Community Sponsorship of Refugees in Chicagoland

Capturing Key Learnings for Refugees and Local Communities

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HIAS

Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Contents

An Iraqi immigrant family reunites in Chicago, circa 1970. (HIAS)

Introduction

Community sponsorship of refugees is rooted in the simple, powerful idea that everyday Americans can play a role in welcoming newcomers. This idea has a history as long as migration itself, as new immigrants drew on support from others who came before them. It rests on the truth that building a new life takes a village — and that it's possible to create new villages. The founding of HIAS over 100 years ago was enabled by Jewish immigrants supporting newer Jewish arrivals fleeing poverty and persecution in Eastern Europe. And as the U.S. government has explored community sponsorship as a model for formal refugee resettlement, HIAS has been consistently at the forefront.

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration piloted a program which allowed private groups to formally sponsor refugees. Through this program, HIAS helped welcome thousands of Soviet Jews. The timing coincided with an expansion of the HIAS mission to serve non-Jewish refugees as well. HIAS began welcoming Vietnamese and other refugees through both community sponsorship and traditional government resettlement pathways until the community sponsorship pilot's expiration in 1996.

While the official pilot ended in 1996, volunteers remained integral to refugee resettlement efforts in the United States. The U.S. Department of State has long included definitions and guidelines for co-sponsors in the agreement with resettlement agencies that outlines refugee resettlement policies, but in 2021, community sponsorships saw a major revival when the Biden administration called for an expansion of community sponsorship programming. Groups of individuals would be paired with refugee cases and commit to providing volunteer services to support and integrate refugees in the community, as well as provide financial or in-kind support. HIAS and other resettlement agencies answered the call to recruit, train, and supervise volunteers. A key aim of the new program was to expand the United States' capacity to welcome arrivals, as the

nation's resettlement system was rebuilt from near-total shutdown during the first Trump administration. The effort was able to tap the energy of local communities galvanized by media coverage of immigration restrictions over the preceding four years as well as new developments such as the evacuation of Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 and the displacement of Ukrainians in the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion.

With the critical support of the Walder Foundation, this project aims to advance learning from the latest iteration of the community sponsorship program in the HIAS network. What insight can practitioners take from its successes and limitations? What does this suggest about how the model may adapt to meet new needs and under different circumstances? What lessons might it hold for the broader possibilities of community mobilization? Finally, the project aims to shine a light on the stories of families and volunteers. At a time when media coverage of anti-immigrant voices is prevalent and loud, these stories speak to the reality of Americans far from the spotlight doing the everyday work of welcoming families to their neighborhoods, towns, and cities.

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This report spotlights the perspectives of newcomers, volunteers, and staff from HIAS' longstanding partner, Jewish Child and Family Services of Chicago (JCFS). During an April 2025 visit to the Chicago area, the HIAS team spoke with four families — originally from Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, and Syria — who had been matched with community sponsorship teams, with seven volunteers, and with 10 JCFS staff members. As of mid-2025, much uncertainty surrounds the refugee resettlement program, but these stories, and these lessons, continue to matter and lift up lived experiences for newcomers and for Americans.

Acknowledgements

The project team expresses sincere thanks to all newcomers, volunteers, and staff who took the time to meet and share their perspectives. Particular thanks goes to JCFS colleagues who carefully arranged a complex site visit and provided valuable feedback on early findings. A note of gratitude must go to Emily Griffith for the groundwork they laid for HIAS' community sponsorship program and this learning project; to Lindsay Kagalis for thought partnership in telling these stories; and to Alicia Wrenn for investing in a learning culture. Rachel Levitan and Matt Schiavenza both improved this report through thoughtful edits. Finally, the HIAS team expresses its thanks to the Walder Foundation for making possible through their support the kind of meaningful learning and reflection which makes a network of stakeholders a true community of practice.

