

JUBILEE PARTNERS REPORT

March 2016



And there is deep down within all of us an instinct. It's a kind of drum major instinct—a desire to be out front, a desire to lead the parade, a desire to be first. And so Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness. If you want to be important—wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

--Martin Luther King, Jr.

In December the City of Comer selected Jubilee Partners to lead the annual Christmas Parade. With the help of friends from Comer to Atlanta we were able to pull together a cheery and colorful representation of those connected with the work and life of Jubilee. It was wonderful to be so warmly received as we walked the streets of our little North Georgia town. We do not often have the honor of such public recognition, but we do often receive encouraging letters and financial support from people like you. It is good to be affirmed by neighbors near and far and to know that our work is relevant, but sometimes we are tempted to consider our ministries more important than others and miss the many works of mercy happening around us.

This season of Lent asks us to, as Jan Richardson writes, “Remember what God can do with dust.” It is a time to draw close to God in humility as Jesus did in the desert. Through recognizing our smallness we are called to



Comer Christmas Parade! We braved the cold—all hundred plus of us, to march with CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD banners and celebrate with our neighbors.

realize the wide, wide mercy of God. In this spirit, we would like to tell you about a few former volunteers, former refugees, and organizations in the town of Clarkston, GA whose work builds on and goes far beyond what we are able to do here at Jubilee.

Clarkston is a small town on the east side of Atlanta that was selected for refugee resettlement in the 1990s. It has a population of just over seven thousand that speak sixty different languages according to



Volunteer Cristy Fossum (L) finds a new friend in afterschool student Ngo Dei (R) who lived with her family at Jubilee in 2012.

the city government. *Time Magazine* called Clarkston “the most diverse square mile in America.” It is where the majority of refugee families are placed by resettlement agencies after they leave Jubilee.

Current partner Zac Bowman Cooke moved to Clarkston for nine months in 2011 motivated by his time as a volunteer at Jubilee to live alongside Karen refugee friends from Burma struggling in their new home. Zac quickly discovered that he was not alone. He volunteered at Café Clarkston, a nonprofit internet café designed to help refugees improve computer skills and find employment. “While feeling rather hopeless in my own search for employment I was so encouraged by men from Ethiopia and The Gambia who were teachers and professionals in their home countries, yet still so hopeful and eager to make their resumes and apply for jobs even when the prospects were poultry processing and warehouse work,” Zac said.

When he moved back to Comer, Zac quickly found that the knowledge he gained from his time in Clarkston could be used to help expand others’ view of what it is like to be a refugee. In the spring of 2013, Jubilee had two college groups ask to come

and volunteer during the same week. Instead of refusing a group of willing volunteers, they were referred to Zac who set out to immerse the students in the lives of refugees living here in Comer and beyond. During that week, the college students helped with projects around the community in Comer and also were able to spend a day in Clarkston visiting organizations like Café Clarkston, ESOL programs, a community garden, and a refugee resettlement agency as well as sharing meals in homes with gracious refugee friends of Jubilee. The day-long immersion trip became a hit and was repeated with several other visiting groups and later, with a group of Jubilee volunteers. As a result, the Clarkston Experience is now a regular part of our program for volunteers and long-term staff. It is an opportunity for us to be encouraged, challenged, and inspired by our refugee friends and ordinary folks organizing to support them. It provides a space for us to become more aware of the difficulties and the resources available so that we can better prepare refugee families for their transition.



Meanwhile, along with fieldtrips and ESOL classes, the beat goes on in the garden—hay comes in by the pick-up load to mulch our summer veg-

“I often felt a sense of grief when I visited Clarkston as a volunteer,” says Stephen Speakman, who lived and worked at Jubilee for three years. “I saw people whom I grew to love at Jubilee looking tired and worn out from their jobs. I saw some families struggle with the transition to city life. They would share about their financial concerns or fears about their safety. A lot of the adults were no longer progressing in their English or were losing the English that they had gained. The mix of new stresses and old traumas sometimes led to

strains in family relationships, and that was sad for me to see. It was hard feeling like I was so far away and also realizing that I had limited time and energy to be in ongoing relationship.”

