

# PRSG Newsletter

## December 2021

### Letter from the Executive Director

Dear PRSG Family,

Having had the chance to meet many of our incredible supporters over this first month on the job, it's a pleasure to introduce myself to the wider PRSG network. Your talent, generosity, and welcoming spirit have been on full display, and it's amazing to see all of the great work PRSG has accomplished being 100% volunteer run. Now that we've grown to have full-time staff, I want to let you all know that we intend to keep that grassroots energy alive as we work on the ground to strengthen and expand our programming to meet the tremendous needs being projected in the next few years.



In fiscal year 2021, less than 12,000 refugees were admitted to the United States. The proposed ceiling for refugee admissions in fiscal year 2022 total 125,000. Increasing our community's capacity to effectively welcome these new neighbors depends on organizations on the ground, individually connected to families, offering holistic programming to build a path toward thriving, economically independent futures. Because of the work that you - our volunteers and investors - have done to build Portland Refugee Support Group over the last several years, we're positioned to be a premier partner in that effort.

In November, we organized a Thanksgiving food box distribution, held our Virtual Middle Eastern bake sale, had a successful Giving Tuesday, and launched our End of Year Giving Campaign focused on our Community Classroom programs. We're so grateful for your continued support, and encourage you to invest in our education programs by visiting our campaign site [here](#).

I'm so excited for everything this next year has in store for PRSG. We'll be looking forward to strengthening partnerships with other service providers, building new relationships with supporters, and expanding upon the work of building programs designed to foster long-term economic independence. There is so much work to be done, and I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to work with you all. As always, we have an open-door policy, and I encourage you to reach out to me directly anytime to share your thoughts.

-Peter

# COVID-19 News and Resources

## COVID-19 Case Situation in Oregon – The information below is from the Oregon Health Authority.

*Case situation:* Thankfully, [cases, hospitalizations and deaths decreased statewide](#) from the previous week.

*Breakthrough cases:* [Breakthrough case](#) rates (28%), hospitalizations (4.4%) and deaths (1.2%) have remained consistent for many weeks.

*Omicron variant:* The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Omicron as a new “variant of concern”. The variant has an unusually high number of mutations that may make it more transmissible and more likely to cause reinfection. It has been identified in several U.S. states.

The best strategies to prevent the spread of Omicron include vaccination, masking, improving ventilation, distancing, handwashing, and testing to slow SARS-CoV-2 transmission.

## Federal Plan to Combat COVID-19

Last week, the White House announced a plan to combat COVID-19 and Omicron through the winter months, including some of the following actions:

- Allowing for over-the-counter, at-home tests to be reimbursable by private health insurance.
- Providing free at-home tests to people without health insurance through community clinics.
- Extending mask requirements in airplanes, trains, and public transit through March 18, 2022
- Requiring all travelers coming into the U.S. to take a COVID-19 test one day before their arrival. This includes U.S. citizens and both vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

## Vaccine Info

*Boosters:* The CDC now recommends that anyone age 18 and older get a COVID-19 booster shot.

- Individuals who received a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine can get a booster shot at 6 months or more after their initial series.
- Individuals who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine can get a booster at 2 months or more after receiving the initial vaccine.

Click here to [find a vaccine clinic near you](#). Pfizer is [awaiting a response](#) from the FDA on its request to expand the emergency use authorization (EUA) of a booster dose of its vaccine to include 16- and 17-year-olds.

## Vaccine Clinics

*Pediatric Vaccine Options:* Multnomah County [Student Health Centers are providing COVID19 vaccines to youth ages 5-19](#). Youth under 15 must either be with a parent or guardian, or bring their written consent. Any [youth ages 5-19](#) living in Multnomah County can get vaccinated at any of the student health centers listed [here](#). Family members who come with their child can also get a 1st or 2nd vaccine dose (no boosters). Call 503-988-5558 to schedule. There are no drop-ins.

Check the [COVID-19 Community Vaccine Calendar](#) for weekly vaccine clinics dates and times. You can also go to [Get Vaccinated Oregon](#) or call 2-1-1 to find a vaccine clinic near you. [OHSU](#), [Virginia Garcia Clinic](#), [CVS](#) and [Walgreens](#) are accepting appointments for pediatric vaccines. [FAQ on pediatric COVID19 vaccine for children ages 5-11](#).

