



# GRATEFUL HEARTS

*The Global Village Project Storybook*



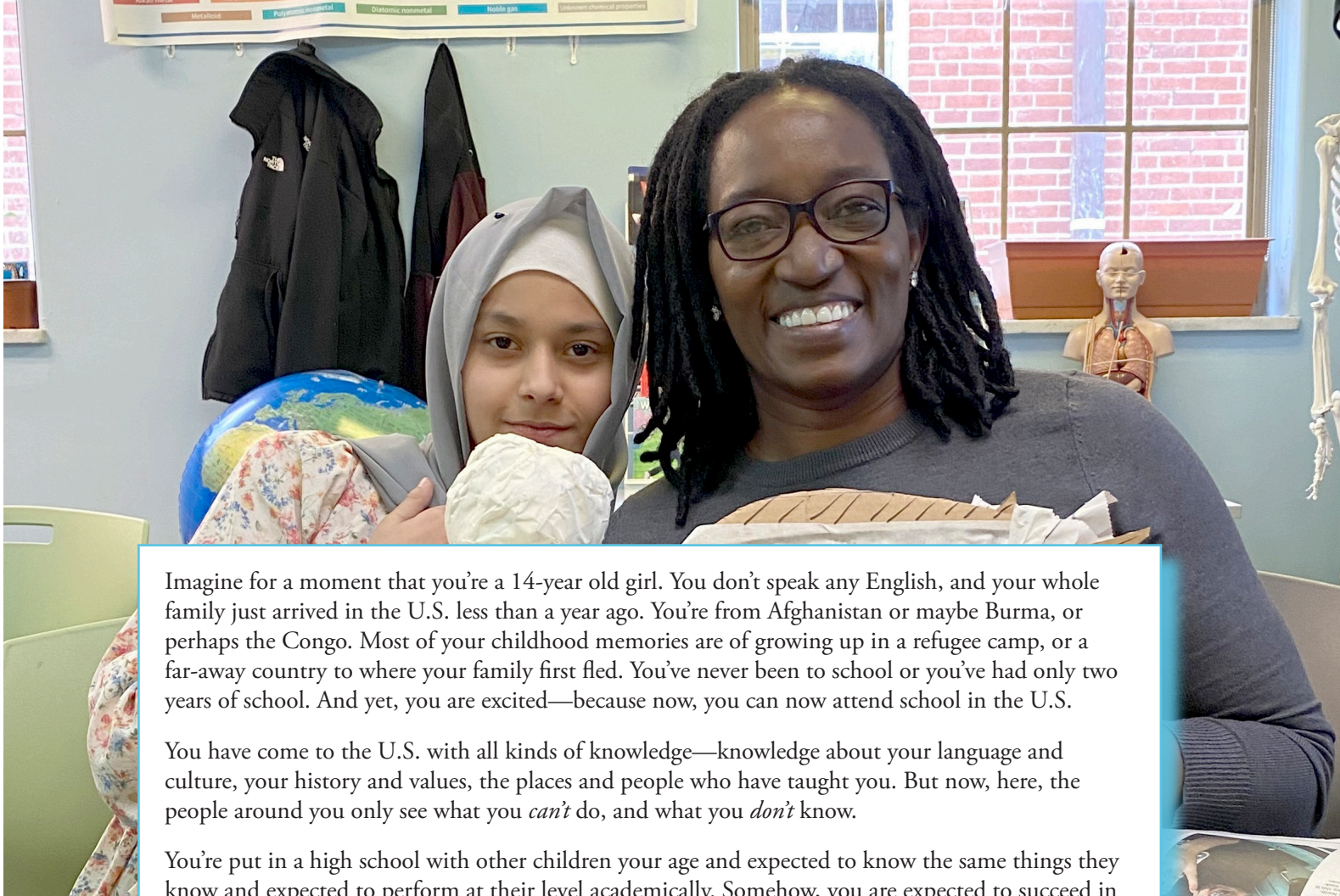
2024

OUR VILLAGE









Imagine for a moment that you're a 14-year old girl. You don't speak any English, and your whole family just arrived in the U.S. less than a year ago. You're from Afghanistan or maybe Burma, or perhaps the Congo. Most of your childhood memories are of growing up in a refugee camp, or a far-away country to where your family first fled. You've never been to school or you've had only two years of school. And yet, you are excited—because now, you can now attend school in the U.S.

