

Deerfield Valley New Neighbors Project

Frequently Asked Questions

America's Afghan allies are coming to the Deerfield Valley.

What does this mean for our towns and villages, our local economy, schools, and infrastructure? You have questions! Here are some of the most-asked questions people have about our new neighbors.

1. Why are Afghans coming to the Valley?

For more than 20 years, American soldiers relied on allies in Afghanistan for support services. Afghans worked as translators, drivers, guides, cultural experts, and more. But when the U.S. military left Afghanistan, our local allies found themselves targeted for violence by the Taliban. Recognizing our responsibility for their safety, the U.S. government organized a resettlement program, designed to provide our allies and their families with the tools to begin a new life in America.

In the Vermont tradition of embracing newcomers, our state has opened the door to Afghan partners. As Governor Phil Scott said, "We have a moral obligation to help the people of Afghanistan, who did so much to help us in the War on Terror." Approximately 100 Afghans (families and individuals) are expected to resettle in the Southern Vermont region, including Brattleboro, Bennington, Bellows Falls and the Deerfield Valley.

2. Who is managing the Valley resettlement program?

The Southern Vermont resettlement program is being managed by the Multicultural Community Center in Brattleboro, which is a branch of ECDC, an internationally respected organization with over 4 decades of experience working with people forced to resettle due to war, famine, and natural disasters. You can learn all about ECDC and the Multicultural Community Center at <https://www.ecdcus.org/mccvt/>

Locally, resettlement efforts are being assisted by the Deerfield Valley New Neighbors Project, an all-volunteer group formed to provide logistical and social support to the new arrivals. (We welcome new members! To get involved, just send an email to DVNewNeighbors@gmail.com

3. How will the Afghans integrate into Valley life?

Imagine being forced to leaving your home with only a few suitcases ... and having to start over in a new country! It takes hope, strength and faith in a better life. The Afghan families arriving here are eager to become self-supporting, contributing members of our local community. And because they have worked closely with Americans, they understand American culture. Many speak English very well.

4. What about cultural differences? How will they – and we – address those?

Cultural and social life in Afghanistan is rich with beloved local traditions. Faith, family, work, and community are important. The majority of our new neighbors are Muslims; some practice other faiths. All are committed to building a safe and fulfilling life here in the U.S, and all have been vetted and cleared by U.S. intelligence. However, life in Afghanistan is indeed different than life in the Valley. There will be many challenges, including finding work, transportation, housing -- and

friends! We've all experienced feelings of loneliness in new situations. And we've all felt gratitude when other people treated us with kindness, and stepped up to help us in our time of need. Cultural differences exist; but we are all humans with basic human needs. Opening our hearts and minds is the key to making this New Neighbors Project successful for everyone.

4. How will our Afghan neighbors contribute to the local economy?

One major way Afghans can help the Valley is by growing the local work force! Employers here are in need of workers; dozens of jobs are available and there's a serious shortage of labor. Afghans are willing and able to fill many of these job openings. As they become employed and start to shop, pay rent and taxes, our new neighbors will have a positive impact on the economy.

5. How else can Afghans enrich life in the Valley?

Afghanistan is a beautiful country with rich traditions in art, music, cuisine, literature, architecture, and crafts. Our new neighbors have adopted many Western / American traditions, but will also enjoy sharing their vibrant Afghan culture.

6. Where will the Afghans live?

It can be challenging to find affordable housing in the Valley. A small group of volunteers is working to identify rental options and potential "home-stay" opportunities. Housing is definitely a critical need and if you know of a home, condo or apartment that is available, please email DVNewNeighbors@gmail.com

7. What else do our Afghan allies need? How can I help?

First, join the New Neighbors Project! We are a team of volunteers working together to help Afghans successfully integrate into Valley life. Here are some major areas where help is needed:

EMPLOYMENT

Do you know of a specific, paying job opening? Our Afghan allies have experience working with Americans and are eager to become self-supporting and contributing members of the community.

HOUSING

Do you know of a rental house, condo or apartment, or someone who might be willing to offer a temporary home stay?

TRANSPORTATION

The Moover will be a key part of a transportation plan for our new neighbors, but volunteer drivers are also needed. Drivers can volunteer for a regular route, or can drive on an "as needed" basis.

SOCIAL SUPPORT/ ACTIVITIES

Refugees can feel overwhelmed -- and lonely. Volunteers are needed to act as "friendly neighbors" who can offer a warm welcome. There are many enjoyable ways to introduce Afghan families to the Valley. You could take a family to a farmers' market, sporting event, parade, or historical sites. Introduce them to local hiking trails and recreational activities. Have tea at a local diner -- or at your house. Invite the children to a playground, or host a "movie night" at your home or local library. Learn how to say "Welcome" in an Afghan language. Teach fishing, quilting, painting, carpentry -- whatever your special skill is!

FINANCIAL HELP

Until the new arrivals have steady employment -- and because many are starting over with almost nothing -- financial assistance is needed. If you can do nothing else, won't you consider a donation to assist with critical living expenses?

DONATE HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Our Afghan allies are starting over with almost nothing. While we work on housing, we also need to gather clean, usable household items, including furniture, linens, cooking items, toys, bicycles, tools, and more.

JOIN THE NEW NEIGHBORS TEAM

If you have a special skill, talent, or interest that you would like to share -- or if you would like to work behind the scenes as an organizer, outreach coordinator or contact person, your talents are needed!

How to get involved: Just send an email to DVNewNeighbors@gmail.com

Let us know your interests, and how you would like to participate. The New Neighbors Project meets bi-weekly to focus on practical challenges and opportunities; we'd love to have you join! But it's not necessary to become formally involved; if you have a donation to make, or want to volunteer with housing, furniture donations, transportation, that would be awesome. We want you -- and we need you!

Thank you!