

Ideas into Action

April 2, 2017

Observer: Sarah Hays (Note: Sarah also assisted in facilitating the meeting)

USA for UNHCR - Susan LaBombard and Lauren Negrete

Susan and Lauren worked in development and advocacy for USA for UNHCR which is one of the largest and longest running organizations working to help refugees survive. They provide materials, cash, and support to refugees and UNHCR recommends refugees for resettlement. Not everyone gets resettled. Those that are selected go through a vetting process of 1.5 years or longer and once approved they can still wait for many years before they are sent to a host country. Neither UNCHR nor the refugee gets to request a country in which to resettle. At this point, it is up to the governments.

Questions were asked about how to get involved to do something as an individual here and the answer was to help raise awareness and obviously financial support is helpful. I have attached a fact sheet on the reality of the refugee crisis/US resettlement. Susan has shared with me some links on videos/films that are enlightening: <http://to.pbs.org/2hMiSDk> (PBS Exodus film), and CNN report <http://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2017/02/22/pkg-amanpour-jordan-refugees-darius.cnn> and <http://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2017/02/21/pkg-amanpour-jordan-child-marriage.cnn>

Brian Norris, a profess of Criminal Justice and a member of the board of World Affairs Council of Charleston spoke a bit on immigration numbers. While the majority of the meeting was focused specifically on refugees, it was interesting to hear how/why many immigrants get to the US (legally or illegally) and how that affects the perception of refugee assistance. He gave us a quick history lesson on immigration laws in the US and recommended the book *Strangers in the Land*.

Next we heard from **David Bateman of the Vineyard Community Church and Lloyd White of Lutheran Services**. They, along with Brian Evanger (Charleston office of Lutheran Services) are boots on the ground in SC and Charleston, resettling families. Charleston has primarily received families from the Congo but there have been a few cases in SC of Iraqi, Syrians, and soon to

be Ukrainians. Five families were resettled in Charleston in 2016. Their stories were moving and their calling to show love for those who are seeking refuge was palpable. SC was set to get 200+ families in 2017 but the current administration is limiting those numbers so we are not certain what the numbers will be.

Vanessa Gongora who has helped sponsor a refugee family (and works with Goodwill) and **Harper Poe** (runs Proud Mary non profit supporting refugee artisans, www.proudmmary.org/) spoke briefly but powerfully about their interactions with the families. From the refugee's immediate desire to work, to their emotional first time at the beach - these ladies gave us perspective on ways to help that are not necessarily financial. We learned the sad history of several of these family members. Many had witness relatives being murdered or raped, fled from gang members, one lived in a camp from age 6 until his 20's, when he and his wife/children (met in the camp) were finally able to come to SC. Vanessa told a particularly touching story of how she convinced her husband to agree to host a refugee family briefly until their housing was in order. She and her daughter were making the bed and her daughter was insistent on putting the pillow case on and making it "just right" because it was the most important part since the refugee would be so tired from travel. It just goes to show how much of an impact we make on our community when we give not necessarily money but ourselves to a cause.

And that is where I want to leave this summary. How to help. There are so many different ways to get involved. It depends on your time, finances, and motivation. Maybe it is just giving a few dollars. Maybe it is hosting a refugee family for the night until their housing is ready. Or driving them to a job interview. I'm going to list some things below and if you are able, please get involved or at the very least, help make your friend aware of what is facing these families who are just trying to survive.

Before the meeting closed, **Michael Shemtov and his wife Melody** spoke about their work in trying to hire refugees at their businesses (Butcher and Bee and The Daily). Michael shared that sometimes even the good intentions don't work completely but other times it comes together. He has currently hired one of the newcomers to Charleston who has a lot of experience in electrical engineering but was desperate to work, so he is currently making all the juices at their restaurants. Cannon Green and some of the downtown hotels have also hired some of the members of refugee families who arrived in 2016. As

Michael stated, we are so blessed. Let's continue to give/share what we have until we can't.

How to help:

International Level

- Build Awareness of the Crisis and the real facts. [Here's some tools on how.](#)
- [Donate to USA for UNHCR](#)
- I met with Susan and Lauren after the meeting and learned that they also do "mission trips" with donors to meet refugees they have helped support. Can be in Europe or Latin America. I am hoping to do one of these trips in the near future.

National/Local Level

- Again, build awareness of the reality of the crisis. [Here's some tools on how.](#)
- Donate. Give financially (*cash or Carta gift cards are big helps*) to Lutheran Services. If cash/check, be sure to specify that it is for refugee programs. You can also donate to their gofundme page: <https://www.gofundme.com/LSCrefugeesonthebrink>
- Work with your company or companies you know to hire refugees. Many come with various levels of education, including engineering degrees and they come wanting to work. If your company or one you know has job openings for electricians, engineers, or even line cooks/cleaners contact Brian Evanger bevanger@lscarolinas.net and let him know. He will have the resumes of local refugees looking for work.
- Sign up to volunteer with Lutheran Services. More info here: <http://www.lscarolinas.net/services.../refugee-co-sponsorship/>. You can email bevanger@lscarolinas.net and LWhite@lscarolinas.net as well for an application.
- Once your background check has cleared, you can offer in a variety of ways.
 - Usually, a small group sponsors a family and they use a google doc to share the list of needs and the individual volunteers update the document with their ability to take on a task. Some examples:
 - Host a family for a night
 - Drive them to an appointment or job interview
 - Show them their new city
 - Help get their new apartments ready

- Follow SC for Refugee and Immigrant Justice on FB <https://www.facebook.com/scforrefugeejustice/> to learn about other local volunteer efforts to support refugees and immigrants