

Create Community, Inspire Hope: Refugee Co-Sponsorship

MCC Refugee Services program is adept at supporting Minnesota's newest neighbors but cannot provide social support and friendship in the same way as accompanying congregations who are uniquely gifted to provide hospitality. By partnering together, we can best help new refugee families. The experience is life-changing for everyone involved as churches are renewed and refugee families receive the resources they need to thrive. As one past volunteer stated, *"This experience affected our lives and spiritual journeys... how we view the world changed."*

One person can make a difference. You can engage your congregation in this life-saving ministry.



"[Church sponsorship] is an incredible thing to be a part of."

-- Christine Osgood, Bethel University

"It's an enriching kind of experience."

-- Gerry Graves, St. Luke Presbyterian Church

Ways to introduce co-sponsorship to your church:

- invite a Refugee Services staff person or refugee speaker to share at your church, adult forum, or committee meeting
- sponsor a donation drive for household and personal hygiene items for a family
- help set up a newly arriving family's apartment

To get started, contact Kathryn Berger at (612) 230-3219/612-247-9760 or kathryn.berger@mnchurches.org

Refugee Co-Sponsorship Model with the Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services

- 4-6 month commitment
- No financial obligation required
- Collaborative model with constant communication and support
- Recommended core committee size 6-10 individuals, assisted by other volunteers.

4-6 month commitment:

- The majority of co-sponsor tasks occur in the first couple months after the family's arrival
- Refugee Services practices a declining support model, meaning that support tapers gradually throughout the time period for an emphasis on early self-sufficiency
- Official co-sponsorship ends with a closing ceremony that transitions the relationship to mutual friendship, rather than a continued helping relationship

No financial obligation:

- All refugees receive a one-time transitional grant from the federal government and have the option to access public benefits for financial support
- Groups are not required to provide MCC with a specific amount of money to enter into co-sponsorship
- Refugee Services prefers that groups provide in-kind donations as well as their time and energy to assist the family
- Groups that would like to make a financial donation to the family may do so. MCC will advise on ways to do that and potential uses of monetary donations.

Collaborative model:

- Refugee Services is involved throughout the process—from pre-arrival planning to the closing ceremony and beyond as needed.
- Group meetings and weekly phone check-ins with the committee chair ensure on-going communication
- A carefully structured timeline of meetings and tasks is managed by a case manager and other Refugee Services staff and shared with co-sponsors

Team Organization:

The following are suggestions on how to organize into teams. Depending on the number of people on your core team, their interests, and the composition of the refugee family and specific resettlement challenges it faces, descriptions of these positions may vary.

Team Coordinator(s):

- serve as the primary contact with Refugee Services
- participate in weekly phone call check-ins with Refugee Services staff
- maintain group calendar
- take questions and concerns from the group and relay them to Refugee Services staff
- report donations and volunteer hours to Refugee Services



Transportation:

- maintain the list of drivers and arrange for transportation to and from appointments, communicate changes to committee coordinator
- create a photo sheet of volunteers and drivers for the family
- provide the family with a map of their neighborhood
- Arrange for volunteers to teach family members about the public transportation system in the Twin Cities, and provide maps, instruction about bus-riding etiquette, and exact change requirements. Take rides with the family to run errands, visit workplaces, or come to Refugee Services, in order to familiarize family members with important routes they will often take.



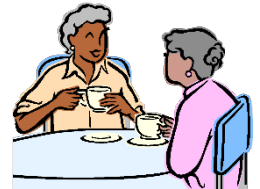
Housing and Resource:

- coordinate donations of apartment items prior to the family's arrival, help with apartment set up
- help ensure that the family has seasonally appropriate clothing
- assist the family to sign up for utilities, internet and phone service, if applicable
- reinforce information about paying rent, utility bills, making repair requests, etc.



Social Activities:

- coordinate airport arrival greeters
- arrange for volunteers to visit the family at their home
- arrange for occasional social outings such as introducing the family to the church congregation
- help orient the family to their new neighborhood: go on a tour, pointing out places to mail letters, do laundry, buy groceries (including culturally specific foods), take kids to a park, etc.



Education/Health:

- school enrollment
- ESL enrollment
- assistance with cultural orientation topics such as financial literacy, housing, education system, etc.
- follow-up medical appointments as scheduled
- WIC enrollment as needed