

GATHERING HUMANITY PRESENTATION

Welcome to Gathering Humanity.

We are a non-profit that was started 7 ½ years ago (2016) because a group of moms wanted to help refugees in our area - but we live in the East Valley - hardly a mecca for refugees. We had no idea how to go about finding them, let alone helping them. So we started to research the process that brings a refugee to our community:

First of all, what is a refugee?

A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. It is also someone who has crossed an international border and been registered at a refugee camp that has been officially sanctioned by the United Nations or other International group. Once there, a refugee begins their vulnerability screening. If deemed highly vulnerable, they will be assigned a host country. The US is one of 13 countries that take in refugees. The screening process for the USA takes approx. 2-3 years, during which time they are interviewed by 8 government agencies, processed thru 5 security databases, fingerprinted, have biometric eye scans and medical screenings, and 3 rounds of interviews. The vetting process is very thorough. If someone says their village was destroyed on a certain day and that was why they had to flee, their story is compared to satellite images for that day to verify their stories match. If anything is amiss in the screenings or interviews, they are not considered for resettlement.

So how many refugees are there in this world?

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, as of May 2023, there are approx. 110 million displaced people in the world. 35.3 million of them are official refugees.

So what percentage of refugees are actually deemed vulnerable enough to be resettled?

Less than 1%. Only the most vulnerable are resettled - those who are determined to be the least likely to survive life in a refugee camp. Perhaps they have a medication that can't be refrigerated in the camp bc there is no electricity or they have been victims of rape and torture. Others have had all of the men in their family killed and without a father, uncle, brother or son for protection, they are highly vulnerable.

Once a refugee has been selected for resettlement, they are assigned to a country.

Unlike immigrants who have chosen to come here of their own volition, Refugees do NOT get to choose where they are resettled. Oftentimes, that is extremely difficult for them because they are leaving behind their community, family, friends, culture and language for the hope of something better here. Once they are assigned to a country for resettlement, they have 120 days to get there which often means paying rack rate airfare.

Who pays for their airfare to the US?

The International Migration Organization (IOM) pays for their airfare. Once they are in the US for 90 days, they have to start paying that airfare debt back. So a family of 6 can have over \$5,000 in airfare debt as soon as they arrive. This is a heavy burden for someone who doesn't speak the language and is usually making minimum wage. IOM's payback program can help refugees establish credit which helps them to secure future housing etc.

Once in the US, a refugee gets 4 things:

- 1. A resettlement agency** (Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, Arizona Immigrant & Refugee Services or International Rescue Committee)
- 2. A Caseworker from the Resettlement Agency.**
- 3. Approximately \$1000 from the US government**
- 4. A "Standard of Living" items that the US government requires they purchase with their funding.** This is meant to help refugees assimilate into society here - for example: If you were a family of 10 from the Congo, sleeping on the floor, cooking with one pot over a fire, you cannot do that here. So the government requires that they purchase the items on the list (ie: bed, pots & pans, bedding, a chair for each person, etc.) with the funding they are given.

So how did that work?

The Caseworker would purchase required items at Walmart, Goodwill or Salvation Army. A significant amount of the overworked caseworker's time was spent shopping. Often the bulk of their funding was spent purchasing the items, leaving them very little money to begin their life here.

This is where we decided we could help.

So what does Gathering Humanity do?

We gather donations from our community to provide (free of charge) all of the mandatory items on the refugee's list.

This allows the caseworker to focus on more important things like: helping them find employment, getting their children enrolled in school, finding an english class, etc.

And it allows the refugee to preserve their funding for more pressing things like: the bus to get to work, a babysitter for their child so they can work, the rent, food or medicine.

How do we know when a refugee family is coming and where they will be living?

The volunteers at Gathering Humanity are alerted that a family is coming by their caseworker. We receive the refugee's country of origin, ages and sexes. With this information, we gather the items that they are required to have, plus much, much more from our warehouse in Tempe. Usually, the day before they arrive, a group of volunteers pick up the items and set up the apartment so when the family gets here, they have a comfortable, inviting place to be.

Where do these refugees live?

