

NORTHERN VIRGINIA HIGHLIGHTS

January 31 – February 3, 2024

With the help of 83 service providers, our team arranged much-needed support for 4,545 Afghans – 57 percent of the newly arrived population in the Northern Virginia region. 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. We look forward to continuing our work from February 14 to February 17 in Detroit at the Marriott Renaissance Center. For more information, please visit [CentersforAfghanSupport](https://CentersforAfghanSupport.org).

During the four-day event in Falls Church, [USCIS](#) staff from the Arlington Asylum Office granted asylum to dozens of Afghans and staff from the Washington and Baltimore Field Offices approved 18 green cards. Many guests who came to the event seeking an update on their status were thrilled to hear about the progress on their resettlement efforts. In due time, these men and women will be able to apply for U.S. citizenship.

Supervisory Asylum Officer Iberkis Faltas was part of the dedicated team of USCIS case officers working long hours each day to help thousands of attendees continue moving toward establishing permanence in our country. She and her colleagues would excitedly applaud each approved case, bringing smiles and tears of joy to everyone involved. “Many of the people we helped were shaking and crying because they were so happy,” Iberkis said. “When I can help – even a single person – I think about all the generations that will come after and be part of our country. They are also focused on bringing family members to the United States. As an immigrant, I know how important it is to have your family here with you. If I can help with that, I can sleep well at night knowing I helped change lives. I am so proud to be here and be able to make a difference.”

Shabir Kabiri was one of the guests who received a significant update on the progress of his asylum case. A 2016 graduate from West Point, he returned to his home country to work in telecommunications. Shabir later earned a graduate degree from Oklahoma State University and traveled back to Afghanistan and began working for the World Bank. With the help of friends and colleagues from West Point, he was able to rush to the airport with his loved ones and board one of the last flights to the U.S. Shabir and his parents and siblings were resettled in Maryland, where he has been anxiously waiting to hear about his application. When Shabir visited the USCIS team, they reviewed his asylum application and he learned it was approved. Today, Shabir works for a manufacturing firm and consults part-time for the World Bank. “My future has been uncertain the last couple of years, sort of in limbo. Without being granted asylum, I have not been able to apply for the jobs I wanted. I’m now able to plan for my future and map out my life. This allows me to pursue a career in the defense industry and follow my dreams.”



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[Capital Area Food Bank](#) provides people struggling with hunger and food insecurity equitable access to food. Working with more than 400 local partners, they source and distribute food for more than 50 million meals each year and work to establish permanent pathways out of hunger.

Food insecurity remains high in the region. Approximately one-third of residents in Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., do not have enough to eat and do not know where their next meal will come from. The organization's [2023 Hunger Report](#) found that "by and large, the trends remain consistent: food insecurity disproportionately impacts people of color, households with children, and those with lower educational attainment and incomes."

After sourcing food from distributors, retailers, restaurants, farms and individuals, the Capital Area Food Bank team works with large nonprofit food assistance partners, including Martha's Table, Bread for the City, Manna, Food for Others and smaller soup kitchens and pantries. They also distribute directly into communities through after-school meals for kids, free produce markets and emergency food distributions.

Virginia Partnership Coordinator Alanna King staffed the Falls Church event. She and her colleagues distributed hundreds of pounds of fresh food, including carrots, potatoes, cabbage, apples and onions. Alanna spoke about the universal importance of her work, saying, "Everyone needs to eat. This is an issue that can and should bring everyone together, pointing communities toward the same goal of getting people the food they need."



[Kitchen of Purpose](#) is focused on creating opportunities for social and economic change through education, food and inspiration. Their chefs, social workers, nutritionists, doctors and business experts help underemployed and unemployed minorities obtain jobs capable of providing a sustainable source of income for themselves and their families.



Their eight-week training program provides all the basic culinary skills and techniques to secure employment in the industry. Courses are based on meeting food service industry requirements, equipping employees with comprehensive knowledge, industry certifications and life skills. Students are given job placement assistance in the food industry when they complete the program.

With the support of more than 40 food and hospitality industry employers in the area, students can apply for job shadowing and internships, assist with chef demonstrations and workshops and find employment upon graduation. Staff follow graduates for two years, offering encouragement and resources all along the way.

Recruitment Coordinator Cinta Garcia talked with many Afghan guests who were interested in the program. She spoke at length about the many success stories she's witnessed – from men and women getting their first jobs and establishing independence to opening their own businesses. She is confident attendees will research what Kitchen of Purpose can offer and apply for a spot in an upcoming class.

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[Liberty's Promise](#) works with immigrant students in high school, removing barriers and opening new pathways through civic engagement, community involvement and college access. They work to give all students the guidance and support needed to pursue their American dreams, which can continue to sustain and inspire others for generations to come. Too often, newcomers to our country do not know the full range of options available to them. For newly arriving Afghans, navigating America can be both exciting and daunting. There are so many choices, options and avenues many did not have access to in their home country. Afghan students want to feel at home in America – especially young girls who have not known this level of freedom.

Director Melissa Gelinas said, “Working with these students is the best because they are so amazing and have shown such incredible resilience. It is exciting to see what they do when they have the right support. They are so smart and able to come up with many good ideas. They also worry about family and friends still in Afghanistan and are constantly discussing what they can do to help.” Their program has fluent Dari and Pashto speakers, alleviating the stress of understanding English and helping with knowledge retention. During lunch periods or after school, the organization brings in a range of speakers who talk about their careers and answer questions about their work, reinforcing how entry-level jobs can eventually lead to promising careers.

Community Engagement Associate Rabia Sabri with [Church World Services](#) shared a story about helping a family in need and the power of community collaboration. She met a young Afghan family struggling to adapt to their new lives in the U.S. They were desperate to find more affordable housing, better-paying jobs and be able to afford food and medication. Their English skills were limited and she sensed they were very stressed. Rabia noticed how few landlords or leasing agencies were aware of the financial situations most newly arriving Afghans find themselves in. They do not have tens of thousands of dollars in savings and cannot afford \$2,500 or \$3,000 for an apartment. After introducing them to a housing provider and hearing their needs, the family was able to find a two-bedroom apartment in Alexandria for \$800 with no down payment or security deposit. The young man was also offered a job with the housing provider, increasing his pay and improving his ability to provide for his loved ones. His sisters, ages 18 and 20, were connected to English language instructors and introduced to providers who offered job training and career counseling.

At the end of a long day, Rabia saw a family of six who entered the Support Center, appearing uncertain and apprehensive, transition into being more hopeful about their future. She said “the Support Center helped me connect to so many people and organizations and learn about what they do. I have never known about [ILSAA](#) and their capabilities. After talking with them, I cannot imagine I would think about anyone else to provide legal services. It would be such a benefit to have these more often so we can reach even more people who are in need.”

Fostering economic independence and self-sufficiency for Afghans remains a top priority. Afghans – like all refugees – come to our country with valuable skills but haven't yet established the networks and connections in the job market. To help bridge this gap, we partnered with [Virginia Career Works Northern Region](#) to recruit 21 employers including Highgate Hotels, Vulcan Materials, Loudoun County Public Schools, American Pool and many others. More than 350 Afghans attended the four-hour event, sharing their talents and aspirations, dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions about their capabilities. Dozens of Afghans were hired on the spot or were able to schedule follow-up interviews to learn more about job opportunities in the region.

