

## Afghan refugees meet Ashfield supporters at community picnic

By BELLA LEVAVI

Staff Writer

Published: 7/22/2022 5:48:52 PM

ASHFIELD — The roughly 50 residents who gathered under a tent behind St. John’s Episcopal Church erupted in applause Thursday night upon the much-anticipated arrival of the Ahmadi family.

Members of St. John’s Episcopal Church and the First Congregational Church of Ashfield supported the Ahmadi family as they escaped Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and immigrated to America, after Ashfield resident Carter J. Carter approached the congregations seeking financial assistance for the family. As of July 1, Ashfield residents raised \$18,220 to support the family.

“A lot of communities profess values and don’t follow through,” Carter said. “It is striking how this community follows their values.”



Jafar Ahmadi and Amir Hosin Ahmadi, 5, enjoy ice cream at Thursday’s picnic behind St. John’s Episcopal Church in Ashfield. STAFF PHOTO/BELLA LEVAVI

The Ahmadi family endured a months-long migration through Germany, ultimately arriving to their new home in Red Hook, New York in May. Thursday marked the Ahmadi family's first visit to Ashfield, where they were greeted by a picnic organized by both churches.

Community members were invited to the picnic and asked to bring traditional Afghan food. A huge crowd showed up, excited to meet the family they have heard so much about.

"This is a culmination of many months of prayer," said the Rev. Vicki Ix, vicar of St. John's Episcopal Church.

The picnic began with speeches and blessings from Ix and the Rev. David Jones, minister of the First Congregational Church. Ix gave blessings thanking God for every piece of the journey the Ahmadi family underwent.

"We were excited to work with Dr. Carter to bring the Ahmadi family to the states," Jones said in an interview. "We couldn't do this without our lay leaders."



The Revs. Vicki Ix and David Jones of Ashfield accept gifts from the Ahmadi family. STAFF PHOTO/BELLA LEVAVI



Zeinab Ahmadi and Fatima Ahmadi, 2, enjoy ice cream at Thursday's picnic behind St. John's Episcopal Church. STAFF PHOTO/BELLA LEVAVI

Jafar Ahmadi, father of the family, gave a passionate speech to the group chronicling his family's journey. He concluded by saying, "We don't know how to compensate for Ashfield's affection and kindness. We can only say a blessing for you and ask God to give you peace and health."

The oldest son, Alireza Ahmadi, 13, talked about swimming in Ashfield Lake and picking up chickens on Carter's farm. The other siblings, Amir Hosin Ahmadi, 5, and Fatima Ahmadi, 2, happily ate ice cream as residents introduced themselves and gave them cards.

In addition to the \$18,220 raised toward the churches' \$25,000 goal, the community also found a car for the family and furnished their apartment through donations.



Roughly 50 Ashfield residents attended a picnic Thursday welcoming the Ahmadi family. STAFF PHOTO/BELLA LEVAVI



Roughly 50 Ashfield residents attended a picnic Thursday welcoming the Ahmadi family. STAFF PHOTO/BELLA LEVAVI

Jafar Ahmadi, the father, got a job at Bard College as a therapist working to support the population of Afghan students enrolled there.

“This is an amazing project of the two churches working together,” said Judy Haupt, a member of First Congregational Church.

Check donations to support the family can be sent to St. John’s Episcopal, P.O. Box 253, Ashfield, MA 01330-0253, with “For the Ahmadi Family” in the memo line.

*Bella Levavi can be reached at [blevavi@recorder.com](mailto:blevavi@recorder.com) or 413-930-4579.*