You have come to the U.S. with all kinds of knowledge—knowledge about your language and culture, your history and values, the places and people who have taught you. But now, here, the people around you only see what you *can't* do, and what you *don't* know.

You're put in a high school with other children your age and expected to know the same things they know and expected to perform at their level academically. Somehow, you are expected to succeed in an environment that is not only foreign to you, but frightening to you. For many of our students, this is not just an imaginary scenario, but their lived reality. This is why Global Village Project exists; so that newcomer refugee girls don't have to live with that reality.

When our doors reopened for school this year, seventeen new girls joined us in the hallways and the classrooms. In their eyes, we could see them taking it all in: new faces, a new environment, new ways of being. The returning students were impatient as we went over school rules and norms; “this is boring!” one complained. “I just want to start school!” “This is school,” I explained. “We have to help our new students learn how to do school.” Another student, a third-year, declared to a teacher, “Miss, I'm going to be so good this year. You will have no trouble with me, I promise. I'll be a leader. You'll see.” What an amazing amount of self-awareness and discipline it takes for a young person to make such a commitment.

This commitment reflects our theme this year: “Her Strength. Her Power. Our Village.” We are celebrating the intersection of these three elements and the collective impact they have on the futures of the girls we serve. We honor the legacy of that impact by looking back, sharing stories from our recent past—a compilation of the everyday moments that shape our school days and school year. These stories reveal the strengths and the power of our girls, and the significance of the village that surrounds them.

Your place in our village is vital. Thank you for walking with us alongside our students on their journeys.

Elizabeth Elango, CEO & Head of School



# Her Strength



“ They [our students] reinforce our commitment to ensuring refugee girls have a safe place to learn and the tools to overcome barriers to equity and accelerate their education.

When the war in Ukraine broke out, one of our students asked: “Miss, why are we at school today when there is a war going on?” Though the conflict is far away, it feels very close for our students. War is what displaced their families and made them refugees. For our students, some of whom fled just months ago, conflict is deeply triggering.

“ When we say we are a trauma-informed school, we mean that our interactions with students are informed by our knowledge of their pasts.

When we say we are a trauma-informed school, we mean that our interactions with students are informed by our knowledge of their pasts. Even simple things, like bright fluorescent lights or the loud clang of a school bell or fire drill can be frightening. We must prepare and support them through each experience. For some girls, sitting at a desk is new and intimidating, so we create safe spaces for breaks and recharging.

In the face of trauma, our students reveal their remarkable strength and resilience drawn from their journeys. Trauma is real and has many dimensions—physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, professional, and more. It can also be cyclical and generational. People can be triggered or re-traumatized by experiences that resemble what they went through in the past. For students like ours, a war in Ukraine can feel as if it is happening right at their doorsteps.

The wars we see in the media weigh on our minds and our students’ minds. They reinforce our commitment to ensuring refugee girls have a safe place to learn and the tools to overcome barriers to equity and accelerate their education.

Here are a few glimpses from the past school year about our students’ journey to America and the knowledge, strengths, and courage they bring with them.



# Leaving Afghanistan

— By Zahra S.

I felt scared and nervous. It was too quiet at my home the morning of leaving Afghanistan. I did not understand where we would end up, but wished for a free life. My family and I woke up in the morning not knowing if we would leave or not. We did not say goodbye to my sister. It was an early, dark morning. My mom woke me up. We ate breakfast (eggs with tomato). It tasted hot and spicy.

We went to the Kabul airport. My brother-in-law drove us to the airport. The sun was starting to come out and the weather was so hot. People were pushing each other around. I heard the loud voices of people shouting and crying. We waited in line for a long time. My mom said to me, “Don’t go far away from me.” We spent the night sleeping on the ground near the airplane. In the street I felt very uncomfortable. I heard a girl saying to the U.S. army, “Help! Help!” We were all wishing to be free.

The next day, I was so tired because I didn’t sleep well. It was really hot that afternoon. Soon, we saw people running fast to the airplane. We finally got on the airplane. We flew to Qatar. My family and I were so tired. The weather in Qatar was even hotter than in Afghanistan. That night we spent the night in a camp on a cot with many people. I did not sleep well. However, I was happy because we were not in danger anymore.

