

Group to bring Afghan refugees to Glens Falls, New York

A newly formed group called Adirondack Welcome Circle is raising money to bring an Afghan refugee family to live in Glens Falls.

As Dr. Kathleen Braico watched Afghan families evacuate Afghanistan as the Taliban took over in August, she knew she needed to find a way to help.

At least 55,000 are currently living on U.S. Army bases, unable to find housing, their relocation delayed by a housing shortage and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“The government has been helping these people find homes, but it’s just the numbers are so huge and the housing situation’s so difficult in the United States that it’s been a very slow process,” Braico said. “And many people are still stuck waiting, hoping to start their new lives and not being able to do so.”

Through research, she found an organization called Sponsor Circles, a nongovernmental group that helps Afghan refugees find homes on a one-family-at-a-time basis.

Braico reached out to local friends, including Dr. Richard Leach, and formed a group called Adirondack Welcome Circle to find a way to bring one Afghan family of four to settle in the Glens Falls area.

The refugees will arrive with Social Security numbers and green cards so they are able to work. But they will need help finding rental housing, applying for benefits, job training, health services and possibly English lessons. Children will need to be enrolled in school.

“They need to be oriented to this culture,” Braico said. “Perhaps they’ve never shopped at a grocery store before. Perhaps they are unfamiliar with how to ride a bus and buy the tickets to get on the bus ... so all of that is what we’re going to be helping them with in the first three months.”

Sponsor Circles requires Adirondack Welcome Circle to raise \$2,275 per family member, which is \$9,100 for a family of four. That money needs to cover all these expenses and more.

“We will need in-kind donations as well. I presume that we will not find a furnished apartment,” Braico pointed out. “I presume that we’re going to have to find furniture, linens, towels, dishes, toilet bowl cleaners, everything that a new family needs to start.”

The family may need clothing as well.

Adirondack Welcome Circle is currently raising money to help fund this project. There is an account open at Glens Falls National Bank. They also plan to start a GoFundMe page.

More information can be found on the group’s Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/354576082782939>. Donations can be mailed to Adirondack Welcome Circle, P.O. Box 132, Glens Falls, N.Y. 12801. The group will soon have a website that will also accept donations.

The group also needs more people to assist the effort, including someone who can handle the financial end of the project and legal services, because the in-coming family will have temporary visas and will have to apply for asylum. They also need people who know about the system of help that’s available.

“It takes a village to raise a child,” Braico said. “Well, it’s going to take a whole community to make these people welcome here.”

The relocation and transition may be difficult for the refugee family, since there are few Afghan families in the Glens Falls area and the closest mosque is in Latham, Braico said.

It may also be difficult for locals who may not fully accept the new family into the area.

“I’m very concerned about that actually,” said Leach, “to the point where we’ve actually asked a sheriff into our organization with that specific thing in mind. And we are already reaching out to the Jewish community, too, of course, who has a historical problem with Arabs. So we’re kind of anticipating that that’s going to happen.”

But both Leach and Braico are optimistic, however, that the community will welcome the new neighbors.

Leach said a lot has changed about the demographics of the area since he moved here in 1977 to set up his medical practice.

“There was very, very little diversity here,” Leach said. “I don’t remember anyone Black or even Brown on the streets in those days.”

That is not the case now, he said.

Braico said she is confident the Glens Falls community is willing and able to be welcoming to this Afghan family. She hopes locals will value the need for diversity in the community.

She moved here in 1978 and said she couldn’t imagine a better place to raise her family.

“I think that we need immigrants,” she said. “Like most white Americans, I’m here because my grandparents immigrated. If it wasn’t for a grandmother at the age of 16 was willing to leave her family in Czechoslovakia and never to ever see them again and come to this country ... I wouldn’t be here. Most of us are the descendants of immigrants. And it’s a way to pay it forward.

“They were willing to take big risks and come here,” Braico continued, “and I think that we can help other people who are willing to take big risks and come here. And they will enrich our community.”

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Kathleen Braico