

Dear Members of the Whitingham Select Board,

You may have heard that Afghan refugees are now arriving in Southern Vermont.

We're writing today to let you know that the Deerfield Valley – along with Brattleboro, Bennington and the Springfield region – has been approved for resettlement of 100 of America's Afghan allies. These new Vermonters, who worked for the U.S. government and military in Afghanistan, were forced to flee Afghanistan last year after the withdrawal of U.S. forces. They have gone through extensive processing and most are now temporarily housed at SIT (School for International Training) where they are receiving ESL (English as a Second Language) training, plus Social Security Cards, Medicaid and work papers.

There will be many questions about our new neighbors! Why are they here? Where will they live and work? How can we help? Fortunately, Southern Vermont is now home to an organization that is deeply experienced in refugee resettlement and led by international experts. Based in Brattleboro, the ECDC / Multicultural Community Center has created a comprehensive program to assist and guide communities as they embrace our new neighbors.

We are attaching FAQs about the Deerfield Valley New Neighbors project. These FAQs contain responses to many questions people have about Vermont's new residents. Perhaps the most important thing to know is this: **The Afghans coming to America served the U.S. military as drivers, translators, administrative and support staff, journalists, and in other capacities.** Many speak English well, and some speak English at conversational level. Some are familiar with American culture, but all are eager to become self-supporting and contributing members of our community. And of course, all were vetted and cleared by U.S. security agencies, and are vaccinated against COVID.

We know there will be many more questions, and we welcome yours! But even more importantly, **we need your help to ensure that our Afghan allies will find a warm welcome here.**

Starting life over in a new country can be lonely and stressful. It's important that we honor the loyalty of America's allies by coming to their aid as they adapt and integrate into Valley life. **We hope you will join us and support the New Neighbors Project by spreading the word, volunteering, donating, or joining the Project's steering committee! Your skills, talents, connections and welcome will be most appreciated!**

To reach the Deerfield Valley New Neighbors Project, email DVNewNeighbors@gmail.com, and we will respond promptly. (This is our primary contact for now.)

Sincerely,

The Deerfield Valley New Neighbors Project

The Deerfield Valley New Neighbors Project is an initiative sparked by the Deerfield Valley Lions Club and open to anyone. "We serve" and "Kindness matters" are the twin mottoes of Lions, and in that spirit, we are helping to assemble a group of volunteers to help our Afghan friends build new lives in their adopted homeland. We invite you to join us! Your skills, talents, energy and warmth will be welcome.