



LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES National Capital Area

Celebrating Over 100 Years of Serving Boldly

Issue No. 1 2019

The Day I Became a Mother

By: Deena Thompson, New Mother

Last fall began for our family like any other. We had just moved back to the U.S. after living overseas for two years. We were in a comfortable rhythm.

Then, one sunny, late September afternoon while out walking our dog, I received a phone call that changed our lives instantly and forever. An adoption agency, where we had submitted an application many months earlier, told us that a baby girl had been born that morning and her mother had chosen us to parent her baby. Knowing that she chose us was incredibly humbling; we find the emotions difficult to describe. Even though we had been informed of the possibility of a "pop-up adoption," we never expected to be one of the families who would need to drop everything at a moment's notice.

Our adoption journey had started nearly two years earlier, shortly after we had moved overseas. The journey quickly proved overwhelming. There were many possibilities and we didn't know where to begin. After speaking with a couple of friends and joining an online community of adoptive parents, we connected with a social worker experienced in helping families like ours. By the time we fulfilled all the home study requirements abroad, we were nearing the end of our overseas tour.

The social worker who had done our initial home study was not licensed to complete an update for us in the U.S. Luckily, we had received a favorable recommendation for LSS/NCA from another family. Our new social worker was able to visit us within days of our arrival back in Virginia and swiftly complete the process. A couple of weeks later, we were approved and officially certified to adopt.

While we hoped we would receive an adoption opportunity soon, we never imagined we would receive

a call exactly—and only—one month after becoming an eligible family. Within a few hours, we completed the required paperwork, rented a car, and began the eight-hour drive to our baby's birth state. We arrived at the hospital the morning after our baby was born. Matt and I spent the day visiting with our new baby and her mother. All three of us chose a name for the baby together.

It was such an emotional day, and I will never forget it. There were tears of happiness, sadness, grief, joy, fear, and even of guilt. Our baby's mother was so warm toward us, and seemed so resolute and at peace with her decision, in spite of her tears of sadness. I found myself feeling guilty and profoundly sad that her baby wouldn't grow up with her. We chose to have an open adoption and have regular contact with our baby's birth mother. We want our baby girl to know, first and foremost, how much her birth mother loves her and how brave she was give her baby a loving home. There is not a day that goes by that I do not think of her and give thanks.

Our adoption was finalized six months later. We navigate life as most new parents typically do: long sleepless nights and too many diaper changes to count. For us, adoption has been a beautiful path on which to grow our family and share our love. Each day has been a new adventure in getting to know our sweet baby girl, to see her big, beautiful brown eyes grow with curiosity, to see her smile, to hear her laugh, to watch her crawl, and to feel her tiny heartbeat when we snuggle her close.



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

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GIFTED BICYCLES**

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Refugee Youth Gifted Bicycles on the Road to Success

By: Aya Turki, Refugee School Liaison

Last summer, refugee children and their parents were invited to a Back-to-School Celebration. Several dozen youth arrived during the summer months and would be attending school for the first time in the United States. Others were returning for their second year and a few were even on the path to graduation.

As students arrived at Cherrydale Church in Arlington, their eyes widened at the rows of colorful

bikes lined up out front, some with tassels, others with bells, a few with baskets. In the months prior, countless community members and organizations gathered and donated 75 unused bicycles, knowing the joy, independence, and reliability they would provide each youth. In addition, 150 backpacks with school supplies were collected to ensure each student was equipped with the tools for a successful year.



One hundred fifty students, along with their families, attended the event, where they shared culture, music and lunch. Two policemen also attended the event to provide an orientation about the rules and safety of the road.

*Special thanks to **Phoenix Bikes**, a nonprofit organization that promotes bicycling and builds community. Phoenix Bikes ensured the proper working order of each bicycle before distribution.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT: *Where Are We Now?*

By: Mamadou Sy, Vice President of Refugee & Immigration Services

In October 2018, the President of the United States signed the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2019, setting the refugee ceiling at 30,000. The regional allocations are as follows:

Africa	11,000
East Asia	4,000
Europe and Central Asia	3,000
Latin America/Caribbean	3,000
Near East/South Asia	9,000

The year prior, in FY18, the United States set a refugee ceiling of 45,000, yet less than half the ceiling entered the country. Now, with the ceiling being at a historical low, the

United States’ refugee resettlement program and its infrastructure hinges on the Administration’s commitment to reach the set ceiling.

It is worth noting that this historical low is occurring at a time when the UNHCR is reporting over 25 million refugees around the world, with over half under the age of 18. According to UNHCR data, over 44,000 people a day (or 30 people every minute) are forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. For those displaced persons, resettlement is the last resort; it’s only when a safe return or a local integration in the first country of asylum have failed, that refugees are referred for resettlement.

