

# ISC's Refugee Support Services Program Report For the month of May 2026

## A few beneficiaries of our refugee mission

### *Faisal's Story: PTSD Impacts the Entire Family*

Faisal is a former Afghan military officer who fled with his family following the fall of Kabul. Taliban soldiers injured his leg, requiring surgery and the placement of a permanent metal implant. Shortly after, the Taliban killed his older brother — a close companion and role model. These traumatic events, combined with the collapse of his country, left a deep and lasting impact on his mental health. He arrived in the United States suffering PTSD as well as physical limitations.

Since Faisal's family enrolled in our resettlement program, Afghan staff at the ISC have provided continuous practical and emotional support. ISC staff referred him to the legal partners at Compass Immigration Legal Services for his asylum application. Our Afghan staff supported him through document preparation and provided interpretation during multiple consultations and interviews. His asylum case progressed through USCIS, including an interview in Newark, New Jersey, in August 2025, and was later moved to immigration court. After his asylum case was transferred to immigration court, ISC had to enlist another partner-in-mission, Rosina Law Office, for legal assistance. He was ultimately granted asylum, although the case remains under appeal by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Recognizing the seriousness of Faisal's mental health condition, ISC facilitated immediate referrals for mental health evaluation and successfully connected him to Intensive Case Management services through Church World Services (CWS). Following a mental health crisis that required emergency care, he was referred for psychiatric treatment, where he began receiving consistent care and showed measured improvement. ISC helped Faisal address an additional barrier to employment: the need for consistent transportation. Through a \$6,000 donation from generous supporters of ISC, we helped him purchase a reliable vehicle to get to and from work.

Today, Faisal continues to receive follow-up support from ISC, including regular case management and coordination to monitor his mental health, employment stability, and family well-being. Our hope is that his two sons will be able to grow up in the United States in a stable home and become healthy, productive American citizens.

### *Yelizaveta's Story: The Financial Strains of Humanitarian Re-Parole Requirements*

Yelizaveta received from ISC \$1,250 in emergency rental assistance. Her request detailed the financial strains of re-vetting and re-filing for recent refugee families. In her own words:

*I would like to respectfully ask you to consider the possibility of financial support for my family while our re-parole process is being finalized. Due to my husband's injury and his temporary loss of work, we fell behind in our rent. The costs of re-parole have hit at a very difficult time.*

*A few months ago, I filed four re-parole applications for my family: for myself and my husband with Employment Authorization Document (EAD) applications, and for our two children for re-parole only. The total cost was \$3,820. In addition to these filing fees, the current re-parole process also requires an additional payment after conditional approval. USCIS charged us a \$1,020 payment per case in order to finalize the approval. Our four cases cost an additional \$4,080. We have received conditional approval and learned these fees of over \$7,840 are due in two months.*

*Because of this unexpected timeline, I am currently facing significant financial pressure. I would be very grateful if the ISC could support my family by helping cover some of our rent while we complete this process.*

### **Nadege's Story: The Ongoing Struggle of a Haitian Asylee**

When 27-year-old Nadege Lamarre arrived in the United States on March 19, 2024, she came in search of safety and a new beginning. Originally from Cavaillon, Haiti, Nadege had been studying accounting before her life changed after a tragic event in 2023, when she lost both of her parents in a violent incident in Port-au-Prince. Following this loss, she no longer had family support and was forced to leave university. This situation deeply affected her and led her to seek a more stable life in the United States.

After arriving in the U.S., Nadege began rebuilding her life despite many challenges. Without strong support and facing language barriers, she initially settled in New York, where she later met her partner, Loovensky Vincent, 26, originally from Haiti, Port-au Prince. Together, they welcomed a baby girl, Anaëlle. Life in the United States was not easy. Facing financial difficulties and adjustment challenges, Nadege later moved to Pennsylvania in 2026 with her family in search of better support.

There, she connected with the International Service Center (ISC), which provided her with assistance and guidance. ISC supported Nadege in applying for essential public benefits, including SNAP, Medicaid, and cash assistance. She also received help understanding the employment application process and attending job interviews. In addition, ISC assisted her in updating her immigration court processing so her case could be transferred from New York to Philadelphia for easier access. ISC continued to support her by helping her navigate the government immigration online system and preparing for her court-related processes. She was also guided toward English classes at Trinity Lutheran Church and was helped in obtaining a Pennsylvania driver's license.

ISC further assisted Nadege in applying for childcare assistance through the Child Care Works (CCW) Program, helping her manage childcare responsibilities while focusing on her part-time job. Despite progress, Nadege continues to deal with emotional pain from

the loss of her parents, which remains a significant part of her life experience. However, she continues to move forward with her partner and daughter, working toward stability and a better future. ISC is also working to connect Nadege with supportive volunteers and resources to help her cope with emotional stress and adjust to her new life.

