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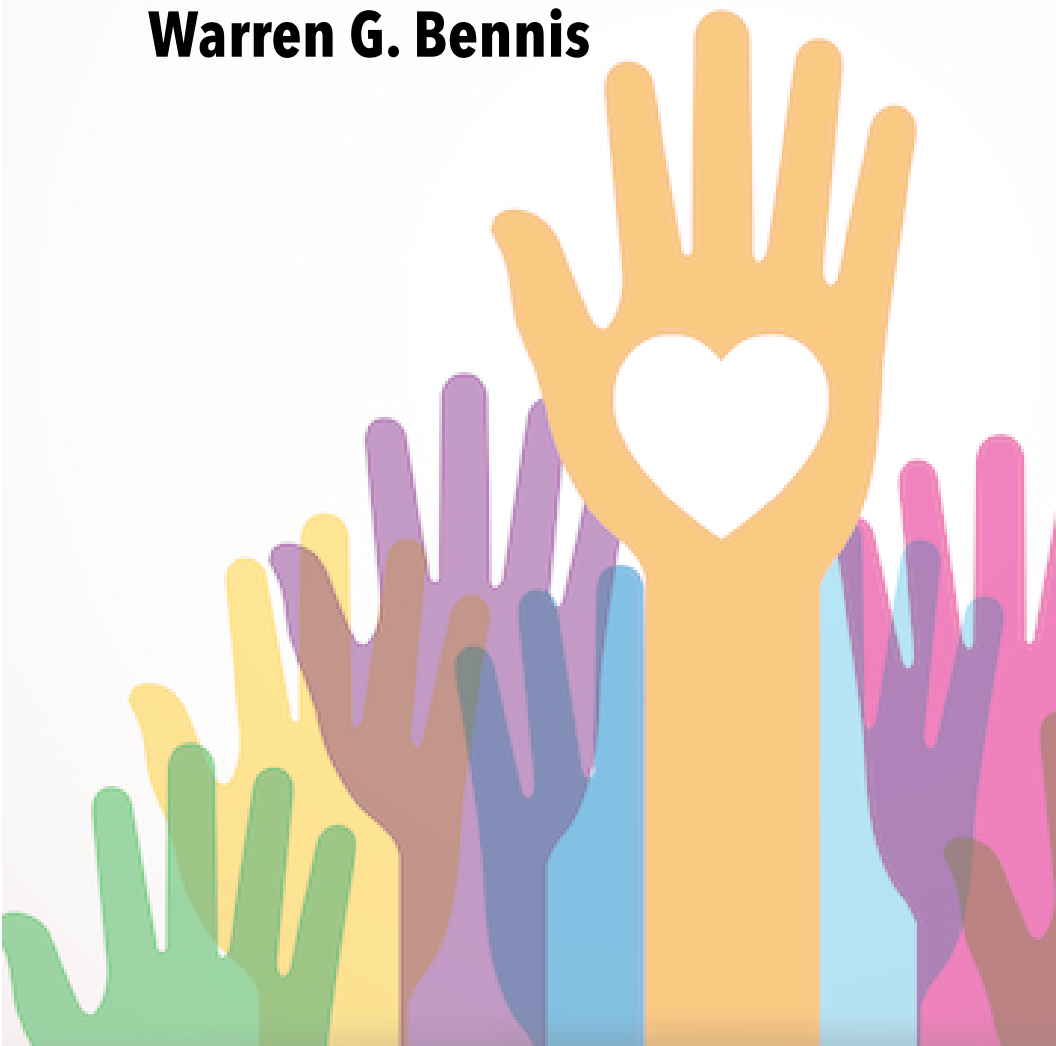
SyrianCommunityNetwork

3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL IFTAR DINNER  
**2017**

SUPPORT REFUGEES RESETTLE WITH DIGNITY

**“What you do has a  
far greater impact  
than what you say”**

**Warren G. Bennis**



# WELCOME MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

May 28th, 2017

Dear Friends and Supporters,

On behalf of the board of directors, staff, volunteers, and mentors, we wish to welcome you all to our Ramadan Iftar event - Faith, Food and Family - in support of the Syrian Community Network and the families we serve. Your presence honors both us and the people we are privileged to serve - refugees, our new friends. When we think of the work we do, we think about how we wish to see children laugh and sing, mentors teach, and volunteers help. Staff members serve, while the board leads. Employers hire, advocates plead, friends talk, supporters contribute. Refugees strive to work, persevere and adjust. We all share the same vision - a dignified life and a matured wave of newcomers that are independent and self-sufficient.

