Spring 2019 Newsletter

Saying Welcome
Serving Refugee and Immigrant Neighbors Together

Programs and Services

- Reception & Placement
- Immigration Legal Services
- Refugee Cash Assistance
- Refugee Employment Services
- Refugee Life Ministries
- Church Refugee Gardens
- Somali Adult Literacy Training

Arrive Ministries
1515 East 66th Street
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“Everybody wishes to have a better life that is free and fair”

Sometimes in life it is better to explore new things even though it may not be easy all the time. Everybody wishes to have a better life that is free and fair, but not everybody can go through it easily. Anyway, we might learn from it as a good experience.

In my home country of Burma, people were in a difficult situation and looked for a way to escape to different places. Many of them were flooding into Karen refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. I left my village and moved to a camp when I was four. I was happy to get a chance to study freely, but when I grew up, I was depressed spending most of my time in the camp because refugee rights were restricted.

In 2006, the resettlement program started. The news spread to all Karen refugee camps but not everybody could apply for it. Refugees who were registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees qualified to apply for it. Many families left, while other families stayed in the camp. I was sad not to go home yet because the civil war was still going on.

My family discussed our future and made the decision to move forward instead of returning to Burma. It doesn’t mean that we don’t want to return there. We have been away from home for so long. We would love to be there again and enjoy its beauty with our beloved family and friends who stay behind. On the other hand, we have to think about our new life here. We worry about our health, job, and daily life; however, we know that we once were in the jungle and we needed to get out. So, these are the steps we must go through.

I would like to say thank you so much to the members of Arrive Ministries. You do a great thing for those who are in need. You warmly welcomed us to the U.S. as new arrivals. You provided orientation, which is important to know to build a new life here. I was happy to learn how to use public transportation. Even though we may not be able to express every single thing you have done, I really appreciate your help and kind consideration.

Paw Eh arrived through the Reception and Placement program last spring. She lives with her husband and parents in St. Paul, where she attends school, intent on further improving her English.

A Home Where She Belongs

Recently I attended the interview for U.S. citizenship of one of my clients. It was actually the second interview attempt for her; the first time she had been denied due to a technicality. The officer had been more than a bit unreasonable, so we were all a little bit nervous.

A little about my client: she has been through a lot to get to this point. She suffers PTSD and chronic depression after fleeing for her life from a brutal military regime in Burma, losing her husband in the process. She came to the U.S. and tried hard to learn English, but has so far been unsuccessful due to the mental and emotional trauma she has experienced. She works hard at a packaging company despite her language limitations, using the help of a co-worker friend as an interpreter when needed.

All that said, she passed the interview! The officer recommended her for naturalization – she is going to be a citizen of the U.S. It is one of the biggest and surely most satisfying steps on her journey to make a new life out of the brokenness that was forced upon her by a home country that did not want her.

This is not an unusual story for any of my refugee clients. Some of them have watched beloved family members die in front of them, some lived in difficult conditions in refugee camps for years and years, and all of them have fled from death and dehumanization that was intended for them simply because of their ethnic identity, religion, tribe, or other markers of their very identity.

It is one of the most satisfying parts of my job to see a person who came to the U.S. hoping for safety and a new life, become a citizen. This is not because I am overly optimistic about our nation; it is one of many, with many warts andills, and many beautiful and confusing people who compose our identity. But this woman has worked very hard to get to this place. Once she was homeless, stateless, and likely hopeless; but after so many people and events told her that she was not wanted, now she has a home where she belongs.

Timothy Paulson, Immigration Counselor, Immigration Legal Services

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Immigration Legal Services (ILS)

Arrive Ministries ILS program provides services to the immigrant community in the Twin Cities. Primary services include: Green Card applications, family-based visas, travel documents, and citizen applications. ILS serves over 1,300 immigrants annually.

Timothy is pictured here with a family reunited from El Salvador.
From Ukraine to Minnesota: A Glimpse of Lives in Transition

“We have enjoyed the lakes and the nature and all of the sports that are available in Minnesota. The people here are very open and helpful” – Yurii

Husband and wife Volodymyr and Yaroslava, along with brother Yurii, were born and raised in Ukraine. In November 2018, they arrived as refugees to Minnesota, where they were welcomed at the airport by their Arrive Ministries case manager, Kisongo Mbeleulu.

