



Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Program Staff left to right: (back row) Fatema Giwa, Hayley Williams, Ali Abdullahi, Zaid Al Showbacki, Bhakta Sharma, (front row) Huguette Mpagazihe, Kristina Hammell

Refugees Find Safety, New Opportunities and Challenges

By Kristina Hammell (Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Director)

If you have listened to or watched any news broadcasts in recent days or months, there is no doubt that you have heard of the many crises taking place in our world. In those news reports you likely heard the word “refugee”, as in “100,000 displaced refugees flee...” or “800 refugees lose their lives trying to cross the sea...” Clearly, refugees are fleeing incredibly difficult circumstances that threaten their very lives.

Worldwide, the situation is enormous. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are 16.7 million refugees worldwide.

Our Catholic faith calls us to respond. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Winona, working with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Department of State, is part of that response.

Officially, a refugee is a person, outside of the country of their nationality, who has a legitimate and genuine fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Due to this fear, the person has fled their country of origin and is unable, or unwilling, to return. War, famine, and political upheaval have caused many of these people within these countries to run fast and far to seek safety for themselves and their children.

Many refugees never intended to leave their homes one day, never to return. They sought safety in a refugee camp, just waiting for the crisis to “blow over” so they could return to their homes, jobs, schools, and way of life. The weeks turned into months and the months turned into years until they realized there was no going back.

Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program assists refugees that have been confronted with this reality. In order to be able to access our services the typical refugee has already completed a comprehensive process that can take anywhere from 2 to 10 years. The process includes being granted “refugee” legal status, passing extensive backgrounds checks, and completing thorough medical screenings.

We provide 90 days of one-on-one case management to newly arrived refugee families. Our case management focuses on securing stable housing, medical care, education for children and adults, and cultural/transportation/budgeting orientations, which assist families in adjusting to a new culture and environment. During this time frame, we connect families with over 25 various sources of support throughout our communities. The goal of Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program is to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills that will assist them on the road to self-sufficiency.

We are always looking for special individuals in our community to volunteer to mentor and befriend newcomers as they adjust to life in the United States. Those who don't have time to volunteer, can support our program by donating items included in Welcome Baskets for children or Cleaning and Survival Kits for families. We also accept household and furniture items in good condition and will provide pick up within the city of Rochester. Monetary donations to our program are welcomed, too. If you want to learn more about our program or to make a donation, please visit our website at www.ccwinona.org or contact the Rochester Office at 507-287-2047.