

# 'They're just like us'

## Circle of Welcome seeks resettlement partners

It is a distressing reality that less than one percent of the 22.5 million refugees worldwide are ever resettled from refugee camps to a third country. In the U.S., the number of refugees now allowed into the country is at an all-time low of 45,000 for 2018. The actual number of resettlements will be even lower, possibly as few as 22,000 for the year.

Despite the challenges of resettling refugees under the current administration, LSC continues to be committed to welcoming refugees in both North and South Carolina. To do that, LSC needs partners to welcome the stranger and help refugee families transition to life in the United States.

Circle of Welcome is a new Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) initiative that has been developed to engage both faith and community groups in the successful integration of refugees into communities in the United States. This initiative is anchored in a close partnership between LIRS, LSC, and volunteer teams from faith and community groups.

The Circle of Welcome program allows for both local and distant partners to play a pivotal role in a family's "long welcome" (the process by which newcomers are received and eventually integrated into their communities). Similar to sponsoring children or families overseas, this refugee integration program allows groups throughout North and South Carolina an opportunity to engage refugees in service and friendship.

Crystal Hall, of Christ the King Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, spoke this summer at a Circle of Welcome event held at Sitti, a Raleigh restaurant. Crystal has been involved with supporting a family of refugees through her church.

"It's about helping them and rejoicing with them," she said. "They're just like us. They have the same hopes for their lives and for their chil-



Volunteers like Julie Fox help refugee families adjust to their new lives.





Posing for a photo after a Raleigh Circle of Welcome event are Ted Goins, LSC president; Adrienne Morton, Circle of Welcome coordinator for North Carolina; Haneen Alsafi, area manager for Refugee Resettlement; Bedrija Jazic, service team leader for Refugee Services; and Whitney Palmer, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service Circle of Welcome coordinator.



Quyen Slone came to the United States in the 1970s as a refugee from South Vietnam and is a member of the Circle of Welcome advisory council. She spoke at a Circle of Welcome recruitment event in Raleigh.

dren’s lives as we do. We help them believe that they belong here.”

“This is work for people who empathize,” said Adrienne Morton, who heads up the Circle of Welcome program for LSC in North Carolina.

Volunteer Veronica Agostino, who is originally from Argentina, has found great satisfaction in helping some newly arrived Rohingya refugees set up their apartments and navigate everyday life in this country.

Veronica says she is guided by these words: “Do for one what you wish to do for everyone.”

Quyen Slone, who arrived in the United States as a refugee with her family in 1975, resettled in Ohio after fleeing South Vietnam and staying temporarily in a tent city in Guam. Quyen, who is on the Circle of Welcome Advisory Council, shared her story with the group at Sitti.

“Refugees are forever thankful and grateful,” she said.



The Circle of Welcome has three distinct models of engagement levels for faith and com-

munity groups. All models require a one-year commitment as well as a financial contribution.

In the Newly Arrived model, the volunteer team focuses on the needs of the newly arrived refugee family, which may include gathering furnishings, supplies, and clothing, stocking the pantry, assisting with transportation needs, and

providing other support as needed. In the Post Arrival model, the focus is on integrating the refugee family longer term. Both the Newly Arrived and

the Post Arrival models usually require partners to be within 50 to 100 miles of an LSC office and to commit to meeting with the family at least once a week.

In the Distant Partner model, volunteers can be engaged regardless of proximity to an LSC office, with the focus being on advocacy and financial support.

*To learn more about Circle of Welcome in the Raleigh area, call 919-861-2846 or email [ncrefugee@LSCarolinas.net](mailto:ncrefugee@LSCarolinas.net). In South Carolina, call 803-445-9833 or email [screfugee@LSCarolinas.net](mailto:screfugee@LSCarolinas.net).*

