

SYRACUSE HIGHLIGHTS

March 21 – March 23, 2024

With the help of 52 service providers, our team arranged much-needed support for 597 guests – including 63 percent of the newly arrived Afghan population in the Syracuse 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 March 27 – 30 at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo Hotel And Conference Center. For more information, please visit CentersforAfghanSupport.org

[The New York State Office for New Americans](#) provides culturally-informed wraparound services to its clients and fosters community partnerships to expand the depth and breadth of its programming. Its success has driven an influx of secondary resettlement in Syracuse among Afghan families after they learned there is a vibrant community and culturally specific resources available. **Immigrant Community Liaison Jason Stowell** described their mission: “We began creating immigrant community liaison positions to make inroads and connections with groups working with refugees and new Americans in the region due to proximity from the border. The number of people coming over the northern border on foot has skyrocketed in the last year.”

Their office has been working to connect food pantries in the area and swap food items based on the needs of the communities they serve, ensuring that culturally appropriate food is available for clients. Food is often the last thing resettled families assimilate to, and it is vital that the resources made available to them align with their needs.



Immigrant Community Liaison Liz Hradil was thankful for the collaborative spirit she saw at the Support Center. “There was a family working with one of our legal teams who had a 3- and 4-year-old, and they missed a biometrics appointment and were unable to reschedule it,” said Liz. “They were denied rescheduling several times and were on the phone for long periods of time trying to get their situation sorted out. At the Support Center, they walked in, and within five minutes, they were able to get their biometrics taken care of, and their resettlement process could continue. Every provider we have spoken with would like this to be an annual event, especially with how much growth we anticipate in this community in the next year.”

[CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity \(CEO\)](#)

helps people find careers in advanced manufacturing, software engineering and IT with the goal of making Syracuse a smart city. CenterState CEO offers professional development opportunities, resume building, and interview preparation and helps build professional networking skills. The team provides training through the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services and Onondaga Community College, helping graduates earn certificates or an associate degree. As high-tech companies like Micron have started investing and creating jobs in Syracuse, the team is building the workforce to fill those future jobs now.

CenterState CEO works with Afghan job seekers at all skill levels, from those starting their careers to professionals with master’s degrees. A recent client their team worked with was a civil engineer in Afghanistan. When arriving in the United States, he had an innovative idea for a construction company but did not have the connections to get started. Through CenterState CEO, he was introduced to the business development program to find funding, locations, paperwork and jump-start the planning to get his business off the ground.

“It is amazing to be a catalyst, or a small part in some cases, in the process of generating generational wealth and helping that mindset change,” said **Surge Career Navigator Cainaan S. Webb**. “I love how the Support Center has brought awareness



to service providers that this population is here to capitalize on their abilities and skillsets while connecting them with opportunities that help.

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United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

(USCRI) has had a regular presence at Support Centers across the country. At each location, they have provided a four-part behavioral mental health program, including education on a national helpline, telehealth services, community teams and crisis response teams. Their approach is rooted in empowerment and advocacy for their clients, teaching them how to be self-sufficient and manage their families in a healthy way after the trauma and stress of their journeys to the United States.

USCRI strives to destigmatize mental health and bring awareness to the need in both the Afghan community and among local service providers. They understand the importance of having refugees serve refugees as they more uniquely understand the history, challenges and needs. The organization's motto is to "meet the client where they are at," both physically and mentally. That means visiting clients in their homes, learning about their lives and getting to know each client's situation.

Program Officer Sultana Rahim-Barakzoy said, "We want to present mental health as a universal part of health and wellness that every human being needs care and attention for. Knowledge is more valuable than any other resource not only because it uplifts clients, but it also helps them build stronger families." **Behavioral Health Program Manager Rayhanna Rahim, Ph.D.**, discussed her passion for sharing experiences and connecting clients to other services using our cultural expertise so we can achieve that on a national level.

Sultana described the Support Centers as "a great opportunity for federal, state, and local organizations to come together in the same space to help clients, deliver services, and identify gaps while solving problems in real-time. They create a sense of unity in an otherwise chaotic experience."



Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) began as a small grassroots operation with a couple of attorneys who were passionate about addressing immigrants' legal issues. Today, they have grown into a small army of pro bono lawyers working to meet the complex legal needs of the Afghan community in the Syracuse region.

When Afghan families began arriving in the region in late 2021, **Immigration Program Assistant Laura Cardoso** realized that "we all need to come together and make this happen." The team understood the value of collaboration, quickly moving to create a master list identifying which organizations in the community are providing services and which Afghans were added to waiting lists for those organizations.

The organization conducts legal clinics based on the needs of the community, focused on issues like re-parole, asylum and work authorizations. One of its primary goals is fostering education and training for other types of attorneys in immigration law, given the profound need for more immigration lawyers. At the Support Center, VLP assisted participants in getting their green cards on-the-spot and expediting their Employment Authorization Documents to allow them to resume working.

When asked why he's passionate about his work, **Immigration Attorney Adam Martin** said, "It is not right to have people who want to come to the country and work, especially the Afghan community who has worked closely with the Western forces for 20 years, and not offer them a place to come and be safe in the United States. We all come from roots somewhere else, so doing this work is just continuing the work of what America is all about."