

## MOTIVATION



MEET PARTNER

### HOPE WILLIAMS

When refugees began arriving in the U.S. after the urgent August 2021 evacuation of Afghanistan, many wore flip-flops and lacked the warm clothes they'd need for the approaching cold-weather season. "This population left Afghanistan with a few bags, the clothes on their backs, and their most prized possessions," said Hope Williams, Human Resource Program Management Analyst at [U.S. Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#). "They arrived needing everything from life-saving critical health care to information on how to start their new lives."

USAID, an independent government agency that provides humanitarian assistance, worked alongside the Department of State, Department of Defense, and other U.S. federal agencies to help resettle millions of Afghans—50% of them children under the age of 18. This effort, [Operation Allies Welcome](#), provided refugees with a temporary home on a network of military bases serving as safe havens. "Our mission was to welcome our Afghan guests with a smile—and with dignity and humanity—to get them acclimated to the United States and able to build up their resilience," said Williams, who acted as a liaison to coordinate much-needed supplies. Ensuring that everyone had what they needed—from toiletries to educational materials to weather-appropriate attire—required thinking creatively and making connections with NGO partners that could provide various necessities.

One such partner was Operation Warm, which delivered more than 13,000 coats and pairs of shoes to Afghan children living on eight different military bases—including 756 pairs of shoes at Joint Base McGuire-Dix, where Williams and her task force were hard at work meeting the needs of a growing population. "Operation Warm arrived at an inflection point on our base in terms of the sheer volume of need," she explained. "We had a pocket of small children who needed shoes, and Operation Warm filled that gap for us."

The gift of brand-new shoes was a bright spot for kids as they adjusted to life on the base and looked ahead to an uncertain future. "[Getting new shoes] transformed the atmosphere and boosted morale for children and their mothers," Williams recalled. While recognizing that the refugees they served faced a long and difficult road ahead, she and the joint task force team lived by the motto "Better every day." Each resolved challenge and gesture of kindness, however small, brought incremental progress in helping families find their footing.

An important part of equipping residents for the future was helping kids build the cultural awareness and sense of belonging they need to thrive in their new home. To assist with that, Operation Warm provided books and educational supplies, which were used to stock rooms on the base where children could learn and play. "We needed to engage our young people with education and enrichment, and Operation Warm helped us do that," said Williams. "The supplies created safe spaces for kids to just be kids and take their minds away from some of the trauma they experienced—even if only for a moment."

