

AFGHAN REFUGEE MENTOR RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SPONSORING AND ASSISTING RESETTLEMENT

AFGHAN REFUGEE
RESPONSE TEAM

*Episcopal Diocese of Washington
November, 2021*

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<i>NOTE: The Lutheran Social Services Manual helpfully outlines key roles for hosting a family at different levels of commitment and provides detailed guidance on setting up teams and the roles of each team supporting a refugee. It also provides a sample budget (please note government assistance numbers likely have changed due to the influx of refugees). It also provides a glossary of some other refugee-related terms.</i>	
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If you have any questions about this guide, please contact
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CAUTIONARY NOTE TO USERS OF THE AFGHAN REFUGEE MENTOR RESOURCE GUIDE

In this rapidly changing environment for Afghan refugee resettlement, we urge all users to closely monitor new developments as the U.S. Government and the resettlement agencies cope with the massive influx of refugees that need to be settled. Policies and programs are changing quickly in the effort to accommodate everyone in need. This guide presents our best information and past experiences as of November 2021.

Welcoming the Stranger

“...I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.”
Matthew 25:35

Dear Friends in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington,

I have been in awe of our collective response to the urgent need to welcome and support the thousands of Afghan refugees that have sojourned so far from their homes in search of safety and peace. Yet I am not surprised, given your compassionate hearts and commitment to Jesus’ Way of Love.

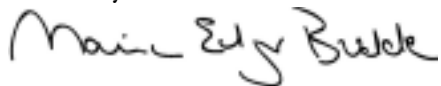
The global context for our work is sobering. According to the U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees, 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced globally as of the end of 2020. A quarter of them, 26.4 million, are refugees: people “unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (1951 Refugee Convention).

Jesus reminds us that these are our siblings. As his followers, we are called to welcome those who come to our land in search of safety.

Refugee resettlement has long been a priority of the Episcopal Church, and many in our diocese have long engaged in this ministry. We now seek to deepen and expand our engagement. Through the EDOW Afghan Refugee Response Team established this fall, **we are working to empower and support all our congregations to undertake the important work of Welcoming the Stranger in ways large and small, in partnership with other faith communities, nonprofits, and community groups.** I am confident that the capacity we build now will not only help meet the current crisis, but also help make “Welcoming the Stranger” a shared, sustainable ministry throughout the Diocese for the future, enabling us to welcome refugees from all over the world who will continue to come to our communities.

The support of a faith community can make the crucial difference in our new neighbors’ success in resettling in the United States. We bring unique human value to the resettlement process: the warm personal embrace of often traumatized people, caring assistance in adapting to a new and strange environment and an unfamiliar community, basic human connection through personal relationships. Thank you for your part in this important work.

Faithfully,



The Right Reverend Mariann Edgar Budde
Bishop of Washington

October 2021

EDOW AFGHAN REFUGEE RESPONSE TEAM MENTORS

The members of the Afghan Refugee Response Team listed below are available to answer questions and support you in your journey of supporting refugees in your parish/region. Please feel free to reach out to them.

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September 2, 2021

REFUGEE AND ASYLEE CATEGORY DEFINITIONS

As people enter the United States, they are given various statuses. Below are a few important categories and definitions to help guide you. The 3 categories below “refugee” apply directly to those who receive refugee status. Asylee is another category on its own.

Refugee: a person who has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Once they have fled their home, they must apply for refugee status with an official entity, such as a government or the United Nations Refugee Agency, who determines whether a person meets the definition of a refugee, based on well-founded fear.

Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Holders: Afghans who have completed the Special Immigrant Visa process and their dependents will be assisted by the Department of State and non-governmental organizations to begin their resettlement process. Those individuals who have not finished the SIV application process are paroled in by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) while their SIV applications are adjudicated, or they determine whether to apply for another immigration status through United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Such individuals will be eligible to apply for work authorization and other benefits.

Humanitarian Parole: Afghans will be paroled into the United States, on a case-by-case basis, for humanitarian reasons. This permits certain Afghan nationals to come into the United States, on a case-by-case basis, for a period of 2 years and subsequent to appropriate screening and vetting, provided their movement to the United States is being carried out pursuant to the current operation. Once paroled by Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Afghan nationals may be eligible to apply for immigration status through USCIS. Afghan nationals paroled by CBP will also have conditions placed on their parole, to include medical screening and vaccination requirements and other reporting requirements.

There are three principal categories through which individuals can seek access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP):

- A. P-1: Priority One. Individuals with compelling protection needs or those for whom no other durable solution exists. These individuals are referred to the United States by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or they are identified by a U.S. embassy or a non-governmental organization (NGO).
- B. P-2: Priority Two. Groups of “special concern” to the United States, which are selected by the Department of State with input from USCIS, UNHCR, and designated NGOs. Currently, these groups include certain persons from the former Soviet Union, Burma, and Iraq.
- C. P-4: Priority Three. The relatives (parents, spouses, or unmarried children under 21) of refugees who are already settled in the United States. The U.S.-based relative must file an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) and must be processed by DHS.

Asylees: An asylum seeker is also someone who is seeking international protection from dangers in his or her home country. However, asylum seekers must apply for protection in the country of destination – meaning they must arrive at or cross a border in order to apply. Overall, the asylum process can take years to conclude. In some cases, a person may file his or her application or pass a credible fear screening and receive a hearing or interview date years in the future. If their application is ultimately accepted, the asylum seeker receives asylee status – granting them relief from deportation and the right to work legally in the U.S.

RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED LEARNING

There are a lot of places to get information. Here are key resources that the EDOW Afghan Refugee Response Team has gathered to support your continued learning.

RESOURCES

Source: Department of Homeland Security Operation Allies [Welcome Fact Sheet](#)

Source: Lutheran Social Services

- National Capital Area Welcoming Refugees [Good Neighbor Timeline](#)
- Lutheran Social Services [Home Supply List](#)

NOTE: The Lutheran Social Services Manual helpfully outlines key roles for hosting a family at different levels of commitment and provides detailed guidance on setting up teams and the roles of each team supporting a refugee.

Source: USA Hello – [Immigration Information for Afghan Nationals](#) and [Afghan Resource Center](#)

- These are helpful resources for Afghan Refugees to have access to essential services and information.

Source: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services [Information for Afghans](#)

- This is a helpful resource to understand the various statuses with which the Afghan Refugees are entering the U.S.

Source: KamaDC [Support for Afghans](#)

- From buying gift cards to driving new arrivals to appointments to donating spare airline miles, KAMA DC volunteers have compiled a list of ways that you can support Afghans arriving in the DMV area.

Source: Montgomery Community College [Refugee Training Center](#)

- The Refugee Training Center offers special programming for refugees, approved asylees, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Cuban and Haitian parolees, and victims of human trafficking.

DMV AREA REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES

[Lutheran Social Services](#) (LSS)

- Lutheran Social Services is a community partner of the Afghan Refugee Response Team and is our regions Refugee Resettlement agency.

[Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#) (LIRS)

- Another community partner to the Afghan Refugee Response Team, LIRS is dedicated to offering newly arrived refugees a warm welcome and a firm footing, in the hopes that our newest neighbors might find peace and prosperity once again.

[International Rescue Committee](#) (IRC)

- The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future.

[Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington](#) (CCDA)

- Catholic Charities has served the needs of the vulnerable, regardless of their faith, on behalf of the Catholic Church in the northern part of Virginia.

THREE OPTIONS FOR AFGHAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The following pages include three options for Afghan Refugee Resettlement. Please note that there are various ways to support and a myriad of resources. Those presented here are ones the Afghan Refugee Response Team have experience with, but they are not the only possible ways to help.

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AFGHAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT OPTION ONE:

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES BRIEFING WHAT TO EXPECT IN FIRST 60-90 DAYS

This briefing was compiled by St. John's Episcopal Church, Norwood in an effort to capture the essential aspects of the first 60-90 days with a newly settled refugee family. Congregations will undoubtedly have varied experiences, but the Afghan Refugee Response Team believes this briefing will be helpful to review as it demonstrates a real world example of going through the Lutheran Social Services process.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

- LSS Will set up a Google Spreadsheet of Core Services for first 90 days that will be accessible to parish Team Leaders. This will include scheduling of all appointments, dates and purposes, and transport needs/who is responsible.

NOTE: We will need to coordinate internally and with LSS on transportation via this spreadsheet, but we may need a schedule of our own so we don't double book.

- LSS notes that many of the initial processes will result in mail to family, but mail is not a known concept, so support teams should monitor mail initially to ensure that SS and other cards get to the family and they know what they are.
- Be aware that any photos of family should not be shared without their permission (including in Church communications such as websites, newsletters and social media, etc.)

II. FIRST 60 DAYS: MOST INTENSIVE PERIOD OF LSS ENGAGEMENT, INCLUDES:

Day 1: Airport Pick Up and Transport to Home/Evaluation and Training

- Picking up family at Airport (with van) and transport to house. LSS will provide interpreter.
- Housing: LSS will take family to house and review use of home, also review safety and overall standards of house. They will monitor housing for the first 2 weeks to ensure family is comfortable and adjusting.
- Culturally appropriate meal must be provided by team for first meal at home.
- Ensure at least 1 week of groceries are in the house.
- Family may have a phone, in which case we will need to help them get new SIM cards. Make sure they have a phone available and know who to call.

Day 2-30: Intense Appointments set by LSS (one SJN could accompany)

- Social Security Appointment: whole family will be taken by LSS to get SS Cards.
- Benefits Appointments: LSS responsible for taking adult in family to apply for food stamps and public cash assistance. (Location: IRC Office, Silver Spring)
- LSS Home Visit: again after 24 hours to ensure family is comfortable and safe.

- School Registrations: LSS will do, may need transport assistance
- Health Screening: LSS takes family to Silver Spring Community Clinic for initial health screening (required), follow up thereafter as needed
- ESL: Sign Up Primary Member (mother) and spouse for ESL at Montgomery College. ESL will be 4 days a week for 4 hours each.
- Family Self Sufficiency Plan: developed so that family understands the role of LSS (primary in 1st 3 months) and that of SJN. Set boundaries.
- Transportation System Training: Family will need to be taught how to ride busses to key locations (and will be tested on this within first 2 weeks), such as the grocery, library, Montgomery College for ESL. They will be tested periodically throughout the first 3 months to assess familiarity. Family will need Smart Trip Cards
- Medical Insurance: LSS Files for this at their offices
- Cultural Orientation: Adults/Family receives 4 hours of cultural training at LSS in first 2 weeks, including geography, U.S. culture, health and hygiene expectations, cash assistance: Childcare and transport will be necessary (SJN?)
- Enrollment in Employment Program: job searches start immediately as they are necessary for matching grants vs. TCA at LSS

NOTE: Childcare may be needed in some cases. Childcare subsidies are available but requires additional process and take 30 days or so to process.

Day 30-60:

- Case Manager Home Visit: comprehensive visit assessing cultural orientation and progress in language, ability to use transportation system, address monthly budget
- Social Security and medical insurance (MEDICAID) should be in place.

NOTE: It takes 4-6 weeks for cards to arrive.

NOTE: need to monitor mail for these.

- If there are medical problems in the interim while medical insurance is pending, family will get the bill and Medicaid will be paid retroactively.
- Medicaid: Once Medicaid cards come in, LSS staff member will review options for care organizations and help family decide on preferences.
- The Case Manager is responsible for updating all documentation and applications as key documents come in.
- Watch mail for temporary Green Cards – important documents for them to establish a bank account.

Day 60:

- Case Manager Home Visit: Case manager will repeat cultural assessment and state of adjustment. Do they know their address? Phone number? The way to the supermarket on their own?
- Employment Process Continues: family needs to keep track of efforts to find jobs and develop an activity log each week. They must have 40 ours of active work, including ESL and job searches, per week to be eligible for benefits.

III. FINANCES

- Family will receive \$1,125 for each family member for Government-assisted family resettlement. Could be used for initial rent, family gets balance at end of 3 month adjustment period.
- SJN and Family need to keep receipts for any payments in first 3 months.

AFGHAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT OPTION TWO:

LUTHERAN IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICE (LIRS) APA COMMUNITY PARTNERS

LUTHERAN IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICE (LIRS) IS LOOKING FOR HELP TO RESETTLE VULNERABLE AFGHAN FAMILIES.

In direct response to the evacuation of thousands of vulnerable Afghans to the U.S., the Department of State created a 90-day program to resettle these families into welcoming communities throughout the U.S. The majority of Afghans who will be resettled worked for the United States on its mission in Afghanistan, in various roles across military, diplomatic, and developmental efforts – and in many cases, these are the family members and children of someone who helped the U.S.

Through the State Department funded 90-day Afghan Placement & Assistance (APA) program, program participants will receive:

- Food and basic needs
- Housing and supplies
- School enrollment
- Connection to English class and employment services for adults
- Cultural orientation and social connection

LIRS is looking to recruit “APA community partners” who are established organizations or community entities such as church congregations with an interest in helping to resettle vulnerable Afghan families for a period of up to 90 days. Please note, individuals and informal groups cannot serve as community partners. With the support of trained community partners, we believe we can achieve our goal of helping the Biden Administration resettle 50,000-75,000 vulnerable Afghans over the next six months.

Requirements to Become an APA Community Partner In order to become an APA community partner, you will be required to:

- Complete a 2-page application form which must be approved by the Department of State
- Sign a formal agreement with LIRS to be an APA community partner
- Receive training on how to be an APA community partner
- Commit to serving at least ten Afghan families for 30-90 days
- Provide culturally appropriate and client centered services to assigned families

AFGHAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT OPTION THREE:

This is information shared by the Biden Administration. If this is something that you and your congregation want to do, please contact [Deb Stein](#), Community Sponsorships Hub Sponsors Circle Coordinator.

