

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

When One Opportunity Changes an Entire Family

When Pashtoon walked into the International Service Center, she was not asking anyone to make her life easier. She was looking for a chance.

Having arrived from Afghanistan in September 2024 with her parents and sister, she quickly became the person everyone depended on. Because she spoke the most English, every phone call, appointment, application, and conversation rested on her shoulders. While she was helping her family adjust to a new country, she quietly accepted that her own dream of working in healthcare might have to wait.

The Employment Specialist at ISC saw something different.

Rather than searching only for the fastest job available, the goal became helping the entire family stand on their own while protecting Pashtoon's future. She was first connected with employment at Lion Country Lodging so she could begin earning an income immediately. At the same time, the Employment Specialist continued researching opportunities that matched her interests and discovered a tuition-free Medical Assistant program through Tec Centro and HACC. ISC guided her through every step from researching the program and completing the application to enrollment, interpretation, and ongoing follow-up. Today, she is expected to graduate in November and is preparing for a career in healthcare instead of leaving her dream behind.

The support did not stop with one person. After working individually with each family member, the Employment Specialist also helped Pashtoon's father secure employment with Dorman Products earning \$22.00 per hour and assisted her sister in obtaining employment at Fresh Express earning \$15.00 per hour. Within a short period, three members of the same household were working, creating financial stability that once seemed impossible. Meanwhile, ISC volunteers provided transportation, donations, food assistance, and encouragement, ESL services helped the family build confidence, and ISC's legal team guided them through the Green Card process.

Looking back, Pashtoon says the biggest gift ISC gave her was not simply a job.

"I thought I had to choose between helping my family and building my own future. Every day I was translating, making appointments, and trying to solve problems for everyone around me. I was afraid my dream of working in healthcare would disappear because I could never afford school. ISC changed that. They found a path I didn't know existed and stayed with me through every step. My father, my sister, and I are all working today because someone believed in our potential before we believed it

ourselves. Now I am about to graduate as a Medical Assistant, and my next dream is to become a Registered Nurse. One opportunity changed the future of my entire family, and I will always be grateful to the people at ISC who never stopped believing in us."

For Pashtoon, employment was never the finish line. It was the beginning of a future she once thought was out of reach.

Nothing but Backpacks: Vika's Story

My journey began on **February 24, 2022**, when I woke up at 5:30 in the morning in Kyiv to the sound of explosions. At first, I could not believe what was happening. I kept hoping it was a mistake, but within minutes it became clear that Russia had launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The next day, my son and I left Kyiv and went to stay with relatives outside the city. We hoped it would only be for a few days until things became safer. Instead, every day brought louder explosions and more fear. From where we were staying, we could see smoke rising in the distance from the areas of Vyshhorod and Bucha. The closer the fighting came, the more frightened we became. It was heartbreaking to realize that our home was no longer safe. Soon, friends offered to take my son and me to Poland with them. There was very little room in the car because it was already filled with the driver's belongings. We were told we could only bring what would fit into **two backpacks**.

Into one backpack, I packed a few changes of clothes and our most important documents. Into the other, I placed my laptop, my son's tablet, chargers, and a few of his schoolbooks. Everything else—our home, our memories, our favorite belongings, and the life we had built—was left behind.

The drive to the Polish border lasted **three long days**. We spent hours in traffic, slept very little, and constantly listened to news about the war. On the night of **March 6**, we finally crossed into Poland. Although we were finally safe, our hearts remained in Ukraine with our families and friends.

We stayed in Poland for about three weeks before traveling to Romania, where we finally reunited with my husband. He had also left Ukraine carrying only one backpack. He brought with him our spring clothes and a few other essential belongings that he was able to take from home.

On **April 6, 2022**, another chapter of our journey began as we traveled to the United States. Our route was long and exhausting: **Bucharest – Madrid – Bogotá – Cancún**. Finally, from Mexico, we crossed the U.S. border with proper papers. We traveled with only our backpacks and many uncertainties. Every airport, every checkpoint, and every border crossing filled us with anxiety. We did not know what questions would be asked or what would happen next. We simply hoped that somewhere ahead there would finally be safety.

