



Welcoming the Stranger

Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services

OCTOBER 2009

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- MN accepts free case refugees for the first time in 10 years
- New donation guidelines for furniture
- Good news for refugee housing
- Information about Iraqi refugees

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REFUGEE SERVICES IN THE NEWS!

Read about resettlement changes in **MinnPost** at: <http://tinyurl.com/m8fnr>

Read about our volunteer, Nalani in the **Star Tribune** at: <http://tinyurl.com/yg3ygjw>

Welcome a Stranger, Inspire Hope

For the first time in nearly a decade, MN will welcome refugees without family or friends in MN. These "free case" refugees need extra support for tasks like finding an apartment, registering their children for school, going to the grocery store, and connecting to their new community. The Refugee Services program is adept at supporting new arrivals, but cannot provide social support and friendship in the same way as supportive 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. People who need your help are arriving every month. Call us to learn more about how you and your congregation can work with us in this hope inspiring ministry of hospitality. Please contact Kristin Zoellner at kristin.zoellner@mnychurches.org or 612-230-3219 and get started now.



Children from a sponsoring group meet a family at the airport.

Save the Date: Christian Community Fair

The 4th Annual Christian Community Fair will be held November 13th and 14th at the St. Paul River Center. With an estimated attendance of 10,000 people, this is a free event featuring 150 exhibitors, a dodge ball tournament, petting zoo, live music, and much more. The fair has generously donated an exhibitor's spot to MCC-Refugee Services, so please come to the fair and stop by our table! For more information, visit the fair's website at: <http://www.christianfair.com/>

Program Focus: Refugee Housing

The Refugee Supportive Housing Network (RSHN) program is unique to the Minnesota Council of Churches-Refugee Services and has received local and national recognition as a best practice because of the success of families enrolled in the program. The program provides intensive case

management and a partial rent subsidy to refugee families who are homeless or are in danger of becoming homeless. Shelters and other agencies refer clients to the program and case manager Said Mohamed helps eligible families to secure housing while helping them achieve long-term goals. The

program is based on the idea that by achieving stable housing, families are able to work towards economic self-sufficiency and maintain their housing after the subsidy period ends. In 2008, 83% of RSHN families increased their income by an average 63% in their first 6 months of enrollment. This October

Continued next page

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If you have any of these items to donate, please contact Liz Leicht at 612.230.3221 or liz.leicht@mncurches.org for details.

CROP Walk
2009



Refugee Housing, continued

marks the start of a new contract for this program, which will now be funded with federal stimulus money. This funding will enable Refugee Services to serve a total of 137 households over the next three years.

Refugees face a number of barriers to finding housing including no credit history, limited rental

history, and minimum income requirements. The Minnesota Council of Churches-Refugee Services has formed an exciting partnership with a well-respected property management company that owns more than 2,000 units in the Twin Cities. They recognize that refugee families make great tenants,

and that they have already passed stringent criminal background checks and work closely with a case manager for their first months after arrival. This partnership has started to break down some of the barriers that face both new arrivals and clients in the RSHN program.

Furniture Needed for Refugee Families

Minnesota Council of Churches-Refugee Services once again has space to accept furniture donations! All furniture must be practical and able to be immediately used by any refugee in any apartment.

High demand items are marked in bold below.

We Can Accept:

- **Mattresses/ Box spring Sets**
- **Bed frame Set**
- **Sofas**
- Recliners
- **Dining room tables**
- **Dining room chairs**
- Lamps
- Coffee Tables
- End Tables
- Set of drawers
- Other (call before bringing them over)

We Cannot Accept:

- Anything ripped or torn, soiled, dirty or smelly
- Incomplete sets (i.e. lamp without shade, couch without cushions, etc)
- Anything that belongs outdoors (lawn furniture, gardening supplies, mowers, etc.)
- Anything that requires special expertise to use (unicycle, leafse-making supplies, etc.)
- Appliances (TVs,

microwaves, dehydrators, toasters, etc.), unless specifically requested.

- Waterbeds
- Computers, unless specifically requested
- Box springs without mattresses (there may be cases where we accept mattresses without box springs)
- King-sized beds
- Tupperware without lids
- Head/footboards

CROP Walk 2009

Once again, Refugee Services partnered with the Minneapolis Church World Service CROP Walk. Through this partnership Refugee Services will receive a percentage of the funds raised at the

Minneapolis Metro CROP Walk. Staff from the Minnesota Council of Churches participated in the walk and presented information about our work to other walkers.

According to early

estimates, this year's walk had 98 walkers and raised almost \$11,500 dollars!

Thank you to everyone who joined us on walk day, supported our team, and to Church World Service for continuing this partnership!

Learn about refugees: Spotlight on Iraq

Iraqi Greeting

[is-salaamu 'aleekum]
'Peace be upon you.'

السلام عليكم.

