

IN GOOD FAITH from page 1

she needed to remove her veil in order to assimilate. She's faced enormous challenges because people think of her as a hostage, even though she's wanted to wear the veil since she was 13. We've been supporting her with rent and food for years. She's hoping to get a job with Intel.

I think the best solution for these women is to create your own business. Islamic Relief USA is piloting a program in Washington D.C. that would provide seed money for small, home business proposals.

For Ramadan fasting during the month of August, we have a fundraiser to buy Winco food cards. That way people can shop for food they want to eat. Throughout the year, we also provide hot meals and moving assistance.

S.B. *What do you think of Muslim/American relations right now, and how can we get to a better place?*

L.H.: When you hear how many Americans are automatically suspicious of Muslims, that's crying out for attention. (A poll one year ago by Time magazine found that more than 4 in 10 Americans say they have an unfavorable view of Muslims, significantly more negative than opinions of other faiths).

Jews, Vietnamese, Japanese ... many groups went through the same discrimination. We can get through it. There's good and bad in everybody. You

L.H.: There was a silver lining in 9/11. American Muslims realized that we have isolated ourselves so much. It's our own fault that a majority of Americans distrust us. How would they know? We never gave (most Americans) the opportunity to get to know us.

It changed after 9/11. All of a sudden mosques that closed their doors to non-Muslims opened their doors and welcomed their neighbors to learn about their community and understand their values.

After the Pioneer Courthouse Square attempted bombing, Japanese Americans really kicked into action. Japanese Americans, including my husband, testified in court about the discrimination and profiling that happened to their families during World War II.

I believe the case of Mohamed Mohamud was a way to justify the need to have the JTTF (Joint Terrorism Task Force) in Portland. We know we can't trust the FBI. The FBI has a lot to do to prove themselves to Arab Muslims.

Our relationship with the Portland Police Bureau is much better. They've tried to extend themselves. We work with the Arab and Muslim Police Advisory Council to encourage the Muslim and Arab communities to report hate crimes.

The police department wants to get Muslim youth interested in joining the police force. Parents, especially refugee parents who come from dictatorship countries, are the biggest hurdles to this goal. For the future of the community, we

have to find a way to reeducate parents, because we need policeman, firemen and politicians from the Muslim community.

S.B. *How do people hear about your relatively small organization, and how do you get funding?*

L.H.: Thirty percent of people we help say, "I know you because you helped my friend." People hear about us through mosques, 211, United Way and nonprofits who link to us.

Funds come mostly from individual

donations. Although, we received a \$3,000 grant from the McKenzie Foundation to create a youth program for kids that are falsely stereotyped - Jewish, African American, Somali Muslim, Japanese American, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. A handful of high schoolers signed up for eight workshops. We asked them to write down stereotypes of each other anonymously on index cards, and by the end of the sessions, they realized they were more like each other than different.

It was a really positive group, and something I think is desperately needed in this country with terms like Islamophobia and so many negative pictures and connotations of Muslims.

ISOS is all volunteers. Each person on

the board comes from a different cultural background. No one can accuse us of being homogenous.

We decided money could never compensate for the work we do, so we all have other jobs. Sometimes you take ISOS's work to bed with you, but when you get through it and you see there's light at the end of the tunnel, it reenergizes you for the next case.

S.B. *Health-care wise, what is ISOS doing to help?*

L.H.: A while back, Providence St. Vincent Medical Center contacted us and said, "we don't know how to deal with health

"So many times people have come to me saying, 'you were my last hope. And not only have you given me hope, but you have also given me awareness.'"

care for Muslim patients." So we sat down with their chaplain and created a brochure that talks about Muslim modesty, food, grieving customs, and comfortable interaction between doctor and client. OHSU got wind of the brochure and is also very excited about it.

A lot of Iraqis coming to the Portland area have mental issues, especially PTSD, and it takes a while to get disability funds and find jobs. We try to help them.

S.B. *Who are your collaborators?*

L.H.: We collaborate with Catholic Charities, Lutheran Community Services, Neighborhood Housing Services, Friendly House, Jewish Family Services, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), and the Oregon Food Bank. We reach out to mosques, including As-Sabr mosque on Capitol Highway, Bilal mosque in Beaverton and the Muslim Educational Trust in Tigard. Right now, we are trying to network with JOIN and Outside In to get homeless off the streets. We work with the Oregon Islamic Chaplains Organization to help ex-prisoners get on their feet again and also address domestic violence.

S.B. *What is it like for refugees you help adjusting to life in the U.S.?*

L.H.: A couple years ago, it wasn't that hard for a refugee to find a job, but now it's very hard. They only have eight months to find a job, house and learn English before TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) runs out. The nice thing about IRCO is they extend support after eight months. In comparison, when the Vietnamese came to the U.S., they were provided with three years of support.

Refugees to the U.S. wait in their home countries to get into the U.S., and they think it will all be OK once they get here. It's a shock when it's not. It begs to ask, if we have the ability to help make them self-sufficient in their own countries, why don't we help them rebuild their own countries?



PHOTO COURTESY OF ISOS

Volunteers at one of the Day of Dignity events, organized by American Muslims to provide meals, clothes and services to people experiencing homelessness.

can't stamp all Muslims.

Working with youth and neighbors, getting the next generation into politics and the police force - that's the way we can make an impact. Our measure of success would be to have advocates speak out on our behalf who are not Muslim.

That's where ISOS comes in. So many times people have come to me saying, "you were my last hope. And not only have you given me hope, but you have also given me awareness."

S.B. *How did the September 11, 2001 attacks and the November Pioneer Courthouse Square attempted bombing affect your own community and ISOS?*

ISOS from page 1

opportunity to start their lives over. ISOS draws on a network of mosques and individual donors, and is composed entirely of volunteers with a board that, by design, represents diverse cultures, including the USA, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Ghana, Palestine and Kenya.

What began as a network to assist arriving and needy families from the Muslim community, has broadened to include everyone seeking help to survive.

Since it's founding as a nonprofit in

2003, ISOS has raised \$300,000 directly for services for the disabled, elderly, single mothers and the homeless. In addition to the Day of Dignity, the organizations' volunteers conduct refugee resettlement assistance, distribute furniture and household items, youth prejudice forums, and food drives, among other efforts and projects.

Board members attest to the challenges their clients face in assimilating on a tight deadline of support; learning a new language, finding employment, and raising children in an entirely different culture

from the one they left behind. They also see the survivors of physical and emotional trauma, more familiar with systems of corruption than of support.

"These people, they fall through the cracks," said Issam Abu-Khater, a board member for ISOS who is originally from Palestine. "Then they come to ISOS. They come to us and we fill the gap. ... In the past three years we have seen an increase in the number of people benefiting from our organization, and we've seen many, many more requests."