The next day we flew from Qatar to Texas. I was so happy; I couldn’t believe that we were in the United States. I remember the United States Army saying, “Welcome to the United States!” After one night we went to a camp in the city of El Paso, Texas. It was August, 2021. We started a new life in a new country. I remember listening to the Afghanistan National Anthem. I listened to it almost every day because it reminds me of my home. I am glad to be in the United States, but I will never forget my home country.

## Where Is She Now?

Zahra attended GVP from 2022-2024. She and her family moved to California in January 2024 where she continued her education at Rosa Parks Middle School and graduated this past spring with a 4.0 GPA. In August she started high school in the 9th grade and has applied for dual enrollment to begin college classes at UC Davis.



Her Strength



# The Pink Pen

— By Feroza A.

I was studying on my balcony in my house with a cup of coffee next to me. It was warm, a summertime afternoon. I saw blue sky, heard birds singing, and children playing soccer. I was 14 years old and in the tenth grade. I felt so proud of being a tenth grader. The sun set, and the stars twinkled. I laid down and closed my eyes hoping for tomorrow. I woke up with the soft voice of my mom that called me in Farsi: بیدار شو عزیزم (“Wake up my sweetie and get ready for school”). I said goodbye to my mother and she wished me success and hugged me.

On the way to school, my friends and I talked to each other about the final exam and how stressed we were. During the test I felt nervous. Afterwards I felt so free, so excited; all stress and worries were gone. I said “goodbye” to my friend and hugged her not knowing I would not see her again.

The next day was August 15, 2021. My dad knocked at the door. My father worked in the government. He said our president took the money of Afghanistan and left, then our country came under Taliban control.

**“The next day, I went to the balcony, and everything had changed. I heard no children’s voices, even no birds singing.”**

We started to worry about what would happen next, because the Taliban started to kill people who worked in government.

The next day, I went to the balcony, and everything had changed. I heard no children’s voices, even no birds singing. Silence covered every alley. I felt a lump in my throat, that’s how my happiness turns to sadness. After 15 days spent with sadness and worries, we got our email from the U.S. to leave Afghanistan. We went to the airport that same day. When we took our stuff, I stood in front of the door and looked back to my house. I wanted to keep looking forever, but I had to go. My heart was heavy. We left for Qatar in military planes then to Germany. The conditions of the camp were very difficult. Finally, on October 10, 2021, my family entered the U.S. On January 5th we came to Georgia, and we started our new life.

One day I came across a shiny new pink pen. There were words on it that said, “Never Give Up.” Yes! I will never give up. Life has many ups and downs, and it is up to us to overcome them and be strong. I wish that one day there will be no war anywhere in the world, especially in my own country.

## Where Is She Now?

Turn to page 8 to catch up on where Feroza is now.



**“I will never give up. Life has many ups and downs, and it is up to us to overcome them and be strong.”**



# Student Life



Students play with Ms. Ehsoe during a field trip to B.J. Reece Orchards. Ms. Ehsoe is a GVP alum who is now a Teaching Assistant at GVP.

Her Strength



# Her Power



Our students show us every day what it means to be powerful. They show their power by advocating for their needs; requesting extra help with schoolwork, seeking advice, or voicing concerns in class. In response, we nurture each student's voice, and they build confidence every day. They know their voices matter and that by advocating for themselves, they can shape their own success.

Our students also have big dreams of making a difference in the world. What makes these dreams so powerful is the deep sense of purpose behind them. Having faced unimaginable challenges, our students use their experiences to fuel their passion for change. They aren't just dreaming for themselves—they're envisioning a better world for others.