## Mask Mandates

*Outdoor mask mandate:* On November 23, the Oregon Health Authority announced the lifting of the outdoor mask mandate, taking effect immediately. While outdoor mask use is still strongly recommended for higher risk people, it is no longer required. [Masks are still required in public indoor settings](#). PPS is not adopting this change for now and [will keep requiring students to wear masks](#) outdoors while at school.

## Upcoming Events

### Crafty Wonderland

We will have a table at [Crafty Wonderland](#) this weekend, December 10th, 11th, and 12th where we will be showcasing baked goods and handmade organic soaps from some of our families. Thank you to Kirsten Burt for securing a spot for us, getting everything set up, and assisting with sales. Thank you to Skyler and Jen for taking time out of your weekend nights to support as well! More information about the event can be found [here](#).

### Rosewood Holiday Market

We will have a table at Rosewood Holiday Market this Saturday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, from noon until 4pm. This event is similar to the Rosewood Saturday Celebrations. All adults who attend the market will receive Rosewood Vouchers to use at the vendor booths where we will have more baked goods available. More information about the event can be found [here](#).



## How you can help!

Thank you to all of our donors. Your generosity is what keeps us going. If you have fundraising ideas or would like to host a goods donation drive, we would love to hear from you. Send an email to [donations@pdxrsg.org](mailto:donations@pdxrsg.org) with your ideas.



If you would like to make a monetary donation, please consider contributing to our end-of-year fundraiser [here](#).

## Volunteers

## Volunteer opportunities

You've completed your application and attended basic training...now what? As we prepare for new families displaced by the situation in Afghanistan and continue to support more than 100 families here in the Portland/Vancouver area, we want to ensure we are overcoming barriers to collection, storage, and distribution of necessary supplies.

We are forming teams that will be responsible for specific aspects of our donation efforts. These teams will have clear objectives, consistent scheduling, and specific goals. If you'd like to learn more about any of the teams listed below, please contact Angela Swan at [angela@pdxrsg.org](mailto:angela@pdxrsg.org) to learn more. Please keep in mind that being on one of these teams does not disqualify you from being able to help in other ways or from being a core volunteer.

- **Storage Unit Inventory Project** - sort, count and inventory donations and supplies in our storage units and office.
- **In-Kind Donations Team** - ongoing collections for monthly care packages.
- **Transportation Team** - picking up and/or transporting donations.

### Something to think about...

Many companies support employees who value volunteering efforts by allowing them time off each month to engage with their favorite organization. Some companies support nonprofits by matching donations or budgeting money to distribute to organizations that their employees value. As 2022 comes upon us, please keep PRSG in mind. We would be happy to speak to your company about how they can get involved! Contact Peter at [peter@pdxrsg.org](mailto:peter@pdxrsg.org) with your thoughts.



# We Love Our Volunteers!

## Highlights – Results from our efforts!



### Winter Clothing Drive

We collected more than 100 coats and jackets and over 40 pairs of gloves and hats in just 2 weeks! Thank you to our donors, volunteers, and [Muslimahs United](#) for the donations and continued support!

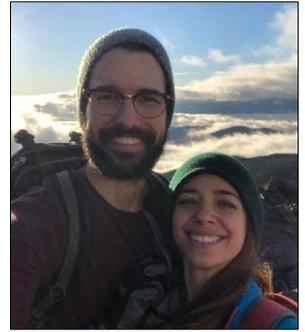
### Virtual Bake Sale

This past weekend, we sold over 80 sampler bags of amazing baked goods that ladies from 11 of our families baked with love. We hope you enjoy your tasty treats! Keep an eye out for our next virtual bake sale!

## Volunteer Spotlight

## Meet Megan!

With a smile that can light any room and a kind heart the size of Mount Hood, Megan French is one of PRSG's finest. As the current head of the Community Classroom program, Megan has helped dozens of PRSG clients improve their English language skills as well as playing many other roles at PRSG. Megan first joined PRSG in 2017, not too long after she moved back to Portland from a year living abroad in France. Much of her reasoning for joining PRSG stemmed from her volunteer experiences in Europe. Soon after graduating with her degree in TESOL, she got a job teaching English in France. She then moved to France at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe and, because of this, Megan knew that she wanted to help in some way while she was there. Megan says, "When I wasn't teaching English, I spent my time traveling around France and Greece, volunteering with refugees who were living in extremely difficult circumstances. Some were homeless because the refugee camp they were staying in was torn down. Others had been living in refugee camps for months, waiting for their turn to be resettled."



