

ST. EDWARD'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH WELCOME TEAM

Our involvement came about because one of our members is on the board of our resettlement agency. The refugee family we are sponsoring is a family of nine, three of which are still in Afghanistan. The children here in Lancaster are 3, 8, 10, and 12. The remaining three are teens.

We broke our team down into different committees, the three main ones being:

Setting Up The Home – This involved obtaining all the furniture, kitchen supplies, bedding, etc. recommended by the resettlement agency. We started collecting items long before we were assigned a family. A Welcome Team member was gracious enough to store furniture, etc. in her garage. When our family came, all we had to do was rent a U-Haul and start moving. We had one day to make the apartment look like a home. In our case, the apartment needed major cleaning and some walls painted. With the permission of the landlord, we painted walls at the last minute....we were still painting the day they moved in.

Education – Responsible for getting them registered at school. The head of our education team does a fantastic job staying in contact with the teachers so we can track each student's progress. We also have a very active group of tutors on our Welcome Team...tutoring twice a week. The emphasis has been on helping them understand and complete homework, and playing educational games. The boys enjoy it because we make it fun. During the summer, tutoring will continue with the main focus being continued learning of the English language.

Transportation – This was the biggest challenge, but we now run like a "well-oiled" machine. The challenge came because they are a family of six and only one or two of the Welcome Team have a car that can transport them all at one time. In addition, all six needed medical, dental, and vision care so there are many doctor appointments, particularly dental. Then we added sports to the mix, so we need to transport to Track and Soccer several times a week. But it's such a blessing watching these little boys participate so enthusiastically.

Last month our family was blessed with a donated vehicle from a member of another Episcopal church. This was a special blessing because it came right before Dr. Rahim was employed by Lancaster General Hospital. Even though he was a General Practitioner in Afghanistan, he had to start at the bottom as a Medical Assistant until he can get his credentials...which will be no small feat.

When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August, Dr. Rahim had to get himself and his family out for their safety....because he worked for our government. All nine were at the airport ready to leave when our military said they could only bring four of the children. As you can imagine, their hearts were and are still broken. Our church started a legal fund for the family and hired a legal immigration attorney who is doing the work necessary to grant "our family" asylum in the United States so they can actively pursue the reunification process. We pray and look forward to the day when the whole family is together.

Some of us have developed very close relationships with our family and have become friends. We will continue in their lives after our July 29 end date as a Welcome Team.

-Joyce Kamm