

Refugee & Asylee PROGRAMS



ABOUT US

More than 60 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons are currently living with a very uncertain future. The Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (LFSRM) Refugee & Asylee Programs are dedicated to helping these individuals and families rebuild their lives, by equipping them to achieve self-sufficiency within their first year in the United States, and fostering integration into their new communities.

In New Mexico, LFSRM is one of two agencies that resettle refugees and provide services during their first five years in the United States. Last year the agency served over 1,200 refugees, asylees, and victims of trafficking in New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, making it the largest such program in the Rocky Mountain region. LFSRM clients have originated from more than 40 countries, including Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, Congo, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Russia, Somalia, Sudan, and Ukraine. The majority of individuals served by LFSRM reside in the Denver and Albuquerque metropolitan areas.

REFUGEES vs ASYLEES

A refugee is a person who *“owning to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”* But that description does not begin to tell the story of the traumas refugees endure. Usually forced to leave their homes suddenly, their possessions are reduced to what they can carry; sometimes no more than the clothes on their backs. They flee for safety to neighboring countries where some face inhospitality. Many face the harsh conditions of overcrowded refugee camps, and all face an uncertain future.

There are 13 million refugees in the world today. When confronted with this staggering number, we must be conscientious about not viewing refugees as a faceless mass. Refugees are individuals. Each has a unique story of suffering and survival, unique hopes for happiness and security, unique skills, and talents to offer a new community.

Asylees are individuals already in the U.S. who receive protected status due to their inability to return home for many of the same reasons that refugees flee their homes. In order to obtain asylum, a claim of individual (and not group) persecution must successfully be made.

THE REFUGEE PROCESS

Once refugees cross into a neighboring country, they are interviewed by U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees staff to determine their status. Those who meet the criteria are documented as refugees and allowed to remain in that

country, usually in a refugee camp. Then they wait – for months, even years. Harsh conditions, overcrowding, lack of living space, and inadequate food, water, sanitation, and medical care are common in camps. Women and children are especially vulnerable. Everyone faces the grinding tedium of passing time without sufficient income-generating activities for the adults, or educational opportunities for the children.



Refugees fortunate enough to be repatriated often find their homeland devastated by war. A minority of refugees are able to remain in the country where they have fled to, but most countries have difficulty absorbing refugees into their societies and economies. Resettlement in a third country is an option for less than one percent of all refugees.

Each year the President, in consultation with Congress, sets the number of refugees who may be resettled in the U.S. Refugees considered for resettlement must be referred by the United Nations or U.S. consular representative and be interviewed by U.S. Department of Homeland Security staff. Those few approved for admission are then allocated among the ten U.S. resettlement networks, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS).

VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines “severe forms of human trafficking” as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for:

- *Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or*
- *Labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.*

Coercion includes threats of physical or psychological harm to children and/or their families. Any child under the age of 18 engaged in commercial sex is a victim of trafficking.

SERVICES AVAILABLE

LFSRM provides services, support, and encouragement to newcomers as they adjust to life in the United States. In many cases, LFSRM works together with a co-sponsoring congregation or community organization to provide basic services. Refugees, asylees, and victims of trafficking may be eligible for the following services at no cost:

Case Management

- Social services enrollment
- Health/mental health services

Community Programs

- Financial literacy courses
- Job clubs for adults and youth
- Specialized youth and senior programs
- After-school mentoring and cultural orientation
- Parenting support classes
- Community development with local ethnic groups

Employment Services

- Job placement
- Job coaching
- Cash assistance
- English language training
- Pre-employment training

Housing

- Referrals and location/placement assistance
- Relocation services
- Basic furnishings, household items, and clothing

CONTACT

Tarrie Burnett, LMSW | Program Director | LFSRM Albuquerque | 505-933-7015 | tarrie.burnett@lfsrm.org