Community Sponsorship Models

Community sponsorship is an umbrella term to describe several different models of community-led resettlement. The main distinction between them is the scope of volunteers' responsibilities versus those of resettlement agencies. In the co-sponsorship and support team models — the focus of this report — volunteers are organized by a local resettlement agency office, and responsibilities are divided between volunteers and agency staff. In the co-sponsorship model, volunteers provide the majority of core services required by government resettlement standards in the first three months after newcomers' arrival, while in the support team model agency staff retain responsibility for most core services, while volunteers provide supplementary support. In a third model, private sponsorship, volunteer groups shoulder the entire commitment of providing mandated core services. They are not coordinated by a local affiliate agency, but rather by HIAS headquarters or another entity participating in private sponsorship.

JCFS Chicago Community Sponsorship Program Overview

JCFS Chicago launched its current community sponsorship program in 2022, in the same period that it restarted its wider resettlement program following the closure during the first Trump administration. Community sponsorship featured prominently in the first years after re-launching the resettlement program, before falling back to a smaller but significant feature of the program. In fiscal year 2022, 71% of individuals resettled through JCFS were matched with volunteers; in fiscal year 2023, this proportion was 52% and in fiscal year 2024 it dropped to 15%. This shift, discussed later in the report, reflected a slowdown in recruitment and a trend towards one-time matches rather than repeated matches for volunteer groups.

Families are matched with co-sponsors based on need, with JCFS prioritizing larger families and those where one or more members has a disability and/or a significant medical condition. JCFS aims to match families before their arrival, but post-arrival matchmaking may occur when case managers assess that a family could benefit from additional support, or if a volunteer group only becomes available after arrival. Families must opt into the program.

In the initial period following the relaunch of the program, JCFS applied the co-sponsorship model, in which volunteers took on the majority of core services. Over time, JCFS' approach evolved towards less intensive requirements for volunteer groups, called support teams. Volunteers sign up for a period of six months, while informal engagement may continue after. Groups are encouraged — but not required — to raise money for a pooled Welcome Fund used by JCFS to supplement government funds to cover necessities such as rent, utilities, transportation, and clothing.

Volunteers receive training and oversight from the Community Engagement Specialist. Trainings include an overview of the resettlement program, cultural humility, privacy laws and mandated reporting requirements.

JCFS Chicago Co-Sponsored Arrivals

As Proportion of Total Arrivals

FY2022

71% of refugee arrivals matched with community sponsors

FY2023

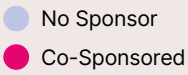
52% of refugee arrivals matched with community sponsors

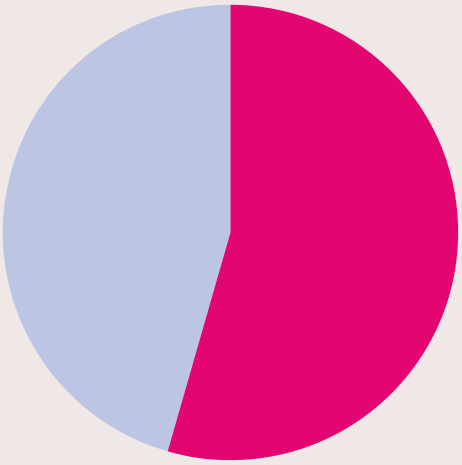
FY2024

15% of refugee arrivals matched with community sponsors

JCFS Chicago Refugee Arrivals by Country of Origin

Number of Total and Co-Sponsored Refugees from Each Country, Fiscal Year 2022–Fiscal Year 2024





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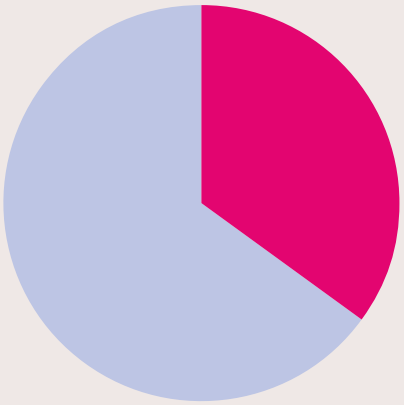
Afghanistan
61 Co-Sponsored



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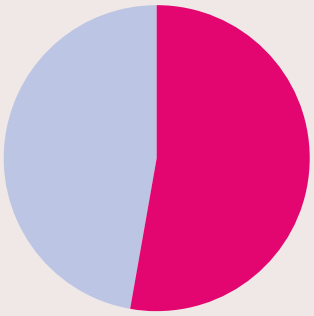
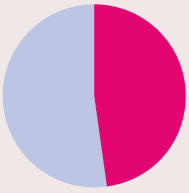
Myanmar
29 Co-Sponsored