*“Since I arrived in the United States, ISC has supported me and helped me understand many things I did not know,” Nadege shared. “They made me feel less alone and more hopeful for the future.”*

### ***Ivanna's Speech at a Ukrainian Fundraiser in Gettysburg (May 15)***

*Good evening, everyone, thank you so much for having me here tonight and for supporting Ukraine.*

*My name is Ivanna, and I came to the United States together with my son from Ukraine in November 2023 because of the war. We came here through the United for Ukraine program, which has now already stopped. I left behind everything — my family, career, and friends — so I made one of the hardest, but I believe it is one of the right decisions in my life. Every day, I live between two countries. When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I do is check the news from Ukraine and messages from my family. Only after that do I begin my normal routine here in America.*

*February 2022 changed the life of every Ukrainian family. On February 23rd, we still had normal lives — plans, meetings, work, schools, and family dinners. But the morning of February 24th divided our lives into 'before' and 'after.' I still remember the first day. It felt unreal, like a bad dream. We thought maybe it would end tomorrow. Unfortunately, the war has continued for more than four years. Only two days after the full-scale invasion began, we created a volunteer center in my hometown, and I was one of the founders. At first, nobody knew exactly what to do. But people united very quickly. The kindness and generosity of local people, together with support from other countries, filled five rooms with donations: food, clothes, shoes, medicine, military equipment, hygiene products, and financial support.*

*We quickly realized that we needed camouflage nets to protect our vehicles and military equipment. At that time, we didn't even know how to make them. The stores were empty, and we could not find the right materials. One 18-year-old volunteer stayed awake night after night trying to create a way to make camouflage nets by hand. In the beginning, we used regular bed sheets and cut them into pieces ourselves.*

*Today, that volunteer center is still working. They now have a machine for cutting fabric, and we can easily order appropriate fabric for different seasons. We have volunteers from many villages and nearby communities: teachers, students, cultural workers, retired people, and also anonymous volunteers who quietly help every day without wanting recognition. Thousands of people from our community became part of a story of courage, unity, and resilience.*

*Even after moving to the United States, I continue communicating with volunteers back home and following the needs of our soldiers and frontline communities. The need never stops. There is always a need for camouflage nets, drones, rangefinders, laptops for drone programs, communication equipment, generators, heaters, warm clothing during winter, and many other critical supplies. The war is still continuing, and we do not have the right to give up.*

*Life in Ukraine is still extremely difficult. People continue living under missile attacks and drone attacks. Many families spend 12 to 16 hours without electricity, especially during winter. People experience fear, cold, destroyed homes, and constant stress. And still — they continue living, working, volunteering, and supporting each other.*

*I also want to briefly talk about my life here in America. Of course, the beginning was not easy: a new language, transportation, a new culture, and trying to understand my place in this new life. But understanding why I came here gave me strength and did not allow me to give up. I could not complain, knowing what our soldiers and families in Ukraine are going through every single day.*

*Today, I work at the International Service Center in Harrisburg, a nonprofit organization that helps refugees and newcomers. It is a great honor for me to help Ukrainian families and other refugees who are rebuilding their lives. Our center helps people with their most important needs: documents translation, benefits, housing, transportation, English classes, school registration, medical appointments, and becoming self-sufficient in a new country. We also have around 50 volunteers — many of them Americans — who do incredible work helping refugees from different countries. Their kindness changes lives. And personally, I continue joining volunteer activities here in the Harrisburg area whenever possible because volunteering has become part of who I am.*

*Helping people connects both parts of my life — Ukraine and America. So today, I want to sincerely thank every one of you. Thank you for supporting Ukraine. Thank you for caring. Thank you for helping people who escaped war and are trying to rebuild their lives. Your donations matter. Your support matters. Your presence here tonight matters. Because even small acts of kindness can give people hope.*

*Slava Ukraini! Glory to Ukraine! Heroyam Slava! Glory to the heroes!*



## **A heartfelt message to American sponsors:**

*A deep and heartfelt gratitude goes to American families who became sponsors for Ukrainian families and opened their hearts and doors to people they had barely known before. You did not simply provide housing or temporary support. You did much more — you welcomed us into your homes and your lives at the moment when we had lost everything familiar and safe. You became the ones who gave us ground to stand on when the world around us collapsed. In the darkest and most terrifying period of our lives, your kindness became a light.*

*You did not just help Ukrainians — you restored my faith in humanity at a time when it was almost lost. This support will remain in our hearts forever as an example of true kindness, compassion, and human unity that knows no borders. And my 'American Dream' turned out to be exactly this — meeting people here who, in the hardest moment of the world, remained kind, open-hearted, and capable of changing someone's life simply through their humanity.*

