



Dear judge:

For the Outstanding Community Service category, we are submitting our editor's work in successfully helping a family secure their safe escape from Afghanistan to Canada after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan.

Our editor, Kevin Weedmark, spent six weeks in Afghanistan in 2004 reporting for the Canadian International Development Agency. During that time, his driver and interpreter, Qasem Sidiqi, was his constant companion, and even saved his life on a number of occasions when Kevin was in dangerous situations.

Sidiqi became an engineer and helped build his country, and had no desire to leave. But when it became clear the country would fall to the Taliban, Qasem reached out to Kevin asking for his help, and Kevin began working day and night to get Qasem and his family—a wife and four children, including two 6-month old baby twins—out of the country. The newspaper submissions you are receiving today only tell part of the story. They don't tell the story of the many, many hours Kevin spent contacting every single government official who would listen and help, to the late night messages back and forth on Facebook Messenger as Kevin tried to co-ordinate between Qasem on the ground and the chiefs of staff to the federal ministers of Immigration and Foreign Affairs a safe way for Qasem and his family to get to waiting Canadian forces through rioting crowds, Taliban checkpoints and gunfire. The moments when Qasem was literally asking where he should go and what he should do can not be included in our submissions. They don't include the 1 am phone call from the chief of staff of the minister of immigration to Kevin as he called from Ottawa to try to help during a tense moment, as there were being shots fired in Kabul and a Canadian evacuation attempt had to be aborted. They don't include the hours Kevin spent writing to every media outlet that would pick up the story to try to keep the pressure on the government to help with the situation and to keep it in the spotlight. They don't include the many media interviews that he did with CBC, Global News and CJME and CKOM radio as people in our province followed the situation.

In the end, Qasem was cleared to come to Canada, but getting here involved a harrowing overland Islamabad, with his wife and four children following on that same journey afterwards.

This situation was so engrossing for Kevin, that he was often tied up with getting Qasem out during work hours, while I and the rest of the staff stepped in to help with the paper.

How is this community service you might ask? Not only were the lives of this family saved, of benefit to the wider community, but the local communities that we cover with our paper were engrossed in this story and we received many, many questions about the situation, how the family was doing, and how people could help. It shed a light on the situation in Afghanistan for our local readers and people around the province, and in the end, it brought six new Canadians to our country where they will have a better, safer, surer life.

You may think that this family would have made it safely to Canada without Kevin, but Qasem is one of the few who worked with Canada who made it safely out. We saw firsthand the inner working of the situation in Afghanistan and within our federal government, and getting to Canada was a monumental task. You will have no doubt read the stories about how many, many Afghans were simply left behind in Afghanistan with no way out, despite the promises of our government. Without Kevin's work, this family would have been one of those. Instead they are here today thanks to the hard work and determination of our editor to do the right thing and never, never stop pushing, no matter how insanely impossible it seemed to get this family out.

Something to note: Our submission includes some newspaper pages from 2022 so that you can see the followup after the family safely came to Canada. I am also including a page of links to some of the media coverage of this issue.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Kara Kinna
Associate Publisher

Links to Media Coverage

https://www.world-spectator.com/news_story.php?id=4067

https://www.world-spectator.com/news_story.php?id=3964

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/afghanistan-weedmark-moosimin-kabul-sidiqi-1.6291488>

<https://www.ckom.com/2021/08/22/saskatchewan-journalist-trying-to-help-afghan-interpreter-friend-out-of-the-country/>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=541752840362739>

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1985376835871>

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2001459267942>