

Cooking Day: Building Relationships Through Food & Love



Neighbors working together in the kitchen.

In February, 100 adults and children gathered in the teaching kitchen and gym space at Faith Lutheran Church. The goal: Continue to build relationships formed through our program last summer, and to learn from each other.

Many of our refugee friends grew up cooking over an open fire in refugee camps, and therefore using an oven is something very foreign. Our group went through the steps and made banana bread together. Led by high school students, kids played soccer, kickball, built Legos and made cards for local teachers. A balloon artist even showed up and wowed us all!

As the loaves were baking, everyone got to taste a homemade Burmese curry dish, which was sensational! ChiChi printed the recipe for the curry, along with the history behind how and why her ancestors made it, written in both Karen and English.



We aim to be a community that reflects the radical love of Jesus by loving and helping one another. We work with local refugees, senior neighbors and school children.

-Ellie Lebron, Founder of Radical Love



Neighbors lining up to try the curry.

Over 500 Neighbors Unite For Community Christmas



Neighbors meeting at Community Christmas.

"It's so nice to think that someone out there loves us," remarked senior neighbor Joyce following this year's Community Christmas. Over the course of two hours, dozens of student groups, adults and even a dressed-up Santa Claus stopped by Greencastle of North Aurora (Senior Apartments), bearing gifts and cards made with love and kindness. Some groups sang Christmas carols, some made cookies, others smiled and brought wishes of Christmas cheer. "In the past two years, our residents have been tucked away. To feel seen and known by our community meant so much to them," commented Katie Tessmer, Greencastle's social services coordinator.

Through Radical Love, 78 local senior citizens, 7 families through local schools, and 15 resettled refugee families received needed clothing and household items, along with some wishes too. Over 500 neighbors came together to make it all happen; groups included co-workers, neighbors and friends, families, Scout and sports teams, and 30 middle and high school youth teams from across the Fox Valley.

Through these actions, the message was conveyed: Our community sees you; you matter to us. Behind that message is the message of Christmas: You are seen and loved by our God. You matter so much to Him that He gave his only son, Jesus into this world. He came for us so that we will not perish but live forever with Him. All we have to do is believe.



Children were a big help and focus of our event.

Eh Moo's Story: A Young Man's Courage & Resilience



Eh Moo in 4th grade with his teacher, Mrs. Macchione.

I was just 9 years old when my family came to the United States as refugees. I spoke no English, didn't know the ABCs, and shortly after arriving, I was placed in a second-grade classroom in St. Charles, Illinois. Today, I am finishing my associate's degree in Accounting, and am a leader in the community.

My parents were born in the Karen State of Burma (also referred to as Myanmar). They had to flee to the jungle, and ultimately found safety in a refugee camp, called Mae La, in Thailand. There are approximately 50,000 refugees that live there, and it's where I was born. I'm the oldest of four children; my sister and first brother were born in Mae La too.

Our home in Mae La was made of bamboo, twigs, and had a roof made of leaves. I spent my days playing with cousins and attending school. At that time, most people didn't have cell phones, televisions or newspapers. If someone did own a small TV, it would be treated like a movie theater! People would pay the owner to watch a movie or the World Cup.

It's a long shot to be selected for resettlement as a refugee; our camp was just 1 of 9 main camps on the Thai/Burmese border. For two years, my family went through interviews conducted by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Once this organization determined that resettlement made sense for my family, we began interviews, background and medical checks with the State Department. It's been said that this process is the most rigorous screening of any traveler to the United States.

On February 13, 2008, our family of 5 came to the United States. We had to say goodbye to grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends that were not selected. I had never lived anywhere but Mae La, and we were all nervous! It was our first time riding in a vehicle, and most of us got motion sick on the bus.

When we arrived in the United States, I started school almost immediately. I could not understand a single word the teacher or my classmates were saying, so I just followed what the other children did. Everything was different! In Mae La, there is just one bathroom for all the students; I never knew there were different bathrooms for boys and girls in my new country. Since I was just following my classmates, I walked right into the wrong one! My teacher gave me a folder with pictures to help me learn about bathrooms, the lunch menu, and simple things in our classroom. Even though I could not understand the language, I knew my classmates and teachers were kind to me.

I began to learn the language and studied very hard. By middle school, I was on the honor roll and an Outstanding Scholar. My father completed the 8th grade in our home country, and my mother finished 2nd grade, but my family understands the importance of education and continues to encourage me and my siblings. I am now exploring transferring to a university to finish my Bachelor's degree.

