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EMPOWERING DREAMS: AFGHAN SUPPORT PRO- GRAM'S JOURNEY TO DMV AREA

To bring hope and opportunities to Afghan newcomers, especially those who arrived...

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**"I HAVE
ONE GOAL
IN LIFE; I
WANT TO BE
THE BEST IN
EVERYTHING
I DO."**



**CAPTURING COUNTLESS TALES
IN A SINGLE SNAPSHOT**



AFGHAN COMMUNITY CENTER

The Afghan Community Center is a vibrant and inclusive space in Saint Louis that serves as a hub for the Afghan community and fosters connections with the broader community.

The Afghan Community Center seeks to develop a center that reflects the diverse needs, aspirations, and cultural heritage of the Afghan community in the United States. The ultimate goal is to create a welcoming environment that promotes social integration, empowerment, and mutual understanding.

The Afghan Community Center aspires to create a dynamic and inclusive space that celebrates Afghan culture, fosters social cohesion, and empowers individuals and families to thrive within the St. Louis community.

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EMPOWERING DREAMS: AFGHAN SUPPORT PROGRAM'S JOURNEY TO DMV AREA



In December 2023, Moji Sidiqi and Hamdullah Hamdard embarked on a special mission in the DC, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area as part of the Afghan Support Program. Their goal was clear: to bring hope and opportunities to Afghan newcomers, especially those who arrived in the U.S. after August 2021. This trip wasn't merely about getting by; it was about nurturing dreams in St. Louis.

In Maryland, they met Fida Ghazi, the owner of [Al-Madina restaurant](#) and a grocery store. The meeting wasn't just about distributing flyers; it was about engaging with the community. Fida Ghazi expressed support for future gatherings, envisioning bringing together up to 1000 Afghans to discuss opportunities in St. Louis.

Positive Responses and Community Connections: Moji and Hamdullah then connected with Jawid Kotwal, who manages a real estate agency, [Kotwal Homes](#) and oversees the Facebook group "Afghans Living in DC Area." The conversation was streamed live on Facebook, as "Afghans Living in DC Area" is one of the largest Afghan Facebook groups. This initiative provided a valuable experience, enabling them to learn more about the questions and demands of Afghans coming to St. Louis, while also serving as one of the fastest ways to connect with them. The video has been viewed by almost 2,000 people so far, and calls and messages from curious Afghans seeking more information about St. Louis continue to pour in.

As the DMV trip concluded, the success filled every-

one with hope. The next plan is to revisit in 2024 for more in-person meetings. This journey transcends mere travel; it represents a commitment to making St. Louis a welcoming home for Afghan families.

The recent Afghan Support Program journey through the DMV area is a story of unity, overcoming challenges, and sustaining hope. The DMV communities played pivotal roles in the journey, aiding Afghan families not only in survival but also in thriving in their new home. As the Afghan Support Program Country Tour continues, it carries with it the promise of turning dreams into reality and creating a brighter future for everyone in the Afghan community.



Hamdullah Hamdard
International Institute of St. Louis

EMPOWERING AFGHAN ENTREPRENEURS: CELEBRATING ROUND 3 SUCCESS AND ENCOURAGING WOMEN FOR ROUND 4



In a resounding celebration of innovation and resilience, the International Institute of St. Louis proudly announces the successful winners of the Afghan Entrepreneurship Grant in Round 3. This groundbreaking initiative, part of the Afghan Support Program, aims to empower refugees and immigrants from Afghanistan by providing them with the financial support needed to establish, strengthen, and expand their businesses. The event, held at the [Afghan Community Center](#), served as a testament to the positive impact of entrepreneurial endeavors within the Afghan community.

The Afghan Entrepreneurship Grant, now in its third round, has identified and celebrated three outstanding winners, each receiving a \$15,000 grant to fuel their entrepreneurial dreams. This marks a significant milestone as it is the first time three entrepreneurs have been recognized for their innovative ideas and dedication to business development within the Afghan community.

