



# LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES National Capital Area

Celebrating 100 Years of Serving Boldly

Issue No. 1 2018

## A Family Reunion 36 Years in the Making

By: Valeska Fernandez, Youth Resettlement Specialist

*Faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen.* (Hebrews 11:1)



Social worker Imelda Rempson lives the agency's mission of offering hope and rebuilding lives by diligently seeking information about adoptees' birth families and facilitating reunions. In 2017, LSS/NCA united 27 families through the private adoption search and reunion process. Each year, we receive letters and cards of thanks to Imelda and the agency.

An adoptee and parent recently shared the following thoughts about their reunion:

### ADOPTEE'S MESSAGE

*My search and reunion was made possible by the fantastic staff at LSS/NCA. As I began the process, I had no idea what to expect. All I knew was that after 36 years of not knowing the history of my birth and my natural family, it was time to take the journey I have dreamt about all my life. I think I was in total shock and overwhelmed during my first meeting at the office. My social worker, Ms. Imelda, walked me through the process and explained that she would be there every step of the way. The fact that I would not be going at this alone was truly comforting. After what felt like only a few weeks, I was told that my birth family had been located. My social worker spoke with my oldest sister and we later had*

*a phone call with my two sisters, my birth mother and maternal aunt. I was nervous about the process moving so fast but my social worker had everyone's best interest in mind and helped me get through the reunion process comfortably. Adoption reunion for me has been very complex. It has been joyous, heartbreaking, exciting, uncomfortable, eye opening and overwhelming, and I am embracing it all. This is the beginning of a new chapter for me and my birth family and I have LSS/NCA to thank for making this connection and reunion possible.*

### BIRTH MOTHER'S MESSAGE

*It was such an overwhelming moment for me when we first met. She was a beautiful woman with a warm and welcoming smile that just took my heart with love. It was hard for me but I made it through, so now my life is complete and we are living life day by day with lots of love and forgiveness. I am thankful that she is in my life.*

LSS/NCA received the court order for this case in spring 2017. Within two months, Imelda located the family. She received the confirmation call from one of the birth sisters who indicated she was with her mother, another sister and an aunt. Imelda made arrangements to go to the home and share information about the adoptee with the family. They decided to pick up the phone that day and connect with the adoptee. "Witnessing the family's conversation for the first time, and crying with them, is a moment that I will forever cherish," says Imelda.

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area LSSNCA.ORG United Way #8146 CFC #78343

**A REFUGEE FATHER DETERMINED TO SUPPORT HIS FAMILY**

**A PRAYER FOR OUR COMMUNITY**

**VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ARIELLE EIRIENNE**

**AN EASY WAY TO GIVE**

**2 RIS**

**4 Community**

**5 Volunteer**

**6 Development**

**LSS/NCA SAYS  
GOOD-BYE TO  
D.C. FOSTER CARE  
CHILDREN**

*Learn more page 3*

# A Refugee Father Determined to Support His Family in America

By: Nizama Tikvina, Employment Program Manager



The LSS/NCA employment team assisted 585 refugees in finding employment last year. One of these, a family of four, including one son and a daughter, arrived at Dulles International Airport in October. The father assisted the U.S. military in Afghanistan and thus the family was targeted for their western loyalty. They had experienced so many hardships in their hometown that they were ready to pursue the American dream.

Like many other new arrivals, the family was challenged by adjusting to U.S. customs and expectations. Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders were often leaders of their communities and are highly educated individuals. Because they were often living comfortably in

their hometown, beginning at an entry level position and affording only the family's basic needs is unsettling for most.

The father has a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Kabul University and five years of experience in construction, yet he had great difficulty in finding a job that paid well enough to sustain his family. He, like most refugees, was determined to find a job, work hard, and provide for his wife and children.

LSS/NCA invited him to pre-employment and financial literacy training where he was oriented on how to write a cover letter and resume, and how to apply for a job based on U.S. market

requirements. He was also assigned a job developer to connect him to employers, invite him to job fairs, and practice interviews.

