



Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services

REFUGEE CO-SPONSORSHIP GUIDE



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Written and revised by the Refugee Services program of the
Minnesota Council of Churches – 2001, 2004, 2008, 2010

Material taken and adapted from the following:

- *Bosnian Refugee Committee* (Gethsemane Lutheran Church and Mizpah United Church of Christ)
- Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta
- *Manual for Refugee Co-sponsorship* (Immigration and Refugee Program, Church World Service)
- *Open Your Heart, Open Your Home* (Sue Veazie, Committee on Refugee Services)
- *Plenty Good Room* (Episcopal Migration Ministries)
- *Refugee Ministry Committee* (The Episcopal Parish of St. David)
- *Refugee Resettlement Manual* (National Ministries of the American Baptist Church)
- *Refugee Resettlement Manual* (Refugee and Immigration Ministries of the Disciples of Christ)
- *Refugees* (United Methodist Committee on Relief)
- *Role of Co-sponsor, Agency, and Community* (Richland-Wilkin Friends of Refugees)
- Co-sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees, Portland, OR
- *Volunteer Manual* (Refugee Services, LSS of North Dakota and the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota)

FAMILY INFORMATION

First Name	Last Name	Age	Gender	Language	Relationship

Arriving From: _____

Arrival Date: _____

Flight Information: _____

Address: _____

Other:

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Family's home phone number: _____

Family's cell phone number(s) _____

Staff Liaison: _____

Team leader home phone: _____

Team leader cell phone: _____

Case manager work: _____

Children's school: _____

Employment Counselor: Name: _____

Location: _____

Phone # _____

EMERGENCY NUMBERS:

Police: 911

Fire: 911

Ambulance: 911

First Call for Help: _____

Doctor: Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____

Children's Doctor: Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone # _____

Hospital/Urgent Care: Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone # _____

Medical Assistance Numbers:

Family Member: Number:

Introduction

Thank you for making the decision to be part of a co-sponsorship team! Co-sponsors make a tremendous difference in the lives of newly-arrived refugees and are themselves changed in the process.

We provide this guide to co-sponsors to share important information, guidelines, and ideas that may be useful to you. Please be aware that programs and contact information change frequently. We do our best to provide up to date information, but cannot guarantee information about program eligibility, class schedules or contact information.

This guide contains many possible activities but please check with your MCC Refugee Services staff liaison for complete information before helping your refugee family to access services or register for programs.

Thank you!

MCC Refugee Services

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A REFUGEE

Sometimes they leave home in the dead of night, taking only what they can carry, knowing that because of their politics, race, religion, or ethnic community they won't be safe tomorrow morning. Sometimes they live with packed suitcases for months or years, waiting for government permission to finally leave. In some places they leave in shock and despair, driven away by bombings, invasions, or wars. They leave for a place where there is hope for a safer, better life.

These are refugees. They are people without a home, without a country. Though they may seem like strangers at first, they are each special people with frustrations, hurts, longings, fears, and hopes. They are the strangers we take in as fellow children of God.

REASONS FOR FLEEING

Refugees flee many different kinds of circumstances and for many different reasons. There are those who flee revolutionary upheavals in their lands; those who were the privileged elite or simply part of old regimes overthrown; or perhaps people who cannot accept the new order or who believe that they may not even survive under the new one.

Others flee the repression undertaken to prevent revolutions. They are victims or intended victims of systematic violations of human rights or military counter-insurgency operations.

There are those who flee conditions under "stable" regimes, conditions which may include the inability of the governing system to assure its citizens even the minimum means of survival or conditions of intolerable restriction on individual liberties or the practice of religious faith.

Some are fleeing violent battles and warfare as their countries struggle for change. Other refugees flee civil wars or wars for succession among different ethnic groups within nations, or violent oppression against racial groups.

Indeed, refugees may have little in common with each other except for the fact that they are refugees.

TRAUMAS AND LOSSES

To leave is a decision that refugees do not make easily or voluntarily. Most of them leave behind virtually everything that is important to them – family, friends, homes, land, possessions, and livelihoods. While some have time to gather family

members and a few prized belongings, for others there is no time to prepare when the bombs start falling or the troops march in.

Indeed, in many societies, leaving is a traumatic decision far more serious than most people imagine. To leave means a loss of roots, lifestyle, livelihood, tradition, and culture. Taking the huge step of becoming a refugee signifies tremendous loss.

RISKS OF FLIGHT

The ordeal of flight presents another trauma for refugees. Many, in fact, do not survive the journey. If refugees do survive their escape, they are not always welcome where they seek refuge. Even if they are allowed to land or enter a country of “first asylum” (refuge), this cannot compensate for the countless losses they have suffered.

When refugees arrive in their country of refuge they are sent to wait in refugee camps. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supervises refugee camps around the world. Nevertheless, these camps are often bleak and lonely places.

For most refugees, there are few certainties about what lies ahead. Will they remain in the camps for months or years, as millions do? Or will they have the opportunity to resettle in a third country, where they will be able to rebuild their shattered lives and once again become productive members of society?

ARRIVAL

When refugees arrive in their country of resettlement they arrive exhausted – drained physically, mentally, and spiritually by their ordeals and losses. With the exception of refugees who are able to earn wages while they wait in camps, these newcomers arrive with virtually no material resources, and diminished reserves of energy to cope with new challenges and adjustments.

One study identified a number of crises people may face over the course of their lives - the death of a close family member, divorce or dissolution of a family, sudden termination of a job, loss of home, or transfer to a new and unfamiliar city or country. Any one of these crises could be related to severe emotional trauma. Refugees, for their part, frequently experience many of these crises simultaneously or in close succession.

NEW BEGINNINGS AND NEW DIFFICULTIES

Once refugees arrive in their country of resettlement, they face a process of adjustment as they learn how to live in a brand new environment. For many, this process involves renewed hope, but also new trauma and often new losses.

Refugees find themselves confronting major and generally unanticipated adjustments here in Minnesota. The reality is always different from the idealized images found in movies and television shows. The new culture may seem utterly alien. Gender roles to which refugees are accustomed and the details of family life are often quite different. Traditional religious practices and work histories seem to have little or no meaning here. Anyone who has traveled in another country without knowing its language knows the incredible feeling of isolation refugees feel when they are unable to communicate with their new neighbors.

HELPING REFUGEES FIND THEIR OWN STRENGTH

Refugees possess great inner strength and resiliency. They bring with them rich heritage and traditions, as well as the determination to maintain and share them with their hosts. Much of the culture of the United States has its roots in heritages carried here by immigrants and refugees.

Part of the challenge of resettlement is helping refugees to discover their own strength. For co-sponsors, this involves providing a caring context within which such a process can take place.

It is the refugee who reveals to us the defective society in which we live. He is a kind of mirror through whose suffering we can see the injustices, the oppression and maltreatment of the powerless by the powerful. – Refugee worker, Africa, 1980

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CO-SPONSOR



By serving refugees we become instruments of God's grace and love, showing refugees that the world is not a cold, merciless place but rather a world of warmth and compassion.

Helping to co-sponsor a refugee family requires the commitment of a caring and supportive community in which the family can begin their lives anew. In return, refugees enrich the lives of the co-sponsoring community in innumerable ways. Ultimately, the co-sponsorship process involves both giving to refugees and being open to receiving gifts of life and hope from them. Co-sponsors are enriched not only by their contribution to healing a broken world, but also by the friendships they make and their new understanding of the conditions that create refugees around the world.

Co-sponsors are advocates and friends to new arrivals, but their role is not an adoptive one. Co-sponsors' efforts serve to help a refugee family achieve self-sufficiency.

The work of the co-sponsor consists of three essential responsibilities:

THE EMPOWERMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Assisting the refugee with initial material needs and helping the refugee achieve economic self-sufficiency. The whole team can participate in many of these tasks (like collecting furniture or clothing), while other tasks are designed for individuals (like driving a refugee to a doctor's appointment).

