

# Spotlight

## RESETTLE TOGETHER: COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP AT IINE

ISSUE 4 | APRIL 2023

### A message from the CEO



**RESETTLING REFUGEES** is a community effort. It requires partnerships with a local network of government agencies, residential property owners, food banks, and health centers. Equally, it requires the goodwill and generosity of new neighbors, including volunteers who form personal connections with new community members in their time of greatest need.

Through what is known as a “community sponsorship model,” volunteers collaborate with resettlement agencies, and both parties make vital contributions. IINE offers professional service expertise built on decades of successfully resettling thousands of refugees in the region. Volunteers with community roots help lighten the load and support refugees by offering welcome and friendship. Those who have participated in IINE’s program, known as Resettle Together, tell us that their lives and communities are immeasurably enriched by the experience.

IINE launched our Resettle Together: Community Sponsorship program in the summer of 2022, shortly before the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement introduced its own community sponsorship programs to serve specific populations—Unite for Ukraine and Welcome Corps. The shift to this increasingly community-centered approach is a response to a refugee crisis that has reached new heights.

The U.N. has reported more than 100 million displaced people worldwide, and humanitar-

ian crises of enormous scale in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Haiti, and Latin America are sending record numbers of people to New England in search of security and opportunity. Resettlement agencies are stretched thin, housing is scarce, and federal and state policies that determine eligibility for support are varied, complex, and slow to improve.

The need for help is tremendous and growing—and offers a profound opportunity for community volunteers to engage in meaningful work. We are greatly inspired by the accomplishments of the first Resettle Together groups that stepped up to partner with us and are proud to share more about this developing program.

With gratitude,



**Jeffrey Thielman**  
President and CEO

### What is Community Sponsorship?

Community sponsorship is a collaborative effort between carefully



selected groups of volunteers and agency

resettlement staff. They work together under a formal agreement to prepare for and welcome refugees into their communities.

The volunteers take on some of the core services typically performed by IINE’s staff. This model not only adds capacity for IINE, but also allows community members to better understand the refugee experience and build direct relationships with arriving families.

Community sponsorship models come in different formats; Resettle Together is an IINE-specific community sponsorship model.

# How To Resettle Together

## THE CHALLENGE

WHEN REFUGEE FAMILIES FIRST ARRIVE, they have few financial resources, no local social support networks, and have faced trauma. As they begin to navigate their new communities, they encounter language and cultural barriers. Community sponsor groups can be a lifeline for these families. Acting as guides, advocates, and friends, they can ensure refugee families are secure, welcomed, and supported in our neighborhoods.

## THE TEAM-UP

Answering the call to service, community sponsor groups can be faith groups, friend groups, civic organizations, or individuals who ask to be matched with like-minded neighbors, united by a desire to help welcome newly arrived refugees. Groups are comprised of about five to twelve

volunteers. In a formal agreement with IINE, each group commits to sponsor an arriving family with whom IINE matches them for up to twelve months, and to raise at least \$10,000 in direct support funds for them.

## THE ASSIGNMENT

IINE staff train community sponsor groups to help provide core resettlement services—preparing them to help refugee families stabilize and begin to integrate. Groups learn how to secure housing and make sure that a family’s first home in the U.S. is furnished and welcoming. The money they raise helps families to cover housing costs and meet other basic needs, providing critical financial support while they apply for jobs or become eligible to receive long-term benefits. Groups also raise in-kind donations to make sure that families have access to necessities from warm clothes to household goods.

On a participating family’s first day in the country, it’s their community sponsor group that picks them up at the airport and drives



The Westside Welcome Committee receives a family of refugees from Iraq at Logan Airport in Boston

## Resettlement Volunteer Models



### PREVIOUS IINE MODEL

“Welcome Home Teams” helped with apartment set-ups and airport pick-ups for multiple families.



### PREVIOUS IINE MODEL

“Family Support Teams” helped with basic needs and community integration for an assigned family.

### NEW IINE MODEL

“Resettle Together Community Sponsor Groups” formally sponsor a family with a more structured IINE partnership, providing more support and forming a deep connection.