58
Syria
31 Co-Sponsored



27
Republic of the Congo
13 Co-Sponsored

8
Burundi
2 Co-Sponsored

8
Guatemala
7 Co-Sponsored

8
Iraq
0 Co-Sponsored

7
Sudan
0 Co-Sponsored

6
Kyrgyzstan
0 Co-Sponsored

5
Colombia
5 Co-Sponsored

4
Central African Republic
0 Co-Sponsored

2
Ecuador
0 Co-Sponsored

2
Haiti
2 Co-Sponsored

2
Iran
0 Co-Sponsored

1
Honduras
0 Co-Sponsored

1
Indonesia
0 Co-Sponsored

1
Senegal
0 Co-Sponsored

1
Uganda
0 Co-Sponsored

Newcomer Experiences with Volunteers

Families matched with volunteers told the HIAS team that volunteers made a meaningful difference in their first months in the United States. They offered families material resources — basic home goods, groceries, and sometimes financial assistance. This was appreciated and sometimes, families said, critically needed. However, families placed the greatest emphasis on non-material support. In particular, newcomers stressed the impact of volunteers' provision of transportation assistance, accompaniment to appointments, and responsiveness to questions.

> **JCFS staff observed that families provided with volunteer support faced fewer barriers to accessing services than non-matched families.**

Since case managers are required to complete a spate of core services and uphold rigorous federal reporting requirements for many families at any given time, accompanying each client for individual appointments and tasks is often impossible. Considering this, multiple families said having volunteers accompany them was an important source of reassurance. A ride in a volunteer's car, or shared practice rides on the city bus system, can make all the difference for a newcomer reporting to their first day of work or trying to get a sick child to a specialist appointment across town. Newcomers also cited the responsiveness of volunteers when they reach out, and volunteers' follow-up as the newcomers tried new tasks independently. Very simply, one family said, "they've always been there for us."

JCFS staff observed that families provided with volunteer support faced fewer barriers to accessing services than non-matched families. For "non-essential" services such as the public library, such accompaniment can determine whether or not families access them at all. As one case manager said,

I think [non-matched clients] have to wait a little bit longer to access available resources … For example, they have services in the library that families with no sponsorship are not aware of. Or even if I let them know, they don't know how to get there … these are not core services, so when I have the time, only then can I take them to the library, get them a library card, and show them the services … that means there is a little bit of delay in services of someone taking them to utilize services that are already available.

Where volunteers provided such accompaniment, particularly in the initial period after arrival, this appeared to build trust. When volunteers weren't able to provide such accompaniment, the match was viewed as less impactful. One family mentioned another family they know who were matched to a smaller group of volunteers which they described as less hands-on: sharing links and directions for example, rather than going together. The hands-off approach was ultimately less helpful, the family said.

Volunteers can be an important source of social capital. In a number of cases, volunteers made connections or introductions to help clients access a particular resource. This included helping clients find job opportunities, navigate the hiring process, or work with schools to enroll children in summer or after-school programming.

Through community sponsorship, newcomers also reported getting an enhanced orientation to the culture, laws, and customs of the United States — what is known in refugee resettlement as cultural orientation. Cultural orientation is a part of mandated services for new arrivals, typically delivered through classes run by resettlement agencies. In addition to the role of the resettlement agency, topics include employment, housing, education, health, community services, rights and responsibilities under relevant law, learning English, money management, transportation, and cultural adjustment.

Alaa, a Syrian refugee, shows drawings by her daughter in their Chicago home. (Lindsay Kagalis/HIAS)

Newcomers said that exposure to volunteers brought many aspects of cultural orientation to life, helping them understand the written (or unwritten) rules of engagement for different situations. Among the topics that stuck with them: seatbelt and car seat laws, labelling allergens on a potluck dish, communication norms around handshakes and eye contact, the type of engagement parents might be expected to have with a child's school, and how to navigate the banking system. For newly arrived refugees facing a firehose of information and fearful of mis-stepping, consulting volunteers was an important way to cut through the noise. As one newcomer said, "Any issue I have — of course I ask my friends, I try to do my own research, but I can go to [the volunteer] because he's from this country. I can consult him."