THE FRIEND RESPONSIBILITY

Providing the crucial emotional support and guidance needed by the refugee to meet the challenges of overcoming great personal losses and making the adjustment to a new society. Respecting refugees and treating them as equals and responsible adults: offering ongoing orientation and appropriate assistance with adjustment issues and concerns; assisting refugees in maintaining and sharing essential elements of their own cultural heritage.

THE ADVOCATE RESPONSIBILITY

Ensuring just and decent treatment for the newcomer in this society and promoting respect for the cultural heritage and identity of the refugee. Making sure that refugees are not taken advantage of, discriminated against, or exploited in their workplaces or personal lives. Encouraging contact, communication, and friendships with other refugees and mutual support organizations, as well as with groups of different backgrounds in Minnesota.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TEAM LEADER

Responsibilities of the team leader:

The team leader serves as the primary contact to Refugee Services' staff liaison before and after the family arrives. In that role the Team leader:

- Participates in brief weekly phone check-ins with Refugee Services staff liaison and case manager
- Keeps track of questions and concerns from other group members to relay to MCC Refugee Services
- Keeps track of group activities and donations given to the refugee family
- Helps to coordinate group meetings, including the closing celebration

Benefits of being a team leader:

Leaders have the opportunity to communicate directly with Refugee Services staff and learn about the inner workings of refugee resettlement

Leaders get to form a relationship with the family that lasts for the entire co-sponsorship period

Leading a co-sponsorship team is a great leadership development opportunity and the group leader gets to know each of the team members better

PRE-ARRIVAL

Pre-arrival Meeting

Once an arrival notice for the family is received things begin to move very quickly. Refugee Services can have anywhere from two days to two months notice of an arrival. Typically we know a couple of weeks before the arrival. At the pre-arrival meeting the team gets together and plans everything that will happen in the first few weeks after the family's arrival. Working from a master schedule the team decides who will perform which tasks during that time.

Move-in plans are made, people are contacted about their donations, friends and family are recruited to help. Cultural orientation is provided and we will share what we know about the family. Most of the time that will be little more than names, ages, language ability, and some work and education history. If there are serious medical issues we may also know that.

You can also take pictures of all members of the team to give to the family. Coming to this new country is bewildering, and it helps to give the family a packet of photos of the volunteers that will be helping them settle.

- Create a master schedule for the first 2 – 3 weeks to insure the family members get to all their initial appointments
- Take pictures of team members to give to the family so they know who will be arriving to give them rides to appointments
- Schedule social visits for the first weekends after the family's arrival
- Schedule the follow-up team meetings and weekly check in times for the team leader.

PRE-ARRIVAL

Housing: Finding a place to live

Housing is, by far, one of the most difficult aspects of resettlement here in Minnesota. Refugee families, even those who can initially stay with their anchor relatives, will need to obtain suitable and affordable housing. MCC Refugee Services has developed relationships with several landlords in the area, so typically the housing is obtained through staff efforts. However there is a shortage of safe, affordable housing for newly arriving families. Co-sponsors are welcome to research possible housing options. There are several factors that Co-sponsors should consider when helping to search for housing.

Timing: Because an exact arrival date is difficult to predict and unexpected delays are common, co-sponsors should never make a solid commitment to a landlord, sign any papers, or pay any money. Co-sponsors should notify the staff liaison about possible housing and staff will negotiate and secure the housing.

Income and long-term affordability: Many landlords require that the family has an adequate source of income before renting. If family members are not yet employed, the landlord may agree to lease the apartment to the family if they are able to pay more than one month's rent in advance. MCC can negotiate with the landlord about that. The housing selected should be at a cost that the refugee family will be able to afford once the family achieves economic independence.

Location: The refugee family's new home should be located near their ethnic community, the public transportation system, shopping areas or a business district.



Size: Many landlords have policies regarding the number of children per family or per bedroom, while others do not allow children at all. Also remember that many landlords do not approve of allowing friends or relatives to move into an apartment.

Discrimination and receptivity: Some refugees have experienced harassment and discrimination in their new neighborhoods, while many have received warm welcomes and hospitality. Racial and economic discrimination are also critical issues that should not be taken lightly.

Tenants' rights and responsibilities: Be sure that the refugee family is informed of their rights as tenants, as well as their responsibilities under the terms of the rental agreement (i.e. family size, pets, maintenance, security deposits, monthly payments, utility payments, etc.). Make sure the refugee family knows how to contact their landlord and superintendent.

WHAT CO-SPONSORS CAN DO

- Research safe and affordable permanent housing. It is important that this housing be near public transportation, a grocery store, and ideally other businesses and even employment.

PRE-ARRIVAL

Housing: Apartment Set Up

The apartment needs to be ready for move-in before the family arrives. Co-sponsors solicit donations for the family using our Master Donations List as a template. In the weeks leading up to arrival the co-sponsors should contact friends, neighbors, relatives, church congregations, book clubs, co-workers, for donations. It sounds like a daunting task, but finding donated materials is often one of the easiest parts of the resettlement process. People who donate to the family will receive a tax deduction for their donation if they request a receipt.

The co-sponsorship group is also responsible to set up the apartment – clean it before move-in, move furniture and small items into the apartment, put dishes in the cupboards, towels on the racks, and sheets on the beds. We strive to furnish a home, not just an apartment. The move-in usually happens the weekend before the arrival.

The day before arrival a volunteer may to deliver culturally appropriate groceries to the apartment. The case manager will call the grocery store to order the food, the volunteer just needs to pick it up, deliver it to the apartment and put the groceries away.

The day of arrival a volunteer may be asked to pick up a hot meal and deliver it to the apartment. Again the case manager will order the food from the restaurant, and the volunteer is asked to pick it up and take it to the apartment. This should be done as close to arrival as possible so that the food is still warm and appetizing.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- Solicit donations for furnishings and household goods, including furniture, cleaning supplies, bedding, toiletries, kitchenware, and other items the family will need to set up a household.
- Arrange to collect donations and drop them off at the family's new home.
- Set up the apartment
- Pick up culturally appropriate groceries and take them to the apartment

- MCC has accounts at several local grocery stores. The proprietors know what kind of food and how much food to have for the family when they arrive
- The day of arrival pick up a hot meal at a culturally appropriate restaurant and deliver to the apartment

THE ARRIVAL

Co-sponsors and refugees often cite the moment of arrival as one of the most satisfying and exciting aspects of the resettlement process. Indeed, it is thrilling for co-sponsors to finally meet those on whose behalf they have been praying and working. And for refugees, it is exciting to finally arrive in their new country after what was often a dangerous escape and a long bureaucratic process. Together, refugees and co-sponsors are ready to embark on the next stage: building a new life in Minnesota.

The airport reception will be the refugee family's first impression of Minnesota – a memory that family members will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Co-sponsors should keep in mind, though, that most refugees will be arriving after a long journey from overseas. They will be excited and curious, but also likely physically and emotionally drained. Co-sponsors should try not to overwhelm the refugee family with too much information at the airport – the next few days will be full of extensive orientation. Because the family may not have eaten on the plane, co-sponsors should have a meal of culturally appropriate food ready for them.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- As many members of the co-sponsorship group as possible should go to the airport to greet the family.
- Meet Refugee Services staff at luggage Carousel #14.
- Optional: Bring welcome signs, balloons and small gifts for the children such as stuffed animals.
- Bring seasonally appropriate outer clothing. Almost all our families arrive from warm climates and will not have winter clothing.
- Bring a camera to take pictures of the family's arrival, and then make copies of the pictures for the family.
- Make sure that there are enough vehicles to transport the family and their luggage to their new home. Most families arrive with very little luggage, but some may have several suitcases.
- Bring car seats for the younger children. These should be kept at the family's apartment so that they can be used in the different volunteer's cars.

