

Sukkat Shalom: The Migrant and Refugee Support Program of Temple Micah

Highlights of our 2023 Impact

The work of Sukkat Shalom with the national HIAS legal services program, with sponsored families in the DMV, and in other actions to build a “Shelter of Peace” for refugees and migrants continued throughout 2023. All of these efforts are made possible by the generous financial support of Temple Micah members and friends, and by a dedicated team of volunteers.



To participate in meeting these and other emerging needs, please contact sukkatshalom@templemicah.org.

For more information and support opportunities you may also visit templemicah.org/sukkatshalom.

Support for a HIAS Legal Fellow in its DC Office

The role of the HIAS legal fellows is to advocate for refugees and assist attorneys with their cases, allowing them to increase their capacity to work with clients. Legal fellows also coordinate the pro bono legal volunteers. The fellow position, first fully funded by Temple Micah, has proven so effective that HIAS quickly created a second position and moved to make the jobs permanent within the organization.

In 2023, Temple Micah continued our support of the fellowship, leveraging additional funds from HIAS. Our efforts enabled Beatriz, herself a native of Venezuela, to conduct many interviews and to interpret for and reassure clients as she helped draft the declarations required to document their desperate stories.

Over this past funding year, Beatriz has been instrumental in supporting the capacity of the HIAS DC legal team to:

- Serve 622 clients directly and another 722 through pro bono attorneys;
- Submit 274 filings for work permits, asylum approvals and status changes;
- Secure 210 outcomes, including 205 approvals; and,
- Assist special cases where women and children are fleeing abuse and face a future alone in a frightening world. They are compassionately supported as

they prepare to make statements about their past trauma and continuing jeopardy before the immigration courts.

HIAS anticipates a continuing need for services as those seeking a safe journey to this country and as policies and circumstances change. The value of legal representation has been proven again and again.

Direct Support for Refugee and Migrant Families

Sukkat Shalom continued its support throughout 2023 of the young Afghan family we began to help resettle in early 2022.

Dad Amir, mom Sharifa, son Mohammad (5) and daughter Hawa (3) made great strides in their new lives in the United States.

Key impacts include:

- **Permanent Resident Status.** After a full year of work, in April, supported by a Sukkat Shalom volunteer and their dedicated pro bono immigration attorney (from Micah member Josh Berman's law firm), the family continued to pursue permanent status. They traveled to Baltimore for their interview with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration (see photo). A few weeks later, their U.S. Green Cards arrived!
- **Housing and financial capability.** The family moved into a better (higher floor, no bugs) apartment in early 2023. Temple Micah cosigned their lease, but as the family built income and credit history, they transitioned to full responsibility for their housing costs. Micah volunteers counseled on how to budget, pay taxes and navigate government benefits.
- **Health Needs and Disability Assistance.** Mohammad has received ongoing treatment at Children's Hospital, requiring weekly visits and more. As the family coped with understanding and making choices about treatment and about Medicaid, the health advocate from Sukkat Shalom stepped up to assure they could access care. And after a year-long process of applications, interviews, and follow up, a dedicated team provided advice so they could obtain Social Security disability benefits for Mohammad. These are critical to the family going forward.
- **Educational priorities.** For Sharifa, English language tutoring continued with outstanding support from a trained Sukkat Shalom tutor. Another member



helped the family navigate continued enrollment for Mohammad in Montgomery County special education Pre-K and, for Hawa, in-home public preschool. The children are speaking much more English! And for Amir, Micah encouraged, facilitated, and supported his first advanced English writing class at Montgomery College.

- **Employment opportunities.** Micah volunteers worked with the coaches at nonprofit Career Catchers, enabled by Micah funds, to identify career goals consistent with Amir's needs and skills. His passion for and experience in the field of fitness training and a Sukkat member's connection resulted in Amir teaching classes at Rec-Mode Boxing and Fitness. Near the end of the year, Micah team members helped him gain a part time position at the Montgomery County Rec Department. You may soon find him at the front desk of a Rec Center near you!

Sukkat Shalom members also remained an important mentorship and friendship network for Amin, Maleka, and their three children, the family we first sponsored in 2017:

- **Education and Work.** Support from Micah mentors helped Maleka complete training at Montgomery College to be a medical assistant. Now, she has a full-time position as a medical assistant at a Johns Hopkins Medicine clinic. Amin remained at Bread Furst Bakery, where he has taken on greater responsibility and is beloved by his coworkers and customers. The children are thriving.
- **Citizenship goals.** All family members now qualify for U.S. citizenship. Several Sukkat Shalom members are helping the parents study to complete the test in 2024.

Those remaining in Afghanistan. Sukkat Shalom volunteers mobilized to assist family members left behind in Afghanistan after the US pulled out. Although the path forward is extremely difficult and uncertain, we secured pro bono counsel to assist 38 people in 7 different families who are trying to leave Afghanistan and come to the US. Because of extensive delays in our overwhelmed immigration system and the lack of a US embassy in Afghanistan, much less the limited ability of people to travel, successful resolution of their cases remains a long shot, but we've been able to provide hope as these people aspire to a better life.

Other Support for Migrants and Refugees

The crisis at the U.S./Mexico border created urgent needs in our local community throughout 2023 as politicians in border states bussed thousands of asylum seekers to the Washington area and the war in Ukraine continued along with the

exodus from other countries. Sukkat Shalom responded with several targeted initiatives:

Ayuda. Early in the year, we organized a collection of winter coats and boots in partnership with [Ayuda](#), a social service nonprofit assisting low-income immigrants across the greater Washington area. We partnered with Ayuda again in the summer months to organize a Micah-wide donation drive of menstrual supplies for migrant women and girls supported by that organization (see photo). Our efforts exceeded expectations!



Lutheran Social Services (LSS), our family resettlement partner, asked us to provide a tax workshop for refugees from Ukraine and their case managers. A Micah volunteer fluent in Spanish also assisted refugees to fill out asylum applications at an LSS workshop. Temple Micah donated grocery gift cards for new arrivals assisted by LSS.

Homes Not Borders. This DMV nonprofit, serving the housing and employment needs of new arrivals, helped us set up a completely furnished apartment for family friends of Amin and Maleka who arrived unexpectedly in the U.S. after winning a visa lottery.

Our Community Commitment and The Road Ahead

The Sukkat Shalom program of support for families, local partners and the HIAS national initiative is continuing in 2024, with funding and important volunteer action from the Micah community.

To learn more and participate in meeting these and other emerging needs, please contact sukkatshalom@templemicah.org.