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Gateways for Growth Seeking Support for Afghan Refugees in West Michigan

Kent County, Mich. (October 14, 2021) – The Kent County Gateways for Growth Welcome Plan Steering Committee is providing opportunities for residents, businesses, organizations and funders to support the hundreds of Afghan refugees who will be arriving in West Michigan. These opportunities will address their essential needs, such as housing, supportive services, mental health care, and volunteers to help them adjust to life in the United States.

The Gateways for Growth Welcome Plan Steering Committee - comprised of representatives from Kent County, City of Grand Rapids, Samaritas, West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce – worked with local partners to compile a list of prioritized needs and ways the broader community can contribute.

- **Housing** - The most immediate need is housing. An [Afghan Housing Resource](#) survey was created to capture housing resources people can offer, such as access to a rental property or extra rooms in their homes.
- **Financial Resources and Volunteers** – Local agencies need assistance to meet the social, emotional, educational, economic, and immediate service needs of the refugees. The initial list of agencies include [Bethany Christian Services](#), [Bhutanese Community of Michigan](#), [Noor’s Heaven of West Michigan Services](#), [The Refugee Education Center](#), [Samaritas](#), [Treetops Collective](#) and the [West Michigan Asian American Association](#).
- **Mental Health** - Mental health practitioners are invited to complete the [Mental Health Provider survey](#) to learn how they can support the wellness of New Americans, also known as immigrants and refugees.

“Creating a welcoming community takes all of us coming together in support of our neighbors, whether it’s our long-time residents or individuals who just arrived,” said representatives from the Kent County Gateways for Growth Welcome Plan Steering Committee. “We are encouraging our community to join together to ensure these families have the resources and support they need to resettle in West Michigan.”

Residents are encouraged to visit the Kent County Gateways for Growth [website](#) or follow its [Facebook page](#) to view the list of ways to support local Afghan refugees and to learn more about the Welcome Plan’s goals and objectives to foster a sense of belonging in Kent County.

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About Gateways for Growth Grand Rapids/Kent County

The Kent County Welcome Plan is the result of a national Gateways for Growth strategic planning award, helping local communities develop multi-sector plans to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for

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immigrants and refugees. Our planning process was led by a steering team with representatives from the City of Grand Rapids, The Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Kent County, and Samaritas, along with a task force of 36 organizations from across the community. Participatory in design and implementation, Welcome Plans reflect the voice of New Americans and provide a measurable framework for our community to work on. Not one entity is responsible for carrying out the entire plan, rather it requires all of us to find our place in the plan and collaborate to carry it out. Ultimately, as our region becomes even more welcoming it will become even more successful for us all.