

HELPFUL TIPS ON HOW TO ENGAGE YOUR CHURCH IN REACHING OUT TO REFUGEES

1) **Offer Multiple Levels of Engagement** - Volunteers are more willing to commit when they can choose a way to volunteer that fits their schedule and interests. For example, offer varying levels of participation, different types of activities, and varying time commitments.

2) **Groups projects vs. Individual Tasks** - We have found that volunteers tend to stay engaged when they are working together with a group on a shared project. That way, responsibilities and experiences are shared between several people rather than one person feeling the burden of meeting all needs and performing all tasks. They can encourage one another and motivate one another as they work together toward helping refugees. Within our organization, we encourage church groups (such as bible studies or Sunday school classes) to adopt one refugee family together. Groups of people who already know each other definitely work the best, although this is not always possible.

3) **Short Commitments with a Clear Beginning and End** - The shorter the commitment, the more likely people will get on board. (In our organization, we ask people to commit to three months of visits when they "adopt" a refugee family.) It is also important for people to understand exactly how they get started and exactly how long they are committing to. The expectations should be clear, and volunteers like to know that they will not be expected to volunteer forever.

4) **Face-to-Face Meetings** - Do whatever you can to get face-to-face meetings between potential volunteers and refugees. Many Americans are hesitant to work with refugees due to fears of the unknown: unknown cultures, unknown languages, unknown social customs. However, most of these fears diminish significantly when a hesitant volunteer actually meets a refugee family and sees that they are friendly, hospitable, eager, etc.

5) **Pastoral Advocacy from the Pulpit** - We tend to get more commitment from volunteers when they hear about our organization from their church pastor or the head of their own organization/agency. This affirmation from those in positions of leadership goes a long way. People become curious at the least and motivated at best when someone that they trust endorses

our ministry. Ask others that you know who lead businesses, churches, or community organization to tell their members about your organization and the opportunities for involvement.

6) Training and Realistic Expectations - Working with refugees has a number of challenges. The better you train and prepare your volunteers, the more likely they will be to stay committed when the going gets tough. It is important that volunteers understand some of the process that a refugee goes through both before coming to the U.S. and after arrival. This will help volunteers to understand a refugee's unique challenges and how to address these challenges in appropriate ways. I also like to make sure that volunteers understand the two main things that are needed to work with refugees: PATIENCE and FLEXIBILITY. We make sure that our volunteers understand that working with refugees is not always easy, but it is incredibly rewarding.