The Afghan Youth Art Project offers an ongoing opportunity for Afghan refugee youth, aged thirteen to eighteen, to express themselves through art. The course meets with an art instructor for 6 weeks at a time followed by reflection and breaks before resuming for the next 6-week session. Currently, there are 30 students enrolled in the program. The program allows the youth enrolled to explore self-expression and build self-confidence, overcome stress and anxiety, and contribute to the overall improvement of mental health.

The curriculum focuses on developing identity through artwork. Through drawing, painting with watercolors, collaging, and utilizing color theory, the students are learning skills. The course allows the students to explore the techniques and offers space for them to grow and externalize the overwhelming feelings the young adults may be experiencing for their age and external factors such as school and migrating to the United States. Additionally, another focus of the course is building relationships with one another and bonding outside of the family to help them integrate into Houston’s community.

Recently, the students’ artworks from the Afghan Youth Art Project were shown in conjunction with “The Art of Perception - An Evening with Amy Herman,” hosted by our IMPower Women’s Initiative at Congregation Beth Israel. Lawyer, author, and art historian Amy Herman’s interactive lecture focused on challenging perceptions through artwork. The Afghan youths’ art demonstrated how refugee children in the program are utilizing art to process and express their feelings following a traumatic experience. Attendees experienced a shift in their perception of the refugee experience through the eyes of a child.

“Amy Herman offers real insight to looking, listening, and hearing in ways that strengthen one’s ability to interact with diverse groups of people,” said Jodi Bernstein, Vice President for Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships. Within her lecture, attendees participated in partnered perception and communication activities, and learned “the four A’s: Assess, Analyze, Articulate, and Act.”

A key takeaway from Herman’s lecture can be summarized with this quote from Herman. “Change the ways you look at things and the things you look at change.” By challenging our visual perception, we can unlock new ways of seeing the world and understanding one another.
Dear Friends,

As we settle into another Houston summer, I reflect on how far Interfaith Ministries has come over a relatively short period of time. Over the past few years, IM has more than doubled in size during a time of rapid change - from the COVID-19 pandemic to the fall of Kabul that brought thousands of Afghan refugees to our city. We have continued to serve the community during times of crisis, natural disasters, a worldwide pandemic, and economic uncertainty. This growth has had an impact - we are serving more people than ever before with more staff, more physical space, and more infrastructure. We acquired and renovated two new buildings during this time – the Linda and Fred G. Marshall Building in Midtown that houses both Animeals space and the Vic Samuels Center for Volunteerism and Civic Service, and a new Meals on Wheels operations center in Galveston County.

This growth was born from necessity and made possible thanks to the amazing generosity of friends like you. Houstonians rose up during these difficult times, as they so often do, to help their neighbors in need. No doubt, there will be other times of crisis in our future that we have not yet imagined.

IM has been serving Greater Houston for over a half century and the investments we have made in our campus and in operational excellence position us well for generations to come. As the pandemic emergency is coming to an end, the significant COVID-era federal funding that gave us a boost during this challenging time has also come to an end. And inflation is leading to decreased contributions, at a time when our costs are soaring.

Our greatest need at this pivotal moment is general support - flexible funds that may be used where needed most to fill in funding gaps so IM continues to serve the community and is ready for the next challenge. The QR code at this bottom at this page will direct you to an online giving form, or simply visit https://www.imgh.org/donate/

Your continued support ensures that IM will be here to serve our community today and in the future. Thank you for believing in our work! We were founded on the strength of shared beliefs over 50 years ago... and that strength propels us onward.

