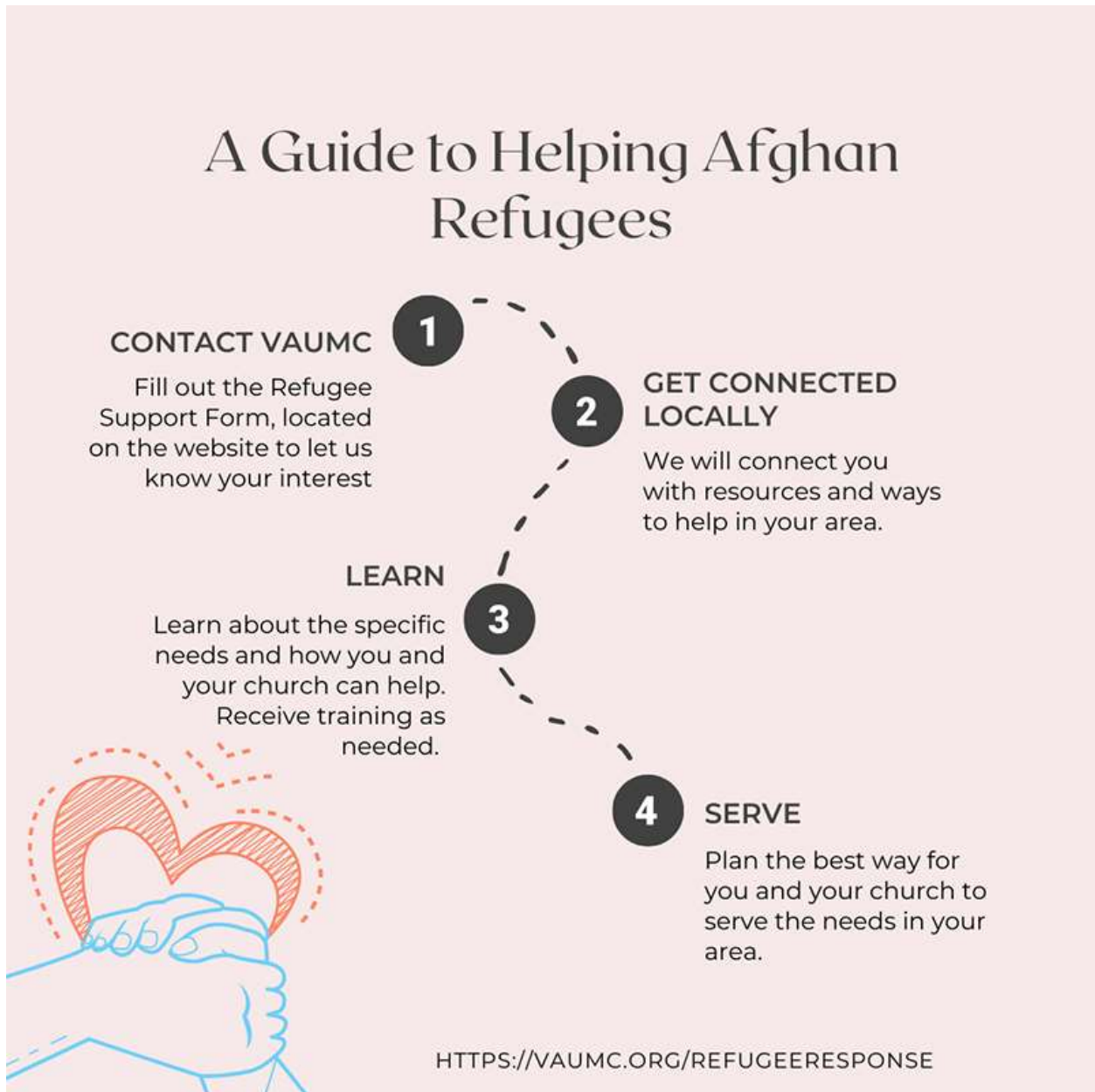


Guidelines for Assisting Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Refugee Families from Afghanistan



