

# ROCHESTER REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SERVICES

*quarterly newsletter*



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Hello friends of Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services!

This is RRRS's first quarterly newsletter, keeping you up to date with our goals and projects as well as sharing possibilities for involvement with our local New American community! We have been serving New Americans in Rochester since 2010 - this term includes refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and "no one left behind" (natives who have served our military in their home country).

This newsletter highlights a few of our latest projects, and you can also learn more about our many other programs by checking out our new website:

<https://www.rochesterrefugeeservices.org/>

# ASYLUM SEEKERS

A refugee is a person who has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Our organization was founded to help the refugee population in Rochester, and we have now expanded to include asylum seekers too!

An asylum seeker is someone who claims to be a refugee but whose claim has not been evaluated by the government yet. The majority of asylum seekers are people who come to the border without legal documentation, and they are usually detained at the border and kept in ICE detention centers. At RRRS, we work with asylum seekers who have been paroled from the detention centers, and we are also in the process of sponsoring more detained asylum seekers so that they can be paroled and come to Rochester, where we can then support them in a number of ways. The other category of asylum seekers consists of people who are in the US, such as on a visitor's visa or student visa, who apply for asylum when they are already here. At RRRS, we are now working with asylum seekers from both categories as well as people who have already been granted asylum.

Asylum seekers face many challenges in their path to a safer life. First, they must escape from incredibly dangerous situations in their home countries. Our current cases include a family escaping from ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, a family targeted for aiding a democratic revolution in Sudan, and an individual caught between armed separatist groups and a corrupt government in Cameroon.

In addition to these threats, asylum seekers face many obstacles in the US immigration system. They do not have the right to an attorney, and the immigration legal system is highly complex. Additionally, asylum applicants wait an average of 1,030 days (almost 3 years) for their cases to be decided, and many do not even speak English. Furthermore, they must wait a year after filing their asylum application to apply for authorization to work in the US, and they are not eligible for government aid.

Here at RRRS, we are committed to supporting our asylum seekers with housing, food, clothing, English lessons, employment, and connections to free legal assistance, all in the hopes that we can help them to be granted asylum and establish a safe, healthy, and productive life here in our Rochester community.



This photo shows one of our asylum seekers, Sharon (second from left) with part of our volunteer team that manages the asylum seeker cases. Sharon and her father are fleeing from violence and political persecution in Cameroon, and we are helping them settle into a safe life here in Rochester as well as build their cases for asylum.

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for more information about this program, contact Katie Kopp ([kakopp9@gmail.com](mailto:kakopp9@gmail.com))  
or Mike Coniff ([coniffmike@gmail.com](mailto:coniffmike@gmail.com))

# City Rise Healthy Home Project



Our City Rise project is developing an innovative, in-home training program to promote healthy housing for refugee and asylum seeker tenants who may be unfamiliar with North American-style housing. The ultimate goal of the program is to provide services, opportunities, and assistance to our New Americans as they strive to be self-sustaining neighbors while still maintaining their own cultural heritage.

The Healthy Home program will consist of: one-on-one training about how to maintain a

clean home, the provision of cleaning supplies, a healthy home workshop, a practical and motivational cleaning schedule, advocates for tenants and landlords, and interpreters as needed.

Although different people have varying ways of living, we believe that maintaining a clean, hygienic home is an essential skill for our New Americans in their journeys to new healthy and happy lives.

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## Advancing Refugee Student Educational Opportunities (ARSEO)

ARSEO strives to prepare Rochester-area refugee high school students to make informed decisions regarding their post-secondary education that match their personal goals, interests, aptitudes, and career aspirations. We facilitate each participant's self-exploration of their own personal values, desires, and dreams, tracing these to possible future careers. ARSEO seeks to empower participants with exposure to a broad range of post-secondary educational opportunities, including trade schools, colleges, and research universities.

Participants also receive a thorough overview of the requirements, expectations, and deadlines in the process of applying for different institutions across post-secondary education.

Alongside essay workshops, standardized testing preparation, and resume building,

students have the opportunity to visit local colleges. Mentorship and exploration are enhanced by a number of guest speakers in the fields of government, healthcare, business, and education, in addition to site visits to relevant work locations in these fields. Students ultimately leave the program having made important connections with peer mentors, community leaders, and college staff, as well as with a better understanding of their next steps and where they might lead.



for more information about either of these programs, contact Ngo Hna  
(ngohna@rochesterrefugee.org)



*Rochester Refugee Sewing & Repair's*

# HANDMADE RAG RUGS

Rochester Refugee Sewing & Repair is excited to announce the launch of our heirloom-quality handmade braided rugs! These beautiful rugs are now being sold in addition to our usual scrunchies, tote bags, and in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, face masks.

Each rug employs the work of up to four refugees, from cutting to braiding to finally sewing. After the braiding is completed, sewists pick the colors they

like, sort them, and create these beautiful pieces. The rugs are seamed together with the highest-quality thread and made from lovingly-selected offcuts and scraps rescued for reuse. In the great tradition of grandmothers sewing rag-rugs across the world, we have brought these rugs to your home to last for generations. Every purchase funds the employment, training, and support of New Americans resettled in our community.



In these photos you can see Samim holding Herat, a 28” rug with concentric circles of cornflower and rose. Charlotte is holding Beni, 30”, made with sky blue and green-flecked neutrals.

Check out the rugs on our website: <https://rochesterrefugee.org/limited-editions>

# HOW YOU CAN HELP

## Volunteer

We welcome:

- one-time or continuous involvement in any of our various projects
- high school and college interns
- individuals and groups for one-day painting and housing projects
- churches who may want to sponsor a family by helping them adjust to life in Rochester
- and more!

Ways you can volunteer:

- Training drivers - if you have taught your kids to drive, you can help teach our New Americans
- Volunteer with our Deaf Refugee Advocacy program - help with literacy classes, paperwork assistance, and social and cultural events
- College-aged volunteers can be peer mentors for our ARSEO refugee high school student program
- Assist our staff as they upgrade, rehab, and maintain our housing
- Volunteer as an English language tutor
- Medical professionals can volunteer to provide mentorship and support to New American healthcare workers
- And more!

<https://www.rochesterrefugeeservices.org/volunteer/>

## Donate

Click [this link](#) to donate money directly to our organization.

Donations of working appliances (stoves, refrigerators, washers, dryers etc.) and cash help us equip our houses so that our New American families can function successfully in our community.

Donations of operational computers (both laptops and PCs work) with at least 5G memory help our adult computer training program and go to refugees and asylum seekers in need.

Buy from Rochester Refugee Sewing & Repair and/or share the link to buy rugs and masks!

<https://rochesterrefugee.org/shop>

