

## **Jewish Family Services of Delaware's Response to the Global Refugee Crisis**

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### **History of JFS Delaware**

JFS Delaware was founded in 1899 with the goal of improving people's lives. Since then, the organization has expanded to serve people throughout the state, reaching more than 2,000 clients annually. The organization's core mission is to provide counseling and support services that strengthen the well-being of the individual, family, and community, based on Jewish values. JFS Delaware provides a continuum of support services focused on individuals and families during the most vulnerable times of their lives. Our programs include outpatient mental health services; in-home care management; support services for older adults aging-in-place; prevention education and digital media training for at-risk youth; case management and workforce development for youth identified with disabilities; family support services including case management for refugee families; a volunteer network; and a crisis alleviation program that distributes food, clothing, and household supplies to clients in need.

In addition to these services, JFS has been working with refugee and immigrant populations since our founding, regardless of race or religion. A refugee is defined as someone who has fled from his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.<sup>1</sup> JFS has historical experience responding to international refugee crises. During the last major refugee crisis in the late 1980s, JFS was instrumental in resettling hundreds of families from the Former Soviet Union in Delaware. Since 1997, JFS Delaware has been providing émigré services for refugees who have already arrived in the state.

### **Scope and Importance of Refugee Resettlement**

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was created in 1950 after World War II to help European refugees<sup>2</sup> and is still on the frontline today. UNHCR is mandated to provide international protection for refugees and registering with UNHCR in the country that a refugee fled to is the first step for most refugees.<sup>1</sup> According to UNHCR, there are currently over 65 million forcibly displaced people worldwide—22.5 million of which are refugees.<sup>3</sup> In 2016, there was a total of 189,300 refugees resettled worldwide<sup>3</sup>—which is a small fraction of the growing number of refugees. UNHCR offers three durable solutions to refugees—repatriation, integration into country of asylum, and resettlement—which is granted to less than one percent of refugees.<sup>4</sup> This statistic is a testament to the notion that only the most *vulnerable* refugees are resettled.

Each year, the President of the United States makes a “Presidential Determination” on refugee admissions to the United States. The Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year 2018 was a ceiling of 45,000 refugees,<sup>5</sup> which is the lowest since the inception of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. According to Refugee Council USA, to reach the proposed ceiling of 45,000 refugees for fiscal year 2018, 3,750 refugees must be resettled each month, and as of

March 5<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. has only resettled 8,757 refugees.<sup>6</sup> At this rate, the U.S. may not come near the proposed ceiling.

## Resettlement in Delaware

In October 2016, JFS became the only refugee resettlement agency in Delaware. JFS, an affiliate of HIAS—one of nine national resettlement agencies—meets refugee families the moment they step into the United States and assists them with everything they need to begin their new life in Delaware. The resettlement program at JFS Delaware is known as the Refugee Integration Support Effort, or RISE. JFS RISE staff members provide transition services and case management to help families resettle, and volunteers assist with tasks such as creating resource packets for local landlords and employers, sourcing furniture for apartments, and providing transportation. JFS works with over 300 volunteers through a coalition comprised of 30 faith-based and local community organizations; seven healthcare and dental providers; and four landlords to house, host activities, offer educational opportunities including ESL classes, provide community integration efforts, medical services, and cultural orientation to ensure that refugees feel welcome in their new home.

Resettlement in Delaware begins when JFS Delaware receives word from HIAS that a “case” or refugee family has been assigned to us. We are usually given about two weeks’ notice before the family arrives. Prior to a refugee family’s arrival, JFS Delaware is mandated to secure housing in a safe and affordable neighborhood (primarily in Wilmington, Newark, or New Castle). Table 1 breaks down services JFS Delaware offers during each phase of the resettlement process, which lasts for 90 days:

