

Refugee Mentoring



Early in 2021, the Rotary Club of Adelaide Light signed up for a new project through Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (link <u>CRSA</u>) to mentor and assist a family to adapt to a new environment after fleeing their country. Several of our Club members undertook the required on-line training to participate in this program.

In December 2021, CRSA assigned a family of seven to our Club – Erfan Abidi and his wife, 3 sons and Erfan's mother and father who had been lucky enough to be on one of the last plane-load of Afghan refugees who were fleeing the tyranny of the Taliban. Erfan, who had been an interpreter for the Australian forces, was targeted by the Taliban for retribution.

The family needed a great deal of help in those early months. Through their humanitarian visa, the government was able to help with accommodation and early funding through Centrelink, but there were huge gaps that were needed to help this family to adapt in a new country.

Through the Community Services group led by Katey Halliday and six other members, our Club took on the role to both financially and personally assist Erfan and his family to arrange things like an Australian driver's licence,

researching university and employment options, security licence (for his job), investigating volunteering options for Erfan's father, running English classes on Saturdays for Erfan's father and wife, and assisting with Housing applications. We also connected socially in many ways – such as visits to Cleland National Park, holding a picnic for Harmony Week and visits to the Royal Adelaide Show (especially loved by the three children aged, at the time, six, four and one year old).

Our Club finished our formal Abidi family mentor relationship (which usually lasts for one year) in December 2022. Since then, our Club has continued this strong bond with the family as Erfan joined our Club as a member in September 2022. A group of female members have been providing driving practice for Erfan's wife to drive the streets of Adelaide with her International licence, and our members have supported several Afghan fundraisers.

Since joining Rotary, Erfan has visited quite a few Clubs and spoke at the Rotary Expo in June 2023 to tell his harrowing story of living in Afghanistan during the first Taliban reign, 20 years of growth as a country protected by the US-led NATO Allies and partner countries, and then the re-emergence of Taliban rule. The escape with his family was on a knife-edge as there were thousands of people surrounding the airport – all trying to seek refuge in another country.



The Refugee Mentoring program has been a highlight of Adelaide Light's Community Service projects, and one we are likely to repeat soon. This mentoring story was published in RDU recently, click on https://rotarydownunder.com.au/2023/06/09/from-mentors-to-friends/