In the month that followed, he was invited to three interviews and offered two employment opportunities, both of which exceeded his expectations. He is now an Assistant Project Manager with a salary of \$28 per hour in a field that he loves.

*"LSS helped me settle and provided employment service by connecting me with a job developer who guided me through the hiring process in the U.S.; and in particular, helped me learn how to write U.S.-style resumes and cover letters."*

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# LSS/NCA Forced to Terminate the Central American Minor (CAM) Reunification Program

By: Emily Muldoon, CAM/ECM Program Specialist

The Central American Minors Program, better known as CAM, was established in 2014, offering families, primarily children, a pathway to reunify with parents living legally in the United States. CAM was created to provide minors the "opportunity to be considered, while still in their home country, for refugee resettlement," with the expectation that a legal pathway would deter children from fleeing their homes out of desperation after being threatened by gang violence and persecution.

Through the application process, LSS/NCA CAM program specialists assisted parents with the completion

and submission of an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR). Program specialists then guided applicants through the steps that followed—interviews, DNA testing and medical exams. At the end of this process, if approved, minors were deemed eligible for either refugee or parole status in the United States.

While ultimately successful for many, the application and review process was intensive and lengthy. Since the establishment of the CAM program, LSS/NCA has assisted hundreds of families with AOR submissions. We were witnesses to dozens of families reunited after seemingly endless years—witnesses to hope.

However, on November 9, 2017, the U.S. State Department stopped accepting new applications for the CAM program. On January 31, 2018, the State Department ceased reviewing completed applications. The program termination has shaken the immigrant population we serve, and many families who were eagerly waiting, or in the application process, have been devastated. LSS/NCA is dismayed and saddened that we have been forced to end our CAM reunification program and pray that our country's leaders will soon provide another pathway for children desperate for safety.



## Families and Youth Celebrate the Holiday

By: Valeska Fernandez, Youth Resettlement Specialist

Dara Yah'ya, Youth Development & Wellness, Program Manager

LSS/NCA threw a holiday party for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors and their foster families, and a second celebration for Youth Haven participants.

The refugee youth were excited when they were greeted with a big Welcome board, written in many different languages. The dishes were brought by all who attended, and were prepared in the spirit of diversity and cultural celebration.

Continuing in the festivities, two of the youth spoke about their many positive experiences participating in the URM program and shared candidly about the challenges of their first year in college.

At the Youth Haven party, the families were greeted by Santa Clause and a bundle of toys. Two parents asked to give the blessing for the food and expressed gratitude for the tremendous support of their extended LSS/NCA family when the road is rough. From Limbo-ing with Santa and making a Christmas keepsake, to enjoying the nutritious and delicious dinner,

the families were filled with joy and the room with smiles.

These were our largest holiday gatherings yet. We thank our partners, volunteers and supporters for making sure there was enough for all to enjoy the holiday season. We pass on the blessing of gratitude to those who made this celebration possible, including Lord of Life Lutheran Church (Fairfax, VA), Grace Lutheran Church (Bowie, MD), U.S. Department Agriculture (USDA), Team Holiday of the eMPAS Group, and the other individuals and families who compassionately gave their time and resources.

## LSS/NCA Says Good-Bye to D.C. Foster Care Children

By: Kichelle Coleman, Family and Community Services Director

While LSS/NCA says goodbye to the children, foster parents and birth families to whom we've provided foster care services for almost fifty years, we continue to keep our doors, our hearts, and minds open to the needs of the surrounding community. LSS/NCA's mission is to *'walk with those in need by mobilizing partners and providing service that offers hope and rebuilds lives'*. Therefore, we embrace this transition and are excited as we seek new opportunities to address the changing needs of the community and serve more BOLDLY.

The D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) has moved forward with their plans to redesign its system to provide foster care services in-house for children placed in D.C. homes and to contract with only one provider for foster care services for children

placed in Maryland homes. That provider has been identified as the National Center for Children and Families (NCCF). LSS/NCA has worked closely with NCCF for the last several months to successfully transfer our children and families to their care.

