

Refugee report from Mary Knecht, Wichita-First
Presented during the May 9th Presbytery meeting.

In 2016, 581 refugees were settled in Wichita. They came from the Congo 304, Somalia 100, Eritrea 42, Sudan 41, Ethiopia & Afghanistan 20 each, smaller numbers from Syria, Iraq, Burma, and Uganda.

Children in Wichita's USD #259 speak 114 different languages in their homes.

For 2017 the International Rescue Committee-Kansas office located in Wichita, an official program of the US State Department, is planning for 540 refugees, 140 will be placed in Garden City. As of May 5th 147 have arrived.

Interesting fact: there are 350 "secondaries" in Garden City (refugees who were originally placed in another state who on their own have moved) to work at Tyson and Cargil.

The two refugee resettlement groups in Wichita, the IRC and Episcopal Migration Ministry, cannot keep up with the needs of the refugees. They need to have a furnished home or apartment when they arrive, learn English, find a job, get children enrolled in school, learn how to navigate in the bus system, etc.

In the fall of 2015 Wichita-First provided 100 backpacks of school supplies for refugee children, in 2016 the number was 250. This year the need will be for 500 backpacks. Help is needed with this project.

Also, as the weather gets cooler in the fall, winter coats are needed. The Economy Corner (thrift shop run by Wichita-First and Grace) last year purchased dozens and dozens of new coats. Financial help is again needed for coat purchase because of the increased need.

At the backpack distribution last fall Wichita-First meet five Congolese refugee families who reported they were praying in a laundromat because they had no other place to worship. FPC has welcomed 15-18 families (25 children and 50 youth and adults) who worship at Wichita-First on Sunday mornings from 10:45 – 1:45. FPC members provide an hour of Sunday school and an hour of structured play for the children. In months that have a 5th Sunday, they experience a joint worship then a potluck lunch.

Pray for refugees who are finding new beginnings in Kansas (mainly Wichita and Garden City) and others that are waiting to come.

Pray that they learn English, find jobs and welcoming mentors.

Pray that those who are anti refugee and anti immigrant will have their hearts and minds softened.

For information on how to support this mission contact Mary Knecht, 316-942-8068
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