

# ATLANTA HIGHLIGHTS

November 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> 2023

With the help of 38 service providers, our team provided much-needed support to 748 Afghans in Atlanta – 44 percent of the local, newly arriving population. While we cannot share every amazing story from our work, we can shine the spotlight on a handful of compassionate professionals who made a significant difference for so many families. We look forward to continuing our work in Chicago from December 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center. For more information, please visit [Centers for Afghan Support](#).

Harris and his wife and children arrived in Georgia in 2017. While in Afghanistan, he worked for a U.S.-based company focused on supplying power to Army bases and focused on infrastructure projects such as building schools, roads, hydroelectric dams and health clinics as part of USAID. Soon after settling in Atlanta, he started as a shipping and receiving manager for a lighting company. After two years, he found an opportunity in logistics with a pharmaceutical company. Today, he works for **Accenture** as supply chain leader.

Harris came to the Support Center as a volunteer, giving rides to Afghan families to the event. While he was there, he decided to ask about the status of his naturalization case. After meeting with **USCIS** staff, they gave him the good news – he has everything he needs to become a U.S. citizen.

On Friday afternoon, November 17<sup>th</sup>, **USCIS** Supervisory Immigration Services Officer **Denise Yearby** administered the oath of allegiance as his family, friends and supporters looked on. Following the oath, **USCIS** External Affairs Senior Advisor **Ademide Adedokun** encouraged Harris to continue making a difference by volunteering in his community, staying involved in the education of his children and advocating for the advancement of his fellow Afghans. She also reminded him to register to vote so he could take part in shaping our democracy.

Harris' wife, Shaista, works as a program director at the **Afghan American Alliance of Georgia**. She and her team were recently awarded a grant focused on empowering Afghan women through ESL instruction with childcare, driving and sewing classes. During the Support Center event, she worked tirelessly to encourage attendance and assist with our transportation efforts so Afghans who needed a ride could meet with providers and get the help they needed.

After the naturalization ceremony, Harris expressed his gratitude for all that made this day possible. He believes in the power of helping others and credited his attitude of doing good for those around him, knowing positive things would come back to him. He remarked "I've never even received a traffic ticket during my time in America. We've all worked so hard and sacrificed so much. I wanted nothing to stand in the way of making this day possible – and I'm so thankful for everyone who'd helped me."



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[Accenture](#) has hired more than 50 Afghans across the country in positions including human resources, finance, customer service and project management. The organization was one of the first to join [Welcome.US](#), a national initiative to support refugees and immigrants as they work to establish new lives in our country. Soon after, Accenture CEO Julie Sweet and Google CEO Sundar Pichai co-founded the Welcome.US CEO Council, a network of CEOs who have generated millions of dollars in pro-bono, in-kind and financial support.

**Moeen Amini** came to the U.S. in late 2021 with his wife and two young children. When he first arrived, it was very difficult to find opportunities matching his background in HR and administration. As a result, he started with a



construction company as a general laborer to support his family. Within several months, he was connected to **Accenture** and was hired in May 2022 as a recruiting specialist. He's now part of a nationwide team focused on employing immigrants and refugees, using his skills and experience in human resources to help his community.

Moeen often goes beyond his job to help Afghans and other immigrants with food stamp applications, writing resumes, work authorization questions and connecting them to community partners. He discussed how much progress has been made in the past two years. Many barriers and obstacles have been removed and the network of support in Atlanta is strong, with visible and clear pathways for refugees and immigrants to receive help. The main message he shares with employers is to “please give these newcomers a chance. They are very skilled and have a strong work ethic. Give them an opportunity to prove themselves and you won't be disappointed.”

When asked about his journey and his hopes for the future, Moeen said, “I still have so many brothers, sisters and family members stranded in Afghanistan. I miss them so much. It is such a beautiful country with nice people. I want it to return to being a prosperous and happy country, where women have rights and we can live our lives in peace.”

Programming and Service Coordinator **Teresa Totten**, and Library Branch Supervisor **Myguail Chappel** attended the Support Center representing the [DeKalb County Public Library](#). The library partners with service providers across the county to support their outreach missions. This may include meeting space to share information, targeted programming and promoting upcoming activities.

The library offers an array of resources and support to newcomers. Free ESL classes are available at many locations with virtual classes offered as well. Print, audiovisual materials and meeting space for tutoring or classes are accessible. Many immigrants need help learning basic computer skills, from learning how to turn on a computer, keyboard functions and setting up email addresses. Applying for a library card allows residents to continue gaining skills as they can check out a Chromebook to take home. The library also provides drop in availability to troubleshoot technical issues, much like a help desk.

Teresa and Myguail talked about the joy in serving one of the most diverse communities in America. “When providing information that can change lives, you see the looks in their faces and their eyes light up. It's so heartwarming and incredibly rewarding to be part of helping better someone's life. As you know, librarians were the original search engines!”



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The [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) and the [Office of Refugee Resettlement](#) held a listening session with housing providers in the Atlanta area. **Yvette McDonald** led a group discussion about challenges and potential solutions for Afghans. One of the major issues discussed was the need to find temporary and affordable housing for new arrivals. Housing agencies provide tax credits in each state, but barriers exist for immigrant populations who seek options in Low-Income Housing Tax Credit properties.

Clients are often told they are not eligible upon arrival as their Social Security numbers are pending. In addition, a lack of credit and rental history further dissuades property managers from leasing to new arrivals. So, housing agencies work diligently to bridge this gap by validating their client's identities and status.

**Emily Walters Laney** of the [Welcome Co-Op](#) talked about their innovative partnership with **Catholic Charities of Atlanta**, **International Rescue Committee** and **New American Pathways** allowing them to combine resources to secure housing, collect household items and furniture. Providers share staff, client databases and better understand how services across the spectrum are being delivered. Clothing, furniture and household supplies are held in a centralized location, helping make distribution and allocation more efficient.

When Afghans arrive in the Atlanta area, many focus on Clarkston where their colleagues have resettled. There are halal markets, a nearby mosque and a welcoming community. But in some cases, housing and apartment units may not be properly maintained. Sadly, some new arrival renters can be taken advantage of given language barriers and making difficult to advocate for themselves. Providers work with property owners to ensure they take upkeep seriously and work to hold those accountable who don't.

At the conclusion of the listening session, participants agreed to continue the conversation around immigrant housing and look for ways to ensure safe, healthy housing options are available to new arrivals.

