Arrive Ministries educates and mobilizes churches on the important issues of our day and speaks out to those in positions of influence so that the vulnerable, oppressed and poor will receive the dignity, rights and freedom God desires for them. Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8)

Arrive Ministries’ commitment to advocate for justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed is based on biblical truths and on the example of Jesus. Scripture constantly emphasizes the importance of showing compassion (Matthew 25:31-46), seeking justice (Isaiah 58:1-14), defending what is right (Proverbs 31:8) and showing mercy (Micah 6:8). As Christians we are called to be Christ’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), representing Christ to the world and speaking on His behalf. For this reason, we also defend those who are oppressed, weak and who do not have a voice of their own, whether in Darfur, Burma, Syria, or the U.S., just as Christ defends us.

We see a perfect example of an advocate in the life of Esther. She was a normal woman suddenly thrust into a position of great influence as the wife of a King. When she learned of the great injustice happening to the Jewish people, she risked her life to advocate and intervene for them and to persuade the King to show justice and mercy. “Who knows,” said Mordecai to Queen Esther, “but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14) Esther’s story reminds us that although Arrive Ministries may just be one organization, God has given us resources and the ability to make a difference in the lives of many, especially the displaced.

We recognize that our role is made that much more impactful and significant with the Church as a partner. This year, when the U.S. will resettle the fewest numbers since the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 was enacted, we covet the prayer and voice of the Church. Whether it be sharing stories of your immigrant neighbor, volunteering with one of our programs, supporting us financially, or contacting our government representatives, we thank you for acting on behalf of and walking alongside our refugee and immigrant neighbors.
A Season of Growing

by Samantha Grimes

S. Cloud Area Director, Arrive Ministries added staff in St. Cloud in 2018.

As the title implies, growth is the best way to describe the last year in St. Cloud. Stretching and growing, learning and changing...and one obvious thing growing around here is a GARDEN. With the help of two church communities, giving of land, water, and financial support, plus 20+ individuals from several local church bodies giving generously of their time, skills, and resources, we were able to turn a dry plot of grass into the first collaborative Refugee Garden in St. Cloud. Within the week, the land went from a grassy field to 36 planted plots. It was a beautiful illustration of what God will do through His church when people pray, work together, and give of what they have.

Through this garden, we’ve connected with some amazing folks from Sudan, Kenya, and Somalia. We’ve started community gardening rights with we get down side-by-side into the dirt and pull weeds (weeds, weeds, and more weeds) and water for hours. We learn Somali, talk about how to cook black-eyed pea greens, learn new gardening techniques, mimic things we can’t get Google to translate correctly, and share lots of laughs. We’re actively building bridges of Gospel friendship and praying the friendships will last longest and outgrow the plants in the garden.

Following a recent gardening night, I sat reading and praying in the early hours of the morning. As I prayed for the garden, I started to think about the soil. It’s been hard, nasty, and somewhat difficult to grow in. It’s taken fertilizer, minerals, and constant weeding and watering to help anything sprout and grow. Some plants aren’t growing very well at all. Other plots are thriving. The Lord reminded me this is a near-perfect metaphor for St. Cloud. Sharing the Love of Christ often takes much work, and we [this volunteer] aren’t in control of the growth. Spiritual growth takes time, love, and the giving of ourselves to make the soil fertile. And the Lord, in His timing, is the one who makes seeds sprout and growth happen. And sometimes the weeds seem to outgrow the plants. I recently spent several hours helping a mother and son weed their plots and search for their seedlings peaking out of the soil. The Lord reminded me this is such a good analogy of how sometimes we think there’s no change or no growth in the lives of people we are actively praying for and loving, but faith is often growing in the midst of a jungle of spiritual weeds.

Long-Lasting Church Partners

by Wendy Meyering, RLM Program Director

Warm weather and time off school bring more opportunities for our Refugee Life Ministries teams to spend time with their refugee families. We are encouraged by recent stories from two of our long-lasting church partners.

Recently at our annual RLM Celebration Picnic, we were heartened to see many Karen people in attendance. Woodbury Community Church was connected to a Karen family in early July, and since that time has befriended six other Karen families! It has been so inspiring to see their steadfast love for this area, and tight-knit community. At the picnic the families and Woodbury Community Church team members began a pick-up game of volleyball. The joy and the significance of this fellowship time was so evident on the faces of everyone playing the game. This is the fifth family that Woodbury Community Church has welcomed over the years. We are so thankful!

