



Afghan Refugee Ministry

greenwichpres.org/refugees

Project Overview

Our ministry offers support and friendship for refugee families from Afghanistan as they resettle in Prince William County and other parts of Northern Virginia. As these new immigrants search for and settle into new homes, we provide genuine welcome and hospitality, financial and in-kind donations, and assistance with transportation and navigating American culture (grocery stores, elementary schools, and the DMV are not always easy!). Our volunteers continue to support families as they assimilate into the community; helping with English language skills, finding reliable vehicles, going to school, searching for employment, and more. The relationships formed are rewarding for both new immigrants and volunteers and have developed into true friendships.

Since 2017, our team of volunteers has worked directly with more than a dozen refugee families. Our approach is to connect two or more *Family Contacts* with each household to be the face of our ministry and coordinate support. Our volunteers receive cultural awareness training and have support teams standing behind them to provide help that is tailored to the needs of each family. To make all this happen, our church community has been incredibly generous, giving financial and in-kind donations including home furnishings, household supplies, clothing, vehicles, and whatever else is needed.

In spite of many challenges, these new immigrants have found permanent homes and jobs, are adapting to the culture, and many are thriving. We have found them to be industrious, courageous, community-focused, and entrepreneurial; several families have even started a farming cooperative in Nokesville and purchased a small herd of cattle! While we are connected with a number of families personally, there are many more Afghan immigrants in Prince William County. In fact, 5 of the top 100 cities in the country with highest percentage of residents born in Afghanistan are in our county (Dumfries, Manassas Park, Gainesville, Potomac Mills, & Gainesville <https://www.city-data.com/top2/h80.html>).

The Growing Need for Church Support

The crisis in Afghanistan this summer and fall has led to so many families arriving simultaneously that there is a backlog for access to government benefits. The U.S. settlement agencies tasked with this responsibility are working hard, but simply not able to process these new immigrants quickly enough. As families are released from temporary housing on military bases around the country, they move to regions like ours where they have relatives or friends, try to find temporary housing, and wait for benefits and other support to come in.

Through our network, we are identifying more refugees each week who need help. We are in need of more churches and individual followers of Jesus to step in and fill the gap. This is a unique opportunity for Christians to make a significant impact by helping immigrants with significant physical needs while offering hospitality and friendship in the name of Jesus. Through these relationships, our hope and prayer is that these friends would know the love of God and have an opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Understanding Who Afghan Refugees Are

A *refugee* is an individual who is outside their country of nationality and has a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, social group, or political opinion. Most refugees we work with are *Special Immigrant Visa (SIV)* recipients, a status given to eligible Afghans and their close relatives, who supported the U.S. military effort and thus have been targeted by extremists for their U.S. loyalty and involvement. They are eligible for government benefits and should receive their *Green Cards* soon after arrival, allowing them to live and work permanently in the U.S. In the 2021 evacuation of Afghanistan, there are also some refugees whose immigrant status is *Humanitarian Parole* and they are applying for *asylum* before green card status is granted, a process that may take years.

The Role of Settlement Agencies

Refugees are ordinarily assigned to a resettlement agency, which provides a case manager to walk the family through the immigration process. In northern Virginia, the two primary agencies are *Lutheran Social Services* and *Catholic Social Charities*, non-profit organizations founded on Christian principles but not explicitly Christian in their goals or interactions. Ideally, case workers help refugees with:

- basic necessities on arrival including finding housing
- applying for social security cards, work permits, green cards and other public services
- enrolling children in school
- budgeting and financial planning
- cultural orientation & finding English language classes
- pre-employment training and help finding a job
- financial assistance from the State Department; approximately \$2200 for each person

The Role of Our Ministry

We fill the gaps. We have found that even the best caseworkers are not able to adequately meet the needs of every family or last long enough for self-sufficiency. Our ministry seeks to help with:

- Friendship (hospitality and genuine presence and care in the name of Jesus)
- Mentoring (understanding a new culture, problem-solving, and filling unmet needs)
- Furnishings (furniture, household items, electronics and other essential items for starting out)
- Employment (after finding a home, this is the next priority)
- Vehicle (reliable transportation is the greatest obstacle to employment)
- English Language Training (improving skills or learning for the first time)
- Financial assistance for unexpected events

We do this by connecting each Afghan family with two *Family Contacts*, mature Christians who are willing to make a connection, coordinate assistance from the church, serve as mentors and guides, and develop a friendship. Family Contacts need help from our support teams and their local church to accomplish this. We need many more churches to get involved and befriend a family!

How Does a Church or Individual Get Involved?

- Contact us to learn more: refugees@greenwichpres.org
- Seek the support of your church's leadership
- Prayerfully identify Family Contacts (preferably 1 man & 1 woman)
- In-person Orientation with our Refugee Ministry Team
- Criminal & driving Background Check through your church's system
- Complete Online Training from [Befriend-a-Fam](#): (1) Cultural Considerations & (2) Sharing Our Faith
- Identify a Family through the Refugee Ministry and pray as you begin!