On **April 11, 2022**, we entered the United States. For the first time in many weeks, I felt that my son could sleep in safety. That feeling is impossible to describe. It was more than relief—it was hope. Starting over in a new country was not easy. Now we need to learn a new language, adapt to a different culture, build new friendships, and create a new life from almost nothing. There were many challenges, but there were also countless people who welcomed us with kindness and compassion. Their support reminded us that even in the darkest moments, humanity still shines.

Today, more than four years later, we continue to build our lives in the United States. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to live in safety, to work, to study, and to plan for the future without fear. Although Ukraine will always be our home, the United States became the place where my family found peace and security when we needed it most. When I think back to those backpacks, I realize they carried much more than clothes and documents. They carried our hopes, our courage, and our determination to survive.

Central Pennsylvania Welcomes another Secondary Migrant Family from South Africa

“Before we knew it, our family was leaving South Africa with only faith. Our journey took us to Denver, where we struggled to begin rebuilding our lives, and today we are grateful to call Pennsylvania home. We have been welcomed with incredible kindness, found a wonderful community, and experienced blessings beyond what we imagined. From learning to drive in the U.S. to moving into our new home and receiving overwhelming support, every step has reminded us that new beginnings are possible. We are deeply thankful to everyone who has walked this journey with us and look forward to the future with hope, faith, and grateful hearts.”

This family consists of five members: Rhyno Pieterse (45), Colet Roos (32), and their three sons, twins aged 16, and a 13-year-old. The family arrived in the United States from South Africa on June 2, 2026. They were initially resettled in Denver, Colorado. After about three weeks, the family made the decision to relocate to South Central Pennsylvania after learning about other South African refugees receiving such strong support services provided by ISC. They were hopeful about finding employment opportunities and building a stable future in the area.

Shortly after arriving in Pennsylvania in early July, ISC helped them enroll in the Refugee GAPS Program. During the initial intake and assessment, the ISC case manager, Mr. Parwani, identified several immediate needs, including finding permanent housing, securing employment, enrolling the children in school, applying for available benefits, accessing healthcare services, and becoming familiar with available community resources.

As newly arrived refugees, the family was unfamiliar with many systems and processes in the United States. They did not have information about the required health screening process and needed guidance on how to complete this important step. The ISC case manager provided education, referrals, and ongoing support to help the family

understand available services and successfully complete required appointments, including their health screenings at Sadler Health Center.

The case manager worked closely with the family to create a plan focused on achieving self-sufficiency. The family received continuous guidance on available resources, assistance navigating applications, and support connecting with community services. The case manager followed up every other day to receive updates, address concerns, and ensure that progress was being made toward their goals. One of the family's greatest challenges was securing stable housing. The case manager assisted the family in searching for suitable housing and provided a personal reference letter to support their housing application process. Through this assistance and the generosity of an ISC volunteer from the South African community, the family was provided with temporary housing at no cost for two weeks while permanent housing arrangements were completed.

When the family moved into their permanent home, the house was completely furnished through the generosity of various donors. Mr. Parwani also organized a team of volunteers who spent an entire weekend moving the donated furniture into the home and ensuring everything was in place for the family. This generous community effort helped create a welcoming and comfortable environment, allowing the family to begin their new chapter with dignity and stability.

Employment was another important step toward independence. Through connections with local employers, Mr. Rhyno Pieterse was offered employment with JGM, an AISC-certified structural steel fabrication company in Lancaster County. Mrs. Colet is working toward finding employment opportunities that fit her skills and family needs. The children are successfully enrolled in school.

The family's journey reflects the importance of a strong support network and the positive outcomes that can be achieved when refugee families, case managers, volunteers, employers, and community partners work together. ISC's dedicated services helped transform the family's initial challenges into opportunities for stability, independence, and a successful future in South Central Pennsylvania.