## **Volunteer Vignette: And Quiet Flows the Susquehanna**

*Driving from Harrisburg to Lemoyne, we cross the Susquehanna River. At other times, we drive along Route 15 in Enola. I point out the river's name to the passengers in the car, typically female Afghan refugees. Their ages range widely, as do their levels of English.*

*The word Susquehanna is a particularly hard nut to crack — it took me ages after coming to Pennsylvania from the Midwest to say it myself without stumbling. So as we drive near the river, I invite my companions to join me in singing loudly: **'Susqua, Hanna!'** At first reluctantly, but then with increasing vigor, they belt out **'Susqua Hanna! Susqua Hanna! Susqua Hanna!'** until we burst out laughing together.*

*I learn a few words from my Afghan friends — I learn that a river in Dari is called darya. But my learning is minimal, disjointed, a few words here and there. They are learning English systematically and in big chunks: at the ESL classes in Trinity Lutheran Church in Camp Hill, but also in conversations with the local population at work and in schools.*

*In the little time they spend with their volunteer driver, they learn the name of a river, in all its tongue-twisting glory.*

**— Sanjay Paul, ISC Volunteer**

## **Testimony for U.S. Representative Scott Perry's Aide**

*Abigail, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my experiences and for sharing this information with Representative Perry.*

*Since 2023 I have volunteered, through the International Service Center (ISC) in Harrisburg, to help our new neighbors from Afghanistan. The ISC has served 422 Afghan refugees in Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, and York counties since 2022. 106 of these refugees are currently employed. Forty-seven are pursuing higher education. The rest are mothers of young children or children under the age of eighteen.*

*Currently, I have worked with seventeen of these individuals from twelve different families. I have tutored people in the English language, driven people to appointments, and taught them to drive.*

*All of these families helped the United States' mission in Afghanistan at great personal risk. As I drove one young man to a job interview, he told me how he oversaw air strikes that supported our ground troops. One driving student's father was a high-ranking military officer. Another student, the father of seven, worked for the U.S. as a project manager overseeing infrastructure work. This gentleman had to jump off a roof into a waiting pick-up truck to escape the Taliban. Not surprisingly, he has a permanent back injury.*

*Our new Afghan neighbors are proud of the work they did for the United States and are now successful members of our community. They work as project managers, production engineers, and college support staff. They do well in school, often working at the same time, to pay college tuition and help their families. One young man has just joined the National Guard. They work hard at improving their English and learning American culture. They find their American neighbors helpful and friendly.*

*I have no doubt that the Afghans waiting in Qatar will be as productive and law-abiding as the Afghans currently living in the Greater Harrisburg area. I hope that Representative Perry will help them.*

**— Susan Rimby, ISC Volunteer**

**Kudos to our wonderful Good Samaritans for their impactful contributions**

The total combined number of hours of volunteer support was 147.75 hours. Most helped by giving rides to our refugee neighbors, as well as some other vital services.

<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
<b>David Castonguay</b>	<b>2</b>	Drove Mohammed Amin to ESL class (5/22)
<b>Jady Conroy</b>	<b>1</b>	Drove Laiqa to and from ESL class (5/1)
<b>Becky Cotich</b>	<b>1</b>	Drove Taj home from Trinity Lutheran (5/15)
<b>Cindy Earp</b>	<b>2.25</b>	Drove Klaleda and Bebe to and from ELL (5/8, 5/22)
<b>Christine Filipovich</b>	<b>20</b>	Facilitated communication and coordination related to client needs and volunteer activities (5/1–5/31)

