

00:00:02.610 --> 00:00:36.810

Hongfei Lyu: Yeah, so it's recording now. Hi, Mr. Taha so before we started our interview, I want to briefly introduce myself. I'm Hongfei Lyu and i'm currently a third year math computer science student at the university of California San Diego and for this spring quarter i'm taking the History of the United States 120. And we partner with the Majdal Center to deliver this History project. So could you please tell us a little bit about yourself.

00:00:37.740 --> 00:03:44.820

Taha Hassane: Sure. So, first of all, thank you so much for inviting me and including me in this project. I hope I am a good candidate for this interview and this project. My name is Taha Hassane. I am originally from Algeria. Em I was born and grew up in Algeria and moved to the United States with my family in 2001. Currently, I am the Imam and director of the Islamic Center of San Diego, which is the largest mosque in San Diego county. Em in the county of San Diego there is about more than 20 mosques. The Islamic Center is um the largest one it was established in 1988 or 87. um so I had most of my education in Nigeria elementary middle high school and university after graduating from the from the high school I attended the Islamic Institute or the Islamic University in the University of Angers and graduated with a bachelor's in Islamic studies. After that I taught at the high school for 10 years and in the same time, I was an Imam in a local mosque over there. In 2001, I migrated with my family and we lived in Denver Colorado um for three years actually, before coming to San Diego in 2004. Since then i've been here at the Islamic Center. Um my duties as an Imam here at the Islamic Center is to lead the the the prayers to give the Friday sermon on Friday, which is equivalent to Sunday service at a church, for example. I give lectures; I answer questions related to religious topics for my Community Members; I also represent the Islamic Center and the Muslim community in the interface work. We are part of different interface alliances around San Diego and California and even nationwide. And I do give presentations about Islam and Muslims everywhere, not only in mosques, but at schools, colleges universities, churches, houses of worship um whatever i'm invited. So this is a little bit about me, I am (I am) a father of four daughters um yeah i'm so blessed to have four daughters yeah.

00:03:44.910 --> 00:03:52.650

Hongfei Lyu: Wow that's so cool. So um you mentioned that you moved to San Diego during 2001?

00:03:53.040 --> 00:04:00.540

Taha Hassane: hmm. (nod) um no no I moved to the US in 2001. I moved to San Diego in 2004.

00:04:01.170 --> 00:04:06.060

Hongfei Lyu: Oh that's that's really early, so where do you identify as home?

00:04:08.070 --> 00:05:04.890

Taha Hassane: Home. The entire Earth is my home. My biggest home. But I do consider Algeria as still my home. I go I tried to go every year to visit my family over there, but certainly in the United States, I'm still i'm still connected and attached to my first place, which is Colorado. I still love that place, love that state and the people of Colorado. But now, I consider myself as a "San Diegan". You know after more than 20 years here, after eighteen almost

eighteen years, I consider myself as as a “San Diegan” and I'm very proud to live and share the beauty and the goodness of of this city.

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00:05:05.760 --> 00:05:09.630

Hongfei Lyu: yeah so Is the beauty why you move here.

44

00:05:11.640 --> 00:05:12.150

Taha Hassane: say it again.

45

00:05:12.690 --> 00:05:16.830

Hongfei Lyu: Like Is beauty the reason why you move here.

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00:05:17.430 --> 00:07:24.540

Taha Hassane: On not only that. So basically when I was in Denver in the summer of 2004, a friend of mine here in San Diego contacted me and told me that The Islamic Center is looking for an Imam, because the previous one had to relocate to the east coast, and if you (if you) want to apply. And I was like Okay, so I sent my resume me to the board of the Islamic Center. I remember that they invited me for the weekend. I gave the Friday Sermon. I gave a lecture to the Community, and then the following day I had a meeting with the board. And two weeks after that, they sent me an email telling me that you're hired so I came back in 2000, in September the first 2004. And, of course, before coming moving to San Diego I had to do some homework, so I realized that the weather in San Diego is very similar to the weather in northern Algeria which is what I grew up you know so it's very similar that everything is very similar. In addition to that, honestly, the Community here in San Diego is larger, is more active, more vibrant and it is part of San Diego is always part of southern California. And the Community here in San Diego is very connected to the larger Muslim community in southern California, which is maybe the largest concentration of Muslims in the United States. So, I started having this connection with a lot of Imams, a lot of Muslim scholars in southern California, so this is what really attracted me this is what made me consider San Diego as my home and not to think about any other place to move.