Overview:

These guidelines were created by the Virginia Conference Refugee Response Team and Bill Shugarts to assist local churches in sponsoring and supporting Afghan families and engaging in refugee ministries in their area. Most Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) families will be starting all over again; meaning they will need to set-up a household, finances, medical care, and child care. A United Methodist local church interested in advocacy, support, or sponsoring a family can begin this process by filling out the Refugee Support

Form(<https://forms.gle/1E9QqaimDeifKWDG6>). This form can be found at www.vaumc.org/refugeeresponse.

From there you will be connected to local agencies, trained to work with refugees, and then sent out to serve families in need. See a list of local agencies in your region below. Each of these organizations work with the Reception and Placement program through the US State Department.

Initial Support from the State Department (contracting with local resettlement agencies) provided to SIV families:

- Securing housing for the family
- Picking up the family at the airports
- Arranging home setup
- Ensuring a culturally appropriate meal and a week's worth of groceries are ready for the family in the home when they arrive
- Providing limited financial support for three months

Local Agency Case Manager - 3 months and beyond:

- Family Health Screening
- Enrollment in K-12 public school
- Enrollment in ESL classes
- Applications for benefits (e.g., social security, Medicaid, food stamps, etc.)
- Orientations on topics such a pre-employment, transportation, and cross-cultural adjustment
- Employment support services

Regional Resettlement Agencies - <https://rcusa.org/>

-Charlottesville

- International Rescue Committee (IRC), <https://www.rescue.org/united-states/charlottesville-va>

-DC Metro

- African Community Center and Ethiopian Community Development, DC Metro, <https://acc-dc.org/>, <https://www.ecdcus.org/>
- Catholic Charities, Diocese of Arlington (CCDA: northern VA, Fredericksburg), <https://www.ccda.net/need-help/immigrants-and-refugees/migration-and-refugee-services/>
- Lutheran Social Services of The National Capital Area, (Fairfax, Woodbridge/Dale City), <https://lssnca.org/programs/refugees-immigrant/how-to-help/>

-Harrisonburg (and Rockingham, Shenandoah, Augusta counties)

- Church World Service, <https://cwsharrisonburg.org/get-involved/>
- Newport News
- Commonwealth Catholic Charities of Virginia, <https://www.cccofva.org/>
- Richmond
- Commonwealth Catholic Charities of Virginia, <https://www.cccofva.org/>
 - International Rescue Committee (IRC), <https://www.rescue.org/united-states/richmond-va>
- Roanoke
- Commonwealth Catholic Charities of Virginia, <https://www.cccofva.org/>

Needs & Ways to Help Identified by Refugee Resettlement Agencies

- IRC - <https://www.rescue.org/announcement/how-help-afghan-evacuees-virginia>
- Commonwealth Catholic Charities- <https://www.cccofva.org/resettlement-services>
- ECDC - <https://www.ecdcus.org/get-involved/volunteering/>,
<https://www.ecdcus.org/volunteer/>, <https://www.ecdcus.org/get-involved/donate/>
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services - https://lsnca.org/take_action/afghan-allies.html
- CWS Harrisonburg- <https://cwsharrisonburg.org/get-involved/>,
<https://cwsharrisonburg.org/get-involved/in-kind-donations/>,
<https://cwsharrisonburg.org/donate/>
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops- <https://www.cdda.net/give-help/welcome-the-newcomer/afghan-response-flyer.pdf>, https://www.cdda.net/give-help/donate-goods-and-transportation/help-immigrants-and-refugees/#ctl00_ContentPlaceHolder1_articleFeaturedResources,
<https://www.cdda.net/give-help/donate-goods-and-transportation/help-immigrants-and-refugees/>

