

UNERASED

From Kabul to Vermont

Afghan women building lives in the Green Mountain State. A documentary storytelling project by The PhotoBridge Project and the Vermont Afghan Alliance, made so Vermont can see its Afghan neighbors, and owned permanently by the Alliance.

The Story Vermont Hasn't Told

Five years ago this month the Taliban took Kabul. No state took in more Afghans per capita than Vermont. Today more than 600 Afghans are building lives here in new languages and new professions. Vermont gave them a place to live and initial support. Rebuilding their lives has taken five years and entire villages of Vermonters, a daily effort no one was documenting. Those resettled here have worked hard to be unremarkable, because fitting in quietly is how you stay safe.

The work isn't finished, and the supports that came with the national welcome have been withdrawn. Those were federal decisions. The consequences are Vermont's, because these are now our neighbors, our coworkers, and our children's classmates.

Making Afghan women invisible was the Taliban's objective. If we choose not to see them in Vermont, we hand the Taliban that outcome for free. This project makes our neighbors visible and asks a simple question. What becomes possible when a community is truly seen?

Five Years In

They came through federal evacuation and resettlement, supported by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) and the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC). They are still here. Their children are in Chittenden County schools. Their parents are learning a language and working in new fields, because degrees and licenses from Afghanistan rarely transfer. None of it made the news, because none of it was supposed to.

There is an unseen weight and opportunity in this displaced and resettled life. Many left careers behind and started over entirely. In Vermont they are caregivers, interpreters, students, and small business owners.

This project is called Unerased. Under the Taliban, women are being removed from public life. In Vermont they can work, study, drive, speak in public, and be known by name. This project shows them doing it.

Why Now

The fifth anniversary of the fall of Kabul will move through the mainstream news cycle in a single day. The people it belongs to, and the Vermont Afghan Alliance, will still be here the day after, doing what they have done for five years. Documenting this now, at the moment the country's attention briefly turns and then leaves, is the difference between a community being mentioned and a community being known.

Since 2025 the federal government has withdrawn protected status, parole, work authorization, and food and health benefits. Vermont families are living with uncertainty about their status and about reunion with relatives still abroad.

Almost no new Afghan families have arrived in Chittenden County this year, and demand on the Vermont Afghan Alliance has risen anyway, to 690 individual service cases between January and June, with growing need for healthcare navigation, housing, employment support, immigration legal services, and mental health support. The pressure is coming from policy, not from arrivals.

There is a second reason for the timing. As the State of Vermont works to establish an Office for New Americans, this project puts the role of immigrant women in Vermont communities into that conversation while it is still being shaped.

2026 is the year to document and share this story. Both halves of it: the people who rebuilt their lives here, and the Vermonters, organizations and individuals, who welcomed them and continue to show up.



O Jobard / Afghanistan / MYOP

How It Works

This story has been available to be told for five years and has not been told. Doing it well, ethically and authentically, takes three things that rarely sit in one place.

Co-authorship

The women photographed decide how they are represented. They help choose what The PhotoBridge Project documents, review images as the work progresses, select what is shown publicly, and speak in their own words. Dari and Pashto speaking staff from the Vermont Afghan Alliance support communication throughout, so participants can say what they mean rather than what translates easily.

Afghan women have spent five years being described by other people, in coverage of a war and a withdrawal they did not choose. Authorship is the point of this work, not a courtesy attached to

it, it allows their story to be told in a sensitive and secure way fully cognizant of their real concerns around the repercussions of exposure.

Experience

The photographer will be Olivier Jobard, an Emmy Award-winning documentary photographer whose work has focused on Afghanistan and Afghan families for more than two decades. His 2024 book, Our Afghan Family, chronicles the journey of one Afghan family across years of displacement, from Kabul to exile and back again. Through years of sustained engagement he has documented everyday life in Afghanistan with depth, trust, and cultural understanding, building an extensive archive of the country's people, landscapes, traditions, and daily life.

