



For immediate release: May 20, 2022

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Women for Afghan Women Open Virginia Community Center to Help Serve Influx of Afghan Refugees

Alexandria field office to provide direct support, training to new Afghan refugees

ALEXANDRIA, VA — On Thursday, May 19, Women for Afghan Women (WAW) hosted the grand opening for its new Virginia Community Center (VACC). The VACC is located in Alexandria, VA, and will provide free, culturally sensitive, and linguistically competent services for Afghan refugees. It is the organization's second field office and community center in the United States and fourth office around the globe.

The grand opening was attended by WAW board members, directors, program managers, and beneficiaries. WAW was joined by Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins, Councilman R. Kirk McPike, and allies such as Haris Tarin from Operation Allies Welcome.

“Our mission has always been to provide Afghan women and girls tools of empowerment both in Afghanistan and here in the United States (U.S.),” said **Naheed Samadi Bahram, U.S. Country Director of [Women for Afghan Women](#)**. “The opening of the VACC is another big step in the fulfillment of this aim. As we continue to expand our work in the U.S. in response to the events of last year and urgent needs of Afghan refugees, we hope with each passing day that our beneficiaries have more resources and services at their disposal.”

Over 80,000 Afghan refugees and evacuees have arrived in the U.S. since the Taliban take-over. This influx of Afghans seeking safety has led to a 300% increase in requests for WAW's services and programs here in the U.S.). Virginia has the second largest Afghan community in the U.S.—over 23,000 or 18% of the US total Afghan population.

“We want those who come through our doors to not just survive, but thrive,” said **Mariam Kakar, Virginia Program Manager**. “Our doors have been open for just a few days ahead of this grand opening, and the difference I've seen in attitudes is remarkable. It's amazing what these resources can do for someone's confidence. We're excited to see just how great an impact this community center will have after a couple weeks, months, and years on the lives of those who come through our doors.”

The VACC was established to provide vital services to newly arriving Afghans, in addition to supporting more established Afghan and other immigrant communities in the area. The services set to be provided by VACC include:

- Case management support to ensure Afghan and other immigrant families can meet their basic needs, including housing, job matching, healthcare, education, certifications/vocational training, transportation, accompaniment to appointments, interpretation/translation, and any other needs.
- Immigration legal services that the majority of newly arrived Afghan evacuees, refugees, and parolees need for adjustment of status, asylum, naturalization, among others.
- Mental health counseling to help Afghan refugees and evacuees better deal with their trauma; and, to develop positive coping skills, especially in light of the panic attacks, post-traumatic stress,



survivors' guilt, and depression that they often suffer.

- Adult empowerment classes such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and citizenship classes, and other life-skills and vocational training for Afghan and other immigrant women.
- After-school and youth leadership programs to help students in the community with high school and college preparedness, career development, and civic engagement.

“Women for Afghan Women is like a home away from home,” said **Jamshed Ahmadzai**, a WAW beneficiary at the VACC. “I feel secure and welcome when I visit the Virginia Community Center. The staff at the center make me feel hopeful for the future, especially at a time when I feel very lost as a new refugee.

More than 6,000 new Afghans have arrived in Virginia since 2021, with thousands more expected to arrive in 2022 and beyond, according to government officials in Virginia. WAW and its resettlement partners also expect more newly arrived Afghans to move to the greater DC area after their 90-day resettlement support period ends in order to be closer to families and an established Afghan community.

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About Women for Afghan Women

Women for Afghan Women (WAW) is a grassroots, civil society organization dedicated to advocating for women's rights, challenging the norms that underpin gender-based violence, and influencing harmful attitudes to bring about positive change.

WAW grew from a small network of volunteers established in early 2001 in New York to become the largest women's organization in Afghanistan before the Taliban took over the governance of Afghanistan in 2021. Today, WAW continues to expand its services to provide life-changing programs, women's empowerment education, and vocational training for its clients in the United States (U.S.) and continues to implement its humanitarian programs and work with non-governmental and other partners across Afghanistan.

The key to our enduring impact is that WAW always hires locally and uses:

- a bottom-up approach,
- local knowledge, and
- a deep understanding of and sensitivity to local culture, traditions, customs, and challenges.

Pragmatically, this approach and operational model has manifested into core programs and services that serve to meet the needs of **8,000+ beneficiaries every year**.