00:07:26.430 --> 00:07:33.810

Hongfei Lyu: Oh so you're invited to be the director of the center that's how you got the position right.

Taha Hassane: Yes

00:07:34.320 --> 00:07:41.130

Hongfei Lyu: Sure, that's great. So is that what you wanted to do at first or...

00:07:41.190 --> 00:07:43.920

Taha Hassane: Oh, you mean in my life?

00:07:44.430 --> 00:07:47.010

Hongfei Lyu: Yeah after education yeah.

00:07:47.070 --> 00:11:50.970

Taha Hassane: Yeah. So I started developing my career or thinking about my future when I was in the in the high school. So when I was in the high school, I started hanging out with some classmates and friends who were kind of religious you know, praying five times a day and spending a lot of time studying the religion and all the stuff. So I started hanging out with them and I started becoming more and more spiritual more and more religious reading more about the Islamic faith and all this stuff. By the end of my high school era, I had this solid thought that I want to be a religious leader. I want to be a person helping my fellow Muslims to become better Muslims to become more committed to develop this solid commitment to their faith, to be more faithful because i've seen you know, even though, you know, Algeria is 99.99% Muslim population, but especially the young people at that time in the 80s, you know, most of them, (they were) They didn't pray; They didn't care about the faith. They were just, you know, playing soccer and watching movies, and all that stuff, so I felt that, you know, this generation, they need somebody, they need at least a small group of people at their age who can influence them who can work on them who can guide them, so I wanted to be that person I wanted really to be that person and I started being active in our local mosque over there, when I was in the high school. I started giving some lectures to the to the kids to the young people. I started doing some stuff in the mosque like organizing the books in the library displaying some materials to inspire people and all that stuff inside the mosque. And then, when I graduated from the high school, the only thing I thought about, the only place I thought about is to go to the Islamic University, even though my parents somehow they wanted me to go to the law school. And I told them I don't want to be a lawyer or a judge. I don't like law. I like the religion, so it took me like a few days or maybe a few weeks to (to) convince them, so finally they agreed and they allowed me to go to the Islamic University and I went over there. And my four years at the Islamic University really, really shaped my future and the way I studied the knowledge I got the scholars and the professors that I had at the university, even my classmates my my friends at the university really inspired me to continue my way to become an Imam. So and by the way, Imam is the title of the religious leader in the Muslim community. It's like a pastor or minister or priest in a church or a rabbi in a synagogue. When when when it comes to the Muslim community, the religious leader is called Imam, so this is how I became an Imam. So, I got this inspiration this guidance um that led me to the position I am in at this at this moment.

00:11:51.870 --> 00:12:08.970

Hongfei Lyu: that's so cool that's a great personal goal, so do you have any suggestion for people who haven't find out their faith yet like, are there any obvious changes in life or mental states that you have after like convince your faith.

00:12:11.130 --> 00:16:15.300

Taha Hassane: Sure you know, talking about my own community, my Muslim community, I know that many of us who are born and raised as Muslims within Muslim families and Muslim communities. You know they (they they) are proud of who they are; they're proud of their faith, identity. But sometimes, the the pressure of this word they live, this materialistic you know life, the pressure of the society, of the community and sometimes you know some of us grew up in families that are not really practicing: they don't give the priority to the religion. They don't care. They practice occasionally, so (they) sometimes under these circumstances, people grow (grow) up without giving the importance to their faith, so my suggestion is for every Muslim, Yes, when (when) we are young, when we are kids we just imitate our parents and our family members: when they pray we pray; when they fuss we fuss; when they celebrate any religious celebration, we do the same thing, sometimes without knowing why, what's the purpose,