Building self reliance is at the heart of our work. Over the past two years, we have served over 600 people, either through our Mentorship program, our Rental Support Program, or through our Case Management Program. At the same time, we have worked at building our capacity by hiring staff in order to better serve our clients. We also want to build the requested by our refugee families - such as English as a Second Language, workshops on job and work culture in the US, financial workshops, health awareness, youth programs and much more.

There is much more work ahead of us, and we need your help to get there. So, as we break bread tonight, please consider your role in building self-reliance among our refugee friends. As you hear about our work, and our hope for more programs, please consider how your contribution can play a key role in helping an entire family achieve self reliance and independence. We have much to do to help our newest community members and together, we can create a loving and supportive community that welcomes refugees to the community.

Thank you again for joining us, thank you for your generous support to help refugees achieve self-reliance, and for your support of the Syrian Community Network. After all, it really does take a community to welcome, support, and empower our new friends.

Best wishes for an enjoyable evening.

With Gratitude,

Suzanne Akhras Sahloul  
Founder & Executive Director



## ABOUT

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The Syrian Community Network (SCN) was established in 2015 by a diverse team of community members with intentions to aid and assist in easing the resettlement of Syrian refugees. SCN is a mutual aid association, defined as an organization that works in tandem with the refugee resettlement organizations that sponsor families to be resettled in the US through the Federal Refugee Resettlement Program. We are prepared and organized to support the anticipated influx of Syrian refugees scheduled for resettlement in the Chicago area. SCN is a 501(c)3, non-profit organization, that will supplement the resettlement organizations' efforts to help the refugees adjust to their new home and build the bridge to the local Chicago community.

The following are SCN goals:

- To partner with refugee resettlement agencies in providing support to the newly-arrived Syrian refugees
- To connect refugees with appropriate services and community resources available
- To foster a relationship between the Syrian refugees and the larger Chicago community
- To establish cultural competency for staff working with Syrian refugees as well as for Syrians who need to learn about their new culture in the US.

## MISSION

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To empower Syrian refugees in achieving a seamless transition and relocation to the United States through connecting people to the right services and support networks.

## VISION

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We envision a matured wave of Syrian refugees who are well-integrated into the culture of American society and leading goal-filled lives.

### BOARD MEMBERS

---

SUZANNE AKHRAS-SAHLLOUL  
HADIA ZARZOUR  
SUEHAILA NABULSI  
FERAS NABULSI  
MANAL MASHAL  
DR. LENA SHAHBANDAR  
DR. BANA MASHNOUK AHDAB

### STAFF MEMBERS

---

SALAM ABDULRAZZAK  
MAYA ATASSI  
RAMA ATIEH



SyrianCommunityNetwork

# EVENT PROGRAM

MASTER OF CEREMONY

WELCOME

IFTAR

AWARDS

SPEAKER

SUPPORT YOUR SCN

CLOSING REMARKS



## TONIGHT'S HONOREES

### **Omar Dweydari**

Omar is a long time resident of Burr Ridge and resides there with his wife and family. He is the owner of Star Motor Sales. Omar donated over 40 cars to the refugee families to aid in their adjustment and help them feel less isolated.

### **Sawsan Martini**

Sawsan is a long time resident of Burr Ridge. She leads a group of female volunteers who support our refugee families by providing food, furniture and clothing. She also runs the Charity Kitchen, an entrepreneurial effort to help women support themselves and their families. She has two children.

