

Helping Refugees



How can we help Syrian Refugees? This question has been asked a number of times in the past several months and we hope to address this question here. According to immigration specialists at the United States Conference of Bishops, the Syrians that we have heard about in the news are arriving in the US.

Catholic Charities staff met recently with staff from USCRI – United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Albany Office and the volunteers from the Refugee Roundtable to discuss ways to engage the faith community in ministry with refugees. We discussed the various needs of immigrants and refugees from around the world who have recently been welcomed to the Albany area (nearly 400 in 2015) and possible paths for this involvement.

The group felt that some good basic education about “the terms” – refugee, immigrant, green card, asylum, etc. and what is involved in the process for someone being “accepted” into the United States would be very helpful. There are many very specific and immediate needs that perhaps members of a parish might wish to become involved with now.

How to get started

First, attend a volunteer orientation to learn much of the above information. It would be helpful to have one or two “coordinators” to be the conduit for information and opportunities from your parish or group. Second, invite USCRI to do an information/volunteer session at your parish.

Third, consider how much time and what kinds of things individuals and/or your parish might become involved with. Among the needs of recently arrived refugees are: mentoring, transportation, setting up housing, assisting with job search and being a kind presence.

The goal in all of these interactions is a relationship that leads to self-sufficiency.

For more information on how you can help, please see the volunteer and donor opportunities listed below.

Catholic Charities would like to be aware of the good work that you are doing and to assist you in this process so would be grateful if you would keep us informed. We will also know what other parishes are participating and connect you to share your experience.

Please contact either of the following:

Mary Olsen mary.olsen@rcda.org | 518-453-6650
Sr. Betsy Van Deusen betsy.vandeusen@rcda.org | 518-453-6650

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Volunteer

USCRI has more staff than ever, are relying extensively every day on volunteers, and yet there is still a need for more volunteers and interns to help with this increased number of arrivals immediately and in the coming months. Please consider the following:

- Apartment Set-up's - Would your family, church, temple, mosque or other organization like to help set up an apartment for a newly arriving refugee family?
- Shopping - Do you know someone who would enjoy shopping for household goods or groceries for new apartments?
- Driving to appointments - Would you or someone you know be willing to act as "patient navigators", driving refugees to doctors' appointments? -- USCRI is able to reimburse for mileage.
- Finishing Touches - Do you know someone who would enjoy visiting apartments after the furniture and household goods are set up and add finishing touches to make it into a "home" (such as: adding curtains, tablecloth and set the table, maybe a few color-coordinated knick knacks)? We could use a second Finishing Touches person who is more of a "handyman", focused on adding light fixtures when needed, doing minor aesthetic repairs, etc.



When these finishing touches have been done we've found it makes a big difference in families feeling the care and love that has gone into setting up these new homes and is in their surrounding new community. It makes a significant difference as to whether the family is able to more easily accept and acclimate to a new apartment that may not be as nice as they were used to in the past and in a neighborhood that doesn't look like they were expecting.

To volunteer to donate or to drive, contact:

Rida Faeed, rfaeed@uscri-albany.org or Jake Slutzky, jslutzky@uscri-albany.org

RISSE - Refugee and Immigrant Support Services at Emmaus - is also looking for volunteers. At RISSE, Volunteers work as teacher's assistants in leading small group learning activities, regular commitment preferred. English classes for adults run Monday through Friday, 12:00-6:00pm. Afterschool programs for immigrant and refugee youth run from 3:00-6:00pm.

**To volunteer with RISSE, fill out the volunteer application:
<http://risse-albany.webs.com/volunteerapplication.htm>**