Over the years, Filipino American Christian Church has welcomed four Karen (from Burma) families with Refugee Life Ministries, the most recent in March of 2018.

At their annual church retreat, team members invited the newly-arrived family to join them for a two-night camping trip. The family of four readily accepted and invited members of their extended family as well. This family is Buddhist, but were welcomed into the “circle of fellowship” where the team and other church members were able to share with them the love of Christ.

In addition to this family, there were also members from refugee families welcomed in the past who attended the church picnic. Actually, one daughter from a family welcomed several years ago, was baptized in the lake at the church retreat! Praise God for this church and their desire to welcome and genuinely love families for so many years!

It takes a Community to Welcome People into the Community

by Jenny Klein, RLM New Neighbor and Church Team Coordinator

Noa Eh laughs at herself so readily, “you keep trying to teach us stuff but we forget it all!” Her husband Say Htoo adds with bashful laughter, “Every day we go to English class but when we come home we can’t remember anything we learned.” Their New Neighbor volunteer, David, whom Say Htoo referred to as “the one who taught us how to go outside” attests that they remember at least one English word—the trees in the park they visit together are, as Noa puts it, “beautiful!”

Soon after introducing David to this family—a Karen from Burma, mom, dad, and two young adult sons recently arrived from a camp in Thailand—I took on the role as their resettlement case manager from a social work intern finishing out her time at Arrive. I had only about a month and a half left to continue helping this family adjust to life in Minnesota, and they adamantly weren’t retaining a lot. I tried to encourage them by reminding them of all they’d accomplished so far and that they are surrounded by supportive extended family that can continue to teach them about their new home. Throughout the rest of their case period, I was personally encouraged to see how the broader community came around them. Strangers on the bus who speak their language explained things like “put the yellow cord to let the driver know you need to get off” as we learned to ride the bus together. The family received support from an organization founded by and for the Hmong population that is now serving predominantly Karen and Karen refugees (populations who followed their same route from Thailand to Minnesota a generation or so later). And this family accessed services from organizations of Karen forebears that devoted to easing the transition of their people who come after them.

In the book tried The New Minnesota [2008] documenting stories of refugees and immigrants in Minnesota, a resettlement expert says “It takes a community to welcome people into the community.” Arrive Ministries is committed to empowering local churches and individuals followers of Jesus to be on the front lines of fostering a welcoming community. We believe that we can offer much to those joining our communities, but we also believe that we can gain much from them. We are woven together as people who belong to each other, who are changed by each other.

When the time came to close this family’s case, it was more emotional than I expected, considering I worked with them for a shorter period than usual. They expressed their gratitude for the very small part I played in making Minnesota their home, and asked that God would bless me. I turn around at how far God has brought them and affirmed that America is better for having them here. Say Htoo solemnly nodded in agreement to both. Noa Eh and the family of four said goodbye one last time to the house they were moving from. The family said “Thank you” but it was much more than “I’ve done for you.” I felt I could put on and explained that wearing this to the future airport arrivals would help me to welcome other Karen families with a familiar sight. That precious shirt tells me that we are woven together, that my life is better for having known them. “Names have been changed.”

Arrive Ministries 2018 Numbers at a Glance

- 1,200 clients served by Immigration Legal Services
- 100 jobs found by Refugee Employment Services
- 2,000 garden plots planted through Church Refugee Gardens
- 170 volunteers serving in 25 locations with Somali Adult Literacy Training
Welcoming the Stranger; a Biblical Perspective on Immigration

by Kate Sherwin, Communications Coordinator at Transform Minnesota, Affiliate ministry of Arven Ministries

On August 2nd, Arven Ministries hosted a seminar called “Welcoming the Stranger.” More than 200 people heard a message of compassion and justice for immigrants and refugees shared by Matthew Soerens, co-author of Welcoming the Stranger.

Who is My Neighbor?

When Jesus was asked “Who are my neighbors?” Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus’ answer is still instructing the American Church on how we should respond to foreigners.

In today’s culture, when answering who are our neighbors, Soerens teaches us that the Bible instructs us to love and have compassion on refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers.