A NEW ALTERNATE PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP OPTION SPONSOR CIRCLE PROGRAM FOR AFGHANS

The Biden administration on Monday [September 25, 2021] announced a new program that would allow groups of private citizens to sponsor Afghan refugees, a move that could bolster a weakened U.S. resettlement system tested by thousands of recent arrivals.

Under the program, groups of individuals may form “sponsor circles” to help Afghan refugees during their initial resettlement in the United States.

The sponsor circles will be responsible for helping refugees with basic services during their first 90 days in the United States, managing tasks traditionally undertaken by nonprofit resettlement groups. The groups, among other things, would help secure housing, provide basic necessities like furniture, clothing, and food, and help refugees access government benefits.

“Americans of all walks of life have expressed strong interest in helping to welcome these individuals,” the State Department said in its announcement. “The Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans harnesses this outpouring of support and enables individuals to become directly involved in the welcome and integration of our new neighbors.”

The program is a partnership with the Community Sponsorship Hub, a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisers, Inc., which will vet, certify and train the individuals in the sponsor circles. The groups also must raise \$2,275 per Afghan newcomer.

Earlier this month, the Biden administration said roughly 7,000 of the Afghans who arrived in the United States since fleeing Taliban-controlled Kabul had been resettled into American communities. But most of the evacuees – more than 53,000 – continued to wait at U.S. domestic military bases. An additional 15,000 remained at overseas sites, waiting to be vetted.

[\[Afghan refugee arrivals will test US resettlement system\]](#)

The arrival of the Afghan refugees, following their country’s August collapse, has put tremendous pressure on the complicated U.S. resettlement infrastructure, which reduced staff and resources during the Trump administration years when few refugees were being admitted.

The Biden administration, despite lofty promises to rebuild the overall refugee system, has struggled: just 11,411 refugees were resettled in fiscal 2021, [the lowest number in the history](#) of the current resettlement program.

Allowing private citizens to help directly with refugee resettlement could help fill the gaps, advocates say.

“With the current capacity challenges, a parallel model like this could be helpful for reaching higher refugee admissions,” said Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, president of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, a refugee resettlement group.

The administration aims to resettle 125,000 refugees in fiscal 2022, a promise that dates to President Joe Biden's presidential campaign.

The administration had hinted at plans to expand private pathways for refugees in its refugee admissions proposal to Congress in September. The State Department said it aimed to launch a private refugee sponsorship program, through which "community members will take on the primary responsibility of welcoming and providing initial support to newly arrived refugees, helping facilitate their successful integration."

Private sponsorship of refugees is not new, Vignarajah said. Before 1980, church groups and private individuals were the primary source of refugee sponsors. The system exists already in Canada, where large numbers of refugees are guided through their initial months by Canadian citizens.

However, Vignarajah stressed that the citizens sponsoring refugees will need proper support from the existing resettlement infrastructure.

"With that said, it's imperative that it is implemented thoughtfully and with sufficient institutional support," she said. "We want to make sure that both refugees and the Americans who welcome them feel positioned for successful outcomes."

Source: *The Washington Post/Rollcall*

GUIDES, HELPFUL HINTS, AND “HOW-TO’S”

The following pages are guides, helpful hints, and “how-to’s” provided by congregations and collaborations that have sponsored refugees in the past. We understand that each parish is unique, so this information is meant to serve as a guide. Take what speaks to you and leave what doesn’t. If you have any questions, please refer to the mentor list on page 5.

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Collaboration Among Three Churches in Helping Afghan Refugees: All Souls Episcopal, Christ Church Georgetown, and St. John’s Georgetown	47
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ST. JOHN'S, NORWOOD EPISCOPAL CHURCH REFUGEE MINISTRY REPORT AND GUIDE

ON SUPPORT FOR THE
KABIRA/KAMBERE/LWAMBI FAMILY FROM
THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

November 2018-November 2020



**ARRIVAL, NOVEMBER 2018
DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

REPORT OF SUPPORT FOR THE KABIRA/ KAMBERE/LWAMBI FAMILY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

2018-2020

I. BACKGROUND ON THE MINISTRY

St. John's Episcopal Church Norwood Parish (Chevy Chase, MD) has a long history of supporting refugee families, dating back at least to the post-Vietnam era, when the church supported (2) Vietnamese refugee families. In 2017, St. John's resumed work in this area, starting initially with work to provide furnishings for incoming refugee families supported by Lutheran Social Services (LSS), one of the agencies in the Washington, DC/Montgomery County, Maryland area responsible for refugee support.

Initial work to help set up housing for refugee families did not involve actual engagement with the families. Thus, in 2018, St. John's members sought to expand our engagement, by volunteering to take on a full-year's support for a family. We anticipated supporting a family of 4 or 5 and began raising funds toward a goal of support of \$30,000 to help with rent and living expenses for the first year, with the understanding that the family would be reasonably small. Our intention was to support a family of a military interpreter for the United States from Afghanistan or Iraq. However, shortly after we volunteered we learned that special visas designated for these special refugees were being held up by the Government. Nevertheless, we began recruiting volunteers and working with LSS to train and obtain clearances for our volunteers.

After waiting many months for a family, Lutheran Social Services approached us to see if we would be willing to help a family of 10 from the Democratic Republic of Congo. After some serious soul searching, we decided that as a relatively well-off church community, if we could not support this family, it would be hard for others to do so. We agreed to take on the task as an LSS Refugee Good Neighbor sponsor for a year. Upon our agreement to sponsor the family work began in earnest.

II. "OUR FAMILY:" WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT WE KNEW

In late 2018, we received basic information on the family, their arrival date, ages, level of education, and languages spoken (Swahili) from LSS. The KabiraKambere/Lwambi (KKL) family was composed of Nzuba Kabira (mother and principal applicant), Vital Kambere (father), Imani Lwambi (19), Eric Lwambi (15), Esther Lwambi (13), Sera Lwambi (12), Ishara Lwambi (10), Dorika Lwambi (7) and 18-month-old twins Lumoo (a little girl, also known as Benedie), and Butsiire (a little boy, also known as Benja). The family had very little English, but the children had studied a bit in the Uganda Refugee Camp where they had resided for 5 years. Nzuba was functionally pre-literate, (but we discovered she is a very wise woman), and the father, Vital could speak and read several Congolese dialects, as well as Swahili.

The KKL family originally was from North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They experienced several years of terror by rebels, first, in a rampage that resulted in the death of Nzuba's father and disappearance of her mother, and several years later, another incident in which their entire village was burned down. They lived for 3 years in the wilderness before finding shelter in the Nakivili Refugee Camp in Uganda. The family lived there, in uncomfortably dangerous circumstances, and there they applied to come to the United States. Their refugee status was accepted by the United States in 2018, and they traveled to the United States in November 2018. Staff from Lutheran Social Services of Montgomery County and St. John's Norwood volunteers greeted them at Dulles Airport and took them directly to their new home in Bethesda, MD.

III. PREPARATIONS FOR SPONSORSHIP

Lutheran Social Services: In preparing for sponsorship, St. John's relied heavily on information provided by Lutheran Social Services (LSS). LSS provided detailed substantive materials and check lists that outlined the key responsibilities of the general coordinator, employment team, food and clothing team, finance team, housing and furnishing team, transportation team, and welcome team. They also provided a housing supply list, and documentation on what to expect in the first 60-90 days, when LSS was most directly and actively involved. In addition, LSS provided training for all our volunteers and information on vetting and clearing volunteers that would have regular contact with the family members. LSS is responsible for many of the initial processes in the first few months, including obtaining social security numbers, work permits, and Medicaid cards.

Other Sources of Advance Support: St. John's teams also reached out to other groups that had experience sponsoring refugee families. In particular, we found very helpful the informal Refugee Support Group (contact merritt@shconnections.org), a network of representatives from churches and synagogues that offered regular meetings to discuss key topics with experts and to share experiences and solutions to challenges. This group also has a blog site that helped members seek and obtain information between meetings.

We also reached out to specific churches and temples to train our team leaders, seeking advice from Temple Micah in Washington, DC, which had just completed their sponsorship. They were full of extremely valuable insights and provided information that supported our efforts all year long. We discovered that 3 religious entities nearby (Old Georgetown Methodist Church, Temple Beth-El and St. Mark's Presbyterian Church) also were sponsoring a recently arrived Congolese family and worked together with them to share information and host joint events with our families. Other faith communities hosting families regularly shared information and met with us to discuss common challenges. St. John's provided one of our members to discuss managing refugee trauma and, not least, caring for all the caregivers involved in these projects. (St. John's set up a monthly opportunity to meet with trauma experts to support all our volunteers, as well.

Local organizations, including Kindworks and Bethesda Rotary, also helped with furnishing the home, along with St. John's parishioners. We remain grateful to all these institutions for their willingness to share their insights, wisdom and financial and other support.

IV. DEFINING TEAMS AND RESPONSIBILITIES – *BASED ON LSS GUIDANCE AND THAT OF ABOVE*

We set up teams of volunteers to handle the following tasks throughout our year. Below we also provide some thoughts from each team leader on responsibilities, time requirements, an assessment of what worked well and what did not and, if not, what we would recommend doing differently.

Overall Coordination of the Refugee Team (Lead: Christie King, and ultimately also Nancy Adams as co-coordinator)

- Responsibilities
 - Regular team leader meetings
 - Regular briefings of church leadership/address legal issues (lease)
 - On call 24/7
 - Emergency issues and back up
 - Coordination with LSS on administrative issues, e.g., Social Security, Medicaid, Food Benefits (SNAP), Green Cards
 - Local Community orientation
 - Retention of all key documentation required to assist in obtaining benefits
- Amount of time required: Extensive in initial stages, through administrative procedures, like SNAP and Green Cards, regular intensive periods of engagement to monitor developments and address challenges.

- What we did right?
 - Working with different interpreters (of different ages) helped us work with both the parents and children. For example, we worked with a young Congolese World Bank staffer to help the girls with their clothing needs (including intimate issues), but worked with an older Congolese interpreter who translates for Montgomery County Schools when addressing key family decisions (budget, jobs, schooling, moving, etc.)
- What internal processes helped? We held regular team meetings, and regular meetings with family (also periodically with interpreters when key decisions were required)
- What we would do differently?
 - We recommend that volunteers focus more on providing more practical experiences, not stuff. After basic equipment, furniture and clothing have been provided, it might have been more helpful to take newcomers to places like the Church Opportunity Shop, Goodwill, etc., along with trips to the grocery store.
 - We could have included these practical learnings in the way our Teams were organized. The LSS material seemed to indicate that we needed to respect the family's privacy and not overwhelm them, but I think they would have been game for more interaction. Certainly, the outings we did with the kids in DC, and our excursions to the Mormon Temple for Christmas lights, our holiday and birthday parties, Halloween assistance, and the visit to the pumpkin patch will be things they will remember us by. But we could have done more with practical education.
 - Of course, not every family will be arriving with the same experiences. And maybe the SIVS who are more likely to be arriving in the coming year will be much more sophisticated, and thus might be ready to be guided into job interviews. Christie did work with another woman in my neighborhood who was assisting an Afghan family in Baltimore by contacting a friend who heads an architectural firm. He got the guy in to interview with some folks on his staff, and they were able to steer him to some contractors they work with.

Housing: obtaining housing and furnishing a home, obtaining phone and utility services as necessary, as well as training the family on management of an American home (Lead by Nancy Adams)

- Responsibilities
 - Finding Housing: With little notice, we needed to make some decisions about location of the family – whether, given the large size of the family, we could support them if they were not in nearby, and whether there were any options in the area that would meet their needs given County requirements for no more than 2 people in a bedroom. We opted to rent a house not far from the church, recognizing the family likely would not be able to remain in it for a second year. Several realtors tried to be helpful and lists from the Refugee Support Group were a useful place to start, but few options for larger families existed in the County.
 - Soliciting Furnishings: Furnishings were not a particular challenge, but it was very helpful that the Bethesda Rotary Club supplied all the beds. Working with a Sign-Up Genius and several local organizations helped us meet the needs.
 - Planning House set up: We assigned a team of people to help with setting up the house. It required about 20 people to organize contributions, set the house up, move the furniture and prepare for arrival.
 - Setting up Utilities (also phones, WI-FI): We used Cricket for the family phones (we bought four of them the very first day (one for the father, mother, eldest daughter and son, latter who had the most English capability.) There was no separate phone in the house and we insisted that one of the 4 phones remain in the house at all times. We used Comcast WIFI, based on their school benefits program. Other utilities were paid by the landlady and pro-rated. St. John's initially paid all charges, and gradually the family began to pay portions of the fees. This was an important step to helping the family establish credit history.
 - Training in Managing the House: This was a particular challenge, given the size of the family and the fact that they had never lived in such a home and had 2-year-old twins. We did several sessions with the mother

and girls/boy children to clean with them, and periodically reminded them of the needs. Tutors also helped to reinforce cleanliness.

- Periodic Checks on House: the landlady lived in an apartment in the basement of the house. We kept in close touch with her, but also made regular visits. Again, tutors were helpful.
- Handling any Housing Challenges (leaks, repairs, etc.): We worked with the landlady to ensure repairs were made and encouraged the family to alert us of problems.
- Searching for Future Housing: We recognized that we would need to assist in finding a more affordable housing situation for the family at the end of the year and worked unsuccessfully with LSS to find housing. In the end, the family opted to move to Baltimore, where they had church connections.
- Move at End of Year: We helped move the family to their new home and ensure systems were set up.
- Amount of Time Required: Extensive time to find housing and to set it up and move, periodic efforts to address problems, significant repair work to the home after departure was required.)
- Specific Challenges and Opportunities: Montgomery County housing rules were a challenge as was finding a house with sufficient space for such a large family.
- What we did right?
 - We built a good relationship with the family and worked hard to show them how to care for their home and their responsibility to their landlady. The landlady was a challenge, since she lived in the basement of the house, and the family was always quite loud. Regular meetings with her (and lots of calming and attention to her needs were important.