what's (what's) the reason, which is okay at that age, but my suggestion to all of them is that once you grew up once you become a young man and a young woman differentiating between what's right what's wrong what's good what's evil, then you have to start building your own faith conviction don't remain in that stage of imitating and and just doing what others are doing without knowing the reason, no, we have to start building our own faith by going back to our faith and studying learning. I'm not saying here, you know everyone should become an Imam and everyone should become like a religious scholar. No. And here I'm talking about the minimum knowledge that every Muslim has to have in his or her life, so they can practice their faith properly, correctly. And they can also answer questions; they can share their faith with others. I have some community members coming to me, sometimes telling me Imam I have this, my neighbor or my classmate or my you know colleague at work asking me about you know why Muslims are not allowed to drink alcohol, for example. I don't know what to tell him and I'm like, brother or sister, this is not a rocket science, you know, this is something basic in Islam. You have to have the answer. You need to have the answer and it's not that difficult to get the answer or somebody sending me: Imam, someone asked me today, why do you pray five times a day. I don't know how to answer him. What do you mean you don't know. You have to learn how to answer these questions because people around us, non-Muslims. Especially those who are not familiar with Islamic faith and the Muslim community they always ask questions about us about our faith, because they don't know. They have never been in a (in a) situation or in a position where they befriend that Muslims or they have Muslims around them so they they are familiar with Islamic faith. Most of the people don't know or they know something wrong about (about) our faith. So, my suggestion is learn, seek knowledge whenever there's an opportunity at your local mosque, local Islamic Center, local community. There is something going on there is a learning, there is a workshop or lecture a seminar go and attend, so you (you) will have that knowledge that can number one allow you to practice your faith properly and number two allow you to answer the basic questions that people might ask you.

00:16:16.770 --> 00:16:26.430

Hongfei Lyu: Well that's so inspiring. Yeah, so what do you enjoy the most when you work for the Islamic Center.

00:16:29.100 --> 00:19:39.960

Taha Hassane: I enjoy everything. To be honest.

Hongfei Lyu: Is that answering questions?

Taha Hassane: Yeah. So I even (I, I) enjoy the challenging moments, because I know the nature of my work. I am the person dealing on a daily basis with my community members, and I am a person that shouldn't expect only the positive things from my community members. I am exposed to a lot of negativity in terms of the concerns and the questions my community members bring to me. Um you know issues about family dispute, about domestic violence, about business people, you know, having a conflict, my community members going through challenges, mental health (issues), you know all this stuff. So lot of community members, they trust the mosque they trust the Imam. And sometimes they over-trust Imam to the point that they think that the Imam can solve all the problems of the community, you know. And (and and) most of the time I just referred them, you know. Sometimes they bring the issues that I don't know how to deal with it, so I (I) refer them to to psychologists, to a lawyer, to you know, but I feel very honored and (and and) trusted when my community members reach out to me and trust me with their very, very private issues. You know, so I try to help as much as possible if there is something I can do personally for them, I will do it. But if I cannot then I have to refer

them to experts in the community who can help them, you know, even when somebody wants to buy a home somebody wants to buy a car. They come to me, sometimes asking me what to do hahaha, so I refer that to a car dealer or to a real estate, you know agents in the community, so they can (go to them)... Somebody who are looking for (for for) a job, so they come to me: Imam, Can you help me find the job? All right in charla, let me do my best to to have as much as possible, so this is, this is the nature of my my work, so people who think that the Imam is just a person who leads the prayers and give lectures religious lectures, they are, they are very mistaken, they are very mistaken. Actually, leading the prayers and speaking or preaching is a very small portion of my work. Most of my work is is dealing with the daily issues of my community members and I really enjoy doing this because I (I) feel happy when I help people in their lives, and I pray that almighty God will always give me this ability and opportunity to help people around me.

00:19:41.430 --> 00:19:46.860

Hongfei Lyu: Oh people trust you a lot and you're really taking care of the whole community.

00:19:47.520 --> 00:19:48.990

Taha Hassane: Yeah, try our best hah.

00:19:50.310 --> 00:19:55.200

Hongfei Lyu: What would you do when you feel lost yourself, or who you would go to?