The third-round winners, announced at the ceremony, are Mustafa Sabri, founder of The Everest Hemp in the Mid-west region, Ajmal Darwish, founder of Sultan Home Remodeling, and Pouya Zabihullah, the creative force behind [WedVio Photography](#). These entrepreneurs have demonstrated not only creativity in their respective fields but also a commitment to contributing to the local economy and creating employment opportunities for fellow refugees, immigrants, and the wider community.

Reflecting on the success of the grant program, previous winners include Raza Hassani, owner of a car maintenance workshop, and Hamdullah Hamdard, the founder of [Owlsion Pictures](#) from the first and

second rounds, respectively. The diverse range of businesses emerging from the grant showcases the richness of talent and entrepreneurial spirit within the Afghan community.

The International Institute of St. Louis, the driving force behind this initiative, has long been committed to providing opportunities for immigrants and refugees to thrive. Their comprehensive approach encompasses various aspects of life, including family, health, community, career, and culture. For more information on their impactful work, visit www.iistl.org

As we celebrate the success of Round 3, the Afghan Entrepreneurship Grant is excited to announce Round 4 in early 2024, specifically tailored for Afghan women entrepreneurs. With a \$15,000 grant up for grabs, we encourage Afghan women to apply, share their unique visions, and stand a chance to turn their entrepreneurial dreams into reality. This is an opportunity to not only make a mark in the business world but also contribute significantly to the growth and prosperity of the Afghan community.

The Afghan Entrepreneurship Grant has become a beacon of hope and empowerment, and we look forward to witnessing the continued success and impact it will have on the Afghan entrepreneurial landscape. Together, let's build a future where innovation knows no bounds, and where every dream, regardless of gender, finds the support it deserves.

Hamdullah Hamdard
International Institute of St. Louis

COMMUNITY UNITY LENDS STABILITY FOR NEW ARRIVALS



In 2021, globally, we saw the repercussions of a crumbling government in Afghanistan and how it could and would impact the lives of those still in Afghanistan, as well as those across the world. In a time of uncertainty and instability, the [International Institute of St. Louis](#), along with numerous other organizations throughout the country, stood in solidarity to do what we could to welcome newly arriving Afghans. We were ready to show what made St. Louis great.

While there was a great deal of uncertainty when it came to things such as work authorization, protected status with a backlog of filings on the federal government level, or housing shortages, the International Institute established weekly calls with other like-minded and like-missioned organizations and groups asking "What can we do? How can we help?" These calls continue to this day in 2023 in order to best help, serve, and provide for those new neighbors and community members.

[The International Institute of St. Louis](#) took special time at this year's [Ubuntu Gala](#), celebrated on November 17, to recognize these community partner organizations and the work they have accomplished over the past two-plus years. Special honors were awarded to [Christian Friends of New Americans](#),

[Kindness Begins With Me](#), [Little Angels Foundation](#), [Oasis International](#) and [Welcome Neighbor STL](#).

By standing together, community partners have helped ease the transition of new lives transplanted to the St. Louis region. There are now numerous locations to learn English, to take driving classes, community centers, and more. Through the establishment of the Afghan Community Support Program, there are further opportunities for entrepreneurs new to the region to establish and grow their businesses. Technology access granted many a way to connect with educational resources and services at the International Institute, and beyond.

What has been learned, most clearly over the past two years, is that when community groups band and work together, great things are possible. Shared resources help create the safety net that new arrivals truly need in order to be successful and prosperous in our region.

Carrie Brickey

International Institute of St. Louis

NADIA NADIM: SOCCER CHAMP TO HEALING HERO



In the dazzling world of football, where each kick and goal tells a story, one name stands out – Nadia Nadim. Born on January 2, 1988, her tale is a mesmerizing narrative of triumph over adversity, from the football pitch to the operating room.

Nadia's journey began in Afghanistan, a country torn by conflict. At the tender age of 9, tragedy struck when her father, an [Afghan National Army](#) general, fell victim to the brutality of the Taliban. Fearing for their lives, Nadia, her mother, and four sisters embarked on a perilous journey to Denmark, where safety awaited but dreams were yet to be discovered.

Denmark not only became their sanctuary but also the stage where Nadia's love for football was born. Picture a 12-year-old girl, new to the country, kicking a ball for the first time. That was Nadia. Joining the local club [GUG in Aalborg](#) marked the humble beginning of a journey that would soon resonate across borders.