I'm very active in my church and was appointed Youth Leader by church members. I serve as lead guitarist in our worship band and enjoy teaching both guitar and piano. While my journey has been long, and often I feel like I'm behind my peers, I've never given up. I know that God has great plans for me, and I hope that He can use me to help others and glorify Him.



Eh Moo (far left) with his parents, sister, and brothers.



Eh Moo (left) connected with Brendan (right), one of Radical Love's accountants in February. The two men, who are within a year of age met up to talk about accounting, college choices, and family. They were both surprised to realize all they have in common and plan to meet up regularly.

Radical Love's Summer Student Program

As we plan our Summer "Friendship & Learning" Program, we are building a special section for STUDENTS (middle and high school and college-aged) that will include exploring careers, connecting with mentors and advisors, and training on confidence and courage. The program will run on Friday mornings this summer, beginning in June. Details and registration coming soon via email.

When we help others, we find our shared humanity.

Appeal for Help



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Last summer, a group of adults and children gathered for 7 Fridays to help local refugee neighbors learn English better. Something much bigger than learning a language happened: Friendships began to form and a common goal of love and belonging was realized. With our children by our sides, we open each of our programs in prayer, done in a language other than English. It's powerful to be in the room, with neighbors from countries all over the world, all lifting our voices and hearts together. It's how I picture heaven.

Our Radical Love programs exist because of the generosity of this community. People of all ages and backgrounds are joining our mission – across the Fox Valley and around the world. Stories of love and unity are emerging through our programs – with refugee neighbors and at senior living apartments and schools where we serve. We need your help to GROW our programs. Would you please consider becoming a BRIDGE BUILDER and making a monthly contribution to Radical Love? Our immediate needs for our summer program include helping fund:

- **Busing:** To help refugee neighbors who don't have a car attend
- **Food:** We want to serve lunch to our summer attendees and also snacks to the children
- **Learning Materials:** For kids and adults coming to our English program this summer.
- **A Community Garden:** Many of our refugee neighbors are expert gardeners (a skill needed to survive). A garden will create a shared learning experience that will involve people of all ages.

The enclosed postcard details the impact of a monthly contribution. If you can help in this way or with a one-time donation, we are grateful and know our collective gifts will make a difference to many in our community.



Ellie & Chi Chi

Our programs are unique because they include and encourage children and students to love and help our neighbors in meaningful ways. Now, more than ever, our youth need to be given opportunities to make the world better. God continues to amaze me with His goodness and faithfulness in our community. Thank you for believing in our mission and helping in any way you can.

With love,
Ellie Lebron, Founder & Executive Director

PS. You can become a Bridge Builder in 2 minutes by scanning this QR code.



Help support
& grow our
programs.

Radical Love is a registered 501(c)3 organization;
all donations are tax-deductible.

Our Leadership

Board of Directors



Ellie Lebron
Founder



Katie Feagans
Secretary



Jason Lebron
Treasurer



Courtney Wilkison
Board Member



Austin Newcomb
Board Member

Advisory Council



Jen Bernal



Cheryl Pacillio



Josh Schwede



Kim Thompson

Radical Love's "Community of Helpers" includes neighbors in town, across the country, and around the world. Thank you to our financial contributors, who have made what we do possible.

Fr Patrick Baikauskas (MO)
Berlien Consulting (HI)
Jim & Gay Berlien (IN)
Heidi and Brett Borter (IL)
Chapelstreet Church (IL)
Eliana and Steve Costello (Portugal)
Rachel & Dave Denazarie (IL)
Jennifer and Ryan Deniz (IL)
Mindy & Dan Devito (IL)
Michael DeVries (IL)
Jill Drake (IL)
Tiffany & Mike Douglass (IL)
Megan & Brian Ernst (IL)
Fran and Roby Fatta (IL)
Mario Fernandez Montero (FL)
Lynn & Ed Finnegan (IL)
Joy Ganster (IL)
Clark Giansanti (CA)
Dorothy Gilmet (IL)
Anonomous Donor (IL)
Barbara and Pete Harper (WA)
Kate & Todd Hertz (IL)
Lizzie Hertz, age 10 (IL)
Lynn & Bob Higgins (IL)
IMEG Corp (IL)
Amy Knecht (FL)
Bob and Claudia Kostur (IL)
Elli Koulos (IL)
Ellie & Jason Lebron (IL)
Josie Lebron, age 11 (IL)
Avery Lebron, age 9 (IL)
Amy Mayer (IL)
Jen and Jeff Mertz (IL)
Deacon Gary & Deanna Miller (CO)
Susan Miller (IL)
Ryan & Tara Moen (IL)
Pat and Bob Montana (IL)
Julie and Jay Murphy (IL)
Austin & Ashley Newcomb (IL)
Elijah Newcomb, age 10 (IL)
Kylar Newcomb, age 12 (IL)
Tinley Newcomb, age 8 (IL)
Steven Obrien (CO)
Stephanie Osborn (OH)
Cheryl Pacillio (IL)
Johanna & Jason Patterson (IL)
Lisa Marie Patterson (CO)
Amy Pedone (IL)
Kara & Dan Petrovich (IL)
Allie Post, age 11 (IL)
Meredith Pihl (IL)
Anton and Molly Purkart (IL)
Anonomous Donor (IL)
Anonomous Donors (IL)
Carmelo and Audrey Rubano (VA)
Heather Ruchala (IL)
Erin Sabo (IL)
Julie & Todd Scheffer (IL)
Alexa Schwab with @ Properties (IL)
Debbie and Josh Schwede (SC)
Sarah Shkutov (IL)
Katie Steely (IL)
Mary and Rick Sturm (IL)
Jeff and Abby Szklarek (IL)
Peggy & John Talbot (CO)
Robin Tardy (IL)
Kim Thompson (IL)
Teri Thompson (TX)
Betty Wells (IL)
Michele & Jaime Yebra (CO)
Mary Kay and Kenneth Yotz (IL)