Finances: management of funds, helping set up bank accounts and billing arrangements, training the family on budgeting and financial management skills (Lead by Melanie Folstad)

- Responsibilities:
 - Obtaining Vestry (church leadership) approval to raise funds to support a family and expand our refugee ministry.
 - Setting up an initial budget, with gradually phased increases in payments for rent from the family.
 - Arranging for finance team to help educate the family on financial obligations, financial management, and document retention,
 - Provide team assistance in oversight for fiduciary role and support for navigating financial decisions.
 - Helping family set up bank accounts, bus passes (for automatic re-loading funds), etc.
- Amount of Time Required: Initial level of financial literacy was low, and there was little comfort with documentation, billing, bank accounts, etc., so initial time commitment was significant. Early stages setting up accounts, getting bus passes, etc., required more time, then regular billing processes set in.
- Specific Challenges and Opportunities: Again, lack of financial literacy and familiarity with handling of documentation, bills, etc. was a challenge. Doing so with limited communication was a particular problem and we would recommend using interpreters, if necessary, for a few months to help translate concepts, as well as specifics. The family was diligent in meeting their requirements as they gradually took on responsibilities for financing.
- What we did right?
 - Financial literacy education was important and warranted. The team responsible for financial education was invaluable and helped set up files for documents (which mostly weren't used, but helped us find key documents when they went missing!) It is important to develop a system and stick to it. We recommend keeping things as simple as possible.

Healthcare: Led by Susan Hebert

- Responsibilities: LSS was responsible for initial arrival screening and applications for Medicaid, but our team (basically just Susan), picked up from there and helped the family with their Kaiser HMO application, full

initial Kaiser physicals and vaccinations, as well as all school physicals. We also taught the eldest daughter (who had some English) how to contact Kaiser and get an interpreter on the line. Essentially, Susan was on call for illnesses and concerns, and helped get everyone to the doctor's appointments and keep track of records. Coordination of all appointments was also a key role.

- Amount of Time Required: The initial time requirements for moving a family of this size through all their physicals was intensive and a bit overwhelming. There were a few additional times when assistance was required to advise the family, a few quick trips to Kaiser for illnesses, and, by a separate team, additional physicals with a Civil Surgeon for their Green Card Processes.
- Specific Challenges and Opportunities: As with other teams, the size of the family made working on health issues, physicals, and transportation and record keeping was challenging. However, it also offered an opportunity to educate the family on the U.S. Healthcare system and how to use it.
- What we did right? The family's decision to use Kaiser was a great decision. Having all the resources for the entire family in one place, effective record-keeping and appointment processes, feedback from doctors, etc. was outstanding. Ensuring dentistry coverage was also essential.
- What would we change? We would have had several people responsible and familiar with the family's records. While it is hard to share this information, and while our team leaders helped on occasion, we would recommend that a few additional health team members should be assigned for larger families.

Employment: Led by Kate Tapley

- Responsibilities: Job search assistance for 3 family members (Father (Vital), Mother (Nzuba) and part time job for 19-year-old daughter (Imani.) First priority was the father, as Nzuba still had twin 2-year-olds at home and Imani was still in school. This required extensive outreach to others in the church for assistance in contacts for jobs, resume writing and interview training (for Imani).
- Guidance received: We were disappointed in the assistance received through LSS. Efforts to obtain jobs at Walmart never materialized, and little assistance was provided to determine why. Ultimately, Vital got a job through other friends at a produce packing facility quite far away. Transport time and costs were significant, as the family had no car. Ultimately, Nzuba got a job at the same place.
- Specific Challenges and Opportunities: Culture of job hunting in the U.S. was one factor. We could not convince Vital that he needed to smile in interviews, for example. We initially tried to find jobs for Imani in restaurants and hotels, but she was concerned about being in a kitchen with a male chef. Ultimately, we found her a job at Giant and helped her with a resume. She enjoyed the job, but then the family moved, Covid hit, and she was unable to get employed again. Pre-contacting Giant and explaining the situation helped tremendously, as did Imani's wonderful smile.
- Amount of time required: Periods of active engagement for job searches and preparation for interviews.
- What would we change?
 - We would try to build a bigger network of potential employment contacts earlier on.
 - We would work harder at explaining why training programs would help their job prospects.
 - And we would do more interview training.
- Overall, as with other teams, working with a family this size was a challenge.

Tutoring (Adults): Led by Ann Ramsey-Moor

As with tutoring refugee children, the task of tutoring their parents in English varied in scope, intensity, and difficulty depending on the kind of foundation tutors had to build on and the learning supports that were (or were not) available. In our case, the challenge was enormous – not only because neither parent spoke any English, but because the mother, Nzuba, had no formal education and the father, Vital, had only briefly attended a French-language primary school in Democratic Republic of Congo.

Moreover, it quickly became clear that appropriate materials for our job were almost nonexistent. Instructors at an English tutoring seminar at MCAEL (Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Learning) had briefly discussed low-literacy situations and their difficulties. But the adults we were dealing with were essentially non-literate.

Atop all else, our refugee parents faced conflicting, simultaneous demands: learning enough basic English to function in daily life, and, seeking employment to become self-supporting. That in-built conflict, present throughout our 6+ months of tutoring, limited what we could accomplish and likely also impacted the parents' desire and ability to learn English.

- Responsibilities: As was repeatedly stressed, both parents were expected to learn English. Under ordinary circumstances, both would have been required to enroll in an English for Refugees class at Montgomery College. Early in 2019, Vital was enrolled in and briefly attended a class -- until he found a job at Taylor Farms. But as a nursing mother, Nzuba was allowed to have at-home tutoring instead. Thus, tutoring Nzuba became our entire focus.

Our labor-intensive DIY project involved:

- Assembling a team of volunteer tutors – several with professional linguistic, international teaching, and/or Peace Corps backgrounds.
 - Building our own curriculum (with input from ESL professionals), with emphasis on conversation: learning simple greetings, describing family members, naming household objects and food items, etc. Recognizing clock times, letters, and numbers, and learning how to write her name, were also part of the plan.
 - Pairing up tutors and, with family buy-in, creating a workable tutoring schedule.
 - A semi-constant search for additional options (*e.g.*, free or community-based programs) that would allow Nzuba and the twins to learn together. Except for a co-op preschool, none of those investigated would have worked because they required at least some English-speaking ability up-front.
- Amount of Time Required: Pairs of tutors began working with Nzuba two mornings a week, for one to two hours per session. By tutor request, a third weekly session was added later. Tutors spent much time before and after sessions creating detailed lesson plans, finding “show and tell” items for lessons, and writing reports. Despite these painstaking efforts, Nzuba’s progress was extremely slow. And tutors grew increasingly frustrated, feeling that “experts” were needed in their place or alongside them. Some dropped out. Others, by summer, began taking Nzuba and the children on field trips where English conversation could be combined with doing something enjoyable outdoors. Yet another did some remarkable art projects with them.
 - At length, we managed to enroll Nzuba in a free Saturday-morning Basic English class at the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center. She enjoyed going to school, but she struggled even in this structured environment. Although registered for a second session of Basic English at Gilchrist, she did not show up the morning of the first class. We later learned that she, too, had gotten a job at Taylor Farms. This effectively marked the end of our formal tutoring enterprise.
- Guidance received: Members of Temple Micah who had tutored a Syrian refugee couple helped frame our initial expectations as tutors. Patty Larson of the MCAEL staff and Brooke Lindsay, a St. John’s parishioner and ESL instructor at Montgomery College, offered suggestions and concrete assistance during the year. We also received feedback, later on, from a teaching assistant at Gilchrist’s Saturday Morning Basic English class.
- Specific challenges: These were many, and included the following:
 - As noted, trying to teach even the simplest English to an adult with no formal education was very difficult.
 - Having to create our own curriculum materials was time consuming.
 - At-home distractions. With children ever-present and no babysitter, it was hard for everyone to stay focused.
 - No way to determine the impediment(s) to progress: lack of motivation, low learning capacity, or something else?
 - Invisible impact of years of trauma and dislocation.

- Nzuba's express desire to get a job, even when she had no English-speaking ability.
- No accountability structure, despite English being a "required" priority.
- What we did right? By me, the Tutoring Team (Joanne Allen, Julia Andrews, Margaret Hilton, Frances Li, Barbara Pace, Carolyn Peirce, and Anka Zaremba) deserves high marks. Rolling up their sleeves, they undertook something very demanding, effectively creating a path where there wasn't one. They worked creatively and unselfishly, for countless hours, finding new ways to accomplish a job with no clear definition or predictable results. Ultimately, as teaching and learning English became a truly rocky road, they concentrated on something that would endure: forging bonds of friendship.
- What would we change?
 - Determine, at the outset, what is honestly expected of the adult(s) we are to tutor – qualitatively and quantitatively – as well as what is possible. The stated requirement that our refugee parents learn English had no parameters; and there were no apparent consequences when they abandoned that pursuit.
 - Learn more about the cultural context of the refugee family and how to work with it. By all appearances, our family did not understand or appreciate the need to learn English in order to succeed in America because formal education was not a high value in their culture.
 - Refrain from imposing upper-middle-class urban American assumptions and values on a rural African family. What they needed – and wanted – was simpler and more basic.

Education/Tutoring (Children): Led by Carl Schaefer

The responsibilities and time requirements that accrue to the refugee team in this area depend very much on the extent to which the parents of the family can take on the responsibilities themselves, which in turn depends crucially on the English language ability of the parents. It is also determined by the amount of time the parents have available to deal with schools and homework themselves. I would assume that refugee parents who have no English but are fluent speakers of Spanish (and are literate) could take on far more responsibility in the area than parents who can speak (and are literate in) neither English nor Spanish.

The ideal person to lead this area would be a current parent of children who are enrolled in the county's public schools, at the levels of the refugee school-age children. Of course, many parents in that demographic group have little time to spare themselves.

If the volunteer team is required to take on responsibilities that are, practically speaking, *in loco parentis*, it may be better to simply assume that the school system will accept a non-parent's exercising those responsibilities, whether the official county school rules allow it or not. We were initially advised that Montgomery County Public School teachers are not allowed to discuss a student's academic performance in school with anyone who is not a parent or legal (*i.e.*, court-appointed) guardian. As matters turned out, teachers were happy for us to sign permission slips and attend parent-teacher conferences; counselors raised no objections to our approving course selections; and school medical staff raised no objections to our approving some required vaccinations.

- Responsibilities:
 - Deal with whichever school system office handles international admissions. This process may take several days and will probably involve proving county residence (it may be required that the students' names appear on a lease or dwelling-sharing agreement), testing/interview for student placement, determining the specific schools/programs for which individual children will enroll, and getting proof of the initial round of required vaccinations. This step will probably result in the international office's preparing preliminary papers for enrollment in the individual schools.
 - Complete the enrollment at individual schools by visiting the appropriate office at the individual school (typically registrar or counseling).
 - Buses. If PS bus transportation is approved, then get the details (route numbers, pickup, drop-off, date service will start) from the system's transportation office.
 - Be prepared to deal with missed buses. Expect occasional calls from students asking for a ride to school.

- Be prepared to drive students to and/or pick students up from evening events (international nights, school concerts, science fairs, etc.)
 - Call attendance secretaries (or use a school portal) to report absences.
 - Routine communication tracking: Checking (daily if possible) communications from school, which may include homework assignments, returned/marked homework, report cards, permission slips, announcements of school events, lunch menus (may be an issue if there are dietary restrictions), special events, back-to-school nights, parent/teacher conferences, info requests regarding qualification for free lunch. And others.
 - If the school does have a parent portal, try to get an account that does not require you to state that you are a parent, relative, or legal guardian -- this is possible in Montgomery County.
 - Go to back-to-school nights, school open-house days (usually Columbus Day or Veteran's Day in Montgomery County), and parent-teacher conferences (which must be scheduled).
 - Tutor children. Huge area. Practical issues arise: What locations and times are best for the tutoring? How do you tutor multiple children at different levels at the same time in the same space/house?
 - Establish direct communication lines with individual teachers if there appear to be significant academic or social issues.
 - Communicate all of the above to refugee parents to the extent that this is possible. Important so that the parents have as much as say as possible, but also to prepare parents for all these responsibilities once the period of sponsorship has ended.
- Amount of Time Required: (describe periods of intensity, regular engagement)
 - Getting through enrollment could entail several 6-hour days, depending on number of children.
 - Ideally, there would be some level of involvement almost every school day.
 - Specific Challenges and Opportunities:
 - Be prepared for difficulties in arranging tutoring schedules. Every volunteer has her/his own life to live.
 - Don't be surprised if you are older than 50 and cannot understand your second-grade tutee's math homework. Periodicity of fashions in math teaching methods is a bit like hemlines.

Transportation: Led by Alan Snyder

- Responsibilities: assistance in transportation in initial stages, training/demonstrating for the family the use of the Metro bus, and metro to get to schools, jobs, and shopping
 - Arrange for family collective movement to church in early days, and help with busses later
- Amount of Time Required:
 - Initial time 2-3 hours per week, later less.

Clothing and Food Support: Led by Valerye Storchak and Sheila Temourian

- Responsibilities:
 - Providing initial clothing packets for family at airport pick up (boots, hats, coats, etc.), and then additional clothing for school (winter items) and later for spring/summer.
 - Periodic monitoring of clothing needs of growing children
- For food, the initial challenge was finding local resources, teaching the family how to read labels, finding specialty stores that carried food they wanted, helping them use SNAP benefits and teaching them how to price items. For clothing, the initial challenge was finding clothing appropriate for the weather and sizes.
- Amount of Time Required:
 - Initial engagement was intensive, ensuring everyone had appropriate clothing for the weather. The second round for Spring/Summer also was pretty intensive, but otherwise, needs were sporadic.
- Specific Challenges and Opportunities: The size of the family made the clothing process, in particular, totally

chaotic. Finding clothing that fit, was appropriate, keeping track of shoe sizes, etc. was really overwhelming. We tried to take kids in smaller numbers to find clothing, which helped.

