

# Strong Voices, New Beginnings: Building Confidence, Community, and Hope for Refugee Women

Mehrish Khan

Human Rights / Immigration and Globalization

December 10, 2025



# IWL Mission Statement

The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

# Background & Foundation

- Refugee women face **disproportionate** emotional distress and “**double burdens**”(Wachter & Shaw, 2025)
- **Restrictive gender norms** and **limited employment access** restrict refugee women’s independence and mobility (Cinar, 2025)
- NJ resettles roughly **400-600** refugees each year, one of the **largest** intakes in the country (NJ DHS, 2023) (International Rescue Committee, 2023)
- Demonstrated need for culturally attuned, women-centered programs that build agency and reduce isolation



# My Social Action Project

- Designed a **women's empowerment workshop** addressing gendered challenges faced by refugee women
- Built a **supportive, culturally attuned** space through guided conversations, goal-setting, and community-building to reduce **isolation** and strengthen **confidence**
- Initially developed with iRise, later adapted to support Emma's Torch's NYC refugee trainees, aligning with their mission of economic independence



# Relation to Feminist Leadership

- Centers **refugee women's** voices and lived experiences, affirming them as leaders
- Creates **women-focused** spaces that challenge **gendered barriers** and shift power toward **marginalized** women
- Builds agency through storytelling, solidarity, and community
- Promotes **confidence** and **self-advocacy**, core to feminist leadership



