

Making Lafayette A Refuge

Proposal to Sponsor A Refugee Family



Introduction

Millions of refugees are currently displaced around the world today with no place to go besides resettlement camps or neighboring countries where they are treated as second-class citizens. Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR) is an initiative dedicated to decreasing the number of displaced persons worldwide in addition to bringing awareness and knowledge to college campuses around the United States. The goal is to have every college campus in the United States host at least one refugee family per campus. In addition to the ongoing support provided to local resettlement agencies (fundraising and petitioning), RefAct, a student run group on campus, hopes to bring one refugee family to the Lafayette College campus within the next year.

ECAR: A National Model for Campus Resettlement

Every Campus A Refuge is an initiative which calls on every college and university around the world to host one refugee family on their campus grounds and to assist them in resettlement. It is a flexible movement that encourages institutions to partner with local agencies to carry out their own initiative. It was started in Guilford College by Dr. Diya Abdo, a professor of English and Creative Writing. It has become very successful on its home campus, with Guilford hosting a Ugandan man and two Syrian refugee families on its campus. The initiative has also spread to five other campuses in North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Ohio and Pennsylvania with many others interested. Our neighboring institution, Northampton Community College, started the process for hosting a refugee family last year and is currently waiting for a family to come.

The initiative was recognized by the Obama Administration at the White House and the Sixth Annual President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge Gathering. It has been featured on NPR's *All Things Considered*, in *The Washington Post* and the State Department's Toolkit on how universities can help refugees.

Supporting Refugees: Easton's Done It Before

During the Vietnam War, a local church in Easton welcomed a Vietnamese Refugee family. This family had three kids, all of whom grew up in Easton attending local schools. Retired professor David Hogenboom was a key member in supporting the refugee family upon arrival, and speaks highly about the experience. The refugee family was brought through the efforts of his local church congregation. Bringing a refugee family, then and now, to Easton is an asset.

Our Local Resettlement Agency

We will be working with Bethany Christian Services (BCS)¹, a local Lehigh Valley resettlement agency. BCS already has a thriving resettlement program through which they help newly settled refugees adapt to life in America. BCS works with the U.S. State Department to help the refugees complete multiple background and health checks before they arrive here. BCS also offers ESL classes, Cultural Orientation, transportation and overall support for refugees. Their efforts are made possible through local partnerships.

¹ <https://www.bethany.org/other-services/refugee-and-immigrant-services>

It is important to note that BCS, although religiously affiliated, was appointed by the Department to do resettlement work in the Lehigh Valley. The U.S. State Department conveys on its website that “while some of the agencies have religious affiliations, they are not allowed to proselytize”. Therefore, even though BCS is a Christian organization, they do not choose refugee families based on religion.

A new strand that BCS is exploring is university and college synergies. Northampton Community College is currently their first higher education partner. The process for them took about 6 months to receive approval to welcome a family. Unfortunately, due to the immigration ban, they have yet to receive a family, but remain ready and waiting. We hope that Lafayette College will be the next to sponsor a refugee family, and see great importance in starting this initiative now. The following sections outline the role that Lafayette would assume in sponsoring a family.

Northampton Community College Contact: 

Lafayette’s Role

Lafayette College is currently an inclusive environment for those who are on DACA as well as many international students that have had travel bans placed on them. Seeing that the campus is an accepting environment, we hope to increase the role Lafayette College can play around the world through hosting a refugee family on or near our campus. We believe that this will be a mutually beneficial relationship in which the Lafayette community will learn to empathize with a refugee’s journey and struggles, as well as learn the beauty not fear in difference. In turn, Lafayette will be providing the practical means and institutional resources to give the family a starting baseline when they arrive in the U.S.

Overview of Benefits the College can provide

Lafayette’s support to a refugee family is invaluable. A refugee family is given a one time sum of \$925 per person when they arrive to the United States. The money is distributed by the resettlement agency over the course of 6 months. Lafayette, in providing housing, access to fresh produce, and students/professors to teach classes and provide transportation allows this money to be used for other purposes that come with building a new life: computers, paying back their plane ticket, saving for a car etc.

Housing and Furnishing

We hope to house the family for at least six months on campus or nearby. Some options we are considering are:

- In an apartment for visiting faculty.
- A college-owned off campus apartment
- A community member's apartment to rent.

It is important to keep in mind the size of the refugee family when choosing our housing options. Lehigh Valley has welcomed refugee families of ten, but also couples without children.

The house would need to be furnished, with a bed and chair for each member of the family. As well as kitchen supplies and other basic household items. These items would not have to be provided directly by the college as students and faculty have already expressed interest in helping to assemble these items. We will be utilizing programs like the Green Move Out to gather furniture and household items for the family.



Green Move-Out

Green Move-Out is a campus-wide sustainability and community service effort where students recycle their unused or gently used goods during finals week at the end of the school year. The items are then donated to local, non-profit organizations or people. Green Move-Out ties together environmental justice and social justice and would contribute to the environmental and community sustainability of the campus as well as Easton. A refugee family could greatly benefit from these items to be used as clothing, towels, furniture, bedding, small appliances, non-perishable food, books, toys etc. These items would be essential in helping Easton become a home for them during this difficult transition.

