



# LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES National Capital Area

Celebrating Over 100 Years of Serving Boldly

Issue No. 2 2019

## Celebrating Ramadan in a New Home

By: Nesar Anwari, Refugee Resettlement Staff

Last month, Ahmad Fahim Azizi, his wife and three children celebrated their first Ramadan in the United States. The young family arrived from Afghanistan in April. They were warmly welcomed by a fully furnished apartment set-up by volunteers including children's rooms with toys, new backpacks, and school supplies. The Azizi family is excited about their new life in the US and feels safer, more secure, and grateful for their new peaceful life.

Shortly after the family's arrival, they began the Ramadan traditions. Ramadan is a special time in the Islamic calendar when Muslims fast and go without eating or drinking every day from dawn to dusk for an entire month. Ramadan is an opportunity for Muslims to stand in solidarity with the poor and less fortunate who fast without choice. It is a month of reflection, self-improvement, and strengthening relationships with others. For the Azizi family, this Ramadan was especially important as they remembered the loved ones they left behind, showed gratitude for their new beginning, and met new friends in holiday celebration.

During their first Ramadan in the US, the Azizi family shared Iftar (the evening meal) with their Arab neighbors. They have come to appreciate the different Arab dishes their neighbors make as they share traditional Afghan dishes, such as bolani.



*"How someone can break the fast without having bolani on the table!" says a jolly Mr. Azizi who comes from the northern part of Afghanistan that is famous for their spicy and delicious bolani and chutney.*

Many refugee families shared in Iftar this season thanks to an LSS/NCA collaboration with Montgomery County Muslim Foundation (MCMF) which provided over 100 LSS/NCA refugee families with Ramadan food packages consisting of flour, rice, cooking oil, sugar, halal chicken, juice, dates, pasta, potatoes, onions, strawberries, and grapes.

LSS/NCA has recently established its connection with MCMF in order to undertake initiatives and programs to help families in need live a better life. While participating in the Ramadan Food Drive, Ms. Saba Rashid, the President of MCMF said, *"I am pleased by the connection with LSS/NCA and am impressed with the services it provides to refugees, asylees, SIVs, and the community at large. MCMF will be more than happy to continue this partnership and contribute to rebuilding lives."*

Fahim Azizi recounted what Ramadan meant to his family after a visit to a mosque near his home. *"We visited the Turkish Diyanat Center of America last week and had quality time as we met people from different countries, including my homeland, shared food during the communal Iftar, and prayed together. It felt like I was home. The kids met some Afghan counterparts, played together, and captured some photos."*

The family culminated Ramadan with Eid al-Fitr, a great feast and celebration that includes great food, new clothes, and yummy sweets! MCMF, in collaboration with LSS/NCA, provided Eid gifts to more than 200 kids during the Ramadan season.

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area [LSSNCA.ORG](http://LSSNCA.ORG) United Way #8146 CFC #78343

**"GOOD THINGS ARE HAPPENING"**

**REFUGEES GIFTED SOCCER BALLS AND TEDDY BEARS**

**EXPRESSIONS OF ABUNDANCE**

**RENEWED FUNDING BOOSTS PROGRAMS**

**2 RIS**

**4 Community**

**5 Volunteer**

**6 Development**

**SOARING ACHIEVEMENT  
FROM OUR  
FOSTER YOUTH**

*Graduation Story on Page 3*

# “GOOD THINGS Are Happening”

By: Tesfay Rezene, Refugee Resettlement Staff

Starbucks, in collaboration with LSS/NCA's new Refugee Youth Career Pathways Program, had a tree planting event at the Parkview Complex in Riverdale, Maryland. This event was an opportunity to engage members of the community with refugee families, and introduce volunteer mentors to refugee youth. As an LSS/NCA staff member, I was excited to attend and brought along my younger high school sister.

The sun was shining and the weather was perfect for outdoor yard work. Many of our refugee families from around the globe—Middle East, Africa, and Latin America—attended to meet their neighbors and beautify their apartment landscape.

The Tree Planting activity was a joyful event for everyone, especially the youth who enthusiastically interacted with volunteers. Younger children were running around to eagerly assist volunteers, shuttling soil, shovels, and gardening gloves, all of which had been donated by the apartment complex for the event. When the trees finally were placed, the children could not wait for their turn to use the watering bucket. Starbucks served coffee and snacks, and gave each participant a t-shirt designed to read “Good Things Are Happening.” It was a perfect sentiment and reminder of the extraordinary accomplishments that can be made by joining hands and using the universal language of smiles and laughter.