Before the transition, LSS/NCA made it a priority to assist as many children and youth as possible in achieving permanency. The agency also worked hard to maintain a 100% employment rate for staff working within these programs. Prior to the transition in 2017, 27% of LSS/NCA foster care youth achieved permanency. Of the youth who remained, 90% were able to transition without having to change foster homes. Employees have been able to transfer to the new agency, find employment elsewhere, or

maintain employment with LSS/NCA in a different capacity.

LSS/NCA's Family and Community Services (FCS)—formerly known as Children's Services—continues to provide service to Unaccompanied Refugee Minors, families interested in private adoption, and youth affected or infected by HIV/AIDS. In addition, FCS is embarking on new initiatives to expand services to other populations, which include youth and young adults diagnosed with mental health disorders, substance addiction and other stigma-related conditions that could lead to their involvement in the child welfare system or even death. Please visit our website for updates on our programming and ways *YOU can join us in service* to the community.

**BE BOLD WITH US!**

### LSS/NCA and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Share the Refugee Story

By: Susan Haine, Development Director

LSS/NCA is excited to report a partnership with Woolly Mammoth Theatre. Isra Siddig, Refugee job developer, spoke at a panel themed, *“Religious Identity, Cultural Preservation and Generational Frictions,”* organized by the D.C. Mayor’s Office on African Affairs (MOAA) in February. The event was followed by a play titled *“Familiar,”* by American actress and playwright of Zimbabwean ancestry, Danai Gurira. The thought-provoking production sheds light on the life of a Zimbabwean family that resides in a snowy suburb of Minneapolis, as they prepare for the wedding of their eldest daughter.

**As a supporter, Woolly Mammoth has offered you a discount on tickets to experience the production first-hand. At checkout, use code: LSSNCA for \$35 tickets!**



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### MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.’S BELOVED COMMUNITY

By: Amy Meli, Congregational and Community Outreach

#### Where was LSS/NCA on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day?

We were with the Faith Justice Foundation participating in a panel discussion focusing on Dr. King’s vision of the “beloved community.” The discussion was hosted by Annandale United Methodist Church.

As part of the discussion, panelists reflected on the state of Dr. King’s dream, and how we can combat racism and xenophobia in today’s divisive environment. During the panel, LSS/NCA discussed a speech given by Dr. King during the Montgomery bus boycott. In that speech, he said, “It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.”



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### A Prayer for Our Community and LSS/NCA Families

By: Amy Meli, Congregational and Community Outreach

To celebrate the end of our 100-year anniversary, LSS/NCA held its 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Day of Prayer on January 22. On that day, during their weekly worship services, 33 area congregations of various faith traditions prayed for the future of LSS/NCA, our community, and our nation during this time of global unrest and persecution.

If you missed our Day of Prayer, we hope you’ll pray with us now.

*Lord, your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and you reign through all the ages. When you first called your disciples, you sent them on a bold journey to bring the kingdom of heaven near as people turned their hearts to you. So move in our hearts this day as we give thanks for our partnership with Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area, and with hearts turned to you, give us strength as we continue to work to bring your kingdom near to the stranger, the orphan, the widow, those oppressed, and all of the “least of these” who you would have us meet on the way. Amen.*

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Arielle Eirienne



By: Kianoosh Asar, Community Resource Coordinator

Since May 2017, Arielle Eirienne has served as the refugee resettlement program's volunteer donations coordinator. Arielle, who holds a B.A. in Sociology and an M.A. in International Affairs, is the first person that community members contact with their furniture donation offers and inquiries.

For years, she has volunteered for various causes, from conducting sing-alongs at assisted living homes to providing legal assistance to immigrants seeking citizenship. In her early 20s, she began volunteering as a refugee mentor, which inspired her to do more for local resettlement programs. Eventually, she served as the director of the Refugee Assistance Program, which works with local resettlement organizations (including LSS/NCA) to ensure that families are matched with capable mentors.

