

Jennifer Selendy Named Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year by Chambers and Partners

06/29/2023

Chambers and Partners has designated Jennifer Selendy, founding partner of Selendy Gay, the **2023 Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year**. This extraordinary national award recognizes Jennifer's work and leadership as the co-founder of [30 Birds Foundation](#), a nonprofit dedicated to safeguarding the future of a group of 500 people, predominantly schoolgirls of the Hazara minority, whom the organization evacuated from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan between 2021 and 2022.

Through their work, Jennifer and 30 Birds Foundation ultimately secured the funding and visas needed to evacuate more than 500 people from Afghanistan, including 400 schoolgirls, their family members, and teachers, in two groups—the first in 2021, and the second in the fall of 2022. Today, the community is safe and sound in Saskatoon, Canada.

"These young women have shown incredible promise and courage," said Jennifer Selendy. "They helped organize their own escape, and their optimism and determination are the keys to their future. I am proud to continue supporting them in the next phase of their journey."

In 2021, U.S. troops pulled out of Afghanistan and the Taliban took over, forcing hundreds of schoolgirls into hiding. Jennifer Selendy was introduced via her alumni network at Tufts to the specific plight of girls at the Marefat High School, a haven for Hazara women. The Hazara people are a historically persecuted ethnic minority who have faced genocide in the past. The girls of Marafat High School were already well into their education, making them particular targets for the Taliban. Their educational opportunities, personal freedoms, and futures were torn away, and they faced a variety of threats, including being forced into "marriage" or sexual slavery, kidnapping, and death.

Jennifer felt called to act and became a co-founder of 30 Birds Foundation. Her impact in this role has had wide-reaching implications for these Hazara women and their families. She helped mobilize a network of lawyers, journalists, military experts, government officials, and human rights advocates; she organized the legal support the nonprofit needed both to establish itself and begin the visa applications and evacuation; and she was instrumental in raising the funds necessary to facilitate the evacuation. At the same time, she led a global pro bono effort that united several law firms in their efforts to help this community – a rare example of a collaborative pro bono initiative.

The evacuees have settled into their new lives remarkably well, demonstrating unflinching work ethic and a strong commitment to education, and sharing their culture with the local community. Several are working with the refugee resettlement agency Open Door Saskatoon and speaking out against ethnic-based violence. Many hope one day to return to Afghanistan to promote democratic change for generations of women that will come after them. 30 Birds Foundation continues to support the Marefat community by offering scholarships, providing mentors and support through the college application process, and offering mental health and therapy services.

This is the second year in a row that Selendy Gay has been distinguished by Chambers and Partners for pro bono work on a national scale; in 2022, the firm was named Outstanding Firm for Pro Bono: USA.

Attorney

- Jennifer Selendy

Practice

- Public Interest and Pro Bono