Transforming the Lives of Displaced Communities Through Technology

A Model for Extending Digital Literacy to Refugees

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Digital Participation for the Next 50%

The N50 Project accelerates digital adoption and community enrichment through innovative applications, network design, and business models to enable the next 3.9 billion people to participate in the digital world. Broadband adoption will be accelerated and sustained-globally, through commercial, non-profit, government, and community partnerships.

The N50 Project focuses on tech-neutral connectivity, literacy, language, and convening partners to deliver human-enriching applications around education, healthcare, agriculture, and local entrepreneurship. We believe this model in partnership with private enterprise is the opportunity to scale.

Overview

In December 2021, 61 young Afghan women refugees arrived on a chartered flight touched at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. All of the Afghan women refugees were previously students of the Asian University for Women. The students are all at different stages of their academic careers: some students require intensive English language training and have limited digital literacy, while others are partially into their modules or close to entering the workplace.

Donated laptops, sponsorships, and grant funding have enabled these students technology access to: counseling via telemedicine, the Arizona State University (ASU) academic programs, on-line learning resources, mentoring programs, daily digital resources and platforms to stay in touch with family and friends. A number of the students have been signed up for the first phase of the N50 Project's Refugee Mentoring Program, and with the help of the program, students will be provided with interactions with difference cultures, explore career options, build networks for advice and advocacy and much more.

Digital equality and literacy are essential tools to empower refugees to become self-sufficient individuals and to enable them to participate meaningfully in the communities where they re-settle and regain independence. Collaborative initiatives such as the N50 Project support a holistic and coordinated approach to harness the power of technology in transforming the lives of displaced communities and the success of such projects allows architecture blueprints to be developed, replicated and shared across digitally-disadvantaged communities around the world.

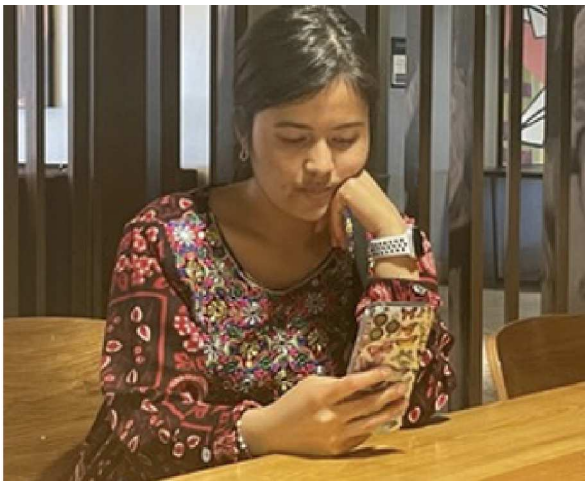
Helping Afghan Students to Navigate a Brighter Future

On the night of 15 December 2021, a chartered Delta flight touched down at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport with 61 young Afghan women refugees on board. Escaping the turmoil of the Taliban take-over, the women had fled from Kabul to Saudi Arabia, Spain, Virginia, Wisconsin and, finally, Arizona.

N50 Project partners Arizona State University (ASU), Dell, Intel and World Wide Technology (WWT) are supporting their resettlement through scholarships, grant funding, the donation of laptops, multi-lingual tutoring and a mentoring program.

Using Technology to Transform the Lives of Displaced Communities

Digital equality and literacy are essential to empower refugees to become self-sufficient individuals and to enable them to participate meaningfully in the communities where they re-settle. Collaborative initiatives such as the N50 Project can support a holistic and coordinated approach to harness the power of technology in transforming the lives of displaced communities.



These Afghan refugees were previously students of the Asian University for Women, situated in Bangladesh. When the pandemic struck, the university had to close its campus and the students had to return home and switch to online learning. Following the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in August 2021, life for the students changed even more dramatically.

Pam DeLargy, Executive Director of Education for Humanity at ASU, was responsible for coordinating the resettlement of the students. The shock of having their lives upturned and families torn apart was deeply traumatic for the women under her care and many of them required 24-hour counseling

support and emergency medical assistance before they could be offered help with their academic transfer.