### **Dr. Amneh Arnous and the Late Dr. Fawaz Kannout**

Dr. Arnous and the late Dr. Kannout served refugee families at their dental clinic, Maya Family Dental, in Chicago's north side. They treated the families with compassion and care, never turning away a patient in need. Dr. Arnous continues on in that vein of giving. Tonight we honor Dr. Kannout's legacy, and the example they have set for others

### **Shawn Lent**

Shawn moves this world as a social practice artist, with experience from a field in Bosnia to a children's hospital in revolutionary Egypt. She serves as Program Director for Chicago Dancemakers Forum, Alliance Building Lead for Createquity, contributing editor for the Clyde Fitch Report, and project lead for Dance Peace and Global Water Dances. Previously, she was the advising coordinator for EducationUSA Egypt at AMIDEAST, a U.S. Fulbright Scholar, UN Alliance of Civilizations International Fellow, Commencement Speaker for Millikin University, and presenter at the University of Maryland, Universal Exposition Milan, Hope College and TEDx Shibir El Kom. Shawn holds a Masters in Arts Management (Arts in Youth and Community Development) from Columbia College Chicago and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Youth Arts Development from Goldsmith's College, University of London.



SCN officially kicked off its volunteer program on January 23rd, 2016, by hosting its first ever volunteer training at the Bezazian branch of the Chicago Public Library. That day, 39 volunteers learned about the refugee resettlement process and the ins and outs of becoming a volunteer, whether as a mentor or in a reserve capacity.

In the ensuing 18 months, 7 additional training sessions have been held, and the response of the Chicago community has been tremendous. From within a pool of 400 total volunteers trained in all, SCN has actively matched 146 mentors with 57 families living in the north side of Chicago, with another 18 volunteers matched with families living in Aurora and the West suburbs. Beginning earlier this year, SCN also helped train 35 volunteers for two partner organizations, SIRAT and PARR, which work to serve the families living in the Hyde Park area.

From helping with set up at an event, to securing employment opportunities for one of the resettled families, or helping them develop English language skills, the support of our volunteers and mentors has been invaluable.

One of our earliest impact stories was little Hasan. When his parents resettled here over 18 months ago, they discussed the difficulties they faced whenever he had to go to the daycare at his mother's ESL class, refusing to go in because he feared he would not understand anyone. SCN paired this young family with a newlywed couple, themselves in the early stages of a new beginning. What developed over the next few months was not a mentor/mentee relationship, but a family. Weekly visits were filled with food and laughter, in addition to a little practice of conversational English. Interacting with these new friends, hearing his parents working on their English, daycare suddenly became a more welcome place for Hasan. Soon, the tears often present at drop off were replaced by excitement and laughter.

Our volunteers do more than just lend a helping hand – they are a friendly face to someone feeling lonely, they are a bridge away from someone's isolation. They connect the families to their new community.





# A MENTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Ryan Schuessler - Mentor for the Muhammad Family

I was not sure what to expect when I walked into the library to meet the Muhamed family in October 2016. Mustafa, Shaho, Lena, Muhamed, and Ronyar were sitting at a table, surrounded by other Syrian families waiting to meet the Americans who had signed up to "mentor" them. Like many, I was disturbed by the images beaming out of Syria, and had been trying to find a way to help when I heard SCN founder Suzanne Akhras speak in Chicago last year. I signed up.

The last six months have truly been life changing in ways I did not expect. I hesitate to call myself the Muhameds' "mentor," as they are teaching me so much.

This experience has not been without its challenges. It was awkward at first, sometimes in a funny way, oftentimes in a frustrating way. During that first meeting, SCN staff translated for us, which made it easy to make small talk, learn about each other, and make plans for tutoring in the weeks to come, and to go to the Art Institute the next day.

Without a translator, though, things were very difficult.

At first, we would often just sit and look at each other, unable to communicate without the help of Google Translate. Even getting "How are you?" across took several minutes. Sometimes we'd laugh, sometimes we'd sigh with exasperation. Aside from the language gap, there was a generational one as well: I'm closer in age to Lena than I am to Mustafa and Shaho. The kids seemed skeptical of this American who was bringing extra schoolwork, and at times I sensed they were embarrassed when I overestimated how much English they knew. I started having doubts when one of the kids cried during a visit, and I had no idea why.

It was easy to fall into the trap of wondering if I was actually helping them—I am not a teacher, after all, and am near worthless when they ask me for help with math homework. Was this whole routine turning into something for me, not them? Was I making their experience worse? Was I inconveniencing them?

