

Jewish Family Services

Charlotte Plays Key Role In New Refugee Resettlement Program

By Sally Ann Phillips

Charlotte has been selected as one of five communities in North Carolina to participate in the "North Carolina Free Case Project" in partnership with HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. To establish this program, HIAS was awarded a grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The goal of the project is to facilitate the placement and resettlement of refugees from the former Soviet Union in several communities within the state of NC as well as in Tucson, AZ and Richmond, VA. The NC project and ORR grant are the product of an extensive planning process that involved the Jewish communities in Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, Durham-Chapel Hill, and Winston-Salem.

This unique HIAS refugee resettlement project is headquartered in Greensboro within the offices of the Jewish Federation. From the Greensboro office, the HIAS staff provides and coordinates refugee services and support across the state. Using all available resources in both the public and private sec-

tors, the project focuses on meeting the refugees' immediate needs for basic necessities (food, clothing, and shelter) as well as the refugees' social, cultural, linguistic, and vocational adjustment.

This NC Free Case Resettlement project's initial goal is to resettle approximately 100 "free case" refugees, that is, those who have no family residing in the area. Charlotte is expected to receive about 90 new Americans. The project is structured with two sources of support: the HIAS staff, and the local communities. The HIAS staff provides specific services to the families to help them "get on their feet" such as facilitating employment, ensuring healthcare screening is conducted, ensuring family members register for English classes, and coordinating the provision of food, clothing and shelter. Local community volunteers serve as the refugees' surrogate family, providing logistical support such as transportation, household goods, food, and tutoring. Most importantly, the local volunteers are the bridge between the families' former life and the future. The relationship

between the surrogate families and refugees begins as a support system during the critical first months of resettlement; these relationships can blossom into long-term friendships and result in extended "chavarot." These types of affiliations have proven to significantly aid new Americans adjust to a new way of life and a new culture. Many of the families from the Former Soviet Union have never been given the opportunity to practice Judaism; the bonds established with the surrogate families help foster assimilation into the Jewish community as well. The project's professional staff is led by Sally Ann F. Phillips, with Faina Bochkis serving as the bilingual administrative assistant in the Greensboro office. Randy Sperling has been hired as a part-time volunteer coordinator based in Charlotte for the Charlotte community. For additional information, or to offer assistance, please call Sally or Faina at (910) 574-2477. If you would like to volunteer to help a family being resettled in Charlotte, please call Jewish Family Services at (704) 364-6594.

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