Supreme Court Rules Haitian Temporary Protected Status (TPS) can be canceled by the Trump Administration

We know from the recent news that the Trump Administration has been given the go ahead to target up to 350,000 Haitians who have lived in the United States for years. The goal is to deport as many as possible by not renewing Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians. In the midst of this trauma to our Haitian neighbors, there are political debates seeking to control the narrative of how Haitian Americans fit or don't fit in the United States.

What is Temporary Protected Status (TPS)? Thursday, July 30, the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) sponsored a webinar focused on the canceling

of Haitian American's TPS. The panel specifically addressed the climate vulnerability aspects of TPS. Most Americans don't know that TPS laws specifically address human crises caused by either wars or climate disasters. Haiti was given TPS designation following the horrendous earthquake that cost thousands of lives in January 2010. What makes TPS so confusing is that it doesn't offer refuge to those actually caught in a natural catastrophe, it simply protects those who already live in the United States at the time of the disaster. TPS protects them from having to return to their homeland in unsurvivable circumstances. TPS is temporary because it only lasts for up to 18 months and needs constant renewal. TPS does not offer a path to citizenship. TPS laws require each Administration to determine whether those nations previously designated as disaster areas are now safe for refugees to return to their homeland. The Supreme Court and Trump Administration have declared that Haiti is now safe, so Haitian Americans here for years under TPS must return home to a good life. Is this true?!?

It's Not About Haiti. The Trump Administration has argued that Haitian immigrants are a dangerous threat to the United States. During the 2024 presidential campaign there were accusations that Haitian immigrants eat neighborhood cats and dogs. The MAGA movement created a sense that recent Administrations had opened the flood gates for Haitian immigrants in the past few years. The implication was that Haitians are dangerous, uncivilized, and threaten good law-abiding white people. With this narrative, the Administration targeted legal TPS holding Haitian Americans who have been stuck in limbo for years without a path to citizenship. In order to help advocate for and protect our Haitian American neighbors, we need our own narrative based in facts.

A More Factual Faithful Narrative. Haitians were the first slaves to throw off slavery in the western hemisphere. Haitians declared independence from France in 1804, creating their own nation. However, when France threatened an extended war, the young Haitian government negotiated with France for annual debt payments to maintain their independence. This debt payment to France lasted over 200 years and kept the nation from building a healthy economy and infrastructures. Thus, Haiti has suffered from ill preparedness for natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes. Today Haiti is considered one of the five most climate vulnerable countries in the world. Haitian Americans have been part of the United States economy, frequently serving in construction, for more than 100 years. Generations of Haitian Americans live in the United States. These are good neighbors who contribute to our communities.

Is Haiti now Safe to Return? The Supreme Court has supported the Trump Administration's declaring Haitian Americans no longer need to remain in the United States. The current situation is no longer ravaged by the 2010 earthquake. However, simultaneously the United States Army has declared Haiti a "war zone." The State Department warns United States citizens not to visit Haiti as it is not considered safe to travel there.

Is It Really about TPS Laws or RACISM?!? Many political pundits suggest it is not actually about Haiti's safety, nor about the Haitian Americans who have lived here for

generations. The MAGA movement and White Christian Nationalism uses Haitians as an easy “dog whistle” to blame the current anxieties in the United States on immigrants. Creating a sense of threat with “us” vs “them” polarization is a political ploy. MAGA wants us to believe that since Haitians come from a damaged and dangerous country, therefore they are dangerous people. **ISC continues to support our Haitian American neighbors.**

Celebrating ISC Staff Member Graduation

Do people come on staff at ISC simply out of the desire to help and bless others, or do they benefit themselves as well? A recent conversation overheard between a newly arrived South African refugee and ISC staff member.

South African: “I arrived a couple weeks ago in the United States. We were assigned to an agency in California. The first night, we were jet lagged with our children hungry and disoriented. The person from the agency put us in a hotel room. We asked about food, and were told, ‘You have feet. Go shopping!’” Then she continued, “But when we arrived here in Harrisburg and ISC welcomed us, we get food, help, counseling about how to meet the government requirements. It is night and day between that agency and yours.”