DC, Maryland, and NOVA regional Starbucks locations are helping create communities that welcome refugees and immigrants. In addition to collaborating with our Refugee Youth Career Pathways Program, Starbucks hosted a table at our Expressions of Abundance breakfast and donated coffee for both MD and VA events! Check out other refugee and SIV community event opportunities through your local Starbucks! Thank you Starbucks for standing #WithRefugees.

## DID YOU KNOW THAT WE NOW OFFER U.S. CITIZENSHIP CLASSES?

By: Nizama Tikvina, Citizen and Immigration Program Manager

The LSS/NCA citizenship program offers a course specifically designed for permanent residents seeking United States citizenship. The citizenship course is taught with one primary goal in mind, preparation for the naturalization of permanent residents seeking citizenship. The course is offered to both intermediate and advanced students. To pass the USCIS interview, candidates for citizenship must be able to listen, understand, speak, read, and write in English. The citizenship course is content heavy. Emphasis is placed not only

on understanding basic concepts of U.S. history and government, but also on understanding the principles behind the concepts. The course requires that students recognize and understand key vocabulary, as well as understand and answer oral and written questions.

Please share this information with your friends or communities who may be interested. **Contact Nizama at [tikvinan@lssnca.org](mailto:tikvinan@lssnca.org) for additional information or to register.**

### U.S. CITIZEN CLASSES:

- ★ 1 class per week
- ★ 2 ½ hours per class
- ★ 8 weeks of instruction
- ★ Total of 40 hours
- ★ Offered 3 times a year: Winter / Fall / Spring

# SOARING ACHIEVEMENT FROM OUR FOSTER YOUTH

By: Leena Said, URM Social Worker

The LSS/NCA Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) team are thrilled and honored to announce that two of our youth graduated from high school this past month and will be attending college this fall.

Diane, 20-years-old, and Dieudonne, 18-years-old, were given the opportunity through LSS/NCA and their foster families to reach their goals and never give up on their ambitions. Since they arrived in the United States, they have overcome past experiences and become positive role models in our community.

Dieudonne arrived in the U.S. from Congo in 2014 after witnessing the death of his grandfather when intruders entered his childhood home. He was inspired by his first plane ride to America and will be

taking aviation classes at Arizona State University, leading to his desired career as a commercial pilot. He was nominated for the Presidential Scholar Award and served as his class Salutatorian at his graduation ceremony.

Diane fled Congo as a young girl and arrived in the United States in 2016. She graduated from high school in three short years and won the award for Black Leadership. This fall she will be attending Marymount University as a nursing student.

Since entering the LSS/NCA URM Program, each has learned a new language, created a support team consisting of family and friends, gone through the highs and lows of adjusting to foster care, and will now, no doubt, excel in the next chapter of their lives.



Without our wonderful and compassionate foster families, Diane and Dieudonne would not have had the opportunity for a college education nor anticipated achieving their dreams. If you are curious about opening your home to a refugee youth, please contact:

**Patricia Britt**

**[BrittP@LSSNCA.org](mailto:BrittP@LSSNCA.org)**

**(202) 723-3000 ext. 254**



## TURNING THE TASSEL THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR A YOUTH HAVEN ALUM

By: Dara Yah'ya, YDW Program Manager



Youth Haven Camps & Retreats has walked with Kia for exactly half of her life—from preteen conversations about the growing pains of adolescence to watching her pass the driving exam, and now the proudest moment of all, her college graduation!

The spunky 11 year old first attended Youth Haven Kids Camp in the summer of 2008. She was full of energy, talkative, and very creative – fiercely intelligent, a little bossy, and extremely compassionate. She enjoyed the summer camps immensely. Kia especially liked

motivating the campers who needed the most attention. So it was an easy decision to have her back as a Leader-in-Training, first as a cabin counselor and then as the Arts & Craft Coordinator for the entire camp.

Kia understood the value of camp and she wanted to be a part of creating this unique experience for others. Camp was the place where practicing leadership and conflict/resolution skills was disguised as games and planning for your future was fun. But what made this camp special to Kia was the safe space that it provided to talk about her fears and emotions. It was a place where she could talk and learn about HIV. She could admit that she was afraid of what HIV could do to the ones she loved the most. As Kia went off

to college, she stayed committed to providing this safe space at Kids Camp, knowing their worry, and confident that she could reassure them that everything would be alright.

Surrounded by the cheers of her loved ones in May, Kia graduated with a Bachelors of Science in Art Education, Bachelors of Science in Art+Design, and a minor in Health Science. She has been hired as an art teacher for Prince George's County Public Schools. Within the next five years, Kia hopes to earn a Master's degree in clinical psychology to pursue becoming an HIV Counselor. She thanks everyone who has supported her education and career goals: "This is for everyone who has made an impact on my journey."



