

**Welcoming Migrants &
Refugees since 1975**



Credit: Migrant and Refugees Section/Vatican

St. James Cathedral IMMIGRANT ASSISTANCE

Annual Report
July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

Major accomplishments from the past year

- ♦ **Sponsored two Afghan refugee families, and waiting for a third family, from Ukraine, to arrive**
- ♦ **23 new citizens**
- ♦ **Afghanistan: Then and Now event**
- ♦ **Helped 176 immigrants apply for their first Covid Relief Funds**
- ♦ **English and Citizenship Tutoring restored to pre-pandemic levels**
- ♦ **Walking with Holy Families march to Seattle Federal Building**

We advance justice for immigrants through education, advocacy, accompaniment, and by helping immigrants and refugees to learn English, become citizens, and connect to community resources.

Refugee Welcome and Inclusion

Volunteers walked alongside two Afghan families helping them to navigate new systems, enroll in benefits and insurance, find and furnish apartments, get to know the neighborhood, find jobs, and connect to community resources.

Deep connections were forged between the volunteers and the families they accompanied. Team members have been embraced with trust and deep hospitality, even being referred to as “my family” by their Afghan friends. More than one volunteer reported sharing a new sense of connection when going to mass and seeing the other volunteers from the Refugee Welcome Team.

One of the Afghan women arrived in Seattle in the last trimester of her pregnancy. Members of the team were extensively involved in connecting her to the providers she needed, scheduling appointments, providing transportation to appointments, procuring baby supplies, navigating a new healthcare system, caring for her toddler during appointments, and even finding a Pashto-speaking doula to be present for the birth.

Within six months, the families have become more independent and need less support from the full volunteer team.

Through a referral from a community member, we connected with the co-founders of Back of House Concepts, a local company seeking to hire immigrants and refugees. Within a week, four Afghan men began work at a downtown hotel. Back of House Concepts has hired over sixty Afghans, working in three different locations, and the number continues to grow each week.

It has been a blessing to witness the generosity, commitment, and abundance shared by our volunteers, donors, community members, and Back of House Concepts.

Within six months, the families have become more independent, and need less support from the full volunteer team. Each family now has two liaison volunteers who keep in touch, help them with things as they come up, and alert the rest of the team when needed. We are looking forward to journeying with them as they create new lives and more fully participate in the life of the community.

We are now getting ready to welcome a family of six from Ukraine. As of this writing, we are waiting on one final document from the family before we submit the sponsor application. As you might imagine, gathering all the necessary documentation is not easy while fleeing war. In the meantime, we are getting their apartment ready through generous donations of furniture, household items, and time. We are so very grateful for the donation of an apartment for a full year!

WE WELCOME OUR AFGHAN NEIGHBORS



Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP via Getty Images

ESL Tutoring

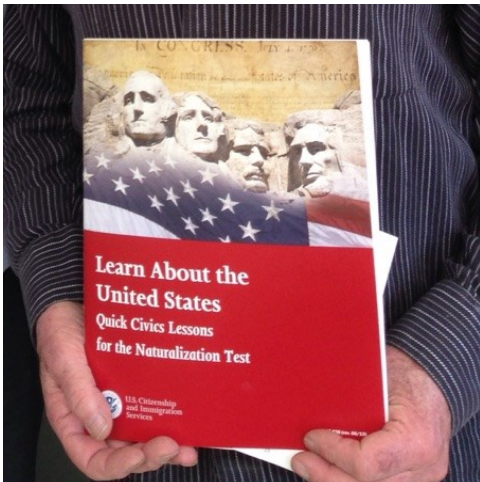
Sheila has been tutoring Ann since March 2021. Ann did not receive any formal education in her home country and could not read or write in any language. She has been in the United States for 20 years, but has relied on her children, dictation software, and other coping mechanisms for her lack of literacy skills. They started with the alphabet, phonemes of each letter, and then moved onto sight words and longer words. Recently Ann said, "Before, I had to wait for my kids to come home [to help me], but now I can do everything by myself. I can read the signs when driving, I can read and write. It is my prayer that anybody who needs help like me will get it at St. James. I thank God for putting me on the right track. Sheila is a wonderful teacher, and a wonderful person. That's why I tell her everything about my life."



