

What is a refugee?

A refugee is "a person who is unable to return to his or her country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group." A refugee legally resides in the country of resettlement and is eligible for Federally funded assistance up to eight months.

Refugees are resettled in the United States by the federal government and afforded specific refugee assistance to help them rebuild their lives in America. Although this funding is specific to serving refugees, it is limited in both duration and amount. It is important to note that most refugees arrive with very little in terms of possessions, beside a few bags of luggage, and if they are lucky, all of their family members.

What is an American Friend?

The American Friends program matches English-speaking adults with recently arrived refugee families to provide them with support to educate, orient, and integrate New Mainers into the community.



Refugee & Immigration Services

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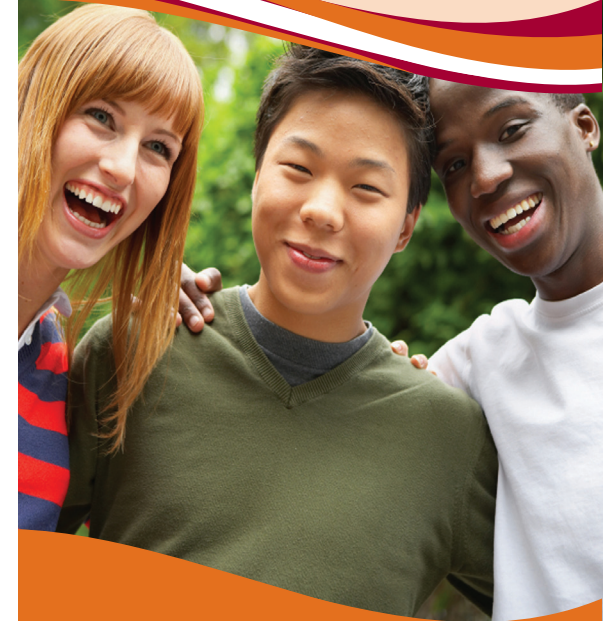
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American Friends Volunteer Program



*Making a difference
in the life of a refugee*



Become an American Friend and Make a Difference

Imagine arriving in Portland, Maine from Somalia or Iraq and not knowing the language or the customs of America. How do I mail a letter? What do traffic signs mean? What type of clothing do I need to survive a Maine winter?

For those of us who grew up in the U.S., these simple tasks are often taken for granted. But to a refugee, learning American language and customs can be an overwhelming experience. This is where an American Friend steps in to help.



How the Program Works

Spend two hours a week for a minimum of six months to help a refugee family to:

- Learn and practice English
- Learn to function independently in their new surroundings
- Become acquainted with aspects of American life (public transportation, street signs, public schools and libraries, markets, the postal system, banking and currency, taxes, and social interactions)
- Become familiar with what resources and organizations are in and around Portland
- Cope with culture shock

Refugee families in this program need a friend who: is dependable, patient and flexible, and who will take time to explain things about the community. Volunteers with previous experience working with English language learners is preferred.

Why Join?

Successful resettlement depends on a life-long partnership between the refugee and the receiving community. By joining, you receive:

- Fulfillment in helping someone become self-sufficient, participating community members
- Exposure to new cultures
- Cross-cultural training
- Join a network of caring volunteers
- Invited to join on-going training opportunities

How Do I Get Involved?

- Apply online at cmaine.org/volunteer or contact RIS at the information below
- Attend an interview
- Attend a half-day volunteer training



For more information on becoming an American Friend, please contact Baba Ly, Assistant Director, at: (207) 493-8913 bly@ccmaine.org

Visit us online at: RefugeeImmigrationServicesCCM.org