# Refugee Families Gifted Soccer Balls and Teddy Bears

By: Mira Mendick, Community Relations Director

In early January, JetBlue, at Ronald Reagan National Airport, contacted LSS/NCA to ask if they could donate Sweet Cases to our refugee youth. As I looked through the email chain, one sentence in particular stood out: *"I have the perfect organization who would love to receive your donation of Sweet Cases."* What a lovely sentiment from a supporter who was clearly thinking of our families.

JetBlue donated 30 Sweet Cases, each was filled with a teddy bear, blanket, coloring book, crayons, toothpaste, and toothbrush. Not only were these goodies a joy to give out to our refugee youth, but also gave parents undistracted time to focus at their appointments with LSS/NCA caseworkers.

In a similar act of kindness, Cheverly Soccer Club gave what they knew would make a big difference in making our community feel like home. When I originally requested a donation of 40 soccer balls, I thought I might be pushing my limits. To my surprise, they were able to gather, inflate, and deliver all 40 balls in just a couple of weeks.

Soccer, better known as football to our refugee families, is one of the two most popular sports in Afghanistan. The soccer balls were not only a fun gift to present to our youth, but provided a sense of familiarity and comfort. Now that the soccer balls have been taken home, our families are outside enjoying the hot summer days. A big thank you to the Cheverly Soccer Club for bringing a little piece of "home" to America.



## Advocating for Refugee Resettlement With Our Partners

By: John Murphy, Advocacy Associate



LSS/NCA representatives joined with over 250 other advocates at Refugee Council USA's Advocacy Days in May. Refugee Council USA is a coalition of national organizations dedicated to refugee protection, welcome, and excellence in the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

LSS/NCA's involvement was critical in raising the organization's visibility on Capitol Hill regarding national resettlement trends and concerns. Each of the nine national refugee resettlement agencies was well represented during the meetings.

Our team members were integral in visiting congressional offices in our Maryland and Virginia service area, building new relationships with congressional staff and cultivating existing ones. We introduced our group, shared individual refugee stories, and identified current resettlement issues.

### CONCERNS & REQUESTS

- The Administration's 30,000 refugee ceiling for FY 2019 (the lowest since the program was authorized in 1980). Unfortunately, to date the U.S. has authorized settlement of less than 15,000 and will likely fall short of the ceiling.
- A request to encourage the Administration to set a minimum Presidential Determination ceiling on refugee admissions of 95,000 each fiscal year, the average amount admitted annual between 1980 and 2017.
- Informing House members of the Bipartisan Congressional Refugee Caucus to protect the United States' leadership role in refugee protection and resettlement.



## Danitra: A HERO EMPOWERING OUR YOUTH

By: Dana Lea, Director of Outreach

LSS/NCA is blessed by Danitra Dorsey-Daniels, an MSW who assists our Youth Development and Wellness program (YDW). She is a DC native and mother of two daughters. Since the start of her internship, Danitra expressed eagerness to help wherever she would be needed most. In only one semester, Danitra has facilitated a youth retreat, and participated in wellness workshops and fundraisers for YDW while providing services for her assigned YDW clients.

At LSS/NCA, Danitra has been involved in projects that empower young people and strengthen family connections through community

partnerships. The *Be Well Retreat* in February, an annual event under the YDW umbrella, was a very rewarding experience for her and she says she got to learn about the "tangible work done to educate and reinforce the importance of human relationships."

Danitra is tasked with supporting our teen and young adult members. Recently, she accompanied a young man on a trip to a local university after he expressed a goal of going to college. He was accepted! Additionally, Danitra is working with a young woman to navigate the day-to-day struggles of managing her health and setting goals for her future.

According to Danitra's internship supervisor, Alicia Gordon, "Danitra is very comfortable engaging with others. She has the desire to learn and help others, which are two characteristics that make her a great social worker. Danitra works without judgment and takes the time to assess and ask questions. This enables her to advocate for those who have difficulty doing it for themselves. It's been a joy to work with Danitra this semester; we look forward to even more engagement in the second semester."

**Thank you Danitra for all of your hard work and commitment to our clients!**



### OUR IMMEDIATE VOLUNTEER NEEDS:

- **Family and Youth Mentors (MD/VA)**
  - ✓ Spend time with refugee families, assist in job searches, mentor in English, provide homework help to youth, and provide career and leadership development assistance.
- **Youth Haven Summer Program Intern (DC)**
  - ✓ Provide administrative and planning support for the annual YDW Youth Haven summer camp. Must be able to commit 20-25 hours a week in our Washington D.C. office.
- **YDW Program Assistant Intern (DC)**
  - ✓ Week day volunteer assisting social workers with client outreach, recruitment, retreat planning, and leadership development activities.
- **Administration Volunteers (DC)**
  - ✓ Provide essential support to program staff through administrative tasks. Particular need for reception volunteer on Fridays, data entry, direct mail, and thank you call support.
- **Communications Volunteer (remote or DC)**
  - ✓ Help manage and coordinate posts for social media, website, and e-news.