WEEK ONE

Intake Appointment: As soon after arrival as possible, usually the very next day, the family will come to the MCC offices to meet with their case manager and complete their intake process. This appointment takes about two hours and many of the processes are begun at this appointment, including form completion for public assistance and social security, and employment assessment. Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) recipients may also be enrolled at this time. The entire family will come to the appointment but it can be helpful for a volunteer to stay to help with small children.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Provide Transportation to the Intake Appointment
- Sit in on intake if possible
- Provide Childcare for the children during the appointment. Volunteers can entertain the children in the intake room on the lower level, but may want to bring age appropriate toys.
- Provide Transportation home

Social Security Cards: If possible the family should apply for social security cards during the first week. Many other benefits remain on hold until the social security card arrives so there needs to be no delay in making the application. All Social Security applications are processed through the Social Security offices at 1811 Chicago Ave S, Minneapolis, 55404. This appointment should not take longer than one hour, but wait times may vary.

The Case Manager will fill out the application at the intake appointment.

If the family is larger than four people case managers may be able to make an appointment to come to the office at 8:00 am, one hour before the office opens to the public.

Each family member needs to apply for social security. They each need to bring their IOM bag with their I-94 Card. Each family member should leave with a receipt in hand. The Social Security staff may want the family to leave with only

one receipt and promise the others will be sent. We encourage volunteers to try to get all the receipts as this has less potential for problems.

Please check the accuracy of all forms before you leave the office.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Pick up the family and give them a ride to Social Security
- Bring the IOM bag with the 1-94 documents
- Check accuracy of all forms and receipts
- Leave with a receipt for each member of the family.

Public Assistance: Refugees qualify for public benefits such as cash assistance, food assistance and medical care. The family should apply for public assistance as soon as they are able, within the first week. The type of assistance applied for depends on the type of benefits that the family is qualified for. The case manager will determine the program that the family will enroll in, and fill out the appropriate forms at the intake appointment.

- Families in Match Grant should apply for Medical Assistance and Food Support only. Cash assistance comes from the Federal Government and the checks will come from MCC. MCC will prepare a letter for the County verifying that the family is in Match Grant.
- Families with children who don't enroll in Match Grant will qualify for MFIP, the Minnesota Family Investment Program, which is the same program that residents of Minnesota qualify for. All benefits are processed through the county.
- Single people, childless couples and people over the age of 65 will qualify for Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA). All RCA benefits are applied for at the MCC offices by our Refugee Cash Assistance specialist during their initial intake appointment.

What to take to the County Office:

- I-94 cards for each member of the family
- EAD cards (work permits) for each adult (if they have arrived)

- Plane ticket stubs or Refugee Services Arrival form to prove the arrival date in Minnesota.
- Check Stub from the transitional grant from MCC or memo from the Case Manager regarding the transitional amount and usage.
- Proof of new U.S. Address and amount of rent.
- Social Security receipts for everyone.
- Proof of school enrollment for children, if completed.
- Letter from MCC regarding Match Grant, if applicable

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Take the family to the county office in their county of residency.
- Bring bottled water and snacks. This process can sometimes take several hours.
- Make sure the family has all the documents they need for their appointments.
- Accompany the family through the series of appointments. Advocate for the family with county staff. It is of course ideal for all the applications to be completed in one visit.
- Give the family a ride home.
- Report to the team leader on the progress of the application process.

COUNTY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE OFFICES

Hennepin County:

Century Plaza Building

330 South 12th St.
Minneapolis, MN 55404
Office of Multi-cultural affairs
Suite 3700

Walk-in, no appointments. Interpreters are provided by the onsite Office of Multicultural Services (Suite 3700). You may take the family directly to their suite for assistance if desired .

Ramsey County:

160 East Kellogg Blvd
Government Center East
St. Paul, MN 55101
651-266-4444

Anoka County

Anoka County Human Service Center (Blaine Human Service Center)

Families with children are served at this location

1201 89th Avenue NE, Suite 400
Blaine, MN
Family Intake - (763)717-7730

Anoka County Government Center (Government Center)

Adults without children are served at this location

2100 3rd Avenue
Anoka, MN 55303
Adult Intake - (763)422-7246

HOUSING: GETTING SETTLED

Each family comes with different backgrounds and different needs. Part of the co-sponsorship process is figuring out how to meet this particular family's needs. Some refugees come from small rural villages, while some lived in large cities. Some will be totally unfamiliar with "Western" home appliances while others have lived in a western style in their country of origin. Co-sponsors may need to remember to cover what might seem like elementary topics, like how to turn a light on and off, how to take out the trash, how to get the mail.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- Have a representative present when the family signs their lease. Explain any information about security deposits, family size, landlord obligations, etc.
- Make sure every member of the family's names are on the mailbox, at least until all documents are received from the county and social security.
- If necessary, teach them basics such as what goes in the toilet and what goes in the diaper pail, keeping the shower curtain inside the tub during showers to prevent spills, how to use a vacuum cleaner and when and how to change the bag, etc.
- If necessary teach basic home maintenance such as how to use a plunger and change a light bulb.
- Help arrange for phone service and the hook-up of various utilities, or transfer the utilities from the landlord's name to the tenant's name.
- Introduce the refugee family to their immediate neighbors and explain the co-sponsorship team's role in the resettlement process.
- Go over the landlord/tenant relationship with the family.
- Help the family organize rent and utility payments.
- Go over basic housing issues, including security/locks, maintenance requirements, appliances, garbage and recycling, sanitation, and the mailbox. Make sure the family knows who to contact if they have a maintenance request.

- Keep track of all receipts and copies of checks for any items purchased, rent paid, and utility deposits.
- 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.
- Provide ongoing orientation to home, community, and American life.

COMMUNITY: GETTING SETTLED

SHOPPING

The family will most likely arrive with very little clothing, so acquiring clothing is a task that must be done soon after arrival. This can be done with a combination of donations, free and used clothing stores and regular retail stores. Co-sponsors can help the families learn where to get the best deals, how to shop for sales, and how to recognize the relative value of things in a foreign economy.

The first trip to a grocery store can be overwhelming for many refugee families. Refugees may be coming from a culture where they shopped daily on an open-air market, where items were purchased and bargained for in small quantities. These markets differ greatly from American supermarkets, with their huge abundance of products and the ability to obtain goods in weekly or monthly supplies.

Co-sponsors can accompany refugees in trips to local grocery stores and shopping areas. Refugee families will need to become acquainted with American shopping habits, as well as with the many unfamiliar foods (and their prices) in Minnesota's grocery stores. Co-sponsors can also take their refugee family to a grocery store that sells culturally appropriate goods.

The "non-bargaining" nature of American stores should be explained to the family. Co-sponsors can explain the advantages of comparison shopping, shopping for bargains, and when to buy certain items in bulk.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- Encourage the family not to spend on things that can be donated, even if they have to be patient for a few weeks.
- After family arrives, figure out clothing sizes and seek out new or gently used clothing that is appropriate for the season. Several free or used clothing stores are listed in the resource guide.
- Find culturally appropriate grocery store, and help the family learn the public transportation to that store.
- Take the family to a nearby farmer's market

- Help the family learn to buy staples at low-cost grocery stores such as Aldi or Cub foods and buy culturally familiar foods at the neighborhood store
- Help the family learn when their money is deposited on the EBT card each month and how to track their balances.
- Work with the family to learn the relative value of merchandise.

HOUSING GETTING SETTLED

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Taking the refugee family on a tour of the local area is a wonderful activity, and co-sponsors can even take their family on a number of tours, each with a different emphasis. No matter how long someone has lived in an area, there are always new places to explore, so be creative!

