



Thought Leadership Corner

By: Kelsey Smith

[About the Author](#)

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Sharing Riches through Mentorship

The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but reveal to him his own. – Benjamin Disraeli

Refugee – fear, persecution, flight, war-torn, trauma

OR

Refugee – courage, strength, resilience, resourcefulness, new opportunities

Headlines might say the former but I insist on the latter.

Headlines also might say help the poor, disadvantaged refugees; give them all the things they lack; teach them our ways. I say that while the spirit of generous giving is always needed (possibly now more than ever), we should focus just as much on encouraging and empowering refugees to delve into the wealth of strengths, talents, ideas, experiences and resources within them.

I’ve been on both sides of the mentoring equation and know firsthand how transformational such a connection can be. Were it not for key people who looked at a starry-eyed but insecure college grad and saw a spirit of adventure and a desire to learn life and serve abroad, I never would have had the courage to move overseas – away from my family and friends and all that was familiar. Now I get to take what I have received and pass it on to others.

I think of one of our afterschool students who, when I first met her, was unhappy, withdrawn and often self-deprecating. Gradually, as our team built rapport and trust with her and as we reminded her again and again of the wonderful qualities she possessed, a light began to dawn. When we talked with students about what they wanted to be and do when they grew up, this little girl would shrug and say “I dunno.” I told her once that I would like it if, when she grew up, she would be herself. She smiled and agreed that was what she wanted to be. When she came back next school year, I rejoiced to see her – a happy, energetic child with a newfound enthusiasm and confidence.

I have seen, over and over, that same spirit of joy in the connections our volunteer mentors and clients make, whether when teaching English through our English at Home program, talking goals and career plans in Mentors for Vocational Pathways, or applying for college and dreaming big in Young Women’s Leadership.

Our mentors insist that they are the ones who benefit from these relationships, as they celebrate the amazing milestones our clients achieve on their pathways to success. Our clients are energized by the gifts of a volunteer’s time and personal connection – gifts that help restore awareness of their own dignity and worth, which persecution and trauma tried to take away from them.

I see this process not as a volunteer making a client into someone better or giving them what they lack, but by calling on the strengths our clients carry within them, helping them to rise up and succeed.

This is what mentorship means, and this is what happens every day in our Adult Education programs. Care to join us?

Kelsey Smith is New American Pathways’ Adult Education Senior Coordinator. She joined the team in 2014 as ESL Instructor and Afterschool Class Instructor and enjoys discovering tea shops and bookstores in Atlanta with her lovely mother.

Find out more about mentoring in our Adult Education programs by attending a Volunteer Orientation. Reach out to Akheia Bowie at volunteerengagement@newamericanpathways.org.