## The Transformative Power of Expressions of Abundance

By: Dana Lea, Director of Outreach

**"Three words changed my life forever....Dwayne you're adopted."**

If you joined us for this year's Expressions of Abundance breakfasts, you heard our testimonial speaker, Dwayne Staten, discuss his emotional road to reuniting with his birth mother. Dwayne captivated our breakfast audiences with his charisma and story-telling prowess. One moment he had the audience laughing about a bad math test score, and the next tearing up over his reunification story.

Through our Expressions of Abundance breakfasts, LSS/NCA is honored to set a stage for guest speakers to share their journeys through the transformative work of LSS/NCA services. This year, our program highlighted both our refugee resettlement and adoption programs. Dwayne was joined by speakers from the LSS/NCA Board of Directors and leadership.

There was a combined attendance in Maryland and Virginia of approximately 185 people and together we raised \$81,000 in pledges and contributions. This money will go towards supporting LSS/NCA's mission of walking with those in need. Among other things, these donations will help send a child affected by HIV to Youth Haven Camp, set-up housing for a newly arrived refugee family, and subsidize the cost of adopting a child through foster care.

**Thank you again to all who attended and are helping us pave new pathways forward.**

### JUST IN:

#### You Can Now Give Through the Maryland Charity Campaign

For several years LSS/NCA has been a beneficiary of workplace giving programs through the United Way (#8146) and the Combined Federal Campaign (#78343) of the Federal government. Those programs enable employees to make immediate gifts or pledge payroll deductions from their regular pay. This year LSS/NCA was accepted into the Maryland Charity campaign. Maryland state employees should look for more news about our participation and how to select LSS/NCA as their charity of choice in the future.

#### Anonymous Matching Gift Boosts Funding for Bold Journey Scholarship

By: Susan Haine, Grant Development Director

An Anonymous donor, who is deeply committed to education and opportunity, challenged Lutheran Social Services supporters. The donor offered to match donations up to \$500 with a dollar for dollar match.

The match campaign was launched in March on Facebook. Our supporters rose to the challenge. In less than a month over \$500 in donations were received and our donors kept giving. At the close of the campaign a total of \$990 was raised to support the LSS/NCA Bold Journey Scholarship program. Our Anonymous donor was so impressed that the final match check was not \$500 but \$510 to add an even \$1500 to this year's scholarship awards. Greater funding enables our team to award more scholarships or increased funding to our awardees. Each year the judges wish there was more money for the deserving applicants.

"They are all so amazing and this was a very hard decision to make... The stories of each of the applicants are so inspiring, I wish we could just give them all the money!" Josh Eberle, member of the judging review panel.

### Government and Foundation Funding Boosts Programs

By: Susan Haine, Grant Development Director

Over the past 6 months, government funding provided by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Family Youth and Children's Services Administration has enabled LSS/NCA to launch a new healthy relationships course in two schools in Ward 7 and 8. The ambitious program will help young people avoid risky behaviors and understand how to protect their hearts as well as their long-term aspirations. The program has a two year term and we hope to extend the program to more schools and youth groups throughout the District.

Our Youth Development and Wellness camps were awarded a grant from the George Preston Marshall Foundation. The George Preston Marshall Foundation was established in 1972 in District of Columbia and its giving is primarily limited to non profit organizations in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. Each year our staff, with dedicated volunteers, offer a retreat for youth diagnosed with HIV and camps for those impacted by HIV. With the help of the George Preston Marshall Foundation, we will be able to support more campers through this enriching and life changing experience. The camps offer fresh air and friendship, mentoring, artistic and sports opportunities along with support services that help the campers cope with life challenges.

The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation is the largest private, independent, local Foundation focused exclusively on the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The Foundation's support of the Refugee and Immigrant Services extends back several years. Our RIS program, which helps resettle refugees in Maryland and Virginia, was again honored to receive funding. The Cafritz grant will help recent arrivals and provide continuing services to earlier arrivals to enable them to learn English, get job training, and initiate other activities which will help their integration within the community.

We are grateful to both the Cafritz Foundation and the George Preston Marshall Foundation for their continuing support which provide training, opportunities, and guidance to youth and refugees.

