

'LIVES ARE IN DANGER'

EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO BRING FAMILIES FROM AFGHANISTAN TO CANADA

MELANIE HENNESSEY
mhennessey@metroland.com

"When was the last time you had a chance to save a life?"

This is the question Lois Fraser is asking everyone she can in order to help raise funds and ultimately sponsor nine Afghans currently in hiding from the Taliban.

The Georgetown woman is a member of the Georgetown Friends of Refugees Committee 3, or GFORCe3, with the first two iterations of the group successfully helping two Syrian families come to



Graham Paine/Metroland
Georgetown Friends of Refugees Committee 3 members (from left) Susan Tupling, Ken Thorn and Dennis McLay are looking to bring two Afghan families here.

Canada.

Now, the local non-profit is focused on assisting two related Afghan families whose lives are in danger as their journalism work covering the atrocities committed by the Tali-

ban has the faction hunting for them, forcing them to flee the country with only the clothes on their backs. They also previously wrote in support of education for girls and women in Afghanistan.

"Here we sit, in a position of safety and privilege, knowing that our Afghani families are in grave danger," said Fraser. "We want to help and we want to help now."

The federal government introduced a rule that sponsors must have 70 per cent of the funds needed to support the families in Canada for one year at the time an application is submitted — and 100 per cent of the money in place when the individuals arrive. So, GFORCe3 is urgently seeking donations to make the mission a reality.

The group had already raised \$17,000 and needs an additional \$67,000 before it can submit the applications. Afterwards, an additional \$37,000 will be required within six months.

The two families have been accepted under Canada's Operation Afghan Safety program, which was established to expedite the immigration of Afghans to Canada.

"They're on a fast track

compared to other immigrants because their lives are in danger," explained Fraser. "The clock is ticking on these families' application submissions, and also on their lives while they are in hiding."

GFORCe3 said it expects to have permission to bring the families to the local community within six months, instead of the usual 12- to 18-month waiting period.

The families' identities must remain anonymous for the time being to keep them safe where they're hiding. For now, the group is referring to them as the "Smith" and "Rogers" clans.

A news release from GFORCe3 indicates the Afghans are educated young adults "who have good em-

ployable skills, if we can only get them here."

The group will be planning fundraiser events in the coming months to support their sponsorship quest. At the moment, local residents can donate to the cause through the Community Unity Halton Hills page on Canada Helps at <https://bit.ly/37C5IES>, with all donations receiving a tax receipt.

Those with the means to make a large donation or provide a loan are asked to contact one of the following individuals to arrange an in-person local pickup: Susan Tupling at tupling@swdsl.com, Dennis McLay at dennismclay@sympatico.ca, Jean Leckie at j.leckie1@sympatico.ca or Lois Fraser at lfraser@fraserdirect.ca.

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