A tutor and her student hard at work in our tutoring room.
Many pairs continue to meet online.

Ann is just one example of the many stories and experiences we encounter everyday. Tutors help not just with learning the language, but learning about life in the U.S. The immigrants we meet are driven to learn the language, become self-sufficient, and not have to rely so much on others. Their goals are as varied as you could imagine and include things such as learning to read, write, and speak more professionally to get a job in their profession from back home; being able to give a deposition in a civil trial after being defrauded; providing personal information at medical appointments; preparing for a Certified Nursing Assistance test; and talking to their kids teachers.

Citizenship preparation



Gabriela had submitted her citizenship application with the help of another agency, but she needed help preparing for her interview with immigration, especially with the writing portion. Jerry was able to jump right in and provide two to three lessons weekly since we had only three weeks until her interview. He worked with her on writing, civics, and application questions and she successfully passed her interview in June!

Jerry also helped Marta to pass her citizenship test in April. He said "For over a year, via Zoom, I had the pleasure of being an citizenship tutor for Marta. Marta and I worked in learning the correct answers to the 100 civics questions as well as practicing how to appropriately respond to [the application] questions. Marta came to this task with a limited educational background as well as limited English, but an almost unlim-

ited desire and commitment to learn the required material. With the help of her grandsons, she learned to use Zoom and was always on-time and ready to learn. She would study on her own between sessions. Marta was nervous and we also worked on ways to stay calm and ask for questions to be repeated. I was so pleased that she was successful and impressed by all her hard work and dedication."

Carlos and Maria started in-person tutoring in April 2019. When the pandemic hit, they took a hiatus expecting it would only be for a short period of time. After an almost two year break, Carlos had his interview date and asked to start tutoring again. Maria began tutoring Carlos online, and after a month of review and final preparation, Carlos passed his citizenship test.

Names have been changed to protect client and volunteer privacy.

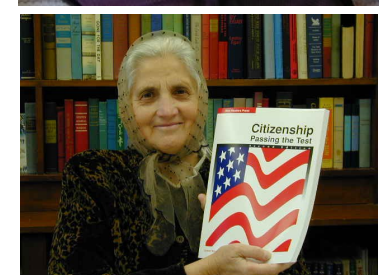
Immigration Legal Services

Our legal services focus primarily on helping people apply for U.S citizenship. We are recognized as providing exceptional quality, while being committed to help people with every step on their path to naturalize. Here are a few of their stories.

Before coming to us, a refugee had filed several unsuccessful applications before she was approved for lawful permanent resident status. She was referred to us by a legal services provider who did not have the resources to assist her with a potentially complex and time-consuming application for naturalization. Our staff reviewed her long immigration history, identifying and correcting some inconsistencies that resulted from the multiple applications that were submitted for her lawful permanent residence. We helped her resolve several court issues, obtaining a wide range of court records needed to clarify her eligibility to become a citizen, and provided Immigration with clear and accurate information regarding those court cases. She obtained her U.S. citizenship on her first attempt, allowing her to fully return her energy and focus to her children and her educational goals.

Another client, a lawful permanent resident, filed an application to become a U.S. citizen with the assistance of a family member, not knowing that her illness qualified her for a medical waiver that would exempt her from having to take the English language and civics tests. Our staff successfully helped her amend errors and inconsistencies on her original application and also worked with her doctor to submit the necessary medical waiver form, without which she would have been unable to obtain citizenship. While waiting to be scheduled for her interview, she developed further complications from her illnesses that required surgery. The surgery posed serious risks. Our staff requested and obtained approval for an expedited interview with Immigration so that the surgery would not be delayed. Our client was approved for citizenship and she received the medical care she needed. Achieving her dream to become a citizen has given her comfort and relief knowing she has the right to remain in the U.S. with her family.

