



Supporting AFGHAN Newcomers to Maryland



Halima Karzai, a lifelong resident of Montgomery County, has been at the forefront of helping newly resettled Afghan families in Maryland since their evacuation from Afghanistan in August 2021. She has been a liaison between resettlement agencies and their Afghan clients, assisted in obtaining basic family necessities, housing relocation, providing interpretation in Dari and Pashto (Afghanistan's national languages), volunteered with school enrollment process' of students temporarily housed in hotels awaiting permanent housing, is a student advocate for several families, including children with disabilities, and has established medical care for children and families.

Halima is part of the Core Support Group (CSG) on the Afghan Family Support Program (AFSP) with the Muslim Family Center in Howard County. The team is providing dedicated support to ten local families, liaising with resettlement agencies (IRC, ECDC, LSS), providing family, job placement, spiritual, health care and rehabilitation support based on individual family needs as well as providing ad hoc support to numerous other families still temporarily housed in area hotels.

Also, a member of Maryland – ARCC (Afghan Refugee Crisis Committee), Halima and her comrades work to provide education, family, health, job, legal, social integration, and housing support to families throughout the state.

Halima has also worked with the Afghan Allies Project through the Lutheran Social Services to locate housing for families requiring temporary /long term housing and provides ad hoc assistance to case managers with Afghan clients.

She is the former Director of Foreign Policy and International Women's Issues at a Washington, DC based think-tank.

Pathway from Afghanistan

- ▶ Beginning August 2021 - mass exodus of 85,000 Afghan refugees
- ▶ Resettled Afghans have come from 8 U.S. military bases around the country
- ▶ Traumatic plight to U.S.
- ▶ Shortage in housing (crisis in U.S.)
- ▶ Temporarily housed between 3-6+ months in hotels
- ▶ Children remained without access to school or any sort of education – major setback to youth
- ▶ Resettled Newcomers are Afghan Allies
- ▶ Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) or Humanitarian Parole
- ▶ Family separations

RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES



International Rescue Committee



Hebrew Immigration Aid Society

Role of Resettlement Agencies (RAs)

- ▶ Relocation from U.S. bases to permanent housing
- ▶ 3 months rent
- ▶ Enrolling in employment services
- ▶ Registering youth for school
- ▶ Applying for Social Security Cards, Medicaid
- ▶ Connecting clients with social or language services

Barriers & Challenges

- ▶ Many families have been left to fend for themselves, despite not having language or literacy skills
- ▶ Case manager support - resettlement agencies are over burdened in handling an influx of cases within a short time frame
- ▶ Children were not enrolled in schools during temporary housing at hotels where they lived anywhere from 1-6+ months
- ▶ Language – hinders chances of obtaining employment above minimum wage
- ▶ Financial strains
- ▶ Medical assistance – identifying doctors
- ▶ Families facing homelessness (reference WAPO article)
- ▶ Mental Health – impacted by all of the above

MENTAL HEALTH

UNDERSTANDING REFUGEE CHILDREN & FAMILIES

- ▶ Migrants leave their countries of origin for traumatic reasons - involves long and hazardous journeys
- ▶ Together with process of resettlement in a new society and culture, there is a higher chance in increasing mental health struggles
- ▶ Cultural Bereavement
- ▶ Advocate for culturally-sensitive therapy

The more common mental health diagnoses associated with refugee populations include:

- » post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- » major depression
- » generalized anxiety
- » panic attacks
- » adjustment disorder
- » somatization (a chronic feeling that one has a physical ailment)

Children and adolescents often have higher levels of diagnoses, with various studies revealing rates of PTSD from 50 to 90 percent and major depression from 6 to 40 percent.

