

How Your Generosity Has Helped an Afghan Family

Written by Jeff Meade

The Muslim holy month of Ramadan ended on March 19. During Ramadan, the Afghan family of seven supported by our committee observed iftar, the evening meal used to break the daily fast.

My wife Diane and I were fortunate enough to have been invited to take part in this sunset repast – a new and fascinating experience for both of us, although I have shared many meals with them.

The family – I'll call them the Akhtars to preserve their privacy – laid out a huge feast. Lovingly prepared by the mother, an outstanding cook, it included buttery basmati rice, spicy tandoori chicken legs, tender meatballs called korma köfta, a vegetable soup spiced with cumin – *lots* of cumin – coriander and turmeric, and a delicate flatbread called bulani. All followed by a sweet traditional Afghan custard topped with chopped pistachios, called firni, washed down with what seemed like gallons of green tea.

The Akhtars long ago ceased to be “the family we're working with.” They have become our friends and neighbors. Their kindness and generosity never cease to amaze and humble me and the very dedicated and diligent members of our team.

I thought you would want to know how their lives are going, since it is largely because of you that they are here, living in a cozy house in the far Northeast, surrounded by helpful relatives, and gradually making their way toward supporting themselves.

Our formal financial commitment to the family ends on June 30, just a little over a year since we first came to know them. Between now and then, our committee – which includes a representative from St. Paul's – pays their rent, utilities and grocery expenses. After that, they will have to earn enough money to make their own way in the world.

To be frank, it will be a close-run thing. The father, whose resume is impressive – he speaks four languages – is still learning English and working at a Dunkin' shop. His ESL class begins in May at the Community College of Philadelphia's Northeast campus. Not a moment too soon. The oldest son is running errands for Walmart in a used car that they bought on an installment plan, but in time he hopes to become a truck driver. The next youngest serves chicken at Popeye's. His plan is to continue to work at Popeye's in the morning and begin classes toward a degree as a medical assistant, eventually with a goal of becoming a nurse.

All of these jobs are part time. Soon, we hope the mother will begin a part-time job cooking in a kitchen that provides food to low-income schoolchildren in North Philadelphia.

All of these are minimum wage jobs.

There is one more adult son who is wrapping up senior year at a local high school. It's expected that he will go to work after graduation but also attend Community College of Philadelphia during the day.

A daughter is finishing eighth grade at a nearby elementary school and was recently admitted to Swenson Arts and Technology High School, where she will focus on culinary arts.

Finally, the family's youngest son will move into sixth grade in the fall.

Of all the family members, his English is the best. He's a real character. He loves soccer and Spiderman. He's been known to break out into a crazy spontaneous dance in the living room to music he finds on YouTube. He loves his English class. He does not like math. (He and I have commiserated over that.) For reasons that are unclear to us, he does not like music and art. We will have to have words about that one. He calls one member of our team "uncle." He calls me "bro."

Perhaps not surprisingly, all the family members are catching up on long-delayed medical and dental needs. (No more candy for that little boy or his sister.)

Little by little, we and they make progress.

All of this progress, of course, takes us back to your generosity back in the late spring and early summer of last year. We could not have gotten to this point without you. Please keep them – and us – in your prayers.

– Jeff Meade