From the local grounds of GUG, Nadia's trajectory in club football soared. Clubs like [B52 Aalborg](#), [Team](#)

[Viborg](#), [Portland Thorns](#), and [Paris Saint-Germain](#) became the canvas on which she painted victories. Winning the [NWSL Championship in 2017](#) and the French league title in the 2020–21 season showcased Nadia as a force in the football world.

Her international stardom was no less spectacular. Overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, Nadia made her debut for Denmark in the 2009 [Algarve Cup](#). Fast forward to the UEFA [Women's Euro 2017](#), where her pivotal goals against Germany helped Denmark reach the final. In 2020, she played a starring role in securing Denmark's spot in the UEFA European Championship 2022 with a brilliant performance against Italy.

However, Nadia Nadim is not just a football star; she is also a healer. Fluent in nine languages, she recently graduated from [Aarhus University](#) with a medical degree, focusing on reconstructive surgery. Her journey from scoring goals on the football pitch to mending lives in the operating room is a testament to her versatility and determination.

Nadia's journey has not been without challenges. Speaking up about [NJ/NY Gotham FC](#) and facing pressure to undergo surgery in the U.S. instead of abroad shed light on the struggles faced by athletes behind the scenes. It's a testament to her courage and resilience in advocating for fairness and transparency in the sports world.

In 2021, Nadia faced criticism for her views on Qatar, leading to her removal as a goodwill ambassador. However, her redemption arc unfolded through her recent graduation and appointment as a [UNE-SCO Champion for girls' education](#). It's a story of triumph over setbacks, illustrating that true heroes can emerge stronger from adversity.

As Nadia Nadim continues to shine, her journey is a beacon of hope and inspiration. From escaping danger in Afghanistan to scoring goals on international pitches, Nadia has proved that dreams can take you anywhere. Now, as a qualified doctor and a football icon, she stands tall, exemplifying that with courage and hard work, one can turn dreams into reality. The world eagerly awaits the next chapter in Nadia Nadim's incredible journey – a journey that transcends the boundaries of sports and touches the hearts of millions.

Hamdullah Hamdard

International Institute of St. Louis

CITIZENSHIP PROGRAM AT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ST. LOUIS SETS THE STANDARD



[The International Institute of St. Louis](#) hosts a community-wide event entitled "[Pathway to Citizenship](#)." This event is a day-long information session where individuals are presented information in approximately twenty native languages.

The last Pathway to Citizenship event was offered in 2022, but plans are in motion to have the event return in 2024. "This is a key feature of the Citizenship program at the International Institute," said Director of Education, Laura Stallings. "The classes of course are important, but getting information to the community members is just as integral to enrollment and involvement."

The International Institute of St. Louis stands out amongst other programs. Earlier in 2023, this was recognized by funders, too. The United States Cit-

izenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has recently announced that the International Institute of St. Louis' citizenship program has been awarded \$450,000 in grant funding over the next two years.

"Needless to say, we are thrilled that this major grant came through," said Stallings. "Education and immigration certainly have some well-deserved accolades to flaunt, but this is really an agency win because it demonstrates that our program and institute are considered top-notch."

[International Institute of St. Louis](#) offers citizenship classes to all levels of English learners. Each year, the organization hosts the Path to Citizenship event, open and free to all who are looking for more information. Know someone looking to obtain their U.S. citizenship? You can contact the International Institute today to enroll in available classes in the education department.



Carrie Brickey
International Institute of St. Louis

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY: WHERE LEARNING THRIVES

Nestled in St. Louis, [Washington University](#) is more than a campus; it's a vibrant hub of learning, diversity, and tradition. With seven schools offering a range of programs, this institution is a place where students and faculty collaborate across disciplines, pushing the boundaries of knowledge.

Academic Excellence and Collaboration

Academic prowess defines Washington University, where a commitment to excellence runs deep. The institution invested a substantial \$920 million in research and development in 2020, securing its spot as a national research heavyweight. Washington University's dedication to groundbreaking discoveries is evident in its significant contributions to the [Human Genome Project](#), unraveling the genetic mysteries of various species.

