globalvillageproject.org>

Donate via mail:

Make checks payable to Global Village Project

Mail to: P.O. Box 1548
Decatur, GA 30031



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