Sincerely

Martin B. Cominsky

FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO
MEALS ON WHEELS

OPERATION IMPACT PREPARES SENIORS FOR STORM SEASON

Each weekday, Interfaith Ministries’ Meals on Wheels program serves over 5,000 homebound seniors with prepared meals. As storm season approaches, Meals on Wheels works to prepare seniors in the event severe weather disrupts our deliveries. During a severe storm, it can be dangerous and sometimes impossible for delivery drivers to reach every Meals on Wheels senior. Disaster preparedness initiative Operation IMpact provides seniors with 5 days’ worth of shelf-stable meals in the event of a delivery disruption. This emergency supply allows seniors to remain in their home with nutritious food while the danger outside subsides.

Our seniors have come to rely on these supplies ahead of hurricane season with many looking forward to the annual event. In Houston, over a dozen volunteers helped set up the event on Saturday, June 3. Volunteers from lead sponsor CITGO were onsite greeting drivers and loading 700 boxes that were delivered across 77 routes helping to make the event a great success. On Saturday, June 10, 22 volunteers attended in La Marque, ensuring seniors across Galveston County have the supplies they need to weather any storm.

Operation IMpact battled inflation costs with project expenses nearly doubling in the last year. Interfaith Ministries raised $90,000 allowing Meals on Wheels to continue serving the most vulnerable population preparing each senior for an unexpected emergency. Interfaith Ministries thanks lead sponsor CITGO, Energy Transfer Partners, Kroger, and the Clark and Charlene Thompson Foundation for their support of this year’s initiative.

Volunteers ensure Operation IMpact prepares seniors for storm season, but Meals on Wheels and Animeals rely on volunteers year-round. As Meals on Wheels and Animeals continue to grow, so does the need for volunteer drivers. Animeals volunteers deliver a monthly supply of pet food to seniors who might otherwise have to surrender their beloved furry companions. Meals on Wheels volunteers help deliver a hot meal once a week to seniors in their area.

MAKE A SENIOR’S DAY!

Our Meals on Wheels program needs volunteers to help us deliver meals to over 5,000 homebound seniors each weekday. The program not only addresses food insecurity, but also social isolation. Most of our seniors live alone and our drivers are often their only regular visitors! You can bring a smile to a senior’s face by delivering a lunch and a friendly visit. For more info, contact Samantha Jump via email at SJump@imgh.org or by calling 713-533-4989.

For more information or to sign up, scan the QR codes below and help us deliver more than a meal!
The United Nations celebrated World Refugee Day on Tuesday, June 20. Now in its 22nd year, World Refugee Day aims to recognize the contributions of our refugee neighbors, commend their resilience, and raise awareness and empathy surrounding their circumstances. Refugees leave their home countries in search of safety for themselves and for their families, often leaving loved ones and precious belongings behind. Fleeing persecution and forced to start over in a new country, refugees bring their culture and tenacity with them, adding to the rich diversity of Houston - the city they now call home.

This year’s World Refugee Day theme, ‘hope away from home,’ is especially meaningful for Interfaith Ministries where every day is World Refugee Day. Our Refugee Services program provides services and support on a daily basis helping our newest neighbors successfully acclimate to American life. Through language classes, job coaching and placement, cultural orientation, and specialized counseling, over 90% of our clients are self-sufficient and productive members of their community within six to twelve months.

Abdul Majeed Alizad was a successful Urologist in Afghanistan, thriving and looking forward to growing his new family and his practice. Unfortunately, Alizad has never known his country to be without war. Since his childhood, Afghanistan has been at the center of war creating a dangerous environment for those willing to fight back. In 2021, Alizad made an impossible choice to flee in search of safety and risk it all for a better life.

Upon arriving in the United States, Alizad was faced with the difficulty of finding a job without the luxury of transferring his medical degree. Alizad began working with Interfaith Ministries helping refugees through the difficult experience he had just overcome, opting to apply to graduate school to focus on public health. Alizad earned his diploma in 2023 and he is utilizing his professional background and his personal experience to serve others. He is grateful for the opportunities he has found in Houston and despite missing his country of origin, he calls Houston home!

