

The Afghan Task Force is still active, just quite a bit differently than we thought it would be when we began this effort nearly a year ago. Earlier this year the Cabrini Center operated by Catholic Charities ended the services it had been providing for the Afghan refugees who had come to Ft. Wayne to make a new life for themselves. When we had asked for volunteers to help in specific ways our query assumed that the Cabrini Center would be used to house refugee families for significant periods of time. When the center closed its doors that model of volunteer participation disappeared. The Task Force eventually decided to divide into two teams to mentor two families. There will be an article in the next edition of The BELL that describes this transition in more detail.

The role of being a mentor for one family requires a commitment greater than the commitment we had made to support the Cabrini Center. Currently, each of these families has 4-6 people entering their homes most every week to offer services in learning English, obtaining decent housing, getting driver's licenses, getting visas, receiving financial system education (debt & credit, bank accounts, debit and credit cards, buying cars via financing, filing income tax returns, and budgeting), getting children in school, getting family members to medical appointments and sometimes advocating for them in those appointments, taking them to activities such as going to the Zoo, and working on cultural change issues.

As we did the work outlined above, we realized there is no overall organization in existence that can provide adequate programs and assistance to the refugees we have brought to our community. Consequently, some of the task force members are now working on creating a community wide organization that could create and manage all the programming necessary to help refugees from countries like Afghanistan get settled and become active members of the Ft. Wayne community. Summer travel plans and activities have severely compromised this effort; consequently, establishing this organization will not be addressed until October.

We are providing this update because we had received interest from many Plymouth members who were willing to provide help to this overall effort, but we have not stayed in touch with you the past 4-6 months because the work we do changed so dramatically when the Cabrini Center closed. Considering the Resource Fair being conducted at Plymouth on September 11, we wanted members to know we will still want many volunteers to be involved with helping refugee families who are settling in Ft. Wayne. However, we are not prepared from an organizational perspective to accept the time and effort you may be willing to give.

When we are successful in creating a community wide organization, we believe that organization will require a broad and deep base of volunteers to operate appropriately and efficiently. We plan that these volunteers will come from Catholic Charities, The International House, Amani Services, Bridge of Grace Ministry, the City of Ft. Wayne, Plymouth Church and other churches in the community, the many philanthropic foundations that support the Fort Wayne Community, and organizations not yet identified. For those of you who want to help provide services to our refugee community in the future, we anticipate there will be plenty of opportunity for you to do so as this organization begins to take shape.

That said, if you have an interest and or experience in organizational development and would like to help with that type of work that will begin in October, please contact Steve Hollingsworth at [stevbeck67@gmail.com](mailto:stevbeck67@gmail.com) or 260-433-6503. Steve will be in town through September 20 but then will be out of the country until October 7.

If you have general questions, please feel free to contact Terry Dougherty, Becky Hollingsworth, Lucy Hess, Doug or Abby Powers, Scott Avery, Alan Chambers, and Linda Kerr as well. These are the individuals who are presently providing mentoring services to the two Afghan families we are supporting.

Thank you for your patience and we hope to be hard at work with you in the future to serve what appears to be an ever-growing refugee population in our midst.

On behalf of the Afghan Task Force-- Steve Hollingsworth