



WHEN AN EDUCATOR IS MORE THAN A TEACHER

Sajeeda* was born in Burma, but grew up as a refugee in Malaysia, where she and her family never felt like they belonged.

"We had really no rights and the people never accepted us," she says.

Though schooling for girls is not typically prioritized in Burma and Malaysia, Sajeeda's father felt that education for his four daughters was important. Even attending public school cost money, so Sajeeda's father worked illegally to earn enough to send his two oldest daughters, Sajeeda and her sister, to school.

After many years in Malaysia, the family received a call from the United Nations that they were going to be resettled in America. Sajeeda's dad was ecstatic, knowing that his daughters would be able to get a good education there. Before moving to the U.S., Sajeeda's father encouraged her to marry her then-boyfriend. The couple married shortly before leaving Malaysia.

In August 2015, Sajeeda and her family moved to Buffalo, while her husband went to Canada.

"Everyone is accepting us here," she explains. "Life is so much easier."

When Sajeeda was in high school, she became pregnant. A teacher

recommended that she join Jericho Road's Priscilla Project maternal health program. Through the program, Sajeeda got connected to Sondra Dawes, director of program operations, who acted as her mentor. She also became a patient at the organization's medical clinic on Broadway.

"Day by day when I was pregnant with my baby, they helped me so much," she recalls. "If I need to talk with someone, I can just call Sondra."

When Sajeeda's son, Sajeed, was two years old, Jericho Road invited the family to join ParentChild+, the home visiting early childhood development program. Through the program, Sajeed received free books and toys every week and Sajeeda became close with the family's assigned Early Learning Specialist, Kawanna.

"Kawanna is more than a teacher," shares Sajeeda. "When I think I can't handle things, she would tell me, 'No, you got this, girl.' She stays so calm."

During the winter of 2021, Sajeeda's family ran into some challenges.

"I was having such a hard time. My husband works in Canada and was coming back and forth. When the border shut down, he decided to stay with us but he can't work in the United States, so I had to work, which I have never done before. It was very hard. I would call Kawanna crying because it was so hard to be away from my kids."

In February 2021, the pipes in Sajeeda's house froze. The family's landlord had been stuck in Burma since March 2020 and said they should just "do the best they could" to fix it themselves because she couldn't send any money to hire a plumber. Sajeeda's husband was ill and in the hospital. Sajeeda didn't know what to do.

"I tried to not show it to Kawanna but she figured out that something was wrong. There was no water in the house for days. I talked to her and she said they would send some people over to look at it."

Kawanna and ParentChild+ coordinator Melissa Christian delivered jugs of water and brought in 716 Ministries, Jericho Road's facilities management company,

cont. on inside

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who also work in home repair and renovation. The team from 716 made several trips to the house to unfreeze the pipes for free and even paid a professional plumbing company to repair a broken pipe.

Kawanna also knew that Sajeeda wanted a supportive job, so she recommended her for a multilingual doula position with the Priscilla Project.

"I want to help others," Sajeeda says. "So many moms have to go [to the hospital] on their own and their husband stays home and they have to struggle with understanding the doctor, who is using sign language to try to explain and they don't understand. I want to be that person to stay by their side, to comfort them, to be trusted."

Sajeeda is now in doula training. Her son Sajeed is three and a half and finished

his first year of ParentChild+ in May. Her daughter, who is one and a half, will be joining ParentChild+ in the fall.

"I want to say thank you to Kawanna," Sajeeda concludes. "If she wasn't there for me, I could have been in the street."

** Name altered to protect patient privacy. Photo is of a different ParentChild+ family and Early Learning Specialist.*

Fostering spiritual connection & community during a time of social distancing

When COVID-19 shut down nonessential in-person interactions last year, Jericho Road's spiritual care department quickly transitioned. The team shifted from working in the clinics, where they would provide daily face-to-face spiritual support to patients and staff, to focusing completely on caring for Jericho Road employees directly impacted by COVID-19. During the first few months of the pandemic, the department directed its efforts to helping sick and quarantined employees with grocery drop-offs, medication runs, and spiritual support.

When global shortages threatened to cut off Jericho Road's supply of masks and gowns, the team also took the lead on organizing a community-supported effort to produce homemade PPE.

"People in the community were so desirous of ways to help," says Director of Spiritual Care Ruth Strand. "This was a way for people to care for our neighbors and frontline workers."

Strand and fellow spiritual care team member Joelle Herskind recruited an army of volunteers who sourced fabric and elastic, cut out patterns, sewed masks and gowns, delivered supplies to volunteers, and transported finished products to Jericho Road.

Volunteer sewists contributed hundreds of handmade items, while local and national corporations donated more than 60,000 machine-made masks and gowns. The team was especially impressed with the community's dedication and resourcefulness in the face of supply shortages.



Some of the hundreds of handmade masks that were donated by local sewists.

"People were ordering elastic from some upholstery place in Chicago just so Jericho Road could use it for mask production," remembers Herskind.

