

News release

For immediate Release: Jan. 26, 2017

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Rutland Welcomes plans rally to support refugee families

RUTLAND – Rutland Welcomes, the grassroots organization created to welcome and support war refugees from the Middle East, will hold a vigil and peaceful demonstration Saturday to welcome two families who have arrived in Rutland – and demonstrate the values of equality, inclusiveness and sanctuary.

The event, Saturday, from 3 to 4 pm in Main Street Park in Rutland, is in response to the president's decisions that have essentially ended the Rutland refugee resettlement program.

“We intend to stand by our new neighbors and ensure they continue to receive a warm and loving welcome in the weeks and months ahead,” said Jennie Gartner, a Rutland City resident and Rutland Welcomes volunteer. “We are heartsick for the additional 91 refugees we had hoped to host this year, who now face a much more uncertain future, but remain committed to our nine new neighbors and their success. Our work on their behalf, and behalf of the greater community, will continue.”

Rutland Welcomes volunteer Hunter Berryhill said that despite frustration and even bitterness among refugee program supporters, it is important that they demonstrate love, peace and positivity for those families who have arrived.

“This is a time for support, love and compassion, not angry protests,” Berryhill said. “We cannot let our feelings about the president's actions overshadow our commitment and support for these two couples and their five children, who have overcome horrific circumstances and long odds to get here. They must continue to be our primary focus.”

Supporters are asked to demonstrate respect for all views and Vermonters, and stand in peaceful demonstration for refugees everywhere, and our new neighbors in particular.

“Many are angry, no doubt, but we believe that now we must focus on what's best for those who have arrived, and feel that anything other than respectful, positive support would be a failure on our part,” Berryhill said.

Gartner urged supporters to bring signs and banners with positive messages of a welcoming and loving community.

“For all its challenges, Rutland is a loving place for families. This is a day to stand up for those who have arrived and show we welcome them with open arms and compassion,” Gartner said. “We welcome all who want to join us to demonstrate the American values of inclusiveness, equality, and caring.”

Rutland Welcomes sprang up within hours of the announcement that Rutland would become a refugee host community. Hundreds of members have worked on everything from collecting furniture and household items to teaching English and serving as host families.

To learn more about Rutland Welcomes, visit www.rutlandwelcomes.org.