

Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan  
Refugee Resettlement Department

**Refugee 101--A Basic Summary**

Refugee resettlement is a humanitarian partnership between the United States of America and the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LSS) has been active in refugee resettlement since 1974 when the State of Wisconsin opened its doors in welcome to those fleeing violence, terror, torture, and war. Refugee resettlement is a complex process. But the goals of refugees arriving in Wisconsin are clear: to live in safe and welcoming communities, achieve earliest self-sufficiency, become US citizens, and contribute to their new home.

Refugees are distinctly different from asylees and immigrants. The differences can be generalized into a 1-2-3 summary:

- Immigrants voluntarily leave their homeland and resettle in 1 other country.
- Asylees leave their homeland and request protection and safe haven in a 2<sup>nd</sup> country.
- Refugees are driven from their homeland while fleeing violence or war, seek safety in a 2<sup>nd</sup> country and are resettled in a 3<sup>rd</sup> country.

The journey to become a refugee is not easy. Each person must first get to a UNHCR field office and register their name and family members on a waiting list. Once their case comes up on the list, they must then tell the UNHCR interviewers a *compelling* story of threat, persecution, and violence. A refugee must undergo intensive review and sometimes multiple interviews to assure a truthful and consistent *compelling* story of permanent displacement from their homeland. Many are denied the refugee designation. Sometimes the UNHCR has hopes that the displaced population may be repatriated back to their homeland and do not designate a group eligible for refugee status. Many refugees spend years and sometimes decades in refugee camps waiting for the chance to resettle in a third country. For some younger refugees, the camps are the only homes they have known.

Out of the millions of people displaced in the world, only a tiny fraction will make it safely to the US in any given year. Of that fraction, LSS will welcome approximately 100 year in the Milwaukee; a decrease of 350 each year from a few years ago. Refugees are screened for health and security concerns several times before travel to the US is scheduled. Refugees may not travel if they are ill, have active communicable diseases, or appear sick. Refugees undergo rigorous Homeland Security screenings and are fully investigated and approved by the US Department of State.

Refugees arrive with the rights and responsibilities of residents in the US. Refugees arrive in the US with full permanent legal status, documented with an I-94 Visa. Refugees arrive fully authorized to work in the US—an important tool for self-sufficiency—and receive an Employment Authorization Card for documentation of that right. They are charged with the responsibilities of being law-abiding and tax-paying members of US society. They must “adjust their status” from refugee to Permanent Resident Alien (green card) after 1 year and are eligible to apply and test for citizenship 5 years after arrival.

Arriving in the US is just the first step of the next arduous journey of a refugee. Resettlement agencies and co-sponsors provide basic necessities and services the first 30-90 days after arrival and may receive additional information, referral, or support up to 5 years after arrival. Refugees are encouraged, directed and expected to grow “from toddler to adult within 6 months” after coming to the US. This means working to be as independent and self-sufficient as possible without depending on others to take care of them. Resettlement agencies assist the refugees by enrolling them in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, providing job development/search assistance to get a job, scheduling health screenings and immunizations to promote good health, and conducting cultural orientation classes to learn life in the US. All refugees arrive with the desire to live peacefully and contribute to their new country.

## Meaningful ways you can help refugees right now!

- **Be a Home Supply Group or Home Supply Donor.** We always need cleaning supplies, laundry detergent, bar soap, shampoo, lotion, new linens and towels, toothbrushes and toothpaste, diapers, and toilet paper. This is a meaningful group service activity for individuals, families, youth groups, confirmation and/or ministry groups, and social groups. Consider supporting purchases of ESL or citizenship workbooks. Donations can also be ordered through our Amazon Smile link and delivered directly to the office where refugees receive services.
- **Do a Congregational or Community Fundraiser.** Energize your compassion with a fun event that raises funds to strengthen the future in these uncertain times. Your donation would be used to maintain services and staff—see the results of your compassion with updates of stories and photos of your support in action in the field.
- **Special assistance is needed right now** to work with refugees in 2 programs that the government places high value on—focused employment and providing extra assistance so that the most vulnerable individuals get the help they need to get a good start in the US.
  - Matching Grant program: clients seeking jobs and needing a jumpstart with learning their communities and English. Donations could include work clothes, cash to be used to purchase needed work items or help with rent until employment, or that old car that is still serviceable.
  - ICM program: clients who are struggling with starting their new lives and would benefit from extra attention and support, such as clothing and footwear for growing kids, winter jackets, or other requested items as needed.
- **Put the power of prayer to work!** Daily kindness and prayer is powerful—and it works! Regularly include a prayer in worship services for this humanitarian effort and the importance it has for each of us. Add prayers for LSS Refugee Resettlement to a prayer group or to individual moments of prayer.
- **Do you have a special skill?** Skills such as graphic art, marketing, or communication is always needed to help with interesting brochures, learning materials, and one-page info sheets for refugee education as well as community outreach. Your skills could make handouts spark creativity and create interest and excitement.
- **Invite LSS Refugee Staff to a meeting or gathering.** Learn how LSS' Mission and activities improve the quality, safety, and future of refugees and many others in Wisconsin.
- **Donate cash in any amount to the Refugee Program** to be used for staff, program operations, and client emergency needs.

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