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As the pandemic wore on, Strand, Herskind, and the rest of the team began making check-in phone calls with patients who had previously accepted or requested spiritual care support in the clinics. One of Strand's calls was to Mikayla*, a patient who she had met for the first time only a day or two before the shutdown went into effect.

"I remember one of our doctors asked me to go in and see a patient who wanted to talk and pray with someone," shares Strand. "She told me that she was really overwhelmed – with health issues and financial issues and job issues. It just felt hard to find a way up. At some point, she mentioned that she needed help finding a church. So, we set up a plan to connect her with a local church that's led by a pastor I know and I was going to meet her there to introduce her."

The timing couldn't have been worse. Everything ground to a halt two days later. Churches stopped meeting and Strand and her team were put onto other work. So, when Strand came across Mikayla's name on her check-in call list later in the year, she was eager to reconnect.

"She expressed again her longing to connect with a church family to find hope and support in that way," recalls Strand. "This was in August 2020, months after our first conversation. So we set up a time for her to meet with me and a local pastor at a café, sitting outside."

After the meeting, Mikayla started attending that church and has found the supportive place of belonging that she was seeking.

"One of our principles of spiritual care at Jericho Road is that we are not a church,"



Purchasing Manager Pat Mellody models a donated homemade mask.

Strand says. "Community really matters and, for some people, faith communities are something that are very meaningful to them. It was striking to me that, under the conditions of the pandemic, we were able to connect this person with a church family."

**Name altered to protect patient privacy*

A Vision Bigger Than Desolation



*Written by:
Steve Noblett, CEO of
Christian Community Health Fellowship*

This March, it was my privilege to visit Sierra Leone with Myron [Glick, Jericho Road CEO] and Paul [Violanti, Jericho Road's global medical director]. This was a meaningful trip for me for many reasons. Two years ago, I was diagnosed with late-stage metastatic cancer. When death looked imminent, I shared that one of the few regrets I had was that I never

got to see the work in Sierra Leone in person. Through the prayers of many, including my friends at Jericho Road, God healed me from my cancer. This was my opportunity to use the gift of my healing to sow into the leadership team in Sierra Leone.

Our first stop was at the new clinic site in Komao, a rural area located miles from any paved road, about 90 minutes by truck from Jericho Road's headquarters in Koidu. Phebian [Abdulai, Jericho Road's Sierra Leone medical director,] had brought most of the Jericho Road staff together for a weekend "retreat." They brought beds for us from Koidu, while most of the staff slept on mats made from rice bags stuffed with hay on bare concrete floors in rooms with no electricity or running water.

The facility was in much worse condition than we had imagined. A British mining company had dug a huge open pit mine, stripping the community of much of its beauty and wealth, and leaving behind an ecological and public health disaster. We expected to see a set of fairly well-built European buildings that would

need some renovating, but would make a nice hospital. Instead, what we found was a group of dilapidated buildings, many of which were unsafe, and piles of waste from the mining operation, all overlooking a giant scar of polluted brown water where once had been lush vegetation. All of our hearts sank.

But where we saw broken buildings, barren ground, and mountains of debris, Phebian saw a pediatric ward, a maternity and outpatient clinic, a pharmacy, guest houses for visiting doctors and nursing students, administration and medical supplies offices, and a community center.

Our first reaction was, "Seriously, be realistic. This is terrible!" But Phebian's vision was bigger than the desolation, and it was contagious. The staff was excited to be there, excited about being part of transforming this property, and excited about the impact that Phebian's vision could have on this community. By the time we left, we all felt the same way.

I'm reminded of a story about when Jesus had gone through an area that had been devastated by oppression, war,



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and greed. He looked out and saw all the brokenness – poverty, hopelessness, sickness, demonic oppression. He was realistic about the condition, and it was terrible.

Jesus' response to his disciples was not, "Boys, this is a tough place. Let's find an easier area where things are not so bad." Instead, he said, "The harvest is ripe. We are in the right place at the right time.



Abandoned buildings in Komao

We just need more help. Ask Father to send laborers, because the yield here is phenomenal!"

Jesus saw the brokenness, and saw it accurately. But as he looked out over the multitudes, he also saw masses of new disciples – people living in the joy of knowing him and his kingdom. He saw a church, a community of love and hope, a bride without spot or blemish, a generation clothed in purity, loving God and one another, bringing healing and setting things right. He saw people who had been prisoners of darkness, soon to be free, participants in and heirs to an unshakable kingdom. He saw those who lived in grief becoming oaks of righteousness, pools of weeping becoming springs, deserts transformed into gardens, mourning turned to dancing.

Phebian's hope did not originate with her. She caught it from Him. We are those who must see the truth and severity of brokenness in our world, and share it with those who suffer the most. But we must

hold in tension the greater reality, a reality yet unseen. We must see what Jesus saw when he looked out over a broken place and a broken generation.

My experience in Komao and the faith of Phebian and the team in Sierra Leone have challenged me to look differently at my own community, and to live in the tension of shared suffering and hope.

