



FOUNDER'S STORY: MEENA SANKARAN

Empowering Refugees: A Highly Personal Mission

As the founder and executive director of PRERNA, Meena Sankaran is passionate about social and environmental causes. Her deep appreciation of the simple things in life influences the changes she seeks. A technologist and social entrepreneur by career, she has a deep desire to contribute to the wellbeing of the community and feels the need to help the underprivileged to succeed. That is why empowering refugees is a highly personal mission for her. Born and raised in India, Meena immigrated to the United States as a student. Through this firsthand experience, she has a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties involved in moving to a new country along with the importance of assimilating into the U.S.

In her own words, Meena shares why PRERNA is so close to her heart: “When my parents sacrificed their own happiness to get me to this great country [U.S.], I never forgot the blessing and committed myself to pay it forward someday. My humble beginnings of volunteering began as a child and it became a part of my DNA every time my parents got the opportunity to serve others.

Whether it was feeding the homeless or recording for the blind or dyslexic, giving back to the community has been the most fulfilling part of my life. During my time volunteering in Arizona with struggling refugees, I interacted with many families across different ethnicities. It wasn't long before I realized the gaps there were in

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services needed by refugees, and the lack of resources available.” For over a decade, Meena has helped to resettle many individuals and families into the states of Arizona, New York, Ohio, North Dakota and California. She has played an important part in making their lives comfortable and sustainable.

Meena continues: “I have always believed that people want to take care of their families and would rather be taught “how to fish” than just be “fed fish” or given hand-outs. Based on my knowledge of their resilience and cultural ethics, I wasn’t surprised to see how hardworking refugee families were. Integrity and perseverance were some of the qualities I saw in families time and time again. By engaging with refugee families who start as low-income earners, it was clear they desperately needed resources and support to care for their children and to navigate their new way of life.”

“Refugees were receiving the legal help they needed to enter the U.S.” says Meena. “But once settled, they often found themselves isolated and alone. The roots of establishing a non-profit grew from the compassion I felt for these industrious families and my desire to help make a difference. We began providing one on one mentoring and support to disconnected families and helping them obtain affordable government housing. Through several tried



and tested measures, I was able to build a successful and comprehensive program of services that helps a family through the entire process from arrival to complete assimilation in the society with a stringent success criteria as per PRERNA’s guidelines. The organization began to take shape; and after assisting refugees for over a decade, PRERNA proudly became an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit in July 2015. Our mission has remained consistent throughout the years. We are steadfast in our commitment to empowering refugees to be constructive members of society through our values of hope, help and healing.”

Meena credits her parents’ incredibly high values and how they raised her in India to give back. She saw that helping people and making others live comfortably without expectations was what gave her satisfaction in life. Growing up with this attitude as second nature inspired Meena’s lifetime commitment to help those in need so they can also “pay it forward.”



“We aim to give refugees a chance at opportunities that most of us take for granted. Through continued service to the less fortunate, we plan to expand to further causes and greater charitable efforts.”

— Meena Sankaran, Founder and Executive Director, PRERNA