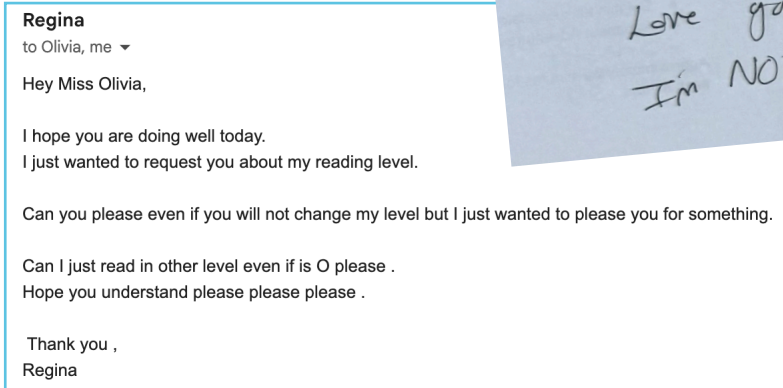
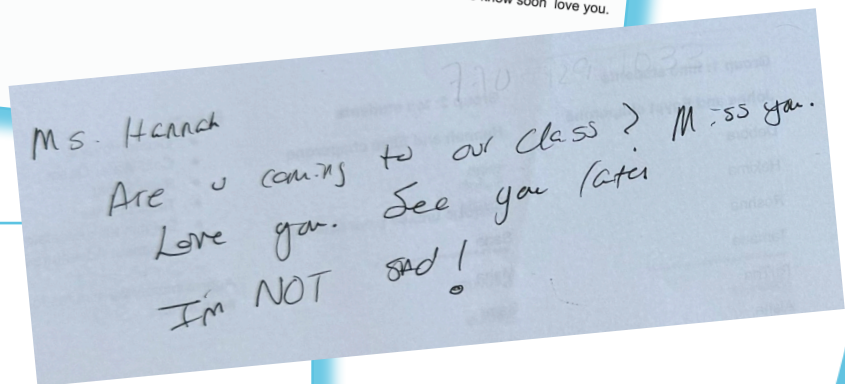
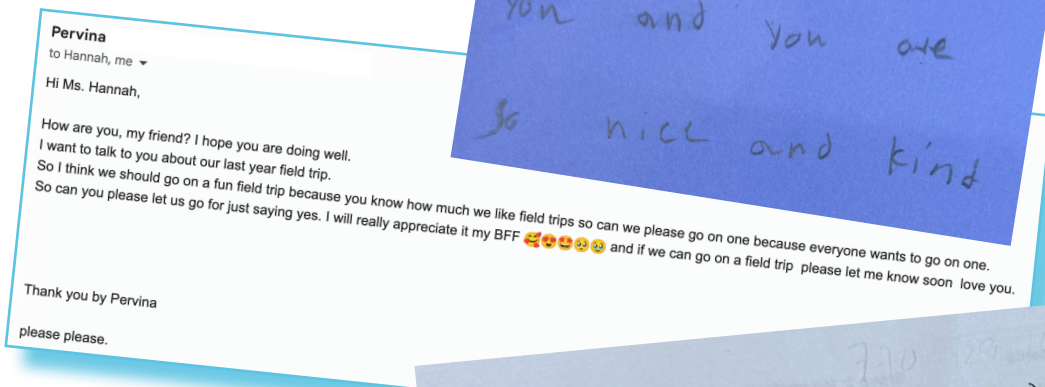
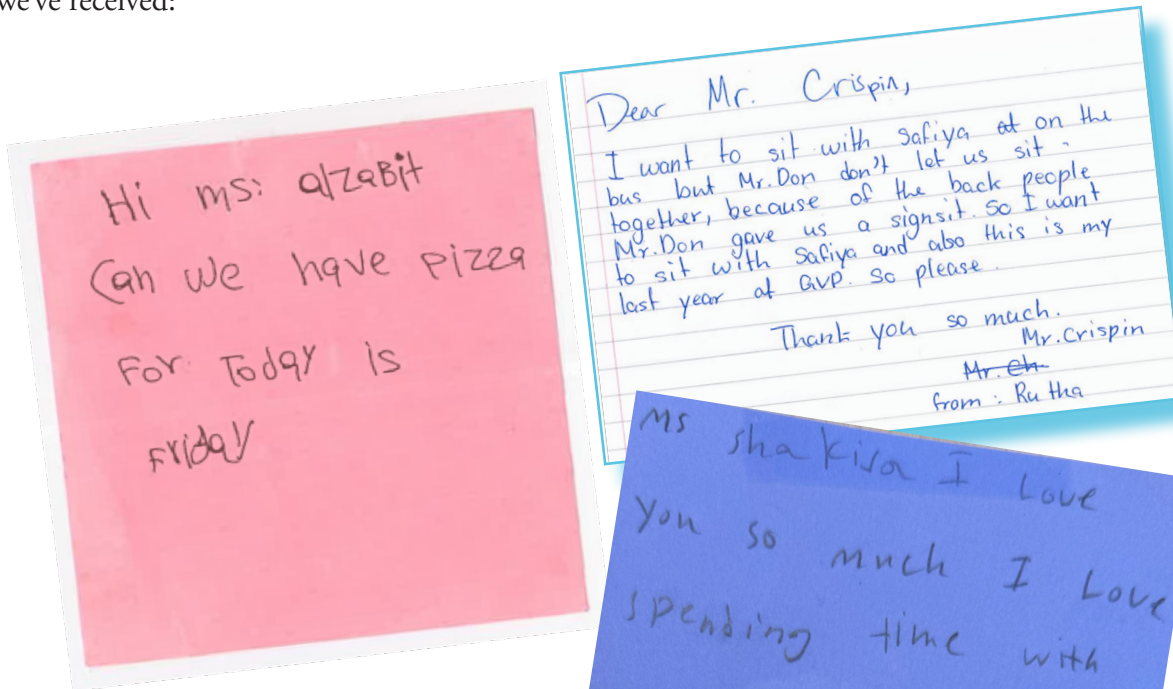
One of the most meaningful moments for GVP students is graduation day. It's a chance for them to stand in front of their families, teachers, and friends and speak from the heart. It's a powerful reminder that their voices, once hesitant, have grown strong, and that they are ready to take on whatever comes next.

