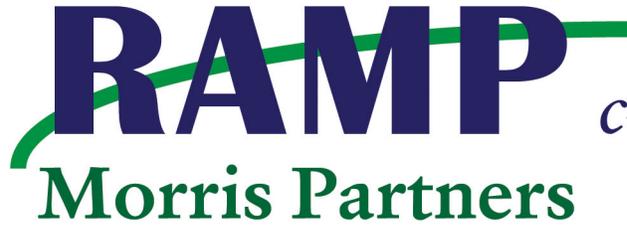


# Refugee Assistance



*A Bridge to Assist People to  
Cross From One Life to Another*

## GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

January 22, 2019

**In Attendance:** Mohammed Alotaibi, Jackie Bay, Fr. Terry Moran, Dave Sullivan, Gaye Swenson, Charles Courtney, Tom and Mary Lewis, Kirk and Sue Nixon, Chris Schuette, Rev. Paul Olsson, Ted Bustany, Norman Lowrey, Erik Borup, Mary Bradford, Carol and Tom Graham, Leslie Raff, Mary Gagly, Mary and Gerry Gannon, Leo and Carole Rogers, Joan Belz, Tina Genest, Mark Braumbaugh and Jonathan Golden

**Special Guest: Courtney Madsen, Director Jersey City Immigration and Refugee Office.**

Courtney spoke about the future of resettling refugees. The refugee pipeline has been shut off but other needs exist to work with those seeking asylum. New Jersey is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest in the country in terms of the number of international asylum cases. CWS served 95 people last year with the goal of employment planning, finding permanent housing, and providing overall support as needed for five years after release from detention centers (4 in NNJ). Asylum seekers are being released with no support and often end up in homeless shelters or seeking temporary shelter in churches.

CWS works with families from many countries. They may be in a detention center until their case is heard or may be someone here who is undocumented for 25 years and was told they have a valid asylum claim. The asylum process unfolds in one of two ways: affirmative and defensive. In the affirmative situation, seekers have a valid visa and a lawyer and they do not enter a detention center. This process can take years. In a defensive situation, the seeker presents at the border and asks for asylum. If they appear to have a credible claim, they are taken to a detention center where they can expect to remain for 9-11 months. These cases can be quite complicated and people can wait years. Detention centers are county or private jails. Individuals don't have freedom of movement; they are treated like criminals. When they come out it can take a lot of work to get them to trust. They're very savvy/tech savvy. They figured out how to get to the US and usually come with pretty strong work backgrounds and English as a first language or co-first language. Clients tend to be solo males who have left a family in their country or origin although it can be small families. They are often political dissidents.

CWS also works with partner agencies like First Friends, IRC, The Lighthouse, Interfaith Rise and Catholic Charities.

What CWS is looking for: CWS seeks co-sponsor groups to work with asylum seekers after they are granted asylum and released from detention centers. CWS only works with those who have made it

through this process. Clients are the same as refugees in that they are eligible for the same benefits. They get their green card after a year and like refugees, are on a path to citizenship. They're not undocumented. Net: This work is very similar to working with a refugee family minus the airport arrival.

Questions:

- How are they vetted? It happens in US customs/border protection. The same organization that grants refugee status grants asylum status. Same process in terms of health screening.

Post Presentation Discussion:

- Don't we need to address the recommendations from the Intern Report first? Address those issues before we expand/change the mission statement?
- Should we continue on our current mission with one of the 3 other groups in NJ that are still accepting refugees? According to Jonathan, there are still refugees coming in (just not through CWS). IRC, for example, is active but don't do a lot of resettlement in NNJ because they don't have the connections (They resettle in Elizabeth.) RAMP could work with IRC instead of CWS. Do we know what we're getting ourselves into? Feeling that we haven't gotten enough info from this presentation.
- Continue with CWS and just vary our path to work with asylum seekers. They are probably coming from war-torn countries which would be in line with our mission and our expertise.
- Potential new way: Volunteer with First Friends and be a visitor of detainees. We could help them get representation and make relationships they will need post-process.
- Need to learn more:
  - Potential to have a panel discussion (Interfaith, IRC and CWS) to learn about what different groups do?
  - Leo Rogers: Would like to know about following our current model with another organization and to learn more about what CWS is looking for.
  - Mary Gannon and Jonathan Golden: Have someone from IRC come talk to us. Jonathan to ask a lawyer friend who deals with asylum seekers to help us learn more.
  - Carol Graham: There is a desperate need and we have the knowledge to help. She has contacts at First Friends and will set up a meeting to learn more about what they do.