Stephen graduated from Candler School of Theology at Emory and now lives in Clarkston where he works for Refugee Family Literacy, also known as, “Mommy and Me,” an innovative ESOL program for mothers with young children. The program provides English classes for refugee mothers who would otherwise be unable to attend school without the provided preschool classes for their children. A visit to Mommy and Me has become a staple of the Clarkston Experience and always inspires Jubilee teachers with new ideas for our Pre-K and adult ESOL classes.

“As a teacher at Mommy & Me, I’m inspired by the women in my classes who continue to show up to class—even when it’s freezing cold, even when it’s raining, even when they are 9 months pregnant,” says Stephen. “I love being part of a diverse community with so much life and potential.”

One of our current spring volunteers, Nina Popkes, from Berlin, Germany, worked extensively with refugees and asylum seekers in Amsterdam and Berlin before coming to Jubilee. On the trip to Clarkston, she was impressed by the very personal and holistic approach of Mommy and Me and the other programs. “In Berlin there might be 5,000 refugees staying in a large church building like that. There is not much opportunity for work and not nearly enough volunteers. In Clarkston there are so many people and programs helping with jobs, housing, and education,” said Nina.

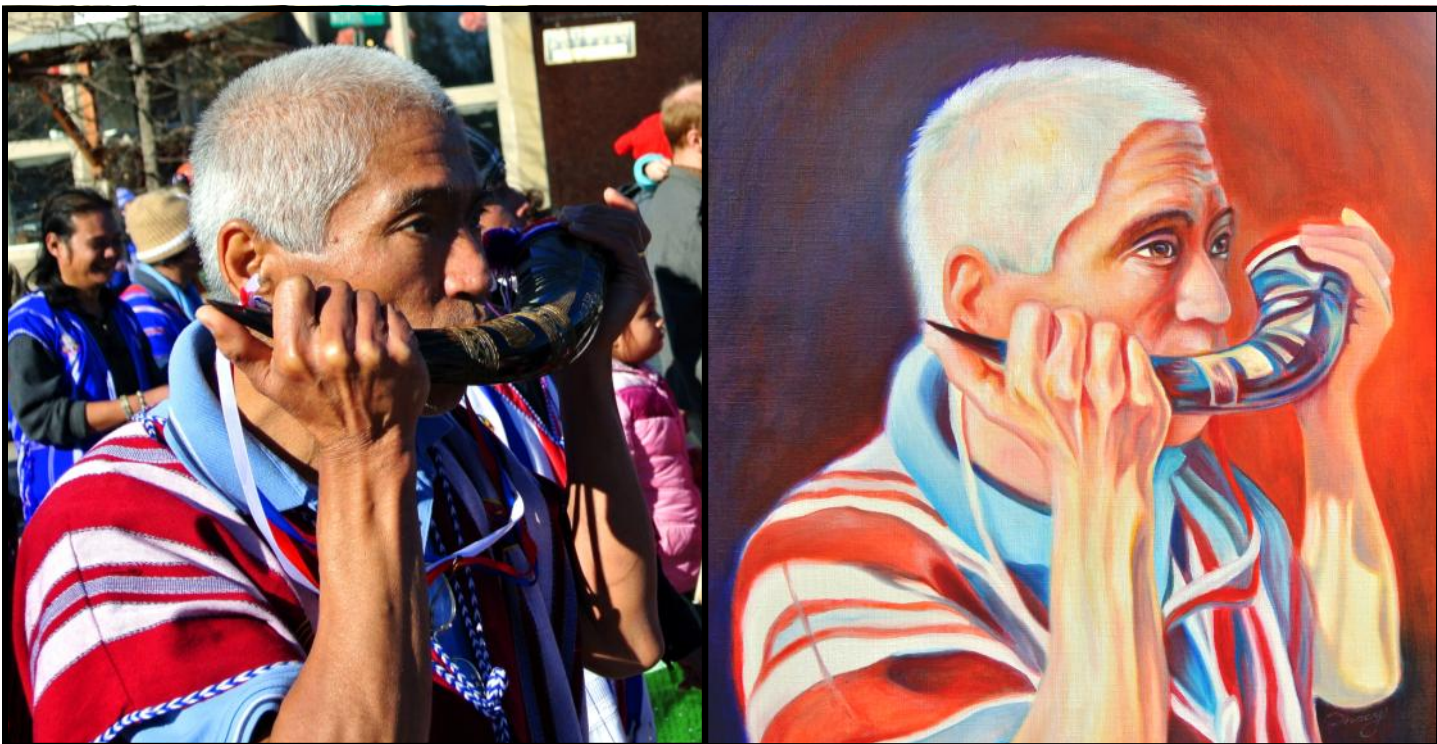
Thank you, thank you, thank you friends!