Damile Ardevol Cordoves left her home country of Cuba on November 26 and arrived in the United States on December 5. Her arrival was the final step in a family’s struggle for survival. Cordoves’ husband and three sons had already settled in the United States fleeing the scarcity and oppression Cubans are still experiencing today. Her youngest son is thriving in high school, her eldest son is married with a steady job, and her middle son hopes to follow in his mother’s footsteps and enter the medical field. Cordoves was a nurse for thirty years serving mothers and babies in the field of obstetrics. Now her passion lies in helping others just as Interfaith Ministries has helped her. Cordoves is taking language classes and hopes to work in a clinic with Spanish-speaking patients helping them navigate their journey to wellness. Cordoves’ and Alizad’s stories are a testament to the resilient spirit of those who find hope away from home.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the refugee experience.
CHEVRON LAUNCHES SPANISH-SPEAKING EMPOWERMENT GROUP

Chevron Houston SOMOS selected IM’s Refugee Services program to receive the Chevron Social Investment Funding Humankind Grant for the second year in a row. SOMOS is a Latin and Hispanic employee network within Chevron whose members volunteer regularly with Refugee Services. SOMOS recently served coffee and pastries to Spanish-speaking refugees during an enrichment event at IM. The 2023 grant funding will support the launch of the Spanish-language women’s empowerment group launching in early fall 2023.

IFTAR TOGETHER

Interfaith Ministries’ Refugee Services program hosted Iftar Together on Thursday, April 6 in observance of Ramadan. Guests were led in prayer to break the fast by Imam Muhammad N. Haq who shared a special message reflecting on the personal growth and self-discipline Ramadan inspires. Iftar Together was the first community celebration of Ramadan at IM since the start of the pandemic. Bringing families and friends together in celebration with food and tradition was especially important for the refugees who are adapting to a new country and a new life.

The program featured remarks from President & CEO Martin B. Cominsky, Chief Programs Officer Ali Al Sudani, Community Engagement Program Manager Praveena Lakshmanan, and Community Outreach Liaison Tehmina Masud. Sara McIntosh attended with her 14-year-old grandson Wilson and relished in the interfaith experience finding the occasion both meaningful and educational. “We were welcomed warmly and were delighted to take part in the traditional observance of Ramadan. The night was a wonderful opportunity to learn more about Refugee Services, visit with others in attendance, and enjoy delicious food!”

“The Iftar Together event offers attendees a chance to celebrate shared cultural and religious backgrounds while also celebrating hopes for the future. It’s a wonderful opportunity for interfaith dialogue, which is beneficial for everyone, regardless of their faith background.”

– Megan Ullman

IM hosted an iftar for refugee families
HOW IM COMES TOGETHER:
WHERE OUR PROGRAMS MEET

OBSERVING JUNETEENTH THROUGH ART:
SPARKING CONVERSATION AND CHANGE

Juneteenth, observed annually on June 19, is an opportunity to pause, reflect, and create space for change. Known as ‘Freedom Day’ and often referred to as ‘Emancipation Day,’ Juneteenth commemorates the end of enslavement in the United States. On June 19, 1865, Union Major General Gordon Granger carried out President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in the state of Texas. The Emancipation Proclamation, dated January 1, 1863, had never reached the southern state prolonging slavery and denying independence. Arriving in Galveston, Union troops delivered the long-awaited message of freedom marking June 19 as America’s second independence day.

While signed into federal law in 2021, Juneteenth has been observed in Texas since 1866 most often through church gatherings, food festivals, and family reunions. Public readings and traditional songs recall the historical significance of the holiday and serve as an opportunity to educate as well. In addition to freedom, Juneteenth has come to symbolize resilience, hope, and advancement. Today, Juneteenth receives widespread attention creating space for conversations that will invoke lasting change.

Interfaith Ministries remains committed to being at the forefront of transforming communities through service and dialogue. Volunteer Houston and Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships commemorated Juneteenth through city-wide art-centric efforts inspiring participants to experience the holiday through interactive initiatives.

Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships brings diverse groups together for dialogue and collaboration with the goal of ushering in a more connected community. On June 14, Community Engagement Program Manager Gayla Wilson led an interactive walking tour of Project Row Houses, an innovative and collaborative art-centric space in Houston’s historic Third Ward. The educational tour showcased the unique mission and achievements of Project Row Houses – to preserve Black culture and traditions while creating opportunities that positively impact the surrounding community. Paying homage to the first exhibit in 1993, art is limited to the exterior of the homes inviting viewers to experience the neighborhood through the lens of history and change with an eye for the future.

In conjunction with famed local artist and Absolute Equality founder Reginald C. Adams, Volunteer Houston embarked on a city-wide public art project recruiting 150 volunteers to paint four Juneteenth-themed murals. Each piece is housed in a partnering service organization’s building creating spaces for reflection while amplifying the voices and experiences of Black Americans and their journey toward freedom. Adams’ vibrant and visionary work highlights the missions of partnering organizations Lord of the Streets, United Way Greater Houston, Precinct2gether, and West Houston Assistance Ministries while showcasing where we have been and a renewed hope for the future.

Volunteer Houston hosted four mural dedications in June unveiling each piece with words from Adams, IM President & CEO Martin B. Cominsky, and IM Vice President of Volunteerism and Civic Service Andréa R. Shiloh. Funded in part by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, the Volunteer Houston Juneteenth Public Art Project brings art into spaces of service inviting passersby to engage with the themes of liberation, resilience, and social justice that are central to Juneteenth.
Tapestry Gala

2023

benefiting
Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, November 4
Hilton Americas-Houston

6:00 p.m. Mocktail Reception
7:00 p.m. Program & Dinner

Tapestry Award Honorees:
Susan & Dan Boggio

Spirit of Respect Award:
Pastors Juanita and Rudy Rasmus of
St. John's United Methodist Church

Honorary Chairs:
Brigitte & Bashar Kalai

Co-Chairs:
Karen & Jay Harberg
Tehmina & Faisal Masud

Presenting Sponsor

For more information, please visit imgh.org/gala2023
INTERFAITH RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

ILEAD ENGAGES YOUTH

Interfaith Relations & Community Partnerships celebrated the graduation of 12 8th-grade students who participated in the 2023 iLead Youth Engagement Program.

The participants completed a semester-long leadership program comprised of interactive learning opportunities and explored Houston’s diversity, learned what allyship means, and made a difference through volunteerism and service. City of Houston Council Member Abbie Kamin attended to share a congratulatory message for the graduates.

Throughout the program, the students heard from City Council Member Edward Pollard on the importance of Dr. King’s legacy and his vision of The Beloved Community, respecting one’s faith and cultural diversity, successfully transitioning to high school, and the importance of volunteerism.

Parent Shannon Lowry spoke of her son Owen who participated in the program, “I see him with a new interest in and an eye toward his responsibility and involvement in the community, looking for ways to help through things that inspire him.”

Interfaith Ministries wishes to thank CITGO for their generous sponsorship of the 2023 iLead Youth Engagement Program.

To learn more about the iLead Youth Engagement Program, please visit imgh.org/lead-program.

FALL VITAL CONVERSATION ADDRESSES THE RISING TIDE OF HATE

Please save the date for The Rising Tide of Hate: A Panel Discussion and Dinner Dialogue, to be held on September 12, 2023, from 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. at Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston.

The Dialogue Project was created in 2007 to expand efforts to promote respect and understanding through dialogue, education, and collaboration. The vision was to bring together people of goodwill, standing together as an antidote to the climate of mistrust, conflict, intolerance, suspicion, hate, and extremist thinking impacting communities around the world, and even in our own community. Vital Conversations was developed in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd to create more opportunities for people to learn about the people in our community seeking to make our world more just. This was accomplished by inviting a wide variety of speakers to share their message with the larger community and encourage conversations that matter.