The ISC staff member responded, “All of us on staff here at ISC are refugees ourselves. We understand what you are going through because we have gone through it ourselves. We are here to help you.”

Our ISC staff are amazing in their compassion, often serving the needs of refugees above and beyond normal office hours. Yet working for a non-profit means lower paying positions often with less benefits. It is normal for staff eventually to desire better jobs in fields using their former education and expertise, where they can excel. Thus, ISC not only serves the refugee families needing help, but also serves its staff as a graduate classroom for improving skills, practicing English, understanding government agencies, and integrating into their local communities.

Recently, another ISC staff graduated from his ISC position into a better paying job with better benefits. Jamal, with his military experience in Afghanistan, was hired by a local Police force in July. We celebrated with another staff member who graduated from ISC into a job in a local community. His time with ISC not only benefited the refugee families he served but also helped him.

France Hoang - From Saigon to Service: One Refugee's Story of Gratitude and Giving Back

From fleeing Vietnam as a 1-year-old refugee to orchestrating Afghan evacuations four decades later, France Hoang's life embodies the American dream and the enduring spirit of service. In this powerful presentation, Hoang shared his extraordinary journey: arriving in America as a child refugee, attending West Point,

serving in a warzone, advising at the White House, and ultimately coming full circle to help evacuate Afghan allies during America's withdrawal. His story is not just a testament to personal perseverance, but a living example of how America's promise of opportunity can transform lives across generations.

Guests joined us at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library as Hoang explored powerful lessons about gratitude, duty, and the ripple effects of compassion. His journey stands as a living testament to President Ford's courageous leadership during Operation New Life, which welcomed over 130,000 Vietnamese refugees to America's shores at the end of the Viet Nam War in 1975.

Born to a South Vietnamese Army Officer father and a mother who worked for the U.S. Naval Attaché, France was among the last wave of evacuees from Saigon in April 1975. On April 23, just days before the city's fall to communist forces, he was airlifted to safety aboard a U.S. Air Force C-141 Starlifter. His family's journey to America took them through the U.S. Navy's resettlement facility on Guam and Marine Corps Camp Pendleton, before reaching U.S. Army Camp Murray, where his family was warmly welcomed by the citizens of Washington State and Governor Dan Evans. France and his family were sponsored by a local family, the Petersons, leading to their settlement in Tumwater, Washington.

From these beginnings as a refugee, France has built an extraordinary career of service and achievement. A graduate in the academic top 1% of his West Point class, he has served in every branch of the U.S. Government, including roles as Associate White House Counsel and Special Assistant to President George W. Bush. His military service includes combat deployment with U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Afghanistan and earlier service in the Former Yugoslavia.

France holds degrees from West Point, Washburn University, and Georgetown University Law Center, where he graduated magna cum laude. His diverse accomplishments include passing both Ranger School and the CPA Exam. He serves as a Distinguished Visiting Lecturer at West Point and as a Senior Fellow with the National Security Institute at George Mason University. He also serves on the boards of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and No One Left Behind.

His commitment to helping others flee persecution came full circle in 2021 when he served as Executive Chairman for Allied Airlift 21, which has facilitated the evacuation of over 2,000 Afghan Allies from Afghanistan. France helped organize the very first approved civilian charter flight out Afghanistan after US forces departed. France has testified before Congress on behalf of Afghan allies and regularly speaks on leadership, service, and the immigrant experience in America.

**Harrisburg Kipona Festival 2026: Labor Day Weekend
(Saturday, September 5 through Monday, 7, 2026)**

More than 100 years ago Native American peoples gathered on City Island for their annual PowWow. These traditional gatherings became known as Kipona. In more recent years, the City of Harrisburg has embraced and expanded this tradition of bringing people together to celebrate cultural diversity and community. Today, Kipona has grown into a vibrant multicultural festival, attracting visitors from throughout the region to enjoy delicious food, browse local vendors, and experience the traditional Native American PowWow and dancing. Food trucks line Front Street, while vendors showcase their unique products and crafts.

