

Refugee Advisory Board Meeting
Refugee Education & Training Center

March 24, 2022

Board Member Attendees – Hayder Allkhenfr, Natalie El-Deiry, Asha Parekh, Casey Cameron, Aden Batar, Steve Pluim, Fatima Dirie, Joseph Genda, Joshua Bell, Tyler Kotter, Janice Kimball, Brett Peterson, Shu Cheng, Pamela Atkinson

Members Excused –Rick Bouillon, Richard Foster, James McConkie, Kelli Meranda

Welcome and Introduction – Casey Cameron

- **Approval of Minutes-**

- Motion to Approve: Casey Cameron requested the motion to approve minutes from the June 2021, September 2021, and January 2022 Advisory Board Meetings.

- Brett Peterson made the motion to approve the minutes with no corrections.
- Hayder Allkhenfr seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Overview on Afghan Arrivals in Utah – Asha Parekh

- 917 Afghans have arrived in Utah to date.
 - IRC has resettled 612
 - CCS has resettled 282
 - AAU has resettled 20 “walk-in” customers, which means that they independently left the military base they had initially been brought to and came to Utah on their own.
 - CRIC has resettled 19 Afghans in Logan
 - Circles Sponsorship has settled 4 Afghans in Lehi
- There were already 300-500 Afghans previously living in Utah from 3 different communities
- The influx of new Afghan arrivals has brought the Afghans in Utah together
- Abdul Baryalai from the Refugee Services Office is providing support to the communities
- Halima Hussein from the Refugee Services Office has been meeting with Afghan women and working to organize the community more
 - The community has identified that they would like better support for ESL, child care, self-employment, and transportation
- **Catholic Community Services-** Aden Batar
 - URM Program
 - Only 4 Afghan Unaccompanied Refugee Minors have come to Utah. There are a total of 63 children in CCS’s URM program currently. Will be preparing to receiving Ukrainian children.
 - Immigration
 - Almost all Afghans that came to Utah came as humanitarian parolees. All parolees will need to be screened and apply for immigration status. CCS has dedicated a senior attorney on their staff to helping with this. Already some cases have been approved for asylum status.
- **International Rescue Committee** – Natalie El-Deiry

- Besides the 612 Afghan refugees that IRC has resettled this fiscal year, there has been an additional 152 refugee arrivals.
- All families are housed, with the exception of 6 large families
- All families have been screened for immigration status and IRC is helping with SIV cases.
- Anticipating that we will continue to see Afghans coming through the regular pipeline as SIV's
- **Asian Association of Utah** – Peter Frost
 - As of today Asian Association has handled 21 cases, 31 total individuals from Afghanistan.
 - 80% of the cases that AAU is handling are in permanent housing. The remaining clients have very particular housing requests which have been hard to meet.
 - Those cases who apply for Emergency Rental Assistance or other assistance programs have applied.
 - All eligible cases have been matched with a DWS employment counselor.
- **Cache Refugee And Immigrant Connection (CRIC)**- Danny Beus
 - This is the first time that CRIC has resettled refugees in Cache Valley. CRIC has received 18 refugees, all have permanent housing and permanent employment.
 - Have 2 asylum cases that CCS is helping with
 - This week have received 5 secondary migrants and have secured permanent housing for 2 of those families.

Board Discussion on Employment, Housing – Loggins Merrill

- Tried to get a sense of education, needs, employment experience, etc.
- Initially thought that we'd get more SIVs, but we ended up getting more parolees.
- A high percentage of Afghans that have resettled in Utah have a very low level of English
- Afghan arrivals have come from a variety of employment backgrounds
- Went over short term trainings that we currently offer and that are in the works from the sheet provided to the board.
 - For the engineering training RSO is working to identify what steps are needed to get people recertified in this country to practice engineering.
 - Many trainings build upon one another. For instance, someone may start in phlebotomy, but will then built to pharmacy tech or medical assisting.
 - For tech trainings RSO is involving industry leaders in development.
- **Employment Efforts**
 - **Catholic Community Services** – Aden Batar
 - Match Grant is a federally funded employment program that only resettlement agencies can enroll individuals in. Those individuals who are employable immediately are eligible for the program. They must be willing to work.
 - Usually within 3-4 months people get jobs (mostly entry level). The jobs people have been getting have been at an average of \$16 / hr.
 - Will not need to apply for financial assistance through the state.
 - **International Rescue Committee** – Natalie El-Deiry
 - Those enrolled in Match Grant are also required to take ESL and do trainings. 45% of Afghan arrivals have been enrolled in Match Grant.
 - Brett Peterson asked if there are set industries that the clients are getting jobs in. Natalie responded that the clients need to take the first jobs that are available to them.