This in-person event in September will bring together a group of experts representing communities that have been impacted by hate-filled rhetoric and actions to foster learning and give information on what the Greater Houston community can do to respond and support those impacted. We are partnering with the Houston Coalition Against Hate to moderate a panel Q&A, followed by small group discussions for 75-100 people to learn more about each other and proposed actions.

The 45-minute panel discussion will be videotaped, and the edited version will be shared on IMGH’s YouTube channel. In addition, we will make these videotapes along with a discussion guide including links to organizations that fight hate. We will provide these resources to adult education groups, young professionals, senior groups, corporate groups, and congregations with the goal of educating and empowering these groups to fight hate.

For more information, please contact gwilson@imgh.org
Houston is the most diverse city in the country. This includes our faith communities - Houston has robust religious diversity. Every major world religion can be found here: the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, but also Buddhism, Hinduism, Bahá’í, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Taoism, and more.

Though Houston is incredibly diverse, we can often be siloed within our own religious communities. All faith traditions make up the vibrant tapestry of Houston's cultural diversity, but may be unaware of our similarities. An Emery Weiner School student spoke about their experience on a House of Worship tour: “There are surprising similarities between religions and communication between different religious leaders is critical for understanding other people’s cultures.”

Interfaith Ministries’ House of Worship tours introduce us to one another, learning not only our theological differences, but our similarities in how we are called to live. We invite you to learn more about your neighbor and join us in building a community.

These groups are geared towards many groups, including but not limited to students in high school and college, youth groups, Sunday School classes, men’s and women’s groups, senior groups, and DEI offices at corporations and universities. Tour packages include three house of worship stops, coordination and scheduling, a tour host from Interfaith Ministries, a donation to each participating site, an interfaith bookmark keepsake, and a tour fee of $750. Discounted rates are available based on need.

Experience Houston’s tapestry of faith, learn from knowledgeable faith leaders, and explore religious, historical, and architectural elements of faith in Houston today. To inquire about a House of Worship tour for your group, please contact Kim Mabry at kmabry@imgh.org.
Companies based in Greater Houston and visiting conferences of all sizes can benefit from Volunteer Houston’s Corporate Volunteer Program (CVP), which connects hundreds of local nonprofits with volunteers. Volunteer Houston’s staff creates interactive and meaningful service projects and reflection experiences that lead to positive change for companies’ teams. The CVP projects can be customized to align with companies’ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals.

The benefits of participating in the CVP program to meet your company’s CSR goals include building a corporate culture that is relationship-centered, increasing brand awareness, and empowering your employees to give back through volunteerism.

The service reflection portion of the CVP program empowers employees to make positive changes in themselves and their environment beyond the project and the workday, turning volunteerism into a service learning experience.

If you are interested in learning more about the CVP program, please visit volunteerhouston.org/companies.

SECOND ANNUAL MAYOR’S VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION AWARDS

On Friday, May 5th, Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston’s Volunteer Houston, in partnership with the United Way of Greater Houston and the City of Houston Department of Neighborhoods, hosted the Second Annual Mayor’s Volunteer Appreciation Awards. The annual ceremony recognized the individual contributions of exemplary volunteers giving their time to support causes and organizations across Houston, with Mayor Sylvester Turner in attendance. Mayor Turner conferred awards in multiple categories.

Interfaith Ministries and Volunteer Houston, in partnership with United Way of Greater Houston, presented the Houston Association of Volunteer Administrators’ (HAVA) prestigious Joan Waite Hanlon Memorial Award for outstanding professionalism in the field of volunteer management.

“Volunteers are the heartbeat of so many service organizations in our city,” said Andréa R. Shiloh, Vice President of Volunteerism and Civic Service with IM, “their dedication and commitment propel causes to thrive and change to happen where it is needed most. It is an honor to take the time and celebrate the individuals and professionals who teach us the value of volunteerism through their efforts.”