<b>Keevin Graham</b>	<b>3</b>	Assisted Zahra Bayat with driving instruction (5/7, 5/11, 5/26)
<b>Barbara Hamm</b>	<b>24.5</b>	Errands for Adiba Sadat (4/2); communicated with new clients (4/25–4/26); drove William and Van der Walt to errands (5/1, 5/2, 5/9); drove Van der Walt to appointment (5/5); communicated with and assisted families about various needs throughout May
<b>Kari Hultman</b>	<b>2.5</b>	Drove Muska Sarwan home from HACC (5/11)
<b>Bruce Humphrey</b>	<b>18</b>	Staff development and newsletter editing (5/1–5/31)
<b>Marleen Karns</b>	<b>8.5</b>	Drove Mohammad Sultani and Rukhsanna Salim to ESL class on multiple dates in May
<b>John Katz</b>	<b>6</b>	Assisted Amena Omid with car shopping (5/1–5/31)
<b>Olivia Long</b>	<b>2</b>	Logging volunteer hours and constructing monthly report (6/4)
<b>Cheryl &amp; Bruce Martin</b>	<b>3</b>	Assisting Shahnaz Khetabi with ELL (5/4, 5/11); assisted Shahnaz at food pantry (5/18)
<b>Scott Miller</b>	<b>5.5</b>	Drove Laika to and from ESL class (5/13, 5/20)
<b>JJ Patterson</b>	<b>16</b>	Drove Rukhsana Salim to ELL class (5/1, 5/8, 5/15, 5/22)
<b>Susan Rimby</b>	<b>5</b>	Gave driving lessons to Khaled Bayani, Zainab, Marsal Bik
<b>Suzanne Secrist</b>	<b>2.5</b>	Drove Veroshka to and from appointments (5/6); drove B. Williams family to and from appointments (5/19)
<b>Barbara Sunderlin</b>	<b>15</b>	Drove M. Sultani from ESL (5/1); assisted Noori family with household duties and errands (5/4, 5/26); drove Farhad Sarwan to appointment (5/6); gave driving lessons for Pashton Saeedi (5/7, 5/12); drove multiple clients to/from ESL (5/8, 5/22)
<b>Michael Varano</b>	<b>10</b>	Drove Veroshka to and from appointment (5/19); drove Mrs. Popal to Project Share (5/20, 5/21, 5/27)

## ISC's Refugee Support Service Outcomes

This month, ISC teams provided services across six programs, reaching clients from 17 countries of origin.

### RSS Team

Provided case management and immigration services to 23 families from nine different countries, including Bhutan, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, and Syria. Highlight: Employment Services secured a job placement in a permanent full-time position.

## **URSS Team**

Provided needed services to 22 ORR-eligible Ukrainian clients. Highlight: Employment Services assisted 3 people in entering permanent full-time positions.

## **ASA Team**

Provided needed GAPS services to a total of 58 Afghan and South African refugees in helping them address various critical needs.

## **UHP Team**

Provided needed GAPS services to 101 Ukrainian clients. Highlights include ESL classes, transportation needs, and re-parole paperwork filing.

## **REA Team**

Provided GAPS services to 21 Caribbean refugees and asylees. Collaborated with the Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center, Gather the Spirit for Justice, Trinity Lutheran Church, and Capital Area Intermediate Unit.

## **PIR Program**

Provided resettlement services to 24 refugees. Highlights: Conducted 6 home visits involving 17 Afghan SIVs and 7 South African refugees to plan for the achievement of housing stability, gainful employment, financial stability, and progress toward self-sufficiency goals.

## **Outreach, Linkage, and Collaboration**

**May 3, 2026:** ISC staff attended a refugee community awareness event at Pine Street Presbyterian Church.

**May 7, 2026:** ISC staff participated in a virtual meeting hosted by the PA State Refugee Resettlement Program and were introduced to the new Program Advisor, Mrs. Noramid Pena.

**May 13, 2026:** ISC hosted a Community Outreach and Career Orientation Event in partnership with PA CareerLink and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.

**May 14, 2026:** ISC staff attended the Randstad Worker Hiring event to expand employment networking opportunities and connect clients directly with recruiters.

**May 21, 2026:** ISC staff attended the Discover Your Future at the 2026 Commonwealth Job Fair, with representatives from over 31 state government employment agencies.

**May 29, 2026:** ISC staff member Ms. Zahra Sultani was honored with the 2026 Torch of Global Enlightenment Award, presented by the World Affairs Council of Harrisburg and recognized by PennLive.

### **Zarah's Award Acceptance Speech**

As someone who came to the United States from Afghanistan with hope, fear, and dreams for a better future, this recognition means far more than an award to me.

Today, I also stand here on behalf of many Afghan women and girls whose voices are now officially being silenced. Girls in Afghanistan are being deprived of education, restricted from pursuing careers, and denied many of the freedoms that so many of us often take for granted. Many young girls are watching their dreams slowly disappear behind closed doors.

As I stand here today receiving this honor, I think of the young girl I once was in Afghanistan and the countless girls who still dream of a classroom, a career, and a future. I hope they know that their dreams matter, their voices matter, and that the world has not forgotten them.

Through my work as an Employment Specialist, I have had the privilege of helping refugees and immigrants rebuild their lives, find meaningful employment, access critical resources, and move toward self-sufficiency.

So today, I accept this award not only for myself, but for every Afghan girl who deserves the opportunity to learn, to lead, to speak, to work, and to dream without fear. I especially want to thank Dr. Phuong Truong and the entire ISC family for believing in me, guiding me, and giving me the opportunity to serve others through my work.

This award is a reminder of what is still possible when people choose hope over fear, understanding over division, and compassion over indifference. Thank you for this honor. I am truly grateful.