I'm still not sure I have the answers to those questions, but over the course my weekly visits to the Muhameds' home I have seen this family adapt and grow in ways that continue to move me. All three kids are now speaking English with confidence. Lena is getting A's on tests in school. Muhamed can read a short story faster than I can. Ronyar—who couldn't write in any language when I met him—can now write the alphabet with ease, and my heart almost burst the day he was able to read a short passage with little help.

(Continued).

Throughout all of this, even when it was hard, the Muhamed family has been welcoming and warm. For people who are starting over, they are eager to give. Shaho always serves Syrian coffee with snacks. Mustafa is making my partner Joy and I a painting for our apartment. A few times, I've been invited to stay for a homemade Kurdish meal (something I now secretly hope for every time I walk through that door, if I'm being honest). When Joy and I make social visits, we are often sent home with a bag of rice, peppers, or flour, and Shaho taught Joy how to make Syrian coffee. We do not deserve their kindness.



I am humbled by their drive and sacrifices. Also a talented musician, artist, and scholar, Mustafa is now working at a factory with six other people on his block. Lena has become a reliable asset in explaining complicated English grammar to her brothers in their native Kurdish. Even though it is hard in ways I cannot imagine, I can see that Shaho and Mustafa have made a stable, loving home for their children despite the hardest of circumstances. I am proud to know them.

A great part of this has been seeing how others have stepped up to help. Of course, Lena, Muhamed, and Ronyar are progressing because of their teachers and classmates. When a new Kurdish restaurant opened in my neighborhood—The Gundis—the owners agreed to hire Mustafa to play music there, and continue to ask about the family often. When I mentioned my time with Muhameds to my own family, my 93-year-old grandmother in Missouri knitted them an afghan. When I brought the idea of inviting a group of Syrian families to the museum where I work, my coworkers eagerly stepped up to help.

When the President tried to shut down our country's refugee resettlement program, I saw the Blue Line of the CTA fill with Chicagoans heading to the airport to send a message to the White House: "hell no."

Refugees are us. When I speak with Mustafa and Shaho, I see the great-grandparents who I never met, who came to America from Yugoslavia more than a century ago, to give me a better life.

It is so easy for Americans to forget that the refugees and immigrants of our time are just like our own ancestors. Instead of stepping out of steerage onto Ellis Island, they are stepping out of airplanes all over this country. We owe it to our own immigrant ancestors—who we may have never met, but who sacrificed so much for us—to pay it forward.

The desire to help, but the uncertainty of how, can be overwhelming. But it is so easy to make a difference. You don't have to commit to visiting a family every week. Start a collection at your church, synagogue, or mosque, or among your friends, to donate to organizations that are helping refugee families get settled. Reach out to those organizations and ask what items these families need. If you see prejudice or hear others scapegoating refugees, speak out.

But if you have the chance to get to know people like Mustafa, Shaho, Lena, Muhamed, and Ronyar, take it. You won't regret it.



# RENTAL SUPPORT PROGRAM

## INITIATED NOVEMBER 2015

When families resettle in the US, part of their sponsorship package from the resettlement organization is to cover rent for the first 3 months. That is all. Even if families have found stable work by that time, it is almost always for minimum wage, which is not enough to pay high rental costs. Therefore, once that initial period of rent support has finished, SCN provides an additional 6 months of support.

Our hope is that this will allow families an extra cushion of time to learn how to budget their savings, in the midst of everything else they are going through in having moved to a foreign country. That is why one of the biggest financial challenges we have is ensuring we have the adequate funds to continue to aid these families in paying their rent. To this day, we have paid close to \$300,000 by providing monthly rent assistance, as well as occasional emergency funds to pay eviction notices and prevent homelessness.

## SUCCESSFULLY HELPED 140+ FAMILIES PAY THEIR RENT

**\$114,944**  
by November 2016

**\$213,893**  
by April 2017

Total projected  
**\$343,893**  
for 2017



# CASE MANAGEMENT

Case management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for options and services with the aim of meeting an individual's or family's comprehensive needs. The case manager helps identify the needs of the client through efficient and effective psychosocial assessments.