Because of this historical low allotted number of refugees, LSS/NCA will see a significant reduction in the number of refugees it can help resettle. Nonetheless, LSS/NCA is committed to continuing work with local communities and congregations to provide mentorship, employment services, and individual case management to the hundreds of refugees who arrived in the past few years, and to Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders who have supported our troops at their own risk. In addition, we continue to provide immigration services, foster homes to unaccompanied refugee youth, and advocacy opportunities for community members to speak for the millions of refugees persecuted around the world.

5 REASONS TO BECOME A FOSTER PARENT

ATTENTION:

LSS/NCA is recruiting foster homes in Virginia, as well as in Maryland and DC. Refugee youth need immediate placements. Join an upcoming orientation or contact us to learn more.

Patricia Britt
BrittP@LSSNCA.org
(202) 723-3000 ext. 254

By: Valeska Fernandez, URM Foster Care Social Worker

1. Connection

There's nothing like that moment when you and your youth have suddenly created that delicate string of unity, which will only grow stronger with time. In those moments, you get a glimpse of each other's core, familiarizing yourself with another, as well as yourself.

2. Cultural Empathy

Being in tune with the world is only part of the reason why we learn about cultures that are different from our own. When you become a foster parent for a refugee, you open your heart to include different values and belief systems, delicious cuisines with spices you may have never tried, languages you've never spoken, and different norms that may challenge understanding.

3. Enrichment and Emotional Intelligence

The capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically provides an enhancement in your life that you will be hard-pressed to find in any other way.

4. Meaningful and Lasting Relationships

In the process of getting to know your youth, you thread the binding layers of family around each other, with every challenge and victory.

5. You become a Change Agent

Through unconditional love and support, through the infusion of cultural empathy and connectivity, you help mold and prepare a youth to be their best selves and thrive in the world as they become adults.

Taking that step could be the most rewarding one you ever take.

"What if Christmas Perhaps Means a little Bit More"

By: Alicia Gordon, Director of Community Services

"Red light! ...Green light!....Red light!"

Along with the giggles and pitter patter of dozens of shoes, this is what you would have heard walking into Grace Lutheran (Bowie) church last December. If you've never seen Santa Claus leading the Hokey Pokey, you should have been there. Every year, LSS/NCA hosts a colorful and exciting holiday party for the children and families in our Unaccompanied Minors Foster Care program, and the Youth Development & Wellness program. Despite a tight budget, this year was no different.

Along with games and dancing, activity tables filled with glitter, stickers, and paper products surrounded the outskirts of the

room. The children clamored for their favorite colors and embellishments as they made tree decorations or Christmas cards for family members. In the corner was a stack of shiny presents—one for each child—that had been donated weeks prior by congregations and generous community members. In addition, everyone got a duffle bag from Comfort Cases, full of treasures, including toiletries, stuffed animals, books, and blankets. And in the middle of it all was a delicious buffet, including roast beast—enough food for a Whoville feast!

Over 60 youth and families attended. Many were transported by the Baron Bus Company that generously donated their service



and time to ensure that every family had access to attend the party. Generous donations supplied the food and all the presents, while a volunteer photographer caught the memories and other event volunteers in action. Thank you to everyone who helped create a lasting holiday memory for our families. It wouldn't have happened without you!

A Refugee Family Shares Its First Christmas in America

By: Tanya Vitusagavulu, Maryland Refugee Resettlement Director

Sharing in the Roger family's first American Christmas—decorating a Christmas tree—was a heartwarming experience. I watched as they excitedly mixed with their American guests, members of the Good Neighbor Program from Temple Bethel, which had committed to support the family of 10 for their first year in the United States.

Sunday volunteers had brought over a Christmas tree. The smell of Congolese cooking filled the kitchen, while unfamiliar Congolese music played in the living room. The younger children played blocks

in the living room, while anxiously looking up every so often to see if the tree was ready to be decorated. When it was set up, each child placed an ornament on the tree and marveled at each unique bobble. "Bird," said a member of the Temple volunteers as she pointed to a shiny red robin on the tree. "Bird," repeated the children.

An NPR radio crew was present to record the special occasion—the family's first Christmas since their arrival from Uganda where they had been living as refugees, NPR held

interviews in the basement and recorded snippets of the children playing. When they arrived, the Rogers family did not speak a word of English. Yet, on this day, I was amazed at how much English they had learned in three months.

The family shared their memories of Congolese Christmas traditions as they learned new traditions. It was a memorable day for all.