Megan took on several volunteer roles during this time - passing out supply bags to homeless refugees, organizing donation items, visiting refugees in detention centers, and tutoring English at refugee camps. These experiences opened her eyes to the many traumas these families were facing, and led her to reflect on the refugee situation in the U.S. She wondered how many refugees were currently residing in Oregon, which areas they were residing in, and what types of challenges they were facing by being displaced in the state of Oregon. When she returned to the U.S., there was no doubt in her mind that she wanted to continue this type of work, this time with the refugee community in Portland.

Once back in Portland, Megan learned about PRSG from another local non-profit that supports refugees, the Refugee and Immigrant Hospitality Organization. At RIHO Megan used to volunteer with children, looking after them and providing educational support while their parents were in English class. She learned about PRSG after volunteering at one of their bake sales as a RIHO volunteer. Not too long after this, Megan was a core volunteer and tutor for two refugee families within PRSG!

Megan shared with us that she learned a lot about the refugee crisis by volunteering with PRSG. She says that "One of the most significant things I've learned is just how many long-term challenges exist for refugee families after they have been resettled. In Europe, she was interacting with families who were in a state of emergency after fleeing their home countries. Their primary concern was just getting somewhere safe to live. Megan adds, "PRSG opened my eyes to the long-term challenges families must deal with once they have been resettled - things like living in poverty, lack of access to jobs and education, and dealing with the psychological effects of the trauma they experienced before coming to the U.S. (and the new traumas they are facing as resettled refugees). The list of barriers they are facing go on and on, which was an overwhelming but important realization to have."

When Megan was asked about what she loves most about volunteering with PRSG she replied, "The best thing for me about volunteering with PRSG is collaborating and building relationships with refugee families, volunteers, and PRSG leadership. I have met so many wonderful people by volunteering with this organization. Everyone I have interacted with has a unique story and an open heart, and it has been amazing to work with each of them."

As PRSG's tutor coordinator and core volunteer for the two families she was originally assigned back in 2017, much of her work involves matching volunteer tutors with refugee families who are in need of tutors, both for adult English language and academic support. She has also worked alongside others in developing tutoring assessments and evaluations to help PRSG better monitor the academic and/or language needs and progress of our students. Although her time is often limited, she has really enjoyed helping with the development of PRSG's education programs and hope to continue this work.

We asked Megan if she had any special memories she would like to share while at PRSG and she replied with a sweet story. She said, "One of my most memorable experiences goes back to my first year with PRSG, when I was regularly tutoring a Syrian woman in English. I would visit her and her family every week and we would work on her writing

assignments from PCC for a couple of hours. One evening after our session, she invited me to stay for dinner with her, husband, and her two children. She cooked up a feast for us where I was able to try so many amazing Syrian dishes that I had never tasted before. While eating, we had some wonderful conversations about all kinds of things, including her family's story and how they ended up where they are today. I ended up staying much longer than our normal tutoring visits, and it meant so much to me that they shared their meals and stories with me. I felt a much stronger bond with this family that night, and it was a memory that I would not have today if I hadn't joined PRSG.”

Outside of work and PRSG, Megan leads an exciting life. She says she comes from a family of 5 kids and divorced parents who have since both remarried to lovely people. Most of her family lives in Portland, besides one sister who has been living in California for a while. They have all chosen fairly different paths for their lives, but, she says, they get along ridiculously well, and it has always been that way. She also has a partner who she has been sharing her life with for the past 3 years. Megan says he is a curious, smart, and loving individual who she has thoroughly enjoyed growing with over these past few years. Megan also shares her home with a pup named Kanga who looks like a mix of coyote, dingo, deer, and kangaroo! She is 1 1/2 years old, a bundle of energy, and goes everywhere with them.



Megan says she feels very lucky for her life now, both because of all the amazing people that are a part of it, and the sense of balance that she feels every day between her work and personal life. She loves living in Portland, teaching ELL and working in the non-profit sector, hanging out with her friends and family, and continuing to learn new things while living very much in the moment from day to day. It's a good place to be!

In her free time, most of her hobbies involve doing something active - yoga, running, rock climbing, or backpacking. She loves any outdoor adventure, cozy nights in with loved ones, chips and guacamole (best snack ever!), sipping on coffee in the morning, going to live shows of her favorite musicians, and getting lost in a good autobiography book.