For example, refugee parents don't always know where to go for inexpensive entertainment for their children. They may not know the location of the nearest park or playground, or the best way to get there. Co-sponsors can also introduce refugees to libraries, so that both refugee parents and children can find English language learning materials. Many refugee families also find a trip to a local lake to be a special treat.

Other places that can be included on a tour include the local post office, police station, fire station, and hospital. Second-hand stores and discount stores can be great destinations, as well as local farmers' markets. Co-sponsors should keep their eyes open for "freebies" so that refugees can be exposed to fun, inexpensive activities in their neighborhoods. Co-sponsors might also consider asking their refugee family what places they have heard about but haven't been able to find, and then explore these new places together.

Co-sponsors should bring a map on neighborhood tours and point out the places they will be visiting with the family. During the trip, ask family members to describe with the map how to get to the next location. Afterwards, look over the map again to find all the places you visited.

Use opportunities from the tour to help build English skills. Even if family members have a very low level of English, work on identifying simple vocabulary about important locations like the children's school, the police station, or the post office. Co-sponsors can also talk about concepts like "left" and "right."

Co-sponsors can help the refugee family members develop skills in the area of giving and asking for directions. One way to do this is to simply step outside and ask, "Where is the _____?" Alternatively, co-sponsors can ask refugees to locate important locations on a map. Co-sponsors can also help the family to work on reading and understanding addresses. The family members should practice writing and saying their own address so that they can fill out simple paperwork and answer the basic question, "Where do you live?"

It's important to realize that even if members of the refugee family have not yet learned English, helping them get acquainted to their neighborhood will still help them gain confidence and move towards self-sufficiency.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:



- Bring maps for the family. Show them where things are on the map
- Help the family members learn their address and phone number. Some co-sponsors have made cards for the family to carry until they have that memorized
- Show them the nearest emergency room and urgent care. Help them make a plan to get to those places in an emergency
- Help them learn the route to the MCC Refugee Services office. They will have multiple appointments there and may not always have a volunteer to help them.
- Introduce the family to the neighborhood – stores, library, parks, etc.
- Show the family how to use public transportation to get to places like the Como Zoo, the lakes or Minnehaha Falls.
- Take the family to sporting events. Soccer is very big overseas.
- Invite family to your family and neighborhood social functions.



FINANCES

There are three kinds of financial support programs for newly arrived refugees. The family will be assigned one of these programs in their first weeks in Minnesota. All of the programs require compliance on the part of the refugee – to be actively seeking employment and/or attending ELL Classes or other school. Documentation must be turned into the Employment counselor in order to remain eligible for benefits.

Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA): Single adults and married adults with no children are enrolled for Refugee Cash Assistance, Food Support, and Refugee Medical assistance. These benefits, which are federally funded, are available for the first eight months after a refugee arrives in the country. These benefits are provided to our clients through our office. RCA enrollees are required to come to the MCC offices monthly to pick up their check.

Match Grant is an early employment program. Primarily funded by the U.S. Government through our national affiliates, the goal of the program is to ensure that employable refugee enrollees achieve economic self-sufficiency through employment—without recourse to public assistance—within four months after their arrival. Families in Match Grant receive their cash assistance through MCC Refugee Services but receive food support and medical assistance through their county of residence.

Match Grant clients receive intensive early job search assistance, and there are economic incentives.

Volunteers can help by keeping good records of material donations and volunteer hours spent helping the family. These records are used to prove the matching in-kind donations for the program.

The Minnesota Family Investment Program, or MFIP, is the state's welfare program for low-income families with children. MFIP helps families move to work and focuses on helping families. It includes cash, food assistance and medical care. MFIP clients are assigned a MFIP Employment Counselor, but also can have a Refugee Employment Counselor. Co-sponsors can encourage refugees in the job search process.

Types of Support:

Food Support: formerly known as "Food Stamps," helps low income, low asset persons purchase food using an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. The benefit amount is based on income and certain expenses and the number of people in the household. The EBT Card is replenished each month on the same day of the month. The day varies by individual. Co-sponsors can help the refugee understand when more money will be added to their EBT card.

Cash Assistance: Refugees can receive cash each month in all the financial support programs. Eligibility and amount depends on a number of factors. All cash assistance programs require participation in Employment Services programs.

Medical Assistance: Medical Assistance (MA) is the largest of Minnesota's publicly funded health care programs. MFIP and Match Grant clients apply for MA through the county. Most families will receive all their health care through health plans. The remaining get care on a fee-for-service basis, under which providers bill the state directly for services provided.

Transitional Grant: Limited funding is provided through MCC Refugee Services to help with the family's initial needs. This funding is used to help stabilize the family's housing and fill other needs, depending on the family's size and situation. During the co-sponsorship, we will be able to share more detailed information about the family's support and the budgeting forms that we use as planning tools for families.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- Help the refugees understand the importance of keeping their eligibility for benefits by attending school, ESL class and looking for work
- Help the family make a budget for use of EBT card and cash for non-food items
- Help keep track of medical bills and help them understand the information which is sent from their insurance plan.

ACHIEVING SELF-SUFFICIENCY – DECLINING SUPPORT

While co-sponsors help provide many of a refugee family's needs during the period immediately following arrival, they must resist the temptation to continue with major support. The primary goal of co-sponsorship is to enable the refugee family to become self-sufficient as they adapt to their new life in Minnesota. It may be useful to think of gaining self-sufficiency as a process in which the co-sponsors' support decreases while the refugees' ability to take care of themselves increases.

The declining support model can be a valuable tool to help co-sponsors help plan for the self-sufficiency of the family they work with. It is helpful to discuss the short-term nature of co-sponsorship starting at the beginning of the process. The declining support model:

- Establishes a mutually understood timeframe for transferring responsibility for refugee support from the co-sponsors and Refugee Services to the refugee family.
- Builds hope, confidence, and a renewed sense of pride in refugees as they begin to assume total responsibility for their lives.

The key to the success of the declining support model is the agreement between the co-sponsorship team and the refugee family to abide by the plan as much as possible. The co-sponsorship team should explain the role of co-sponsors – facilitators during a transitional period – and the role of refugees – people becoming independent and self-sufficient.

Additionally, the team should discuss the goals of the refugee family. Do family members want to achieve employment right away? Do older teenagers hope to attend high school, or go into the job market? How does the family hope to honor their culture while working towards integration in the greater Minnesota community? Co-sponsors should discuss the family's overarching goals – whether financial or otherwise – to help come up with a plan for working towards each goal. Not every goal will be met in the family's first three months in Minnesota– that is, during the length of the co-sponsorship – but by helping the family plan steps to achieving their goals, co-sponsors will help ensure that the family is in a good position to continue working towards their goals even after the co-sponsorship is over.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- Stress the importance of remaining eligible for benefits, for instance by working with their employment counselor and attending ELL classes.
- Talk with family about Western attitudes about keeping appointments, being on time, attending classes.
- Keep accurate and complete records for Match Grant families.
- Provide basic instruction about budgeting, insurance, taxes, and Social Security. Explain how to use the banking system, including ATMs, checking accounts, and savings accounts.
- Help family members establish their own bank accounts.
- Discuss ways of conserving expensive utilities, like heat, gas, water, and electricity.
- Explain the cost of telephone calls, especially long-distance calls. If possible, consider providing some phone cards to the family to call overseas.
- Enroll the family in energy assistance and phone assistance programs. If these are seasonally appropriate when the family arrives, Refugee Services staff will provide guidance about how to submit these applications.

ENGLISH CLASS

During the first month after arrival, interpreters will be present for most appointments. However, both the co-sponsors and the refugee family must quickly learn not to fully depend on a translator. You can creatively use sign language, pantomime, and dictionaries to help with communication. However, some form of structured language training will be necessary as soon as possible.