We will give a more complete report in our next newsletter, but we just *have* to share the good news that you friends on our Jubilee mailing list have responded generously to the appeal we sent out in mid-November. Hundreds of donations have come for the refugees trapped in dangerous situations all over the Middle East. As this newsletter goes to press we have passed along almost \$80,000 – and gifts are still coming in! We and our friends at Dreams InDeed International (who are in direct contact with the refugees) are *so grateful* that lots of people react to the current news reports with compassion – and then *do something about it!* ***I was hungry and you fed me***



Jubilee staff participated in homework help, an art project, snacks, one-on-one reading and some UNO competition with Inspire Afterschool students.

Refugee families who came through Jubilee’s refugee program host Jubilee staff for a visit and meal as part of the Clarkston Experience. Eh Doh and his wife, Hsah Bu, are Karen refugees from Burma that hosted Jubilee staff this spring and several times in the past. They arrived in the U.S. via Thailand and came through Jubilee in 2013. By putting their resources together with their son-in-law’s family they were able to buy their own home last year. They live together as an extended family of eleven with six people working in poultry and seafood processing. Eh Doh, a teacher by profession, now attends citizen-



Karen neighbor Rolled Gold blew this buffalo horn in the Comer parade. Volunteer Tracy Newton captured his photo (left), then painted the portrait (right). Her many gifts are visible and appreciated at Jubilee these days.

ship classes and maintains a kitchen garden. “I was very impressed by their English abilities. Everything is going so well for them now. There was a good feeling being in their home,” said Nina.

Natalie Schmucker was a volunteer at Jubilee when Eh Doh’s family came through our refugee program and now lives and works in Clarkston. “I love the deep relationships with friends from Jubilee,” she says, “At the community garden, Eh Doh and I both have a plot there and it’s fun to garden alongside someone I knew at Jubilee, especially someone like Eh Doh with his botanist brilliance!”

Natalie helps to coordinate host families for our Clarkston trips and debrief with Jubilee staff at the end of the day. Both she and Stephen are part of a dynamic young African church in Clarkston called Shalom, which often helps to welcome Jubilee families from the Congo and other parts of Africa when they arrive in Clarkston. In partnership with this church, Natalie developed the Inspire Afterschool program for refugee youth. This spring, our staff spent the afternoon there tutoring and participating in the program.

“Clarkston is not as bad as you might think,” says Natalie. “Yes it can be difficult, but for the most part folks are surrounded by community: ethnic and linguistic communities that take new arrivals under their wings, church communities that welcome new arrivals into their congregations, neighbors who know exactly what they’re going through and have been there themselves.”

We remember in Clarkston that Jubilee is part of an extraordinary network of organizations, churches, and individual volunteers working for peace and offering hospitality to refugees. And we realize that often the greatest and most capable of these people are the refugees themselves.

from the people of Jubilee



K-house contra dancin'; so fast it's all a blur!



Chloé

Nathan

Nina

Above right: Europe has been especially generous to us this spring. Chloé, from France, followed her father who was a Jubilee volunteer in 1993. Nathan comes from Switzerland having left his fiancé behind to experience some months of community life here. Nina, from Germany, brings a smile and creative energy to her pre-K students most days.



Above: 2016 era toys in childcare...in another time these wooden building blocks made towers, but today they are cell phones, of course, even for the 2-year-olds!



HEY—Cool nails!

Left: Phoebe and Lisny get creative with nail art.

Right: Our potluck suppers are for fun and feasting. Recently Chris, Tin Tin and Mya Tha all competed for "best hat creation" as part of the before-food activities.



Who we are

Jubilee Partners is an intentional Christian service community in north Georgia. Our primary ministry is offering hospitality to newly arrived refugees. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization; donations are thus tax-deductible. Your donations and support of our work are most appreciated.

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Three year old Ywa Hay Tha (featured in our December Newsletter) is going to school! His mother, Paw Paw, watches as the attendants lift the new little student in his own Kid Kart up and into the waiting school bus.