

Refugee Advisory Board Meeting
Refugee Education & Training Center

January 6th, 2022

Board Member Attendees – Brett Peterson, Steve Pluim, Joseph Genda, Shu Cheng, Rick Foster, Jim McConkie, Tyler Kotter, Rick Bouillon, Aden Batar, Natalie El-Deiry, Rachel Ashby (substitute for Hayder Allkhenfr), Kelli Meranda, Tino Nyawelo, Nate McDonald

Members Excused –Joshua Bell, Fatima Dirie, Janice Kimball, Pamela Atkinson

Welcome and Introduction – Nate McDonald

- Introducing new board member Brett Peterson, and new RSO Assistant Director Loggins Merrill

Update on Afghan Arrivals

- **Refugee Services Office**- Asha Parekh
 - Totals of Afghan parolees that have arrived thus far- 685 persons, 193 cases.
 - AAU has picked up support for walk-ins. 48 individuals have walked in.
 - CCS- 221 arrived, 214 are in permanent housing
 - IRC- 434 arrived, 253 in permanent housing
 - CRIC has been approved to support 20 new arrivals in Logan
- **International Rescue Committee** – Natalie El-Deiry
 - A high number of pregnant mothers or mothers with newborns are arriving
 - 258 health screenings so far
 - Offering vaccine assistance
 - Providing digital devices
 - 60% of arrivals are in permanent housing (on average people are spending 6-8 weeks in temporary housing)
 - Lifting Hands International has been an important partner to get apartments set up
 - Still welcoming other refugee arrivals (68 individuals have arrived this fiscal year)
- **Catholic Community Services** – Aden Batar
 - From October to January CCS has had 297 arrivals (this includes Afghans and regular refugee arrivals)
 - Housing is an issue, especially for big families. Only those who have arrived in January have not been placed in permanent housing.
 - Have seen a lot of families that need help with prenatal care.
 - Behind in health screenings and school enrollment.
 - Not everyone got all of their COVID vaccines on the military bases, so CCS is helping individuals to finish their series. No one is refusing to get shots.
 - Immigrations staff have been meeting with Afghans to help them get asylum status. Interviews with USCIS are being scheduled within 45 days.
 - During the holidays CCS received a lot of donations
 - Military bases will be closed by the end of February / beginning of March
- **Questions**
 - Steve Pluim- where are Afghans with getting work authorizations?

- Batar- all Afghans get work permits and Social Security cards as part of their parole status. There is a 30-60 day processing time to get cards. Social Security cards have had lag time.
- Steve Plum- What percentage of the group has good English?
 - Natalie- 15-20% of the arrivals have at least one person in the household who is proficient in English.
 - Batar- the parolees were not the interpreters, so fewer of them have good English than was originally expected.
- Steve Plum- is there anything that can be done to support employment for Afghans?
 - Natalie- DWS is helping. This is the next phase of concern after housing has been arranged.
 - Batar- a lot of employers are reaching out. Entry level positions are needed.
- Shu Cheng- Do Afghan parolee cases receive priority in terms of asylee cases?
 - Batar-Yes, that is why the Afghan parolees are getting interviews within 45 days. Will receive asylum status shortly after. Unless case is denied, then they go to court and it takes years. Family is processed together as one case. Adult children are processed separately.
- Tino Nyawelo- What language do Afghans speak?
 - Natalie- Dari / Farsi / Pashto

Workgroup 1 Report: Housing Needs – Nate McDonald

- Housing is one of the greatest challenges
- Worked with UT apartment association to look for new landlords. They've been good to work with. Got 80 landlords who would be willing to work with Afghans. Resettlement agencies have gotten referrals.
- Reached out to developers to get new resources.
- COVID relief program for rental assistance. Trying to use it to help new arrivals after first month.
- Thought would have a longer period of time to coordinate housing. State Department did not spread out new arrivals as they said they would.
- Introduce Heba Geiang- Housing Coordinator at the state level. Worked previously in Attorney General's office. New working with resettlement agencies to bring in new housing opportunities. Could then direct back to resettlement agencies. Email at refugeehousing@utah.gov
- Shu Cheng- how is housing tied to employment?
 - Nate- there is not a direct connection yet.
 - Natalie- looking at access to public transportation is important when placing refugees in housing.
 - Batar- as long as public transportation nearby is available, will put refugees in that housing

Workgroup 2 Report: Basic Needs- Asha Parekh

- Community Fund- Scott Anderson / Naja Lockwood are co-chairs
- Very close to \$1M goal (Asha reviewed donors)
- Have disbursed money to IRC, CCS, and UMCL for emergency needs (phones, computers, etc.)

Workgroup 3 Report: Community Support- Luna Banuri

- UMCL has been toggling between meeting the needs of new arrivals and meeting the needs of the existing Afghan community
- Have been holding free legal clinics in which existing community is applying for Humanitarian Parole for people left behind in Afghanistan
 - 200 lawyers, 56 sponsors, 20 translators have all been involved in over 500 applications for parole that have been filed
- Created youth group
- Doing needs assessments
- Provided new shoes for new arrivals
- Making sure mosques are welcoming
- Providing emergency assistance for rent/food
- Provided volunteers to CCS to help with housing applications
- Introducing Abdul Baryalai who joined RSO in mid-November

RSO Update – Kiley Foster and Michael Pekarske

- **Refugee Center Update-** Michael Pekarske
 - Went over Q4 report that was sent previously to board members
 - Warehousing training had 100% graduation rate, and 100% job placement rate
 - 14 participants are on track to graduate from IT training. Average starting wage after graduating from this training is \$53,000.
 - Finished leadership classes.
- **Refugee Services Office Update-** Kiley Foster
 - Went over Q3 report that was sent previously to board members.
 - 99 customers found jobs- \$15.08 hourly wage on average
 - Lots of employer outreach
 - 8 trainings offered. Those graduating from the trainings had an average \$16.15 hourly wage.
- **VOXY ESL online platform-** Dan Helms / Tadd Wamester
 - Presentation of the software from Tadd Wamester of Engen.

Refugee Services Fund – Joe Edman

- Joe Edman walked through the financial income statement for the fourth quarter of State Fiscal Year 2021.
 - Since the beginning of fiscal year 2021, received \$1560 donations. Spent \$2000 for funerals mostly.

Annual Report to Governor- Becky Wickstrom

- This report is interesting because it reflects an entire year of COVID.
- Report sent to board in early December and again in the email preparing for this board meeting. Please reach out if there are any questions.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn: Nate McDonald requested the motion to adjourn.

- Aden Batar made the motion to adjourn.

Next Meeting: March 24th, 2022