

April 18, 2018 Refugee Services

A Need for Solutions

It is important to understand what is happening to humanity on a global scale. There are currently thousands of refugee camps around the world. Some camps, like the very large camps in Kenya, have been around for decades. People are born, live, and die without ever exiting these camps. While others, like those in Bangladesh, were put together over night as over 600,000 Rohingya flooded over in less than two months.

The most notorious camps are overcrowded and lack basic hygiene facilities. But even the well-planned camps require residents to be locked in for their own safety. They are prisons. What most have in common: insecurity (beatings, rape, torture, kidnappings), lack of mobility, lack of or limited employment and educational opportunities, malnutrition, disease, abuse of children, trafficking, child labor, and lack of medical and mental health support. They are all filled with people who are just waiting.

The Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year 2018 calls for resettlement of 45,000 refugees across the United States. This is the lowest in history. Still, six months into the year, a little over 10,000 refugees have arrived in the United States, so potentially half of the 45,000 will actually be able to come. In Lansing, St. Vincent Catholic Charities (STVCC) – the only refugee resettlement program in mid-Michigan — has resettled exactly 100 people from October 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018. In a normal year, STVCC would have resettled over 300 refugees by now. STVCC has no arrivals scheduled in April.

Lack of resettlement options means that those who have fled war are now in camps and detention centers indefinitely. Although the first “durable solution” is voluntary repatriation when the conflicts subside, clearly peace is not coming soon enough to most of the war-torn areas of the world. And since the numbers of displaced are historically high – over 65 million—the host countries cannot possibly absorb them. It is no wonder that many news articles are coming out recently showing an increase in suicides in refugee camps. [1]

Refugee camps are not solutions. STVCC has been resettling refugees for over 40 years. During that time, we have met the most amazing people – artists, doctors, nurses, eager young students, gardeners, women who have rescued babies... the list goes on. People who have enriched our lives and inspired us to be kinder and more faithful. What a shame if they had been left to live the rest of their lives in a “temporary shelter”. And we wonder who is left in the camps. Maybe the person who would find the cure for cancer. Maybe the next neighborhood hero that will coach our children to soccer stardom. The possibilities are endless. If only there were solutions.

Meanwhile, at STVCC, we are trying to stay optimistic and to serve refugees who are already here while maintaining our capacity to resettle, once the doors reopen. This month, we are planning to start several new educational programs, entitled “Living in America”, to help our clients succeed and thrive. These classes include: academic English, small business planning, computer literacy, home purchasing, home maintenance, and taking the written driver’s exam. Financial support for our programs will help us to maintain these programs.

We are grateful for the amazing people that we have met through this program – those who entered our community as refugees and who we now call friends. And we are grateful to all our

supporters. You keep us going with your energy, your optimism and your love. Keep praying for refugees. Pray for solutions. And pray for peace.

Please consult our website (stvcc.org) for more information on refugee resettlement in Lansing and contact us if you would like to set up an educational session for any group or organization that may be interested.

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