A Recap of Our Past 6 months...



Snack Packing

Each month 300 snack bags are packed and delivered to kids throughout our community. This project involves many student-led organizations. Each bag includes messages of love and encouragement.



Pumpkin Festival

To continue relationships formed last Summer, kids and adults met in October to decorate pumpkins to take home and for local senior neighbors.



Halloween Costume Collection

A group of 7th-grade students and their teacher collected 46 costumes to make sure every student at Nicholson Elementary had something to wear in their Halloween parade.



World Relief Training

Neighbors trained with World Relief to help welcome new refugee neighbors. Volunteers help to set up apartments, meet families at the airport, and serve as "Friendship Partners" for a family's first 3 months in the U.S.



Helping Seniors

Each month, adults and children help unpack food delivered from local pantries, and stock a community room senior neighbors can do their grocery shopping.



Journals

Journals were shared to local refugees learning to write English, as well as our senior neighbors and students, encouraging them to write down their experiences with helping others.



Teacher Appreciation

We celebrate and thank the men and women who show up each day and teach our children. Your support made teacher appreciation events happen at two of our partner schools this Winter.



Children's Book Collection

Over 200 children's books were collected by middle schoolers for children in our community. Some kids don't have books of their own at home. If the family has a car, it goes to work, making trips to the library difficult.



Cooking Day

Our Winter meet-up brought together 100 kids and adults, learning about baking banana bread in a local teaching kitchen and sampling an amazing Burmese curry dish.



Sharing The Story

Through our Website, eNewsletter, print newsletter, photos, and social media pages, we continue to tell the story of what God is doing through Radical Love in our community.

Schools & Organizations We're Helping

Hesed House, Children at Batavia Apartments, Greencastle Senior Living, Williamsburg Elementary, Harrison Elementary, Nicholson Elementary, Geneva North Middle School, Geneva South Middle School, Batavia High School.

Quotes Of Feedback

You are helping to build confidence in our people.
- **ChiChi, Leader in our resettled refugee community**

To the kids who took the time to write words of love - it meant everything to me.
- **Debbie, Community Christmas participant**

Our teachers felt so loved and appreciated; thank you for the lunch you brought to us!
- **Principal at Nicholson Elementary School**

The snowpants could not have come at a more perfect time! We've already outfitted several kiddos. Thank you so much!!
- **Social Worker at Williamsburg Elementary School**

Thank you for all the wonderful gifts! They were they only gifts I got this year.
- **Community Christmas participant**

Supporter Highlights

Josh and Katie Feagans with Feagans Law Group, our lawyers; **Greg Loberg and Brendan Bell** with Loberg & Associates, our accountants; **Professional Mailing & Print Services, Inc., Symboliq Media, and Kelly Vanderploeg** for helping us tell the story of what God is doing; **CC's Wishlist** for generous donations of supply and gear; **Faith Lutheran and Chapelstreet Church** for use of gathering space; **Alexa Schwab** with @Properties for helping make Pumpkin Festival possible; Noonday and **Julie Garlock** for helping make Cooking Day possible; **Courtney Wilkison** for leading donor appreciation efforts; United States **Congresswoman Lauren Underwood** and her office for helping advocate for our organization in the 501c3 application process.



Be first to know about ways to help; join our mailing list!