# Timeline

## August - September

- Created idea
- Contacted/met with iRise to establish partnership

## October

- Met with iRise staff to receive feedback on workshop outline

## November

- Met with iRise staff to finalize location, date, & time for workshop

## Late November

- Encountered logistical issues
- Pivoted idea towards Emma's Torch

## Early December

- Planned with Kira
- Promotion/event registration
- Purchased materials

## December 9

- Hosted graduation gift bag making event for Emma's Torch

# Promotion & Outreach



## *Strong Voices, New Beginnings: Building Confidence, Community, and Hope for Refugee Women*

**Date:** Tuesday, December 2nd

**Time:** 4:30 PM

**Location:**

InterfaithRISE Trenton Office  
1140 Greenwood Ave.  
Trenton, NJ 08609



Registration Link



## **EMMA'S TORCH GRADUATION GIFT BAG MAKING**

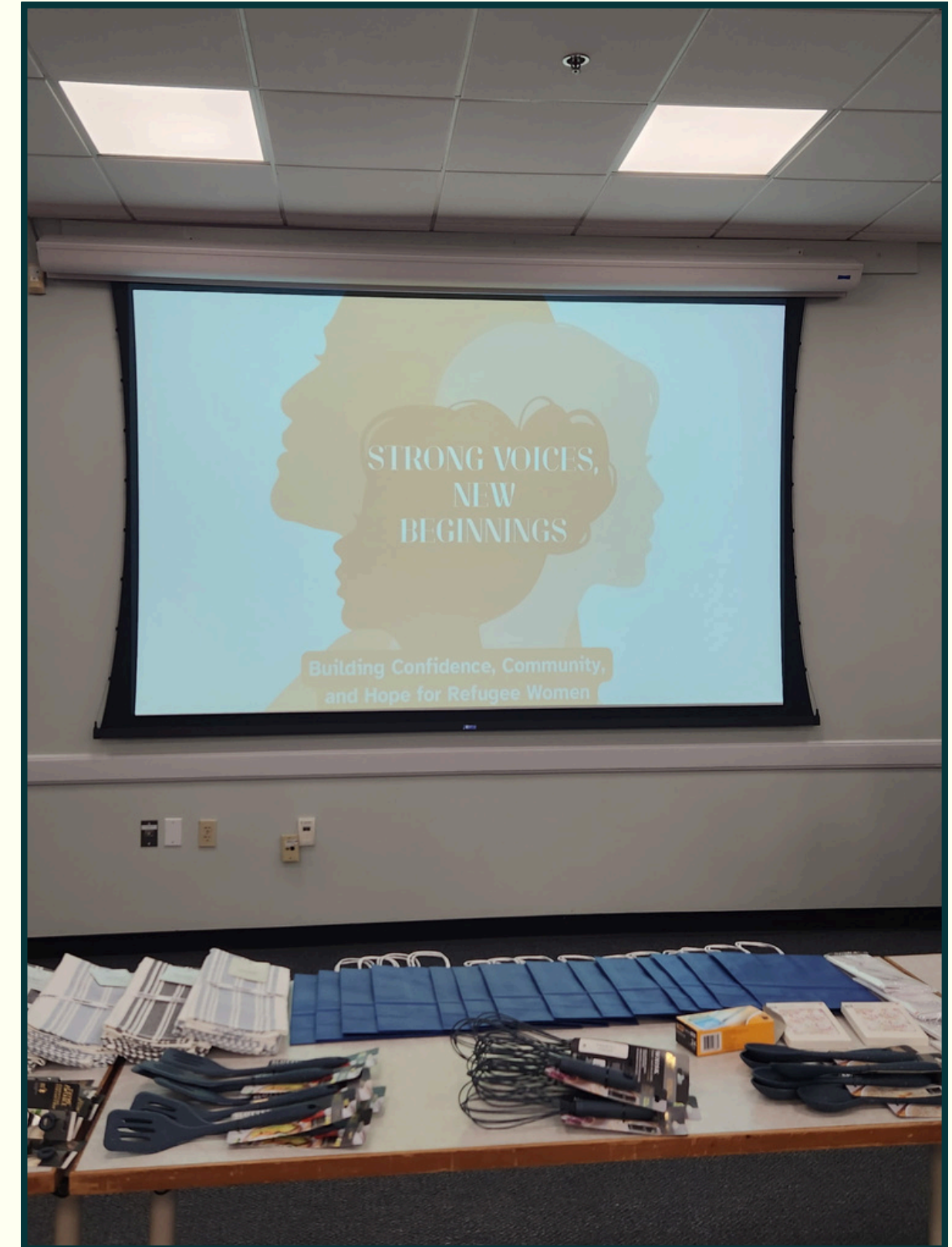
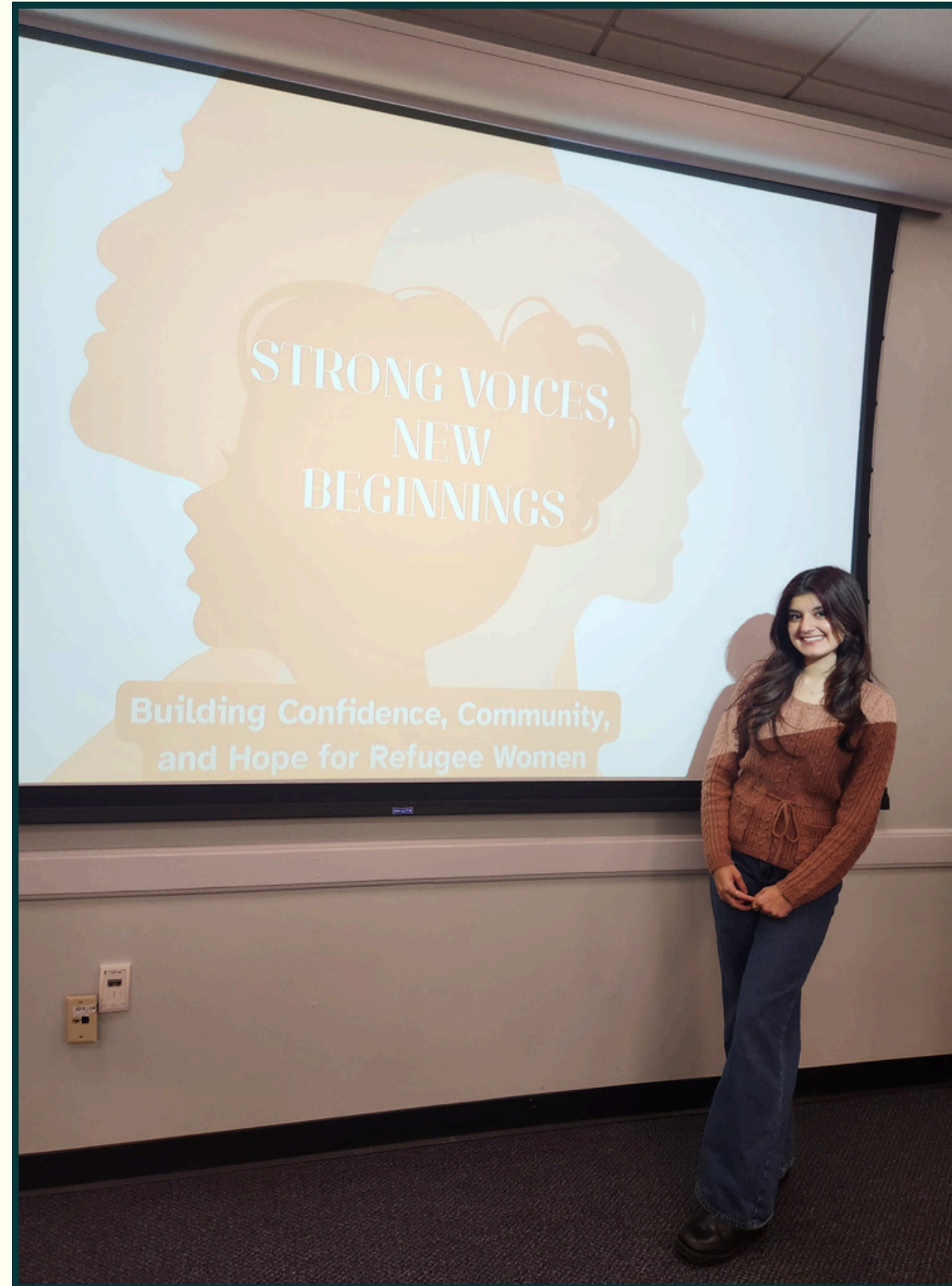
**DATE: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9**