“[Before we arrived] I didn’t even know that somebody was going to help us. I expected to come here and start working the first week somewhere washing floors. I didn’t realize that I would get so much help, both financially and emotionally, and that Arrive would explain everything to me,” says Yaroslava.

Refugees coming through Arrive Ministries typically work closely with their case manager throughout the first 30 to 90 days of their resettlement. This case, however, was unique in that this family worked with multiple departments including: Reception and Placement Services, Refugee Cash Assistance, Refugee Employment Services, and our volunteer program.

Yaroslava was interested in a volunteer to help her prepare. Arrive Ministries Volunteer Coordinator, Rebekah Phillips, connected her with a volunteer who was excited to meet Yaroslava and help her prepare.

“We spent two and a half hours together the first time. I recently saw her again and we talked just like friends. She is a very good person and also helped me practice my English and writing,” Yaroslava shared.

Arrive Ministries Employment Counselor Anya Yastremska, attended a job interview with Yaroslava.

“On the day that I had my interview, I asked Anya to come with me because I was little bit hesitant, and I didn’t want to miss this opportunity,” Yaroslava shared.

Yaroslava was greatly encouraged that Anya attended the interview with her as a support system and was so excited to receive a job offer at the end of her interview! “Basically they [Arrive Ministries staff] do a good job at their work, not just because they are professionals, but because they do it from their heart. Thanks to them, they eased our transition that we made from our comfort zones to the zone of sudden change. They prepared us very well for the hardships that could happen by showing us how to deal with those situations,” Volodymyr commented.

Volodymyr, Yaroslava, and Yurii live in Burnsville, MN.

My Part in the Resettlement Puzzle

“It has been an absolute joy to be able to give back to others what was once given to me and my family!”

Hi, my name is Kristina Shirokova and I began working at Arrive Ministries in October as the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) Eligibility Coordinator and Resettlement Specialist. It’s a long title but it basically means that I help refugees get cash assistance, housing, and health care. However, if you told me 18 years ago that this is what I would be doing, I’m not sure that I would have believed you. Because 18 years ago, I myself stood at the MSP airport with my parents, wide-eyed, excited but nervous as we waited to drive to our new home in America.

I was born and grew up in Russia. In July 2001, my parents and I were resettled by Arrive Ministries as refugees. As a young girl this move was exciting, a little scary and very confusing. I had to leave my family, friends, and the only life I ever knew for something that was completely foreign, including the language. The move came with lots of hardships, but with many joys as well because we got to experience freedoms that America offered.

It has been an absolute joy to be able to give back to others what was once given to me and my family! And while I am only a small piece of the resettlement puzzle, I feel so honored to serve the refugees that come to Minnesota. My experience as a refugee has helped me relate in a unique way with other refugees – such as Volodymyr, Yaroslava, and Yurii – who are passionate, hardworking, and kind. My experience with finding housing has been a treat as well, as I often get to find or help secure the first home in America for our refugee families. I love to see how their faces light up when I tell them that this is their new home.

While it’s easy to forget the good and the bad of the past and to get discouraged with all that is happening now, I am constantly encouraged by the refugees that come through our doors! They carry such strength, resiliency, joy, and hope. They inspire me to continue to live to the fullest, work with all my heart, and always remember that even the hardest and craziest seasons are never wasted.
Literacy, Friendship, and the Somali Language

“When we learn their language, we, like Jesus, are willing to take a new posture”

“When we learn their motivations for learning Soma-ship with Professionals Global. Adult Literacy Training in partner-stand the Somali language during and even colored candy to under-niture, Total Physical Response, ruary, participants used hands-on For four days in early Feb-

“Kursiga miiska dinacisa dhig.” They listen and select the doll chair. “Kani waa kursi.” Again iature table from the toys in front of them. “Kani waa kursi.” Again language guides shared with us of SALT’s mission: to obey Jesus’. we learn their language, we, like Jesus, are willing to new posture. We learn to language-learning is just one way

During the course, a de-votion on Philippians 2 reminded us that Jesus “made himself noth-ing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human like-ness.” (v. 7, NIV). Our knowledge of English and American culture of-fers us a position of power and ad-vantage over our immigrant neigh-bors. However, when we learn their language, we like Jesus, are willing to take a new posture. We learn to enter their world as a child does, speaking in broken phrases, listen-ing, and even playing with toys.