**“ Our students also have big dreams of making a difference in the world. What makes these dreams so powerful is the deep sense of purpose behind them. ”**



# Finding Her Voice

During the course of the school day, our students often leave notes for staff—sometimes, to express gratitude or share an emotion. They advocate for themselves, wanting a change in the lunch menu or asking for new seats on the bus. We are proud that they actively pursue what they want, and encourage this in their persuasive writing classes. Here are some of the notes we've received:



Her Power



# A New Page

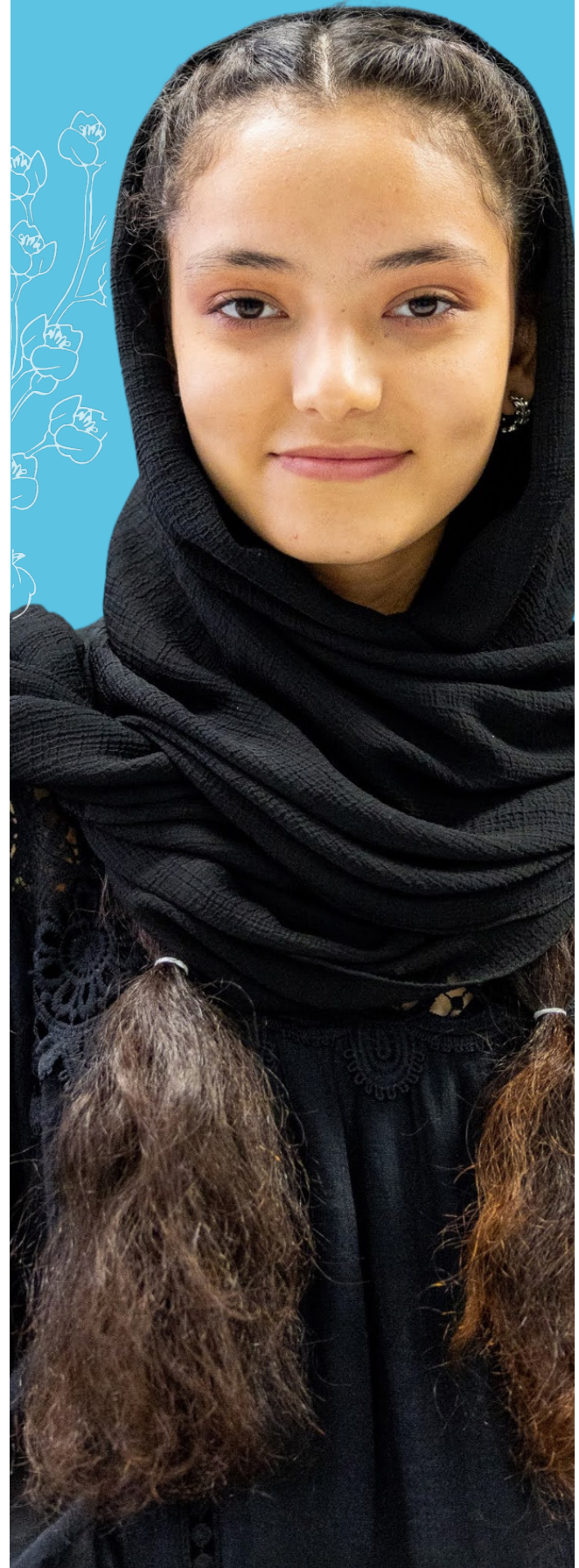
Seeing the successes that our alumnae achieve provides one of the greatest affirmations in our work. One student, who only recently moved to high school, sent us exciting news! While she was at GVP, we all knew very clearly that she wanted to be a congresswoman. This past spring she did something that set her firmly on that path: she got accepted into the Page program at the Georgia State Capitol. The Senate Page Program offers students a first-hand opportunity to visit the Capitol to observe and participate in the legislative process.