00:19:57.480 --> 00:21:37.740

Taha Hassane: So, the Imam is a human being, like everyone else. We need support. We need um self care. We need to take care of ourselves to take care of our families. We have families like everyone else. We need time for ourselves. We need time for our families. And this is what we try to manage also in our lives as Imams. Sometimes, how busy we get in the community makes us forget ourselves to be honest, and forget our families until our families, they remind us like my daughters: "Dad, you are off today so don't go to the mosque or don't go to the office. Let's go outside. Let's go somewhere." For example, you see. Also, as Imams among each other, we try to get together and not to discuss anything about the community, but just to kind of rest a little bit and (and and) have some fun and entertainment for ourselves. Um yes, I do get tired sometimes I feel exhausted sometimes, but not lost not lost. Yes, tired, exhausted and we try to manage our time and our situation in the best way possible, so I can come back to the community with (with with) a fresh spirit and (and and) continue my service to the community.

00:21:38.910 --> 00:21:40.650

Hongfei Lyu: yeah that's so touching.

00:21:42.000 --> 00:21:42.630

Taha Hassane: Well, thank you.

00:21:42.720 --> 00:21:50.220

Hongfei Lyu: You really pay a lot of efforts, so what's the most impressive work you have done at the Center.

00:21:53.040 --> 00:23:25.050

Taha Hassane: Um my daily service to the community, um when people come and seek help and seek assistance from me. Um also had been parents with their kids, whenever parents get confused they don't know how to deal with different situations with their kids especially when their kids start growing up as teenagers. You know that teenagers always try to have their own adventure (their own adventure) in life. Sometimes they become rebellious they don't care about their parents and they think that their parents don't understand the world, and all that stuff they start going wild and crazy. So I try to assist the parents to understand the situation and how to deal with their kids at that moment, this is very important. Also, reconciling between spouses whenever there is a family dispute, for example, whenever there's a family conflict between husbands and wives. Sitting with them and bringing them together and helping them to navigate the situation is something very, very rewarding that (that) I really like to do. So yeah these are the things that really make me happy and (and and) you know proud and humble, at the same time for who I am.

00:23:27.270 --> 00:23:39.570

Hongfei Lyu: That's cool. So you're introduced to me by the Majdal Center. Right, so how does the Islamic Center come to cooperate with Majdal Center.

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Taha Hassane: So few years ago, when the Majdal Center started operating in the east county mainly in alcohol area exactly when the when the Syrian refugees started arriving to San Diego um, so the lot of Syrian families, they (they) arrive to San Diego to the United States and they had no idea about the life here, and so they needed a lot of orientation and they needed a lot of assistance with their kids. So Majdal Center basically started the work with the kids of the refugees, bringing them on the weekend to a park and having some activities sport activities, entertainment, picnic, so this is when they started contacting me asking the Islamic Center to assist them to assist them financially to assist them with like buses when they wanted to take the kids of the refugee families to balboa park to the museums, for example, to field trips, so we started helping them by providing them with transportation, financial aid, anything that we could do for them, so this is how we started working with Majdal Center and you know this relationship became stronger and we became more involved, so now we have some members from the community from the Islamic Center here members on the board of Majdal and they are the liaison, so whenever they need any support from us, they contact us and we provide them with whatever we can to make or to help them in the (in the) service that they are providing to the refugee community in the east county and mainly to the kids now they are doing with them like tutoring they are orienting them, for example at school. They are responding to their, whatever their questions about those at the school district over there, and all that stuff and I really like what Majdal Center is doing for the community.

00:26:09.240 --> 00:26:16.380

Hongfei Lyu: Yeah, that's so supportive. Yeah, I remember you came to UCSD this week right.

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Taha Hassane: Yes, yeah

Hongfei Lyu: So do you also cooperate with UCSD?

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Taha Hassane: Yes, yes, mainly since 2004 I've been the religious advisor of the MSA Muslim student association at UCSD. So I used to (I used to) go to campus every single week to give an Islamic studies class to the Muslim students. Um last year and this year I have been going every other week. So every other Tuesday meeting with Muslim students at the price center over there and giving them a class, (cough: excuse me) a Islamic studies class. In addition to that, I had you know, in the last few years or throughout the years some work that I did with UCSD as university whenever there is an event sometimes they invited me as a speaker. The last time they invited me of right before corvid myself and Bishop McElroy of the Catholic diocese when we talked about immigration in Islam and Christianity or Catholicism. So this was the last event we did in person at UCSD right before COVID, and I still look forward to more events that we can do together between the Islamic Center and the University of California San Diego.