In cases where clients have experienced domestic violence, the abuser often continues the abuse through the Immigration process. Abusers have been known to submit inaccurate applications for their ex-spouses, creating risks as our clients move forward with applications. One client was confronted by this during her naturalization interview when the Immigration officer presented her with documents that had been falsified by her ex-spouse. Due to our extensive review of her immigration file and working closely with her divorce attorney, we were ready for this. With the police and court records related to our client's divorce in hand, we were able to overcome Immigration's suspicions. Our client was able to naturalize and was freed from any further attempt of her ex-spouse to affect her ability to safely remain in the U.S. and continue to raise her children here.





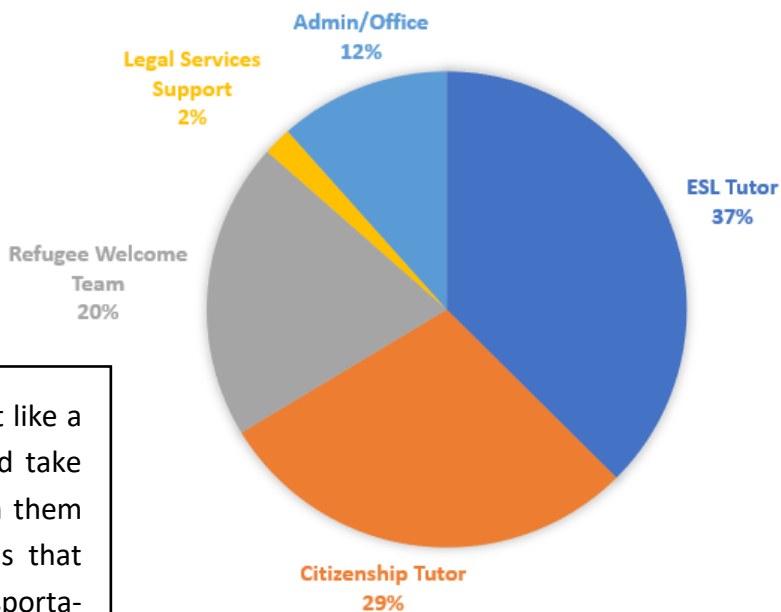
Thank You, Volunteers!

We couldn't accomplish everything we do without our volunteers. You make this world a better place through your hard work and commitment. You freely give your time, talent and treasure. You are a blessing and we value you more deeply than words can express. This coming year will be full of challenges as well as joys, and we look forward to sharing it with you!

"Being useful to migrants is one of my chief passions, so I volunteered to help SJIA in whatever way might be needed. ESL hadn't crossed my mind. But as it turns out, I love it! I love the cultural exchange!" - Max

Volunteers by Primary Role

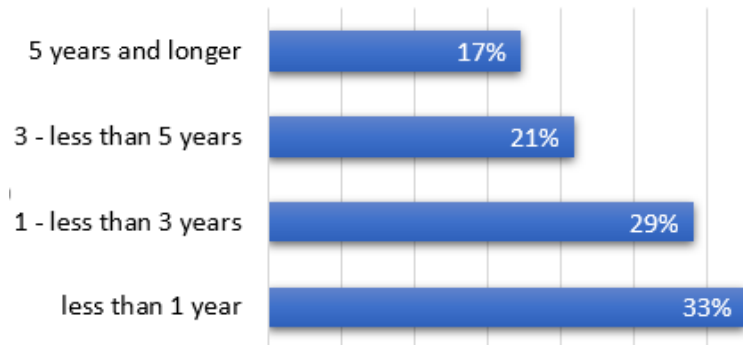
(some volunteer in more than one capacity)



"Helping the family was such a privilege. I felt like a superhero when I could solve a problem and take some stress out of their lives. Working with them put into perspective the constant challenges that refugees face. Battling basic barriers like transportation access and language on a daily basis is frightening and exhausting. I admire our new neighbors for their courage. It's good to have volunteers who can carry that load every now and then." - Kathy

"Working with immigrants and refugees who want to become American citizens is one of the richest experiences I have ever had. Through the years, I tutored people from all parts of the globe, some of whom never even learned to read or write in their native language. Their courage, dedication, determination, and most of all, their compelling life stories have been both inspirational and educational to me, and I feel deeply privileged to have been able to meet and work with them on their journey toward citizenship." - Joyce

How Long Have Volunteers Been With Us?