In her application to the Program, she wrote: “There are two reasons why I want to be a Page in the House of Representatives at the Georgia State Capitol. First, I was born at a time of great struggle, injustice, and cruelty in Afghanistan. This era ended in the collapse of the Afghan government and the takeover by the Taliban group. I want to see how democracy functions in my new country. Second, I want to be a congresswoman so that I can help my fellow human beings regardless of race, religion or skin color. I can be a voice for the people. This goal would not be possible in my home country.” She concluded: “My long-term goal is to serve my society. I hope that serving as a Page at the State Capitol will be a first step toward greater service in the future. I will stand up and speak out, not to offend, but to defend.”

Over the summer, she was also accepted into an annual internship with a local law firm. The internship is designed to encourage diverse high school students to pursue legal careers. She was thrilled to participate in a mock trial, proudly sharing that she was on the prosecution team—and they won!

**“I will stand up and speak out, not to offend, but to defend.”**

**“I want to be a congresswoman so that I can help my fellow human beings regardless of race, religion or skin color. I can be a voice for the people.”**





# From Different Worlds



My name is Tirhas. I'm Eritrean, but I grew up in Ethiopia. I went to school there up to the sixth grade, then I had to quit school for two years. I came to the U.S. at age 11 and attended GVP from 2015-2017. After GVP, I graduated from Clarkston High School.

When I came to GVP, I didn't know any English; I only knew my country's language. I had a hard time trying to communicate with the students and the teacher, so I used to be quiet. But when I started learning the language, I started

talking. My teachers and classmates were surprised and excited. I had friends from different countries. We learned their culture, their language, their religion. We used to share histories, ideas, what we're going to do in the future and what plans we have. That was my favorite part.

At GVP, all of us are girls and I feel like we are sisters. We come from different worlds, maybe we look different, but we have big dreams. When I saw that they have dreams like I have, I thought that was amazing. I said, let me learn something from them. We helped each other and we built up each other. GVP is the place where I learned new things and new ideas.

“ At GVP, all of us are girls and I feel like we are sisters. We come from different worlds, maybe we look different, but we have big dreams.

## Beyond GVP

I'm currently at Georgia State University. I'm studying computer science. I'm working part time and I'm about to graduate with an associate degree. I'm planning to stay at Georgia State or move to Kennesaw University to do my Bachelor's Degree. I like computer science because it has a lot of math and math is my favorite subject since I was at GVP. In the future, I want to work with Apple or Microsoft; this is my big goal waiting for me to accomplish.



Her Power



# Student Life





# Sisterhood at GVP

When our Form 3 students graduated last year, they insisted on making speeches from the podium. This was unprecedented. In the past, our students had been more reticent about public speaking. But this year, something was different. Not only had they made an impassioned request to each speak, but they had also—long before graduation day—requested for the first time to graduate in caps and gowns.



As student after student took the stage to deliver their remarks, our entire community sat in awe to listen to them say what they had to say. One student, Barka, spoke about sisterhood and resilience:

**“I would like to say to my school sisters: try your best and don’t give up. Even when it’s hard, tell yourself ‘I can do it.’”**

“I have sisters in life, but at GVP, I have 41 more. Thank you to my teachers and everyone who has helped me. I would like to say to my school sisters: try your best and don’t give up. Even when it’s hard, tell yourself ‘I can do it.’”

Another student spoke: “It has been less than two years since I migrated to the U.S. from Afghanistan, from a country where the girls and women do not have the right to read or study. I can even say women do not have the

right to live because of the Taliban. I am one of the handful of girls who emigrated to the United States and to an educational environment for everyone. I would like to thank the school and teachers, also the institution which has made the learning environment favorable for us.”

These testimonies of scholarship, of valued education, of the sisterhood of GVP students, and of their tenacity and resilience are made possible by your support. We join the voices of our students to express our gratitude to all of you for being a part of our village.