*Do you want to have a greater impact on refugee families, vulnerable youth, or adoptive families?*



**Please consider a matching gift challenge. We welcome your initiative and will do everything we can to meet and exceed your challenge. Contact Susan at [HaineS@lssnca.org](mailto:HaineS@lssnca.org) to begin your challenge!**





## A Letter from Lynn

After nearly a decade of Board and volunteerism with LSS I was asked by the Board in February of this year to serve as interim CEO. I was honored to be asked and excited to be part of a dedicated staff that is steadfast in service to our community in need.

After four months it was obvious to me why LSS has continued to serve our neighbors for over 100 years. In addition to being able to evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of our community, by taking a "roll up your sleeve" approach, we exceed common expectations. We make certain that those we support achieve their goals, meet responsibilities and never have to compromise on their ambitions. Here at LSS we are not satisfied with the "basics" the contract or grant provides to our children and families. We succeed when we provide what is essential to well-being. We work side-by-side with our neighbors satisfying their immediate needs, while simultaneously addressing their broader goals, significantly enhancing their ability to achieve at their highest level.

Over the last year, nearly 30 foster families provided love and safety to refugee youth who had lost their families along their courageous journeys. Over 1,000 volunteers furnished apartments, provided career guidance, and offered mentoring to refugees forced to flee their homes. 56 parents began strengthening their families through adoption. And local community partners, like John Hopkins, joined forces with our Youth Development & Wellness program to bolster health education in local DC schools.

As we continue in our tradition to meet the ever-changing needs of our community, we have expanded our immigration services. Recently, we began our Safe Release program in Maryland. This fingerprinting service makes it possible for unaccompanied children to safely reunite with loved ones in the United States. Over the past year, 1,500 cases came through our doors, identifying family members and sponsors who will ensure the care and safety of children otherwise left without a home. We are expanding this service in Warrenton Virginia doubling the number of children we can help.

Our Youth Haven program serving HIV affected youth is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. It has been so successful in helping young adults achieve optimal wellness, we will be replicating the program to serve the broader youth community by providing "Be Well" retreats. These retreats are designed to educate our youth in healthy lifestyles and encourage positive relationships.

I hope you take a minute to read some of the inspiring stories of how LSS continues to support those in our community.

We are grateful for you. It is because of you we are able to continue our 102 year tradition of providing "above and beyond" to our clients.

## Board of Directors

The Honorable Mary Warlick,  
Chairperson  
Mr. Chris Hunter, Treasurer  
Ms. Kimberly Williams-Jenkins,  
Secretary  
Mr. Abed Ali  
Dr. Monique Davis, PhD, MSN, RN  
Ms. Meha Desai  
Mr. Joshua Eberle  
Ms. Kim Green  
Pastor John Hagedorn  
Mr. Daniel Mekibib  
Ms. Seblewengel Tekelhaimanot

### Ex-Officio Members of the Board

The Reverend Dr. John Denninger,  
President  
Lutheran Church Missouri Synod  
(LCMS), Southeastern District  
*Represented by The Reverend  
Lloyd Gaines*  
The Rev. Richard Graham, Bishop  
ELCA Metropolitan Washington,  
D.C., Synod  
Lynn Tedesco, Interim CEO

## LSS/NCA Offices

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

4406 Georgia Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20011  
(202) 723-3000

### MARYLAND

3799 East-West Hwy  
Hyattsville, MD 20782  
(240) 714-4034  
2503 Belair Dr.  
Bowie, MD 20715  
(301) 809-5558

### VIRGINIA

8922 Little River Turnpike  
Fairfax, VA 22031  
(703) 698-5026  
1601 Prince William Pkwy.  
Woodbridge, VA 22191

## TURNING THE TASSEL THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR A YOUTH HAVEN ALUM



Read the story  
on page 3

### INSIDE THIS EDITION

## Celebrating Ramadan in a New Home



*Celebrating family  
and friendship*

Read more on  
front cover

## SAVE THE DATES

June 28	One Journey Festival
June 29	World Refugee Day Celebration (VA)
July 18	Foster Parent Orientation
July 23	Volunteer Orientation (DC)
August 14	Volunteer Orientation (VA)

For more information & events, visit  
**LSSNCA.org**

**NOW OFFERING U.S.  
CITIZENSHIP CLASSES**

**2 RIS**

**ADVOCATING FOR  
REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT**

**4 COMMUNITY**

**DANITRA: A HERO  
EMPOWERING OUR  
YOUTH**

**5 VOLUNTEER**

**MATCH GIFT BOOSTS  
FUNDING FOR  
SCHOLARSHIPS**

**6 DEVELOPMENT**