

Whatcom Refugee Project

January 2022 Newsletter

The Storm

Steven Shetterly (Resettlement Manager)

He was so close. One of our expected arrivals had made it as far as SeaTac and there he stopped. His journey from Kabul through Qatar and Germany, enduring a weeks-long wait on a military base in the desert southwest--he had made it as far as SeaTac, a 30-minute flight from Bellingham, and he got stuck. What was falling as a cold rain in Seattle had turned into a major snowstorm in Bellingham, and this young man's midnight arrival had been delayed, delayed and finally cancelled. By 2:00 in the morning I had contacted all the different parties involved, informed them of the delay, negotiated for meal vouchers for this traveler with no cash, no credit and no English, and had settled in for a short night of sleep at my office (slim chances of making it safely home with the snow still falling and drifting).

Refugee resettlement, it turns out, has its surprises. It has twists, turns, delays, cancellations and storms. It is not an easy, linear path from Point A to Point B when dealing with a multitude of governmental and nongovernmental agencies while trying to assist human beings who are fleeing for their lives in the middle of a global pandemic. These first several weeks of resettlement—opening months early in order to help with the massive refugee crisis facing our country—have felt very much like a monster storm. And yet even the biggest storms come to an end, and in the midst of it all there are moments of beauty: In this case, I have been especially humbled to see the effort of the community to welcome our new arrivals. Volunteers spending hours getting housing set up, buying groceries, cooking meals, helping our new neighbors figure out city buses and get enrolled in government services. Donors sending gift cards to local grocery stores, offering to help pay refugees' rent, passing along very nice used vehicles to us, buying textbooks and beds and car seats from our Amazon Wish List. Neighbors calling or emailing to ask how they can assist with the family who just moved in next door, school officials working overtime to make arrangements for kids to start classes.

World Relief in Whatcom County has now welcomed 23 individuals since the beginning of December, and has started them on their path toward self-sufficiency and new life. Nothing about it has been easy; everything about it has been worthwhile. I've been so proud of our community and so encouraged by this rollout, despite the bumps in the road and the inevitable chaos of opening our doors in a storm. Our stranded traveler did eventually make it to Bellingham—wary from the extra time spent waiting, but happy to be here nonetheless. He was reunited with his brother, and they've begun English classes and are making connections in the community, riding the bus, playing soccer, asking when they can start work.

As this current storm abates and things calm down to a more manageable level of crazy, I can do nothing more than offer my thanks to all of you for the roles you have already played or will yet play in this story. It's a beautiful thing that is happening, and you have made a tremendous impact in many lives.



GIFT CARDS

Gift cards are another tremendously helpful way of supporting these new arrivals with food, clothing and other necessary items before their state and federal benefits are activated. (Any local grocery or department store cards are appreciated, though we have found that Winco has not only consistently affordable food, but a good selection of halal meats.) **Gift cards can be dropped off at, or mailed to, Bellingham Covenant Church, 1530 East Bakerview Rd. Bellingham WA 98226.**

HOUSING

No matter where refugees resettle, the single greatest challenge remains the same: finding affordable housing. Stable housing is critical since the sooner families find housing, the sooner kids can enroll in school, and the sooner parents can secure well-paying jobs.

If you are a property owner or landlord looking for a way to help refugees, consider renting to them! Because refugees arrive with nothing, their rental applications require special consideration. By choosing to rent to a refugee, you are not only providing housing but also the opportunity to build credit, establish a rental history, and find their first job.

If you are not a property owner or landlord, you can still help! Let us know if you have an Airbnb, ADU, rental, or spare room available for short stays (up to 6 weeks). As we work toward long-term housing and contend with an unpredictable flow of arrivals, we are wholly dependent on the generosity of flexible hosts.

In either case, the first step is filling out our Housing Survey: <https://forms.gle/cXK3Wuy7tn7Qhggy6>

DONATE FURNITURE & HOME GOODS

You can support refugees by donating furniture and home goods to the Habitat Store! Through this partnership, World Relief receives the value of your donations in store credit, giving refugee households the opportunity to shop for their own furniture when they need it. **Donors must specify that their donations are on behalf of World Relief.** Donation receipts are issued by Habitat for Humanity.

Ways to donate:

- Drop off at the donation dock behind the Habitat Store, 1825 Cornwall Avenue, Bellingham
 - Mondays 9 - 4:30 | Tuesday - Friday 9 - 5:30 | Saturday 10 - 4:30
- Schedule a free pick-up (7-10 days out) by
 - calling 360.778.2036, ext. 1001
 - emailing truck.schedule@hfhwhatcom.org
 - using the online scheduler <https://shop.hfhwhatcom.org/donate/>
- Please note: Habitat Store employees are not permitted to enter homes but are happy to load from a driveway, carport, or porch. Please call the Habitat Store with any questions.

Guidelines:

All donations to the Habitat Store are subject to staff approval to ensure that every item is sellable, clean, and in working order. For a full list of accepted items, as well as additional information regarding mattress and box spring donations, visit the Habitat Store website at <https://shop.hfhwhatcom.org/donation-guidelines/>

If you would prefer to donate furniture directly to World Relief and are able to transport it, please send an email to [whatcomrefugees@bellinghamcov.org] with a description and picture of the item. Because we are unable to store furniture at this time, we will let you know whether we have immediate need of the item and arrange a time/location to receive it. Thank you so much for your understanding!