**“I am 7,000 miles away from my home, but because of GVP I do not feel alone. You are my mothers and my sisters.”**

Her Power



# Our Village



## What Ms. Hope Sees

As we came to the end of the school year this summer, I reflected on the year with some of the teachers. I feel really proud of all the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program at GVP has accomplished this year, and the student growth I was privileged to bear witness to. We implemented an SEL curriculum in homeroom, grappling with serious topics such as mental health and safety and deepening our relationships with students' families.

Our SEL program is informed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) mindsets and behaviors and by GVP's core values of respect, responsibility, kindness, appreciation, and lifelong learning. Our program is strength-based, tapping into our students' prior knowledge.

Our curriculum is both proactive and responsive. We proactively teach social, emotional, and executive functioning skills, and we leave space in our school day for responding to the students' present needs—grief, good byes, and welcoming people who are different than us in response to things happening in our school community. This year, we delivered over 100 SEL classes, over 300 homeroom advisement meetings, over 50 restorative circles, and individual meetings.

Throughout the semester, students had opportunities to bring something to share with the class that was important to them. Many shared clothing or pictures from their home countries or art they had created. This culminated in a Celebration of our Cultures Party, where students shared

**“It is a joy to build a community where students take pride in their cultural heritage and develop curiosity about other peoples' cultures and stories.”**



food, music, traditional clothing, dances, and games with each other. It is a joy to build a community where students take pride in their cultural heritage and develop curiosity about other peoples' cultures and stories.

In spring semester, we focused on health and safety, which corresponded with our study of women's health. Students learned ways to be safer online, bullying prevention, suicide and self-harm prevention, mental health education, sexual assault prevention, and healthy relationships. Holding space for these serious topics takes courage. I felt nervous each time I introduced serious topics such as suicide, self harm, or sex trafficking.

However, each time, I was surprised when students piped up: "Oh yeah, that happened to my neighbor. I have a friend who is struggling with that. I used to see that a lot in my home country." I wasn't teaching students about something they had never heard of. I was giving them a safe space to process their feelings, ask questions, and empower them with ways to stay safer and help others who are struggling.

**“Her words hit me deeply, because she wasn't thanking me for solving the problem or fixing things for her. She was thanking me for being with her in the struggle.”**

One of my joys this year was helping a graduating student apply to a competitive arts school. Facing a deadline, a team of teachers, including myself, gathered around her to help her submit her application. One teacher helped her write her personal statement, another

helped her gather writing samples, another helped her prepare for her interview, several wrote references for her, and one drove over to hand deliver her application. I helped her complete the tedious and sometimes confusing school application. At some point part way through, she looked at me and said, "Miss, thank you for struggling with me."

Her words hit me deeply, because she wasn't thanking me for solving the problem or fixing things for her. She was thanking me for being with her in the struggle. It's better to struggle together than alone. When people are in pain, they want someone to be with them in the pain. I'm deeply honored to be with my students in the struggle.

It is a deep honor to be here, educating these students. It is a privilege to be part of the journey and to witness their strength, resilience, humor, growth, intelligence, thoughtfulness, and fun. Thank you for journeying with us and "being with us in the struggle."





# The Giving Pot

At the end of October parent conferences, our staff and teachers checked in to review parents' and students' experiences of the day. Gratitude was the recurring theme. We'd had interpreters translating conversations between parents and teachers, and the word we heard over and over was "Thank you." We heard it in Pashto, in Karen, Sudanese Arabic...and 14 other languages: Merci. Asante. Tobeingi. Gracias. Murakoze.

Two days later, one student showed up with a big pot of food. It was a gift from her mother, who wanted to thank teachers and staff using one of the universal languages of mothers' gratitude—food. We unwrapped the cloth around the pot to find a freshly cooked dish of basmati rice with chickpeas, carrots, raisins flavored with saffron and cardamom, ginger, garlic, and many other spices. The aroma danced up and down the hallway of our small school. We ate heartily at lunch that day. At the end of the day we washed out the pot in our small sink and put in a thank you note for Mom.

A day later the same pot, wrapped up in the same tablecloth, came back to school. In it, another pot of rice, cooked to delicious perfection. We ate again, grateful and wondering how long this exchange would continue.

