

## **Leichtag Foundation**

### **A Giving Circle to Support Syrian Refugee Needs in San Diego**

*The stranger that lives with you shall be to you like the native, and you shall love him [or her] as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19:34)*

#### **Background**

Syria's civil war is the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Half the country's pre-war population, more than 11 million people, have been killed or forced to flee their homes. The Obama administration has now exceeded its goal of accepting at least 10,000 Syrian refugees by September 30<sup>th</sup>, the end of the government's fiscal year. No state took in more Syrian refugees than California, with 1,300 and to date, San Diego has resettled nearly 700 of them.

The arrival is surely a great relief to those escaping the horrors of war and the camps that became their homes sometimes for years at a time. These new Americans also face many trials and challenges that we as Jews know well: understanding a new culture; learning a foreign language; basics like housing, education, jobs and transportation. Even simply meeting each other, or those who have been in this country for longer periods, is a challenge.

Local agencies work hard to meet refugee needs and provide an array of support. These include housing, cultural orientation, enrolling children in school and adults in ESL classes, cash and employment assistance. However, due to the high number of refugees needing help and the intensity of their needs, as well as the limited government financial support available, agencies are overwhelmed and needs are going unmet.

#### **Leichtag Foundation Support**

It was just one year ago that the Leichtag Foundation asked, "How can we, the people who have been refugees and strangers generation after generation, do more to address [the Syrian refugee crisis] just 70 years after the Holocaust?" That question prompted research; convenings with other funders, nonprofit leaders, and community members of many faiths; and grantmaking all aimed at filling gaps in service and support to refugees. We've been awed by the leadership of professionals and volunteers alike, all working in creative and impactful ways to ease the journeys of families in need.

#### **A Multi-Faith Giving Circle**

Adding a new dimension of support, the Leichtag Foundation is offering to host a model for dialogue and action, providing those of different faiths, including Jews, Christians and Muslims the chance to meet, study shared values, and work toward a common vision of aiding Syrian refugees new to San Diego. In a constructive and supportive environment, participants will learn about and from each other as well as from field experts. The circle will serve as an interreligious voice for aiding newcomers with pooled donations.

Giving circles have emerged the last decade as a growing and significant philanthropic trend among donors of all wealth levels and backgrounds, appealing particularly to those who might never have considered themselves philanthropists in the traditional sense. They are a powerful way for small groups to make big change: to give together proactively and strategically, to build community with each other, and to connect to excellent potential grant recipients who are bettering the world in a variety of meaningful ways. Research has shown that giving circle

members give more money, give more strategically, and engage more deeply in their communities than non-giving circle members. They are also more likely to tell people about the organizations their giving circle supports (rather than their own personal charitable donations) – thereby creating ripple effects that go far beyond the circle itself.

Logistics and giving amounts will be part of the group's start-up with administrative support provided by the Leichtag Foundation. It is expected that the group will:

1. Share religiously-based and personal approaches to giving and related values.
2. Discuss personal stories of the immigrant experience.
3. Learn from field experts.
4. Explore strategies to address refugee needs, including increasing community awareness.
5. Experience impactful, collective grantmaking.
6. Explore opportunities to add value beyond financial contributions, including providing access to networks that could prove helpful to grantees. Others may have particular professional skills which could be offered on a volunteer basis.

We would love to have your congregation's participation. Please email Sharyn Goodson at [sharyn@leichtag.org](mailto:sharyn@leichtag.org) to learn more.