Libraries, Museums, and Artistic Expression

Washington University's intellectual landscape extends beyond classrooms. [The Olin Library](#), the state's largest, is a treasure trove with over 4.2 million volumes. [The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum](#), established in 1881, adds an artistic flair to campus life, showcasing works from renowned artists and fostering cultural appreciation.

Diversity and Engaging Student Life

Diversity is more than a buzzword at Washington University; it's a way of life. The campus hosts a dynamic mix of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, ensuring a rich tapestry of perspectives. With 60% of undergraduates involved in faculty research, the university is committed to

providing hands-on experiences for all, shaping the next generation of innovators. Student life thrives with over 300 organizations, offering something for everyone. From large-scale events sponsored by the Washington University Student Union to student-run musical groups, the campus buzzes with energy and creativity.

Residences, Athletics, and Timeless Traditions

Home is where the heart is, and Washington University ensures that over 50% of undergraduates living on campus feel at home. [The South 40 residences](#), recognized for having the "Best College Dorms" in 2020, provide a nurturing environment for students.

In sports, the [Washington University Bears](#) have clinched 23 NCAA Division III Championships, embodying the university's commitment to sportsmanship and achievement. The club sports program adds a community dimension, promoting well-being and a sense of belonging.

In essence, Washington University in St. Louis is more than an institution; it's a dynamic ecosystem where academic excellence, creativity, and tradition converge. Students don't just learn here; they embark on a transformative journey, becoming architects of their intellectual destinies within the legacy of excellence that defines this remarkable institution.

Hamdullah Hamdard
International Institute of St. Louis

KABUL UNIVERSITY: A SAGA OF PERSEVERANCE AND RENAISSANCE



Nestled in the heart of Afghanistan, [Kabul University](#) stands as a testament to resilience, navigating the tumultuous tides of political upheaval and conflict over the past nine decades. Established in November 1932, this academic institution has not merely weathered storms but has emerged as a beacon of hope and education for the nation.

Founding Years (1932 - 1978)

In its nascent years, Kabul University experienced a transformative phase between 1932 and 1978, witnessing the establishment of pivotal faculties that laid the foundation for modern [higher education in Afghanistan](#). [The Faculty of Medicine](#) marked the beginning, followed by the blossoming of the Faculty of Law and Political Science, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Literature, Faculty of Sharia (Islamic) Law, Faculty of Agriculture and Engineering, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Pharmacy, and the Faculty of Arts. The structural groundwork laid during this period accounts for nearly half of the existing infrastructure of Kabul University.

Challenges and Stagnation (1979 - 2001)

However, the university faced a stagnation period after 1978, marked by political turmoil and civil unrest. Despite some progress in the late '70s and early '80s, the subsequent years saw a decline. Conflict and war wreaked havoc, resulting in the destruction of facilities, the emigration of talented faculty, and the loss of working relations with prestigious institutions.

Rehabilitation and Progress (2001 to Present)

The dawn of the 21st century ushered in a new era for Kabul University. The political landscape shifted in 2001, providing an opportunity for the

university's revival. This period witnessed a comprehensive overhaul across academic, infrastructure, and governance realms. Academically, Kabul University expanded its faculties, establishing departments in Computer Science, Environment, Administration, and Public Policy. The Faculty of Science diversified into Mathematics, Physics, Biology, and Chemistry. Curriculum updates, the introduction of Master's and PhD programs, and the recruitment of young scientific staff propelled academic excellence. Partnerships with national and international institutions were revitalized, and laboratories were equipped and renovated.

Evolution of Access: Modern Challenges

Despite security threats and the challenges posed by COVID-19, Kabul University has displayed remarkable adaptability. Initiatives such as increasing female enrollment, providing dormitories for thousands of students, offering better facilities for the visually impaired, and ensuring transparency in academic staff systems underscore a commitment to inclusive growth.

Kabul University stands as a symbol of Afghanistan's intellectual resilience and determination to overcome adversity. As it navigates the complexities of the contemporary world, this institution remains poised to meet the economic and social needs of the nation, reflecting a legacy of unwavering commitment to education and progress.