The arrival of Thanksgiving ushers in a season of gratitude and of giving at our school. For so many, this is a time to take stock of the year, plan for the next one and manifest our values through giving. GVP's mission is sustained through that generosity. We see it when our donors rise to meet our increasing needs every year. We see it in the growing number of volunteers and mentors. We see it in our Board who meet often and stay late in long meetings to make sure they make the right decisions for the school. We see it when our parents, despite their resource limitations, find ways to give.

We are incredibly grateful that they—and you—turn up in large and increasing numbers for all our events. However our gifts come to us, we are deeply grateful for them and to you.



Asante

مننه

Gracias

Murakoze

شكريه

Tobèingi

ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါတယ်

Thank You

شكرًا

Merci



# The Same Side

Our Math teacher, Ms. Linda, talked about shapes in one of her classes; triangles, squares, rectangles—basic shapes. “A shape is something that has sides,” she said. “An angle is where the sides come together.” She went on to explain the meaning of the prefix “Tri” for three. Triangle. She explained the prefix “-rect,” as in rectangle and rectify. “It means to correct something; to make something right.”

Ms. Linda asked the students to draw a shape with only one side, and we were stumped; unable to imagine it. After a long silence she drew a circle. Of course! A circle has only one side; the inside. “A circle is a line that is the same distance from the center.” Consider for a moment this is a metaphor for our students lives: war and displacement have forced them from their homes. But in this new country, through this new education we can help restore them by reminding them we are in their corner and on their side. We can help correct the wrongs; make things right by showing that in our global village, we are all on the same side.





# From Our Board Chair

Dear Friends,

I have had the great honor of serving on the GVP Board for four years and this past year as Chair of the Board I see in these girls' the strength and knowledge they bring with them from their own cultures and home countries. I've watched one Guatemalan girl, Debora, teach her classmates Spanish words for the new English words they are learning. I've been amazed as another, Hakeema, free-hands a henna pattern on my hand in celebration of Ramadan.



I also see the power in the girls' determination and how they show up at school ready to learn. I catch them completely engrossed in a book as we walk to Agnes Scott College for lunch. I find them in the library giddily reading their favorite graphic novel. I see their conflicted emotions on Fridays; happy for the weekend but sad to be away from their beloved school. I am inspired to see their hunger to soak up knowledge.

Serving on the board and as a volunteer, I see the amazing village of support our community gives to the girls. During a meeting with parents, they shared through an interpreter how they value GVP as a safe space for their daughters' education while preserving their cultural practices like prayers and fasting. I've witnessed new Board members invite key community leaders to our school and seasoned board members connect us with local Foundations for important grants that resource our school. I've seen volunteers cook special meals for the students' lunch, sometimes using familiar herbs and spices that remind the girls of home. I've seen more and more donors come to events over the years in support of our mission. Every day, our volunteers, donors, and Board show up, give generously and rise to meet GVP's needs. That is the power of the village.

During the Korean War, my 12-year-old father and his five younger sisters fled their village due to conflict. The strength, resilience, and thirst for knowledge in the GVP girls remind me of my father's journey, overcoming poverty and hardship to become a successful doctor in America. For me, GVP brings everything full circle, allowing me to support the same catalyst—education—that enabled my father to fulfill his dreams, just as it will for our girls.

Thank you for all the ways you support us.

Sonya Ko, Board Chair



# Save The Date



*Join Us:*

## **Tribute to Education** *A Gala Benefiting Global Village Project*

Sunday, April 27th, 2025  
Savanna Hall, Zoo Atlanta

Our Village

## Invest In GVP

### **1** Through Our Website

Visit [www.globalvillageproject.org/give](http://www.globalvillageproject.org/give) or use this QR code:



### **2** Through the Georgia Tax Credit Program

As a taxpayer in Georgia, you have the opportunity to contribute to Apogee and receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit in the state. By participating in this program, you can choose to direct your contribution to GVP, enabling our students to receive scholarships. Deadline to pledge is Dec. 15, 2024.

### **3** Write a Check, Donate Stocks, or Give through a Donor Advisor Fund

Contact Natalie Huyghe at [nhuyghe@globalvillageproject.org](mailto:nhuyghe@globalvillageproject.org) to make a gift.

*A special thank you to Graphic Solutions Group for their invaluable support in printing Grateful Hearts. Their generous donation has made it possible for us to share our message and stories, and we're deeply grateful for their partnership in our mission.*





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