



Refugee Volunteer Organization

The United States is often thought of as a melting pot; a place where many ethnic backgrounds blend together and make up something unique, something “American”. Unfortunately, a blended and understanding society isn’t usually the outcome. Personal fears and stereotypes often win out over compassion and a willingness to step into another’s shoes.

But as the refugee crisis continues, millions of concerned citizens in our nation are unwilling to sit by and do nothing. I was one of them and just couldn’t sit by. A few years ago, I asked around and learned that I could host refugees temporarily in my home. I was given an hour and a half of training by one of the wonderful organizations that helps in the refugee resettlement process here in Portland. But I felt vastly unprepared and ignorant as I strove to help those who came to live with me. Where could they find food assistance? Interpreters? Transport? Health checkups?

I felt a little like Alice going down the rabbit hole. If only there was a centrally organized place where I could get all this information: find local ESL classes, places of worship, restaurants, businesses willing to hire refugees, local events. The more research I did, it became obvious that nothing like this existed. Perhaps I should start something like this? Surely not. I’m in my sixth decade of life, a practicing psychologist with no tech understanding and no personal significant cross-cultural experience. The cosmic joke was on me.

Fast forward a year. Refugee Volunteer Organization (RVO) has received 501(c)3 non-profit status. We have a team that includes Fatein Mahmoud, RVO’s Co-President, and a media director, Tim Cowley. Our online presence has grown to include www.RefVol.org (our main site), www.RefVolPDX.org (the Portland site) and social media accounts.



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We are prototyping and experimenting and excited to get other cities on board full of a groundswell of compassionate community members eager to befriend and help our refugee neighbors.

What We Are Doing

Our ultimate goal at RVO is to facilitate the integration of refugees into our communities. We do this by empowering the volunteers who will be helping along in this process. We envision city-specific websites and social media accounts that can model themselves after our Portland example and take away much of the frustration that comes with trying to navigate this process, a feeling not unlike groping around in the dark.

How It Works

Let's say you live in Springfield (25 states have one, after all). You know of at least a few refugee families in your community as well as a few services that you've heard about that help them with various needs. Could an RVO site for your city be worth a bit of effort to get one going?

We've put together a little guide to help you think this through:

1. Do you have recent refugee arrivals in your area? If yes...
2. Are there a few refugee-focused events or non-profits working in your area? If yes...
3. Have you checked out RefVol.org to see what we're trying to do?
4. To see a real working live example from Portland, have you looked at RefVolPDX.org?
5. If you've done the above and feel like you'd like to bring this to your community, email Tricia at tricia@refvol.org or our media director tim@refvol.org or fill out our online form.



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What Does It Include?

RVO is in its infancy, but we're excited about the future and have thought of a lot of different things that we like including on our website and sharing through our social media accounts.

- Events (upcoming and recounting past events with photos & video)
- Country and people-group information
- Local resources of help (food banks, clothing, rent assistance, healthcare, etc.)
- pretty much anything you can think of that will be helpful for refugees...

We would love to hear from you and discuss the possibility of helping you, and your city, care better for the refugees around you.



sincerely,
Tricia Zigrang (06.04.2018)