- Brett asked if there are barriers to people getting employment. Natalie responded that English has been a barrier and then when the clients do get a job, English classes take a back burner. It has been helpful for the clients to do Upward Mobility assessments with Jon Simmons from RSO. Peter Frost from AAU added that there have been some cultural barriers. Employment is going really well for those who want to work.
- **CRIC** – Danny Beus
 - Most refugees are lower skilled, even illiterate in their own languages. All the clients that CRIC is handling have been employed full time in production jobs. The average wage is \$21 / hr.
- **Refugee Services Office** – Loggins Merrill / Asha Parekh / Noelle Bradford
 - We have seen that Match Grant gets capped out, then clients flow our way for help getting jobs, and then Match Grant opens again.
 - In February 44 new people were enrolled in job development and 18 people were employed that month.
 - RSO currently has a caseload of 120 people in job development, 50% from Afghanistan.
 - The average wage we have been finding refugees jobs at is \$17.80/hr.
 - English is so critical as we develop pathways. A lot of our work over the past 5 years was to build a way for refugees to access trainings.
 - We are providing support to SLCC and other partners to help them infuse ESL into trainings.
 - Tyson Foods is trying to hire 500 people. They are offering \$1500 for a down payment on a car, \$4000 signing basis, \$19/hr minimum wage, will pay this month and last months rent to help people move closer, and they do onsite ESL and workers are paid for that time.
- **Questions**
 - Steve Plum asked if it is a challenge to find cohorts for the trainings.
 - Asha responded that we not offered framing training in a long time because it has been hard to find an instructor. We need to find 8-10 people at a time who are willing to take the class during a specific timeframe.
 - Steve asked if out placement has been difficult.
 - Asha responded that this has not been a problem recently and added that employers have even been hiring people before the training is over.
 - Steve said that he is seeing a lot more willingness from employers to adopt interesting things, like down payments on cars, to attract talent. Might be able to create other programs with employers including ESL onsite perhaps.
 - Casey asked IRC what are their prospects of finding the 6 large units for the remaining large families.
 - Asha replied that 3 more units have been secured today after checking with the landlord association. Natalie says she is confident that all of the families will be housed. Janice Kimball said that units with 4 rooms and above are hard to find, and Natalie mentioned that this should be an ongoing conversation because there are more refugees in the pipeline. Natalie suggested keeping the Housing Committee open to help with future refugee arrivals.

- Brett asked if we have been working for other technical schools besides SLCC to develop trainings.
- Loggins responded that we have mostly been working with SLCC due to that being the area of highest concentration of refugee resettlement.

Utah Community Fund Update – Derek Nunner

- The Community Fund was started in October 2021 as a public/private partnership.
- The fund has raised \$1.2 million
- Over 300 individuals donated to the fund
- There is a committee to help with the disbursement of the fund.
- Have already disbursed \$500,000

Refugee Services Office Updates

- **Refugee Services Fund** – Joe Edman
 - At the beginning of the fiscal year there was \$208,000 in the fund.
 - There has been a net gain of \$10,000 since the beginning of the fiscal year
 - Have contributed to the funerals of 2 refugees this year
 - The portion of the fund reserved for World Refugee Day is just under \$4,000. Over the next few weeks a budget will be put together for World Refugee Day.
 - Pamela Atkinson asked where the money in the fund comes from and Joe replied that it is from donors.
 - Pamela asked if the donations to the fund are still tax deductible and Joe replied that they are.
- **World Refugee Day** – Loggins Merrill
 - June 17th & 18th is an in-person live event this year at Big Cottonwood Regional Park
 - Events on Friday will be in the evening and on Saturday will run from 10:30 AM – 5 PM
 - There are planning meetings being held every month. Reach out to Loggins if you would like to be part of the planning.
 - Brett Peterson says he would like to help with planning and asks if youth can help as well. Loggins says there are opportunities for youth to help.
 - Casey suggested sending a Save-The-Date appointment to the Advisory Board.
 - Casey also said that an email vote would be sent to the Board to move funds into the WRD portion of the RSO fund once the budget is known in the next few weeks.
- **Ukraine Update** – Asha Parekh / Derek Nunner
 - The U.S. intends to bring in 100,000 Ukrainian refugees through “other” resettlement options, as well as through normal channels.
 - Temporary Protective Status (TPS) was announced early in March for those who were already in the United States when the crisis started. TPS is good for 18 months and allows Ukrainians to stay here and work.
 - The Community Foundation launched the Utah for Ukraine Fund. \$2.5M was raised in 2 weeks. Donations were received from 2500 people. The fund is still open to receiving monetary donations. The money is being used to support refugees who are fleeing Ukraine and is being brought to neighboring countries that are accepting the refugees.
 - Pamela commented that she has heard rumblings in the refugee community that Afghans and Ukrainians are being given special treatment.

- Natalie responded that IRC is making sure that all refugee arrivals have access to housing help, but for refugees that have been here longer than 2 years IRC can't provide additional resources and maybe this is where concerns are coming from.
- Asha suggested perhaps we could keep the community fund going to help all refugees.
- Peter commented that he is finding it hard to explain why some refugees are getting differential treatment, especially to incoming Venezuelan parolees.
- Casey suggested we tackle this more in depth at the next Advisory Board meeting.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn: Casey Cameron requested the motion to adjourn.

- Joseph Genda made the motion to adjourn.
- Natalie El-Deiry seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Next Meeting: June 23rd, 2022