



Saint Mary Parish

Saint Mary Parish Refugee Resettlement Update

A Warm & Welcoming
Catholic Family of
Faith, Love & Service



*For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger, and you invited me in –Matthew 25:35*

This past December, Saint Mary Parish helped welcome a Syrian refugee family to Ridgefield! In concert with the Refugee Resettlement Committee of Ridgefield (RRCR), we offered one of our Parish-owned houses to the family. The couple, with their two young children, moved in just before Christmas and are settling in well. Below, we'd like to share an update we received on the family's progress in transitioning to life in the United States and our community!

The family is comprised of the parents in their thirties, and two boys age six and under. The parents both have post-secondary education and both worked in the medical field while in Syria. They had been living in Istanbul, Turkey for about two and a half years since leaving Syria. They supported themselves while in Turkey in various ways, including medical work and elementary level teaching. Having lived in a smaller city in Syria, they are quite pleased to be out of the massive city of Istanbul and to be able to live in the smaller community setting of Ridgefield.

Much has been accomplished already to help them get settled, by many volunteers, in the short six weeks since their arrival:

The parents are now enrolled in ESL classes four mornings a week. Both parents have some prior English training and capability, but improving their speaking and comprehension remains the top priority for RRCR, as that is the main path to the family finding employment and achieving self-sufficiency. In advance of regular classes, ESL volunteers have been tutoring the parents several mornings each over the past weeks. That work has been evident, as both parents are showing good development in their English already in this short time.

The family recently attended CORE training classes this past week in New Haven. This orientation program is run by the New Haven resettlement agency, Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services, and covers a range of topics such as the governmental structure of the US, wellness and budgeting skills, and the importance of learning English as a path to employment. They were in a class of roughly 25 newly arrived refugees from Syria, Eritrea, and Afghanistan. Three families like themselves are being resettled via co-sponsorship groups (like RRCR) outside of New Haven, the rest are living in the New Haven area.

School and learning English is the focus for the children. The older boy is now enrolled in school. RRCR has been facilitating his transition with interpreters as well as with the help of several committee volunteers who have children in the same school. The group is also exploring local options for providing the younger (pre-school aged) son with socialization and English learning opportunities.

RRCR volunteers are helping the family to establish the routines of daily life. For example, since the parents don't drive, volunteers have organized a schedule of drivers to help take them shopping each week. Other volunteers are helping them with budgeting and related activity, like setting up a checking account to facilitate paying bills.

The parents now have their Social Security cards, the other key to getting employed. Over the coming weeks, as the parents continued to build their English skills, the RRCR employment team will start to develop strategies and think about timelines for the employment search. There have already been a couple of interesting job leads that have developed through the RRCR volunteer network, especially for the father.

Ongoing community support continues to be strong. The Committee has received a number of unsolicited contributions of varying sizes over the past weeks, and every week continues to receive notes from people who have heard of the effort and want to know how to get involved in helping the family. One interesting example - a member of St Mary's has reached out, and is sponsoring the boys in a learn-to-skate program at the ice rink as a way for them to interact with other children in town.

As an aside, the father made himself available to be interviewed by a news crew that was visiting during the CORE training in New Haven described above. When asked by the reporter "How are you finding living in Ridgefield?", he responded with ease and a HUGE smile on his face, "I think the people in Ridgefield helping us would not let my boys return to Syria even if it could happen."