Hamdullah Hamdard

International Institute of St. Louis

UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF COFFEE



Ever wondered if your favorite morning brew could do more than just kickstart your day? Let's dive into the health benefits of [coffee](#) and tea.

Beyond being a caffeine jolt, coffee boasts numerous health perks. Its caffeine content not only wakes up the central nervous system but also provides stamina and increased energy. Research suggests that regular coffee consumption might lower the risk of diseases like diabetes by influencing sugar metabolism.

The activation of beta cells in the pancreas is a star feature of coffee's benefits, producing insulin that regulates blood sugar levels. Studies hint at coffee fortifying the liver, potentially reducing risks of [Alzheimer's](#) and [Parkinson's](#). Acting as a metabolic maestro, coffee can tweak the body's metabolism for better weight management. It's a boon for physical enthusiasts, supporting weight regulation and acting as a motivator.

Recent studies strengthen the claim that regular coffee intake is linked to a reduced risk of certain cancers. However, the caveat is the potential elevation of blood pressure due to caffeine, urging caution for those with [hypertension](#).

Pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children should approach coffee cautiously due to its interference with calcium absorption. Excessive consumption may correlate with an increased risk of fractures and certain bone diseases. Shifting focus to tea, recent studies

praise its potential for longevity and a healthier life. Green tea, rich in [antioxidants](#), combats inflammation. Regions where green tea is a staple show a correlation between tea consumption and a reduced risk of diseases.

Yet, recent research suggests caution against excessive hot tea consumption due to a potential risk of esophageal cancer. Letting tea cool before sipping is advised.

Memory loss concerns surfaced in 2020, attributed to increased work demands. Persistent memory loss, however, could signify a more serious issue influenced by genetics, age, and lifestyle choices.

Engaging in mental and physical exercises, solving puzzles, and addressing mental health enhance memory and reduce the risk of memory-related diseases. Quality sleep, a balanced diet, and avoiding excessive sugary foods contribute to a healthy brain and prevent cognitive decline.

Consistent mental and physical exercises, treating the brain like a muscle, strengthen memory. A balanced lifestyle, free from habits contributing to cognitive decline, is paramount. Regular consumption of nutritious, low-sugar foods is recommended for preserving memory.

Reducing sugar intake positively impacts memory and lowers the risk of Alzheimer's disease. Excessive use of artificial sweeteners and high sugar intake may negatively affect brain health.

Both coffee and tea, with their caffeine content, have been linked to improved cognitive function and memory enhancement. Moderation is key, and consulting healthcare professionals can determine suitable caffeine intake based on individual health conditions.



Fawzia Shahab
Afghanistan National Radio TV
Former Anchor

DISCOVERING AFGHANISTAN'S RICH HISTORY: A VISIT TO THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE



On a crisp Saturday morning, I charted my day's course with a visit to the [National Archive in Kabul](#). Armed with my camera, notebook, and pen, I anticipated a day of beauty and excitement. Exploring historical sites, especially in one's homeland, is a delightful experience, where every step as a tourist is laden with fascinating discoveries. The National Archive is a sanctuary for collecting and safeguarding the documents and cultural heritage of Afghanistan. Its inception dates back to the year 1271 solar (around 1892 AD) during the reign of [Amir Abdul Rahman Khan](#) in the Chermgar Gardens of Kabul. Transforming into the National Archive in 1356 (1977 AD) during [President Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan's](#) tenure, it absorbed historical works from places like the Kabul Museum and the [Public Library](#), becoming the custodian of the country's written legacy.

Divided into two sections, the National Archive houses a treasure trove of handwritten copies and historical documents. Presently, it boasts around a thousand handwritten copies and an impressive 150,000 historical documents, some dating back to the first century.

The handwritten copies section contains an array of works encompassing verses of the Quran, interpretations, noble sayings, missions, collections, literary books, literature, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and various calligraphic pieces from the first century. Among the noteworthy works are a copy of [Ferdowsi's Shahnameh](#), authored by Abdul Qasim Ferdowsi, and the [Divan of Hafez](#). Additionally, a printed book in [Kufic script](#), considered the script of Hazrat Uthman, stands as a testament to the archive's diverse collection.