Resources and further education is provided to clients to improve their language skills, seek higher education, financial stability, emotional and psychological well being. The case manager's goal is to build rapport, assess clients' needs, focus on clients' strengths and work on their weaknesses by setting goals to: Empower- financial well being. Shape- physical well being. Thrive- emotional and mental well being.



Case Manager's goal is to build rapport, assess clients needs, focus on clients strengths and work on their weaknesses by setting goals to:

- Empower- financial well being.
- Shape- physical well being.
- Thrive- emotional and mental well being.



# NEEDED PROGRAMS

**Women support group** - Help women manage the daily stressors, by providing support and strategies to cope with anxiety and stress.

**Teen/ youth programs** - Drugs, alcohol, dating, fear of police, stress of being a teenager coming into a new school, bullying, how to choose your friends, etc..

**Law Enforcement Engagement** - Community engagement between families and local law enforcement with the purpose of creating a sense of trust

**Financial Literacy Workshops** - Basics of saving, opening and maintaining a checking account I write

**Family nights** - It is also important to value quality- time with family. SCN wants to help families keep that balance by providing events such as bowling night, and fun in the park activities to create something for children to look forward to as well as build new friendships.

**Spiritual and Psychological Counseling** - In the Past we've invited Imam Kifah Mustafa and Imam Hasan Aly and Dr Iyad Alkhouri (Psychologist) to speak to newly resettled families on how to cope with challenges they face.

**English as a Second Language** - English language skills are the most vital tool needed to find better paying jobs and develop skills to help improve their level of confidence purposes.

**College Prep and FAFSA** - As the children of our resettled families grow older, they will soon face the college application process. SCN hopes to help students prepare for college entrance exams and the arduousness of college applications. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) remains the single most important financial-aid application form that students must complete to qualify for student aid, scholarships and loans. Yet the FAFSA form itself has been a major obstacle in getting some students the financial help they need to attend college. One of the workshops SCN provided was one held at Waubensee Community College and given by the director of the financial aid department. Our goal was to bring some of the students who were interested in applying for FAFSA but didn't know how to begin, a chance to help walk them through the process. Once some of the students mastered the procedure they began helping others that couldn't attend.



# SYRIAN DELIGHTS

Informally launched at our women's event last March, Syrian Delights was started with the aim of providing an outlet for some of the women to help support their families without having to leave the comfort of their home. The trauma of resettlement in a new country, oftentimes the conclusion of a 3 year long journey that saw families displaced within Syria's borders, move to a neighboring country, all before having to come to the US, is painful enough. Men and women face equal pressure to secure and maintain employment - this program allows them to feel empowered to do so, while allowing them the time to adjust.

To make an order, have a delicious treat, and support our families in the process, please consider ordering dessert through email at [SyrianDelights@SyrianCommunityNetwork.org](mailto:SyrianDelights@SyrianCommunityNetwork.org)





# FINANCIAL REPORT

# 2016

## Donations Received **\$253K**

In-Kind Donations	\$2000
Organization Contribution	\$122,694
Business Support - LUSH	\$10,000
Individual Contribution	\$102,805
Restricted Donation	\$15,656

## Operations Expenses **\$163K**

Operations	\$3,000
Events	\$3,500
Professional Fees	\$9,400
Insurance	\$3,000
Meetings and Travel	\$11,000
Facilities & Equipment	\$27,000
Programs	\$10,400
Sponsorships	\$1,500
Eid Gifts	\$6,000
Charitable Distribution (Rent Assistance, Zakat...etc)	\$87,000

# 2017

As of April 2017

## Donations Received **\$391K**

Individuals & Businesses	\$332,866
Giving Tuesday	\$58,692

## Operation Expenses **\$406K**

Financial Service Charges	\$5,443
Business Expenses	\$7,677
Professional Expenses	\$9,625
Assistance Payments	\$8,327
Charitable Disbursements	\$213,893
Zakat Distribution	\$6,200
Eid Gifts	\$9,750
Insurance & Liability	\$2,979
Marketing & Advertising	\$3,490
Operations	\$20,424
Programs	\$116,272

رمضان مبارك

# Ramadan

A time of **REFLECTION**,  
A moment of **PURIFICATION**  
& An opportunity of **SHARING**

Zakat Foundation of America's Ramadan program reaches families and communities in more than **40 countries** across the world with food packages, Eid gifts, and livestock donations to help celebrate the holy month.