Other Organizations Connected to Resettlement Work

- Homes Not Borders, <https://www.homesnotborders.org/>
- primarily focuses on setting up apartments for refugees
- KindWorks, <https://www.dokindworks.org/>
- provide community and workforce opportunities to refugees and other vulnerable populations
- No One Left Behind, <https://nooneleft.org/default.aspx>
- works specifically with SIVs to get them out and help them resettle in the US
- ReEstablish Richmond, <https://www.reestablishrichmond.org/>

- connects our newest neighbors to life-building tools and resources
- Upwardly Global, <https://www.upwardlyglobal.org/>
- helps skilled refugees prepare for and find employment in their original fields
- NOVA Friends of Refugees, <https://www.facebook.com/novafriendsofrefugees>
- referral support network, supports refugee resettlement needs, mobilizes volunteers

Advocacy Organizations

- Refugee Council USA, <https://rcusa.org/afghanistan/>
- Church World Service, https://cwsglobal.org/take-action/afghan-siv-and-refugee-program/?utm_source=cwsglobal&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=home20210813
- Episcopal Migration Ministries, <https://episcopalmigrationministries.org/>
- HIAS (originally Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), <https://www.hias.org/>
- International Rescue Committee (IRC), <https://www.rescue.org/>
- Refugee Congress, <https://refugeecongress.org/>
- Jesuit Refugee Service USA, <https://www.irsusa.org/>
- Refugees International, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/>
- American Friends Service Committee, <https://bit.ly/3kAP5fF>
- The Center for the Victims of Torture, <https://www.cvt.org/>

United Methodist Resources

- United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), <https://umcmmission.org/august-2021/umcor-supports-afghans-in-need/>
- Church and Society, The United Methodist Church, <https://www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care-about/civil-and-human-rights/global-migration>

For more information please visit www.vaumc.org/refugeerresponse.

Or contact Kenn Speicher, VAUMC Refugee Response Team Contact, at speicherak@gmail.com or the Serving and Learning Offices of the Virginia Conference at serving@vaumc.org or learning@vaumc.org.

Bill Shugarts' Tips and Overview of Needs for Refugee Families

Each family is different, so it is a situational relationship depending on the family profile. The goal is to help each family learn and negotiate our cultural nuances and become functioning/independent families as soon as they are able. Top priorities for families are: furnishing their apartments, groceries, ESL classes, transportation access, job search and

assistance, clothing needs, providing for children, computer and tv access, and financial assistance.

Apartment Furnishings:

They will need the basics via furniture, pots & pans, kitchen equipment (knives), linens, toiletries, shampoo, soaps, bedding, etc. unless the apartment is already furnished. Helpful furniture items include a couch, table lamps, kitchen/dining room table and a rug. Your church or organization may want to consider other needed appliances with furniture. One family bought a pressure cooker with the initial cash payment they received, so they cook various things with it.

Food:

Do a quick google search for Afghan food. Rice dishes, kabobs, chicken and Afghan bread “naan,” are the most common. Drinks might include tea, water, milk, and sodas on occasion; but no alcoholic beverages. Providing some of these items is a simple way for your church to support an Afghan family. Also, they might need help on how to operate various kitchen appliances pending the apartment set-up.

Language:

The good news is that many refugees are fluent in English as well as other languages. Some family members might need ESL courses. Help connect them to ESL courses. Here is a helpful resource for Northern Virginia - <https://www.eslim.org/students/classes-schedules/>
Richmond Area - <https://www.reestablishrichmond.org/esl-classes>
Norfolk Area - <https://www.englishonline.net/esl-classes-norfolk-va/>

Transportation:

Transportation is critical to a refugee family’s success as they shop for groceries, job search, take kids to schools, classes, doctor appointments, dentist appointments, or laundry. Connecting a family with driving classes and navigating the DMV can be helpful. One church that sponsored a family chose to fundraise money to buy their family a car. The father of this family used it to start driving Uber/Door-Dash. This effort had a great impact on the family’s life. Refugee families may also need assistance to learn the public transportation in their areas. However, this does not offer them the flexibility and carries the risk of making them late for interviews, appointments and work. Consider what your church or community might be able to provide to assist a family.

