

## AFGHAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT TEAM

### AUGUST, 2023, REPORT TO THE CONGREGATION

#### TWO YEARS IN

It has been nearly two years since the mass evacuation by the U.S. military from Afghanistan (August 14-25, 2021). In those two years, 77,000+ Afghans resettled in the United States. 2.6 million Afghan refugees are registered with the United Nations worldwide. Another 3.5 million people are internally displaced, having lost or fled their homes to escape the Taliban. [Source: (modified) Women of Welcome] Our two SMLC Co-sponsored men through Lutheran Social Services (LSS) and the U.S. State Department have been involved with that evacuation for the duration. Their resettlement in Kenosha began on August 30, 2022, one year ago this month.

#### PROGRESS ALONG THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

In June, each man was awarded a one-time incentive check from the State of Wisconsin for maintaining 1) the same job, 2) for nine [9] consecutive months, 3) on a full time basis. While this may seem easy to do, they were the only two of five resettled Kenosha Afghans to achieve this goal: one Afghan left the state, and so forfeited this Wisconsin incentive; one lost a job after several months (currently employed elsewhere); one has worked 10 months, but on a part time basis, and so does not qualify for the incentive. The other factors are that these men left their family, their homeland, and their way of life out of life-preservation and came here to start anew while learning a new way of life and a new language.

In July, both men met with the Catholic Charities pro bono attorney with whom they had met in January regarding asylum. The January meeting was to evaluate their case to determine if they would be eligible for asylum. They each made formal application for asylum which is still months away. The next step is an interview in Chicago with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The current hope is that each will be processed by the end of *this* calendar year to get in the que for asylum. USCIS has a backlog of over fifteen (15) *months*--at this point--for asylum approvals. Only two of the fifty families being processed through Milwaukee have been granted asylum because of this backlog. In the meantime, 77,000+ Afghans are in limbo across America.

In July, each man applied for an extension of his work permit (through the Catholic Charities pro bono attorney), now required by the U.S. State Department. While the men are part of what is commonly known as "Refugee" status, they are, technically, each here on "Humanitarian Parolee" status. ***To be clear, neither has a criminal background.*** "Parolee" is the technical term used by the U.S. government for those here on a two-year work permit until they are processed through the system. Their work permits will now expire in September, 2026.

#### SMALL WORLD

In the course of the asylum application process, the men and the interpreter, an Afghani with whom they are working, discovered that they had all been held in the same center and had been on the same flight to the U.S. during the evacuation. By coincidence, they all ended up in Milwaukee area for resettlement. They had met last September at the Lutheran Social Services (LSS) offices, and then again at the Catholic Charities offices in January. Not until the fourth meeting in July did they come to this realization.

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## **SMLC TEAM**

The SMLC Afghan Refugee Resettlement Team members continue to provide outings which include the men in American traditions, such as, the 4th of July parade, Pops Concert, and fireworks. They, also, now know how to make (and eat!) s'mores.

## **PRAYER**

Please pray for the Afghan men, our resettlement Team, and our congregation, as well as, asylum-seekers, immigrants, refugees, and unaccompanied children in our country and around the World.

*Oh God of Comfort,*

+Let peace that passes understanding cover our brothers and sisters from Afghanistan. Every one of them has experienced upheaval in the past two years as the life they knew before has changed forever.

+Blanket them with your presence, with the assurance that you see them in their suffering.

*Oh God of Peace,*

+May you restore peace to the land and people of Afghanistan.

+Unite families that are separated and comfort them in their time apart.

+Protect those who remain in their homes and calm them in their time of fear.

+ Guide those who flee into unknown lands and bring people of peace into their path to welcome them.

*Oh God of Restoration,*

+Envelop our Afghan brothers and sisters in the U.S. in your love.

+Fulfill their dreams, as they seek to provide for their families and find a place to call home – guide them.

+Restore hope in their hearts through welcoming individuals and communities.

+Empower your church to receive them with open arms.

Amen!

[Source: (modified) Women of Welcome]

***Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.***

Matthew 10:40 (NRSVUE)

