

# MONTCLAIR SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT MOVES FORWARD

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So far one of them has a job at a popular local restaurant, but the clock is ticking for two Syrian immigrants who arrived in Montclair in June to find permanent housing.

Alsayed Abbas, 30, and Abd Al Rahman Ajlooni, 35, were brought to the United States under the auspices of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark and St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish in Montclair. They briefly stayed with parishioner Catherine Mulroe and her family in Montclair before moving to temporary quarters at a house owned by the Park United Methodist Church in Bloomfield, where they have been staying for free.

“We’re really moving along,” Mulroe said.

Now St. Teresa is stepping up efforts to find a dwelling, either a small or studio apartment, for Abbas. The bulletin for St. Teresa’s two churches, the Church of the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, this weekend will have a blurb soliciting a place for him to rent, Mulroe said. But St. Teresa is looking for help from anyone who has an apartment available.

“He does want to stay locally,” Mulroe said.

Abbas recently found work at Mishmish, a Mediterranean restaurant on Glenridge Avenue in Montclair, where he is busing tables and is sometimes a barista. Ajlooni’s future in New Jersey is less certain, as he is looking to move to outside Detroit, where he has a friend and he would be closer to his brother in Canada, according to Mulroe.

Both men are supposed to have found permanent housing within 90 days of their arrival in the states, which was June 21, according to Mulroe, something St. Teresa only just recently learned, Mulroe said. Abbas and Ajlooni have now been in America for just over half that period.

“We’re midway,” Mulroe said.

She isn’t sure if that 90-day rule is from the United Nations Refugee Agency, which has stringent standards and can spend years carefully vetting refugees, or from the federal government. Catholic Charities’ case manager for Abbas and Ajlooni, Wendy Marroquin, and Maria Biancheri, who is with Catholic Charities of Newark, didn’t respond to repeated requests for comment.

St. Teresa has raised roughly \$10,000 to pay for the refugees' expenses, such as rent and food, Mulroe said.

Earlier this month, on Aug. 2, St. Teresa held a meeting on what it described as Phase 2 of resettlement efforts for the next 12 months for Abbas and Ajlooni. About 25 people attended the gathering at Immaculate Conception, breaking into groups to deal with employment and financial planning, housing, education, and transportation and driving for the two men, according to Mulroe.

The Newark archdiocese's new leader, Cardinal Joseph Tobin, has made it a priority to assist refugees. Earlier this year the Church of the Immaculate Conception hosted a meeting at which Biancheri spoke about refugee resettlement. This led to the arrangements for Abbas and Ajlooni to come to Montclair.

As it turns out, Abbas and Ajlooni have different backgrounds and needs, presenting very different challenges in terms of their transition and acclimation and somewhat complicating their resettlement. Perhaps most importantly Ajlooni, whose wife and children remain in Syria, now wants to relocate out of New Jersey and go to Michigan, Mulroe said.

Abbas, who speaks English well, is getting help from St. Teresa parishioners in terms of looking at local colleges to attend, Mulroe said. He is taking English-as-a-second-language courses at Bloomfield College, and once he passes them he plans to enroll in school, according to Mulroe.

"He really wants to pursue an education," she said.

In Syria, Abbas was a coordinator at an advertising company, and also studied sociology at Damascus University. Ajlooni was a car mechanic and driver back home.

Abbas has passed his written driving test in New Jersey and a volunteer had paid to get him three professional driving lessons, Mulroe said.

Parishioners are helping Abbas by creating a mock budget for him for a year and helping him practice his interviewing skills, Mulroe said.