
GLENVIEW ANNOUNCEMENTS

Suburban nonprofit working to reunite area families with relatives still in Afghanistan: 'They are in harm's way'

By DANIEL I. DORFMAN
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As the searing images of people clamoring to board planes and leave Afghanistan continue to resonate around the world, a local nonprofit organization is assisting two area families.

The families both left their native Afghanistan and hope to now aid other family members who are seeking to leave as they face a dire future.

Representatives of the Glenview-based Building Peaceful Bridges are currently working with a seven-member Skokie family who came to the United States through a Special Immigrant Visa last November. The organization now wants to bring over an additional 25 members of that family who are living in Parwan Province, roughly 40 miles north of Kabul.

The organization believes the individuals remaining in Afghanistan are in danger because they have relatives in the United States who worked with the American military.

With the Taliban gaining control of the country, that could be a very perilous situation.



U.S. soldiers board a U.S. Air Force aircraft at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan on Aug. 30, 2021. Rockets were fired at Kabul's airport on Aug. 30, where U.S. troops were racing to complete their withdrawal from Afghanistan and evacuate allies under the threat of Islamic State group attacks. (AAMIR QURESHI/AFP / TNS)

“The end goal is to get them evacuated out of Afghanistan,” said Lori Lucchetti, the organization’s president and co-founder. “The objective is to get them out of there because they are in harm’s way.”

Lucchetti, of Glenview, said the portion of the family now living in Skokie has been able to maintain contact with their relatives.

“When you are on FaceTime with them, their communication is, ‘Can you get us out?’ That is the heartbreaking part,” Lucchetti said

In another case, Glencoe’s Kevin Harvey, director of communications for Building Peaceful Bridges, said the agency is working with a family located in Chicago that arrived late last month and are designated as refugees by the United Nations. That family has three relatives remaining in Afghanistan who are seeking to leave.

In the cases of the people still in Afghanistan, Building Peaceful Bridges wants to assist in the evacuation process by obtaining a designation of Humanitarian Parole.

“That is the most efficient to get them out of the country because of time, as speed is safety for these people. It will still take some time, but an (Special Immigrant Visa) could take years,” Lucchetti said.

She added the situation is very fluid because of the large influx of new immigrants and the resources needed to acclimate them to a new country.

“It is going to take a lot of help,” Lucchetti said. “Americans need to act like Americans.”

The nonprofit’s representatives said they are not certain how long the process will take and whether they will be ultimately successful. They added they are working with U.S. Rep. Brad Schneider’s office to assist with the process.

At an unrelated event on Sept. 1, Schneider declined to comment on the specifics of the cases, but did say he had been in a briefing earlier that day with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas.

We’ve been working with people throughout the district and actually across the country trying to help with people at risk,” Schneider said.

Once the refugees are in the country, the Glenview organization’s efforts continue. The group follows the initial work of other agencies such as Catholic Charities Refugee One or the ICNA Relief Chicago, which generally focus on refugees’ initial months in the United States.

Building Peaceful Bridges serves as a mentor or sometimes as a sponsor, providing financial assistance for rent, food and clothing.

“In general, we pick up where the resettlement agency work leaves off. We try to get them oriented after those first three months and bridge the gap to self-sufficiency,” explained Harvey, who spoke of the group’s representatives stopping by for weekly visits and providing counseling. “We follow them step-by-step and become a family to them.”

Assisting people from other part of the world is at the center of the Building Peaceful Bridges mission, following the organization’s launch in 2018.

“These are the new immigrants and somebody has to step up,” Lucchetti said. “They are in our neighborhood and we are supposed to be a welcoming community.”

Daniel I. Dorfman is a freelance reporter.