Elevating Love

Welcoming Refugee and Immigrant Neighbors

2020 Newsletter v. 1

Seeking life transformation for refugees, immigrants, and the Church.

Arrive Ministries
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A Mission of Welcome

“We boldly welcome those God is bringing to our country...”

Thank you for supporting Arrive Ministries as we strive to love refugees and immigrants practically, socially, and spiritually.

In spite of ever-changing immigration policies, church and volunteer engagement is at a higher level today than it has ever been in our 30 year history.

Your partnership enables us to provide direct services such as welcome kits, beds and safe, permanent housing for refugee families upon their arrival in Minnesota. In addition, our immigration legal team helps over 100 people annually prepare documents for things like Green Cards and citizenship applications.

We’re also busy working with churches to mobilize them to walk alongside our newest neighbors. In fact, over the past year we have connected over 50 refugee and immigrant families from Afghanistan, Burma, Ukraine, Somalia and more to committed volunteers from local churches.

“We boldly welcome those God is bringing to our country...”

Providing direct services:
• Refugee Reception and Placement
• Immigration Legal Services
• Refugee Employment Services
• Refugee Social Services

Mobilizing the Church:
• Refugee Life Ministries (RLM)
• Somali Adult Literacy Training (SALT)
• Church Refugee Gardens
• Afghan Women’s English Language Learners (AWELL)

We have an incredible opportunity to provide English tutoring and homework help to families in their homes. There are 240 volunteers currently meeting this need, but we are looking for more! Contact us if you are interested in getting connected to one of the 50 adults and kids on our waiting list.

As followers of Jesus, we continue to boldly welcome those God is bringing to our country with respect and dignity, because all are created in the image of God.

Thank you for your partnership and prayers.

Arrive Ministries staff

Loving Refugees and Immigrants Practically, Socially, and Spiritually

Cover Photo: An Afghan family of 10 arriving at the MSP airport, greeted by three Arrive Ministries staff members and a team from Grace Evangelical Free Church in Fridley. The family and team filled the elevator to capacity, and required three vehicles to transport them to their new home.
Freedom After Russian Persecution

“I felt they were threatening my kids, we decided to leave everything behind.”

“I was refused jobs because I am a Protestant. I was working as a contractor on the house of a Russian parliament member. When he found out I was a youth pastor at a church, he took all of my tools, kicked me out, and refused to pay me for any of the work I did on his house.

I hired a lawyer to receive payment, but since the justice system is in submission to the government, I was found guilty.

I had a lot of trouble as a pastor. Officials couldn’t directly make threats about my kids, but they would hint about getting my kids hooked on drugs, and how that could lead to overdoses. I felt they were threatening my kids. We decided to leave everything behind and move. We weren’t going to test the waters anymore. That’s why we applied for refugee status.”

Update: After settling into their new lives in the Twin Cities, Andrei is self-employed remodeling bathrooms as a contractor. Galina works as a tailor at Nordstrom. Their children are loving life and school in America, and are quickly becoming fluent in English. Andrei and Galina found a home church in Brooklyn Park.

A Prayerful Connection in St. Cloud

“...raised her hands in praise and thanksgiving with tears in her eyes.”

A St. Cloud volunteer has been tutoring Asha*, a Somali woman for the past year. The trauma and loss Asha has faced due to the Somali civil war is unimaginable. Even after living in St. Cloud for several years, she was still quite isolated.

At a recent literacy lesson, Asha tried to pay our Somali Adult Literacy tutor for her help. The volunteer refused, and did her best to communicate that the love of “Isa al Masih” (Jesus the Messiah) compels her to be there and to love Asha.

Asha raised her hands in praise and thanksgiving with tears in her eyes.

The volunteer asked if she could pray for Asha, and she agreed. We trust that Jesus is pursuing Asha and wants her to know His love.

*Name has been changed
From the very beginning Carol Entwistle knew she would become fast friends with Shema, who arrived from Rwanda at the Minneapolis airport on a frigid November day, wearing flannel pants and flip flops under her African dress.

“We share the same birthday, we are about the same age, and we have both been married to our husbands for almost 50 years,” said Carol.

The night of their airport greeting was dangerously cold, so the church team from Shepherd of the Valley in Afton, MN brought hats, gloves, jackets, and a bouquet of flowers for Shema, her husband Fataki, and their 18-year-old daughter Christelle.

Shema was floored by the church teams’ extravagant gesture. “Shema told us only the President of her country is given flowers, so when we gave them flowers at the airport, it was really special,” said Carol.

“(As) Lutherans, we don’t show much affection. But I hugged Shema and her family more in my first week of knowing them than I have anyone else in my whole life!” Carol joked.

Later that summer, more extended family members moved to Minnesota, growing from three people to 13 people over the course of one year.

“Sometimes I wonder what God got us into, but He always provides the next step,” said Carol.

Christelle agrees, “I feel like I have another family here. The team has done all they could to help us. I am only able to be independent right now, because of their help.”

That mutual transformation for both refugee family and church team makes the work of Refugee Life Ministries so rewarding.

“Shema and I are sisters forever. She calls me Mon Amie (my friend) and gives me big hugs. She and I have been joined at the hip ever since the airport,” said Carol.

“Sometimes I wonder what God got us into, but He always provides the next step.”

