

“Refugees Work Hard and Make Fantastic Citizens”

By Toni Kirk

After living in extremely harsh and life threatening environments, immigrants and refugees seek relocation and assistance from other countries. In the United States, there is an organization called the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. Their mission is to “resettle vulnerable refugees” with an end goal of having a successful future and to be able to move forward. This organization is non-profit, and works on the generosity of donations and outside assistance.

Kerissa MacKay, program director for the USCRI, assists in getting refugees jobs, as well as working one-on-one with most refugees. Although some argue that refugees pose a terrorist threat, MacKay disagrees saying, “You’re taking the most vulnerable people in the world, and we are a country with a lot of opportunity and resources. The refugees, when they come here, they work very hard and they make fantastic citizens, it changes their life.” MacKay is currently running a program that helps resettled refugees buy homes, cars, and get additional college education - which would keep them moving forward economically.

Although the work they do is outstanding, the USCRI team members often face a lot of challenges and obstacles. By being nonprofit, from an organizational standpoint, finances are always very tough. But, from a resettlement standpoint, working with someone that is not literate in their own language, has no work history, has no education, no knowledge about the United States and their customs, it’s extremely challenging to get that refugee a job and support their family in an extremely short amount of time (generally 3 months).

A lot of the refugees that are coming to Cleveland are often coming from the Congo and Iraq. Refugees may come to the United States because of a U.S. tie from a family member that

they want to resettle with. Others may come to the United States because they've heard things about it. Then, they get here, and discover that it is nothing like it is in the movies. Cleveland is among one of the best places for refugees to be resettled. We have public transportation, affordable housing, a fairly welcoming community, as well as reasonable cost of living. Refugees that come from warmer countries do get a little bit of a culture shock, especially because Ohio has four seasons (it might feel like more sometimes). Refugees are willing to overlook the crazy weather, and look towards the future of living a happy and successful life.