

# Let's Welcome Our New Afghan Neighbors

By partnering with Samaritan's Purse, your church has an opportunity to sponsor an Afghan family. You will be living out the story of the Good Samaritan as you respond to one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time.

The Afghan Resettlement Program, launched by Samaritan's Purse, is part of a larger emergency response to welcome Afghan refugees in the United States. This program allows church sponsors to be matched with an Afghan family or individual to welcome them and show them the love of Jesus.

## The Humanitarian Context

In August, we watched in horror as the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and tens of thousands of our Afghan allies were desperate to flee. The Afghan newcomers, who are now at military bases in the United States, have been brought in through Humanitarian Parole – an established U.S. government program that is used sparingly and only in emergency situations. In this instance, Humanitarian Parole is being utilized due to the massive influx of people in need of immediate resettlement and protection.

### Terms of Stay

- Humanitarian parolees are allowed to stay in the United States for a temporary period—usually up to two years.
- In order to stay in the United States for a longer period, humanitarian parolees must be granted another status such as political asylum or Special Immigrant Visa Holder.
- To learn more about the Humanitarian Parole program for Afghan nationals, please refer to U.S. Citizenship and immigration Services.

## Becoming a Sponsor Church

As a sponsor church, you take primary responsibility for welcoming newcomers while providing initial support and resources as they integrate into their new community.

Samaritan's Purse is ready and available to support you in this process in the following ways:

- Support your church in the application process, including creating a welcome plan.
- Match Afghan families with your church.
- Direct your church to external resources to aid Afghan newcomers.
- Provide support via phone and email.

Evacuees are six times as likely to successfully resettle in the United States if they have a sponsor. This can be challenging, but we believe the church is uniquely positioned to welcome families while demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ.

### Sponsor Church Group Members

It is recommended that you form a team from your church of five to six people who will commit to actively participating in the resettlement process and serving as key contacts. How you structure your group is up to you. As you are determining roles, consider key contacts' availability and how to best communicate as a group in order to overcome challenges, respond to unpredictability, and achieve success.

### **Time Commitment**

Sponsor churches commit to providing welcome and critical support to an Afghan newcomer or family for a minimum of 90 days. Our desire and hope is that sponsor churches will be actively involved for at least six months as the family moves toward greater independence.

Church sponsors should be prepared to give 10-40 hours each week in total. This will be more intensive at the beginning and decrease as the family settles. As a team, you can determine who leads in which area and divide the commitments in a way that works best for your church.

### **Responsibilities of the Sponsor Church**

1. Housing and Transportation
2. Education
3. Public Services
4. Professional Services
5. Cultural Adaptation
6. Employment and Financial Support

## **Responsibilities**

You must submit a welcome plan to Samaritan's Purse for review in order to demonstrate your readiness to sponsor an Afghan family. The following information will help you understand your responsibilities as a sponsor, prepare to welcome an Afghan family, and develop a thorough welcome plan. A sample welcome plan will also be provided to help guide you through the process.

### **1. Housing and Transportation:**

#### **Housing**

You will need to arrange for safe, sanitary and affordable housing to ensure plenty of space and privacy. In your welcome plan, please include as much information as possible such as location, number of bedrooms, whether it is a house, apartment, etc., and any other details that are available. If temporary housing is arranged prior to the newcomers moving into permanent housing, please provide necessary details such as length of stay and dwelling occupancy.

In addition to securing a safe and affordable place to stay, please keep in mind that you are expected to also fill the home with basic living necessities such as furniture, kitchenware, and toiletries.

Please note that the sooner the newcomer is in permanent housing with adequate resources, the sooner they will feel at home.

#### **Transportation**

You will need to consider any additional transportation needs for Afghan newcomers such as public transportation, bus routes, and how to pursue a driver's license. At the beginning of their arrival, there will likely be a greater need to provide transportation, but you can help them become more self-sufficient.

Humanitarian parolees are eligible to apply for a driver's license and state identification. In your welcome plan, you should include the links of any websites that offer guidance on completing change of address forms and applying for documents such as driver's licenses and state IDs.

#### **Clothing**

You will also need to provide clothing and footwear for work, school, and everyday use for each member of the family. This may include diapers for infants and toddlers. It is important to consider the time of year that they are arriving in order to provide seasonally appropriate clothing.

## **2. Education:**

### **English as a Second Language (ESL)**

The family that you support may speak little to no English. As a part of your welcome plan, you will need to detail how you intend to support them in developing and strengthening their English skills.

Research what is available in your area. It is common for libraries and community centers to offer ESL courses. You may also identify informal ways to help them continue to learn.

You will also need to develop a plan to communicate with the Afghan family at the beginning of their arrival. This can be accomplished by including the name(s) of local volunteers who can provide language support and the contact information of an organization that will provide in-person or telephonic interpretation.

### **School**

If you are welcoming any school-age children, you will be responsible for supporting the family in enrolling them in school within the first two weeks of arrival. This may be public or private school. Please provide details regarding the enrollment process including necessary immunizations and your district's local point of contact responsible for enrollment.

