

INVESTING IN PEOPLE OF REFUGEE STATUS



LSI's Refugee Community Services provide extended support services for people of refugee status in the Des Moines metro, and other Iowa communities face a need for similar services. We urge legislators to support proposed legislation (SF369; HF354) that would fund two critical needs:

Refugee family support services pilot project

This project would train and hire people from refugee ethnic communities to help their peers find local resources and learn about their new communities. Improving access to already existing resources will help families and their children achieve success in school, the workplace and the community. At LSI, we've seen how people of refugee status flourish with better access to resources, and EMBARC (Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center) has already successfully piloted this project in several communities.

Community-based ESL

LSI, EMBARC and Oakridge currently support volunteer-led ESL (English as a Second Language) classes at 10 sites in Polk County. This innovative concept brings classes to neighborhoods where refugee families live, targeting low literacy students who can't access other programs due to literacy level or transportation and childcare barriers. We've since helped 200+ adults access education! We're asking the State to help expand the Polk County program and help other communities with significant refugee populations design their own effective local models for improving access to ESL classes.

Three reasons why investing in this specific population is a smart move:

- 1) Providing great opportunities for people of refugee status now helps them achieve a better quality of life more quickly and avoid generational poverty. Investing up front to help people succeed also saves the State money by reducing the need for more expensive long-term supports.
- 2) People of refugee status are highly motivated. They are driven to succeed and create better futures for themselves and their families. They are eager to contribute their skills to our communities, and they already do!
- 3) Iowa lacks a skilled workforce for certain jobs, including growing industries. People of refugee status offer untapped talent and potential that is vitally important for economic development, especially with Iowa's aging population.