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Hongfei Lyu: Yeah sure. That would help. Um so is COVID influencing heavily on the operation of the Center and how?

00:28:07.140 --> 00:30:58.440

Taha Hassane: Yes, of course, I mean. Like every other house of worship, when covid hit, we had to close, we had to shut down and we started cooperating with our local health department at the county of San Diego attending the weekly and then becoming every other week meeting virtual meetings with our health authorities to know what's going on, how, what are the updates whether we should open or not, distancing, masks, everything that we needed to know. So we shut down and we switched everything to virtual, so there was no in person prayers at the Islamic Center. People prayed at home, even the Friday sermon where people are supposed to be in the mosque, we started live streaming, so people have been following us from their homes. And then, when things became a little bit better and they allowed us to have our prayers outdoors so (cough: excuse me). We started using our playground for outdoor prayers with distancing and then things became a little bit better they allowed us to go indoors but with a limited capacity. So with distancing, limited number of worshipers, we went inside indoors and then, little by little, now we (we) are having full capacity of the mosque, but we still request or require the mask, so we lifted the social distancing about like five or six weeks ago and we kept the mask, face mask mandatory. Things um you know coming back to the old normal again and we are very, very grateful that, you know, almighty God has protected us and have us to go through the very difficult situation of covid safely, of course, we unfortunately we have lost a few community members to covid. And we always pray for them and for their families, but I would say now, the situation is much better, and we are going slowly and slowly, step by step to (to) the normal that we (we) had before yeah.

00:31:00.420 --> 00:31:15.600

Hongfei Lyu: Yeah yeah that's tough. We're all suffering through. So what do you think influenced you the most is that the immigration experiences or the religion.

00:31:17.700 --> 00:32:56.940

Taha Hassane: Um I would say both. I would say both. You know immigration experiences that I went through really shaped (shaped) part of my personality and my life here, but you know going through that experience and carrying with me my faith always the values and the principles of my faith helped me to have a less painful, you know, immigration experience. As we know that everyone, no matter who they are, when they migrate to another place, they

always go through times of nostalgias, you know, missing home missing family, you know when (when you when) you arrive to a new place, you don't know anyone at the beginning. You don't know how the system is, so we had to go like everyone else through that process. But as long as we carry with us our faith, we carry our trusting God, we integrate to the community, then everything will be (will be) okay, and you know we came up out of that whole situation of being newcomers new immigrants in a very pleasant way and we are very thankful to God that you know we live here in the United States, we live in San Diego and we are able, the most important thing, we're able to preserve our faith and identity and help my community members to become better Muslims and better citizens of this wonderful country.

00:32:58.290 --> 00:33:05.730

Hongfei Lyu: Yeah, that's great. So what's your expectation on the like foreseeing future of the Center.

00:33:07.860 --> 00:38:12.990

Taha Hassane: I'm (I'm) very hopeful because if I want (I want I want) to look at the Islamic Center, like 18 years ago and what I heard about the history of the Center before I came and I see it right now, I can see a lot of progress. I can see a lot of progress, and I can tell you what's the progress. Number one, we have more and more and more people attending the Islamic Center. I remember we used to have on Friday one service and the mosque was not even full and now we have two services and both of them are full. We have more Members coming to the Islamic Center and we are providing them with more services, education on the religious, social services um and also what is making me hopeful and very optimistic, is the way (that) my community is engaged civically and politically. I remember when I came in 2004, the first, one of the first, preacher I gave when I talked about, I remember it was, the elections in 2004, and I said, you know please community members don't forget to register to vote and go and vote and all that stuff. There were some few people who are not happy with me saying that because, for them, you know, don't mix politics (politics) with religion you know we are here to pray, we are here... so don't talk about politics, but I told them, you know what I don't differentiate between religious and politics. You know, whoever is going to be elected and coming to office work, whether he is or she is a mayor or you know council member or assembly member whoever is going to be my elected person will make decisions that will change my life, so I cannot be passive and just pretend that i'm living in my own world disconnected from everything else, everyone else, I cannot do this. Every single person in my community, every household, every family, the entire community will be affected by the decisions made by our politicians, so it's better to have a voice it's better to be active and choose the right people to go to office, so when. You know anything happens, we shouldn't blame anyone but ourselves, you see, so I'm very happy now that my community is very engaged civically and politics. Not only this, but the Islamic Center itself is one of the election (pol) polling centers you know, so people in the neighborhood they come and vote at the Islamic Center on the (on the) election day. So we do provide a space for that, we (we) invite candidates funding for different offices to come to the Islamic Center and introduce themselves to (to) the community, answer their questions, telling them why I want you to vote for me, why (why why) I'm so special. You know so (and) in addition to that, there are so many things going on in the county of San Diego that we are involved in like homelessness, feeding the homeless, for example, things about social justice, immigration justice, things about racial justice. You know that the Muslim community if ethnically is very diverse. A lot of people think that all Muslims are Arabs coming from the Middle East, which is not true. The vast majority of (of of) our community members are not Arabs, they don't speak Arabic. (They are) coming from all places in the world: many of them (are) coming from Southeast Asia, when we talk about Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Filipino Muslims, right here in

