

How San Diego Congregations and Communities Can Respond to the Refugee Crisis

Many synagogues and organizations have contacted Jewish Family Service of San Diego seeking to learn about, support, and advocate for the protection of refugees. With over 65 million people displaced from their homes, the world is facing a refugee crisis worse than any since WWII. In January, an executive order was signed closing the door on immigrants from seven select countries and banning all refugees for at least 120 days. Despite the recent ruling to maintain the freeze on this executive order, there is ongoing uncertainty about exactly which refugees will arrive and when. Urgency is needed to bring awareness to the refugee crisis, and to ensure the protection and dignity of refugees worldwide. Because of both our history and values, many American Jews are deeply moved to help today's refugees.

Since JFS was founded nearly 100 years ago, we have been the first to welcome refugee families, from all religions and backgrounds, as they begin to rebuild their lives in San Diego. The JFS Immigration and Refugee Services team helps them find permanent jobs, start businesses and enroll their children in school to continue their education. JFS continues to stand behind its belief that stopping refugee resettlement, for any period of time, undermines our nation's founding principles and turns away our brothers and sisters seeking safety, freedom and hope.

We were encouraged by show of Jewish community support at our recent community forum on Immigrants and Refugees: A Call-to-Action. Showing up was a first step and we hope it was only the beginning. This document provides information about several ways that your congregation and community can help:

NATIONAL ACTIONS

1. Sign-on to join HIAS' "Welcome Campaign": Congregations and communities across the United States are affirming their support for welcoming refugees to the United States. As part of this campaign, congregations commit to engage in at least one meaningful way around refugee issues. This could be a simple statement, volunteering, or something larger with a number of local partners and congregations involved. *Sign up at www.hias.org/join-the-hias-welcome-campaign.*

2. Join over 1,900 rabbis in signing the HIAS' National Rabbinic Letter in Support of Welcoming Refugees: Adding your name is a powerful show of unity from the Jewish community and serves as a major advocacy tool. *Add your name at www.hias.org/rabbis2017.*

LOCAL ACTIONS

3. Educate your community: Given the vastness and complexity of the global refugee crisis, one of the most important steps is developing a deeper understanding of refugee issues - both the "facts and figures" of the crisis and the interplay between refugee issues and Jewish history and values. Talk about the refugee crisis in newsletters, from the pulpit or hold an educational event. Plan to weave refugee issues into your Passover celebrations. Consider a special Shabbat of June 17-18 in honor of World Refugee Day which will be June 20. *HIAS supplemental materials are available at www.hias.org/resources. You can also contact Serena Pelka to request a JFS Refugee & Resettlement staff member to present at your event. serenap@jfssd.org or (858)637-3030*

4. Volunteer: Opportunities are available now to directly assist local refugee families. JFS greatest need is for Linguistic Liaisons (Arabic, Farsi, French, Somali, or Swahili), Cultural Orientation Presenters, Administrative Support and Friendly Matches. Friendly Matches mentor a newly arrived family at least 5 hours per week for 4 months. Most refugee families are located in El Cajon or City Heights. *To learn more about volunteering, contact Jessica Marin. jessicam@jfssd.org or (858)637-3024.*

5. Organize a collection drive: Refugees come with almost nothing in hand--only a few suitcases. At this time, we are most in need of toiletries (i.e., shampoo, razors, soap, toothbrush, feminine hygiene products), baby items (i.e., bottles, car seats, strollers, diapers), school supplies (i.e., backpack, paper, pencils, notebooks), and household cleaning supplies (i.e., dish soap, bathroom/kitchen cleaner, sponges, laundry detergent, mop/broom, trash bags). *To arrange for delivery of items collected, please contact Serena Pelka at serenap@jfssd.org or (858)637-3030. Larger furniture items can be donated by calling (619) 563-5232.*

6. Advocate with state and local Officials: With the refugee issue so central in political discourse, it is critical that the Jewish community raise up a powerful voice. Spearhead a community letter writing campaign. Sample messages are available at www.adl.org/action-center. Addresses of elected officials can be found at www.usa.gov/elected-officials. *Contact Ashley Harrington, Manager for Public Affairs at JFS to learn more about our the efforts of our Public Affairs Committee and to explore more ideas about engaging state and local officials around policies impacting refugees. ashleyh@jfssd.org or (858)637-3051*

7. Donate to support JFS Refugee Resettlement Services: One of the best ways that your congregation can directly support local refugees is by making a financial contribution to support JFS Refugee and Resettlement Services. There are many options available to you from encouraging congregants to make individual contributions to organizing a synagogue-wide fundraising appeal. *Donate online at www.jfssd.org/donate or call Sol Kempinski at (858)637-3207.*

8. Broadcast your involvement: You can amplify the Jewish response to the refugee crisis with strategic engagement of the media and social media. If your congregation is doing a program, event, volunteer opportunity, or advocacy action, share it on social media. *Tweet about your involvement using the hashtag #refugeeswelcome or the hashtag #mypeoplewererefugeestoo. Tag @HIASRefugees and @JewishFamilyServiceofSanDiego in your post, so that we can amplify your work.*

Whether inspired by our history as refugees, Judaism's call to welcome the stranger, or simply the humanitarian plight of people forced from their homelands, we invite you to join JFS and HIAS by becoming part of the American Jewish response to the refugee crisis.