

AFGHANI REFUGEE FAMILY UPDATE OCTOBER, 2025

Graeme Donovan, Vision Team - Diversity Ministry

Around midnight on November 30, 2021, twelve St. Paul members and staff waited with two members from Kentucky Refugee Ministries (KRM) at the Louisville International Airport to welcome our newest refugee family. Mohammad Ali Khalili, his wife Fatima, and their nine children arrived in Louisville after an arduous and several month journey from Kabul, Afghanistan. After collecting an assortment of bags and luggage (their only possessions), we took them to their newly rented house in the church bus.

The Khalili Family

When they arrived, the nine children ranged from two to twenty-three years of age, seven girls and two boys. Mohammad Ali had been employed in Afghanistan as a warehouse worker for twenty years. Some of their children were in school or older ones had completed at least some secondary education. Their eldest daughter (Shakila) had attended some university classes. When the country was overrun once again, the family was forced to flee and be evacuated from Kabul.

Now, after four years, the family is doing well - assimilating, and happy. The St. Paul members who are visiting and working with them always receive a warm and friendly reception. The children are in school, the father is working, and the family has moved residences twice since their arrival; their current home is a nice upgrade to a very nice neighborhood. Shakila (the oldest child) has moved out, and has her own apartment, car, and stable employment.

Brad Matthews and Joanne Milo have been working with the next three oldest girls – Humaira (now 24), Najiba (22) and Shar Mina (19) - on improving English skills and working to pass the DMV driving exam. Brad is using the Practice Test for the driver's permit to teach English and assist with understanding the "rules of the road." Joanne is providing on-the-road experience, checking out signs and explaining decisions we all must make while driving and assisting them with online job applications. Humaira (oldest daughter at home) recently passed the driver's exam and now has her driver's permit. This is impressive as she aged out of high school at 20 when she arrived and has had limited access to English in her time at home. She has not yet had an opportunity to practice driving on the road and will need to move forward to get her license as she wants to go to school to get her GED. Although she finished high school before coming to the U.S., she was not able to receive a copy of her diploma because of the urgent need to leave Afghanistan. Earning a GED would help further her English skills and allow her to be able to go to college. Najiba (two years younger) did finish her high school education here in the U.S. and is now enrolled at JCTC. She also did three full days of orientation in the third week of August for her new job at Walmart where she works a regular shift from 3-11 PM. Some days her father can drop her off or pick her up. On other days, she has to walk the 2.5 miles between Walmart and their home. Najiba has passed her driver permit exam with help from Joanne and Brad. Shar Mina just graduated from high school and is enrolled at JCTC this Fall. The elder son, Ghulam Abbas (21), has been working at Jewish Hospital as a nurse's aide, attending JCTC, and has his own car. Dad works at Jewish Hospital as a housekeeper.

Team members have recently talked with Mohammad Ali and other family members about starting the process for becoming U.S. Citizens, since all the family members have Green Cards. Although they have been here for nearly four years, their Green Cards were not issued until January 2024, which means the five-year waiting period before applying for Citizenship makes our target date January 2029. We have provided two computers, school sized posters of both the Pledge of Allegiance and the three forms of

government along with other English assistance posters commonly used by students when learning English. We are also planning to contact Morgan McGarvey's office to get information about starting the citizenship process. Abbas (the eldest son) is the farthest along in terms of readiness. He speaks and reads fluent English, has a driver's license, and works. Najiba would be the next most able family member. All the younger children who are currently in Jefferson County Public Schools are becoming very fluent in English in reading and writing. Dad understands and can speak English but is not able to read or write in it. That may require separate tutoring with him.

In a recent St. Paul newsletter, we identified an emerging issue concerning transportation for the family. The father, Mohamad Ali, and Abbas (21), are working. Both have cars. The three oldest adult girls are past high school and are now going to work at Walmart and/or attending school at JCTC. They ride the bus when they can and, when not driven by their father, they walk 2.5 miles to or from Walmart. There is a need for the family to have another car as more members are able to drive and need to go their various ways to work and study. Our team has discussed this and identified two possibilities: 1) someone in the church might have a car they would be willing to donate to the church for a tax write-off (if that is possible). The church could then gift the car to the family; 2) willing church members might put up enough money to provide a downpayment on a used car. Two members are already willing to do that. If anyone in the church has other ideas, they would be welcomed. We also have a Refugee Ministry line in the Designated Funds Budget that might be used to assist with transportation needs. Donations to that fund could help as well.

The mother, Fatima, asked if there might be a job that she can do, where English is not required. When they first arrived, she had a job for a while that involved sewing. If anyone in the church has ideas about this, please pass them on to Brad or Joanne.

It is helpful to remember that the Khalili Family was evacuated from Afghanistan because the father and grandfather had worked with the United States during the war. We are thankful for the opportunity to sponsor them and to continue to show our interest and concern for their full integration into American society.

To show their appreciation, the family wants to invite the church team over to their house for a meal sometime in the near future. We are working to find a date/time that will work with our team, and all who helped with the initial resettlement process.



The Khalili family, soon after their arrival in 2021.