

## **The Welcome Team at St Paul's: Refugee Resettlement Update**

Our church community has been so generous with their time and money, and we have learned so much about the hospitality of Central PA, we thought it was time to share an update about the family from Guatemala.

A family of 7 arrived on May 24<sup>th</sup> at the Harrisburg International Airport where they were met by members of our Welcome Team. It was late at night, and they were tired, and hungry, but once they got to their temporary home, they were met with food from a local restaurant that specializes in food from Guatemala. And they were hungry. There were lots of smiles and a lot of using Google Translate as we said our hellos and provided well wishes, but we could not help but notice that they arrived with little more than their carry-on baggage.

Within two weeks, we were able to obtain permanent housing in uptown Harrisburg and moved them into a 3-story house within walking distance of multiple grocery stores and other local resources. Two of the adults began employment at an eatery that turned out not to be the best choice due to the lack of efficient public transportation.

The four children (ages 14, 13 & 7 - the 14-year-olds are twins!) are quickly adapting to their new home and have been enrolled or have already participated in local soccer camps. They are in the process of getting ready to start school in the fall and we are completing all the paperwork and medical appointment requirements.

We celebrated a 21<sup>st</sup> birthday with one of the young women. She was overjoyed at the celebration that we held at our church pavilion.

These past few weeks, the Welcome Team has been walking alongside the family as they apply and use government benefits for accessing food and other necessities, find employment, and get any medical needs identified and addressed. This last has been a very concerning issue as they have been put on wait lists for needed medical care.

During these past few weeks, the family and the Welcome Team have experienced the overwhelming generosity of Central PA. Here are just a few examples:

- St. Paul's donated \$3,365 and we were able to purchase air conditioning units, a laptop, groceries, a U-Haul rental, gas for the U-Haul, and other assorted household items for their new home.
- Along with St. Paul's members donating furniture and other needed items, a local family donated contents of a house for basic furniture needs
- Each family member received a brand-new mattress from another organization
- Recycle Bicycle donated 7 fully equipped bicycles
- CSE (Center for Sustainability Education) at Dickinson College donated brand-new helmets and bicycle locks for each member of the family

- Dick's Sporting Goods donated full soccer gear to the twins, including soccer cleats, shin guards, shorts, shirts, balls, and goalie gloves
- Messiah College donated free and/or reduced soccer camp registration to all four children
- The Uptown Community provided potential employment ideas and local connections
- One local dentist provided initial dental care and x-rays, and another performed emergency dental surgery on one of the adults – all at no cost!
- COUNTLESS HOURS were donated by the Welcome Team to pick up and deliver furniture, help organize and set up the new house, install air conditioners and other needed house repairs, drive and attend needed medical appointments, drive children to soccer camp, join with family to just have some fun, drive to first jobs in the US,
- Church World Service helped them locate both temporary and permanent housing and in addition, provided the funds for their rental costs for the first couple of months until they get settled and employed, as well as some other needs.

**What's next:** The Welcome Team is now focused on connecting the adults to accessible employment, connecting with local health care professionals, learning English, and starting school. All this will help the family be self-sufficient!

**What could we use some help on:** Ideas for free dental care for the adult women, employers who are hiring non-English speakers, continued donations for bus passes, personal care products such as “period” needs which are not covered by SNAP, help with tutoring (don't need to know Spanish) and attending FUN events with the family so they learn what life is like in the United States and Central PA.

Questions or ideas: Contact Kathy Williams at [kjlwms@gmail.com](mailto:kjlwms@gmail.com) or Shirley Keith Knox at [skeithknox@comcast.net](mailto:skeithknox@comcast.net).

**While this has been a lot of work, the Welcome Team is overwhelmed by the generosity of St. Paul's and many others in our community. At the same time, we are learning first-hand about the many struggles that families with limited resources have in our area and sometimes – the lack of respect that people unfortunately experience. We stand alongside - I guess this is what walking your faith looks like!**

**THANK YOU ST. PAUL's FOR YOUR OVERWHELMING GENEROSITY and SUPPORT!**