San Diego we talk about Latino and Latina Muslims, we talk about African American Muslims and (indigen...) you know indigenous people here so that's why my community should be very engaged civically and (and) politically, because we represent a very wide range of (of) people in the American society, so this is what inspired us, this is what makes me always hopeful and optimistic about the future of the Islamic Center of San Diego and the way we are serving our Muslim community.

00:38:14.730 --> 00:38:36.870

Hongfei Lyu: Yeah, those are great great ideas. Yeah respect. Right, there are some people thinking that the cost of voting is actually overweighing its significance like we individuals doesn't make a difference, so like what do you think about that?

00:38:38.430 --> 00:40:31.980

Taha Hassane: You mean like voting election.

Hongfei Lyu: en (nod).

Taha Hassane: Of course, it's very important. It's very important. You know, if we (if we) think or believe that voting is not important, and we disengage from (from) this political, you know activism we're not (we're not) going to change the world for the better, so anyone who comes to office and making decisions that go against the interest of my community and the interest of (my) the people in my neighborhood, then we cannot complain, because we didn't do anything to change the reality for the better, so it is our duty and responsibility always to make sure to bring the right people to office, otherwise, if anything goes wrong, I shouldn't open my mouth. I shouldn't complain. Why? Because I didn't do what I was supposed to do, so it's very important (to do) to be civically and politically engaged because politics in the United States (politics) are made locally. You know if (if) I ask any person in (in) San Diego who is your representative of the city council and he doesn't know; who is he represented in the county board of supervisors, or who is your representative in the Congress, or in the State Assembly and he or she doesn't know, you know what I can't understand this. I can't understand this. So that's why (we have to be) we have to give importance to vote, election, engaging with our elected officials, engaging with the candidates, so to make sure that they will bring the right people to the office.

00:40:33.360 --> 00:40:57.300

Hongfei Lyu: Yes, that's right. So for the immigration part, you mentioned that it's normal that everyone who immigrated would suffer through that and would have to adjust to the new environment, so like, how did you adjust to the environment and did you get any help?

00:40:59.370 --> 00:44:06.300

Taha Hassane: Yes, yes, I remember when I when we (when we) move (to San Diego) to Denver Colorado. You know, we live within the community over there and always we learn things from our community members, from the institutions of the Community. So it depends, sometimes you live in a community that is very engaged and they can help you to integrate um quickly and sometimes you find yourself in a community that is very slow, so it takes you longer to adopt and to integrate in the community and integrate into society, the greater society, the larger society, so because of my experience, I learned how important it is to welcome the newcomers, the new immigrants, especially the refugees and to help them to understand the new reality, have them to understand them to adapt to that to the (to the) new

