InterFaith Works of Central New York, through education, service and dialogue, affirms the dignity of each person and every faith community and works to create relationships and understanding among us.

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The Ikiande Family
Enhancing Education and English Skills

“Even if I don’t know much English, I keep my eye on what my daughter is doing and see that she always concentrates on her studies and completes her class work.” – Rachelle Ikiande

Rachelle views the gifts she and her daughter, Christiana, received through InterFaith Works’ Children’s Technology Fund as a godsend. From the Central African Republic, they arrived in Syracuse in June 2019. Before the coronavirus-related lockdown, Rachelle was enrolled in ESL classes and her daughter attended Lincoln Middle School.

“Once school and the ESL program closed, it was difficult for both of us because my daughter used my telephone to try to do schoolwork,” Rachelle said. “We did not have the required technology, and I was worried about her being left behind.”

After receiving a computer, Christiana was able to log into the Syracuse City School District’s website and resume her school’s activities. The family also received a TV, enabling Rachelle to view YouTube videos that help her build her English language skills in lieu of ESL classes.

The Al Hariri Family
Gift from Fund Eases Learning Obstacles

Ammar Al Hariri, having fled his home country of Syria in 2012, arrived in the United States with his wife, Fedaa, and their four young children – Mohammad, Yazan, Rana and Ritaj – in February 2019. Despite the challenges of resettlement, the Al Hariri family likes their new community because of the schools and Middle Eastern restaurants, as well as feeling safer and less crowded.

Since the coronavirus outbreak hardened its grip on their adopted home, the family has been affected in many ways. “Having to self-isolate reminds us of the hard times during the war when we were back in Syria and had to shelter at home,” Ammar said.

When schools shut down, the family was worried about how they would communicate with the children’s teachers at Webster Elementary School in Syracuse and continue developing their academic skills.

When they received a laptop computer through InterFaith Works’ Children’s Technology Fund, the family was able to communicate with teachers and access school materials.

Building a Bridge Across Digital Divide

COVID-19 has revealed many gaps among those of varying ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, including the technology gap among school-age children. With schools forced to close abruptly, educators quickly turned to remote learning as a means to continue the teaching normally conducted inside the classroom. Students without access to the internet, a computer or TV were unable to access assignments and needed coursework. As a result, students were falling further and further behind in their studies, and we feared they might never catch up.

While we know the need is far larger, InterFaith Works’ Center for New Americans immediately identified 46 refugee families without the necessary technology to permit the family’s children to access digital educational resources. To help these children, we put a plan in place to identify specifically what each family needed.

We were not only able to equip each of these 46 households, but through a grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation, we now contract with a technology coach and digital literacy coach that are helping each family learn how to use their new equipment.

When we asked the community for help to bridge this divide, many responded. If you would like to help us equip refugee families with the basic technology they need, we would be most grateful.

How to Give

Additional information about the Children’s Technology Fund and how you can support our efforts is available at https://tinyurl.com/yajnash5.