Dell laptops donated by WWT and Intel through Welcome to America Project were vital in supporting the medical care required. “We had to register the students on the state healthcare system, secure insurance, arrange appointments and receive referrals – some of which was done via video,“ De Largy explains.

The laptops enabled the students to access counseling via telemedicine, to support them in coping with the stress and anxiety they experienced.

Students accessing the health care portal

The students were also dependent upon digital enablement to orientate themselves, find out where to purchase basic supplies, arrange transport and keep updated on news from back home.

Since settling on campus, the laptops have become an indispensable part of the students’ academic life, as they need to connect to on-line learning resources in order to do their homework, download class presentations and complete exercises.

Students working on class presentations and degree applications

David Stevens, Chief Strategic Advisor at WWT notes: “We are committed to making a positive impact by caring for people and communities. The best way WWT can make a new world happen is to take what we’re best at – deploying transformational technologies – and collaborate with like-minded partners such as the N50 Project, on bold initiatives for the greater good. Our goal is to create a blueprint that can be leveraged and scaled to extend digital literacy to refugee communities nationwide.”

The student refugees are all at different stages of their academic careers: some require intensive English language training and have limited digital

literacy, while others are a year or more into their modules or preparing to enter the workplace. ASU's extensive academic program offers them a vast range of majors to choose from and they will also have access to a mentoring program, which will provide essential support in establishing their career paths.

Turning Aspirations into Achievements

While describing their journey to Phoenix, some of the students talked about how difficult it was traveling to a strange country without their families or any of their belongings for comfort. The environment, culture, food and people were all unfamiliar: everything was completely new and they had to adapt to different challenges constantly.

"One can't survive without technology today: we need it for our studies, research, doctor's appointments, to help us find our way on and off campus and for legal assistance," notes one of the women.

However, technology is a mixed blessing for these student refugees. As the only source of connection with family and friends is video calls, it is a constant reminder of the hardship their loved ones are enduring in the dire situation in Afghanistan. So, while digital enablement heralds renewed hope for a brighter future with greater opportunities, it also brings home the ongoing stress and emotional strain of communities torn apart by conflict.

Despite the significant obstacles they have had to overcome, the students say they are exploring ways to manage stress and depression in order to stay focused on their studies. Their aspirations remain high and they are determined to find good jobs and pursue peaceful futures.

As daily life has become more familiar and the future becomes clearer, the students are finding it easier to settle. Through the strong support of the local

community and their hard work and resilience, these brave women will be able to navigate brighter lives and regain their independence.

Opening Minds to New Possibilities Through Holistic Mentoring

The world is at your fingertips: ASU's Thunderbird School of Global Management

Twelve students have been signed up for the first phase of the **N50 Project's Refugee Mentoring Program**. Mentors from Intel will offer the students one-to-one support, adopting a holistic approach in helping each individual to achieve their personal, educational and professional goals.

Skills and guidance will be provided to assist them in interacting with different cultures, exploring career options, creating a resumè and building a network for advice and advocacy.

Daniel Gutwein, an N50 Board of Advisor concludes: "The global reach of the N50 Project gives us access to a wealth of knowledge, experience and languages. By providing opportunities for the students to learn new skills, we can open their minds to new possibilities.

It has been inspiring for us to explore how we can utilize these unique abilities to benefit displaced and disadvantaged communities, working with them and also walking alongside them as they find their path to self-determination."

References

All Image Credits: Arizona State University

This project was made possible by the support of the following N50 Partners: Arizona State University (ASU), Dell, Intel, Welcome to America Project, and World Wide Technology (WWT).

About the N50 Project

The N50 Project is the Geeks Without Frontiers led initiative that is focused on the next 50% of the planet that does not fully digitally participate. The N50 partners' primary focus is to launch projects for marginalized communities using best-practice blueprints for long-term delivery of ICT solutions. N50 is an open, inclusive ecosystem that is fueling transformation in some of the world's most challenging environments. Our live 'Digital Participation' projects in the field are designed to enable communities to access the education, health, social and financial benefits that flow from affordable and sustainable digital inclusion.

To learn more about the N50 Project, visit: www.n50project.org