“In Jewish culture, the Samaritans were heretics. They were ethnically different. They were pretty well despised by most people around Jesus. But in Luke 10 and in other cases throughout the Gospel, Jesus’ response to Samaritans is counter-cultural,” explained Soerens.

In this parable, the Samaritan is the model of neighborly love. Contrary to the priest and Levite, who walked past the beaten man lying on the side of the road, the Samaritan sees this person in need, has compassion on him, and puts himself at risk to help.

“I think that’s an important point. It’s easy to criticize the priest and the Levite, right? But what would any one of us teach our children to do on a dangerous road? Don’t linger, keep your head down and keep walking. It’s prudent from a human perspective to be like the priest or Levite and not stop on the side of the road to, not mince words, but those aren’t the people who Jesus claps to as the moose of what it means to love your neighbor, and we are called to do likewise,” said Soerens.

“Even if it’s costly, risky, or there’s the potential for danger, we are called to love our neighbor. There is no caveat emptor. And that neighbor whom we are called to love could be just about anyone, we cannot narrowly define as someone of our own ethnicity or language or religion.”

Effective Vetting Diminishes Risk

Soerens went on to explain that Americans have no reason to fear the resettlement of refugees due to our extensive and thorough vetting system.

“When refugees come to the United States, there actually isn’t much risk. The reality is refugees who are admitted through the U.S. refugee resettlement program already undergo the most thorough vetting process of any visitor or immigrant who enters the United States every year. It’s a process which lasts between 18 months and 3 years, and it’s a process that’s working really well,” he said.

Since 1980, 3 million refugees have come to America. “Zero of those refugees have taken an American life with a terrorist attack. That’s a remarkable record that suggests a high level of effectiveness in vetting, making sure we’re bringing in the right people, the victims of persecution and terrorism, and not the wrong people, the perpetrators,” said Soerens.

American Church Welcoming Refugees, Making a Difference

Soerens also credits the American Church with being instrumental in helping resettle refugees safely. He points to Arven Ministries and other agencies across the country that pairs local church teams with newly arriving refugee families by greeting them at the airport, battening them, and welcoming them into their new country.

“The least likely people to be radicalized are people who are not marginalized, but who are welcomed, and integrated into the fabric of a community,” said Soerens.

The Cato Institute found that the odds of the average American being killed by a refugee turned terrorist are 1 in 3.6 billion. “If, as followers of Jesus in this country, we’re not willing to sacrifice 1.5 billion of our security to the ending of human suffering and for the great commission opportunity that the refugee resettlement program represents, frankly that troubles me about the state of the American Church,” said Soerens.

Reflections from Participants

“The local church has a divine opportunity to show generous grace to refugees.”

“If we [the Church] are not Biblically informed on topics like immigration and loving our neighbor, we are likely being informed by other sources (media, family, friends) and we might not be aligned with God’s will for us and our world.”

“God’s heart is for the refugees, and as His follower mine must be too. I was challenged to be more active in reaching out, sharing this with my church, and contacting our representatives.”

We Why we defend – and still foster – the American dream

by Michelle Eberhard, Director of Refugee Arrival Services

In 1821, businessman and historian, James Traylor Adams, published a book called “The Epic of America,” in which he described what he called “the American dream.”

The dream, he wrote, was of “a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone” — a land that every American who came before, and each who has come after, has sought to replicate.

The values embodied by this dream — hard work, determination, self-initiative — define the expectations placed on each person who calls our country home, without exception. They set a standard of excellence that has built, re-imagined and rebuilt our country, time and time again.

And in our years of working throughout Minnesota with people with refugee status who seek to rebuild lives in the wake of unimaginable conflict, displacement, loss and trauma, we see how these very same expectations are met by those who, despite not having been born here, understand that embracing these values is the only viable path to success.

In the nearly four decades since the Refugee Act of 1980 established the refugee resettlement program that is now so intensely scrutinized by the current administration, more than 3 million individuals have entered the U.S. with refugee status. With the ultimate goal of achieving economic self-sufficiency “as quickly as possible,” this program has assisted individuals — who did not make the choice to leave their homelands — toward lives that allow them to reflect back the very ideals this country offered them upon their arrival, by pursuing education, building careers, opening businesses and creating better futures for their children.