- Guidance Received: limited
- What we did right? We used a young female interpreter from the World Bank who was very helpful in dealing with the kids and their clothing needs (particularly things like bras for the girls). We highly recommend sponsors set aside some money for interpreters and for clothing
- What would we change? The size of the family was too large for us.

Social Engagement: Christie King/Nancy Adams/Anne Derse/Nancy Balph

- Responsibilities: Plan and encourage others to host the family (or members) for social events. (See Attachment at end for list of engagements)
- Amount of time required: Initial effort was intensive, later work was more sporadic
- Guidance received: limited
- Specific Challenges and Opportunities
- What we did right? Many of our team helped organize small events, like trips to the monuments, birthday parties, art projects, refugee events, concerts, art shows, etc. This was a great benefit to all and wonderful opportunity to share experiences with them.
- What would we change? We could have done much more with the parents, but their schedules made this difficult. This left them far behind their kids in social adjustment. As noted above, our tutors began to do more social things with Nzuba in the short time she was studying and that helped.

General Thoughts: What we learned/What we would do differently?

- Setting and having realistic expectations of the family, knowledge levels, learning capacity is very important from the outset
- Be Mindful of excessive generosity to family (Christmas gifts, wants vs. needs)
- Build on Activities: We organized Christmas cookie decorating, birthday parties, Valentines-making, trips to a local concert, trips to an art showing, trips to the DC monuments, outings to Great Falls, Halloween outings. We could have done even more.
- Housing Location (pros and cons – think about convenience for tutors, who will be there most frequently). We opted for a closer home, recognizing that most of our tutors and volunteer team were retirees or working and a further location would limit our assistance for the family
- Needing more Partnerships: Reach out to other organizations – Rotary, other sponsors, other faith communities, organizations providing furnishings, etc.
- Team Exhaustion: We recognized that several of our teams faced significant burn out, particularly the team leaders. We offered the opportunity to meet monthly with St. John's members who are psychologists to share concerns and
- Rethink the ability to support a family of this size as one community
- Don't know what they know/what they understand/whether we are communicating effectively
- Using interpreters for critical discussions (focus on interpreters the family trusts). We also found it helped to target the interpreters used to the specific need and audience (we used younger interpreters for the kids.)

UPDATE ON THE KABIRA/KAMBERE/LWAMBI FAMILY

In December 2019, the KKL family decided to move to Baltimore to be nearer their Pentacostal (and Swahili-speaking) church community. The church was a small community, composed mostly of similar families new to

the U.S., and support for the family was quite limited. Several members of St. John's continued contact and some assistance, but with the onset of the Covid restrictions and school shut-downs, the situation in Baltimore became quite challenging. Thus, the family decided in December 2020, to move to Wisconsin to be near a number of people from their refugee camp who settled in Kaukana, Wisconsin.

In June, 2021, one of our team (Nancy Adams) had the opportunity to visit them in their new home in Kaukana. Kaukana clearly is a better fit for the family. The housing is much cheaper and larger, with a nice yard and neighborhood. The parents and eldest daughter found jobs immediately nearby at a Nestle factory and the school situation (and quality) is a significant improvement over Baltimore County schools. The second oldest daughter, Esther, even tested out of having to go to summer school this summer due to her hard work with a local school tutor. They were very happy to see a member of St. John's and share in stories of their first year in the U.S. See the family in Kaukana with Nancy (*next page.*)



KAUKANA, WISCONSIN, JUNE 2021

See Attachment: Engagement and Activity Report

ATTACHMENT

**REPORT TO LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES
ON ST. JOHN'S NORWOOD CHURCH'S ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVITIES
WITH THE KABIRA/KAMBERE/LWAMBI (KKL) FAMILY**

November 28, 2018-November 2020

Overview: From the date of their arrival in late November 2018, St. John's has had an active team engaged extensively with the KKL family to provide housing, furnishings, food and shopping support, regular social and experiential activities, tutoring, both of the mother (Nzuba) and all the children, provided transportation, support for job searches (including resume writing), ensured all medical needs, including school physicals and inoculations, have been provided, arranged for summer camp activities for Eric, Esther, Ishara and Dorika, and arranged pre-school for the two-year-old twins. Members of the core refugee team, composed of approximately 10 team leaders, have been active on virtually a daily basis with the family. Teams include housing, food and clothing, finances, employment, transportation, and tutoring/school support, and include over 35 persons frequently involved.

Following is a brief, non-exhaustive summary of our actions and activities with the family since their arrival.

November 2018:

- Coordinated with other congregations and civic organizations to raise funds and locate furniture and acquire new beds

- Located and fully furnished a 5-bedroom, 3-bath home in Bethesda for the family before their arrival
- Provided warm clothing at airport and for each family member
- Provided initial food for the family, and took them shopping (ongoing)
- Provided a welcome dinner
- Assisted LSS in obtaining school and health documentation
- Obtained 4 phones and service for the family
- Assisted in registering the family for Social Security cards
- Introduced children to local parks and playgrounds
- Instructed family on use of washer, dryer, stove, fire extinguisher, refrigerator, microwave, and food processor

December 2018

- Established regular transportation support and demonstrated how the metro rail and bus systems worked to key locations
- Provided introductions and connection to the Montgomery County African Women's Group to assist, where necessary, in cultural and communication issues
- Initiated WI-FI service in the home and set up computer systems
- Coordinated with LSS for Medicaid enrollment
- Coordinated with LSS for food stamp and WIC enrollment
- Took kids and parents to meetings and testing with MCPS international admissions, and for all appointments for vaccines necessary for school
- Assisted in registering the kids to their respective schools, arranging bus schedules, initial transport to schools
- Transported the family to church when they expressed an interest in attending to learn English faster
- Initiated 3-4 times per week after school tutoring for the kids
- Initiated 2 time/week English language tutoring for the mother (Nzuba) (first 9 months)
- Helped the family decorate their home for Christmas, including buying a tree, providing ornaments
- Held a Christmas cookie decorating party at the residence
- Hosted a Christmas dinner at the church
- Arranged for Christmas presents from Suburban Hospital and Clark Construction employees, for all family members
- Took the family to the Mormon Temple's Festival of Lights

January 2019

- Initiated financial education program, set up bank accounts, filing systems, etc.
- Took kids to the Washington Mall/Monuments
- Transported three older teens to choir rehearsal weekly through spring
- Worked with family to educate them on house cleaning, etc.

February 2019

- Held Valentine's making party for the family
- Took remaining kids to Washington Mall/Monuments
- Initiated period art classes for kids in home and at team residences (ongoing)
- Enrolled family at Kaiser Permanente and took them for initial visits
- Helped Vital with job search and bus schedule to work
- Negotiated with landlady for repairs
- Drove kids to work when they missed the bus
- Attended parent-teacher conferences and school events

March 2019

- Took kids to concert at St. Mark's church and to an art show
- Introduced kids to library and obtained library cards
- Held regular meetings with Team Leaders to keep them up to date

- Arranged for free YMCA membership for entire family
- Assisted in helping children prepare for class presentations

April 2019

- Took family to Washington Zoo and for pizza outing
- Continued art projects weekly
- Outings in the park with church members
- Signed Nzuba up for Saturday English Classes (in addition to home tutoring) and transported her to class

May 2019

- Reevaluated clothing needs for the spring/summer
- Helped Imani develop a resume and summer job plan
- Arranged for summer camp for Eric, Esther, Sera, Ishara and Dorika
- Hosted birthday party for 2-year-old twins and celebrated family's six-month anniversary with potluck barbecue
- Initiated search for alternative housing as landlady threatened to evict the family (she withdrew her request)
- Applied for free Ride-On bus passes for all school-aged kids

June 2019

- Assisted in family participation in LSS Refugee Day
- Helped Family participate in National Cathedral's Refugee Day celebration
- Took kids to outing at Great Falls
- Regularly took kids to swimming pool
- Initiated monthly meetings with parents and older kids on family issues (with interpreters)

July 2019

- Took family to Fourth of July celebration
- Ongoing swimming adventures on weekends (camp during week)
- Arranged for Nzuba to take required training for pre-school cooping (ultimately, only ½ day per week), including Health, CPR, fingerprinting, applications and medical screening for twins and mother

August 2019

- Regular food shopping trips
- Art projects at home with team
- Picked up backpacks and school supplies/clothing, as needed
- Pre-school physicals and inoculation updates

September 2019

- Assisted in back-to-school school processes
- Resumed 4 time/week after-school tutoring
- Weekly running outings and dinners for the kids
- Arranged for and attempted to register twins for full time days are (parents declined due to need to move)
- Met regularly with the family and an interpreter to discuss the options for their move once they moved to independence

October 2019

- Hayride and outing for apple picking
- Weekly running outings and dinners for the kids
- Pumpkin carving party
- Provided Halloween costumes, decorations and took the kids trick-or-treating in their neighborhood
- Arranged for SNAP resumption

November 2019

- Initiated new housing search (as of end of lease, December 31)
- Additional work to re-establish SNAP benefits
- Periodic doctor's appointments
- Initiated Green Card paperwork processes (with guidance from LSS)
- Collected documentation for Green Card process
- Working with Eric (16) to find short-term seasonal employment
- Coordinating with family's friend and a pastor in Baltimore to identify housing closer to parents' workplace
- Kept parish and teams updated on family's progress, needs and eventual need to move

December 2019

- Planned and completed move to Baltimore, MD
- Assisted in school registrations in Baltimore
- Assisted in address changes, utility set up, etc.
- Helped clean and repair Bethesda house

January 2020

- Assisted in filing all documentation for Green Card Applications
- Assisted in Medical Exams, for Green Card Applications

February 2020

- Obtained donation of an automobile
- Arranged for and paid for auto repairs and registration requirements

March 2020

- Assisted in car title transfer

April/October 2020

- Assisted in research on missing IRS refund and Care Act Funds
- Contacted U.S. Senator for Assistance on above
- Assisted with Online School Challenges

INSIGHTS FROM THE ST. JOHN'S, NORWOOD REFUGEE SPONSORS' GROUP

GENERAL GUIDANCE

- Be sure to set expectations with the family in all areas early and often. Most sponsors have found weaning the family off support as the year goes on is very difficult.
- With a very large team of volunteers, you need strong central leadership. Rules have to be very clear. As well intentioned as everyone may be, you need consistency in all that you do. Holy Trinity had a handful of people that were extremely active in overseeing the family's needs and the large volunteer base. There was a weekly call of team leaders so all were kept apprised of issues the family was having.
- Teams will need to be truly dedicated, particularly the education and transport teams. Appointments: with many family members, making sure that all appointments are met, etc., takes very strong organizational skills, so that transportation is lined up, drivers are ready and no one has scheduled a conflicting appointment. A centralized calendar for the team may be necessary.
- Be prepared for lots of paperwork. It is very time consuming, particularly early on, to fill in all the medical and school forms. It is good to have a few people who fill out forms regularly because it will go quicker (they know the data that goes in the form so that someone isn't constantly re-inventing the wheel).

WELCOME TEAM ISSUES

- Only a few SJN team members should join LSS at the airport.
- Use Google Translator initially, as necessary if no interpreter is available.
- Limit the number of people who initially have regular contact with the family so not to overwhelm and confuse them. Plan daily visits initially by the same individuals.
- Work with Clothing Team to have shoes and appropriate warm weather clothing and coats at airport
- Start slowly with social group activities. Give the family time to adjust.

EDUCATION TEAM

- Carl Schaefer has been researching the Montgomery County METS program for older children who have had their educations interrupted. Several schools serve this purpose.

EMPLOYMENT TEAM ISSUES

- St. Marks, Beth-El and Bethesda UMC's refugee employment committee have shared some insights and materials they circulated to solicit interest. They are currently seeking employment for their Congolese family, which arrived several months ago. Nancy and Anne D have copies of their material.
- Christie stopped at Trader Joe's and asked whether any of the African staff speak Swahili and was assured that they do. This might be a good place for a first job application.

CLOTHING TEAM ISSUES

- One community borrowed a foot measuring device from a shoe store so they could find/solicit donations of appropriately sized shoes for the family after arrival.
- Op Shop for clothing?
- Youth Group Clothing Drive?

FOOD TEAM ISSUES

- Need to provide culturally acceptable food for first meal in home.
- Christy is seeking guidance on what would work
- Staples should also be provided meeting key dietary needs and reflecting traditional food needs.

MEDICAL/DENTAL TEAM ISSUES

- The most recent Congolese family had numerous cases of latent TB, gynecological issues, and other concerns that needed to be addressed immediately. Anne D. has contacted Montgomery County to assess the ability of the Kaseman Health Clinic in Rockville to see if it might be possible for them to get an initial health screening physical upon arrival. Filing for Medicaid early will be critical.
- The family is listed as “Pentacostal.” Anne Derse has reached out to a Swahili Revival Fellowship, which meets on its Olney Church Campus of the BWOMI-City of Hope. The Beth-El coalition’s family goes there.

HOUSING TEAM ISSUES

- Holy Trinity and Beth-El have both provided sample letters to demonstrate to landlords that they are responsible for the rent, and ultimately, care of the property and will be engaged actively. These could serve as models for us.
- Set up utilities in family name (both parents) upon arrival to help create credit history. We will want to ensure we have rental insurance in the tenant’s name, too.
- If we have a delay between arrival and availability of the property, we should check with Airbnb has a refugee resettlement program to cover the rent for up to one month. Need to check if it is still available.
- Bethesda Rotary and Kindworks have furniture to contribute. Rotary has already committed to providing all new beds. Kindworks has offered to provide furniture and also help setting up the house.

NOTE: Several St. John’s furnishing contributors do not drive and need pick up. Nancy has the list.