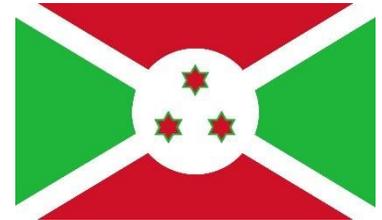
When asked how long Megan will stay with PRSG, she replied, “Although my availability may vary at times over the years, I plan to stay with PRSG for a long time. :)” That makes all of us at PRSG very happy.

Lastly, we asked Megan if there was anything she would change about PRSG and she replied that she would not change anything. Megan says, “It has been an amazing experience so far, especially witnessing how much growth has occurred within PRSG since I first started volunteering with them. I look forward to continue working with all of the lovely people involved in this organization, including our refugee families.”

We are so grateful to have Megan as part of the PRSG family and we thank you for all that you do.

## Burundi – Population 11.9 million

Burundi is a landlocked country found in east-central Africa with Rwanda to the north, Lake Tanganyika to the south, the DRC to the west and Tanzania to the east. One of the few countries in Africa whose borders were not determined by colonial rule, it has a deep history as a rich kingdom. There are two main groups who make up the majority of Burundi's population, the Hutu and Tutsi. Burundi's Hutu people, who are primarily farmers, make up the vast bulk of the country's population. The Tutsi minority, on the



other hand, has long held sway over the army and the majority of the economy, particularly the lucrative international coffee trade. There are few major cultural differences between the two peoples, and they both speak Rundi (Kirundi). Speaking the same language is uncommon in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the peoples of Burundi's historically deep cultural and ethnic links. Despite this, ethnic strife between Hutu and Tutsi has plagued the country since splitting from Belgium in 1962, causing death and destruction throughout the country. When interethnic violence flared up again in the 1990s, few Burundians survived the fighting. Beginning in the late 1990s, neither the presence of an international peacekeeping force nor the ratification of a power-sharing deal between Hutu and Tutsi were immediately effective in reducing interethnic violence, which spread to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Culturally, Burundi has a very rich and colorful history. In the past Burundi's people sang folk songs honoring the royal family of Burundi but since the fall of the monarchy and the massacre of the Hutu this tradition has basically ended. Due to ongoing conflict, the once family-oriented nation has changed into a society living in survival mode with authorities such as political counsel and tribal leaders losing influence. Sadly, once loved festivals and celebrations such as the sorghum festival have been lost. Current governments have worked towards restoring the importance of the shared cultural heritage found within Burundi but sadly it has been a slow process. In terms of religion, most of the people of Burundi practice the Christian faith (60% Roman Catholic, 13% Protestant) and less than 5% practice Islam. Many Christians in Burundi have expressed their distrust of the church causing a loss of religious practice among the young in the country.

The conflict within Burundi continues to cause problems within the country resulting in the 10<sup>th</sup> largest refugee crisis in the world. This crisis is not commonly heard about in mainstream media and sadly it is one the least funded crises in the world making relief efforts of any kind very difficult. Burundi has over 381,000 Burundians who are internally displaced (up by over 40,000 compared to last year). Many of those who have departed Burundi have done so because of the country's deadly political instability, which began in 2015. While security has improved over the last five years, an economic crisis and widespread food insecurity have spurred additional instability. The majority of the people of Burundi who have been

displaced can be found in neighboring countries. Although these countries are trying their best to help, the influx of refugees result in strained resources in the host community.



Luckily Burundi still has a lot of wonderful traditions to share, especially with regards to food, art, and music. The people of Burundi are experts at decorating papyrus panels featuring themes of legends ordained with geometric patterns. These pieces are prized by art collectors along with Burundian handmade swords, drums, and ceramics. Burundian drums are a very important part of the country’s history and heritage passed down from generation to generation. Ornately decorated drums were used as symbols of power and beaten in special events in honor of the king. To learn more about the importance of drums in Burundian culture, click [here](#).

Like with many African nations, Burundi boasts beautiful textiles and patterns in their clothing. The traditional clothing worn in Burundi is made up colorful wraps called pagnes, skirts, and tops made up of 100% cotton. Fancier clothing is often made from silk. Today, the majority of Burundians dress in western attire including suits, jeans, and dresses. To learn more about Burundian culture and society, check out the links below.



[Our Impact | Concern Worldwide \(concernusa.org\)](#)

[Burundi - Cultural life | Britannica](#)

[The Burundian drum is at a crossroads between heritage and commodification | Africa at LSE](#)

[Burundi Fashions \(uganda-rwanda-travelguide.com\)](#)

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