The crowning jewel of the National Archive is

a 22.5-meter-long print of the Quran, presented in twenty-two halves. Equally captivating is the invitation letter of [Prophet Muhammad](#) and Hazrat Umar in Kufic script, both showcased in meticulously organized glass houses.

As I immersed myself in these historical artifacts, the art of ancient history unfolded before me. These works eloquently display the evolution of science and art throughout history, emphasizing the enduring importance of learning and writing to our ancestors. The archive's diverse collection introduces us to famous faces, kings, rulers, pleasant landscapes, and items like the Red Rose Stick displayed in ornamental frames. This visual journey through the annals



of Afghanistan's history offers a glimpse into the problem-solving efforts and the thoughts and issues of their respective times.

My visit to the National Archive of Afghanistan proved to be an enriching experience. I had the opportunity to interact with the archive's officials, capturing invaluable photographs and documenting essential topics in my notebook. Such historical journeys, including visits to other landmarks, hold a distinct importance for me, a rarity not found in every locale.

In reflection, no nation can chart a good present or secure a better future without acknowledging its past. Countries that flourished historically derive strength from their cultural and historical heritage, providing a solid foundation for their present and future. Fortunately, the National Archive of Afghanistan stands as a beacon, showcasing a vibrant aspect of Afghan cultural art.

Elyas Mirzaee
Kabul - Afghanistan

KABUL EXPRESS STL WELCOMES PRIVATE CELEBRATIONS

[Kabul Express STL](#), a hidden gem nestled in the Carondelet neighborhood of St. Louis, has recently unveiled its expansive new location at [7704 Ivory St.](#), inviting patrons to embark on a culinary journey that transcends borders. Originally a modest takeout spot in South County, the restaurant has evolved into a spacious haven for food enthusiasts seeking a fusion of Afghan, Indian, and German influences.

Owned by the multi-cultural gastronomic virtuoso, Kauash Adalat, Kabul Express STL breathes life into the vibrant tapestry of Adalat's culinary experiences from Afghanistan to India, Germany, and now the United States. With a heartfelt touch, Adalat collaborates with his wife, Samera, his sister Miriam, and his two sons, Roman and Romal, to curate a menu that truly emanates from the heart.

The restaurant's diverse menu, a symphony of flavors, showcases perennial favorites alongside innovative dishes. Diners can indulge in succulent chicken and beef kebabs, fragrant pita bread, delicate mantu beef dumplings, wholesome rice bowls, crisp falafel, and hearty gyros. A delightful surprise awaits with weekly and daily specials, including the indulgent braised lamb shank and a zesty lamb kebab rolled with beef, adding an extra layer of excitement to every visit. Kabul Express STL, spanning an impressive 2,700 square feet, is a modern gourmet food haven with an aesthetic fusion of wood floors and industrial lighting. The spacious setting, adorned with contemporary charm, can comfortably host up to 75 patrons, inviting them to savor each bite in a relaxed and inviting

ambiance. As daylight fades into evening, Kabul Express STL transcends beyond a mere dining experience. The restaurant's strategic operating hours, currently spanning 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. from Monday to Friday, set the stage for weekend hours to be introduced in the coming weeks. This expansion aims to cater to patrons eager to savor the restaurant's delectable offerings during leisurely weekend sojourns.

Beyond its gastronomic delights, Kabul Express STL now extends an invitation to host private events for those seeking a unique venue for celebrations. With the ability to accommodate up to 75 people in their new location, the restaurant provides an intimate and culturally rich setting for birthdays, anniversaries, and corporate gatherings.


As patrons step into the warm embrace of Kabul Express STL, they aren't just entering a restaurant; they are embarking on a transcendent voyage that promises to delight their taste buds, ignite their senses, and create lasting memories. It's not just about the food; it's about the artistry, the passion, and the familial touch that transforms every meal into a celebration of life's diverse flavors. Whether reveling in a quiet dinner for two or celebrating with a gathering of loved ones, Kabul Express STL welcomes all to experience the richness of its culinary offerings and the warmth of its inviting ambiance.

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