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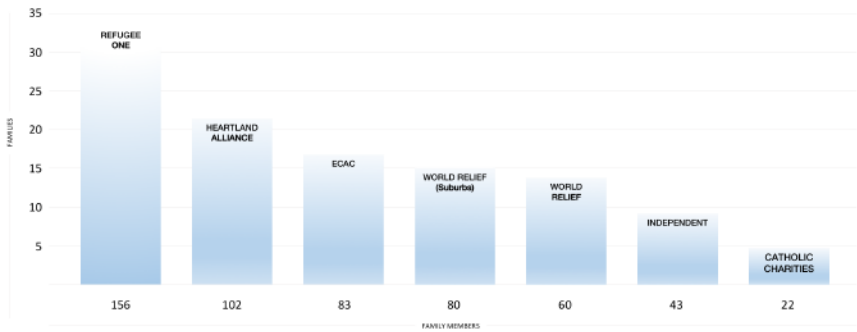
For more information, email us at [info@zakat.org](mailto:info@zakat.org)

Zakat Foundation of America is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization.  
Donations are U.S. tax exempt.

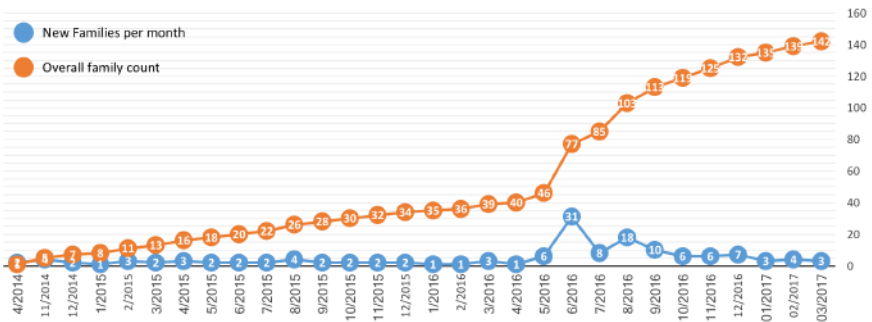




## Organizations & Families



## Family Arrival Timeline



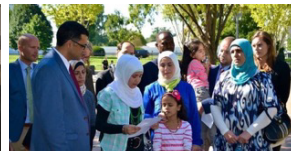
# SCN Open House



# Women's Empowerment Luncheon



# Advocacy



# Job Fair



# Financial Workshop



# Our Children



# HOW CAN YOU HELP SYRIAN REFUGEES

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO FILL OUT A VOLUNTEER FORM AT [WWW.SYRIANCOMMUNITYNETWORK.ORG](http://WWW.SYRIANCOMMUNITYNETWORK.ORG)  
OR SEND AN EMAIL TO [INFO@SYRIANCOMMUNITYNETWORK.ORG](mailto:INFO@SYRIANCOMMUNITYNETWORK.ORG)



MENTOR A FAMILY



GENERAL  
VOLUNTEER



SOCIAL EVENTS  
VOLUNTEER



DONATE A CAR



ORGANIZE  
CLOTHING DRIVE



HELP WITH  
EMPLOYMENT



DONATE  
HOUSEHOLD ITEMS



SyrianCommunityNetwork



HOST A  
DINNER



ORGANIZE BACK  
TO SCHOOL DRIVE



DONATE CTA  
BUS PASSES



TUTOR A  
STUDENT



TEACH BUDGETING



SUPPORT  
WITH RENT



COMMUNITY  
RESOURCES

# LETTERS OF RECOGNITION



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO

RAHM EMANUEL  
MAYOR

April 21, 2017

Dear Friends:

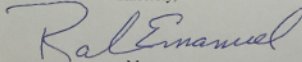
As Mayor, and on behalf of the City of Chicago, I could not be more proud to join all of you in celebrating this auspicious occasion as you cut the ribbon on the Syrian Community Network's new home.

