

## ONCE A STRANGER, NOW FAMILY

Chicago O'Hare International Airport is one of the busiest airports in the world, welcoming travelers daily from more than 210 destinations including 60 international destinations. It would have been hard to pick out Mazin Shaban among the multitudes, as he, his brother, and sister arrived as refugees. They came in summer, 2013 by way of Jordan to be resettled in Chicago by Heartland Alliance after fleeing religious persecution in Iraq. Despite being frightened to come to Chicago and feeling like a stranger, Mazin was hopeful that he would be able to secure a job quickly, acclimate to his new home and find the stability he craved. However life often doesn't work out as planned.

"My educational credentials weren't recognized here [in the U.S.], so I had a hard time finding employment," says Mazin. "It's very important to me to work, though. Heartland Alliance had given so much to me, so as I searched for a job I wanted to volunteer and give back for all they'd done for me."

### Guiding the Lost

Mazin found his place with Heartland Alliance's Travelers Aid program at O'Hare, helping distressed passengers navigate the busy airport. The bustle and energy of the airport was something he quickly came to love. Even after he found employment, he continued to volunteer with Travelers Aid.

"I see so many people from different cultures and nations, and I get to learn about them," he says. "I get to advise them about the city, telling them where to go and what to eat, what's fun to do. I feel at home in the airport." He jokes that he tries to share the good about Chicago, even when it is freezing in the middle of winter.

Mazin's brother and sister also volunteered with Travelers Aid until his sister found a job at the airport and his brother returned to school to work on his master's degree in engineering.

### Finding Home


Mazin's work at Heartland Alliance's Travelers Aid has taken a different turn recently. He's now an employee, coordinating the efforts of volunteers. For a refugee who once arrived knowing no one, in a place wholly unfamiliar, both the work and the team of which he is a part hold special meaning to him.

"The employees here are like family," Mazin explains. "We look out for each other just like we do for the people we help. We make sure people don't feel like strangers anymore. As someone who came here as a refugee, who felt like an outsider, I know how much that means."

Just as he considers his colleagues family, Mazin tries to extend that feeling to those coming to Chicago for the first time, since they are often feeling anxious. He also knows firsthand that many refugees experience discrimination, but points out that there are many people here to help.

Today, Mazin is proud to be a beacon of hope for refugees landing in Chicago for the first time, just as Heartland Alliance was a beacon of hope for him when he arrived at his new home.

**READ MORE TO LEARN ABOUT THOSE WE SERVE HERE:**  
[HEARTLANDALLIANCE.ORG/STORIES](https://heartlandalliance.org/stories)



**"WE MAKE SURE PEOPLE DON'T FEEL LIKE STRANGERS ANYMORE. I KNOW HOW MUCH THAT MEANS."**

Mazin Shaban, Volunteer Coordinator with Heartland Alliance's Travelers Aid program at O'Hare International Airport