Cultural orientation works best customized to newcomers' backgrounds and prior knowledge. Refugees are highly diverse; even within the four families interviewed, educational backgrounds and prior exposure to U.S. culture varied greatly. Volunteer support offers the advantage of providing concentrated, intensive attention to each family, or each family member. At the same time, limitations on this kind of informal cultural orientation may mean that such exchange serves families best as a supplement to existing classes rather than a replacement. Volunteers' own experiences and perspectives as individuals are by definition limited. Complex, nuanced topics may require more formal language access solutions — volunteer groups often rely on technology such as translation apps, while case managers can more easily access in-person interpreters.

Newcomers interviewed by HIAS said that because of volunteer support, they felt less anxiety navigating the new community. "From the first moment we arrived, we felt very welcomed," one person said. Several said that the support accelerated their stability. "We would have struggled a lot more," one newcomer said, "and it would have taken us longer to adjust, a much longer time." Staff shared a similar assessment. "When you compare families with volunteers and families without volunteers," a case manager said, you feel that families who get volunteers here know the city, the rules, the system faster." That matched families tend to be selected on

> **The volunteer-newcomer relationship can defy easy categorization — and individual mileage may vary.**

the basis of vulnerability makes this assessment even more notable. When things go well, these stakeholders said, the volunteer connection can provide a jumpstart on at least some aspects of integration.

The volunteer-newcomer relationship can defy easy categorization — and individual mileage may vary. Both newcomers and volunteers often reach for metaphors of kinship or friendship, but circumstances place families and volunteers at an undeniable power differential. The dynamics of individual families and volunteer groups may be further influenced by differences in wealth, age, and racialized identities. Most JCFS volunteers are relatively affluent professionals or retired professionals from Chicago's Jewish community, and — while acknowledging the complexities of Jewish identity — they generally experience life in the United States as white people. Many volunteers' families have immigrant backgrounds, but few volunteers are first-generation immigrants.

At the core of the community sponsorship program lies a responsibility to set participants up for an experience that avoids paternalism and white saviorism and encourages cultural humility. These are crucial roles that JCFS can play on the ground, and complexities are addressed in recruitment, training, and ongoing engagement during the match period.

Moreover, not all matches are, well, a match. JCFS staff recalled cases when families decided they were not comfortable with the level of involvement volunteers wished to have — for example, attending a doctor's appointment uninvited, or pushing for an unwelcome role in managing the family's finances. In a few cases, JCFS said, families have withdrawn from a match. Input from interviewees suggests that some of these mismatches boil down to the individual styles of the volunteers and the family. It also appears that rapport could be hurt in some cases by confusion around the role of volunteers versus agency staff, which will be covered in another section. Above all, a core insight may be that newcomers should set the pace of the relationship with volunteers, so it doesn't outstrip the level of trust which has been built.

A group of volunteers discuss their experience working with refugees in Chicago. (Lindsay Kagalis/HIAS)

STORY HIGHLIGHT

"We learned that they like us the way we are"

Alaa and Hussam were just beginning their life together as a couple when war forced them to flee their home in Syria. Hussam left his physics studies a year short of graduation, and they spent over a decade in Turkey, where they welcomed two children and found a way to get by. But as Alaa says, without a durable solution, "there was no way to stabilize psychologically." After they were accepted for resettlement to the United States in 2023, they boarded a plane to Chicago "and started over from zero."

Waiting for them at the airport was a group of volunteers, including Tom. Growing up, Tom heard stories about HIAS from a favorite great-aunt who had worked with the organization in New York. When JCFS put out a call for community sponsorship volunteers, he rallied friends and members of his rabbinic seminary. "I was always taught that the most repeated commandment is some version of take care of the stranger," he said. "It's really trying to do that mitzvah in a very concrete way."