- Plan regular (almost daily) visits to the home in the early days to monitor and educate family on use of the equipment and appropriate care of the home. Teach, don’t just do. We need the family to understand how it is expected they care for the house. We will need one team member who will be a point of contact with the realtor for necessary repairs.
- Plan on the need for extensive engagement in the first 2-3 months.

FINANCE TEAM

- Plan to start phasing out subsidies incrementally as soon as some employment is obtained.
- Both parents need to be on all accounts (and the lease, if possible) to establish credit for both. In our case, the mother is the “principal”.

REFUGEE SPONSORS GROUP TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

WELCOME/FELLOWSHIP TEAM

- provide orientation to home and community
- stock the refrigerator with food before family arrival
- host/prepare a welcome meal with a small group
- put together a welcome packet/basket
- organize outings and social gatherings with the family and among volunteers throughout the year

HOUSING TEAM:

- teach family about home maintenance
- obtain and set up furnishings and supplies that may be missing from the furnished home that is already in place;
- help secure computer systems in home (and cell phones with service?)
- obtain furnishings and set up any additional homes

FINANCE TEAM:

- create a budget sheet that meets the needs of the family
- engage with the family in financial planning, monthly finance/budget meetings, and in accounting for the spending of raised funds;
- collect, distribute, and account for new and continuing funds
- teach banking, budgeting and basic finance to the family
- assist in the preparation of income tax forms
- determine a plan for fundraising to provide support to the family
- implement sign-up for donation of items and funds
- develop a plan for family to establish credit

FOOD AND CLOTHING TEAM:

- ensure the family has enough culturally-appropriate food and clothing needed upon arrival;
- help family identify ethnic food markets that meet their needs;
- assist with supplying seasonal, school, and work clothes;
- accompany family on regular trips to the store

TRANSPORTATION TEAM:

- arrange/provide transportation for family to and from appointments, worship services, after-school activities, job interviews, stores etc;
- supply children under age 8 with car seats/booster seats
- help train the family to use the metro and get around by bus and metro;
- assist the family in obtaining state identification cards, if necessary
- manage a shared calendar where appointments are listed and drivers/companions are assigned

EDUCATION/TUTORING TEAM:

- assist with school registration,
- help family navigate school system and communications
- accompany parents (latin term) to school conferences?

- provide tutoring for children and/or adults
- ensure that students have necessary school supplies
- identify translators and translation options

EMPLOYMENT TEAM:

- assess the skills and interests of employable adults
- identify potential professional mentors in areas of adults' career interests
- work with the family and LSS and/or local employment agencies to help to secure jobs for employable adults
- help with access to job training and education when appropriate
- assist adults with employment preparation (e.g., resume writing, interview skills)
- help assess work benefits
- work with Transportation Team to coordinate transportation to and from work site

MEDICAL/DENTAL TEAM:

- help family access health benefits;
- assist with setting up and keeping medical appointments;
- help family find medical and dental providers
- find resources for trauma related to refugee issues

ST. COLUMBA'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH REFUGEE RESPONSE MINISTRY: SPONSORSHIP OF THE KHWAJA FAMILY FROM KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

February 2017-December 2019



**KHWAJA FAMILY ARRIVAL, DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
FEBRUARY 22, 2017**



**KHWAJA FAMILY AT RRM 2ND "ANNIVERSARY" COMMUNITY DINNER,
MARCH 2019**

A REPORT ON ST. COLUMBA'S RRM SPONSORSHIP OF THE KHWAJA FAMILY, FROM KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

2017-2019

BACKGROUND ON ST. COLUMBA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE MINISTRY (RRM)

In late 2015, when stories about war-weary Middle Eastern refugees dominated the news, parishioners began asking how St. Columba's, as a parish, could respond to this terrible humanitarian disaster. In response, Rector Ledlie I. Laughlin called a parish meeting on December 18, 2015, to discuss possible responses, including sponsoring a refugee family as well as creating opportunities for greater understanding in the face of anti-Muslim hatred and rhetoric. From a follow-up meeting with interested parishioners in January 2016, came the creation of the Refugee Response Ministry (RRM) led by co-chairs, James Losey and Deacon Jean Ann Wright, with the stated mission: *To sponsor a refugee family from the Middle East, help them resettle in the United States, and assist them in becoming self-sufficient within one year of their arrival.* That spring, the co-chairs met with members of the new ministry to discern how to best achieve this mission.

RRM DISCERNMENT AND NEXT STEPS

The new RRM team met with Lutheran Social Services (LSS), the primary refugee resettlement agency serving the Washington Metropolitan Area, and other parishes engaged in refugee sponsorship, particularly Chevy Chase Prebyterian's Refugee Resettlement Task Force, to learn more about refugee family sponsorship. Based on the information gathered and internal discussions, St. C's RRM decided to become a LSS "Good Neighbor Sponsor." By late spring 2016, the RRM co-chairs had requested and received the full approval of the St. C's vestry to sponsor a refugee family and raise funds to support sponsorship.

With the request for funds coming at the end of the budgeted program year, the RRM was granted permission to make a special ask of the parish and funds raised were placed in a new outreach fund for the purposes of resettling a refugee family. Once fundraising began, it took very little time – less than three months – to raise approximately \$40,000, including more than twenty \$1,000 donations from parishioners who came to be known as "refugee angels." Simultaneously, the RRM began to organize teams of volunteers to carry out the necessary tasks that would be required of sponsorship based on a committee structure recommended by LSS, including an employment team, food and clothing team, health team, finance team, housing and furnishing team, transportation team, and welcome team. The committee structure encouraged additional parishioners to take on leadership roles as committee co-chairs and allowed others to determine how best they could serve the ministry based on their skills and knowledge.

PREPARING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF A REFUGEE FAMILY

The RRM recognized the collection of furnishings for a refugee family's new home as an important next step. At this point in time, LSS was unclear approximately how long it would take to be matched with a refugee family. Thus, in August 2016, the Housing and Welcome committees launched a drive to collect home furnishings, primarily new, from the parish using LSS's "Welcome Boxes" list of furnishings as a guide. In less than one month, all the items requested from the parish were collected and stored in the home of a parishioner. Furniture – primarily used – also was collected and placed in a storage unit rented by the RRM.

Another key next step was an LSS-led training session for volunteers likely to work with the refugee family in the fall of 2016, involving more than 50 parishioners. LSS staff explained to our volunteers what to expect during the first 60-90 days, when the LSS case manager would be most directly and actively involved in securing the family's social security numbers, work permits, and Medicaid and other public benefit cards. We also learned about the vetting and clearing volunteers would need to obtain for those who would have regular contact with the family members. This training meeting also allowed the RRM leadership to identify key skills and knowledge within the parish, as parishioners chose which committee they would serve on based on their interests, skills and knowledge.

ANTICIPATION OF A REFUGEE FAMILY, REGROUPING, ARRIVAL OF THE KHWAJA FAMILY

For months, we anticipated the arrival of a refugee family for sponsorship by our parish. With the November 8th presidential election of Donald Trump and his subsequent signing of a travel-ban, we feared the refugee family we were awaiting might not be let into the country. Finally, in early February, the RRM Co-Chairs received word that “our family” had left Kabul, en route to Germany, with a final destination of Dulles Airport. Preparations got underway to receive this family of three – mother, father and infant child – including locating infant items like a stroller and car seat. While awaiting this refugee family's arrival at Dulles, we learned for the first time that they had relatives – other recently arrived refugees – living in Virginia who planned to reunite and resettle together with the family members we were awaiting. Once they arrived, a discussion took place, aided by a translator and the LSS case manager, with our ministry Co-Chairs, the newly arrived family, and this family's relatives. Ultimately, despite the advice of the LSS case manager, the refugee family we anticipated sponsoring decided to live with relatives in Virginia without sponsorship. While we were disappointed, we remained committed and applied for another refugee family via LSS. It was the first of many lessons in how expectations about how resettlement works required adjustment. We needed to be flexible, understanding and realistic.

By mid-February, LSS asked us to sponsor a larger refugee family, an Afghan family of five, which we accepted. On February 22, 2017, we welcomed the Khwaja family – Fridoon Khwaja (father), Shakeba Khwaja (mother), Siddiq Khwaja (son age 14), Omer Khwaja (son age 13) and Usman Khwaja (son age 7). From Kabul, Afghanistan, the family arrived on a Special Immigrant Visa since the father, Fridoon, had worked for a contractor in the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan. While we had an interpreter present at our first meeting, we discovered quickly that Fridoon spoke English and the oldest son, Siddiq, had studied English for one year providing him with a basic capacity to communicate in English. The other family members had very little or no understanding of English. All the family members spoke Dari, their native language, and Fridoon also spoke Farsi. The family left Afghanistan to flee the Taliban and threats against the family. Having worked in the U.S. Embassy compound, the Taliban tried unsuccessfully to recruit Fridoon. Following threats to his life, Fridoon left his job and moved his family within Kabul. While it took a few years for Fridoon to obtain approval of his SIV application in Afghanistan, the family were excited to resettle in the Washington area. We learned that they also had relatives in Virginia – an uncle and cousins – but they had limited contact with them prior to their arrival. While they sought to reconnect with these relatives shortly after their arrival, the Khwajas recognized that these relatives would be unable to support their resettlement.

RRM COMMITTEES, PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, & LEARNING

Based on guidance from LSS, we set up committees of volunteers led by two co-chairs. Below are the committees, their primary responsibilities, time commitments, and some of the learning that occurred from our first two years of sponsorship of the Khwaja family.

Overall Coordination of the RRM Team (Co-Chairs: James Losey, Jean Anne Wright, and by mid-2017 Keri Piester)

- Responsibilities
 - Monthly team leader(s) meetings
 - Regular briefings of vestry and church staff/CFO, particularly regarding financial assistance and apartment lease
 - On call 24/7 for first two weeks to month of resettlement
 - Contact for emergency issues and back up
 - Coordination with LSS on administrative issues, e.g., Social Security, Medicaid, Food Benefits (SNAP), Green Cards
 - Retention of copies of all key documentation – visas, passports, etc – required for obtaining public benefits
 - Support cultural orientation, initial welcome events, and other events
- Amount of Time Required: Extensive in initial stages (first three months) involving meetings with family, LSS case manager, and committee co-chairs. Followed by regular intensive periods of engagement to monitor developments and address challenges.
- What did we do Right?
 - Met regularly with family and committee co-chairs.
 - Identified parishioners & others with expertise in housing, education, and finance to support the ministry's mission, including interpreters.
 - Regularly updated volunteers and broader parish on family's progress and volunteer opportunities
- What would we do Differently?
 - Rely more on co-chairs and volunteers to provide practice knowledge and experiences. In other words, encourage even greater interaction with the family.
 - Create a separate committee to coordinate ongoing social engagement with the family. Many volunteers stepped forward initially to organize outings, field trips, celebrations, and accompany the family to religious services at a local mosque and children's soccer games. Over time, however, it proved difficult to sustain this level of engagement without more intentional planning and outreach to the broader parish.
 - Emphasize the importance of information sharing and coordination with the co-chairs.
 - Provide additional cultural training and discussion of expectations with volunteers. We relied too heavily on LSS for training and discovered it was insufficient.

Housing: locate affordable housing, coordinate and conduct any rehab of housing as needed, furnish home, stock home with household necessities, ensure utility services are set up, instruct family on proper use of household appliances, provide guidance on home security and maintenance. (Co-Chairs: David DeBruin and Jane Dana)

- Responsibilities
 - Housing Selection: RRM Housing Committee relied on three criteria to select housing for our family of five – affordability, proximity to public transportation and parish, and rating of public school system. With input from a parishioner who is a real estate agent, this committee selected an apartment complex on East-West Highway in Silver Spring that met all the criteria, though affordability meant anticipating that two incomes potentially would be needed to cover the rent and other living expenses.
 - Soliciting Furnishings: Furnishings requested via a sign up system from parishioners were easily obtained. Given the uncertainty of when a refugee family would arrive, furnishings had to be stored in a storage facility for nearly three months. The cost of storage was covered by funds raised.
 - Home Set Up: A team of approximately 20 volunteers set up the home; some people moved heavier items from the storage facility into the home; other volunteers did the unpacking and set up the apartment.
 - Setting up Utilities, Including Cell Phones & Wi-fi: Initially, we provided one cell phone, but soon discovered two phones were needed. We discovered Comcast provides a low cost WI-FI service based on

income level which we secured for the family to pay directly to establish a credit history. Electricity was the only other utility which the church paid directly as the primary party on the lease. Once the father (Fridoon) was employed, the family covered this cost. After the first year, when the lease transferred to the family, the electric bill was fully paid by the Khwajas.

- Amount of Time Required: Initially, for a brief period of time, a few team members dedicated extensive time to locate housing. Collecting and storing the furnishings required several hours on more than one day. That said, many volunteers came together easily for a full day of setting up the apartment. Following the apartment set up, there was a meeting with the family about maintaining the home and working with the management company for the complex to address any repairs or problems. At the end of the one year lease, the family considered moving to an apartment with a lower monthly rent. We supported that search and found it challenging to locate an apartment for a lower rent. Fortunately, we again consulted the same parishioner/real estate agent who discovered a rental public assistance program that allowed the Khwaja's to stay in their apartment with a rent reduction of nearly \$200 based on their income. This volunteer worked with the family and the management company to complete and submit the necessary forms and documents.
- What did we do Right?
 - We identified the right criteria to guide our housing selection. In the long term, finding the family housing in a location with a highly rated public school system proved to be key to the family's successful resettlement. Consulting a housing expert, in our case a local real estate agent, provided the committee with the expertise needed to find and guarantee an affordable housing option.
- What would we do Differently?
 - We would involve the family in discussions about housing options, so they could understand the factors other than cost that shaped our decision making regarding housing. Learn about the family's expectations for housing in the U.S. and help them understand the difficulty of finding affordable housing.

