



Community Matters

Doing Good in Your Community



The images are appalling. A war-torn country. So many displaced families with, quite literally, nowhere to go. The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is a tragic reminder of how innocent lives can be destroyed by the forces around them. But there's also hope amid the ruin via grass roots help right here in Guilford in the form of volunteers who painstakingly help these refugees one family at a time.

Gini King and Claudia Buzzi are the co-founders of the Shoreline Interfaith Resettlement, formed as a direct response to the ongoing Afghan refugee crisis. The efforts started within the First Church Guilford.



Left, Diane Grasso and right, Winnie Siebert are two Team Chairs.

Others quickly joined, including the North Madison Congregational Church, Christ Episcopal Church of Guilford, Temple Beth Tikvah of Madison, and St. George's Catholic Church of Guilford. It's a dedicated group of community volunteers.



Left to right, Joanna Bingham, Craig Mullett, and Chris Breton are members of the Finance Team.

Collaboration at its best

The collaboration starts with the New Haven-based non-profit agency Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS). IRIS has been welcoming and supporting refugees for 25 years. IRIS identifies the families in need. Co-sponsors, like Shoreline Interfaith Resettlement, take on the logistics. They find housing for the family, health care, registering



The dedicated volunteer leadership team who responded to assist the Afghan refugees

the children for education, helping the parents find jobs, etc. "It's a gargantuan task," observes Gini. The group has 8 working teams. Many have worked with families in the past. This time, there was a twist.

The group is currently assisting a couple with nine children. "Families have generally had three kids max. And that was hard," notes Claudia. "I still can't wrap my head around it. ...needing 10 beds, 11 kitchen chairs, 11 sets of sneakers, daily living supplies..." The family arrived on December 29. "It is wonderful to experience all this happiness," Gini related. "The family is very warm. The children are curious and the adults are eager to learn about their new home where open hospitality extends to family members and visitors."

Strength in times of need

With such a large family, there was much to do. An apartment wasn't an option. A house was needed. Rent alone was expected to be about \$2,800 a month. Basic supplies had to be secured. Donations help – like the recent \$5000 grant from The Guilford Foundation. Once the family is situated, there will be assistance in, essentially, reuniting them with the world, helping them into a community while respecting each other's cultures, providing

transportation, communication, and support. "It's about how things work...small, concrete, everyday things," explains Claudia. "Like how to pay bills online, what the bus route is, going to meet with teachers."

Obtaining employment for the parents is imperative as the support through IRIS lasts one year, and the family is expected to be self-supporting thereafter. The parents will not have working papers when they arrive. Gini and Claudia describe how the Afghan refugee families are termed 'humanitarian parolees' who are permitted in the U.S. for 2 years and must apply for legal asylum to remain thereafter. That will require legal help.

Triumph amid tragedy

Tragedy can bring us together in ways we never imagined. It is hard, but gratifying work for those who volunteer their time and skills. "These families come here in the most dire of circumstances," underscores Gini. "It's amazing when you see people who are so grateful to have a home, to have a roof over their heads." And it's all about the mindset to which Gini, Claudia and this group of dedicated volunteers hold fast: "To help and love neighbors no matter who they are and to reach out to people who are suffering."