Seattle Relief Fund 2021

The Seattle Relief Fund provided one-time grants of \$1,000 - \$3000 per family to residents of Seattle who met certain criteria. It was designed to help people who had not been able to access other relief during the pandemic. This short-term project was funded by the City of Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. Over the course of three months, staff and volunteers put in more than 300 hours helping 176 immigrants learn about and apply for this cash assistance. Through the work of more than a dozen agencies, The City of Seattle disbursed at total \$16 million to low-income Seattle households who were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Most had lost jobs, experienced unstable housing, and had no health insurance. One third had a disability, 40% were single parents, and 44% had contracted Covid. The assistance they received was a desperately needed lifeline.

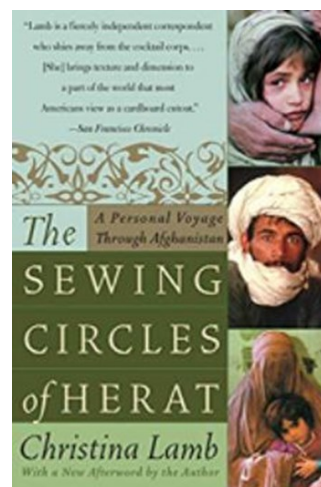
Advocacy and Awareness Raising

Afghanistan: Then and Now

On April 27th, our advisory board members presented an informational evening entitled “Afghanistan: Then and Now”. A panel of four people discussed various aspects of Afghan life, resettlement issues, and general information regarding Afghan culture. The panel included Dr Farid Saydee, a professor at Kean University in New Jersey; Edris Karimi, a refugee; as well as Brian Beattie, an attorney and Sarah Riggio who are both parishioners of St James and members of our volunteer refugee welcome team. The program was presented via Zoom and had attendees from as far away as Pakistan. We received very positive feedback and requests for more programs similar to this one.

Book Club

As part of our year-long focus on Afghanistan, two advisory board members planned and facilitated a book club on *The Sewing Circles of Herat*. This was so successful the group decided to initiate a parish-wide book club focused on Catholic Social Teaching for the coming year.



Walking with Holy Families

In honor and celebration of International Migrants Day we gathered in solidarity with families seeking asylum. We prayed, heard stories, and called for an end Title 42. Gathering at the steps of St. James Cathedral we then processed to the Federal Plaza in downtown Seattle to hold vigil at the federal government’s doorstep, urging them to restore access to asylum.



Thank You to All of Our Donors!

This past year, you responded to the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees with astounding generosity!

with special gratitude to the following foundations

TEW Foundation in support of legal services

Sisters of Providence in support of our sponsorship of two Afghan refugee families

The Whitaker Foundation

Join the Refugee Welcome Team!

Support a newly arrived refugee family by helping out with household supplies, stocking the pantry, clothing, helping the family learn about their new community, assisting with transportation, tutoring English, and more; but most of all, building a lasting circle of friendship. Email Erica de Klerk at edeklerk@stjames-cathedral.org

Be an English Tutor or a Citizenship Tutor!

Help an immigrant learn English or prepare for their citizenship interview. Email Sayuko Setvik at ssetvik@stjames-cathedral.org

Advocate for Justice!

Stay up to date by signing up to receive our Immigration Updates. Go to www.stjames-cathedral.org/immigrant and scroll to the bottom of the page to click on the “mailing list” button.



Advisory Board

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