Volunteer Houston is a program of Interfaith Ministries that connects individuals, groups, and companies with service opportunities at nonprofit agencies. Volunteer Houston promotes the transformative effects of volunteerism and is a part of IM’s Vic Samuels Center for Volunteerism and Civic Service, which establishes a positive and lasting impact on the Greater Houston community through organized service and leadership. For more information or to sign up, visit https://volunteerhouston.org.
SERVE HOUSTON’S FIRST CLASS GRADUATES

Congratulations to our SERVE HOUSTON AmeriCorps Class 1 members on their Close-of-Service Ceremony on April 6, 2023. We are so proud of each member for completing 450 service hours supporting local nonprofit project sites. Together, our members served over 10,000 hours.

The teams gave presentations on their service at their project sites & received their certificates from Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. Mr. Fred G. Marshall, who made the lead gift for the Linda and Fred G. Marshall Building that houses Serve Houston, was a guest of honor.

Class 2 of SERVE HOUSTON AmeriCorps was sworn in on May 12, 2023. They participated in team-building activities, practiced their AmeriCorps pledge, and were officially sworn in by Interfaith Ministries President and CEO Martin B. Cominsky that afternoon.

We are looking forward to seeing all of the service that Class 2 of SERVE HOUSTON accomplishes!

Serve Houston, along with Volunteer Houston, is part of our Vic Samuels Center for Volunteerism and Civic Service. To learn more about the program, visit volunteerhouston.org/servehouston.

SEEKING AMERICORPS MEMBERS FOR FALL 2023

Our SERVE HOUSTON AmeriCorps Program is gearing up to recruit for Class 3, set to start on Monday, October 2, 2023. SERVE HOUSTON places teams of diverse, service-minded individuals at nonprofit organizations across Houston to build healthier futures. Our members provide outreach, training, and hands-on activities on nutrition, wellness practices, and social and physical fitness to a variety of communities, such as children, babies, seniors, veterans, and individuals with autism. SERVE HOUSTON allows its AmeriCorps members the opportunity to learn, lead and make an IMPact through service... and Get Things Done! Applications will open in Mid-July.

SERVE HOUSTON Member Kel Víctor spoke about the importance of service and participating in programs like the SERVE HOUSTON AmeriCorps program. “To me, service means taking time out of what you would normally be doing to shift the focus away from yourself and to someone else who is in need, whether that be using your time, using your money, using the skills that you have... service can show up in many forms, but really it’s about changing the focus from internal to external.”

APPLICANT SELECTION PROCESS

1. Apply online at volunteerhouston.org/servehouston and submit a cover letter and resume.
2. Attend a 15-minute 1-on-1 virtual screening interview.
3. Attend a 1-hour virtual group interview.
4. Receive, sign, and return a conditional offer letter.
5. Begin enrollment and submit proof of eligibility requirements.
6. Attend in-person Project Site Matching Fair.
7. Complete and pass background checks and drug screening.
8. Receive Member Service Agreement (MSA) and begin service.

SH graduate with Sheila Jackson Lee  Lead donor Fred G. Marshall, Elizabeth Anchondo, Andréa R. Shiloh, Maria Magee  The first graduating class of SERVE HOUSTON
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 15th
MOW Super Saturday
8:30 – 12:30

August 10th
SH Close of Service Ceremony

August 19
MOW Super Saturday
8:30 – 12:30

September
Hispanic Heritage Month

September 12th
IRCP Rising Tide of Hate

September 16th
MOW Super Saturday
8:30 – 12:30

September 22nd
MOW National Centenarians Day

LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY
Interfaith Ministries could not carry out its work without community support! We are grateful to all our donors for their generosity.

Become an IMPact Society member:
www.imgh.org/donate/impact/

To find out how you can include Interfaith Ministries in your estate plans, contact Jerry Haus at jhaus@imgh.org or 713-533-4965.