

## New Neighbors

Consider the many every-day challenges your family would face if you suddenly found yourselves in a country and culture completely different from your own. How would you communicate with the community surrounding you without speaking the native language? Could you be sure that a behavior of yours is not offensive in the new culture? Are there certain laws you don't even know exist? If you or your children got sick, where would you go for treatment and how would you get there? Would you be able to use the public transportation system when you are not familiar with names of streets or neighborhoods? Could you figure out how to do laundry without a washing machine or prepare foods you have never tasted before? If most of your family or friends remained here in the U.S., how would you fill that social void in your life?



Refugees resettled through World Relief Minnesota encounter all of these obstacles and more during their first several months in the U.S. WRM's New Neighbor Program seeks to empower members of the local church to respond to God's persistent call to welcome the 'stranger' by connecting newly arrived refugee families to volunteers who provide the needed support during these critical moments in cultural adjustment. The goal of the New Neighbor Program is for refugees and volunteers to build

relationships and participate in cultural exchange as the refugee families resettle in the Twin Cities. Through this process, refugees and volunteers come to see one another as neighbors instead of strangers. To be a neighbor, whether you are the refugee or the volunteer, is to be a friend, a cultural broker, a teacher, and a learner.

How does the New Neighbor Program work? What would I be doing as a New Neighbor volunteer?

Through experience, World Relief has found that the goals of the New Neighbor Program are better accomplished when a volunteer starts out with a particular task or set of tasks when engaging a refugee family. This is especially true when the refugees speak little English or the volunteers have not had much experience interacting with refugee families. A volunteer can choose to focus on English language tutoring, grocery shopping, apartment cleaning and maintenance, job mentoring, etc. while also incorporating social time or events into the relationship. Once trust is established

between refugee families and volunteers and communication is improved, the neighbor relationship can move forward according to the mutual preferences of the refugees and volunteers.

What time commitment is required to be a neighbor?

World Relief Minnesota asks that New Neighbor volunteers commit to meeting with their refugee family about once a week for three months or twice a month for six months with the goal of forming an ongoing relationship.

What qualifications do I need to meet to be a New Neighbor volunteer?

No extensive cross-cultural experience is necessary to be a New Neighbor volunteer. However, World Relief Minnesota does ask that volunteers have a strong desire to work cross-culturally and are willing to make a commitment to do so. It is important for volunteers to be comfortable interacting with limited English speakers from cultures that may be different from their own. We ask for volunteers to show cultural sensitivity, flexibility, patience, and a sense of humor towards the refugee family. Volunteers should also be fairly independent and willing to learn-as-they-go while spending time with new families. The best interest of the refugee family must be a top priority in the minds of all volunteers. Volunteers must be willing to maintain ongoing communication with the WRM case management team (when applicable) and Community Engagement Coordinator to ensure a positive experience for all involved.

How do I become a New Neighbor for a refugee family?

1. Complete the volunteer application and background check form. (Both can be found at the WRM website: <http://www.worldreliefmn.org>)
2. Discuss your availability and interests with the WRM Community Engagement Coordinator. We will take your preferences into consideration when partnering you with a refugee family. For example, if you live in the West Metro we will try to partner you with a family in Minneapolis rather than St. Paul. If you would like your children to be involved as neighbors, we can try to partner your family with a refugee family who also has children. If you would like to be a language tutor, we will partner you with a family in which one or more members is enthusiastic about learning English.
3. Attend a volunteer orientation.
4. Meet your New Neighbors!
5. Maintain communication with appropriate WRM staff members. Report your hours to the Community Engagement Coordinator once a month using the Volunteer Activity Form.

Contact: For more information, please contact Katie Day, Community Engagement Coordinator, at 612-798-4332, or email us at [mnvolunteers@wr.org](mailto:mnvolunteers@wr.org).