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When Arrive Ministries welcomes a refugee family from Burma, Congo, or Afghan-istan, as we did in February, or when we come alongside asy-lum-seekers or secondary arriv-als, two powerful arms embrace our new neighbors:

Our Social Services Arm: This arm is comprised of a team of case managers and resettle-ment staff who secure housing and material needs for new ar-rivals; apply for cash assistance and insurance, find jobs, and provide immigration services.

Our Ministry Arm: This arm consists of RLM Church Teams and New Neighbor vol-unteers from dozens of church-es, 220 weekly SALT volunteers who share their lives and the love of Jesus through literacy, and churches who offered more than 2,000 garden plots to refu-gee families in 2018.

It is only when both arms are fully functioning, supported by volunteers, and resourced by the financial support and prayers of God’s people, that we are up to the task of truly welcoming the stranger. You warm our hearts because you care enough to “hold up our arms in battle” (Exodus 17:12-14) for the sake of vulnerable people who together we have the privilege of calling our new neighbors and friends.

What is SALT?

SALT is a growing network of volunteer tu-tors who meet weekly with Somali families throughout the Twin Cities, St. Cloud and Willmar. Recently we have seen exciting ex-pansions, growing to over 200 active volun-teers and open doors to expand our services in the Midway of St. Paul, Burnsville, and New Brighton. It is a privilege to grow in mutual friendship with our Somali neighbors as we seek to meet their practical needs of English and literacy.

Learn more or get involved at arriveministries.org/salt

Two Arms Working as One

“But refugees are not numbers. They are people like you and me, created in the image of God, each with a story of loss and resiliency.”

Arrive Ministries has the privilege of coming along-side some of the most resilient people in the world. There is a tendency to reduce refugees to numbers: 25.4 million world-wide, 44,000 forced to flee every day, 13 million displaced Syrians. But refugees are not numbers. They are people like you and me, created in the im-age of God, each with a story of loss and resiliency.

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Empowering the Church

“I can’t say enough won-derful things about Arrive Minis-tries. They have made it easy to get personally involved in a con-roversial “issue” of our day. A lot of people have critical ideas and opinions about refugees... but do those same people know any refu-gees? And others still might have a heart for refugees but nowhere to express it!“ Arrive has done an in-credible job of reaching out to both groups of people. They are thoughtful and articulate in dis-pelling prevalent myths about resettlement. They’ve created a beautiful framework for people who want to come alongside refu-gees but don’t know where to start. They did all the hard work of organizing and training, we just showed up with willing hearts and got to experience the immeasur-able blessings of taking part in this very good work!”

Molly Stawarz, Restoration Angli-can Church, South Minneapolis
Last summer, Refugee Life Ministries staff met a Congolese family through a community organization working with secondary arrivals in Minneapolis. This family had recently moved to Minnesota after being resettled as refugees in Massachusetts. When we met them, they were getting ready to move into their new home and we were excited to have a church team come alongside them.

We connected Kristin and the RLM team she leads at Park Community Church with this Congolese family of five. Despite some barriers, including language and culture differences, a mutual friendship quickly developed. Shortly after meeting each other, team members Mike and Erin were able to walk alongside the family in applying for ESL classes, tutoring their children, and helping the dad of the family learn how to drive.

Kristin shared that she and her team members are also growing: “We are learning to be patient and flexible as things don’t happen on our timetable.” She mentioned how they are blessed by this family and how quick they are to love and to laugh. The father of the family shared that they have a good relationship and have been able to do fun activities together as well as being helped in practical ways.

Through RLM, Church Teams and New Neighbors are walking alongside newly-arriving refugees, families who have been here for several years, and asylum-seekers. More than 1,200 refugees have been welcomed by the church through RLM. We know that when we are obedient to God’s command to welcome the stranger, life transformation is possible for refugees and the church.