Finance: administer and keep track of expenditures, assess family's current and ongoing financial needs, help set up bank accounts and billing arrangements, educate the family on budgeting and financial management skills (Co-Chairs: Laura Hills & Gardell Gefke)

- Responsibilities:
 - Set up an initial budget, with gradually phased increases in payments for rent from the family.
 - Educate the family on financial obligations, financial management, and document retention,
 - Assist family with setting up a bank account and filing income tax.
- Amount of Time Required
 - Initial time commitment to set up accounts, review rental agreement, and discuss family budget. Periodic meetings (monthly/quarterly) to review and approve expenditures, assess the family's movement toward self sufficiency and adjust schedule for phasing out rental support by the parish.
- What did we do Right?
 - Scheduled regular meetings with the family/head of household (Fridoon primarily) to review the family's budget and financial needs.
- What would we do Differently?
 - There was some unwillingness to share financial information by the family/head of household over time. From the outset, this team with assistance from the co-chairs needed to establish clearer expectations regarding financial assistance and the requirements for financial accountability. As stewards of parish funds, this committee struggled with balancing the family's desire for privacy regarding their finances and assessing their ongoing financial needs.

- Assess how our contribution to the cost of rent would impact their benefits. We didn't fully appreciate how the church's rental assistance, considered income, would impact public benefits, specifically SNAP (food stamps) monthly benefit amount.

Health: set up medical appointments and follow-ups with family members and coordinate ongoing attention to medical and dental health. (Co-chairs: Adrienne Clamp and Judith Kozlowski)

- Responsibilities: LSS scheduled initial arrival screening and applications for Medicaid. RRM Health Committee arranged for follow-up visits, school physicals, and set up files for keeping track of medical records, especially children's vaccination records. This team was on call for medical emergencies which the family did experience during their first year. Guidance also was provided to the father (Fridoon) on seeking treatment and ongoing physical therapy for a work-related back injury. Dental care for all the family members, particularly the youngest child, became an immediate concern, requiring multiple visits to a dental clinic that accepted Medicaid.
- Amount of Time Required: Initially, the time commitment to schedule and accompany the family members to medical and dental appointments was significant. Over time, it became much less intensive and only periodic depending on the health and well-being of the family.
- What did we do Right?
 - Recruited volunteers from within the parish with an understanding of the U.S. medical system and medical expertise to advise the family on care. Respected the request for a female doctor to care for the mother (Shakeba) and found a female PCP.
- What would we do Differently?
 - We were unprepared for their need for immediate dental care. We also lacked an understanding of Medicaid benefits, and the limits of dental coverage for adults. On more than one occasion, we needed to secure pro bono dental care for the mother (Shakeba) because Medicaid only covers routine dental hygiene care for adults.
 - Manage expectations regarding health and dental care in the U.S. Fridoon and Shakeba expected that care in the U.S. would be better and were disappointed by the costs associated with some of their dental care.
 - Maintaining the family's medical and dental records proved to be challenging. Setting up a system and instructing the parents on the importance of these records is critical.

Employment: help secure employment for adult family members, identify job training programs and opportunities, and support submission of job applications, resume writing and job interviewing. (Co-Chairs: Alice Goodman and Susan Laing)

- Responsibilities: Assessed employment skills and provided job search assistance primarily for Fridoon (father). Encouraged Fridoon to take an HVAC course at Montgomery Community College. Identified HVAC positions, helped Fridoon submit job applications, and prepare for interviews. Assisted Shakeba (mother) with the launch of a home-based catering business. Helped Shakeba acquire an internship with Foodhini.
- Amount of Time Required: Periods of very active engagement for job searches and preparation for interviews.
- What did we do Right?
 - Assessed Fridoon's job skills and employment history. Proceeded patiently in a search for a higher wage job in the area of HVAC in which Fridoon had previous experience rather than encourage him to accept the first unskilled low wage job. Encouraged higher expectations than LSS case manager. Fridoon secured an HVAC job installing metal duct work with a firm in Rockville. Based on Fridoon's need to be at different job sites, we helped Fridoon get a driver's license and car with our support. Unfortunately, Fridoon seriously reinjured his back while on the job. After missing a few weeks of work for physical therapy, Fridoon returned to this job, but had to reduce his work hours. Ultimately, Fridoon decided he had to leave this job because he could not continue to carry out the heavy lifting required without risking permanent injury

to his back.

- Helped Fridoon obtain a car to get to various construction sites for his first job. Having a car allowed him to replace his first job with driving for Uber. He continued as an Uber driver until the pandemic shut down his business. Later, he obtained a job as a cashier at Giant, however he was sometimes frustrated by the lack of full time hours. As an essential worker, Fridoon had to combine part-time jobs to obtain the income of a full-time job.
- Encouraged Shakeba's interest in cooking by helping her launch a small home-based catering business supported initially by parishioners and their friends. Later, once she had acquired more basic English fluency, we helped her obtain an internship at Foodhini.
- Supported Siddiqi's (son) efforts to secure computer certifications. Reviewed his resume multiple times and carried out mock interviews.
- What would we do Differently?
 - Research more job training programs at Montgomery Community College and other institutions. Rely less on LSS for employment assistance as they encouraged taking any first job offered as a source of income rather than securing a more skilled or higher-paying job, if possible.
 - Provide more training on work habits and requirements, especially for Shakeba who had no previous work experience. She had difficulty understanding her employer's expectations and keeping up with the pace of the work in a busy catering company.
 - Recognize the parent's English fluency and literacy limitations and their impact on employment. We encouraged Fridoon to continue his study of English at MCC, but he found it difficult to find the time.
 - Seek more support from the broader parish on potential employment opportunities.

Education Committee: support English language acquisition for the family, assist with enrollment of children in school, monitor children's progress in school, and assist parents with building a relationship with the school (teachers, admin, and other families). (Co-Chairs: Alex Acosta & Elsa Skaggs)

- Responsibilities: Ensure parents acquire basic English verbal fluency as well as functional literacy in English. Identify classes for English language instruction for parents. Supplement ESOL classes with 1:1 tutoring and/or group conversation practice.
 - Enroll children in school via Montgomery County Public Schools International Student Office. Provide student records/history and confirm testing for school placement.
 - Maintain records, including vaccination records needed for enrollment in school, activities, sports program and summer camps.
 - Provide tutoring and/or homework assistance to children, as needed.
 - Monitor and Instruct the parents on school/teacher communication via email.
 - Accompany parents to school conferences and events to help integrate into community and advocate on their children's behalf as needed.
 - Advise on educational opportunities and programs for older students, including grade level placement, community service and college planning. For younger child, advise on summer camp programs and secure funding for camp attendance to provide care and ongoing English acquisition.
- Amount of Time Required: intense periods involving enrollment and parent-teacher conferences as well as regular engagement for tutors or those gathering for conversation hour.
 - School enrollment and testing is intense, involving several days for a few hours each day depending on the number of children.
 - Monitoring the progress of the entire family is time consuming and involves regularly checking-in with family members, teachers, and tutors, among others.

- What did we do Right?
 - We were fortunate that Fridoon had basic verbal fluency, though reading and writing English were challenging tasks for him. Shakeba arrived without any fluency in English. Committee identified ESOL classes provided by Montgomery County Refugee Training Program at Montgomery College, Takoma/ Georgia Avenue Campus. Both parents were tested and attended ESOL classes at their appropriate level at this program located a short bus ride from their apartment. Fridoon attended classes for a much shorter period of time as he needed to be employed first. Shakeba was able to continue the classes regularly with all three of her boys in school. The classes helped Shakeba gain basic English fluency, but also provided her with new friends.
 - Supplemented ESOL classes with 1:1 English tutoring weekly, specifically English reading instruction, for Fridoon.
 - Organized “Tea and Conversation” gatherings for Shakeba with women parishioners on a weekly basis for several months to provide an additional opportunity for Shakeba to practice speaking English and increase engagement by the parish with the family.
 - Worked in partnership with teachers, administrators, and counselors to ensure the Khawaja boys had appropriate academic support and to monitor their progress.
 - Provided/Secured funding for the youngest son to attend summer camp and for the older boys to attend summer sports camps during summer break to continue their integration into the community and English acquisition.
 - Provided Khwaja boys with needed technology to be successful in school, including laptops, software, and scientific calculators.
 - Supporting Usman’s passion for soccer by enrolling him in a league and ensuring his participation did more for his acquisition of English than probably any other activity outside the classroom.
- What would we do Differently?
 - Encourage both parents to consider the job training programs at Montgomery College. We didn’t fully appreciate the skill assessment as well as training and job placement provided. Given Fridoon’s previous experience, as well as his eagerness to find employment, we didn’t fully consider this option with Fridoon,
 - Research ESOL tutoring and train volunteers with a curriculum. Over time, tutoring was not a focus of our efforts, though both parents would have benefitted from additional support. The tutoring provided by some of our volunteers was varied and inconsistent. It’s challenging to train, manage, and schedule volunteers for this work and we had limited guidance by anyone with expertise in this area. The parents increasingly had busy schedules which made them more reluctant understandably to commit to tutoring.
 - Tutoring and/or homework help for the children became less a priority as they were diligent students and Shakeba ensured they dedicate themselves as students. It’s difficult to say how much more tutoring would’ve impacted their progress.
 - Involve the children even more with the children and youth programs at St. Columba’s. The older boys benefitted from participating in a summer service program with St. C’s youth.

Transportation: arrange transportation for the family for appointments and instruct family on public transportation. (Co-Chairs: Keri Piester & Cindy Anderson)

- Responsibilities: provide transportation to key appointments during the first 3 months, instruct the family by accompanying them on public transportation, including the Metro and bus lines to get to schools, jobs, and shopping.
- Setup and maintain a shared Google calendar of family appointments for an initial period of time (approx 6 months).
- Assist adult family members in obtaining a driver’s license.

- Amount of Time Required
- Initial time 2-3 hours per week, once the family understood public transportation & obtained car assistance by request only.
- What did we do Right?
 - Found housing within walking distance to public transportation.
 - Secured Dari translator for driver's exam.
 - Supported the family acquiring a car with the financial assistance of a parishioner.
 - Use of Google calendar to schedule appointments and needed drivers.
- What would we do Differently?
 - Encourage practical instruction of public transportation from the outset.
 - Prioritize driving needs and appointments vs taking on driving commitments for school age children in a variety of activities, especially soccer, that increased the demand for drivers who needed to be vetted &/or accompanied by another adult to drive the Khwaja children.

Clothing and Food Support: ensure family members have adequate food and clothing, assist family with shopping for both, provide/secure necessary school supplies and toys, books, games for children. (Co-Chairs: Joanne Lin and Greg Chen)

- Responsibilities:
 - Providing initial clothing packets for the family at the airport depending on season.
 - Collect gently used and/or new additional clothing for family members by season fall/winter and spring/summer.
 - Periodically monitor and check-in on clothing needs of growing children.
 - For food, initially provide two weeks of groceries for a family of five. Research and identify stores for obtaining groceries that would fulfill their needs and diet restrictions.
 - Instruct the family on reading labels, finding specialty stores, particularly a butcher carrying Halal meat, and help them use SNAP benefits. For clothing, the initial challenge was finding clothing appropriate for the weather and sizes.
- Amount of Time Required:
 - Mostly intense the first few weeks, then a few hours monthly to monitor and obtain clothing needs. Collecting used clothing that was weath appropriate and the sizes needed proved to be a challenging task. By spring, we opted to provide the family with Visa gift cards to purchase clothing and we accompanied them to discount clothing stores. This proved to be less time consuming and more respectful of their needs and selections.
- What did we do Right?
 - Worked with the family to determine their food and clothing needs.
 - Identified places for them to shop themselves, so they felt more independent of us.
 - Provided a small clothing budget after the first six months to allow the family more independence in this area.
 - Shared meals with the Khwajas to learn more about Afghan cuisine.
- What would we do Differently?
 - Use budget for clothing items at reduced cost vs collecting used clothing. This task is time consuming for volunteers and difficult to manage regarding quality and sizes vs family preferences. Providing a small clothing budget worked well and proved to be more respectful of the family's preferences.
 - Educate ourselves prior to the family's arrival about Halal food, local availability, and grocery stores and butchers providing Halal food, particularly meat.

REFUGEE RESPONSE MINISTRY (RRM) RETREAT 2019:

SUCCESSSES, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

As the Refugee Response Ministry team approached the end of its nearly two year sponsorship of the Khwaja family, a half-day retreat was held on **January 12, 2019** to explore the following:

- (1) Discuss what was successful about the work of the RRM to date.
- (2) Discuss what was challenging about the work of the RRM to date.
- (3) Share ideas about next steps and possible new work with refugees and immigrants the St. Columba's community should consider going forward (not included in full detail in this report).

SUCCESSSES OF THE RRM:

The following top successes were identified by RRM members:

- (1) Achievement of tangible and successful outcomes for the family: Although the family did not achieve complete self-sufficiency in the originally proposed 12-month time frame, the family achieved multiple successes over a two year period with our assistance, including stable affordable housing, employment for the father, a vehicle for transportation, attendance for children at very good public schools in Montgomery County, improved English acquisition, and integration into the community.
- (2) Responsiveness and resourcefulness of RRM members: RRM members found the committee structure encouraged by LSS to be very successful for handling complicated logistical challenges, being adaptive and resourceful when responding to emerging difficulties (e.g. health issues and need for new employment) and identifying and resolving emerging family needs (e.g., identifying need for a vehicle and arranging to help the family secure one).
- (3) Engagement opportunities with the family: RRM members expressed satisfaction with their opportunity to get to know the Khwaja family, especially those involved with transportation duties allowing for conversation and relationship-building with members of the family. And, more recently, "Tea & Conversation," weekly gatherings of volunteers with the mother, Shakeeba, to support her English language learning, both deepened existing relationships and developed new ones. Overall, the fact that over 60 parishioners were involved, in some way, with the family through this ministry was considered a success. However, there was recognition that we could have organized even more activities for the family and involved them more often in the life of the parish.
- (4) The opportunity to build friendships with fellow parishioners active in the ministry. Several RRM members said that a benefit of involvement with this ministry was the opportunity to meet members of the congregation, to make new friends within the congregation, or to deepen relationships with parishioners who they already knew.
- (5) Personal satisfaction for RRM members: Many RRM members felt personally connected to the mission of the ministry and found personal satisfaction in many aspects of the work. They enjoyed learning new things about Afghanii culture, Islam, refugee and immigrant issues, and social service resources. They enjoyed feelings of satisfaction by demonstrating resourcefulness and persistence in problem-solving. They also appreciated working as a team, and feeling a part of a larger effort to live God's love as a member of a faith community engaged in serving the community.