By utilizing the expertise and guidance of the new sustainability director, donating items to the refugee family could add to the robustness of Green Move Out. This will grow the initiative as students see this as a civic responsibility and gain a better understanding of where their items are going. Students, faculty, staff, and local families can all participate in the collection and sorting process. We can build an interdisciplinary team with different departments across campus and the Easton community to make a positive impact and carry out the missions of Green Move Out, Every Campus a Refuge, and the greater Lafayette community.

Contact: [REDACTED]

Feeding the Family

The family will be provided with food stamps when they arrive in America. However, we would like to provide the family with fresh produce as a supplement to their given food stamps. Refugee caseworkers that we have spoken to have said that most of the time, refugees are unfamiliar with the food that food stamps can get them. However, they are familiar with fresh produce and prefer cooking with it. Therefore, we believe that providing the refugees with fresh produce would contribute meaningfully to their wellbeing.

Easton has many community farms that contribute to food pantries and neighborhoods that are food deserts. We will be working with these farms and their capabilities to contribute produce to the family, but also make sure that we are not taking any resources away from the residents of Easton. We have already contacted community farms like Urban Farm in South Side, and they have expressed interest in helping the family. We would show the family where community food pantries are, and how to cook with the produce if they are unfamiliar with it. Even though it would only be supplementary to their diet, we believe it is important that they are familiar with local produce and community food producers.

Contact: [REDACTED]

Education (Cultural Orientation and ESL classes)

Refugees can arrive to the US with limited or no knowledge of the English language. We hope that through an ESL course offered by Lafayette, the family would be able to learn the language during the six month period. This can be carried out through the use of a Community-Based Learning/Research (CBLR) course or through volunteer programming via the Center of Community Engagement or the Landis Center.

Likewise, Lafayette is a community with a pool of expertise in navigating the United States. Connecting refugee families with Lafayette Students would be very beneficial in helping them become successful and connected citizens in the U.S. In turn, Lafayette students would have the opportunity to learn about diverse cultures and build relationships with those who come from different backgrounds - an experience we know Lafayette is committed to providing for their students.

Contact: [REDACTED]

Career Advisement

Lafayette has a very strong and active Career Service department on campus. Conversation has already begun with Career Services to see if potential advisement can be offered to refugees. Although refugees will be looking for local jobs, they can receive job training such as interview tips and how to communicate with employers. Students could be trained to pass along valuable career service information to refugee families looking for employment.

Contact: [REDACTED]

Health Providers

Lafayette is situated in an ideal location in the Lehigh Valley to provide the refugee family with several options for healthcare. The refugee family will qualify for Medicaid, so Lafayette is not responsible for any costs here. However, an extensive search told us there are many doctors in the Lehigh Valley who accept Medicaid, as well as the hospital. Even further, the Lehigh Valley Health Network offers translators to their patients, if they do not speak English or if they feel more comfortable negotiating doctor appointments in the language most familiar to them. We found 24 doctors in the Lehigh Valley who speak Arabic, and at least one local family care doctor who speaks Arabic. We also found transportation options that travel to and from different health providers. Depending on where the family is from the language need will vary, but we are confident we can help point the refugee family in the right direction for receiving the care they need.

Contact: [REDACTED]

Transportation

Lafayette's location in Easton is an asset in helping the refugee family acclimate to the U.S. Children enrolled in Pre-K through 5th grade would be able to attend March Elementary with ease, as the school is within a 10-minute walking distance of the Lafayette College campus. Furthermore, older students would still be able to attend school as the Easton School District provides reliable transportation to each student through grade 12, to the middle and high school.

Similarly, Lafayette has a shuttle that runs regularly to local grocery and department stores. Refugee families could use these services and save money on buying a car or public transportation immediately upon arrival. It also helps the family get to know the local area.

Contact: [REDACTED]

Benefits to Lafayette Students

In line with Lafayette's expansion of community-based learning and/or research (CBLR), we believe that including many students and faculty in this initiative will help build stronger ties between Lafayette and the greater Lehigh Valley community. In helping resettle a refugee family in the local community, students will be able to interact with not only the family, but also members of the Easton community. Along with the family, students will gain a better understanding of the bus system, various welfare programs, and the Lehigh Valley area in general.

Contact [REDACTED]

Lafayette's Role in the Sustainability of Refugee Resettlement

Refugee resettlement agencies depend on government funding to support families arriving in the U.S. The recent Executive Orders issued by President Trump have cut off this funding to many resettlement agencies. BCS has already begun laying off employees, individuals who are well equipped and skilled to serve and welcome refugees to the Lehigh Valley. This is problematic because when the U.S. begins to receive refugees again, they will be short staffed and have difficulty providing for each family. This is where Lafayette and other colleges can fill a very high need through institutional resources. Having the college partner with local resettlement agencies will ensure stable and sustainable service to refugee families. Students and faculty at Lafayette can provide support, ESL and cultural orientation classes, limited food, and housing for families when resources are tight for the agency. Lafayette has many ready resources listed in this proposal that equips us to host a refugee family. We, as Lafayette College, are a part of a greater Lehigh Valley community, and supporting resettlement agencies and ultimately refugee families is an important role for us to fill.

For any additional questions, please contact:

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