ISC is honored that the City of Harrisburg has invited us to host the Multicultural Tent this year. The city has asked us to create interactive displays and experiences that increase awareness and appreciation of the diverse cultures that enrich our community. In response, ISC staff are preparing engaging displays and activities that will give families an opportunity to learn more about refugee and immigrant cultures. Staff members will host individual cultural tables within the Multicultural Tent, representing Afghanistan, Cuba, Haiti, Vietnam, and Ukraine. Children will receive special “passports” and can travel from table to table, learning about different cultures and collecting stamps from each country along the way.

If you have not visited the Kipona celebration on Front Street and City Island in recent years, this is the perfect year to come! We invite you to stop by the ISC Multicultural Tent, show your support for our staff and volunteers, and learn more about the important work and mission of the International Service Center. Our Multicultural Tent will offer a special Asian Lion Dance performance at 1:00pm on Saturday, September 5, courtesy of the Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Central Pennsylvania.

Our ISC staff and volunteers are looking forward with great anticipation to welcoming you to our Multicultural Tent during Labor Day weekend, Saturday through Monday, September 5–7. We hope to see you there!

Kind Thoughts from One of our Unsung Heroes (*Mrs. Cindy Earp*)

I am very appreciative of the opportunities that I have had through ISC. So far, I have been providing transportation to some Afghani women home from HACC, to and from ELL classes in Camp Hill, and more recently providing a ride home from work for a lady from South Africa. I learned so much from Veroshka as I drove her home from work. The two ladies which I provided transportation to and from ELL classes were on an ongoing basis. This provided me with the opportunity to get to know each one and some of their children. These families are in my town. I ran into them at New Cumberland Borough Park when my husband and I were taking my dog for a walk. It was so nice to run into them and spend some time together. One of these ladies (Bibi) and some of her children were able to come to our house for lunch a couple of weeks ago. It was a pleasure and privilege to share a meal and spend some time together. Another ISC driver (Delores Reese) also joined us.

I am so grateful for the work that ISC is doing. It is so needed. I am glad for the opportunity to be of assistance and offer friendship to the folks that I have served.

Kudos to our Wonderful Good Samaritans for their Impactful Contributions.

The below report summarizes the volunteer activities of the Harrisburg/Mechanicsburg group of the ISC. Each volunteer who contributed in July 2026 is listed with the hours they spend aiding ISC clients.

The total combined number of hours of volunteer support was 95.5 hours.

David Castonguay - 4 hrs.

Drove Veroshka home from work - 7/6, 7/9

Drove Maryam Perwani to store - 7/23

Cindy Earp - 5 hrs.

Drove Bibi to and from store - 7/20

Picked up goods from ISC and drove Veroshka home from work - 7/24

Christine Filipovich - 12 hrs.

Drove Mahasiba Noori to and from appointment - 7/6

Facilitated communication and coordination related to client needs and volunteer activities - 7/1 - 7/31

Barbara Hamm - 15.5

Drove Veroshka home from work - 7/1, 7/23

Drove Maryam and family to and from appointment - 7/16

Delivered goods to Valentyna - 7/19

Drove Adiba Sadat to driving instructor - 7/28

Picked up goods for Roos family - 7/31

Communicated with and assisted Parwani, Anastasia, Valentyna, Veroshka, Samad, Elena, and Hayat about various needs - 7/1 - 7/31

John Katz - 1 hr.

Assisted Menrulla Bayani with car search - 7/18 - 7/29

Robert Little - 4 hrs.

Drove Veroshka to work - 7/15

Drove Bibi and her daughter to clinic - 7/21

Olivia Long - 2 hrs.

Logging volunteer hours and constructing monthly report - 8/4

Cheryl and Bruce Martin - 3 hrs.