Next Steps:

- Gerry Gannon proposed that a group be formed to discuss ideas on how RAMP may proceed relative to asylum seekers. Small group's ideas would go before the Steering Committee. Issue: Our current mission statement is not aligned with the work Courtney is talking about.

**Finance Report:**

Leo Rogers reported that total contributions in 2018 were \$45K and in 2019 YTD, totaled \$990. Total 2018 expenses were \$90K in support of 3 families. The Tarakji's signed their own lease in 2019. They paid Nov/Dec/Jan rent despite personal setbacks. RAMP continues to pay heating oil and renters insurance. RAMP continues to pay the Mashal's rent and any extraordinary expenses. The assumption is that we can bring in a new family for \$35K without fundraising. Our current balance is \$74K.

Motion made and passed to accept the finance report.

Motion made and passed to accept the October meeting minutes.

## **Family Update:**

Mashal Family - Tom Graham: Have had some problems getting social services for the Mashal family. We did not get the birth certificate in time but the OTA office thinks it will be resolved. Medicaid is still a problem (baby has it; parents do not). Thinking about reaching out to congressional representatives to get help. Issue: Morris County OTA office employees are not trained very well. They don't understand how these Visa's differ from normal refugees. The work has been outsourced to NJ family health care and CWS telephone calls are not returned. Issue: We don't understand all the rules and what we need to know. We could have avoided some of these problems.

Employment: Jewish Vocation Services work to get immigrants employment and Mr. Mashal has an appointment with them tomorrow. Tom Lewis has a lawyer friend, could they get together about employment for Mrs. Mashal?

Fahim will be presenting at the library tomorrow night 7pm Mendham Township. He will make connections for other libraries to give him more speaking opportunities in which he can be paid \$100 per appearance. He will be a good advertisement for his abilities as a job candidate.

### Discussion:

- Get help with Medicaid, etc: Perhaps contact Mikkie Sherrill or Senator Bucco for help. Family Care is run by the state so would have to go to Bucco. Need someone from the state to call a state agency to help them understand that they're SIV applicants.
- Gov't shutdown sounds like SNAP will be interrupted. Can we give them more assistance if needed? Decision: If SNAP is interrupted they will need to go to the food pantry before we give them more money.
- Joan Belz suggested that Fahim be given the donated car and that RAMP pay his insurance. This would be good for his mental health. Tom Lewis thinks they should look for a different car that has fewer issue with help from an expert at the mosque. Proposed next step: Ask the Islamic Society Basking Ridge for \$2K, take the \$3K from Sisters of Charity to buy a car for the Mashal's. Tom: it would be a mistake for RAMP to buy the insurance. Without a job, the rate would be punishing. Steering Committee said car should wait until they have a job.

Muniri Family – Tom Lewis: They are doing well. Nargis is working to pass her driving test. Their son has been enrolled in the nursery school at the Boonton mosque. Carol Graham: Nargis is still taking ESL classes Dover library meets Wed 9-1pm Carol is driving and looking for other volunteers.

## **RAMP Evaluation**

Kirk Nixon talked about providing public access to the recommendation. The Steering Committee will post an edited version of 15 pages to the RAMP website. A Sub-committee has been set up to prioritize recommendations. The committee has met twice and consists of: Leo Rogers, Mary Gannon, Kirk Nixon and Noel Robinson. Each person has taken one important group of recommendations to work on. Kirk: tutoring; Tom: family timeline; Leo: mission statement; Mary: independent advocate as an intermediary between RAMP and families; Noel: vetting volunteers and insurance. Sub-committee members will bring all this work back to the Steering Committee, but can't go forward without a decision on the group's overall mission.

## **Next Meeting**

Tuesday, February 19 at St Peter's.

*Submitted by: Jackie Bay, RAMP Secretary*