To Listen to NPR's Weekend Edition Audio Story, visit bit.ly/RefugeesChristmas



Courtesy of NPR Weekend Edition and Sharon Fine

Walking in the Shoes of John McCain: Seeking Bipartisanship & Safety for SIVs

By: Wendy Hahn, LSS/NCA Supporter & Refugee Advocate

On September 5, 2018, Washington D.C. was blazing hot, with heat indexes exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The extreme heat seemed a fitting backdrop for a discussion of immigration. In the basement of Lutheran Church of the Reformation, 34 attendees from D.C., Maryland, and Virginia gathered for an advocacy orientation session.

The United States was on track to admit fewer than 20,000 refugees by the end of Fiscal Year 2018 (the lowest number ever in the history of the program). Constituents like me represented our church communities to voice our concern. We prepared to ask Senators and

Representatives to recommend a return to 90,000 persons the following year.

After hearing updates on the latest statistics and legislation, Refugee Advocacy Day organizers divided us into groups according to our districts to prepare for visits with our elected officials. Nervous constituents were reminded that members of Congress "work for us."

After a successful day of meetings at the congressional offices, our group wondered when immigration had become a partisan issue. Talking about the hope for bipartisanship,

we decided to visit the late Senator John McCain's office. We arrived in front of the placard for SR218 with an American and an Arizona flag flanking the door. There were no staffers or no appointments but the pause felt necessary to pay quiet respects to a statesman who had cosponsored the Afghan Allies Protection Amendments Act of 2018 and had so many times spoken compassionately about those who needed our help overseas. We hope his example will inspire others to see the crisis, not as a political bargaining chip, but as a humanitarian challenge that can only be solved together.





SHEILA FLANNIGAN: *“A Real Gem”*

By: Dana Lea, Director of Outreach

Sheila Flanagan has been volunteering with LSS/NCA two days a week since mid-September. She came to LSS/NCA through the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC). Sheila was particularly inspired by the communities LSS/NCA serves, in particular refugees and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors, and hoped she could help in some way.

“The motivation to become involved with IVC came from spending time, this past spring, witnessing first-hand the plight of deported migrants in Nogales, Mexico. Through an organization called the Kino Border Initiative, I saw and heard the heart breaking stories of migrants trying to

navigate the frustrating process of entering or remaining in this country legally.

If you have visited or called our D.C. Petworth office, you may have met Sheila, since she staffs our front desk on Tuesdays and Fridays. She has been instrumental in the application process for the Council on Accreditation (COA). The application itself requires an enormous amount of information from staff and programs. Sheila processed surveys, reviewed standards, and collected narratives to help meet the application deadline. Once COA-accredited, the agency will have greater access to funding sources, as well as expanded local partnerships.

Sheila and her husband have lived in the D.C. metropolitan area for

the last twenty five years. They have three children: two boys in college and a daughter in high school. We are so thankful to have Sheila in our office, helping us with various and vital administrative tasks.

Her employee supervisor, Kichelle Coleman, said: “Sheila is extremely pleasant and very welcoming to visitors. She is there faithfully and on time to assist our guests with their needs. In addition, she is always ready and willing to help staff and has asked for additional tasks to expand her service. She is a real gem and I am looking forward to her contributions with preparation for the COA site visit. Thank You, Sheila, for rolling up your sleeves and helping LSS/NCA with this important milestone!”

OUR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

REFUGEE FAMILIES

Car Seats & Boosters
Toiletry Items (full size): shampoo, toothbrushes, toilet paper, diapers
Pots & Pans
Brooms
Alarm Clocks
Lamps
Laptops
Strollers

COMMUNITY YOUTH

Cleaning Supplies
Toiletries
Reflection Journals
Shower Shoes
Socks
Gloves
Sleeping Bags
Magazines & Poster Board for Vision Boards
Gift Cards: Michaels, Ross, Walmart, Harris Teeter, Safeway, etc.

To donate, contact Dana at Lead@lssnca.org or drop off donations at our offices.

DINE FOR A CAUSE

By: Dana Lea, Director of Outreach

LSS/NCA is looking for restaurants in D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia to host restaurant proceed nights. Restaurant nights are a great way for both our agency and the host restaurant to reach new and interested supporters, customers and volunteers. For these fundraisers, we are seeking restaurants that will donate 15-25% of their daily/nightly proceeds to LSS/NCA and feature us as a partnering charity. LSS/NCA will promote the fundraising event through social media and email, asking our supporters to “dine for a cause.”

If you know restaurants that frequently partner with local organizations or you belong to a congregation or business that may be interested in organizing a dinner on a specified LSS/NCA night, contact LSS/NCA volunteer Amanda Lettieri at 540-336-0520 or arinker@gmail.com.



1917 Society: Recognizing Your Legacy

By: Susan Haine, Director of Grants

We are grateful for all the donations that help support our mission. Hundreds of national capital area residents provide financial support to our programs through annual cash gifts. However, there is still a great need for additional funding. Gifts from an IRA, will, or trust provide an opportunity to give more generously. This past year, we were surprised by a generous gift created under a trust that was established almost 20 years ago.

