

Good morning and Assalamu Alay Kym to all here,

My name is Gulshan Yusufzai, and I am the ED of MAS Social Services Foundation.

First my thank you to Mayor Steinberg for his unwavering support and efforts during this on-going Afghan crisis.

He has always been a pillar of support for all the diverse communities that call Sacramento home.

I have had experience with the mayor in the past for his support in co-authoring of the mental health bill prop 63. It is our good fortune and the city of Sacramento that he is in charge at this moment.

This refugee crisis is very personal and close to my heart. I came to Sacramento as a 9-year-old child from Afghanistan when soviets invaded. And it seems like yesterday to me when we arrived at the Sacramento airport.

As traumatic as it is to flee from Afghanistan, somehow riding on a bare back mule while the echoes of bombs were flying around, those traumatic experiences recede to the back waters of my mind.

What, however, plays like celluloid in my mind is every day I spent growing up here? I remember in 4th grade my teacher was explaining to us the idea of Sisyphean task from Greek mythology where they would push a boulder up the hill every day and once at the top then it would roll back. As a child I felt that was my experience every day.

Every morning would bring a new set of challenges, a series of unpleasant experiences and very little help. I know the refugees coming to Sacramento would have the same challenges and they have to push the boulder up the hill many times over, up the same hill but

what we are trying to do is to make the boulder much less heavy and the hill much much smaller.

The biggest challenge a refugee faces is language, unfamiliarity with the new culture and ways of doing things and the eagerness and knowledge of how to access help. I am somewhat comforted that we are in a good position to help them on many good fronts.

Over the last 14 years, at MAS Social Foundation we have developed programs that serve youth to adults and are offered in 5 languages. We have trained 68 mental health peer specialists who are refugees/immigrants and speak the relevant languages and understand the culture and have the lived experience.

We are going to make lots of efforts and outreach in places refugees will visit so they can feel comfort talking to trained professionals who understands them and most likely has gone through the same trauma not too long ago. Both myself and Basim along with many other community agencies have formed the coalition Ansar which will provide an array of service to meet all the needs of refugees.

In the end, I would like to express my gratitude to the Mayor again for his support and help throughout. My sincere thanks to Assemblyman McCarty and Aisha from Airbnb. Last but not least, my colleague Basim from CAIR and Jesse from Opening doors along with the other 4 other resettlement agencies.