Arielle works diligently with LSS/NCA staff, as well as with dozens of donors to ensure that refugee families have the most-needed furniture items in their new homes. She hopes to continue working with refugee and immigrant populations as she dedicates her career to social justice. We thank Arielle for her commitment to our families and her exceptional coordination with the over 60 generous donors she has worked with thus far.

*Donation pickups are performed by LSS/NCA staff every Monday morning and afternoon. If you are interested in donating furniture items, please reach out to Arielle at [donations@lssnca.org](mailto:donations@lssnca.org).*

## New Orientations Expedite Volunteer Process and Participation

By: Kiersten Rossetto Nassar, Staff

LSS/NCA is in the process of revamping its volunteer onboarding process to ensure community members can begin volunteering more quickly than before. As part of that process, we have started holding monthly volunteer orientation sessions.

During orientation, prospective volunteers will learn more about our programs, volunteer requirements, and expectations for participation. The orientation also includes breakout sessions with training specific to each volunteer role. Contact Amy Meli at [melia@lssnca.org](mailto:melia@lssnca.org) to learn more about available volunteer positions and register for an upcoming orientation. See orientation schedule on back cover event listing.

**Here's a sampling of the volunteer opportunities currently available:**

- **Muscle Mover (Virginia):** Volunteers will assist with moving large donated items from the homes of donors to the LSS/NCA storage facility in Northern Virginia.
- **Family Mentor (Virginia and Maryland):** Volunteers will spend time with refugee families and help them acclimate to their new homes, including assistance with the English language and job search.
- **Career Mentor (Virginia):** Volunteer provides professional counseling in the fields of accounting, engineering, medicine, law, teaching, and business.
- **Youth Haven Program Assistant (DC Office):** Volunteers will assist with program development and implementation of youth programs.
- **Employment Assistant (Maryland):** Volunteers assist job developers by helping clients explore career options related to their experience.
- **Community Advocate (Maryland and Virginia):** Volunteers provide transportation to clients traveling to appointments and assistance to families when filling out applications for government aid.
- **Driver (D.C. Office):** Volunteers provide transportation to and from weekly events for participants in our Youth Haven program.
- **Apartment Set-Up Team Member (Maryland and Virginia):** Volunteers will help prepare apartments for arriving refugee families.
- **Administration Aide (Washington, D.C.):** Volunteers will assist our development team with administrative tasks, data entry, event promotion, mailings, in-kind donations for events and other tasks as assigned.

# 1917 Society: Recognizing Your Legacy

By: Susan Haine, Development Director

In celebrating the agency's centennial, we realize the importance of remembering our past and we also understand the need to prepare for the future. A gift, through your estate, helps LSS/NCA meet the future needs of our community after your lifetime.

Individuals who make a planned gift to LSS/NCA become members of the 1917 Society. The Society is a small group of dedicated, thoughtful and generous individuals whose extraordinary commitment to our mission is deeply appreciated.

Examples of such a legacy gift include a gift through your will, naming LSS/NCA as beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement plan, or establishing a charitable gift annuity.

### The benefits of a legacy gift include:

- Maintaining control of your assets during your lifetime
- Making a significant impact on LSS/NCA families for decades to come
- Setting an example for your heirs and family about the values you cherish

For additional information on specific gift types that qualify you for membership, contact the Office of Development at 202-723-2000 at ext. 138. We would love to work with you to establish a legacy that reflects your values and priorities.

*This information is not intended to provide specific legal advice to your individual circumstances or legal questions. It should not be used as a substitute for seeking competent legal and/or tax advice from a licensed professional attorney, accountant and/or tax advisor in your state.*

To include LSS/NCA in your will, share this language with your estate planning attorney:

"I give, devise and bequeath to Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area, 4406 Georgia Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20011, a charitable corporation (Tax ID #53-0207407), \_\_\_\_\_ % of the residue of my estate (or the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_) ( or a specific asset such as securities) for its general purposes."

