

Our Newest Refugees

Early this year Homeland Security stopped the arrival of refugees into this country while they updated their screening process. Refugees are now arriving again. However they are mostly Iraqi men who were associated with the American presence in Iraq. Here are our latest arrivals who are now living in the front apartment of the Hospitality House.

Mohammed Al Rubaye earned a two-year degree from a technical institute in electrical engineering. He then got a job with Al Amad, an American sub-contractor who was working for the U.S. military. This was followed by a job with another sub-contractor, Proactive. In both jobs he installed internet dishes for the military. As the Americans began pulling out of Iraq, there was no future for Mohammed in his own country. So he did what many Iraqis who had been associated with the Americans have done. He became a refugee. He leaves behind in Iraq his parents and three sisters. He arrived in Bridgewater August 18 and is glad to be in America where he looks forward to getting a job and improving his English.

Adnan Abdalsalam arrived here on August 17. He comes from a well educated family and is the youngest of eight children. All his brothers and sisters are college graduates. Two of them, a brother and a sister, have master's degrees in engineering and another sister is a medical doctor. Just a few years ago Adnan was working on a degree at Dyalla University. He was in the College of Education and the department of English. But things were not going smoothly at the university. On two different years the university closed its doors without completing the semester as it was too dangerous to remain open because of the unrest taking place in Iraq.

Then last fall a crushing blow came. Adnan got a phone call reminding him that he had a brother who was working as an engineer in Dubai and the caller was asking Adnan to obtain money for him. This was followed a few days later by a threatening letter saying he was to immediately get money. Adnan says that he did not have access to any of his brother's money, and that even if he did he would not give it to such thugs. His only hope for a future was to leave his country. So last October he fled across the border into Turkey. Things were not good for refugees in Turkey. They could not go to school and they could not hold jobs. Their only chance was to emigrate to another country. He is happy that things worked out and he is now in America. He hopes to eventually get back in school and finish his college degree.

Jamal Dawood had known Adnan in Iraq and had independently fled to Turkey at about the same time as Adnan did. They rediscovered each other in Turkey and decided to live together there. Here in Virginia they found that they had both been assigned to the Harrisonburg Church World Service Refugee Office and again wished to room together. Our church refugee committee agreed to the request and on September 8 Jamal moved in with Adnan and Mohammed.

Five years ago Jamal ran a small grocery store in Iraq. But because his clientele included American soldiers as well as native Iraqis he began to get in trouble with vigilante groups in the area. At one time he fled to Syria. There was no future for him in Syria, so after about two months he returned to his store in Iraq. Then in October of 2010 he was given an ultimatum by a group of masked men; either close the store or pay them the equivalent of \$50,000. Jamal decided it was time for him to leave Iraq permanently. His uncle, a cousin and a young nephew had all been killed in the country's unrest. He left behind in Iraq his wife and a five year old son who are living with his parents. He wants to get a job and earn money to bring his wife and son to this country.

All three men are finishing up their orientation paperwork and are beginning to look for jobs.