Did you know that there are 4.7 million Iraqis living outside of their

homes? About 2 million refugees have fled their country, and the other 2.7 million are internally displaced. The U.S. resettles Iraqi refugees who have family here, were victims of violence, are in women-headed households where the men were killed or kidnapped, those who fear reprisal for assisting U.S. forces, and are afraid to return to Iraq because of

religious or political persecution.

In fiscal year 2009, the United States plans to admit up to 17,000 Iraqi refugees and Minnesota will help to resettle approximately 100 of those refugees. The Minnesota Council of Churches-Refugee Services has already resettled several Iraqi families.

As with other refugee groups, priorities for many Iraqi refugees include learning English and finding jobs, but for some Iraqis, these goals present unique challenges. Many Iraqi refugees already speak some English, but have difficulty finding ELL classes that cater to students with relatively high English levels. Many Iraqi refugees are also highly educated and held professional positions in Iraq,

but have difficulty entering their professions in the US because of strict recertification requirements. They must work lower level jobs to become self-sufficient while working toward recertification.

More information is available in the Cultural Orientation Resource Center's Iraqi Backgroundler at <http://www.cal.org/co/pdffiles/iraqis.pdf>. Minnesota also has an Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project, which promotes reconciliation between American and Iraqi people in response to the devastation affecting Iraqi families, society, and culture. More information can be found at <http://reconciliationproject.org/>.

Client Story: Faegan (name has been changed)

Every year, the United States offers a limited number of diversity visas to citizens of countries with low admission rates to the US through a lottery system. Many refugee and immigrant families "play the lottery" for 7 or 8 years before winning a visa. Some families trying to come to the US as refugees also try the lottery to improve their chances of coming to the US more quickly. Faegan and his family were lucky because they won a diversity visa in only their second year of playing the lottery. When they came to the US they flew first into Washington D.C and then proceeded to Minneapolis. Faegan joined a friend that he had known through high school and college, and who had been in the US for 6 years. When Faegan arrived in Minneapolis with his wife and two sons, his friend picked them up and let them stay with him for 5 days. Faegan's family was living in a two bedroom apartment with his

friend's family and space was very tight. Faegan's friend brought his family to Mary's Place Shelter where he and his family could live until they were able to find their own housing and jobs.

Faegan was referred to the Refugee Supportive Housing Network (RSHN) program by his advocate at Mary's Place. By that point, he had already secured one job at the airport and was working to secure another to supplement his income. While this was a great start, his family still needed a permanent place to live. Said Mohamed, RSHN case manager, worked with Faegan to find and secure housing, and to make sure they had furniture, blankets, and kitchen supplies for their new home. Faegan's wife is expecting another baby in November and was concerned about washing and drying clothes, so VISTA volunteer Liz Leicht searched Craigslist for a free washer and dryer. After

replying to a post, she discovered that the washer and dryer were not compatible with Faegan's new house. In response, the individuals posting the washer and dryer set offered to buy a used set specifically for Faegan and his family. Both Liz and Faegan's family were very grateful for this unexpected generosity. Faegan and his family were very excited to finally move into a house of their own this fall!



The washer and dryer set is delivered to Faegan's new home.



Visit our Website! www.mnchurches.org

Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services

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Minnesota Council of Churches
manifests the unity of the body of Christ and builds the common good in the world in partnership with 24 member Protestant, Historic Black, and Orthodox judicatories representing more than 2000 congregations and their one million members.

Refugee Services Our Mission Statement:

Refugee Services is an ecumenical ministry welcoming persecuted people from around the world into new lives of freedom, hope, and opportunity in Minnesota.

Our Vision:

Refugees are abundantly supported as they move from addressing basic needs to achieving their dreams. *And* faith communities are transformed by partnering in this ministry of hospitality.

Recipe Corner

Kofta Mishmisheya: Iraqi meatballs in apricot sauce

This dish is said to have originated in Iraq, and first appeared in a 13th century Baghdad cookbook.

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3-4 T vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 lbs ground lamb or beef
- 1 tsp dried lime powder (available at Indian groceries)
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp allspice
- salt and pepper
- 3-4 T tomato paste
- 7 oz dried apricots, soaked in water for 1/2 hour (unsweetened)
For additional tartness, dried prunes can be added too.
- 3-4 T currants or raisins
- 1 lemon, juice of
- 1 tsp sugar (increase to desired

sweetness)
Basmati or Ambar rice (to serve)

Directions

1. In a large frying pan, fry the onion in oil until golden.
2. With your hands, work the meat into a paste with the dried lime, cloves, allspice, salt, and



- pepper, and roll into walnut-sized balls.
3. Add them to the pan and

cook, turning them to brown all over.

4. Stir in the tomato paste, add the drained apricots and the currants or raisins, and cover with water.
5. Simmer about 25 minutes.
6. Crush the apricots a bit with a fork, add lemon juice and sugar and a little salt and pepper, and simmer for another 20 minutes.
7. Serve with a side of rice

Source: *The Book of Jewish Food* by Claudia Roden