It is no secret that this ribbon cutting comes at a crucial time in America's history as a new administration attempts to reinforce fear. But just as I said in January, the City of Chicago will operate as it always has – as a welcoming city for every resident no matter their ethnicity or citizenship status. As Mayor – and as a neighbor – I believe we must all do our part to ensure our neighbors, friends, and family members know they can always call Chicago home, and that they will always have equal access to all City services and opportunities. I am proud of the tireless efforts of community agencies and city partners like the Syrian Community Network in offering the programming and services necessary to help individuals and families.

One of the most important and impressive aspects of the City of Chicago is that we are truly a city of neighborhoods but more than that, a city of neighbors. We are neighbors of different faiths and backgrounds, and we celebrate one another creating a great cultural exchange. And so we take pride in our individual heritages and our collective culture. That is why the work of the Syrian Community Network – and the opening of this space tonight – is so important. Whether a first- or fifth-generation Chicagoan, we must keep working together to help each other lead successful, independent lives. I commend the Syrian Community Network for working to empower residents.

Again, congratulations on this very special milestone. Best wishes for much continued success.

Sincerely,



Mayor

# LETTERS OF RECOGNITION

BRADLEY SCOTT SCHNEIDER  
10TH DISTRICT, ILLINOIS

WASHINGTON OFFICE:  
1432 LONGWORTH BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-4833

DISTRICT OFFICE:  
111 BARCLAY BLVD, SUITE 300  
CHICAGO, ILL. 60609  
(847) 383-4070



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-1310

April 21, 2017

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NONPROLIFERATION  
AND TRADE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS, INTELLECTUAL  
PROPERTY, AND THE INTERNET

SUBCOMMITTEE ON REGULATORY REFORM,  
COMMERCIAL AND ANTITRUST LAW

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS  
RANKING MEMBER ON THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
AGRICULTURE, ENERGY AND TRADE

Syrian Community Network  
5439 N Broadway, Suite 1  
Chicago, IL 60640

Dear Friends,

I write to offer my sincere congratulations to the Syrian Community Network as you celebrate an open house at your new office in Chicago. Unfortunately, a previous commitment means I cannot be there in person for your ribbon cutting ceremony. Nevertheless, I would like to thank you for the important and generous work that you are doing to help resettle Syrian refugees throughout the Chicago area.

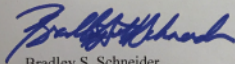
Those forced by the ongoing civil war to leave their homes in Syria have faced unimaginable tragedy and endured inconceivable hardship. The work of SCN ensures that these families who have overcome so much have the resources and network of support needed to finally build a new life here in the United States.

We are a nation founded by people who were fleeing persecution and oppression. As our country's embrace of immigrants and refugees is being tested, your actions send a clear message about the values that represent the best of America.

I hope your work inspires more Americans to stand against the fear that turns us inward and ensure the doors of the United States remain open to the next generation of refugees seeking a safer home and a better future here.

Again, congratulations to the Syrian Community Network on your new offices. I thank you for your work and for setting an example for all in our communities.

Sincerely,



Bradley S. Schneider  
U.S. Representative (IL-10)



AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE

**EMPOWERMENT** through  
**EDUCATION** and **ACTION**

## **AMP** proudly supports **Syrian Community Network (SCN)'s** *efforts and programs*

[www.ampalestine.org](http://www.ampalestine.org)

# ACCOUNTING SERVICES

For All Your Needs

CONTACT

**Thabraize Ahmed**

Phone: 847.485.9407

Email: [info@cafinancial.biz](mailto:info@cafinancial.biz)

Fax: 815.331.5193



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Mutual Fund investing involves risk. Principal loss is possible.





SyrianCommunityNetwork

5439 N Broadway Suite #1  
Chicago, IL 60640

-  [www.SyrianCommunityNetwork.org](http://www.SyrianCommunityNetwork.org)
-  [info@SyrianCommunityNetwork.org](mailto:info@SyrianCommunityNetwork.org)
-  SyrianCommunityNetwork
-  SCN\_Network
-  SyrianCommunityNetwork

Visit the Syrian Community Network's website and learn about the different volunteer opportunities. Fill out the volunteer form or send us an email with any questions.