

My Story- Penny Arnold

AKRON -- She saw an evening news story about dozens of local immigrants in need -- family she had recently met -- and she just couldn't sit back and do nothing.

Dr. Penny Arnold, a professor at Ashland University, stepped forward to help two Karen families in Akron that were featured six months ago as part of a WKYC investigative series, "Forgotten Families."

Arnold, a great-grandmother and former sixth-grade teacher, paid the down payment on a duplex in North Akron and then turned over the deed to a Karen (cur-IN) family that makes the payments as the new owner. A second Karen family now rents the upper part of the home.

Arnold was already supporting the Karin refugees as part of a volunteer group from The Chapel, but she felt a stronger calling to do more after the families were evicted.

"It would be more beneficial if we as a family would adopt a family," she said. "And whatever we teach that family, they could teach others. As far as we're concerned, the Lord must have brought us to this family."

Arnold said she considers these refugees as her "new family" and is doing her part to help.

Henry Grey, a 23-year-old Burmese man who arrived in Akron about a year ago from a refugee camp in Thailand, was happy to receive special help from Arnold. Grey, his wife, Ahda, and their one-year-old daughter, Ellen, now hope to buy the duplex along Dayton Street.

In the original series, Channel 3's Eric Mansfield found hundreds of Karen refugees living in overcrowded apartments that included rats and low-light.

City housing inspectors hit the building's landlord with more than 20 violations and ordered immediate repairs, which are still on-going.

Dozens of the immigrants were eventually evicted, including the Grey family.

Penny doesn't consider herself an angel, but believes God's hand is leading her work and that of her Adult Bible Fellowship group from The Chapel as they help other Karen refugees in need.

"We're Christians," she said. "As believers, (the Karen) are here in Akron and they're fellow believers. Who is going to help if we don't step and teach them the American way? There's the bottom line."

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