According to the Refugee Act of 1980, a primary objective of resettlement is the financial and social self-sufficiency of refugees. Many co-sponsors thus wonder about the priority of language training versus the priority of employment. English language ability is vital to self-sufficiency and key to employment opportunities, yet employment is key to financial independence. Which should come first: language training or a job?

MCC Refugee Services generally feels that language instruction at the same time as employment is preferable. Many refugees have found that studying English after they have found a job can be a successful alternative.

LANGUAGE ISSUES

The ability to communicate in English is key for refugees hoping to achieve self-sufficiency. Speaking English helps refugees:

- Find and keep employment
- Cope with everyday living
- Develop friendships
- Verbalize their feelings during the adjustment process

Progress in learning English is usually slow, especially for adults. They may become frustrated, but co-sponsors should urge them to keep trying.

Co-sponsors should pay special attention to, and be patient with, refugee family members who remain at home and seem slow or resistant to learning English. Adults may feel a sense of alarm when younger members of their family learn English more quickly. They may feel that their closeness as a family is threatened, or that their culture will be forgotten by their children. Therefore, they may prefer that all family members speak their native language while at

home. Co-sponsors should not have inappropriate expectations about language used in family or home situations.

Emphasize speaking and listening skills first, rather than reading and writing. The emphasis on speaking and listening is particularly important for refugees who may not be literate and who come from cultures where an oral tradition prevails.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- To find an ESL class for the family call the Literacy Council Hotline at 1-800-222-1990 or on-line at www.theMLC.org/hotline.
- Call the various programs near the refugee family's home to find an appropriate class.
- Ask about levels of classes available and registration requirements. Most classes will want to administer a placement test for the refugee.
- Assist the refugee in registering for class, and perhaps help them get to the first session
- Assist them with finding transportation to the classes if necessary.
- Encourage them and help them practice their English.

CHILDREN'S' SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School age children need to be registered for school within ten days after arrival, and begin attending school within the first month. Although the children may not seem ready (for example, if they have not yet learned English), they still must be enrolled in school as soon as possible.

Many school districts in the Twin Cities have new arrival welcome centers to help register the children. The welcome center staff will let the family know what the community school for the child is, and what their options are. The volunteer can help the family make the decision on the right school for their children. If there is no welcome center in the area co-sponsors can research nearby schools and call the school for registration information. For this appointment, families should bring I-94 cards and any other documents or records of the child's educational background. Following the appointment at the placement center, the student will also usually need to register at the school they will attend. This is a brief registration process where they can sign up for the free lunch program (public assistance case number required) and learn about their bus route. Following this registration, co-sponsors can help the children purchase supplies and help them meet the bus on their first day of school.

When making the initial steps toward school enrollment, the following suggestions may be helpful:

Most refugee children, once in school, learn English remarkably quickly. However, refugee children have more than the language barrier to overcome. They also must deal with tremendous social and cultural differences. Because of the foreignness of their new surroundings, refugee children often enter their new schools with feelings of uncertainty, fright, or confusion. Although children are often quick to adapt, co-sponsors should still give them careful attention during their first few weeks to ensure that they are adjusting socially and emotionally.

Many refugee children will need special tutorial assistance during the first few months of school. Members of the co-sponsors' church or community may be willing to volunteer for this, and it can be combined with English instruction. The sensitivity of the tutor can provide an invaluable link between the refugee child and the new world he or she faces.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Make an appointment at the New Arrival Welcome Center or local school and accompany the parents and children to the appointment. (Check with your MCC staff liaison before making the appointment)
 - Be sure to ask if an interpreter will be available at the time of the appointment.
- Make sure the children have appropriate school supplies for their classes
- Make sure the children are signed up for free and reduced cost breakfast and lunch at the school
- Help the parents advocate for the children at the school
- Explain the Role of Parents. Some refugee parents may have questions or experience confusion regarding certain aspects of their children's schooling.
 - Parents are encouraged to visit their children's school to meet their teachers and discuss any problems the refugee children might be having. Open Houses or Parents' Days are good opportunities for this.
 - Parents are responsible for the attendance of their children. They must call the school to inform them if their child will be absent due to illness or another reason.
 - Parents should be encouraged to share any communication from the school with the co-sponsors, and to ask for clarification on any questions that may arise.
- Co-sponsors may need to explain the difference between public and private schools.
- Co-sponsors should explain the role of crossing guards and school buses in ensuring their children's safety.

Welcome Centers:

Minneapolis:

New Families Center
 English, Somali and Spanish Speaking Staff
 Wilder Complex (The entrance is at the corner of 34th St. and Chicago Ave.)
 3354 Chicago Ave. S.
 Minneapolis, MN 55407

Phone 612-668-3700

Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

St. Paul:

Student Placement Center

2102 University Ave W

St. Paul, MN 55114

Call for Appointment: 651-632-3701

Hours: Monday – Friday 8:15 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Be sure to ask what documents you will need to bring to the appointment.
Usually they will ask for the following:

Proof of the child's birth date (birth certificate, passport, I-94)

The child's immunization record

The child's Early Childhood Screening record

The record of your child's most recent physical exam

Transcripts/credit information if the child attended school in another country

Proof of address

If you do not have all of the necessary documents, please do not wait to make an appointment.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Head Start: Head Start is a federal program designed to prepare low income children for kindergarten. Early Head Start is available for pregnant women and families with children up to 3 years old. The Federal program is offered through grantees through the county of residence. Many newly arriving children can benefit from the Head Start Program.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- Check the Minnesota Head Start website at www.mnheadstart.org
- Help the family get their children enrolled in the appropriate Head Start program.
- Accompany the family to registration, first day of class, orientation, etc.
- Assist the family with securing transportation to the Head Start classes

ECFE: ECFE stands for Early Childhood Family Education. ECFE offers a variety of classes and resources for parents and children birth through kindergarten age.

Most ECFE classes meet once a week and include:

Parent-Child Activity Time where families explore a classroom filled with developmentally appropriate play and learning activities planned by a licensed early childhood teacher.

Parent Discussion Time where parents meet with a licensed parent educator to share support, experiences and information about child development and parenting techniques.

Children's Activity Time where children learn with the licensed early childhood teacher and paraprofessional and practice social skills as they interact with each other.

ECFE is administered by the school district.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

- Call the school district and inquire about ECFE classes.

- Ask about culturally appropriate classes
- Assist the family in registering for ECFE Classes
- Accompany the refugee to the first session
- Help the family assess transportation to subsequent classes by researching bus and train routes, or setting up car pool with those in the class.

EMPLOYMENT

Finding appropriate employment for the head(s) of the refugee household and any other employable members of the family is perhaps the most crucial element of a successful resettlement effort. Employment, after all, not only meets economic needs, but can also meet psychological and social needs as well. Successful employment can build skills, help refugees learn English, and be vital in building a refugee's sense of self-respect.

Some refugees will require a short period of adjustment before actively seeking employment, and may need to rest and become acclimated to life in Minnesota before starting to job hunt. However, others will be ready and willing to look for work as soon as possible.

The lack of English does not need to be a barrier to employment. Co-sponsors can help look for entry-level positions that can be explained visually rather than verbally. Later on, refugees may be able to pursue work that is more in line with their expectations or skills; the key is finding a first job.

Early employment has major benefits for refugees. The benefit of an income is obvious. Additionally, a job gives refugees daily exposure to English and can help speed the English-language learning process; tutoring or language classes can supplement this learning. A job provides a refugee with satisfaction that he or she is making a concrete contribution to his or her resettlement, and that he or she is on the road to self-sufficiency and independence. This helps refugees' self-respect, and assists in avoiding the "parent-child" dependency that can sometimes develop between refugees and their co-sponsors.

IMPORTANT EMPLOYMENT DOCUMENTS

I-94 card – This card is issued to refugees by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. Refugees should have this card with them when they arrive in Minnesota – it is the only evidence of their permission to legally enter the United States. The I-94 card gives refugees the right to work. Refugee Services will keep a copy of this important document for the family.