Table 1. Refugee Resettlement Services

<b>Pre-Arrival Services</b>	<b>Arrival Services</b>
Create signup list for donations from the community (furniture/food/linens/etc)	Meet the family at the JFS Delaware office upon arrival/copy all documents/take family home
Secure Housing (max rent \$950)	Conduct home visits family’s arrival
Furnish Housing (Apartment setup team)	Transports families to apply for public assistance/social security numbers/scheduled medical appointments
Connect with an in-person interpreter to translate during day of arrival	Assist clients with school-aged children enroll in school after receiving proper immunizations/enroll in employment services/and English classes
Arrange to have culturally-appropriate meals, and weather-appropriate clothing present when the family arrives	Connect families with JFS RISE volunteers, faith-based, and community organizations to help families integrate into life in the United States
Begin scheduling medical appointments for each family member	Provide cultural orientation lessons to families upon arrival to ensure they understand the services being offered to them, US Laws, and the education on the overall goal of the US Refugee Admissions Program, which is self-sufficiency

Table 2 includes statistics on the number of refugee arrivals to Delaware since the program started. We welcomed the first family to Delaware in January 2017. It's important to note "Country of Departure" in the chart below. Families who must flee their country of origin are hosted by an asylum country and are later recognized as refugees by UNHCR. These asylum countries are usually the countries they depart from to enter the US, or other countries that accept them for resettlement.

Table 2. Statistics for Delaware

Year of Arrival	Month of Arrival	Country of Origin	Country of Departure	Number of Arrivals
2017	January	Ukraine	Ukraine	4
	February	Syria	Thailand	3
	February	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	2
	March	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	4
	June	Eritrea	Ethiopia	7
	September	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	4
2018	February	Afghanistan	Pakistan	2
	February	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	3
	February	Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo	Ghana	3
	March	Democratic Republic of Congo	Tanzania	3

The newest family that arrived in Delaware on February 27<sup>th</sup> were welcomed by JFS in the "Kimmel Center," which resembles a comfortable living room. This space is strategically setup for just that reason—to serve as a comfortable place for our clients. When this family arrived, they were welcomed with a culturally appropriate meal while the staff made copies of their documents. After the welcoming reception, they asked to be shown which space (in the office) they would sleep in. They were informed that there was a furnished home waiting for them. When we got to the home, the family cried, and prayed and mentioned how grateful they were to be in their own home as they spent most of their lives suffering.

## Partnerships

In addition to our wonderful volunteers who work extremely hard alongside JFS RISE staff to welcome families and help them integrate into life in America, the RISE Program has formed great partnerships with local healthcare facilities and landlords. These partnerships make it possible for us to promptly schedule medical appointments for clients prior to them arriving to the country and secure apartments through "RISE Landlords" who are willing to rent to refugees. RISE Landlords graciously agree to waive credit and background checks and allow us access to the apartment prior to the family's arrival so that we have time to set up the home. The successes of the new refugee families would not have been possible without these partnerships.

One example of how our partnerships with faith-based organizations have attributed to the success of refugee families is the interfaith coalition that West Minster Presbyterian,

Congregation Beth Shalom, and Hanover Presbyterian church formed to help one of the Afghan families we resettled last year with adjusting to life in the U.S. By leveraging their resources, these faith-based organizations helped the family learn how to save, secure a job, learn how to drive, and participate in different community events.

## Challenges and Future Direction

While many of the refugees who arrive are experienced, talented and possess professional credentials in a variety of fields, their biggest challenge is employment. Many face seemingly insurmountable obstacles when they arrive speaking little to no English and their professional credentials are not recognized in the United States. JFS works closely with Literacy Delaware and many volunteers to help them learn English as quickly as possible. Each member of a family receives an English test and enrolled into English classes as soon as possible as a way of career development. However, the newly arrived refugees are forced, at least initially to find entry-level employment. JFS RISE is working diligently to connect with employers in the New Castle County area to build a database of work opportunities for refugees. Another major hurdle, securing affordable housing in a safe neighborhood is also a challenge as the most affordable houses are often not in the safest neighborhoods. Therefore, RISE Landlords are one of the keys to the program's success. JFS will continue to work with the Delaware community of residents, business owners, property owners, and healthcare providers to strengthen our collaborative to ensure that we have the necessary resources for newly arrived Americans to settle safely, comfortably, and with dignity and to become integrated members of our community.

## References

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