Assisting Shahnaz Khetabi with ELL and at food pantry- 7/13, 7/20, 7/27

Scott Miller - 4 hrs.

Drove Veroshka home from work - 7/22, 7/29

William Port - 7 hrs.

Drove Leslie and Elena Pretorious to and from appointment - 7/15

Drove Veroshka home from work - 7/20

Susan Rimby - 10 hrs.

Driving lessons for Khaled Bayani, Mursal Bik, and Zainab - 7/1 - 7/31

Barbara Sunderlin - 20 hrs.

ISC's Refugee Support Services Outcomes

1) This July, our Refugee Support Services Team provided needed services to ORR-eligible refugees of various national origins, including:

A. Refugee Support Services (RSS)

The RSS Team served ORR-eligible refugees from multiple countries through case management, immigration assistance, and employment services.

- Case Management: Assisted 5 refugees (DR Congo, Libya, South Africa, Sudan) with medical care, public benefits, ESL, driver's licensing, employment, transportation, and housing.
- Immigration Services: Assisted 16 refugees (Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Sudan) with permanent residence, naturalization, and fee waiver applications.
- Employment Services: Assisted 3 Afghan refugees, resulting in 3 full-time job placements.

B. Ukrainian Refugee Support Services (URSS)

The URSS Team served 70 Ukrainian clients.

- 65 clients received case management addressing healthcare, housing, employment, education, immigration, public benefits, transportation, and small business development.
- 5 clients received immigration assistance with re-parole, TPS, work authorization, arrival records, and fee waivers.

C. Afghan GAPS Program (ASA)

The ASA Team served 35 at-risk refugees through comprehensive GAPS services.

Services included:

- Case management for all 35 clients covering immigration, healthcare, employment, education, transportation, housing, and benefits.
- Immigration assistance for 14 clients.
- Interpretation and communication support for 5 clients.
- Healthcare and public benefits coordination for 12 clients.
- Enrollment of 5 new PC-GAPS cases (13 individuals), including one Afghan SIV family and four South African secondary migrant cases.
- Employment, education, and self-sufficiency support for 10 clients.
- Housing, relocation, transportation, and material assistance for 9 clients.

D. Ukrainian Humanitarian Parole GAPS Program (UHP)

The UHP Team served 62 Ukrainian clients.

Services included:

- Cultural orientation (15 clients)
- Healthcare navigation (14)
- Immigration and legal assistance (13)
- Public benefits assistance (10)
- Interpretation/translation (4)
- Educational credential evaluation (2)
- Employment counseling (3)
- Emergency housing financial assistance (1)

E. Haitian GAPS Program (REA)

The REA Team served 19 refugees and asylees.

Key services included:

- Interpretation and communication support (12 clients)
- Enrollment of 9 new PC-GAPS clients (Haitian, Colombian, and Venezuelan)
- Immigration assistance (16 clients)
- SNAP/Medicaid applications (2 clients)
- Housing assistance (2 clients) and legal referral (1 client)
- Employment placements (2 clients)
- ESL and transportation referrals (2 clients)

F. Program of Initial Resettlement (PIR)

The PIR program served 8 South African refugees.

Services included:

- Initial resettlement and orientation (2 clients)
- Transportation assistance (4)
- Medical exam coordination (4)
- Social Security application assistance (2)
- Banking and public benefits assistance (2)
- Employment services (3)
- Housing assistance (5)
- Food deliveries (3)

2. Outreach, Networking, and Staff Development

ISC strengthened community partnerships and staff capacity through several activities:

- Hosted a free medical screening event with Penn State Health, serving more than 10 refugee and immigrant clients.
- Held an on-site hiring event with MJ Morgan, connecting Afghan and Haitian refugees with employment opportunities.
- Staff completed two Switchboard Case Management Fundamentals training sessions covering case management foundations and trauma-informed care.
- Staff attended the Practising Law Institute's Defending Immigration Removal Proceedings 2026 training to strengthen legal knowledge and client support.

Respectfully submitted,

Phuong N. Truong
Executive Director