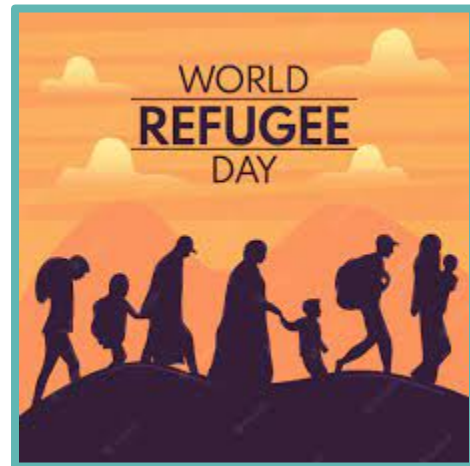


World Refugee Day

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World Refugee Day is an international day designated by the United Nations every June 20th to honor refugees around the globe. This day celebrates the strength and courage of people that have needed to flee their home country to escape conflict or persecution. Since February 2022, over eight million refugees have been displaced from Ukraine across Europe. More than 271,000 Ukrainian refugees have made it to America during this time as well. While these displacements may be temporary, for example refugees from the Ukraine in the UK are currently expected to leave the UK within three years, many refugee displacements last over three years.



Two-thirds of all refugees around the world have been displaced for over three years. Once they pass this threshold, it is known as protracted displacement. Additionally, half of refugees, around 10 million people, have been displaced from their home country for more than ten years. Over the years, they may move from country to country before permanently



settling somewhere new or finally returning home. This can result in frequent disruptions to education, limited access to schooling and little help to support language development and additional language barriers as they move to different countries with new languages. There is also the loss of a sense of community they formerly had and may have trouble rebuilding during frequent moves.

Some refugees are displaced to neighboring countries while they wait to process paperwork to be resettled abroad. There are many local nonprofits in the USA that help with these resettlements through the Office of Refugee Resettlement as partners of the national resettlement agency USCRI (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants). In Pittsburgh, for example, we have four resettlement agencies and volunteered with one of them, Hello Neighbor, for our Day of Service last year. These local agencies welcome refugees when they first arrive and help them find housing, navigate public transportation, as well as enroll in services. They are expected to hit the ground running and be ready to support themselves just three months after moving to the U.S.! Many of these nonprofits also have volunteer groups that help create a sense of community for newcomers. In South Carolina these groups are



called a Circle of Welcome and each one consists of about 20 volunteers. In Charleston, for example, Circles of Welcome were formed by a variety of churches, the College of Charleston and by Jewish Family Services, as well as many individuals. They, like Hello Neighbor's mentorship program in Pittsburgh, provide a sense of community and help navigate the first year in their new homes. Many of these groups help prepare the homes, provide necessities as well as helping them with the new language, school enrollments, job placements and even just getting out and seeing the sights in their new cities.



While many of these groups focus on resettlement and helping families and individuals acclimate to new places, there are also groups that help by sharing community, providing friendship and helping others learn about the refugee experience. One such nonprofit in Lancaster, PA is called Bridge. Bridge was started by a refugee from Somalia named

BRIDGE

Mustafa Nuur. His family had to flee Somalia when he was only 13 years old. They spent the first eight years in Kenya before resettling in Lancaster in 2014. To make it here, his family would have spent two years wading through a screening process that involves eight federal agencies. Once his family was settled, he wrote an op-ed for the local paper in an attempt to dispel some of the negative feelings towards refugees. While this resulted in a lot of support within in his community, he also received harassing messages from a man named Mark, telling him he was not welcome here and should go back to his country. Eventually, he met this person for coffee and they came away from the meeting with common ground and a new friendship. This spurred him to create Bridge, a social platform where you can meet local refugees, hear their stories, enjoy their food and build a strong community. Mustafa says, "Once you know somebody's story it's going to very difficult to hate them. That's what Mark told me one time."

We encourage you to work with local resettlement nonprofits, read stories from refugees or donate to celebrate this World Refugee Day. Additional online resources can be shared upon request by emailing DEIChampions@vfccu.org.