STAGES OF GRIEF FOR MIGRANTS

FIGURE 3A

THE TRIPLE-TRAUMA PARADIGM		
PRE-FLIGHT 	FLIGHT 	POST-FLIGHT 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Harassment/intimidation/threats ■ Fear of unexpected arrest ■ Loss of job/livelihood ■ Loss of home and possessions ■ Disruption of studies, life dreams ■ Repeated relocation ■ Living in hiding/underground ■ Societal chaos/breakdown ■ Prohibition of traditional practices ■ Lack of medical care ■ Separation, isolation of family ■ Malnutrition ■ Need for secrecy, silence, distrust ■ Brief arrests ■ Being followed or monitored ■ Imprisonment ■ Torture ■ Other forms of violence ■ Witnessing violence ■ Disappearances/deaths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fear of being caught or returned ■ Living in hiding/underground ■ Detention at checkpoints, borders ■ Loss of home, possessions ■ Loss of job/schooling ■ Illness ■ Robbery ■ Exploitation: bribes, falsification ■ Physical assault, rape, or injury ■ Witnessing violence ■ Lack of medical care ■ Separation, isolation of family ■ Malnutrition ■ Crowded, unsanitary conditions ■ Long waits in refugee camps ■ Great uncertainty about future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Low social and economic status ■ Lack of legal status ■ Language barriers ■ Transportation, service barriers ■ Loss of identity, roles ■ Bad news from home ■ Unmet expectations ■ Unemployment/underemployment ■ Racial/ethnic discrimination ■ Inadequate, dangerous housing ■ Repeated relocation/migration ■ Social and cultural isolation ■ Family separation/reunification ■ Unresolved losses/disappearances ■ Conflict: internal, marital, generational, community ■ Unrealistic expectations from home ■ Shock of new climate, geography ■ Symptoms often worsen

Source: Center for Victims of Torture. Working with torture survivor: core competencies (www.cvt.org/sites/default/files/u11/Healing_the_Hurt_Ch3.pdf)

Cultural and Religious Sensitivity

- Family Life and Human Sexuality Permission Forms
- Children not eating lunch at school because no one is there to explain safe list/ lunch menu / or provide translated lunch menu. What items are non-pork (Halal/Kosher)?
- Having a designated space available at school for children who need to pray
- Culture shock – children in Afghanistan were not in co-ed classes

Prince George's County Public Schools
Family Life and Human Sexuality
~~Seventh~~ Grade Permission Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child is enrolled in the required Health Education course for ~~seventh~~ ^{8th} grade students. This course is taught by Ms. George.

One aspect of this course will be a unit of study in family life and human sexuality which will include information on maturation, anatomy and physiology of the reproductive system, puberty, the reproductive process, the value of abstinence, the problems of premarital intercourse and teenage pregnancy, and marriage and family responsibilities.

In accordance with the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 13A.04.18), your child's enrollment in this unit depends on your permission.

Please indicate your response on the attached form and return it to this school prior to 1/24/22.
Materials to be used will be available for your review in room # 94m on .

Name of Student _____

(Please initial your choice and sign at the bottom.)

I give permission for my son/daughter to be enrolled in the Family Life and Human Sexuality unit.

I do not give permission for my son/daughter to be enrolled in the Family Life and Human Sexuality unit.

I want to discuss this with you. I can be reached at _____
(phone number)

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Ways to Support Afghan Newcomers

In-School Supports:

- Assist with IEPs, ESOL, High school credits
- Student Service Learning hours
- Connecting students and families with other Afghan students and families
- Online system assistance for checking grades
- Who they can use in the school as a point of contact
- English classes for parents
- Enrollment support – completing paperwork, forms, etc. May not qualify for homeless status in hotels
- Pairing children with classmates who speak same language or have a buddy system for newcomer student to shadow
- Forms translated in to Pashto/Dari

Outside Resources

- Linking families to local mosques who help with mental health
- Housing – linking to HOC
- Food – halal locations
- Clothing – uniform and traditional clothing help/find
- Internet
- Other assistance programs

Understanding

- Families have limited to no grasp of English language. Communication can and will get lost in interpretation.
- Cultural understanding, building culturally responsive relationships

Additional Resources

Our New Afghan Neighbors: The Challenges and Opportunities of Afghan Resettlement to Houston

<https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/efaa1bb6/bi-brief-042522-cme-afghans-houston.pdf>

Washington Post

Afghan evacuees in DMV struggle with Rent After running out of aid
(4/24/22)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/04/25/afghan-evacuees-rent-evictions/>

Social Justice Brief National Association of Social Workers: Challenges of Refugee Resettlement Policy and Psychosocial Factors

https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=X2QaNfEuJ_Uk%3D&portalid=0

Maryland – Afghan Refugee Crisis Committee (MD – ARCC)
Halima.Karzai@gmail.com