Can you imagine trying to find housing if you didn't have a job, no guaranteed income, no first and last months rent or deposit and you couldn't speak the language? It is very difficult and refugees find themselves in sub par apartment complexes where those things are not required. The apartment complexes that the resettlement agencies are able to secure for them are often quite dreary and even dangerous. When we set up their apartment, we not only try to pepper the walls with as much love and care as we can, but we also act as another set of eyes and ears to advocate for these highly vulnerable people. We do this by making sure things are in order and that everything is working in the apartment. We contact the appropriate person if they are not.

Other things Gathering Humanity provides refugees:

We leave the family a ready made meal and two weeks worth of groceries that are specific to their country of origin. In our experience with refugees, culture shock and fear can cause them to not leave their apartment for the first few weeks they are here. We have encountered refugees who had no idea how to get to a store and had no food

weeks after they arrived. For this reason, we leave them a meal and groceries. We want them to have familiar food to eat as they acclimate to life in a new place.

What countries are our local refugees coming from?

Afghanistan, Congo, Burma, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, North Korea, Iran, Russia and Ukraine. Right now we are averaging 12 families a week. We have done as many as 100 set ups in a month.

Gathering Humanity is an all volunteer, donation based non-profit. Everything that is donated directly benefits displaced people. Once the needs of our refugees are met, we use any surplus donations to benefit other displaced populations in our community. Whether it is those fleeing domestic abuse, teens who are aging out of the Foster Care system, or the homeless, our donations are used to bless and serve the community we live in.

We have 2 locations:

Our Tempe Warehouse - This is where donations are received, organized and stored for apartment set-ups.

Hours: Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday 9:30am-12pm.

510 S 52nd St #107 - Tempe, AZ 85281

Our Gilbert Serving Center - This is where we invite individuals and groups in the community to come serve with us. We have weekly service projects that are posted on JustServe.org. We also host group service projects by appointment and have projects that can be picked up and done off site.

Hours: Wednesday & Thursday 10:30am - 12:30pm
(other times by appointment)

726 N. Greenfield Rd. Suite 120 - Gilbert, AZ 85234

How can the community get involved?

There are so many ways to help refugees and others in need in our community. Here are a few ways to serve with Gathering Humanity:

Sign up to work at the warehouse

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/30e0f44aca82da64-warehouse#/>

Donate funds to purchase 2 weeks of groceries for a Refugee Family

<https://donorbox.org/refugee-welcome>

Sign up to do an Apartment Set Up for a refugee family:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/409054fadad2fa7f49-volunteer#/>

Serve at the Gathering Humanity Serving Center in Gilbert:

We host a service project to benefit local refugees each week. Projects are posted on JustServe.org

<https://www.gatheringhumanity.org/serving-center>

<https://www.justserve.org/gatheringhumanity>

Organize a Service Project

We help facilitate and host service projects for any size group (at our location or yours).

To schedule a project email: tjohnson@gatheringhumanity.org

Become a Mentor/Cultural Navigator for a Refugee Family

Whether you have a little time to spare or a lot, there is a refugee family who needs your friendship.

<https://www.ofoneheart.org/>

Help with our bi-annual Refugee Baby Shower:

Gathering Humanity provides emotional, educational, and physical support to help refugee mamas get through the first two years of their baby's life.

<https://www.gatheringhumanity.org/babyshower>

Adopt a Refugee Christmas Program

You can help coordinate, contact and assign out refugee families for volunteers to adopt for Christmas.

To get involved, email: ghchristmas@gatheringhumanity.org

Provide Christmas for a Refugee Family

Adopt a refugee family and provide Christmas for them

To get involved, email: ghchristmas@gatheringhumanity.org

Fill Christmas Stockings for Refugees

Many refugees arrive here during the Christmas months. You can make stockings to welcome them to America.

To get involved, email: ghchristmas@gatheringhumanity.org

Other Opportunities:

Volunteer with Somali American United Council

Help refugees with immigration paperwork, citizenship classes, English classes, etc.

<https://www.somaliunitedcouncil.org/>

Phoenix Refugee Connections

Connecting Christian churches with refugees across the valley

<https://www.phxrc.org/about>

Matthew House

Serving refugees in the East Valley. Tutor, teach life-skill or english classes. Matthew House provides opportunities to help our immigrant and refugee neighbors engage and connect with their communities.

<https://matthewhouseaz.org/about/>

Foster Your Future

Help and mentor teens and young adults who have aged out of the Foster Care system

<https://fosteryourfuture.org/>

Winged hope

Providing support and assistance to those fleeing domestic abuse

<https://www.wingedhope.com/>