

BUFFALO HIGHLIGHTS

March 27 – March 30, 2024

With the help of 69 service providers, our team arranged much-needed support for 1178 guests – including 88 percent of the newly arrived Afghan population in the Buffalo area. 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 participating. We look forward to continuing our work April 16 - 20 the Anaheim Marriott hotel. For more information, please visit CentersforAfghanSupport.org

Immigration Legal Services for Afghan Arrivals (ILSAA) provides eligible Afghans free legal services as they navigate the U.S. immigration system.

This includes support for pathways to permanent residency, such as obtaining asylum or a Special Immigrant Visa, and family reunification. Services are available in all languages spoken in Afghanistan, including Dari and Pashto.



Community Engagement Specialist Razia Hussaini joined ILSAA in December 2023 and has attended three Support Centers. She talked about how inspiring it is to hear and see so many people who came to this country with nothing, now growing successful businesses, giving back to their communities and achieving the American dream. “I have been able to connect with so many Afghans,” she said. “These events are so helpful because a lot of recently arriving Afghans do not know where to go, and caseworkers can be really overwhelmed. These events are a one-stop-shop for whatever they need, whether that is medical, education, employment, legal services, or access to anything else.”

Razia shared a story about how the Afghan community in Buffalo has stepped up to help one another: She recently spoke with an immigrant who came to the U.S. two decades ago when he was 10 years old. When Afghans began arriving in Western New York in 2021, he was motivated to give back and opened a food pantry offering Afghan cuisine. Even after 20 years in America, he cares so much for those coming here to start a new life.

For 60 years, **Mental Health Advocates** (MHA) has been committed to providing essential non-clinical services addressing the needs of individuals and communities living with mental illness. Through awareness, education, prevention, early intervention programs, and supportive services, their team advocates for the mental health and wellness of adults and children across Western New York.

The bulk of their work focuses on family support groups, offering help to families with children who have mental health diagnoses. “We offer nonclinical support to help people more holistically,” said **Law Clerk Brandon Small**. “Taking a human approach to ask people what they need or what is happening in their lives and then working from there to support them.”

Additionally, MHA offers free legal services for anyone with a mental health diagnosis, including services related to family court, housing court, divorce, and social security/disability. They are also affiliated with the CASA program (Court Appointed Special Advocates), working with children going through custody hearings or other family court issues.

“Resource education and awareness is really important for our clients,” said Brandon. “Many people do not really know if you have a mental illness. With our help, you can access free legal support. Attending the Support Center is a great opportunity for our organization.”



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[The International Institute of Buffalo](#) strives to make Western New York a better place for immigrants and refugees by providing a variety of essential services related to case management, employment, legal needs, healthcare, and education, particularly in the initial 90 days of resettlement.

With the help of their team, refugees can better navigate job searches and join a job club workshop to inform them how to apply, interview and work through new employee processes. The Institute is the only resettlement team in New York partnering with the Office of Refugee Resettlement to offer a professional pathways program. This program helps foreign-born clients with previous certifications and accreditations become recertified, enroll in school or secure fulfilling jobs.

The Institute offers robust translation services – a division that has grown substantially in the last three years. “We have been able to work through the employment program to translate clients’ transcripts, resumes and cover letters at no cost,” said **Translation Assistant Mairead Farinacci**. “These can be expensive services to pay for on their own, so it is a huge benefit our organization offers.”

Afghans can also open bank accounts, travel to grocery stores, find primary care doctors and access public benefits enrollment and other eligible social services with the help of the Institute.

Intern and Volunteer Coordinator Steve Bosco was grateful for the opportunity to bring the community together. “There is a need for events like these to happen because we have had so many asylees arrive in Buffalo over the past few years,” he said. “Connecting them to community resources is great.”



[Ladies of Charity Buffalo](#) is a volunteer organization of Catholic Charities of Buffalo where 400 members give their time and talents to serve the less fortunate of Western New York. Members embrace the ideas of Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac to help people experiencing poverty, striving to break the cycle by advocating for social change.

The Fresh Start program helps new arrivals and people emerging from crisis with access to few resources by offering clothing or household goods, including bed pillows, sheets, towels, pots and pans, dishes, silverware, curtains, small appliances and cleaning products.

“We helped so many asylum seekers this year,” said **President Kathleen Roseti**. “They would walk miles and miles to get access to our services. It blew me away how far away they would come from to receive our help.”

Ladies of Charity also operates a program to assist those who are homebound, donates backpacks filled with supplies for those in school, and brings toys to children during the holidays.



“It is wonderful that these events have been able to provide people with resources to help them in their new lives,” said Kathleen. “Get them started, educate their kids, and ensure they are healthy. We are happy to have the chance to participate here.”