You may also need to assist adult learners with GED enrollment when necessary.

## **3. Public Services:**

Prior to leaving the U.S. military bases, Afghan newcomers will have already been supported in applying for Social Security cards and an Employment Authorization Document. To ensure that these cards are received, you will need to assist them in completing a change of address form with the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Postal Service.

They may also be eligible for a variety of services such as Medicaid and food assistance. Samaritan's Purse will provide state-specific guidelines that detail different programs you can explore to support the family you are sponsoring. Please be aware that government benefits may change.

You should also assist families in understanding and utilizing community resources such as the library, post offices, public transportation, and any additional outlets to aid in their transition.

## **4. Professional Services:**

In your welcome plan, demonstrate your understanding of how to connect the new family to the necessary medical, trauma/mental health, and legal support resources in your area. The first step will be assisting the Afghan newcomers in contacting your local health department and by helping them complete an application for medical assistance through your local Department of Social Services. It would be beneficial to note the contact information of these offices along with any additional support services that are available in your area.

Since these families are currently in the United States on humanitarian parole, you will need to assist them in filing their political asylum claim to obtain permanent legal status in the country. To identify a professional for assistance with this step, please visit [USAHello](#).

## 5. Cultural Adaptation:

Cultural adaptation is crucial for successful resettlement. Remember, these families have experienced trauma and left behind everything that they know. Make a plan for how you will facilitate cultural connections such as appropriate foods and connecting them to other Afghan families in your area. This will lessen the negative effects of culture shock.

Based on your location, this may feel daunting; however, there are available resources to help such as the USAHello website and app, as well as local interpretation services. You may also find that many resources exist online.

Be intentional to share in activities with newcomers to help them adapt to their new home. A few practical ways to help families integrate in your community include:

- Visit a local farmers market, museum, or zoo.
- Visit public spaces such as libraries that often host free events where newcomers can engage with their neighbors.
- Go with newcomers to nearby grocery stores, department stores, pharmacies, etc.
- Find a market that offers ingredients needed for traditional Afghan cuisine.
- Ride the local bus route with them or use a ride-hailing service together.

### **Build Relationships**

Apart from community engagement activities, assisting families with home visit activities will also be beneficial. Some examples of these activities are below:

- Make crafts together such as artwork, sewing, and simple crafts for children.
- Spend time coloring with younger members of the newly arrived family while practicing simple English words throughout your time together.
- Share a meal together.
- Spend time teaching the new family how to cook traditional American dishes and treats such as chocolate chip cookies.
- Ask the family to teach you how to prepare a traditional dish from Afghanistan.
- Spend time sharing updates about your family and life.
- Show family pictures from a recent family gathering such as a birthday party or school field trip. However, be mindful to not display wealth, such as large homes or expensive vacations.
- Play games. Many games such as hopscotch, jacks, soccer, and jump rope are played throughout the world.
- Be intentional to visit the newly arrived family just to say “hello.”
- Enjoy outdoor activities such as vegetable gardening.
- Draw pictures together using chalk on the sidewalk or driveway.
- Spend time listening to one another's favorite music.

## 6. Employment and Financial Support

Employment is an important step toward self-sufficiency, and it is important to support newcomers in finding a job. This will also enable them to develop a daily rhythm while assisting with language learning and becoming accustomed to local norms.

As part of your welcome plan, describe and direct newcomers toward affordable employment counseling or other employment programming that exists within your community. You may also choose to outline your plans for how you will assist newcomers through informal support such as leveraging your own networks.

### **Income Support**

The sponsor church will have access to \$1,225.00 per newcomer, as allocated by the U.S. government. Any expenses beyond this amount will need to be provided by the sponsor church until the family is able to support themselves.

In your welcome plan, you should include how you may be able to financially support newly arriving families above the per capita amount already provided to them by the U.S. government. If finances would preclude you from sponsoring an Afghan newcomer or if you are in need of additional resources, please contact Samaritan's Purse.

## **Consider the Challenges**

As a sponsor church, you are welcoming an Afghan newcomer into a new community and demonstrating God's love in a tangible way. Your support can greatly impact their ability to integrate successfully and thrive independently. A successful sponsor church is able to share, empower, and learn from the newcomer while offering flexibility, patience, and empathy in challenging circumstances.

### **Managing Expectations**

Each newcomer's adjustment period will be different. Be patient and understanding as they experience a major life transition. At any point in the process, the Afghan family may choose to end their participation in the sponsorship program, and they have the freedom to do so. Keep an open mind while managing your expectations to avoid disappointment or confusion. Remember, the Afghan family will also have expectations about life in America and church sponsorship. Maintain open communication to clear up any mistaken expectations or incorrect assumptions, set goals and boundaries, and help prevent confusion, conflict, and frustration.

### **Power Differentials**

Before you start your sponsorship, consider that you are not "giving to" or "helping" the individual but rather "supporting" them as equals. Practice the skill of "doing with" and not "doing for."