Social Security Card – All refugees, including infants, should apply for Social Security cards as soon as possible. Family members over age 14 need to apply in person, while children under 14 can be applied for by their parents or guardians who are in possession of the child's I-94 card. Social Security cards take at least 2 weeks to be processed.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD): Also known as a work permit, this is a photo ID that documents refugees’ right to work. A refugee’s work authorization does not expire. This document should be carefully guarded as it is very expensive to replace. Once the EAD arrives, MCC recommends that adults bring their EAD and social security cards to a local DMV office to purchase MN State ID cards which can be used to demonstrate employability and are much less expensive to replace than EADs.

What Co-sponsors Can Do

In conjunction with the Employment Counselor the co-sponsors can:

- Talk to family to learn about their skills, work experience, and job interests.
- Research job openings for employable family members. Ask other members of your community to let you know of any openings they find, and then forward these to the Employment Counselor.
- Help family members create or review their resumes and assist them with job applications.
- Offer to hold mock interviews.
- Take job seekers to purchase appropriate interview and work clothing.
- Help orient family members to the U.S. workplace. This conversation may include topics like sick leave, vacation, benefits, appropriate clothing, attendance, punctuality, safety, taxes, contracts, and “working one’s way up the ladder.”
- Communicate with case manager if a family member obtains a job; provide the location of employment, the date employment began, the name and phone number of the supervisor, the hours, wages, and benefits of the job, and the first pay stub.
- Co-sponsors can explain that employable family members can work towards better-paying jobs after securing entry-level jobs. Sometimes refugees feel “trapped” in a first job, particularly one that does not use the full range of talents and potential of the refugee, unless the co-sponsor helps explain the concept of “upward mobility.”



MCC ORIENTATION CLASSES

The Minnesota Council of Churches offers several workshops to help new arrivals become acquainted with life in the United States. Case Managers will let families know about the workshops, but co-sponsors can help in providing transportation to the workshops, provide childcare while the adults attend the workshop and encouraging refugees to take advantage of these offerings.

New Arrivals Resource and Empowerment Workshop (NAREW)

The NAREW (New Arrivals Resource and Empowerment Workshop) is a four day workshop from 9:00am – 12:00pm each day. Participants learn to ride the bus, receive a bus pass, and are expected to ride the bus independently to and from the class after the first day. Participants meet Police and Fire Officers and learn about personal and community safety and fire prevention. Class participants also meet outreach people from the Minneapolis public schools about school involvement and English-as-a-Second-Language instructors about enrolling in Adult Education. Finally, we cover some basic health and medical information including accessing primary care, emergency rooms, using prescription and over the counter drugs, etc.

What Co-sponsors can do:

- Provide transportation to the first day of the workshop
- Provide childcare, if necessary, so that adults can attend
- Practice riding the bus or light rail to locations such as ELL Class, nearby grocery stores, etc.

Financial Literacy

The three day financial literacy workshops teach how to manage finances in the US, make appropriate budgets, and the banking system. Includes information about:

- The monetary system in the US and how to make payments with checks
- How to open a banking account

- How to create and manage a household budget

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Encourage the refugees to attend the classes
- Assist with transportation. Families should be able to use the bus by this time, but it may help to have some assistance with transportation, or rides to a couple of the classes
- Assist with childcare if necessary
- Help the family open a bank account, if advised by the case manager
- Help refugees to write and record checks once the bank account is open
- Assist the family in financial record keeping

Renter Education Training

Description: A two-hour workshop about the process of renting apartments in the US. Families will learn:

- How to complete a rental application and read a lease
- How to prepare for the housing search, unit inspection, lease signing and lease termination
- Rights and responsibilities as an applicant for a rental unit

Offered on a regular basis with rotating language interpretation.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Encourage families to attend the classes
- Provide transportation and childcare if necessary
- Review tenant rights and responsibilities.
- Help family learn how to use laundry facilities, trash and recycling procedures, circuit breakers, storage areas, etc.
- Make sure the refugee has the contact information for the landlord, and the person to call for repairs to the apartment

- Introduce the family to neighbors in the building
- Review safety considerations of the building and the neighborhood. Review things such as not letting unknown people into the building, keeping apartment door locked, not opening the door to strangers.

Job Readiness I

Description: A three-day workshop about the culture and expectations in the US workplace and informs about the employment process. Families will learn the advantages of employment and job retention

- What is expected of potential employees
- How to begin the job search process
- How to complete a job application
- How to talk about their skills and experience as a refugee

Job Readiness II

Description: A more accelerated Job Readiness workshop for refugees and asylees who have already begun the job search and would like continued employment-related information. Special attention is given to practice interviewing with professional HR representatives who volunteer to be mock interviewers. The course will cover:

- How to prepare for an interview
- What documentation is required to work
- How to read a paycheck
- How to network
- How to market yourself to potential employers

TRANSPORTATION

The co-sponsorship team will play an important role in transporting family members to places like grocery stores, ELL classes, and job interviews. It is crucial to remember, though, that as in all other aspects of resettlement, the primary goal is self-sufficiency. Therefore, co-sponsors should focus on helping refugees learn how to use public transportation.



WHAT CO-SPONSORS CAN DO

- Provide rides to the initial appointments for the family
- Teach family members about the public transportation system in the Twin Cities.
- 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.
- Provide the family with maps of their community.
- If the family is interested, provide bicycles, helmets, and locks.

HEALTH CARE

GENERAL HEALTH

Refugees receive basic health attention overseas and most arrive in generally good physical health. Refugee Services will inform co-sponsors of any known major medical conditions before their refugee family arrives. Sometimes families arrive with medical conditions that were not reported on the pre-arrival form. In that case the case manager will direct the family to the emergency health care that is needed.

If there are no major medical concerns, the case manager will refer the family to the public health office in the county of residence. The full physical examination (Refugee Health Screening) is scheduled as soon as possible. There are many variables that determine the schedule, but ideally the first appointment will happen about one month after arrival. These appointments are scheduled by the Public Health office in their county of residence. Public Health will arrange for a taxi and interpreter for these appointments.

Once the initial health screenings are completed the family will need to find a primary care doctor. Each county has contracts with a variety of medical providers such as UCare, Health Partners or Blue Cross Blue Shield. The family can choose which health plan they want. Once they choose a health plan they can find a convenient clinic that takes that health plan.

Most refugees come from countries with health care philosophies and medical systems that differ greatly from those of the United States. Given the high cost of medical care here, refugees will benefit from learning about and enrolling in health insurance or other health care assistance programs.

HEALTH CARE AND PHILOSOPHY

It is important for co-sponsors and health care workers to keep in mind that refugees come from societies with different philosophies of health and wellness than those in the United States, as well as different levels of access to medical services.

In most less-developed countries, general knowledge of health issues and preventative medicine is limited. “Western” medical care in most of these countries is often only available in urbanized areas and cannot be afforded by a large percentage of the population. In particular, people living in poverty might only have gone to the doctor when they were very sick, and might have seen a hospital as a place of last resort.

Some refugee cultures place a higher emphasis on the spiritual or psychological aspects of healing than does modern Western medicine. While co-sponsors should help ensure their refugee families receive complete modern medical care, they should also respect the refugees’ traditional understandings of health and wellness.

ORIENTATION

For their own empowerment and well-being, refugees will need to understand the general layout of the United States health care system, as well as the costs involved in seeking medical and dental care and hospitalization.

Co-sponsors can help refugees find reliable sources of information about health and medicine. Co-sponsors should make sure that they explain emergency medical procedures, common drugs and medicines, symptoms of illness, rules and policies of hospitals, and insurance to their refugee families.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

Refugees should be reminded of the importance of keeping medicine, cleaning supplies, and other potentially toxic materials out of the reach of children. They should be instructed in basic household safety procedures, especially in regards to appliances like stoves and ovens, disposals, and irons.