You may know some of them. They are your co-workers, your accountant, the health aide attending your elderly relative, the farmer down the road. They are the family creating the store on the corner, and they are the parents of the child your daughter will become best friends with when she starts kindergarten in the fall.

But instead of criticizing us for welcoming these ordinary people with extraordinary stories into the folds of our communities, we are being told that those who are most in need of safety — indeed, people who have been so dramatically stripped of their own safety — are somehow different from us and do not belong here.

The consequences of this shift are difficult to ignore. Families separated for decades have been further disconnected due to policies dramatically limiting resettlement in general, and for people of certain nationalities in particular. As of the end of May, 14,351 people have been admitted to the U.S. as refugees this federal fiscal year, in contrast to 41,423 at the same time in 2016. Update: As of the end of August, only 19,867 people have been admitted to the U.S. as refugees.

Because of the administration’s new policies, the infrastructure and volunteer networks that make places like Minnesota uniquely positioned to help people with refugee status establish roots are finding it difficult to maintain staff, knowledge and experience. Years of hard work and commitment to representative of our strong cultural identity are being challenged.

Shamefully, this shift is happening in the midst of the world’s worst refugee crisis in recorded history — when more than 68.5 million people around the globe have been displaced from their homes, of whom nearly 25.4 million are refugees. As a country, we have chosen to respond to this global crisis by closing the door to those who could otherwise help enrich the next chapter of our American dream.

Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis recently announced it will be closing its refugee resettlement services this fall “as a direct result of the administration’s policies that have made maintaining the program impossible.”

Yet, and despite all of this, we as a community do not lose our voice. Now more than ever, all of us are needed to continue Minnesota’s long-standing tradition of welcoming the stranger in solidarity as one human family.

So contact your offices and ask now you can get involved. Hold politicians accountable for their unwillingness to stand up for our friends, our new Americans. Be kind the next time someone responds to your question of “how are you doing?” is simply a smile.

All we will be, we will keep working, building and dreaming so that communities in Minnesota and around the country remain strong — so that this land, our land, remains a better, richer, fuller place for everyone — not just for the neighbors we already know, but for those we have yet to meet.

This article originally appeared in the Star Tribune on July 4, 2018, with the support of at resettlement agencies operating in Minnesota.

Arven Ministries is an affiliate of Transform Minnesota, an evangelical network of churches from across the state. For information about Arven Ministries and the important work we do in Minnesota, visit arvenministries.org or contact us: office@arvenministries.org, 612.786.4332.
A Whole Lot of Love

by Bob Oehrig, Executive Director

One of the most rewarding parts of my job is meeting with leaders and members of local churches as they express interest in Arrive Ministries. I tremendously enjoy sharing about the work we do, our various programs, and the hundreds of volunteers we have walking alongside our new refugee neighbors. I have been especially heartened by the many people who have reached out with the desire to show their support in practical ways:

In August, just in time for the new school year, a donor purchased and filled 100 backpacks for the many children of refugee and immigrant families we serve. When we initially spoke, I expected the number to be around 10 or 20 backpacks (which would have been a special blessing in itself), but when she said she wanted to give 100 backpacks, I was blown away. I love the visual of these colorful backpacks and imagine them being worn by kids throughout the Twin Cities as they ride the bus for the first time, start at a new school, and begin life in their new home.

Earlier this year, I met with a staff member from Trinity Lutheran Church in Waconia who asked what our greatest need was in terms of donated items. I told her that one thing we often end up purchasing for our newly-arriving families is car seats. Soon after our meeting, she and children in her church had collected, prayed over, and written notes of welcome that were included in 13 car seats for our resettlement program.

Throughout the year we have been blessed by the organization “Don’t Cry… I’m Here” through their donation of handmade dolls and stuffed animals reflective of the cultures we serve. The care given to each doll – from the clothes to the facial features – shows the intention and love these friends have to welcome new families and their children. We have been able to bless newly-arrived children from Afghanistan, Burma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Nigeria with dolls that reflect beautiful aspects of their culture.

We are thankful for partnerships like these as we fulfill our mission to carry out God’s command to welcome and bring lifelong transformation to refugees and immigrants in Minnesota.

100 backpacks, car seats, and dolls were recently donated for the many children of refugee and immigrant families we serve.