Tom's group worked with Hussam and Alaa to navigate life in their new city. They helped the couple open bank accounts. They asked around to help Hussam change jobs to one with benefits and a vastly shorter commute. They convinced Chicago Public Schools to let the children enroll late for a summer program to set them up for success in the fall. Most of all, the family says, Tom made them feel they were not alone. Hussam reflected, "It's a society I'm dealing with for the first time in terms of work, in terms of finances, and all of that. [Tom] convinced me: 'I'm with you. Don't be afraid. There's nothing to fear.' It was material support, logistical support, psychological support, everything." Alaa says that Tom took the time to get to know their strengths and goals, and as a result, "there was respect and exchange between us and him." Tom described his role as "being a resource, being a listener, being a friend. And providing support where they need it as opposed to what I think they may need." Alaa and Hussam felt that the partnership gave them a jump start. Without the volunteers, they imagine, "it would have taken us longer to adjust, a much longer time."

Beyond this, Hussam says, the experience "got us excited about integrating." Chats over shared meals or

Hussam and Alaa, Syrian refugees, talk about settling into their new home and community. (Lindsay Kagalis/HIAS)

driving through Chicago traffic helped to demystify a new culture and make the family feel they were welcome additions to it. Hussam continued, "When we first arrived, I would say to [Alaa], we have to know — through the volunteers of course — we have to learn their customs so that when they come over, they're comfortable." Then over time, he says, "we learned that they like us the way we are." Alaa noted that the ease they felt with the group around their differences has fed her own curiosity. "You start to be excited to get to know them — the Jew, the Christian, the Druze, and they're really amazing people."

> **"We hope that there comes a time when we can return the favor and be with them — be volunteers.**

Two years after arrival, the relationship with Tom has evolved. Today, "we're just friends," Tom said, and the family is focused on the future. Alaa is continuing her studies and working as a translator. The kids are "excelling" in school; the oldest is in a special STEM program. They are saving for a house. Alaa said, "I feel, maybe in this country, now our lives have begun, for my husband and me to have stability." The experience has also shaped how they think about their roles in the community. "We hope that there comes a time when we can return the favor and be with them — be volunteers," Hussam said. When they expressed gratitude to Tom, Alaa recalls that he told them "We too were migrants, and of course when my grandparents came here, there were those who helped them. So, I too need to help. And someday you'll be older and you too will help." Alaa added, "We say to him, 'yes, the cycle is continuing'."

Staff at JCFS Chicago talk about the community sponsorship model. (Lindsay Kagalis/HIAS)

Roles and Responsibilities

Engaging a wider circle of stakeholders through volunteers brings additional capacity, but also additional variables to the already complex experience of resettlement.

JCFS staff expressed that volunteer support can be a great extension of capacity. In cases with volunteers, some staff reflected they could partner well with volunteers to coordinate services, and they were less likely to work overtime with a vulnerable family. "I wish we could have one [volunteer] match for each of our cases," one case manager said. If co-sponsorship can be managed in a way that feels like a force amplifier for staff, it can help improve care for all clients and reduce the risk of staff burnout, which is extremely common for refugee resettlement case managers.

To achieve this, the division of responsibilities between volunteers and staff could benefit from more explicit, consistent communication to all parties.

While the four families interviewed by the HIAS team did not report confusion about the volunteer role, the HIAS team heard from JCFS staff of cases where confusion and concerns had arisen. JCFS staff reported that when matches struggle, a common cause cited was families perceiving volunteers to be overstepping. It is worth noting as well that concepts of volunteerism may vary across cultures, informing varied expectations that families bring to the relationship.

Volunteers for their part expressed a lack of familiarity with the responsibilities of agency staff, leading to confusion about their own roles. One volunteer said of an early experience, "It wasn't clear what the caseworker's role was, or what our role was, so it almost became a negotiation between the caseworker and me."

Volunteers also voiced a desire for more communication with agency staff. Communication channels have been updated since the program first began, with the JCFS Community Engagement Specialist serving as the primary focal point to help case managers balance their caseloads. Volunteers expressed that this shift had brought some advantages, with a consistent dedicated channel and "a lot more resources" created by the Community Engagement Specialist.

