**Refugee Resettlement Project**

***Project Update – January 2018***

Marzia told me, in her basic English, that she is so lucky she has our church in her life. The Refugee Resettlement Project began sponsoring Marzia in September 2016 when she and her two children arrived in the United States. Marzia is a widow from Afghanistan whose husband was killed by the Taliban. The family sought refugee status here when the Taliban then threatened her 10-year-old son. They waited in Pakistan for 3 years. UUCF and UU Sterling have combined efforts to help the family resettle.

From the outset, it was clear that Marzia’s concerns for her children occupied the highest priority in her mind. It took some months before she began to feel safe in her new life, and trusting of volunteers from UUCF-UUS working with her. Marzia and the children were settled into an apartment in Reston, but that was only the beginning of volunteer efforts. The family has made enormous progress over the past 15 months settling into their new home and gaining independence. Marzia’s English has improved significantly. She qualified and has held a job for almost a year now working in child care for a licensed home day care provider. In Afghanistan she was a kindergarten teacher for many years. She has been praised by her current employer, parents, and licensing monitors for her work.

Marzia has learned to maneuver public transportation and taxi service (using a voucher system that pays 2/3 of the fare) to take her daughter to school-based child care, get to work, medical appointments and visit family in Springfield. She obtains health care consistently for herself and her children, and with the generous gift of one of UUCF’s members the family has had significant dental work done. She has just received prescription glasses through a combined program of the Health Department and the Lions Club. Marzia has been working with Cornerstone, a non-profit organization that has provided case management and helped by referring her to resources in the community.

Each of these accomplishments and activities have required hours of effort on the part of individuals working on the project. Volunteers recently found, applied for, and assisted the family with a move into subsidized “affordable housing” here in Reston. The children remain settled in their same schools despite the move into lower cost housing. During her first year the family’s rent was significantly higher than they could pay. During that year, UUCF and UUS paid rent in full until Marzia began work in March, 2017. After that she contributed but needed significant financial assistance.

Even with these important steps, Marzia still has a long road ahead to be self-sufficient and independent. For that reason, the Refugee Resettlement Project volunteers decided to continue providing support in the coming year. Financial support will come in the form of rental assistance. Although there are some remaining funds from the donations we received in September 2016, the project members are now asking for our congregants to once again help by contributing donations for the family. We will be raising funds during the month of February, with a goal of $5,000. This amount will allow us to support her with rental assistance through November 2018.

Contributions can be made at the Refugee Resettlement Project table in the commons every Sunday in February. Or, checks can be mailed to UUCF with “Refugee Project” in the notation line.

In addition to donations, we are also in need of volunteers. We will continue to work with Marzia in several areas - improving her English skills, gaining employment that is full-time, with higher pay and benefits; tutoring her son to improve his school performance; guiding Marzia in parental involvement with her children’s schools; helping her find and use food pantry resources; budgeting; and guiding her in managing benefits that she is eligible for. A possible goal in the coming year will be to obtain a driver’s license, and car. If you are considering donating a vehicle, please keep her in mind.

Beyond volunteering in the areas listed, we also want individuals to join us in generating new project ideas, including the possibility of sponsoring another family down the road, and helping this family develop self-sufficiency. We expect our efforts with the Popal family to subside after 2018.

The Refugee Resettlement Project needs new volunteers, so if this project interests you, please contact Ann King who coordinates the effort, following Rod Paolini’s leadership for the first 15 months.

This year we will be looking for balance in supporting Marzia but also fostering her independence. She is an amazing individual in her love of her children, willingness to work hard to build a new life in the U.S., her appreciation of volunteers who have helped her, and her warm, positive and contagious energy.

A Unitarian Universalist theme is “Answering the Call of Love.” I believe that our congregation does this as we contribute to this family’s well-being and a viable life here. We hope you will join us in continuing to support them in work that is significant and personal. We are keenly aware of shared humanity in this world and enormous need. Although at this time we are helping only one family, our work can have a ripple effect in growing a beloved community.

Thank you to our congregation for help to support our refugee family.

Ann King

January 2018