



Refugee Co-Sponsorship

Partnering with IRIS to welcome & resettle new Americans

Whenever possible, IRIS recruits community based groups – often churches and other houses of worship – to participate in this great mission of welcoming and resettling refugee families in Connecticut.

Not surprisingly, refugee families come with a lot of needs. Community groups can help in many ways. This is a list of tasks that groups can help with:

- Collect furniture for a family
- Find an apartment (often churches own property or have a vacant parish house.)
- Pay the first 2 to 3 months of rent (this comes to about \$3,000)
- Collect clothing and food for a family
- Set up the apartment (a few days before the family arrives)
- Meet the refugee family at the airport, or at the Limo station, when they arrive; and drive the family to their new home.
- Cook a “culturally appropriate” hot meal to serve the family when they arrive
- Drive the family to appointments: DSS, Social Security, IRIS office, DMV
- Arrange for health care appointments and drive the family to and from
- Register the children in schools
- Teach the family English and help the children with homework
- Show the family how to take public transportation, where to launder clothing, where and how to shop
- Help the adults find jobs

In general, the goal is to help the refugee family get off to a good start with their new lives, and to become self sufficient as soon as possible.

If a group is ready to take on most of the resettlement tasks, we refer to this as a ***Full Co-sponsorship***. If a group is ready to do a few of the tasks, we call this a ***partial co-sponsorship***.

Whether partial or full, the assistance of a community group is linked to a specific refugee family. You will get to know the family, and they will get to know you; as you help them adjust to life in America.

IRIS is your partner. IRIS is always involved, regardless of how much a group decides to take on. IRIS helps you prepare for this adventure, provides advice along the way, and will do any of the tasks that the community group is not able to perform.

In some cases, a number of groups (churches and synagogues) have pooled their resources and come together to help a refugee family. In Canton, five congregations combined to help families from Cuba and New Orleans (Hurricane Katrina evacuees). And recently, in Wilton, seven churches and a synagogue are pooling resources to welcome refugees from Iraq.

IRIS can send you the names and email addresses of churches and synagogues that are currently supporting refugees.

The process:

- Invite IRIS to your meeting or service for an introduction to refugee resettlement. In most cases the Executive Director, Chris George or Sponsorship Developer Roger Saterstrom, will meet with your group for 45 minutes to an hour. Some congregations have invited Chris and Roger to say a few words during the service, and stay on for a longer presentation after the service. In some cases, Chris or Roger will present the topic in the form of a homily or sermon.
- After this initial introduction, groups typically meet to decide if they want to go forward. If they do, then a second meeting is scheduled for IRIS to meet with a committee of interested people. This second meeting, lasting an hour or two, will cover the details of co-sponsorship.
- A third meeting might be necessary to continue to discuss details, and to conduct a brief training on how to work with refugees and committee function.
- Once a congregation or group has made the decision to become a co-sponsor, formed a committee and assembled the necessary resources; IRIS will ask the group to complete a co-sponsorship commitment form and select a start date, after which, the group would be ready to accept a family.