life, to understand the institutions, to understand the law, to understand, you know, how to navigate things in this (in this in this) society. And this is what we do at this moment, so there are not only the Islamic Center, by the way, but there are other organizations in the community, working with working extensively with the refugees with the newcomers to help them integrate, to help them understand, to help them know about the law of the land so because we don't want them to (to) make mistakes that will jeopardize their existence, their lives, their future and the future of their families. You know, when it comes to the refugees, all of them, they came from war zone, war torn countries, they came from you know areas where (where) violence was dominant. There was a war and they were (they were) taken to the refugee camps and they spend, you know, a long time in the refugee camp, so when when they land here we don't expect them to change in 24 hours, you know that the trauma that they went through all that stuff makes them take (take) a lot of time to adjust and we have to help them if they don't find anyone to help them I don't know what's going to happen to them, so that's why we try at the Islamic Center to team up and to cooperate with other organizations in the community to assist them to integrate, and to go as fast as possible through that period of transition as immigrants and the newcomers to stand on their feet, to find jobs, to enroll their kids at school to know, you know, how to get assistance from the government to know everything they need to look yeah.

00:44:09.330 --> 00:44:14.370

Hongfei Lyu: Is there any personal stories or experiences that you would like to share?

00:44:16.260 --> 00:47:24.810

Taha Hassane: Um I think I (can) share with you a story that happened a few years ago, I remember when the first wave of the Syrian refugees arrived to San Diego. So, we invited few families to come to the Islamic Center we made a lunch for them and I invited some speakers to welcome them and explain to them, you know, the life here in San Diego. And one of the speakers I invited was a police officer from the community, who is the liaison between the Islamic Center and then SDP the senior police department. So when (when) he was speaking, I was standing in the back of the room, the Multi purpose room. And he started telling them, you know here is my job, here is my duty as a police officer, is to serve and protect, so if any one of you goes through any type of situations where you need the law enforcement, here is my number here's my name, you can call me anytime i'm here to help you. And while he was saying that I was standing in the back of the room and looking at the reaction, the faces of the people that attend, these refugees, and they started looking at each other and like are you hearing what i'm hearing. A police officer standing right here telling us that I'm here to protect and serve you if you have any problem, you know, you can contact me here's my number phone number. And they were they were kind of shocked why, because this is the first time in their lives, hearing somebody who to present the law enforcement of the government talking to them this way. They came from dictatorship countries, dictatorship governments, where you cannot (you cannot) have a police officer talking to you that way. If a police officer comes to you, it means you are in trouble. Okay, and corruption is rooted over there from where they came. (In) many places around the world, corruption is so rooted and bribery and (and) you know anything that you do is (is) okay over there. And coming to the United States to hear a police officer telling them "I'm here to help and serve you if you need anything, please call me at this number" For them, it was something that nobody had in mind. And it started, you know that (that) meeting started changing their minds, giving them the new perspective of the new life in America, so this is one of the things that I still keep in mind, and I share with my audience every time I talk about the experiences of the newcomers and the refugees here in San Diego.

00:47:25.980 --> 00:47:39.690

Hongfei Lyu: yeah it's really a sad and sorry story, this is so grateful that they're finally here. Yeah, so um do you have any other stories you want share?

00:47:41.340 --> 00:47:47.940

Taha Hassane: Um well, I think this one. I don't have in mind anything at this moment.

00:47:48.210 --> 00:47:50.520

Hongfei Lyu: Um if that. We can conclude our interview today.

00:47:51.690 --> 00:48:11.280

Taha Hassane: Alright.

Hongfei Lyu: So thank you so much. It's so glad to speak to you here and Islamic Center is really a great community for like support people of all kinds, so thank you so much.

00:48:11.730 --> 00:48:15.600

Taha Hassane: You're very welcome. Your name is Hongfei?

00:48:15.870 --> 00:48:17.010

Hongfei Lyu: Yeah yeah exactly.

00:48:17.040 --> 00:48:50.010

Taha Hassane: Hongfei okay. I was afraid to misspell it. Ok Hongfei, Thank you so much for this opportunity and I really appreciate the time you're taking to learn about me, my faith my community, the Islamic Center, the work (the work) we do, and I wish all the best for you, a successful project. And please keep in mind that if you need any assistance, any help from me from the Islamic Center you can always contact me. Thank you so much.

00:48:50.400 --> 00:48:51.510

Hongfei Lyu: Thank you.

00:48:51.750 --> 00:48:52.470

Taha Hassane: you're welcome.