It is crucial to address refugee health concerns promptly. Untreated health issues can cause refugees to leave or lose their jobs.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Bring any health concerns to the attention of the team leader who can alert the case manager. Working with the case manager who has experience with the various health plans, the co-sponsors can help the family decide on a health care plan that best serves them.
- Help the family locate a clinic that is convenient and meets their particular needs and accepts their type of insurance.
- Show the family where the nearest urgent care and emergency room is located, and help them understand the circumstances about when these are appropriate. For instance it is not appropriate to go to the emergency room with a head cold.
- Help the family organize their medical paperwork, insurance cards, notices from doctors, etc.
- Create a reference card with relevant phone numbers and insurance numbers for the family to keep near their phone, including the number to call for a taxi, to call for an appointment, etc.

MENTAL HEALTH

By definition refugees have experienced trauma. They have been forced to leave their home, country, community, language, job, and extended family behind. They may have experienced violence, hunger, disease, and other conditions during their ordeal of being displaced. Now they have been resettled into an unfamiliar place among strangers where nothing is familiar.

It is therefore normal for them experience feelings of anxiety, distrust, irritability, frustration, feeling overwhelmed and crying soon after their arrival. These are all normal responses that you may observe, and that will usually subside as the family begins to feel more comfortable in their new home.

When a family first arrives in their new home they will be mostly concerned with their safety. Co-sponsors can help their transition by being patient and by reassuring them that they are being taken care of, and that there are many people here to help them get resettled successfully.

It is difficult to discern when the readjustment responses are something which require mental health care. Basically co-sponsors should be attentive to behaviors which interfere with everyday functioning. These may include not getting out of bed for days, not eating, not sleeping or having nightmares, the absence of good self care such as bathing, extreme lack of care for the apartment, a high level of family conflict, and drug or alcohol use.

Remember that some things that are outside the norm of Western culture may be normal for other cultures. Mental health looks different cross-culturally. Although it is sometimes helpful for group members to talk among themselves about what they are observing with the family, please respect their privacy. Do not discuss your concerns with anyone outside the group. And please understand that there may be time when MCC Refugee Staff will not be able to share detailed medical or mental health information with the volunteers for privacy reasons.

Co-sponsors are not responsible for “fixing” the new arrival. Concerns about the family should be brought to the case manager for referral to appropriate supportive services.

IMMIGRATION

Every refugee who comes to the United States has left people behind. Some are in refugee camps, some are still in the home country, and they may not know where other friends and relatives are. In some cases the people left behind are children, spouses or parents, and the newly arrived refugee will want to process the documents to bring those family members here. Refugee Services provides immigration services to these families.

The eligibility requirements for family reunification are complex, and often change. If the refugee expresses an interest in bringing family members to the United States he or she should meet with our Immigration Services Coordinator to find out if the family member is eligible. They can come during weekly walk-in hours or make an appointment.

The process for sponsoring additional family members can take a year or more, even after the documents are filed. It also can take time to gather the necessary documents. Since there is a limit on the time the documents can be filed the process should be started as soon as possible.

The Immigration Services program also provides services to adjust status (obtain a green card), to apply for citizenship, to apply for travel documents, and to replace lost or stolen documents. The newly arrived refugee will not need these services immediately, but should be encouraged to return to the Minnesota Council of Churches when they need these services. They are provided to Minnesota Council of Churches clients either free of charge or for a small fee.

What Co-sponsors Can Do:

- Alert the team leader who can talk with the case manager if the family is expressing a desire to bring additional family members to the United States.
- Make the appointment with our Immigration Services Coordinator, Nina Vang at 612-230-3224.
- Accompany the family to their appointment or bring them to the walk-in day.
- Reassure them that they have done all they can to bring their family here and encourage them to be patient while waiting for the process.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Communicating across cultures can be challenging. Here are some tips to help co-sponsors communicate as clearly and effectively as possible.

Pay Attention

Clear your mind so that you can really concentrate on what your conversation partner is saying. Make eye contact (as culturally appropriate), and try hard to listen. Keep attuned to the possible deeper meanings behind what the person is saying.

Set Assumptions Aside

If a statement or action seems strange to you, try to withhold judgment. Place yourself in the refugee's shoes, and imagine how some of the things you commonly say or do might seem unusual.

Ask for Verification

After you have spoken, try to get confirmation that your conversation partner has understood you. Ask the person to restate what you have said. For example, "I want to make sure I made myself clear, so could you please tell me what you understood me to say?" Avoid asking the other person directly, "Do you understand?" Often people will simply say "yes" even if part of your meaning was unclear.

Watch for Confusion

You can usually tell whether you have blundered or said something unclearly by being aware of the verbal or nonverbal reactions to what you've said. If you don't know what nonverbal signs indicate puzzlement or confusion in the family's culture, ask them to show you. That way you can be alert for those signs whenever you are talking.

Paraphrase

After someone has spoken, and before you respond, restate what you heard that person say and what you thought it meant. For example, "As I understand it, you are saying that your daughter needs new shoes for school, is that correct?" Add your comment only after the person has assured you that you have understood correctly. This helps prevent situations in which you and a family member are assigning different meanings to the same word or phrase.

Be Complete and Explicit

Be ready to explain your point in more than one way, and to explain why exactly you are trying to make a particular point in the first place. Establish background and context for what you are saying; make sure the refugee understands “where you are coming from.” For example, don’t just tell a refugee family to close the windows when their air-conditioning is on; explain that they will save money on energy costs and keep their home cooler by trapping the colder air inside.

Be Patient

Communicating across cultures can be difficult and frustrating at times. It helps if both you and your conversation partner have the attitude that sometimes you both will make mistakes or say something that is unclear to the other person, and that that’s a normal, totally okay part of the learning process. Being positive and willing to laugh at yourselves will help make communication that much easier.

CULTURE

Culture is the way of life of a people: the sum of their learned behavior patterns, attitudes, and values. It is a way of organizing life, of thinking, of conceiving the underlying assumptions about the family, the state, the economic system, and even life itself.

It is important for co-sponsors to think about culture when they co-sponsor a refugee family, but they should think about more than just the culture of the refugee. In understanding cultural diversity, the main task of the co-sponsoring congregation is to better understand the “American culture.”

Many Americans either do not understand that there is such a thing as American culture, or they take it for granted. Americans often fail to think of culture as something they have. Culture, for them, is what they experience when they pay for expensive tickets, dress up, and go out to a “cultural event,” or they think culture is what other people have – usually something exotic and different.

This failure to understand that Americans, too, have a culture that controls almost everything they do, can lead them to assume that their way of doing things is simply “the norm” or the right way. If they believe they are doing things “the right way,” it will be easy for them to assume that they, as co-sponsors, have a responsibility to teach their refugee family what is “right.” A judgmental attitude towards the refugee family’s culture can be harmful to everyone involved.

The capacity to overcome predispositions that have been learned from American culture, to withhold judgment of the refugee family’s actions when they are different, and to accept other cultural views as valid, is possible only when there is an understanding of American culture.

