



Refugee Crisis Information Meeting Tuesday, November 17, 2015

Background Notes:

- *Unite is making it possible for diverse churches across Greater Dallas to work together and with others to address the needs of our city. Today, the topic is refugees. We're also working on Education, Poverty, and other issues.*
- *There are 3,000 churches in Greater Dallas, and collectively we have access to everything needed to literally transform this city into what God intended it to be.*
- *Unite's role today is to bring diverse Christians together to get the facts. Because the core of our mission is to unite the Church around the things we all care about, our job is not to advocate for positions that will divide the Church. Other organizations can provide those advocacy outlets. Any opinions shared at the meeting are not included in these notes. Only verifiable facts.*
- *Our primary motivation is love and compassion. We have compassion for everyone experiencing understandable fear right now and for those having to make difficult decisions. At the same time, we have deep compassion for the millions of refugees trapped in the most severe humanitarian crisis since WWII. We can't lose sight of them.*
- *We're not setting aside national security concerns. Those are real. We're here to get the facts so we can each make informed decisions, personally and for our churches and organizations.*
- *Because DFW receives the most refugees of any city in the US, this information is critical regardless of the decision whether or not to resettle refugees in America from any particular country or religious background.*

Meeting Purposes:

1. To educate church leaders and other Christians with facts about the refugee resettlement process to calm their fears so they can lead with love and peace.
2. To give churches a clear model and specific roles to care for refugees using this opportunity to permanently expand capacity of our system of care for refugees and others.



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Attendees:

- The attendees were a mix of pastors, nonprofit leaders, politicians, business people, students, and other Christians from all denominations and ethnicities coming from all over Greater Dallas and at least as far away as Denison.
- They included at least 3 former refugees (one of the Lost Boys of Sudan, an Iraqi, and a pastor who had fled the Iraq-Iran War) and at least one American veteran of the Iraq War.
- Several representatives from one of our local resettlement agencies were present, and the Area Director fielded questions.
- There was a State Senator and a few other representatives of elected officials.

**Subject-Matter Expert: Jason Clarke || jason.clarke@seekingpeace.org
President & Executive Director, Seek the Peace (Seek)**

Jason holds an M.A. in International Affairs from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and a B.A. in Law and Society from The Pennsylvania State University. His professional focus includes conflict transformation and the role of forgiveness and reconciliation in peace-building, forced migration, the Middle East region and the Arabic language.

In the fall of 2008, Jason founded Seek after returning from Asia where through his work in the private sector, he created sustainable opportunities for underserved populations through multiple business and humanitarian projects. Through his experiences in Asia, Jason grew to understand the urgency surrounding critical needs, the relevance of context-specific solutions; the importance of sustainability; and the great responsibility of people who enjoy freedom, peace, and justice in facilitating the solutions to such global needs.

1. Overview of the scope of the current humanitarian crisis:

- The Syrian civil war has pushed 9.5 million people from their homes.
- 3 million have had to leave Syria. 6.5 million are internally displaced but can't leave Syria because of danger or lack of means to leave.
- 150,000 have fled to Europe in search of safety and sustainability. They're more like asylees.
- 50 million total people are displaced right now. Less than 1% will be resettled ANYWHERE as part of the UN resettlement program.



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2. The Refugee Resettlement Process:

- There has been some form of refugee resettlement since WWII.
- 3 million people have been resettled just since 1975.
- The program we have now was established in 1980.
- Resettlement to another country (especially to the US) is a last resort. The most preferable solution is for the family to return to their country. The second is to become a resident in the country where they've sought refuge.
- If those two solutions are not viable, there are 7 categories that define priority:
 1. Legal or Physical Protection Needs.
 2. Survivors of Torture & Violence.
 3. Medical Needs.
 4. Women & Girls at Risk (due to gender).
 5. Family Reunification.
 6. Children & Adolescents at Risk.
 7. Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions.
- The process is:
 1. A person or family is driven from their home due to war, famine or persecution.
 2. They cross their country's border into a neighboring state.
 3. They register with UN as someone seeking refuge and explains their situation.
 4. The UN begins to check their story and presents the case to US as a case for resettlement.
 5. The case goes to DHS, State Dept., and other government agencies that work to verify the story and determine identity. This is one of the most extensive background checks anyone can go through. It takes 18-24 months.
 6. Once approved, the State Dept. and US Office of Refugee Resettlement work with nonprofits at the national level to allocate families to US cities.
 7. Nonprofits designated in each city provide services to those families for several months to help them acclimate to their new home.
- Can they verify every story or prove every identity? No. But if we cannot vet them, they aren't allowed in.
- Refugees from countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia have been safely vetted through this program for years.
- We only have 3 cases to date since 1975 where people have tried to harm the United States.



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3. What kinds of things do the refugees need help with to becoming thriving members of our communities?