You can easily make a gift from your IRA or make a planned-gift from your estate. While multi-million dollar gifts make headlines, your estate gift, of any size, is a valuable contribution, helping us meet significant needs in troubled times.

To encourage, facilitate, and recognize the very important financial support of a bequest or other planned gift, we created the 1917 Society, named for the year of LSS/NCA's founding.

We will be pleased to enroll any donor who has made or intends to make a bequest to LSS/NCA, or to name LSS/NCA as the beneficiary of a trust, a life insurance policy, a retirement death benefit, or other form of estate gift. We invite you to call us at your convenience.

Susan Haine
201-723-3000 x138 • HainesS@lssnca.org

Sharing Prince George's County Awards \$20,000 to Bolster Refugee Employment

By: Susan Haine, Director of Grants

Sharing Prince George's County awarded LSS/NCA a grant in the amount of \$20,000. The funds will help support the Refugee and Immigrant Services (RIS) program's efforts to provide workforce development assistance to refugees settled in Prince George's county.

Sharing Prince George's is a strategic, donor-led funding effort to encourage more residents and businesses to 'give where they live.' Since its inception, Sharing Prince George's has awarded nearly \$900,000 in grants to some of the most influential community-based nonprofit organizations serving local residents.

LSS/NCA's RIS program is one of only a handful of safety net providers working in Maryland and Northern Virginia to help refugees and asylees thrive, by promoting successful reception, placement, and workforce services for persons who are admitted to the United States. Last year, the majority of refugees came from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and El Salvador. LSS/NCA collaborates closely with other refugee resettlement agencies to meet the needs of newly-arrived refugees.

Employment is a critical part of refugee recovery and integration. It restores self-esteem, purpose, and belonging, thus getting a job and ensuring job retention is essential to overall well-being. RIS job developers work to establish a good match between employer's needs and participant's skills. They also help address and resolve barriers clients may face, such as child care, transportation, health care, English literacy, or housing.

With the help of funding from Sharing Prince George's County, refugees and asylees will be able to improve their skills, obtain better jobs, more quickly attain self-sufficiency, and become contributing members of the community.

*You're invited to our annual Expressions of Abundance breakfast,
hosted in Virginia on Tuesday, May 14 and
in Maryland on Thursday, May 23.*

Find more details on our website calendar or email Dana at Lead@lssnca.org to RSVP



A Message from Mary Warlick, Board Chair

Dear Friends in Service

Thank you for supporting the children and families served through LSS/NCA. Your role in offering hope to the most vulnerable members of our community is essential and exemplified beautifully in the stories highlighted in this winter's newsletter. Your continued support is particularly important during these challenging times of national and local policy changes that have the potential to impact our ability to walk with those in need.

As many of you may now know, Lynn J. Tedesco was recently appointed as acting interim Chief Executive Officer of LSS/NCA, following Christine Connell's departure on February 14. Lynn brings an extensive understanding of and commitment to LSS/NCA given her significant volunteer roles within LSS/NCA for the past seven years. In addition, as the owner of Inthevent, LLC, a firm focused on event marketing and sponsorship management, as well as development for corporate and non-profit organizations, she has provided strategic consultation to global business for over 30 years.

As we work through this transition to ensure LSS/NCA remains a thriving agency, I'd like to emphasize the Board's continued strong commitment to the welfare of our team of dedicated staff members and the individuals and families in the communities we serve.

Your compassion has sustained a legacy of service. Thank you for encouraging new beginnings and inspiring hopeful futures.

With sincere thanks for your support,

Mary Burce Warlick

Mary Burce Warlick
Board Chair

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“What if Christmas Perhaps Means a little Bit More?”



**Children and Families Create
a Lasting Holiday Memory**
Read the story on page 3

INSIDE THIS EDITION

The Day I Became a Mother



***A Mother Shares the Joy
and Challenges of Adoption***
Read more on front cover

SAVE THE DATES

Mar 4 - Jun 26	Citizenship Classes
April 7	MLK Multi-Faith Program and Resource Fair
April 16	Volunteer Orientation (VA)
May 7	Volunteer Orientation (MD)
May 14	Expressions of Abundance (VA)
May 23	Expressions of abundance (MD)
June 15	World Refugee Day Celebration (MD)
June 29	World Refugee Day Celebration (VA)

**For more information & events, visit
LSSNCA.org**

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RESETTLEMENT:
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SHARES THEIR FIRST
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4 COMMUNITY

**SHEILA FLANNIGAN
“A REAL GEM”**

5 VOLUNTEER

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