The following are example of elements that can make up American culture (though variations exist):

- A belief in rugged individualism where people see themselves as independent and autonomous, rather than integrally related to a family unit or ethnic group
- A system whereby positions and material resources are given as rewards for personal achievement, not based on need
- A concern for efficiency and for solving problems in a pragmatic way, regardless of personal feelings

- A limited need for privacy, other than physical privacy
- A preference for separation of the elderly from the rest of society
- An acceptance of displays of affection in public
- An expectation that families will often be separated by long distances
- A lack of acceptance of the world as it is and strong efforts to change it
- A view that mental, managerial, and scientific labor is inherently superior to manual and service-oriented labor
- A rational worldview where events can be explained and reasons for particular occurrences can be determined, rather than a belief in fate
- A confidence that people with opposing viewpoints can be faced directly and intentionally confronted
- A social order where the primary motivation is competition rather than cooperation

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Refugee Resettlement

www.mnchurches.org/refugeeservices: Refugee Services

www.churchworldservices.org: Church World Service

www.state.gov: Department of State

www.episcopalchurch.org/emm: Episcopal Migration Ministries
Martinez, Ruben. *The New Americans*.

www.refugees.org: U.S. Committee on Refugees and Immigrants

www.unhcr.org: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Immigration

Lynch, James. *Immigration the World Over: Statutes, Policies, and Practices*.

www.uscis.gov: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service

Cultural Background

www.cal.org/co: Center for Applied Linguistics/Cultural Orientation Resource Center

Books

Refugee Resettlement

MCC Refugee Services. *This Much I Can Tell You: Stories of Courage and Hope from Refugees in Minnesota*. Available on our website.

Pipher, Mary. *The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town*.

Suarez, Virgil and Ryan G. Van Cleave, editors. *American Diaspora: Poetry of Displacement*.

Africa

Asgedom, Mawi. *Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey from a Refugee Camp to Harvard.*

Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Child Soldier.*

Bixler, Mark. *The Lost Boys of Sudan.*

Eggers, David. *What is the What.*

Farah, Nuruddin. *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora*

Kulah, Arthur F. *Liberia Will Rise Again: Reflections on the Liberian Civil Crisis.*

Pham, John-Peter. *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State.*

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BIBLE PASSAGES RELATING TO REFUGEE CONCERNS

What does the Bible say about refugees? God's people in Old Testament days carried out a tradition rich in generosity towards sojourners, strangers, and aliens. A hospitality code is even stated in Leviticus as an integral part of the word of the Lord to God's people, and many of the Psalms reflect the need for consideration of the refugee. In the New Testament, several related themes are present: love for Jesus – himself once a refugee, love for our neighbor, and trust in God's care.

Leviticus 19:33-34

33 When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien.
34The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 10:18-19

17For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, 18who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. 19You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Psalms 107:4-9

4Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;
5hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.
6Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
7he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.
8Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
9For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.

Proverbs 31:8-9

⁸Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.

⁹Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Matthew 25:31-40

³¹ When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Hebrews 13:1-2 (NRSV)

¹Let mutual love continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

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**Many more scriptures and worship resources are available on our website:
www.mnchurches.org/refugee_services**

QUR'ANIC PASSAGES RELATING TO REFUGEE CONCERNS

More than any other historical source, the Holy Qur'an along with the Sunnah and Hadith of the Prophet of Islam are a foundation of contemporary refugee law. Even though many of those values were a part of Arab tradition and culture even before Islam, this fact is not always acknowledged today, even in the Arab world. The international community should value this 14-century-old tradition of generosity and hospitality and recognize its contributions to modern law.

*António Guterres
UN High Commissioner for Refugees*

Surah Al Baqarah: 277

Those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, and establish regular prayers and regular charity, will have their reward with their Lord; On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Surah Al Nisa' : 36

Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good – To parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet and what you right hands possess; For Allah loves not the arrogant, the vainglorious.

Surah an-Nisa': 86

When you are greeted with a greeting, return the greeting or improve upon it. Allah takes account of everything.

Surah Al Tawbah: 6

If one of the pagans ask for asylum grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge

Surah Al-Balad:12-17

And what will make you know the path that is steep? It is Freeing a prisoner or giving food in a day of famine, to an orphan, or to the poor afflicted with misery."

HADITH RELATING TO REFUGEE CONCERNS

Once he said, "Anyone who has enough food for two persons should take three of them, he who has enough for four should take five of them with him." -**Abu Bakr**

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Every Muslim has to give in charity." The people then asked: "(But what) if someone has nothing to give, what should he do?" The Prophet replied: "He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give in charity (from what he earns)." The people further asked: "If he cannot find even that?" He replied: "He should help the needy who appeal for help." Then the people asked: "If he cannot do (even) that?" The Prophet said finally: "Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and that will be regarded as charitable deeds." - **Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 2, Hadith 524**

A man once said to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "I have plenty of property, a large family, a great deal of money, and I am a gracious host to my guests. Tell me how to conduct my life and how to spend (my money)." The Prophet replied: "Give (regular charity) out of your property, for truly it is a purifier, and be kind to your relatives and acknowledge the rights of the poor, neighbors and (those in need who seek your help)." - **Fiqh-us-Sunnah, Volume 3, Number 3**

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Charity is prescribed for each descendant of Adam every day the sun rises." He was then asked: "From what do we give charity every day?" The Prophet answered: "The doors of goodness are many...enjoining good, forbidding evil, removing harm from the road, listening to the deaf, leading the blind, guiding one to the object of his need, hurrying with the strength of one's legs to one in sorrow who is asking for help, and supporting the feeble with the strength of one's arms--all of these are charity prescribed for you." He also said: "Your smile for your brother is charity." - **Fiqh-us-Sunnah, Volume 3, Number 98**

GLOSSARY

Asylee – Essentially a refugee who is already in the United States. Asylees have the same persecution claims as refugees, but have already arrived in the United States (for example, on a student or tourist visa) and present themselves at USCIS to claim asylum.

Case Manager – The person responsible for managing the day-to-day aspects of a refugee’s resettlement process. He or she conducts home visits, helps the refugee set up important appointments, and makes sure that the refugee is adapting to life in Minnesota. Case managers generally work with a refugee for three months.

Civil Surgeon – A doctor who has been authorized by USCIS to perform the medical examination necessary for a refugee to apply for a green card.

Employment Counselor – Someone who works with refugees and asylees to find employment, improve job skills, practice interviewing, and work towards economic self-sufficiency.

Green Card – Officially, the United States Permanent Resident Card. Refugees can apply for green cards after one year in the United States. Obtaining a green card is a necessary step on the path towards applying for U.S. citizenship.

Match Grant – An early employment program that aims to help refugees and asylees secure employment within four months of entering the United States. Match Grant offers assistance with job-searching and self-sufficiency building.

MFIP – The Minnesota Family Investment Program. MFIP is Minnesota’s welfare reform program for families with young children. It offers both food and cash assistance. Case managers help enroll eligible families in MFIP when they arrive in Minnesota.

Principal Applicant (PA) – The PA is a member of a refugee family unit. He or she is the person from whom others (such as minor children) may derive their refugee status. Principal applicants are often fathers or mothers. Each refugee family case has one PA.

R & P – Reception and Placement. R & P is managed by a case manager, and refers to the process by which a refugee begins to set up their new life in Minnesota.

Refugee – According to the 1951 United States Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to, or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country.

Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) – RCA is a federal welfare program designed for refugees who do not qualify for MFIP (e.g. single or married with no dependents). RCA offers financial support, food support, and health care for participants for up to 8 months. RCA participants are also matched with an employment counselor.

Refugee Employment Services (RES) – An employment program that helps refugees and asylees who have been in the United States for less than one year seek and maintain employment.

Co-sponsorship – The process by which neighbors work together with a refugee resettlement agency to support a refugee family in their first few months of life in Minnesota.

UNHCR – The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. UNHCR is the United Nations office dedicated to leading and coordinating actions to protect refugees and resolve refugee issues around the world.

USCIS – The United States Citizenship and Immigration Service, a bureau of the Department of Homeland Security. USCIS performs many of the functions of the now defunct Immigration and Naturalization Service.

US Tie – The relative or close friend of a refugee (him or herself a former refugee or asylee) who files for his or her family members to come to Minnesota. Newly arrived refugees often live with their US Tie (or anchor relative) for a short period of time, or receive other forms of support from their relative or friend.

VOLAG – Voluntary Agency. VOLAG is simply a name referring to refugee resettlement agencies in the United States. MCC Refugee Services is a VOLAG.