Reach

You cannot fund what you cannot see. Photographs change nothing sitting in a folder. The PhotoBridge Project designs exhibitions and public conversations that put the work in front of people whose decisions matter, then hands the whole thing to the community it documents, permanently, to use as they wish.

What This Project Delivers

A two-act premiere, September 17, 2026

The work debuts at the Vermont Women's Fund Annual Event at UVM, where Shabana Basij-Rasikh, co-founder and president of the School of Leadership Afghanistan and a Middlebury graduate, will speak. Before Vermonters hear from Basij-Rasikh, they walk through the country she and their Afghan neighbors left, in large-scale prints in the Davis Center as they enter: the landscapes, the households, the ordinary days. The new Vermont portraits follow as a large-scale projection, made earlier that week. That room will be the first to see them.

A traveling exhibition across Vermont

Discussions are underway with Main Street Landing, the McCarthy Art Gallery at Saint Michael's College, and Middlebury Arts, alongside libraries, high schools, universities, and community venues. These are precisely the spaces that the Taliban are excluding women from in Afghanistan. When the legislature returns in January, the work can be exhibited at the Vermont State House in Montpelier, in front of the people making decisions about New Americans in this state. Each exhibition will invite conversations between Afghan Vermonters and their neighbors, so the work creates encounters rather than only audiences.

A multilingual digital portfolio

In English, Dari, and Pashto, built for education, advocacy, and public engagement.

Vermont and national coverage

Media conversations are underway with Seven Days and the Middlebury newspaper. Welcome.US has expressed interest in showcasing the Vermont Afghan Alliance as a national story through its networks, carrying Vermont's example to other communities.

A permanent archive, owned by the community it documents

The Vermont Afghan Alliance receives the finished work outright: no license, no expiration, no editorial control retained by the photographer or by The PhotoBridge Project.

Why This Partnership

The Vermont Afghan Alliance brings what no outside organization could. Led by and for the community it serves, the Alliance has spent five years providing employment support, housing, transportation, interpretation, health navigation, immigration legal services, and community connection in Dari, Pashto, and English. The trust that makes this project possible is theirs, built case by case. They shape what the project documents, and they keep the finished work.

The PhotoBridge Project brings the capacity to make it. Co-founder and Executive Director Karen Lambert spent seven years inside Vermont's refugee resettlement community as a Welcome Navigator with USCRI Vermont, and is active in Vermont, New England, and global philanthropy networks. Olivier Jobard brings decades of documenting Afghan communities across several countries and a sustained commitment to portraying Afghan families with dignity and depth. Both are committed to storytelling that centers the voices of the communities being documented, which is the foundation of The PhotoBridge Project's methodology.

Guillaume Binet, Chief Vision Officer and co-founder of The PhotoBridge Project, designs every exhibition the organization produces. A co-founder of the Paris photo collective MYOP and a two-time Pictures of the Year International (POYi) award winner, he has documented displaced and detained populations for MSF, the French Red Cross, and the UN Foundation, with work published in Le Monde, TIME, The Washington Post, and Al Jazeera. He brings decades of working with press and cultural institutions, and he shapes how an exhibition explains itself, so that visitors leave understanding not only what they saw but why it matters.

The project has secured foundational support through City Market Onion River Co-op's 2027 Rally for Change program, funded through its Global Ends initiative, which invests in organizations that strengthen Vermont communities. The Vermont Afghan Alliance and The PhotoBridge Project are now seeking additional funding partners to bring Unerased to full realization.

Afghan women in Vermont are already strengthening their communities as professionals, parents, neighbors, volunteers, and leaders. This project ensures that their contributions are documented, shared, and preserved, creating a lasting record of their role in Vermont while building understanding across the state.

For more information contact Karen Lambert, Co-Founder and Executive Director:
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The PhotoBridge Project is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Burlington Vermont. FEIN 33-4605102. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.