Refugee Life Ministries empowers the Church to walk alongside refugees and immigrants with the love of Christ. Experience mutual transformation with those who have been forced to flee their homelands as you provide practical support and build friendship.

arriveministries.org/rlm
God’s Heart and My Heart for Refugees

Once our sweet refugee family was here, our team from Emmanuel Covenant Church started helping meet practical needs as they adjusted to their new lives here. We took them to the social security office, job counselor appointments, doctor’s visits, and registered their kids for school.

It was amazing to witness all they needed to get done and all of the forms that needed to fill out; yet each of these were opportunities for us to connect with our new family.

I had the incredible privilege of spending a lot of time with El Dohtoo early on, who has a brittle bone disease. Because of his health needs, El Dohtoo wasn’t able to attend classes during his first few months here. So, we played a lot of UNO together, which taught him colors and numbers in English (and me in Karen). El Dohtoo is incredibly smart and it was humbling to see all that he was able to learn when given the opportunity.

I will never forget the day El Dohtoo was fitted for his power wheelchair. As I watched him practice in the demo chair, I had to go into another room because I was so emotional thinking about how different his life would be here; from using the wooden wheelchair back in the refugee camp, to the freedom and independence he would have here.

I often tell my kids that when we walk with Jesus, he writes our stories, often in ways we would never dream. Five years ago, I knew little about refugees or the worldwide refugee crisis. Then I got to lead a church team to welcome our refugee family.

Refugees became my friends; and just like in any friendship, what matters to them, matters to me. God ignited this passion in my heart for vulnerable and marginalized people, that sometimes the world chooses not to see. I believe this heart that I have for refugees is because it is God’s heart and passion, living in and through me.

The author, Natalie Schmidt is an Arrive Ministries board member.

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“...from using the wooden wheelchair back in the refugee camp, to the freedom and independence he would have here.”
Eyewitnessing Life in Four Refugee Camps

“Aida Camp is less than one square kilometer, and hasn’t been able to expand. The narrow alleyways and roads make it a challenge to bring in medical care.”

Natalie Narloch (R) speaking at our Behind the Wall panel about her visit to Aida Camp in Bethlehem, Palestine. This spring four Arrive Ministries staff members shared their observations after visiting refugee camps around the world.

“The authorities are so far behind in processing asylum claims that currently 20,000 people are in a camp designed for 3,000. It is filled with families desperately doing what they can to make life better.”

Mike Bergman recounted his experience at Moria Refugee Camp on the Greek Island of Lesvos

“I was really struck by the wall, seeing it in person hit me very deeply, as well as hearing the stories of discrimination, hurt, pain and loss; and how the U.S. law are impacting people on both sides.”

Kristina Shirokova shared insights from a refugee camp at the U.S. Southern border with Mexico

“Food rations have gotten so low for refugees in Kakuma, cut to less than half of what they once were. Everybody is distributed a sack of flour, a little oil, a bit of salt, and one U.S. dollar per month.”

Wendy Meyering shared her visit to the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northwestern Kenya
Long-Term Friendships Through Literacy

“...thank you for all that you have done for our mothers.”

Bill Cameron planted a Somali Adult Literacy Training site in his East St. Paul neighborhood 13 years ago, teaching English language skills to a group of Somali refugees.

“Their eagerness to improve is what continues to inspire me,” says Bill.

With many Somali husbands and fathers forced to stay back in refugee camps, many Somali mothers find themselves in the vulnerable position of raising children alone in a new country.

“SALT is a great program for opening up doors,” says Bill. This rang true for Bill when one night he was going to tutor at an apartment complex but grew nervous as half a dozen teenage boys approached him. They asked if he was part of the tutoring program at their apartment.

When Bill replied that he was, they moved closer to him and said, “We just want to say thank you for all that you have done for our mothers.”

The relationships Bill Cameron has enjoyed with his Somali friends encourages him, believing God can use these relationships for His glory.

Open Doors for Hospitality

“...hospitality communicates to our clients that they matter, not only to us, but to God.”

In big and small ways, Tracy works to open her doors at our Immigration Legal Services department in warm and welcoming ways. She offers tea or water to her clients, and toys to their kids. Tracy also regularly offers to pray for her clients.

“The sweetest parts of my day always involve a pause, whether it’s to listen or pray with someone,” says Tracy.

Hospitality shows love and honor to another culture. It creates safe spaces. Tracy views her appointments as more than just a meeting, but as an opportunity to help her clients feel comfortable in their new homeland in the midst of their busy moving process.

“Offering hospitality says to our clients that we see the people behind the documents and file numbers. It communicates that at the end of the day, we are all just people who have similar wants and needs. We hope our hospitality communicates to our clients that they matter, not only to us, but to God, who sees their situation,” says Tracy.
Anna Martinez and her family came to Minnesota in 2014 as persecuted Christian refugees from Cuba. They were connected to a team from Wooddale Church. In 2018, Anna graduated from high school with honors, and was awarded a full scholarship to attend Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN.

“I can still remember the day before my family and I embarked on our journey coming to the United States. There were so many things on my mind, and I remember thinking ‘what will our lives be like in a few years?’ I now look back and I can’t believe how amazing God has been to us. Five years later, I am in college after having received a full scholarship.

Our family grows speechless when it comes to expressing our gratitude to the wonderful and unconditionally supportive team that has been with us since day one, as well as Arrive Ministries. We left so many family members and friends behind in Cuba, but we have found so much more here. All I can say is, ‘To God be the glory for putting us here.’”

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