However, there was a general sentiment among volunteers that more coordination with the agency during the match period would make their support more effective and efficient. "A lot of things you can't anticipate through

> **Engaging a wider circle of stakeholders through volunteers brings additional capacity, but also additional complexity to the already complex experience of resettlement.**

the training" one volunteer said, "because every family is different." Another said, "so much time is wasted by us trying to figure out what's going on in a situation."

When in doubt, volunteers expressed a bias towards action, for fear things would fall through the cracks. This looked like advocating for clients or assuming responsibility for a task when volunteers perceived there to be a service delay or roadblock. "So often we took it upon ourselves to just go and do," one group leader said.

This could at times lead to duplication of efforts, volunteers and staff both acknowledged. Strengthening coordination may look in part like defining more firmly what falls inside and outside of volunteers' purview, and in part like strengthening information sharing on tasks where collaboration can be additive. Employment is an area where such collaboration could have significant potential. At the time of the HIAS visit, JCFS' employment team was not systematically engaging with community sponsorship volunteers but perceived that volunteers could be a value add through the social capital and accompaniment described earlier.

Finally, there is a need to ensure that staff are well trained on how to engage with volunteers in a way that allows them to balance their existing caseloads. If clients without volunteers were to receive proportionally less attention from case management teams because they lack volunteers advocating on their behalf, this would represent a harmful spillover effect of community sponsorship on the wider refugee population.

It should also be noted that while the partnership between volunteers and local agencies brings some complexity, it also carries some advantages when considering different types of community sponsorship. With co-sponsorship, the affiliate provides a safety net in the event of a breakdown in the match, which can ensure minimum standards of care are upheld for families. This same safety net doesn't exist in private sponsorship. This may make co-sponsorship lower risk than private sponsorship in some ways, particularly in complex cases.

Two boys resettled with their parents in Chicago talk about what they're learning in school. (Lindsay Kagalis/HIAS)

Volunteer Mobilization

Without volunteers, there is no community sponsorship. Understanding volunteer experiences is critical to making community sponsorship sustainable and scalable.

In the case of Chicago, most recruitment has been self-recruitment by self-starters. JCFS is diligent about outreach efforts, but staff noted these tend to yield one-off or episodic volunteers. Many of the community sponsorship volunteers, on the other hand, approached JCFS to form groups. Groups were most commonly associated with one or more faith communities, and less commonly organized around a workplace, friend group, or family.

> **“Understanding volunteer experiences is critical to making community sponsorship sustainable and scalable.**

What volunteers interviewed had in common was a desire to act on deeply held values, and a desire to do so in a “hands-on” way. The specific values that fueled each of them included personal ethics, religious values, or a commitment to solidarity based on a family history of migration. Media coverage of displacement crises, such as the 2021 evacuation of Afghanistan, was cited by some as a catalyst to take action.

Some volunteers go on to recruit others and have also observed that the experience is not for everyone. “People are very willing to do a one-off,” one volunteer reflected, but hesitate “to have a sustained commitment, a more personal commitment” to families. “It’s not just the time commitment,” another added. “You’re committing to have a role in people’s lives … [and] people get overwhelmed by that idea.” But for those who stick around, it’s “the most rewarding kind [of involvement].”

After a surge in volunteering when the JCFS program first reopened, demand for co-sponsor volunteers has come to outpace supply of those volunteers. In part, this is because volunteer retention is lower than desired by JCFS, while new groups have not formed fast enough to make up the difference.

There is also a limited demographic being tapped, with volunteers tending to be homogeneous in some ways, as mentioned earlier. This presents a natural limit on the ability to scale the program. In a focus group discussion, volunteers expressed interest in engaging younger generations, diaspora communities, and interfaith partners. This may require adjusting existing program requirements — for example, shortening the match period to match academic calendars in order to engage students.

Working in diverse groups can also extend the capacity of teams in new ways. One group of volunteers set up their team with precisely this goal in mind. The original group, formed at a synagogue, cultivated a partnership with a local Islamic center. Between religious observation and the fact that synagogue volunteers were mostly retired while Islamic center volunteers were mostly in the workforce, the group found they were able to complement each other’s skills and schedules in a way that has sustained them through matches with multiple families. “We rely on our Muslim partners to do visits on Saturday [when the Jewish volunteers observe the Sabbath],” the group leader said, “and we do the heavy lifting during the week, because most of them are working.” The leader continued, “Because we draw from the two communities, and different ages, we’ve had pretty good success with recruitment.” With two of the families, the group said, the Islamic center volunteers organized iftar dinners shared by everybody to celebrate the holy Muslim month of Ramadan.

