

# RACHEL SCOTT

## MA, MPA

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January 14, 2016

Dear Forty Under Forty Selection Committee:

Please accept this letter as my strong recommendation of Christina Sohn Sibouih as deserving of recognition as a Des Moines Business Record Forty Under Forty honoree. Though not a person who seeks the spotlight, Christina's accomplishments are laudable in service of expanding democracy and education across Iowa and even across the globe. As a current colleague and former supervisor of Christina's at the Iowa College Student Aid Commission (Iowa College Aid), I am excited to be a part of her career and personal development. Consistent with past Forty Under Forty honorees, I know that Christina is just getting started with her impeccable brand of social entrepreneurship that builds connections between cultures, supports innovation, and broadens opportunities for people experiencing barriers.

In her current role leading our Grants Administration Division, she serves as Project Director for GEAR UP Iowa, a \$22.4 million dollar, seven year grant from the US Department of Education that is working to build a college-going culture for 6,300 students across twelve high-poverty Iowa school districts, including Des Moines Public Schools. She works tirelessly to mentor and guide staff members working with students, families and school districts to improve the odds that these students will graduate from high school and be prepared to pay for and succeed in postsecondary education. The model she developed and manages not only secured grant funding in a highly competitive process, but has also attracted an additional \$22+ million in pledged support from project partners across the state. Her work to push forward strong systems that will lead to and effectively measure success for Iowa students has gained the recognition of national partners and school district leadership alike. Under her direction, GEAR UP Iowa is already helping to ensure that more students believe college is possible for them.

The magnitude and complexity of Christina's work with GEAR UP Iowa is even more impressive in light of how Christina has spent her "free time" in the last two years as a co-founder and volunteer for the Refugee Resource Center. Christina, her husband Hicham, and two other community leaders saw overwhelming numbers of refugees in the Des Moines area struggling to find assistance with a variety of basic needs from filing for green cards to accessing health care and safe housing. These four volunteers established a board and weekly assistance, proving to refugees from countries across the globe that the Des Moines community cares enough to assist them with problem-solving and resources—even if official support is no longer available to them.

While I will not discuss Christina's considerable achievements before I met her in 2013, I would last like to share the inspiring context from which she lives her life. Not only a first generation college graduate, but also the first in her family to graduate high school, Christina's personal and educational journey has been built on tremendous courage. As a Lincoln High School graduate initially working in customer service, Christina couldn't for long ignore the draw that she was destined to experience more and help more. Enrolling at Grand View, she sped through a course load her professors must have found insane. When Grand View couldn't offer a study abroad program, she devised her own, boarding the first plane in her life, embarking to Morocco. Adding to her fluent Spanish, Christina learned French, Arabic, Moroccan Arabic and other languages, eventually earning a Master's in International

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Studies and Diplomacy from a Moroccan university before working to build democratic engagement in places like Morocco and Tunisia.

Somehow, Des Moines got Christina back—our community and Iowa College Aid are unquestionably better with her here. Despite Christina's busy professional life, caregiving to her three small children, her adopted teenage daughter and ailing grandfather who lives with her, she has made time to personally assist several hundred of Des Moines' diverse refugee community members every Wednesday night for the last two years. She is a powerful example to students who would be the first in their families to attend college, to young women learning to navigate public service—to anyone who might wonder if hard work in service to others is something that pays off.

Christina Sohn Sibouih is among the most impressive, intelligent, community-minded and hardworking persons I have ever met. It is my honor to work alongside her each day and to recommend her for this recognition.

Sincerely,





January 14, 2016

Dear Forty Under 40 Selection Committee:

I am proud to support Christina Sibouih's nomination to the 2016 Forty Under 40 class. For eight years, I have witnessed her professional achievements and successful pursuit of her passion for multicultural understanding, and commend her to you for this important recognition.

Christina and I met beginning in 2008, when she joined the staff of the Iowa Council for International Understanding (ICIU, now known as the Iowa International Center) and I served on its board. She had been a top student achievement at Grandview in Des Moines and Al Ahkawayn University in Morocco, and worked with the National Democratic Institute in Africa. It quickly became clear to me that Christina had a passion for welcoming international visitors and immigrants to Iowa, and she ably positioned ICIU to do the best possible job of that in her finance and marketing roles for more than two years. Christina earned love and respect from colleagues and clients alike, making everyone feel that she would do everything in her power to make a positive difference for them. And she has continued to accomplish that in spades.

When Christina moved on to a grant writing role with Drake University, I learned from several sources that she excelled in connecting grant opportunities with appropriate departments. In 2013, after joining the Iowa College Student Aid Commission staff, she made a tremendous impact when she succeeded in garnering a federal grant, matched by non-federal dollars, to establish a seven-year, \$45M program called Gear Up Iowa. Christina manages this program, promoting college readiness among Iowa students in twelve school districts across the state. Its success alone would make her worthy of recognition.

Yet, she has done so much more. While working full time and with a growing family at home, Christina has devoted tremendous amounts of time and resources to causes that promote civil rights, diversity and inclusion. I personally benefited in 2012 when she volunteered for my campaign for the Iowa House of Representatives – a selfless service that meant the world to me. She has continually offered French and Arabic translation skills through the Iowa International Center since leaving that employment. But her crowning achievement is likely the establishment of the Refugee Resource Center of Iowa, where she personally gives countless hours to help refugees obtain green cards and employment, and access medical care and housing. A mutual friend said, "What would Iowa refugees ever do without her? They'd be lost." I am grateful that instead, they see in Christina their role model among Americans. So do I.

Sincerely,

  
Susan Judkins  
Project Developer

1/14/2015

Dear Forty Under 40 Selection Committee:

I would like to lend my support to Christina Sibouih's nomination for the 2016 Forty Under 40 class. I have worked very closely with Christina the past year and a half creating a non-profit agency called the Refugee Resource Center. It has been an absolute pleasure working with her and she is one of the most dynamic people I have ever worked with.

Christina has had a very eclectic professional career and has literally lived and worked all over the world. I really admire the fact that she chose to return to her home state of Iowa and share her experience and education with us. Since her return to Iowa she has been employed with Iowa Council for International Understanding, Drake University and Iowa College Aid. She has been very successful in grant writing for all 3 of these agencies. She is very well respected by everyone who comes in contact with her.

Christina does a wonderful job balancing her life; she has 3 small children at home, a full time job and then has been a founding member of the Refugee Resource Center. She manages to do a wonderful job at everything she endeavors. I am frankly in awe of her on a regular basis.

Christina is an amazing role model and I wish there were more people in this world like her. Thank you for considering her for this honor!

Sincerely,

Deidre Evans

Founder/Treasurer

Refugee Resource Center