

GREENFIELD RECORDER

‘It’s the least we can do’: Ashfield resident, backed by church support, sponsoring Afghan refugee family



Jafar and Zeinab Ahmadi, who will be arriving in the United States this week under the sponsorship of Ashfield resident Carter J. Carter, pose for a photo with two of their three children. Contributed photo



The Ahmadi children, who will be arriving in the United States this week under the sponsorship of Ashfield resident Carter J. Carter, pose for a photo. Contributed photo

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ASHFIELD — Roughly \$12,000 has been raised by the community to help a family of Afghan refugees preparing to make their journey to the United States.

“We owe so much to the Afghan people, all of us,” said Carter J. Carter of Ashfield, who is sponsoring the Ahmadi family’s move to the U.S. “I think the kind of support the churches in our community are offering is extraordinary, and it’s the least we can do.”

After hearing about other colleagues sponsoring families after the fall of Kabul last year, Carter wanted to do the same. After all, as the grandson of an Afghan asylum seeker who received political asylum in American in 1978, he had a personal connection to the people there.

“In a way, this was about honoring him,” Carter said, referencing his grandfather.

He recalled connecting with Jafar Ahmadi through colleagues, at which point they started corresponding and became “pen pals.” Before Ahmadi was offered a job in New York at Bard College, the plan was for his family to move in with Carter.

“Early on, I approached the two Ashfield churches and asked if they would form a ‘Circle of Care’ to help me and the family,” Carter recalled.

Those churches — St. John’s Episcopal Church and First Congregational Church — are helping to financially support the family members in their resettlement, according to a joint press release from the churches. A goal of \$25,000 has been set, according to Annie Cheatham, a trustee of the First Congregational Church.

“We need more support,” Cheatham said.

The family of five is currently in Germany, with plans to travel to Red Hook, New York on Thursday. There, they will rent a house, according to Cheatham.

“We’ve raised enough money to ... pay their deposit, security and last,” she said. “Now we’re working on furnishing the place.”

Carter, who said the response he has received from the community has “bolstered his faith in humanity,” transported donations in a U-Haul over the weekend.

“I’m a social worker by profession, and mostly what I see in my work life is systems not working — people being failed, people being dropped, people not getting what they need — and to see this exception is a really wonderful thing to see,” he explained.

Carter said the journey “has been a long haul” for the Ahmadi family. He explained that in Kabul, Jafar and his wife, Zeinab, trained psychologists, many of whom were women or ethnic minorities.

“They’re really a pair,” he said.

After he arrives, Jafar Ahmadi will work at Bard College as a therapist, Carter explained, where he will support the population of Afghan students who are enrolled there.

As the family will not be eligible for any form of government aid, the churches are hoping to fundraise what is needed for rent and other family expenses they'll have once they arrive.

"We have come to love this family and that love has changed us," said the Rev. Vicki Ix, vicar of St. John's. "During this time when we see so much heartbreak and tragedy in Ukraine, in Afghanistan and in other places around the world, here are five individuals we can help. The immediate need is for financial support."

Checks can be sent to St. John's Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 253, Ashfield, MA 01330. In the memo line, write "For the Ahmadi family."

Members of the two congregations are also seeking the donation of a car. Anyone who might know one that could be available for the family is asked to call First Congregational (413-628-4470) or St. John's (413-628-4402) and leave a message.

"Our two congregations have engaged with Carter throughout the process of getting the family out of Afghanistan after the fall of Kabul, which was very difficult," said the Rev. David Jones, minister of the First Congregational Church. "And now we will have a chance to support them as they begin life in America."

Encouraged by the community's response, Carter noted that as Americans, "it's the least we can do."

"We demolished their country," he said. "American foreign policy made it possible for the Taliban to retake the entire society and persecute women, persecute minorities, threaten to murder the parents of young children. That was made possible by American voters, including myself."

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