

## COMPASSION STORIES

# Celebrating Ramadan in Brattleboro

## The experience of a high school exchange student from Pakistan

By LAIBA EAGER

Until this year, I'd never spent even a month away from my mother. Now I had flown across the seven seas to an adventure I could never have imagined.

It would have been sufficient to experience a new family, a new school, and new friends. But I never imagined that I would have an experience of Ramadan here in Brattleboro that would be so memorable.

Ramadan is a month of blessings for Muslims and a time during which we try as best we can to help those in need. In that spirit, a friend and I decided that we wanted to reach out and help prepare a special meal on the first night of Ramadan, an Iftar meal, particularly for the refugees from Afghanistan who have settled here in the Brattleboro area.

One thing quickly led to another: interactions with interested teenagers from Putney, meetings at The Works ... and it happened!

I have to admit that when Ramadan actually began, I found myself with mixed feelings. It was my first suhoor — the meal eaten before dawn and before the fast — without my family. With the help of technology, however, I made some short clips of the food I was cooking and



**Afghan refugee families and other community members gather at the St. Michael's Catholic School cafeteria in Brattleboro to break the fast on the first day of Ramadan on March 23.**

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sent them to my mother — and now we were connected again. Then off to school to share the blessings of Ramadan with teachers and friends and to wish them all “Happy Ramadan.”

After school, I was picked up by the woman who had taken responsibility for the event. It was held at St. Michael's Catholic School. I jumped right in, helping set up the tables, welcoming the guests and bringing out the food from Bridget's Kitchen for the Iftar meal.

Once again, there was a moment of melancholy — an Iftar meal without my family. And yet there I was, surrounded by friends, hearing the Adhan, the call to prayer, by one of our new Afghan neighbors, the heavenly taste of the first date I

put in my mouth.

It all brought me home.

Before we knew it, the event was over, and it was time to clean up. That was also fun. We put the chairs and tables back, returned the food to the kitchen and then used trash bags to clear up the area. After everyone left, I stayed behind with a group of new friends and we dried dishes together.

I smile now when I think about the effort made by so many, and the genuine expressions of appreciation offered by those partaking. It was Ramadan at its very best. I returned with a full stomach and a big smile to share the experience with my wonderful second family. Who could have imagined?