



NOVA Friends of Refugees is a grassroots interfaith network of more than 830 members dedicated to welcoming refugees, creating welcoming communities, and raising awareness of the many ways refugees add to our culture, communities, and nation. We work on the front line of the welcoming movement.

Our Vision: to make every refugee feel welcome and every resident a welcoming friend

Our Purpose: leveraging our network to welcome, assist, and advocate for refugees. We focus on three areas: advocacy, community events, and life-skills support. In addition, we connect members with opportunities to volunteer and respond to urgent requests for help. We also work with health professionals and students to help them better serve refugees and improve access to care.

History & Growth

- Founded in Fall 2016 in response to anti-refugee, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim rhetoric during the Presidential election. Founders were from Saint George's Episcopal Church and Mount Olivet United Methodist Church in Arlington, VA.
- Grew from three members to a network of more than 830 people from 150 faith communities, nonprofits, businesses, government agencies, and refugee communities, including people from other states and countries.

Advocacy

- Conduct advocacy campaigns and training to support the U.S. refugee resettlement program, oppose anti-refugee (including asylees, SIVs, TPS) policies, end family separations at the southern U.S. border, and restore refugee admissions, which have been cut to a fraction of their historic levels.
- Held inaugural **Advocacy Workshop and Information Fair** in March 2017. More than 300 people heard leaders from the U.S. State Department refugee program, U.S. Senator Kaine's office, the VA State Senate, and local faith communities, plus an expert advocacy trainer and local refugee service organizations.
- Held advocacy training workshops at faith-community facilities throughout northern Virginia.

Community Events

- Held three public forums on the global refugee crisis, refugee resettlement, refugee stories, government policies, and ways to help refugees. The weekly forums were held at Saint George's Episcopal and each drew 100-150 people, plus local press coverage.
- Participate in and host community events, including film screenings, fairs, conferences, celebrations, workshops, panel discussions, dinners, and school and faith group events, raising awareness about refugee-related issues and volunteer opportunities.
- An original organizer of the **One Journey** movement and **One Journey Festival**, the first national celebration of refugee talents, stories, and contributions.
- Helped recruit a team of 150 sponsors/partners and 140 volunteers for the **One Journey Festival** in Washington, DC, which attracted 4,000+ people. The day-long festival showcased music, food, dance, and art by refugee performers, chefs, and artists.

Life-Skills & Integration

- Provide an online resource for posting urgent help requests for refugees, such as low-cost medical and legal aid referrals, furniture and toys for a new home daycare, and financial help for a Marymount honor student when her work permit was delayed.
- Conduct employment mentoring workshops for refugees who were professionals in their original countries.
- Partner with the Georgetown University School of Medicine to support community-based training for medical students focusing on health needs of refugees. Assisted students with production of orientation videos for newly arrived refugees.
- Member of Northern Virginia Coalition for Refugee Wellness, providing community outreach and advocacy support for the Coalition's mission of improving behavioral and psychiatric healthcare for refugees.
- Promote and support events, programs, and volunteer opportunities of refugee resettlement agencies and other NGOs.
- Engage and partner with students at universities and secondary schools to raise awareness of the refugee crisis, organize response activities, and encourage hands-on support (e.g., English tutoring) of refugees and participation in One Journey Festival.

Networking

- Advise other communities interested in using our network model and best practices to launch their own Friends of Refugees/One Journey activities and networks.