The team did not speak with volunteers who had discontinued involvement with JCFS’ sponsorship program, but staff and remaining volunteers cited drivers including inability to meet the time commitments, and disappointment with the experience in a previous match. There was a case where a family moved to another state without informing their volunteer group. The agency was aware of the move, but volunteers say their group wasn’t informed until after the fact.

Volunteers dive into how community sponsorship has impacted their lives. (Lindsay Kagalis/HIAS)

Key to the program's sustained work is a smaller, dedicated core of volunteers who have engaged with multiple families over time. Volunteers who stick with the program reported they do so in part because of relationships formed with newcomers, the enjoyment of learning new things, and the sense that they are living out important values. "It just aligns, I guess, with personal beliefs I wasn't conscious of," one volunteer said. Many came back to religious or civic values — perhaps fittingly, values tied to community. "This is how I fight antisemitism … I know the family I worked with had never met a Jewish person before," one person said. Another reflected, "I look at it and say, 'this is one of the things that makes America still a great country.'" The experience has also been enriching for the institutions that host volunteer groups, some said. "We've built a whole community of volunteers, so it's been good for our community as well."

Volunteers also want to be seen for the value they are contributing, JCFS staff note. It may be worth exploring additional ways for JCFS — or the HIAS network as a whole — to recognize and honor community sponsor volunteers. There may be potential to combine this with efforts to engage volunteers in advocacy or program visibility efforts. Volunteers share their experiences with friends and family, spreading awareness of refugee experiences — seeds of advocacy which can be cultivated. One volunteer reflected that in the current circumstances, "It makes it even more imperative now in some small way to provide that support, and also to advocate for a program I think does wonderfully good things for our country and the world."

There is a need to consider how the current model scales. In a scenario where refugee arrivals resume and the supply of volunteers remains relatively small, the selection criteria become all the more consequential. If there is a desire to grow the volunteer base, current program parameters may need to be considered against their effects on recruitment and retention. If the volunteer pool were to grow, more staffing will be needed to maintain the same level of support to those volunteers to ensure a smooth partnership.

Conclusion

Hours of discussion with those touched by community sponsorship in Chicago suggest that this program is best understood as high investment, high reward.

For strongly motivated volunteers looking for a hands-on experience, this can be a very rewarding answer. For JCFS, the program requires continuous coordination and stakeholder management, with a potential for a rising tide to lift all boats.

Most importantly, refugee families urged HIAS to continue the program, so that other new arrivals could have the same access to what they considered a powerful jumpstart in their journey of resettlement.

Much uncertainty surrounds refugee resettlement writ large, and adaptation will be imperative for those who have an interest in standing for welcome. For newcomers and for volunteers consulted, a salient part of the experience was the opportunity to "see through the eyes" of the other. In conversation after conversation, the biggest impact, for many, came down to perspective. It's very timely to consider what drives community mobilization, what it takes to work in partnership, and what possibilities may arise from the ability to see farther together.

Recommendations for Co-Sponsorship

- **Explore new directions for volunteer recruitment** including academic, diaspora, and interfaith circles. Assess alignment of program requirements (timing and financial) with their effect on the ability to recruit and retain volunteers of various profiles.
- **Ensure volunteers have consistent access to reference information** on the division of responsibilities between staff and volunteers. Establish more dedicated touch points during the service period for volunteers and staff to share information.
- **Create linkages between volunteers and employment teams,** with clear delineation of roles and dedicated touch points for coordination.
- **Expand volunteer recognition activities.**
- **Provide recurring reporting** to volunteers on Welcome Fund spending.
- **Invest in additional staffing capacity** for volunteer management in the event of increased volunteer recruitment.

Front cover image: Mary, resettled from Colombia, shares the impact of having volunteers welcome her and her family to Chicago. (Lindsay Kagalis/HIAS)

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