Resettlement is successful when newcomers regain power and control in their lives. Sponsor churches can contribute to this success by helping them build self-sufficiency. Best practices include:

- Plan an initial check-in with the newcomer to establish next steps and expectations.
- Respect space, possessions, and privacy.
- Support parental roles by asking newcomer parents for permission before giving a child something.
- When interacting with interpreters and service providers, position yourself behind the newcomers so they are the individual primarily in the conversation.
- Remember sponsorship is not adoption. Consider "the family we are welcoming" or "my Afghan friend" rather than "our or my family."

### **Language Barrier**

The national languages of Afghanistan are Dari and Pashto. Some newcomers may also speak some level of English. Many want to improve their language skills in order to gain employment or pursue a higher education.

Some supportive tasks related to language acquisition may include identifying access to necessary language assessments, assisting in enrolling family members in basic language training, providing emotional support, and offering one-on-one informal language learning support.

As you communicate with language learners, it may be helpful to imagine how you would feel if roles were reversed. Be patient, write things down step-by-step, and use numbers or pictures if necessary. Take time to pronounce names correctly, be personal, and speak to newcomers as a friend.

## **Culture**

Familiarize yourself with Afghan culture such as greetings, foods and traditions while learning a few basic phrases in Dari or Pashto through online resources.

Adopt a culture of humility and a willingness to acknowledge one's own knowledge gaps. Use this as an opportunity to be curious about the newcomer's customs while suspending judgement of what is "wrong" and "right."

## **Trauma**

The Afghan family you sponsor may have experienced trauma in their past. A successful church sponsor is informed on how to best support a newcomer who has experienced trauma by identifying mental health and emotional support resources in your area.

Common responses to trauma include intense fear or horror, a sense of powerlessness, and a loss of control. Strategies to engage with newcomers who have experienced trauma may include:

- Understanding and identifying signs of traumatic stress such as overreacting, being "difficult" or "unreasonable," fatigue, worry, and forgetfulness.
- Creating a safe, empathetic and responsive environment.
- Being mindful of triggers such as certain events, noises, smells, and people.
- Sharing mental health supports such as clinics, books, phone apps, and support groups.

Don't expect that newcomers will share their stories. Instead, give them the space and freedom to share their experiences when they feel comfortable. If they do share, offer understanding and support through messaging like "it's understandable that you're feeling overwhelmed after everything you've been through" or "it means a lot you are sharing this with me."

## **Desire for Privacy**

As a sponsor church, you will have access to certain information about the newcomer that is confidential and private. Respect that privacy and allow the individual to share any information when they feel comfortable doing so.

Do not share any important information related to the newcomer such as name, address, telephone number, date of birth, health information, photos, or personal stories.

## **Loving in Jesus' Name**

The majority of Afghans are Muslim, and their faith is very important to them. We want to love them in Jesus' Name and demonstrate our faith to them through words and actions rooted in love. Our prayer is that they will come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, but we never want to force our faith on them.

# **The Successful Church Sponsor**

Successful sponsor churches can take many forms, but the overall goal is for newcomers to feel prepared to thrive independently. To be best situated for success, sponsor churches should set small goals and monitor progress, set and maintain boundaries, and celebrate milestones.

## **Monitor Progress**

Any achievement is more attainable when progress is monitored. You can do this by creating a clear timeline of activities in partnership with the newcomer, checking in frequently regarding expectations and achieved successes, alerting the Samaritan's Purse resettlement team of unresolvable challenges, and keeping accurate record of work that has been done. You can also connect with other churches that are sponsoring Afghan families through the Samaritan's Purse resettlement program for access to a network of support.

### **Set and Maintain Boundaries**

Successful church sponsor members are able to keep a balance between themselves and the newcomers they welcome. Establishing and maintaining clear boundaries helps the newcomer know the areas in which they can count on you, when they should act on their own, and in what areas they need to seek outside support.

Some steps to strengthen boundaries include defining your role, sharing your goals as a sponsor, reviewing your role as a member of the church sponsor, identifying the problem and determining who is responsible, recognizing and communicating your personal limits, and taking care of your own physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. Remember that you are not alone as you help sponsor these Afghan families. Others can offer support, perspective, and resources. If there is a challenge that arises within the first 90 days that keeps you from performing your sponsorship responsibilities, please inform the Samaritan's Purse Afghan Resettlement Program.

### **Celebrate Milestones**

It is important to celebrate and acknowledge both big and small successes. Some goals may include successfully purchasing groceries independently, taking transportation to key locations, being aware of language learning opportunities, successfully scheduling doctor appointments, and depositing or withdrawing money from their bank account.

You may also choose to formally conclude the support of the sponsor church by planning a gathering to share with the newcomer how happy you are that they are your neighbors.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for your interest in serving as a sponsor church with Samaritan's Purse. We will be praying with you as you consider this opportunity to love Afghan families in Jesus' Name. If you decide God is calling your church to do this, please proceed to complete your application of sponsorship.

### **Samaritan's Purse Afghan Resettlement Program**

All inquiries will be responded to within 24 hours or less.

- [afghanresettlement@samaritan.org](mailto:afghanresettlement@samaritan.org)
- 828-588-2610

**“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”**

— Matthew 25:35, ESV