### FEDERAL PROGRAMS

In the “Unite For Ukraine,” “Welcome Corps,” and “Sponsor Circles” programs, individuals or groups of volunteers sponsor migrants arriving with temporary legal status, providing financial and integration support.



We have [had] a wonderful experience with Jon’s team for resettlement, ever since the beginning [with] house renovations, furnishing, warm welcome at the airport, funding our family upon arrival with pocket money—MOST IMPORTANTLY—they were so helpful regarding my children’s school enrollment [and] continually [driving] us [around] the whole [of] Newton and sometimes Boston. They made us feel at home. The experience with this team [has been] literally MAGNIFICENT.”

—A RESETTLE TOGETHER CLIENT

them to their new living space where a culturally appropriate meal is waiting for them. With the help of IINE interpreters, groups then orient families to their new communities, helping

them to learn about local resources, shop for groceries, navigate transportation, make medical appointments, enroll their children in school, and more.

## Team Together



**ONE OF THE VERY FIRST** Resettle Together community sponsorship groups assembled, “Team Together”, is helmed by experienced resettlement volunteer Tom Barrington. Tom says, “One of the opportunities of being a parish priest in the Episcopal Church has been helping refugees and asylees begin new lives in this country. Upon my retirement this past summer, I knew that I wanted to continue this work. It is an incredible privilege to witness and accompany the courageous and determined individuals and families who have left everything, most often without much choice, for the hope of a better life.”

Tom was referred through our network of community partners, and IINE helped him form a group of ten interdenominational church volunteers—who can each draw upon their own congregations for support. The group has been matched with the Aimaqs, a family of nine newly arrived Afghan refugees settling in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Tom describes partnering with IINE to support this family as a joy. “[IINE has] done a lot of the heavy lifting,” he says, “such as finding them an apartment, dealing with government support and benefits as well as English classes, and helping the adults find jobs. It has been

a huge relief to not have to worry about the things that IINE is doing.”

Meanwhile, Team Together has been busy. “Our team has been able to set up the apartment, introduce them to stores, enroll the school-age children in local schools, and provide rides multiple times every week,” he says. “In the process of all of the tasks, we have been able to introduce and help them process what living here entails.” Tom says that process is definitely not always easy, but it is rewarding. “With this work comes great joys, learnings, frustrations, sometimes anger, and a lot of humor.”

### WHAT HAS TOM LEARNED?

Three big lessons, he says. First, that “accompanying refugees or asylees means not trying to control their lives. We are there for guidance and helping them understand this new culture and society.” Second, “that I need to slow down and pay attention so that I can learn from them,” and third, that resettlement is “the work of a community that includes the family we are accompanying, the agencies and organizations we are working with, and the other members of our team. We can only do this together.”



### The Challenge

WHEN REFUGEES FIRST ARRIVE HERE, THEY DEAL WITH...

- Limited financial resources
- No local social support networks
- The impacts of trauma
- Language and cultural barriers

# Launch a Group!

- 1 CONTACT** IINE director of community engagement Jessica Cirone at [jcirone@iine.org](mailto:jcirone@iine.org) to learn more
- 2 ATTEND** an (optional) information session
- 3 GATHER** a group or ask to be matched with one
- 4 AGREE** to IINE's formal sponsorship terms and submit background documents
- 5 ATTEND** trainings with IINE's professional resettlement staff
- 6 RAISE FUNDS** so your group will be ready to support a family on day one
- 7 BEGIN** pre-arrival services which may include: working with IINE to locate housing, set up apartment with furniture and groceries, prepare welcome meal
- 8 WELCOME A FAMILY** 

## DONATE

If you don't currently have the time to commit but want to support refugees resettling in New England, visit [www.iine.org/donate](http://www.iine.org/donate), and help newly arriving refugee families by supporting the resettlement staff that serves them.

## SPREAD THE WORD

Let people in your own network who may be interested in joining or supporting Resettle Together know about the program.

## Resettle Together: A community approach to welcoming new Americans

VIRTUAL TOWN HALL | APRIL 26, 2023 | 5-6 PM

This town hall webinar will provide a deeper look at IINE's Resettle Together community sponsorship program and provide a look back on the successful Family Support Team model from which the program grew.



# Click here to register!



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