## AN EASY WAY TO GIVE

By: Amy Ranker, Executive Assistant

Enjoy the convenience of an automatic gift to LSS/NCA with your credit card. Give online via the link below, or call Amy Ranker at 202-723-3000 ex. 220, with your credit card at hand!

As we head into a new century of service, we hope to make donating easy, as your support is integral to sustain our services. Nothing is more convenient than a prearranged gift. Let us know the amount you wish to donate monthly and we will bill you automatically. Whether it's 10, 25, or 100 dollars a month, your recurring gift makes a huge difference to refugee families and youth challenged by illness and addiction. It will save you time and can help us save money on postage. If your situation changes, you can call us to change your gift amount at any time.

**To set up your recurring gift, please call Amy or visit [LSSNCA.org](http://LSSNCA.org) and click 'donate.'**

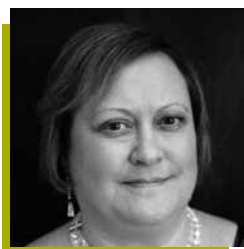
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### Does your congregation or employer have an event or fair that requires a voice from a local social service agency?

LSS/NCA would welcome the opportunity to lend our expertise in child welfare or refugee resettlement in an effort to better educate our community.

Contact **Amy Meli** at [MeliA@LSSNCA.org](mailto:MeliA@LSSNCA.org) to add your event to our calendar.





## A Comment from Chris

Dear Friends:

I pray this note finds you well and enjoying a healthy and happy start to 2018. It's no secret that our turbulent national discourse has impacted each of us in our own unique way. Our staff has worked diligently and creatively in this crisis to continue to serve the most vulnerable populations.

Over the past year, LSS/NCA has found itself at the center of the debate, proudly advocating for our refugee neighbors and those who choose to cast aside differences to boldly embrace those from afar. To say that this debate has energized us as an organization and a community would be an understatement. Last year, with the help of 44 partner congregations, we resettled nearly 1,600 refugees—more than our agency has served previously in any year's time.

Likewise, 192 children and families were served through our adoption and foster care programs, while 88 youth were provided confidential and supportive services to confront the challenges of HIV/AIDS. Although the agency said good-bye to the foster children and families we have been serving for over 50 years in our traditional and therapeutic programming, our doors and hearts remain open to those who need hope and encouragement (Page 3).

This year is an opportunity for growth. As we move forward into the next century of service, we continue to live our mission of mobilizing communities and offering hope to our most vulnerable neighbors. This year, we are encouraged by the opportunity to expand services to youth affected by mental illness or addiction, and look to grow our adoption services throughout the region. In addition, we continue to strengthen our message in effort to educate others about the growing refugee crisis and our responsibility to welcome the stranger as Jesus once taught us.

As we undergo a shift in services and combat the negative discourse challenging our vulnerable populations, I ask you to stand with us. Your support and prayers are more important now than ever. Together, we can bring love and compassion to a world that desperately needs it.

Blessings,

Christine P. Connell  
CEO

*"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?" ~John 14:2*

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*Families and Youth  
 Celebrate the Holiday*



**A visit from Santa and cultural cuisine spread Christmas joy**  
 Page 3

**INSIDE THIS EDITION**



**A Family Reunion  
 36 Years in the  
 Making**

*A daughter seeks her birth parents after years of wondering...*

Read more on front cover

**SAVE THE DATES**

MARCH 13 Volunteer Orientation (MD)

APRIL 5 Volunteer Orientation (DC)

**For more information & events, visit [LSSNCA.org](http://LSSNCA.org)**

**FORCED TO  
 TERMINATE THE  
 CAM REUNIFICATION  
 PROGRAM**

2 REFUGEE

**LSS/NCA AND WOOLLY  
 MAMMOTH THEATRE  
 SHARE THE REFUGEE  
 STORY**

4 COMMUNITY

**NEW ORIENTATIONS  
 EXPEDITE VOLUNTEER  
 PROCESS AND  
 PARTICIPATION**

5 VOLUNTEER

**1917 SOCIETY:  
 RECOGNIZING  
 YOUR LEGACY**

6 DEVELOPMENT