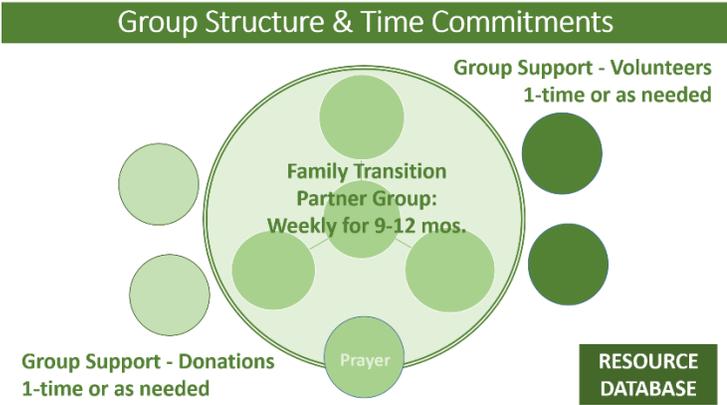
milestones adapted from Refugee Mobility Handbook© created by Seek the Peace

4. How can churches best serve refugees?

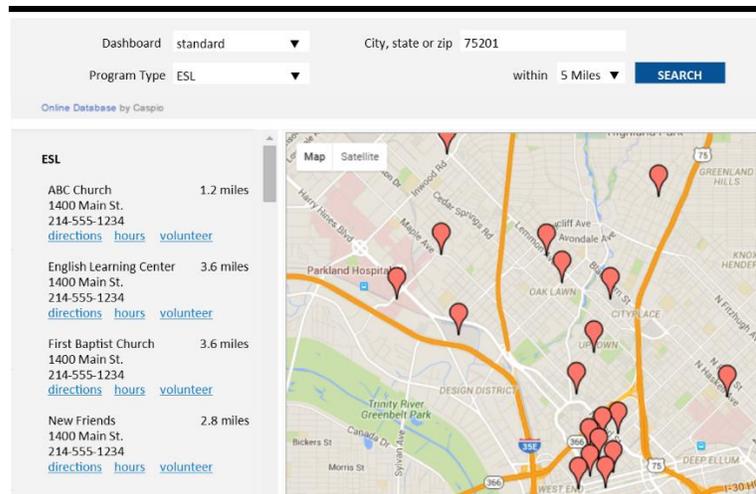
- The best thing for churches to do is to form small groups that will walk alongside the refugee/family for 9-12 months supporting the existing resettlement process in the above areas of need (see diagram below). There is training, a handbook, and other resources mentors can use to make this process easy and effective.
- Additional church members can support these groups with donations and/or by volunteering on a one-time or as-needed basis. Roles might include things like:
 - Prayer.
 - Home set-up.
 - English discussion partner.
 - Financial coach.
 - Resume writing/editing.
 - Interview prep.
 - Driving coach.
 - Help navigating our healthcare, education, or other systems.
- This group will also have access to a database of citywide nonprofit, public, and private services and other resources helpful to this process.



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- To connect with a refugee/family, churches can go directly to the local Resettlement Agencies (Refugee Services of Texas, IRC, and Catholic Charities in Dallas), or they can go through a nonprofit like Gateway of Grace.
- Churches with programs helpful to refugees can request to be included in the Resource Database being implemented in Greater Dallas in early 2016:



Screen mock-up courtesy of Unite

Churches can add their programs to the database using the appropriate link below (found at www.unitechurch.org/COORDINATE):

- [On-site Church-Based Programs](#)
- [Programs Offered by a Church at a Public School](#)
- [Programs Offered by a Church at Another Location](#)



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5. What can nonprofits do to help most?

- Nonprofits will be able to make sure they are correctly reflected in the above Resource Database being implemented in Greater Dallas in early 2016.
- Nonprofits offering programs specifically helpful to refugees should email refugees@unitethechurch.org to be included in the earliest release of the Refugee dashboard.

6. What can volunteers do? Look for opportunities on Voly.org.

7. How is this going to build the capacity for the collective Church of Greater Dallas to help our city become what God created it to be?

- By engaging refugees in long-term, empowering relationships, Christians develop new ministry skills, grow in their faith, learn more about American systems and processes, see what it's like to navigate the world from a place of material poverty, and learn about other cultures.
- Our churches build internal capacity to serve the community by developing leadership structures and partnerships with other churches and organizations.
- Programs and resources that serve all refugees, other immigrants, and other people in need are added to the Resource Database and/or strengthened so that they are more effective.



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We understand and respect the concerns and opinions of others. Following are answers to common objections that were made at the meeting not addressed by the information above:

- **We need to focus on taking care of the people at home.**

In Greater Dallas, Unite is working to bring the Church together to address issues like poverty, education, and hunger. It has been found that as churches begin to engage outside the four walls, that actually builds their capacity to impact the city in other ways. God created cities to meet these kinds of needs. When a city is broken, it isn't working as God intended it to. Part of our work as Christians is to restore that.

- **They will be a burden on our communities.**

Every situation will be different, but most Syrians are well-educated. Many who would come here would be professionals coming here to pursue their dreams as they were before war. However, it's not cheap to be a refugee. 60% live outside of camps while awaiting resettlement, and the UNCHR only gives them \$12/month for food. This means they may come with little to no assets initially. But like you or I, they have capacity to get jobs and become contributing members of our communities. And with a certain number of new people comes the need for more doctors, grocers, restaurant owners, etc.

Sources:

- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/17/how-were-welcoming-syrian-refugees>
- <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/admissions/index.htm>
- <http://www.rcusa.org/history>