CHALLENGES FACING THE RRM:

The following top challenges were identified by RRM members at the retreat:

- (1) Managing expectations: The RRM had a goal of family self-sufficiency in 12 months based on guidance provided by LSS, which proved to be unrealistic. In addition, some members and the parish-at-large had expectations about how involved they would be in personally interacting with the family, which were not fully met. The family also had expectations of what their new life in America would provide (e.g., financial opportunities, size of housing) which were either not met quickly or fully as they got settled. We learned the importance of establishing realistic expectations from the outset of sponsorship of the family, their knowledge levels and ours regarding public benefits, employment training programs, and the learning capacity of the family and our volunteers.
- (2) Communication: There was some frustration about internal group communication processes. Some members wanted more invitations to share input with the RRM leadership, as well as opportunities for more cross-communication between committees. Others felt the frequency and content of communication from the RRM leadership met their needs. Regular updates about the family and the work of the RRM to the parish via the church website have proved valuable, but a few felt this work could be improved by making communications more often.
- (3) Parish engagement: A number of RRM members were concerned that the RRM was unable to sustain widespread enthusiasm and engagement from the parish over time. RRM members agreed that a lack of roles for potential participants could be a factor – whether simply there were more people initially who wanted to work with the family than the family size/needs could accommodate, or that the RRM didn't have the right number of appropriate roles for congregants who wanted to do more than donate funds, but who could not commit to the time-intensive committee work needed. Over time, team exhaustion became a concern as several committee leaders faced burn out. Given the extended time horizon of sponsorship, having support in place for leaders as well as ways to share the responsibilities over time are critical challenges.
- (4) Structure of the RRM: Some RRM members worried that the committee structure led to being “siloed” and that increased information sharing between committees would have led to better collaboration and possibly improved outcomes for the family given the interrelated nature of the work. Others felt the sub-committee structure was appropriate and effective in meeting the ever-changing needs of the family. There was some discussion about the ideal frequency of meetings – some members thought there were too few, while others thought there were enough or even too many.

TWO ADDITIONAL KEY TAKEAWAYS TO STRENGTHEN THE MINISTRY

One key takeaway from the retreat is the need to deliberately cultivate fellowship in ministry work. RRM members suggested creating a designated “fellowship lead” role. The fellowship lead would be responsible for integrating fellowship opportunities into the regular order of business of the ministry – for example, ensuring that meetings start with a fun or inspirational activity. The fellowship lead would also be responsible for coordinating “non-business” activities for ministry members such as a quarterly or semi-annual group lunch, or a group outing to see a film or art exhibit about the refugee experience. RRM members felt a sustained focus on cultivating fellowship could increase congregant engagement and build better communication, trust and teamwork among ministry members.

A second takeaway is the need for spirituality to be more deliberately integrated into the work of the ministry. RRM members wanted more time and opportunities to discuss the connection between their faith and the practical work of the ministry – through prayer, scripture reading, and guided discussion about how their faith has been impacted by their ministry work. One possibility would be to ask clergy to periodically guide a discussion. Another possibility would be for ministry members to participate together in a spiritual activity such as a special interfaith prayer service or labyrinth walk.

UPDATE ON THE KHWAJA FAMILY: WHAT SUCCESSFUL RESETTLEMENT LOOKS LIKE IN 2021

By the end of 2019, the Khwaja family was financially independent of the church. Following a schedule, the Khwaja's took on full responsibility for their apartment rent and all other costs of living. Regular interaction with the committee co-chairs and volunteers came to an end, though there was periodic support provided, particularly by the employment, housing, and education committees. The RRM Co-Chairs continued regularly calling and meeting with the family to assess overall progress and well-being through the end of 2019 and to a lesser extent in 2020.

Today, the Khwaja family remains self-sufficient, though St. Columba's briefly provided some rental assistance at the start of the pandemic when Fridoon like many others could no longer make a living driving Uber. Based on advice Fridoon sought from a member of our Employment Committee, he took a position as a cashier at Westbard Giant in Bethesda. Fridoon continues working in this position part-time and also has resumed driving for Uber. All the family members are fluent verbally in English, though Shakeba's fluency is more basic than the others. Currently, Shakeba is considering working outside the home again as a part-time salesperson for a clothing store of an Afghan friend at the Wheaton Mall. The family continues to live in their original apartment at a reduced rent due to a subsidy provided by a Maryland public housing assistance program. The apartment is very much their home and reflects their preferences and style in terms of additions to and replacement of some of their original furnishings. Other Afghan families now live in the same apartment complex and we're confident the Khwajas are a source of knowledge and support.

All the children are thriving, in great part due to the opportunities they took advantage of in Montgomery Country Schools. Siddiq, the oldest, graduated from Bethesda-Chevy Chase (BCC) HS during the pandemic, having completed all the requirements at BCC and the Computer Technology program at Thomas Edison HS of Technology. Like many other high school graduates of the Class of 2020, Siddiq postponed his academic plan to attend Montgomery Community College for two years followed by a transition to the University of Maryland. To assist his family, Siddiq took a part-time position at Giant while simultaneously taking computer certification courses. With the assistance of a few of our volunteers, Siddiq updated his resume, wrote cover letters, applied for entry level tech jobs, and prepared for interviews. Today, he is employed as a tech dispatcher at a computer consulting and cybersecurity firm based in Alexandria, Virginia with a salary and benefits that ensures the family's economic security. With the support of his employer, Siddiq continues to acquire certifications with the full intention to obtain a college degree as a part-time student. In 2022, Omer also will graduate from BCC HS and also will complete the dual enrollment program with Thomas Edison HS of Technology with industry certification in automotive science. Omer's passion for cars no doubt placed him on a career path that will provide him with a job following graduation. And, finally, Usman continues to progress academically and seems like a typical American tween, still a standout player on his soccer team.

St. Columba's Refugee Response Ministry, its leaders and all the volunteers, are gratified by these successes. And, while there have been challenges, tensions, and even disappointments, by most measures the Khwaja's resettlement has been a success. From the start, we found the Khwaja's – individually and collectively – to be resilient, faithful and joyful. It's hard to assess how much of an impact our sponsorship had on their resettlement. What we do know is that we built a ministry committed to doing this work – now with much greater capacity and knowledge – and, as important, built many life-long relationships with a family very different from those we most often encounter in our lives. And, this is genuinely what we're called to do as faithful followers of Jesus and practicing Christians.

COLLABORATION AMONG THREE CHURCHES IN HELPING AFGHAN REFUGEES

Helping a refugee family can be very time-intensive and expensive, but the rewards are great. Depending on the commitment made, it will take hours of volunteer labor. These include the time helping families become oriented to the U.S., transportation to various appointments (*e.g.* medical, dental, Medicaid and other services), assisting in finding employment, helping children register for public school, getting health insurance for the family, helping the family set up banking and credit relationships, assisting with telecom needs (mobile phones, Internet access), and many other time consuming activities. The expenses come with assistance with clothing and food (not a substantial expense, given food stamps/SNAP), child care and nursery school costs, transportation costs, and – especially – assistance with rental costs.

Beginning in early Fall 2016 our three churches – All Souls Episcopal, Christ Church Georgetown, and St. John’s, Georgetown – all wanted to help a refugee family, but the two smaller churches (All Souls and St. John’s) did not have the capacity to provide the full range of assistance that we jointly felt was necessary to help a family from the time they arrived to the time they were fully self-sufficient (a multi-year process, as it turned out). We all attended orientation events sponsored by Lutheran Social Services, and connected in that way. We began corresponding, with the approval of our vestries, and eventually representatives from all three churches began meeting regularly to plan our joint initiative. This process took several months, during which we set up teams and recruited volunteers for each team from all three churches. Our teams were Finance; Housing; Furnishing/ Food and Clothing; Transportation; Welcome/Family Support and Communication; Medica/Dental; Education/ Language; and Employment. Representatives from each church worked separately with their vestries and with their mission/outreach groups to establish commitment to the endeavor and develop financial support. Between the three parishes, we raised \$40,000. In addition, a separate donation from a church member that allowed the family to purchase a car for Dad’s commute to work. (While these amounts were realistic to support our family for a year, given that this family had good employment prospects and came through the SIV program with its Medicaid and SNAP support, a family that does not have that governmental support or have good employment prospects will likely need substantially more financial support.)

There were many challenges to having the collaboration, including the time needed to coordinate so many “moving parts,” but by doing this we were able to sponsor a family and afford to pay for pre-school and rent expenses, as well as transportation costs to and from pre-school and English lessons. We were able to take them from their arrival at Dulles airport straight to their newly rented and furnished apartment in Mt. Rainier, Maryland. We then helped their older daughter enroll in kindergarten, and eventually enrolled the younger daughter in pre-school. By paying for rent for a full year, Dad (an engineer who had worked for the Corps of Engineers in Afghanistan) was able to study for and pass his basic engineering exams and then obtain employment. Initially he worked as a construction worker/supervisor, which led to a job working as an engineer on the Purple Line. The family, in addition to their two daughters, now has added two sons, both born in the U.S., and have been able to purchase their own town house in Virginia (being furnished with help from one of our churches). It has been a rewarding experience to see the children grow and the family become settled into a stable path towards full participation in American life.

HOW GOOD NEIGHBORS OF CAPITOL HILL FURNISH REFUGEE APARTMENTS

Over the past five years, Good Neighbors of Capitol Hill (GNCH), a coalition of eight Capitol Hill congregations plus numerous other volunteers, has been working with Lutheran Social Services of the National Capitol Area (LSSNCA) and other partners to support refugee families as they adjust to their new lives and to furnish apartments for dozens of refugee families in the metropolitan Washington, DC, area.

Since furnishing the first apartment in 2016, the GNCH team has gathered and installed furniture in apartments for some 65 families, primarily from Afghanistan, but also an extended family from El Salvador. After the US military's exit from Afghanistan in August 2021, GNCH began to receive dozens of offers of volunteer help and supplies. How does it all work? The following is a summary of where we have been and where we are going in the area of providing furnishings.

BACKGROUND

Beginning with our organizing meetings in 2016, GNCH has been involved in many aspects of assisting refugees. In our first months, we did the following:

1. Recruited our first volunteers – some 30-40 people came initially from Lutheran Church of the Reformation, St. Mark's Episcopal, and Capitol Hill Presbyterian. Later, we were joined by from five other congregations, including Capitol Hill United Methodist, Hill Havurah, Christ Episcopal, Latter Day Saints of Capitol Hill, and St. Peter's Catholic Church.
2. Began forming teams to work as volunteers in areas suggested by LSSNCA: General Coordination, Employment, Finance, Food and Clothing, Housing and Furnishing, Transportation, and Welcome.
3. Participated in LSSNCA training – more than 30 people attended the training in July 2016. Followup included scheduling background checks for participants interested in working directly with refugees.
4. Began meeting monthly in mid-2016 to decide in which areas we wanted to concentrate. By late 2016, each of the areas above had coordinators and were in planning stages.

Later we added other areas of concentration, including fundraising, tutoring support, job search assistance, assistance with green card requirements (for the Salvadoran families; the Afghan SIV families were already on track to receive green cards), and special health care needs, e.g. locating inexpensive dental assistance, etc.

In mid-2016, GNCH decided to take on one family at a Level 1 sponsorship – working closely with the family to assist with a wide variety of needs. In September 2016, we located a Cheverly apartment – available, but in need of considerable work – and teams began cleaning, painting, arranging for appliances, and getting the apartment ready for furnishing.

While we awaited the family's arrival, we practiced by furnishing apartments for two families who had been assigned apartments at a housing development that welcomes refugees in Prince Georges County. We later learned of a number of such Prince George's County housing complexes – under the same management – that work closely with LSSNCA to provide apartments for refugees as they are needed. The managers of these complexes arrange for the apartments to be cleaned, painted, repaired, and prepared in advance of the families' arrival so that our teams can focus on other aspects of the work.

A FURNISHING FOCUS

These early efforts laid the groundwork for our subsequent work furnishing apartments. As we started out using teams for various broad categories, we did the same with furnishing apartments.

A list of supplies needed for every apartment was provided by LSSNCA and we supplemented it with other items identified by our teams. We broke the list down into categories so that procurement, storage and deployment could be managed by a smaller group of volunteers. The broad categories evolved over time, but eventually included

- Furniture and décor for each of the rooms (living room, dining room, bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom);
- Kitchen cookware etc., and dining ware;
- Linens for the bedrooms;
- Personal toiletries;
- Household cleaning supplies;
- Babies' and children's supplies, school backpacks and toys tailored to the family's composition;
- Appliances such as vacuum cleaners and irons;
- Information technology such as a radio, television and computer;
- Tools and other needs, such as office supplies, a tool kit, extension cords, lightbulbs, hangers;
- Food – a two-week supply for each new family;
- Outerwear – coats, hats, boots, mittens (but not other clothing, which varies in sizes, styles)

The teams formed based on the talents and interests of various congregations. Reformation Lutheran, which had an old, but serviceable large van and a volunteer leader interested in both sourcing furniture and beautifying living spaces, took the lead in obtaining large furniture, lamps, tables, and decorative needs. St. Mark's Episcopal took on providing bed and bath linens. A team from Capitol Hill Presbyterian organized to furnish kitchen and dining ware. Hill Havurah took on providing two weeks of food including staples, fresh fruits, vegetables, and other groceries, and for the Afghans, halal meats, Afghan bread and spices, as well as the pressure cookers requested by the Afghan families. St. Peter's provided needed cleaning supplies. Christ Episcopal, the Mormon church, and others provided various needed items including infant, toddler, and children's supplies, outer winter clothing; vacuum cleaners, televisions, microwaves, and miscellaneous supplies on a long list that continued to grow.

