



Omar Bah

The Wheeler School and its Students Involved in Cultural Awareness (SICA) club are pleased to recognize Omar Bah, the Founder and Executive Director of the [Refugee Dream Center, Inc.](#) (RDC), with this year's Wheeler Community Spirit Award.

Bah is a torture survivor, former journalist, and refugee from The Gambia in West Africa. He is also the author of the book, *Africa's Hell on Earth: The Ordeal of an African Journalist*. Bah founded the RDC, which is based in Providence, along with his wife, Teddi Jallow. Through the center, refugees learn new skills, receive case management support and job training, and network in a diverse setting as they work towards self-sufficiency in their new communities and integrate into American society by interacting and sharing their unique cultures and skills.

"It is an honor to be able to celebrate Omar Bah and the incredible work he has done with and for refugees," says Wheeler's Head of School Allison Gaines Pell. "He works and leads with empathy, compassion, and a drive for a better world that speaks to our mission and we know will resonate with and inspire our students."

Bah and the RDC are already serving as an inspiration to a group of Wheeler 8th-graders in the [Cityside](#) program who wanted to learn about the lived experiences of refugees in Rhode Island. After interviewing Bah as part of their project, the students have decided to develop a podcast. "Our goal is to inform the local community about the experiences of refugees, what we can do as a community to help them succeed and feel welcomed, and what we are doing as a community that is working," says Hailey Nickerson '26. Even when their Cityside experience is over, Marion Cook '26 expects the group will "continue collaborating with the Refugee Dream Center because we find them very compelling and wonderful, and we want to help bring awareness to what they're trying to do."

Each year since 2004, the Wheeler Community Spirit Award has recognized a person in the Providence community who advocates for those with fewer opportunities. They are selected based on their efforts in

four key areas: passion for equity and social justice, both locally and globally; appreciation for and promotion of the benefits of education; commitment to creating opportunities in the community for those who otherwise might not have a voice or an advocate; and resilience in the face of challenge and adversity.

“This award recognizes the powerful forces of courage, resilience, advocacy, and passion in the work of social justice and equity,” Bah says. “I have had the privilege to recognize these qualities in the youth population of Providence, who possess brilliant minds and an urge to create change. I dedicate this award to them, because they have reminded me of the power of speaking up on issues that matter. And while thanking The Wheeler School for this recognition, I want to seize this opportunity to thank the entire refugee community for their trust in me and for working with me over the years to grow together. May we continue to uplift and empower one another to create a better world.”

Omar Bah will receive the 2022 Community Spirit Award in a ceremony at The Wheeler School on Feb. 11. The event is sponsored by Students Involved in Cultural Awareness, the Office of Unity & Diversity, and the Wheeler School Parents Association.

### Previous Community Spirit Award Recipients

- 2021: Dr. Nicole Alexander Scott, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH)
- 2020: Dr. Arun Singh, Cardiologist
- 2019: Jeffrey Osborne, Musician and Philanthropist
- 2018: Rose Weaver, Musician, Actress, and Activist
- 2017: Dan B. Miller, Former Head of School at Wheeler
- 2016: Patrice Wood, News Anchor and Adoption Advocate
- 2015: Joseph Le, Former Executive Director of Providence-based Center for Southeast Asians
- 2014: Richard Rose, Assistant US Attorney
- 2013: Angelo Garcia, Founder and Head of School, Segue Institute for Learning
- 2012: Mamie Catlin, Founder of Camp Street Community Ministries
- 2011: Teny Gross, Executive Director, RI Institute for the Study and Practice of Non-Violence
- 2010: G. Gail Davis, Educator and Coach, Rhode Island College Student-Athlete Center
- 2009: Jim Vincent, Manager of Constituent Relations, RI Housing
- 2008: Len Cabral, Master Storyteller
- 2007: Armeather Gibbs, Chief Operating Officer, United Way of Rhode Island
- 2006: Dr. Pablo Rodriguez, Healthcare Leader and Community Activist
- 2005: Rob DeBlois, Educator and Founder, Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program
- 2004: Edward C. Clifton, RI Superior Court Judge

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