

## Personal Story: MPC's Refugee Partnership Leads to New Friend

It started with a book I read in my book club – What Is the What by Dave Eggers. After reading one “Lost Boy” from Sudan’s heartbreaking account of adjusting to life in the US as a refugee, I was overwhelmed with wanting to do something, but I wasn’t sure what. Then, through MPC’s involvement with the Six Star Refugee Partnership, I met Yalda.

For the past year and a half, I have been tutoring 18-year-old Yalda each Monday evening at her home. When Yalda’s family arrived a little over two years ago in Atlanta from Uzbekistan (originally from Afghanistan), Yalda spoke several languages – but not a word of English. Nonetheless, she and her younger sister Malalay were enrolled at Grady High School.

High school was hard enough for those of us who had to overcome bad hair, braces, or unfortunate clothing choices – but imagine overcoming a language barrier in a new country. And what comes so naturally to American born students – vocabulary, basic spelling and grammar, even US history – is an everyday struggle for Yalda and her sister. They are constantly playing catch-up, and that’s where their Six Star tutors come in.

Six Star, a group of Atlanta churches that helps refugee families resettle in Atlanta, provided the family with tutors to teach them English basics when they arrived, so my role is to help Yalda better understand her day-to-day homework assignments (thank goodness she needs no help in calculus and chemistry!). I’m also a sounding board for her general questions and observations about life in Atlanta, and in the US. (And, occasionally we end up gossiping about Edward vs. Jacob or Justin Bieber.)

Often Yalda is tired when we meet. She works several nights and on the weekends as a cashier at Publix, to which she walks from her apartment about a mile and a half away. She is one of the two breadwinners in her home (her older brother works two jobs and is hoping to enroll in college soon) since her father passed away shortly after her family arrived in Atlanta, so she feels the weight of responsibility most of us were free from at her age. But Yalda is always smiling, and you would never know it if these worries bring her down.

I’m not a teacher, and there is rarely a night when I don’t have to look something up to explain it clearly. Tutoring has been humbling, challenging, and at times very frustrating because there is so much more Yalda needs than I am able to give. But I hope that the few hours we spend together each Monday will add up to something better for her and her future in the US – and I’m grateful that MPC introduced me to this mission, and to this person who has become so important to me.