**TIME: 5 PM**

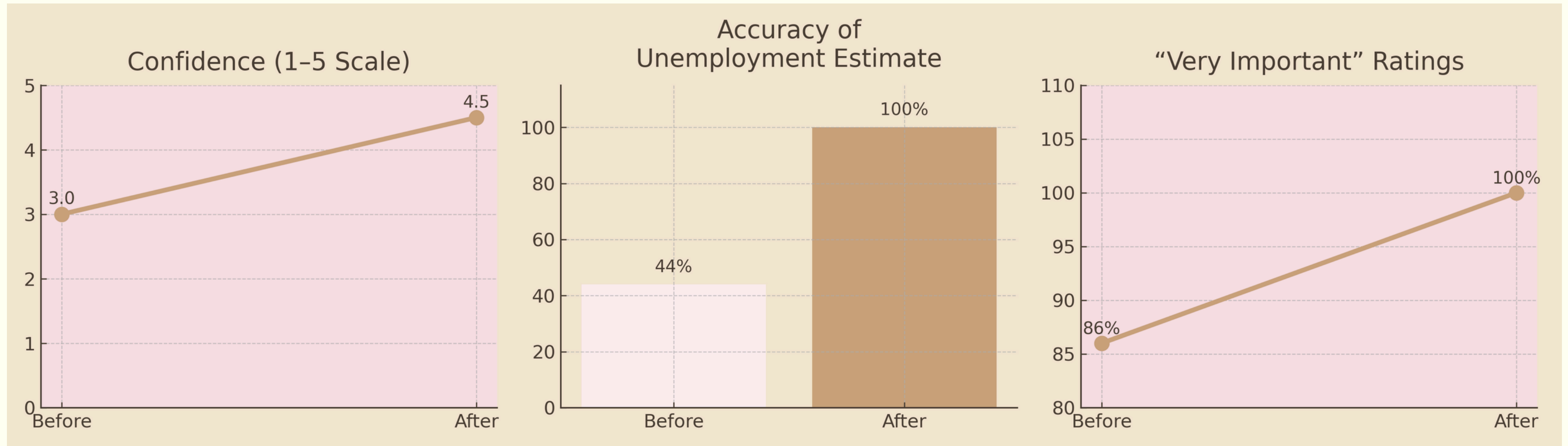
**WHERE: IWL CONFERENCE ROOM**

**RSVP: <https://tinyurl.com/36f3b5t3>**

# Final Product



# Evaluation



**Results based on Mentimeter polls conducted before and after my event**



# Final Budget Breakdown

**Total Budget Used: \$424.07**

**\*Remaining budget will be used to ship gift bags to Emma's Torch**

Item	Cost
Gift Bags	\$20.72
Tissue Paper	\$5.92
Stationery (pens & congratulations cards)	\$14.93
Kitchen Towels	\$93.38
Kitchen Utensils	\$238.07
Food for Event (snacks, plates, & napkins)	\$18.84
Miscellaneous	\$32.21

# Lessons Learned

## 1. Flexibility is leadership

a. Pivoting strengthened my project, not weakened it

## 2. Community impact requires resilience

a. Nonprofits face unpredictable constraints

## 3. Meet people where they are

a. Support must reflect community needs and realities



# Future Impact

- Plan to intern with **Emma's Torch** in Spring 2026 & implement my **women's empowerment workshop**
- Emma's Torch reports **95%** job placement for graduates (Emma's Torch, 2024)
- Strengthen a sustainable model supporting refugee women through **IWL alumni connection**



# Acknowledgements



Sasha Taner

Professor Jackson Brewer

Samantha Agtarap

The rest of the IWL team

My IWL Cohort

Kira O'Brien, Emma's Torch

InterfaithRISE Staff

My family & friends



# Thank You!



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