ACQUIRING FURNISHINGS

Each team developed its own process for procuring the items needed. For example, at first, LSSNCA was requiring that all mattresses be new and linens new or lightly used. The team from St. Mark's responded by purchasing linens at a relatively inexpensive source such as Ikea. Eventually, the restrictions loosened, and the linens crew was able to take advantage of lightly used and well washed donations that became more and more available from the Capitol Hill community.

Reformation's furniture team acquired a newer, larger van, to pick up furniture from many sources. There were thrift stores and furnishings resale stores like Community Forklift in Hyattsville and Second Chance in Baltimore that offered used furniture at lower prices. There were perfectly good and usable items left on the curb for pickup. As GNCH became better known, there were donations, especially from Capitol Hill residents who were remodeling, moving, downsizing, or whose family member had passed away. The team leader estimated that donations of these furnishings amounted to a thrift store value of goods in excess of \$8,000 per apartment.

The kitchen team received many donations from various sources and was careful to count, wash, and package each kitchen and dining set so that it could be unloaded by two people in a half hour at the apartment.

Other teams have used other methods to obtain the needed supplies. Some of the recent volunteers who are unaffiliated with a congregation have used Amazon wish lists and similar sourcing methods to obtain everything from diapers to televisions. The food team, usually the last to purchase and deliver items to each apartment, has worked with Afghan advisors to develop a shopping list of typical foods. They use two sources—an economical

store like Aldi for fresh fruits and vegetables and many staples, and a nearby halal store for Muslim-friendly foods like Afghan bread, halal meats, and commonly used Afghan spices.

Most of the furniture and supplies used to furnish the apartments come from generous donations, Craigslist, thrift stores, organizations like Mothers on the Hill (MOTH), wherever it can be found. But there is also a need for some funds. GNCH, LSSNCA, and the families we support are always extremely grateful for donations of household goods, cash, and/or volunteer help.

SPACE FOR RECEIVING AND STORING SUPPLIES

As donations and demand have increased, the issue has been where to store furnishings between donation and installation. Three garages in Cheverly have served as temporary storage that occasionally is reclaimed for other purposes. During the pandemic, Lutheran Church of the Reformation allowed use of several of its temporarily unused rooms to be used for storing beds, mattresses, couches, and donations of all kinds of household goods. But as the pandemic eased, these rooms were again needed for their earlier purposes.

When the situation in Afghanistan shifted and more families began to arrive in late August 2021, there were more volunteers and many more offers of needed furnishings that in turn required temporary storage. We asked donors to hold on to items for donation until needed, if possible. We began looking around and asking for spaces on Capitol Hill—whose residents provided many donated goods—and in nearby Prince George’s County. Capitol Hill Presbyterian offered temporary use of the garage connected to its manse, which was being rented temporarily. A Capitol Hill resident offered use of their garage. And as a place for donors to drop off donations approved by the Furnishings team, Reformation arranged for temporary rental of a storage pod, now installed in its parking lot.

RECRUITING AND MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

As more refugees are being processed—and a large number are expected to arrive soon—there has been an increasing need to recruit and manage volunteers. And many volunteers have been coming toward Good Neighbors over recent weeks. We continue to be in the process of learning how best to make use of volunteers’ time and energy—we want them to keep coming back! We try to make sure that those who show up to help have appropriate work to do, whenever possible. From the supply perspective, our communications team has created a form that helps them and us identify the kind of work volunteers are available and eager to do, as well as the time they may have to give.

From a demand perspective, we are always looking for help, especially from people willing and able to lift furniture, who can offer assistance, yes, on weekends, for collecting donations, but also and especially when it is most needed for furnishing apartments. We have used a combination of young people, who tend to be more available on weekends and evenings, and still active retired people, who are more likely to be available on weekdays, when much of the apartment furnishing work takes place.

In short, managing the welcome inflow of new volunteers is a skill we continue to develop and learn more about.

THE FURNISHING PROCESS

Once a family is on the way or has arrived and needs a furnished apartment, LSSNCA contacts our furnishing team leaders and requests assistance. If the full team agrees, LSSNCA provides information about the arrival date, family size and genders of children (families have ranged in size from two to as many as 11 members), address of the apartment and when it will be available for furnishing. One of the furnishing team leaders notifies the team of the relevant facts, then goes to the leasing office on the appointed day, picks up the key, and puts it in a lockbox on the door to the apartment. Each of the furnishing teams schedules a time so that there is not too much overlap—this is especially important during covid. The furnishing process begins, usually with installation of the large furniture. And the furnishing process begins, usually with installation of the large furniture.

After as long as a week, or as short a time as 10 hours, the family arrives to the welcome of a comfortable and beautifully furnished and decorated apartment.

COMING SOON

What's next? Many of the families being sheltered while they are approved for immigration will soon be ready for housing. Some 800 individuals—and counting—are expected to be resettled in the metropolitan Washington, DC area in the next couple of months.

GNCH has been accepting volunteers for the work of furnishing apartments as well as other kinds of efforts, and we are in the process of streamlining our processes for involving them, as well as accepting, storing, and inventorying furnishings. We look forward to the ongoing teamwork of installing them in the home of a new American family.

Kathryn Tobias

September 21, 2021

BEING A CARING AND SUPPORTIVE SPONSOR: UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Sponsorship of a refugee family is one important way congregations participate in the U.S. refugee resettlement process. As sponsors, congregations supplement the public and official resettlement program resources and services provided, in this way helping newly arriving refugees achieve self-sufficiency and become integrated into life in the U.S., particularly the local community in which they are settled. As a sponsor, congregations strive to be caring and supportive as they accompany refugees during their first days and months of resettlement. It is critical that all involved in doing this work treat refugees with dignity and respect and foster cultural awareness and sensitivity.

In preparation for resettling a refugee family, congregations should consider their expectations of refugees as well as the likely expectations refugees may have about resettlement and the sponsoring congregation. Ministry leaders will need to manage expectations over time and potential challenges that may arise during the first year of resettlement and beyond. The previous refugee sponsorship experiences of parishes within the Episcopal Diocese of Washington (EDOW), most of whom served as *Good Neighbor Partners* with Lutheran Social Services, highlight some of the most common expectations as well as potential challenges that may face ministry leaders and volunteers.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF REFUGEES AS NEW ARRIVALS?

Employment by one or more members of the refugee family is expected as critical to moving the refugee family to self-sufficiency. One of the most important tasks facing a sponsoring congregation is helping a refugee find employment. Increasingly, given the cost of housing in Maryland and Virginia, this likely means both husband and wife – or another family member like an adult child – will need to find work to achieve self-sufficiency. Lack of English language skills will not prevent refugees from getting a job, but it will limit the kind of job and hourly wage they can obtain when they first arrive. Given the need to move refugees to self-sufficiency, case managers from resettlement agencies like LSS typically urge refugees to accept the first job offered. While it's essential to maintain focus on this goal, sponsoring congregations may be in a position to help assess the refugee's skills and identify additional job opportunities, as well as consider job training programs that will allow the refugee to extend the time frame for securing employment. The extent to which a congregation can support this is dependent on funds available to support rental assistance and previous knowledge/research of job training programs and employment opportunities. Access to public transportation also will impact the refugee's job choices. It's likely best practice to expect one member of the refugee family to secure employment within the first six months. Congregations should recognize that changing and upgrading jobs is common, especially as a refugee's English and job skills likely will improve.

English language acquisition will have an impact on the refugee family's capacity to move to self-sufficiency. Obtaining basic English fluency – at least verbal – is a reasonable expectation to have of both the adult and children in the refugee family. That said, many factors will affect family members' willingness and ability to meet this expectation. Refugee parents face the challenge of learning sufficient English to function independently in daily life while simultaneously finding employment to become self-sufficient. Most refugee parents need to study part-time to improve their English language skills while they work and/or care for young children, however finding programs and tutors to fit their schedules and sustain their commitment can be challenging. Sponsors help by identifying ESOL programs, providing tutors, organizing opportunities for practicing English via cultural

and other small group outings and generally encouraging their efforts as important to successful resettlement in America.

Cooperation with the resettlement agency and sponsoring congregation will impact the success of the resettlement. While there is an expectation of cooperation, building a relationship based on trust and mutual respect is essential. It is important to remember that refugees have not only experienced loss of homeland, but often their sense of self-respect. Initially, refugees will likely experience feelings of grief, culture shock and even some depression. As sponsors, congregations can begin by letting the refugee family members know that they are glad they are here and accept them the way they are. Volunteers should be encouraged/trained to be patient, respectful and understanding of language and cultural differences, free from judgements about the refugee family's native culture. Moreover, volunteers working with the refugee family should keep information about their resettlement primarily confidential.

Cooperation relies on effective communication with the family. All volunteers involved in the resettlement effort should keep the ministry chairs/coordinator/leader informed of significant developments, successes, problems and concerns. Regular ongoing meetings should be scheduled with the refugee parents and the ministry leaders to determine agreed upon tasks and plans. Ensuring a cooperative relationship sometimes may require managing one or more well-meaning and generous volunteers, who in their desire to help the refugee family, impose their views, taking on a "we know best" attitude that doesn't sufficiently respect the dignity and self-determination of the family. It's also not uncommon that refugees will follow others advice or their own wishes, even if they don't seem in agreement with previously agreed upon plans or advice from the ministry leaders. This is not a sign of failure, though volunteers can feel surprised and frustrated when things don't work out as planned. It's important to recognize this can occur and be prepared to adjust plans and expectations.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF SPONSORING CONGREGATIONS?

Working with resettlement agencies, congregations that serve as "sponsors" are expected to be a **source of information and assistance** for several months – often longer – to help move the refugee family toward self-sufficiency. Depending on the resettlement agency, sponsoring congregations often are involved in meeting the refugees at the airport, organizing a welcome meal, arranging for housing and/or setting up a home, and accompanying them to appointments with social service agencies and health providers, among other tasks.

Financial assistance for the refugee family is expected both by the official resettlement agency and the refugee family, though the amount and duration of the assistance often varies depending upon the resources available from the congregation and the needs of the family. Official sponsorship with a resettlement agency usually requires a commitment by the congregation to provide full rental assistance for three months and partial rental assistance for six months or more. In-kind donations of new and/or gently used furnishings and clothing also contribute to the family's beginning a new life, and congregations have found providing cell phones essential to ensuring regular communication. Following the refugee family's arrival, experience of other congregations highlights the importance of having the ministry's leader(s) and a volunteer with budget/finance experience meet with the family to discuss what it means to be sponsored and what types of support the family will get, when and how. For this meeting and other regular discussions involving the family's finances, it is recommended that an interpreter is provided unless the parents are fully proficient in English. Being open and honest from the start of the sponsorship about the monthly budget, a schedule for reducing the congregation's rental assistance, and the availability of other financial resources from the congregation will help the family toward making informed decisions and potentially avoid misunderstandings and disagreements. Parishioners should be discouraged from providing significant gifts – money or items – directly to the refugee family without consulting the ministry leaders and team of volunteers working with the family.

Time Commitment expected to provide support and services as a sponsor also varies, but the congregation should plan to be involved with the refugee family for at least six months, and more likely a year to 18 months to ensure

the family achieves self-sufficiency. It's likely that some individual volunteers may remain in contact with the refugee family and maintain ongoing friendships with their new neighbors beyond this time frame. Often, the needs of a family and the specific tasks being taken on will determine the amount of time required by volunteers. Some activities like setting up the refugee apartment/house will require a one time commitment of a finite number of hours by volunteers. Other activities may be more ongoing, like providing tutoring or job search assistance. An important task of ministry/committee leaders will be communicating from the outset the estimated time commitment of specific tasks to the volunteers within the congregation. Equally important, ministry leaders need to communicate to the refugee family the availability of volunteers and the importance of respecting the time and other limitations of the volunteers. Refugees can become too dependent on volunteers from the congregation if they are calling at all hours of the day and night and/or making last minute requests for things. If this occurs, the ministry leaders will need to intervene to manage requests and reestablish boundaries.

Respect for their Faith Tradition means not only serving refugees of all faith traditions, but inquiring appropriately if the refugee family would like to participate in a local community of their faith tradition. While it is not appropriate – and is prohibited by federal funding agencies – to proselytize any refugee who is of another faith tradition, interfaith dialogue and experiences are encouraged. Being a resource for referrals about local places of worship in their faith tradition is very helpful.

Privacy and Confidentiality of the refugee's individual and family data, their history, and resettlement experience is expected by all those engaged in this work. We should be guided by the principle that for volunteers working with refugees information regarding that individual's resettlement should remain confidential unless express permission is granted to share specific information. Names, addresses, phone numbers, or personal circumstances can only be shared with express consent of the refugee family. Sharing general information about the status of the refugee family – arrived, enrolling in school, looking for work, sharing a meal with parishioners – to keep the congregation engaged about the ministry's work is a common practice, but releasing more specific details and sharing photos of the refugee family via the congregation's website, newsletters, and bulletins without their consent should never occur and is a violation of their trust. Ask the family what information you may tell others and what they consider private.

SOMETIMES SUPPORTING TOO MUCH LEADS TO UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

It is helpful to think with your entire team about the difference between “wants” and “needs.” Sometimes, individual team members may want to respond to a specific request, for example from a child, that is not really a need at that stage. Over-sharing can also undermine a family's adjustment to the realities of their life. This is not to say that some fun things are verboten, but just to suggest that you keep track of what team members are providing and whether they are consistent with the family's adjustment needs.