Job Search:

Beginning the job search is key to getting quickly settled for refugee families. Government resettlement benefits run out in about 3 months. Assisting with the job search includes resume assistance and interview coaching. Comprehensive interview coaching helps prepare the individual to understand the interview process, potential interview questions, assistance with dressing for the job, and guidance to navigate transportation to and from the interview. Afghan refugees come to the US with various levels of education that may or may not transfer easily into our education system. Connecting refugee families to refresher courses or necessary additional courses for jobs in the US is beneficial. Partner with area campus ministries to connect to community colleges and universities. These partnerships could include guiding Afghan families through the application process at universities and getting around the college campus. Families may also need financial assistance for higher education. While a Lutheran Social Services Case Manager may assist in some of these areas a higher success rate for families is seen when they are supported by a community or local church. Critical to assisting with the job search for Afghan families is understanding their cultural context. Here's some helpful thoughts from Bill Shugarts and his work with Afghan families:

- Afghan wives frequently do not work outside the home, be sensitive to this cultural practice. Some families do have both spouses working. It's important not to make assumptions about why or why not both spouses may choose not to work.

Western Clothes:

Each SIV family is coming to the US in a unique situation and may or may not need assistance with Western clothing. They might need seasonal jackets/coats as the weather turns colder. They also may need a set of interview clothes for their job search. Bill Shugarts shared that the family his church worked with started building their wardrobe with donated and lightly used suits and ties from church members. Regarding helping women with clothing, support SIV family women by using women volunteers to guide them.

Children:

Children may be in shock when they first arrive but are resilient and will adapt quickly. Supporting parents is the key to helping children adjust. It might be a bit tricky now with Covid protocols so the family might need help beyond the case worker with medical records, understanding Medicaid, etc. The case worker will assist in these areas, but some extra support and advice might be helpful.

Tip: donate or purchase the children a few age-appropriate toys, games, balls, school supplies, etc. The kids will learn quickly from American TV as well so consider donating a small television and maybe a bicycle.

Computers, Internet, Cable TV:

Most families will not have a computer. It is essential now for each family to have at least one working computer. Computers can often be purchased at lower cost and this may be an item a local church can fundraise for or get donated. While children may receive laptops from school, parents will need a computer for their job search, resume building, medical records, bills and other essential needs. Internet and cable TV is key. Most families have cell phones as their lifeline now. Some adjustment to the United States codes and requirements might be necessary.

Finances/Bank Accounts/Signing Leases:

SIV families will need assistance opening a bank account and navigating finances in the US. They will likely have no credit rating in the US. Without a credit rating it is difficult to get a cell phone plan, a rental agreement, or even a car. Leases can also be tricky for a SIV family. Various problems can occur with leases (1) loss of funds or lack of job after the first three months, (2) the need to relocate to find work while in a long term lease, or (3) lack of credit to find a suitable rental property. Walking alongside Afghan families to navigate these potential problems, creating a budget that relates to the unique expenses they face in the US, and assisting them in building credit are helpful.

Tip: Afghan families frequently wish to send money back to Afghan relatives. Case workers will be clear that this may harm the family and not allow them to have adequate resources to stay afloat. Your team can help by reminding them of the list of great needs they have in the US before trying to send money back.

Confidentiality/Pictures:

Confidentiality is critical too. The Taliban monitors almost all of our media. A mistake was once made when taking pictures of the family. It was culturally inappropriate to take photos of the wife of the family. These photos had to be blacked out when CBS media publicized them to ensure their family members back in Afghanistan would not be harmed.

These comments are by no means an exhaustive list of situations the SIV's will face. It however is based on firsthand experiences and again, is situational requiring flexibility. The easiest way to help is by donating funds to non-profits who are coming alongside these SIV families. But the human touch in helping a family legally immigrate for church folks can be extremely rewarding—Loving God and Loving Others.